The role of Black women in shaping Soweto's Methodism (1950-2000): uncovering hidden narratives of Black women in a racial society through feminist critical historiography

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Academic declaration of a student written work:

I declare that the written work is my own work. All the sources I have used or quoted are indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.
Furthermore, I declare that where there are no references is my own written reflections.

Signature

Abbreviations

AIC	African Instituted Churches/African Indigenous Churches
ANC	African National Congress
DRC	Dutch Reformed Church
CCS	Christian Citizenship Secretary
MBO	Methodist Book of Order
MCSA	The Methodist Church of Southern Africa
NP	National Party
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
SACC	South African Council of Churches
SMMS	Seth Mokitimi Methodist Seminary
REV	Reverend
The Circle	The Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians
UKZN	University of KwaZulu-Natal
WCC	World Council of Churches
YWCA	Young Women's Christian Association

*Reader's note: A brief Glossary (compiled guided by the MCSA Laws and Discipline [14th ed., 2016]) defines Methodist terms used in the dissertation (see **Appendix J**).*

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Abstract

In the vibrant community of Soweto, where the rhythm of life pulses with resilience, the stories of our ancestors remain enduring beacons of survival. Yet, dominant historiographies of Southern African mainstream history and Christianity marginalise, misrepresent or erase the contributions of Black women, particularly within Methodist traditions. Despite comprising a significant majority and active participation in many Christian denominations, women's historical roles and leadership in Soweto's Methodism remain undervalued.

Since the late twentieth century, African feminist theologians and historians have made significant strides in highlighting and vocalising women's theological and social agency. However, most studies approach Black Methodist women's experiences from broad continental or national perspectives, leaving gaps in localised historical analyses. This study intends to address that gap by uncovering the hidden narratives of Black Methodist women in Soweto between 1950 and 2000. It critically examines how their spirituality, social agency, leadership, and resistance to apartheid and patriarchy shaped Methodism in this context - five decades of struggle, resistance, and transformation.

Guided by feminist critical historiography, the study draws on three oral history case studies-oral testimonies, archival materials, and church records to challenge historical erasure. The findings reveal that Black women in Soweto were not passive observers, but central figures whose presence, spiritual leadership, and talents drove the growth of Methodist congregations. Their persistent advocacy for justice contributed significantly to broader social transformation.

The novelty of this study lies in its explicit focus on local narratives, recognising these women as dynamic and unique agents of ecclesial, social, and political change. By applying feminist historiography to Soweto's unique socio-political and religious landscape, the study contributes to the contemporary feminist theology and church leadership discourse. It calls upon scholars, ecclesiastics, and policymakers to acknowledge women's integral contributions and to reimagine church history and leadership through more inclusive, just, and contextually grounded lenses.

Key terms: Black Women's Agency; Methodism; Oral History; Soweto; Apartheid, Feminist Historiography.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION - AN OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

This oral historical study aims to explore and recollect stories about Black women's agency in the development of Methodism (Methodist Church of Southern Africa) in Soweto over the five-decade period dating from the early 1950s to 2000. The current study aims to investigate the role of Black women in the advancement of Methodism within Soweto, using archival documentation to guide oral historical recollections. The study intends to apply the feminist critical historiography theory to document and record the voices and oral testimonies of the ordinary Black women as an alternative to a hidden, distorted and fragmented history written from above. By exploring the agency of Black women in shaping Methodism's development in Soweto, the study also aims to provide insights into the intersection of gender, race, religion, and social change. In this study, "Black" is capitalised and used intentionally in its historically South African sense to refer primarily to Africans (as reflected in participant narratives and ecclesial sources). Some cited authors employ a broader usage; where relevant, this is signalled in text. This operational definition supports conceptual clarity in a local oral-historical study focused on Soweto's Methodist women (cf. Kumalo, 2020).

1.2. Background of the Study

African religious groups, notably Methodists in Southern Africa, have been intensively studied for their structural and doctrinal growth (Mkhwanazi and Kgatla, 2015:185; Williams and Bentley, 2020:3) as noted in Williams and Bentley's observation that "being the church in Africa requires a continuous self-assessment by Christian denominations…". The Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA), with its profound footprint in Soweto, has historically been more than a religious institution; it has been a pivotal community cornerstone amidst the tumultuous backdrop of apartheid and its aftermath (Frahm-Arp, 2021:314).

Within this context, women have played indispensable roles, not merely as congregants, but as key agents of spiritual resilience, social cohesion, and political activism (Magadla, 2023:24). Despite their integral contributions, secular historiography and traditional ecclesiastical historiographies have often overlooked these roles, leading to a skewed understanding of South

African (township) history, the church's history, and the dynamics within it (Magadla, 2023:12; Van der Merwe, 2022:73).

African feminist scholars widely acknowledge that Black women in religious contexts have consistently fought for both ecclesiastical reform and social justice while empowering their communities (see Oduyoye, 1999). According to Matis (2022:81) and Zurlo (2023:42), African women have maintained and built Christian communities, but historical narratives ignore their contributions. This oversight is not just a gap in historical narrative, but also a profound loss to understanding the full spectrum of resistance and community building in apartheid and post-apartheid South Africa, and also as a result of patriarchy.

Scholars like Oduyoye thus, stress the importance of recognising women's contributions to church life and social activism, highlighting their role as catalysts for change within patriarchal structures (Oduyoye, 1999:55). Ackermann argues that documenting these women's historical roles helps uncover their efforts against intersecting forms of oppression, thus preserving their legacy and inspiring future activism (Ackermann, 2016:78).

Meanwhile, Magona and Gqola emphasize the need for narrative diversity to challenge single-story histories that marginalise women's voices, advocating for more inclusive storytelling to deepen our understanding of their impact (Magona, 2018:112; Gqola, 2015:97). This recognition is crucial for reinforcing their activism's legacy and encouraging ongoing movements within and beyond religious institutions (Nadar, 2018:230).

The period from 1950 to 2000 marks a defining era in South African history, framed by the consolidation, intensification, and eventual dismantling of apartheid. This era followed what some historians have termed “the age of segregation” (1910–1948) and began with critical events such as the forced removals from Sophiatown in the late 1940s and early 1950s, which symbolised the state's increasing control over Black life and space (Gaitskell, 2016:45; Vosloo, 2015:3). The apartheid regime’s rise and systemic racial engineering not only reshaped the social fabric; it also deeply impacted religious communities, forcing them to reorganise spiritually and socially in resistance to dispossession and repression (Kumalo, 2020:103).

According to Vosloo (2015:3), the period between 1948 and 1960 was marked by the theological legitimisation of apartheid, alongside the emergence of early dissenting church

voices, while the years from 1960 to 1994 witnessed the intensification of the church struggle against apartheid and the church's role in ushering in a democratic South Africa (De Gruchy, 2004: xxix). Thus, this fifty-year period is pivotal for understanding how faith communities, including the Methodist Church, navigated, contested, and survived structural injustice.

The Methodist Church, much like other ecclesial institutions, became a contested space where faith practice and resistance often converged. By focusing on this era, the study captures the dynamic interplay between socio-political contexts and religious practices, providing insights into how Black women navigated intersecting systems of patriarchy, racism, and classism to sustain, reimagine, and shape Methodism in Soweto (see Mafutha, 2018:32; Kgatla, 2016:23). Their religious agency was not merely spiritual, but deeply political, as women carved theological and organisational spaces in defiance of both ecclesial marginalization and state repression. This focus uncovers overlooked yet critical contributions of women to both the church and the broader struggle for liberation and justice, positioning them as vital actors in South Africa's public and ecclesial history (Haddad, 2016; Denis, 2007:310).

Historians, such as Deborah Gaitskell (2016:56), have highlighted that narratives of Black women's contributions to religious movements have often been marginalised, despite their significant roles in nurturing communities and fostering resistance within. By foregrounding these narratives, the study fills a gap in scholarship, contributing to a more nuanced understanding of South Africa's religious history during apartheid (Mafutha, 2018:47). The emphasis on women's contributions, including, but not limited to those involved in uniformed Manyano movements challenges the dominant historical focus on male-led resistance, asserting the importance of gender-inclusive historiography (Kumalo, 2020:117).

1.2.1 Locating Soweto and the MCSA (1950s–1970s): From Sophiatown Removals to the Townships

Soweto (South Western Townships), southwest of central Johannesburg, consolidated during the 1950s–1970s as a predominantly Black urban complex shaped by apartheid spatial engineering. Under the Group Areas Act (1950), the state dismantled Sophiatown, renowned for cultural life and intellectual resistance, with mass removals beginning in February 1955; (Gready, 1990:140; Beinart, 2001:143–155; SAHO, 2019:n.p). These removals displaced many Black residents and families to peripheral "locations" and catalysed the growth of Soweto. Many former Sophiatown residents were relocated to Meadowlands and Diepkloof, now integral areas within Soweto (Stein & Jacobson, 1986:2).

In this context, churches including the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA) reorganised ministry among relocated communities (City of Johannesburg, 1958:2). Minutes of Conference and District Synod from the mid-to-late 1950s record the impact of removals on membership and the establishment or strengthening of new societies in the emerging townships (MCSA Minutes 1955:20; 1962:207). This socio-ecclesial setting frames how Methodist women, especially through the Women's Manyano, exercised practical agency, became instrumental in planting congregations and sustained community life under pressure (Beinart, 2001:143–155; Stein & Jacobson, 1986:2; MCSA, 1955:20; 1956:26; MCSA, 1962:207).

1.3 Research Problem

Despite the significant presence and contribution of Black women to the development of Methodism in Soweto between 1950 and 2000, their roles remain critically underrepresented in existing ecclesiastical historiography. Scholarly discourse in Church history discipline has largely focused on institutional, theological, and male-centred narratives. As a result, the lived experiences, leadership, and spiritual agency of ordinary Black women have often been omitted or marginalised (Gates, 2021:5; Palmer, 2021:5; Oxford Research Encyclopaedia, 2021:98)

This historiographical gap presents a substantive research problem. The absence of Black women's narratives in historical accounts of the MCSA not only limits a comprehensive understanding of the church's growth in Soweto but also reinforces patriarchal and racialized systems of exclusion in historical scholarship.

Therefore, this study seeks to problematise the erasure and under-documentation of Black women's contributions by employing feminist critical historiography and oral history as methodological tools. It argues that a re-examination of both archival records and lived experiences is necessary to uncover, validate, and recontextualise these hidden narratives. Addressing this research problem has enabled a more inclusive and accurate historical account of Methodism in Soweto, and contribute meaningfully to the broader discourse on gender, race, religion, and social transformation in South Africa.

1.3.1 Motivation and Contribution of the Study

I have chosen to focus on the history of Black women and the MCSA in Soweto because, as a student of historical theology, I am passionate about documenting the experiences of women

within both the church and society. Moreover, as a self-identified ally of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians, I am dedicated to amplifying their voices and highlighting their contributions to theological discourse. This research is aimed at contributing to the ongoing discourse on gender and racial intricacies within religious movements with reference to the Methodist Church in Soweto.

This research seeks not only to fill a gap in history, but also to offer a critical analysis of the intersections between gender, race, religion, and social activism. Akhter (2018:97) emphasises the need for more inclusive historical narratives which not only women but also other groups who took part in the nation-building shaping key social institutions. This study heeds their call by employing a feminist critical historiography approach to challenge the male-centric narratives that have dominated the historiography of religious movements in South Africa.

The involvement of Black women in Soweto's Methodist Church during this period, even those in uniformed Manyano movements, shaped church governance, worship practices, and community outreach efforts (Phiri, 2021:108). uManyano (Nguni: “union”/“coming together”) is the MCSA’s women’s prayer and service movement through which Black Christian women historically exercised religious, social, and civic agency (Mkhwanazi & Kgatla, 2015:191; Preston, 2007:71). Scholarship dates its institutionalisation variably in the early twentieth century, with proposed years from 1905 to 1926; nonetheless consensus affirms the Manyano’s role as a platform of women’s agency and mutual support across mission and urban contexts (Preston, 2007; Mujinga, 2023:3-4; Mkhwanazi & Kgatla, 2015). In this study, “Manyano” designates the organised structures of African women’s spirituality, leadership, welfare and mission within Methodist circuits and societies, an arena where women built power from the church pews and the prayer groups as much as from formal committees (Mkhwanazi & Kgatla, 2015:191;Elphick & Davenport, 1997:10). Their active participation and leadership roles brought new theological perspectives that influenced the social and spiritual development of the church (Siwila, 2019:35). Therefore, this study explores how their engagement was pivotal in resisting the dual oppression of apartheid and patriarchal religious structures, adding a critical layer to our understanding of Methodism's evolution in South Africa (Mafutha, 2018:50).

The importance of this research lies in its potential to shift academic discourse towards a more nuanced understanding of how women, often operating from the grassroots level, have been

instrumental in the development and sustainability of the Methodist Church in the context of a society undergoing profound political and social transformation. By bringing to light the stories of women's leadership, resilience, and activism, the study will offer a more comprehensive picture of the church's evolution over the latter half of the 20th century.

1.4 Key Research Question

What was the role of Black women in the development of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa in Soweto between 1950 and 2000?

1.5 Research Sub-Questions

1. What roles did women play in the Methodist Church in Soweto, and how did those roles influence the church's development and community engagement?
2. How have Black women's roles within the Methodist Church of Southern Africa in Soweto evolved from 1950 to 2000?
3. How did the socio-political context of South Africa from 1950 to 2000 affect women's agency, leadership, and participation in society (and the Methodist Church)?
4. Which factors in the Methodist Church impeded or facilitated Black women's agency during the period of 1950-2000?
5. How do the lived experiences of these ordinary Black women shape our understanding of South African Methodism today?

1.6 Objectives

1. To uncover the roles occupied by Black women in the Methodist Church in Soweto and evaluate how these roles influenced the church's development and community engagement.
2. To explore the evolution of Black women's roles and contributions within the Methodist Church of Southern Africa in Soweto from 1950 to 2000.
3. To understand the impact of South Africa's socio-political context from 1950 to 2000 on Black women's agency, leadership, and participation in the Methodist Church.
4. To investigate the challenges faced by Black women in their involvement with the Methodist Church from 1950 to 2000 and identify the opportunities that enabled them to exercise agency and influence.

5. To analyse the personal stories and recollections of Black women integral to the Methodist movement in Soweto and explore how these narratives contribute to the understanding of Southern African Methodism today.

1.7 Location of the Study

This study is geographically situated in Soweto, South Africa, focusing on the Methodist Church of Southern Africa's local congregations. The temporal scope spans from 1950 to 2000, a period that encapsulates the height of apartheid, the struggle for liberation, the dawn of democracy in South Africa, and the pursuit of a post-Apartheid South Africa. This era is crucial for understanding the socio-political and economic transformations that significantly influenced the country's religious landscape. Accordingly, the social context of the study is inseparable from apartheid realities: the Methodist Church in Soweto functioned as both a site of religious practice and socio-political resistance. Black women's participation reflects both negotiation with and opposition to systemic oppression, contributing to broader post-apartheid nation-building efforts (Ngwane, 2017:175).

1.8 Validity

To validate the study, a comprehensive and transparent approach to data collection and analysis was used. Triangulation was a leading tactic (Varpio *et al.*, 2017:41). By triangulation (multiple data sources such as interviews, archival research, and church records), the confirmation of the findings is essential (Braun and Clarke, 2013:286). Using this method is advantageous as it captures multiple truths and voices of the topic and will simply make sure that any conclusions drawn are accurate and not dependent on a single source of data, therefore making the whole study more credible (Babbie and Mouton, 2001:277; Braun and Clarke, 2013:286).

Furthermore, member validation, also known as member checking (Varpio *et al.*, 2017:43) was also used by summarizing the findings and sharing them with the participants to verify the accuracy and the interpretation of findings which will further increase the validity of the study.

1.9 Reliability

The reliability of this qualitative research was obtained through the thorough documentation of the research process from data gathering all the way to analysis (see Cypress, 2017:259). This helped to devise thematic analysis coding frame that will be systematically applied to every data set (Roberts *et al.,* 2019:6; Lester *et al.,* 2020:100). The study approach was maintained throughout the research process to produce the findings that can be repeated under similar

experimental conditions (Braun and Clarke, 2023:4). This included making a thorough interview guide based on the research questions, making sure that interviews are performed and recorded/taped in the same way every time, and using a strict coding process to find themes and patterns in the data (Braun and Clarke, 2023:4).

In addition, keeping the reflective log over the whole research process helped in admitting as well as overcoming the researcher biases that could have distorted the credibility of the findings.

1.10 Rigour

Rigor was achieved through the responsible execution of the study, the deliberate selection of case study methodology and purposeful sampling, which are designed based on the research objective in mind (Lester *et al*., 2020:102). Rigor of this (rigorous) study was reinforced by the thoroughness of data examination, hand in hand with thematic analysis, which contributes to more profound thinking of the complex roles that women played in the history of the church. The necessity for profound significant research findings justify this sampling technique (Berndt, 2020:223).

The issue of research rigor is also explored thoroughly, with ethical considerations being made to ensure proper, ethical treatment of the participants and data. To ensure study integrity, the researcher regularly reflected on their biases, and how they may affect the research (Braun and Clarke, 2023:4).

1.11 Anticipated Problems/Limitations/Scope of Study

My temporal location was a potential threat to limiting my understanding of the socio-political context of the time, potentially leading to biases in interpretation. Being a male Methodist clergy member may have inadvertently led to the oversight or underestimation of certain women's experiences or contributions within the community, while also recognising the inherent power dynamics associated with clergy roles.

My status as an outsider to the gendered phenomenon could influence my ability to fully grasp the nuances of women's agency and challenges within Soweto's Methodism (Saidin, 2016: 850). Despite employing feminist critical historiography, inherent biases in methodology and interpretation could affect the comprehensiveness of uncovering hidden narratives. The possibility of recall bias from recounting events in interviews with individuals who are

narrating events of more than several decades ago as a social science history and psychological dynamic (Heux *et al.,* 2022:7).

More to that, the availability and accessibility of archival materials can also have an influence on the depth of historical information that could be analysed. The study's scope, which is focused on the Methodist Church in Soweto could provide insights on other broader trends within South Africa, but they cannot be generalized to all contexts or religious institutions. This study may have encountered logistical challenges, remoteness from the research site may restrict personal recollections, such as accessing historical sites and securing interviews with individuals who have direct experience with the Methodist Church in Soweto from 1950 to 2000. However, in this case, such challenges were not encountered.

Moreover, theoretically, the study's focus on feminist critical historiography may not capture all dimensions of the church's development. Its scope is limited to Black women's contributions within the MCSA in Soweto, which may not fully represent other races, regions, or denominations. University ethical considerations required the study to manage personal information with respect, ensuring informed consent and anonymization where necessary. This was adhered to, with noted and appropriate adjustments made to the anonymization of certain participants, in alignment with scholarly interpretation and ethical standards.

1.12. Conclusion

This chapter has introduced the study’s purpose: to uncover the overlooked contributions of Black women to the development of the Methodist Church in Soweto between 1950 and 2000. Situated within the intersecting contexts of apartheid, patriarchy, and ecclesial exclusion, the study applies feminist critical historiography and oral history to recover hidden narratives and challenge male-dominated church histories. The research problem, objectives, and rationale have been outlined, along with the study’s methodological framework and ethical considerations. By centering the voices of women, the study aims to contribute to a more inclusive and accurate understanding of South African Methodism and its broader socio-political impact.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Introduction

In as much as the literature review occupies a crucial place in providing background information on the subject under study, it also acts as a preparatory ground for systematically tracing the complex history of women Methodists in the shaping of Methodism in Soweto between 1950 and 2000, a period in which South Africa underwent through significant social, political, and religious transformations. In this case, the primary goals of this review are to: critically analyse previous scholarly work and outline the strengths and limitations of previous studies in portraying the agency and power of women within the MCSA.

Though much work has been done to understand the larger history of the MCSA, very little work has been done on the gendered aspects of this history. This review seeks to address this gap by adopting a feminist critical historiography approach, which makes it possible to re-interpret historical accounts that may have excluded women (Braude, 2004:555). Through the analysis of primary and secondary sources, this review will offer a systematic analysis of the roles of women in Soweto in contributing and transforming the Methodist Church during a significant socio-historical period in South Africa.

Furthermore, this piece of literature review is not just an exercise in writing, but a way to rectify historical mistakes. The erasure of women from history has been widely discussed worldwide, especially in historical narratives where religion and male dominance played a crucial role. The literature review will, therefore, focus on challenging these patriarchal narratives and writing back, or writing a history that empowers women. This approach is suitable for achieving the objectives of feminist critical history as it aims at transforming historical thinking. Thus, this review will help to ground the subsequent empirical research by contributing to the enhanced understanding of the relationship between gender, religion, and social change in the context of Soweto's Methodism.

2.2. The Role of Women in Religion

As highlighted by Brandell-Syrier (1984:1) and Woodhead (2007:569), women are well known to have been at the centre of religious activities and indeed religious movements, yet their

participation and contributions have over the years been negated. Many religious systems and the Christian religion still placed women as appendages of the religious and faith system in subordinate and supporting roles (Phiri, 2002:16). Kumalo (2024:9) concurs with this assertion, pointing to the Methodist Church as an example where the roles of women have been downplayed and ignored in historical accounts. Nevertheless, there is a growing body of literature on female involvement or assertiveness in religious movements contrary to these perceptions, as women form the nucleus of religious organisations (Riccardi-Swartz, 2023:106). According to Theilen (2005:32), writing about Soweto, women in the Methodist Church also supported the spiritual life in different communities, but were also active in social and political struggles, especially during the apartheid regime.

The position of women in religion can therefore be said to differ concerning the culture and history of each religious system. There has been literature on African women's experience of religion where concerns have been raised about the relevance of applied Western feminist theologies in Africa (Anderson, 2004:191). The Methodist women of Soweto were trapped in a multifaceted cage made of religion, ethnography, and politics to fight the apartheid regime and patriarchal oppression within church institutions (Sawyer, 2002:14).

This literature review will, therefore, analyse how women in Soweto's Methodist Church utilised their agency to contribute towards the development of the church and the challenges they encountered. More importantly, it will seek to understand how these women and the work that they have done have been marginalised in the historical studies of the Methodist Church in South Africa.

2.3. 'Othering' in Methodism

2.3.1. Conceptualizing 'Othering' in Religious Contexts

In social and religious studies, 'othering' is a concept that delineates a process through which one or more groups are constructed and characterised as 'other', thereby defined as different and/or inferior to a specific group (Kithinji, 2023:243). This concept has been used often in analysing the religious organisations where power relations contribute to marginalization or submission of certain group, for instance, the female or the Black (Havea and Melanchthon, 2021:83). Concerning the Methodist Church, 'othering' has been observed in different aspects, such as in the exclusion of women not only in their churches' leadership but also in religious arenas (Kithinji, 2023:249). Starkey and Tomalin (2022:84) have claimed that this process is

grounded in patriarchal values that have long controlled religious organisations and sidelined women from leadership roles.

It is for this reason that, in the MCSA, 'othering' has also met race, thus extending the processes of exclusion (Etherington, 1996:211). In apartheid, Black women in the Methodist Church suffered this dual oppression, gender, and racial oppression (Etherington, 1996:217). The experience of double oppression meant that they were often erased in their roles in the church as well as in other aspects of the larger community.

African feminist scholars such as Brandel-Syrier (1984), Phiri (2002:13), and Kumalo (2009:51) have criticised this dual 'othering' and called for greater intersectionality regarding women's roles in religious institutions. Brandel-Syrier (1984:1) details how Black women in South Africa have long been central to the life of the church, not only as participants in religious activities but also as vital organisers and sustainers of congregational life, even when formal leadership roles were denied to them. Yet, despite their pivotal contributions, Brandel-Syrier argues that institutional frameworks have engaged in systematic 'othering' of women, often rendering them invisible and relegating their spiritual leadership to informal or marginal spaces. Phiri (2002:13,16), building on this foundation, interrogates the deeply embedded patriarchal structures within the church, revealing how 'othering' has positioned Methodist women as supporters and nurturers rather than as full participants. Phiri demonstrates that, even while facing such othering, women have mobilised their faith to resist gendered oppression and to engage in broader social struggles, especially during apartheid.

Kumalo (2009:51; 2024:9) further elucidates the dual 'othering'—along both racial and gendered lines—endured by Black women. He highlights how this layered 'othering' within church life has systematically downplayed or excluded their roles from official church histories and leadership hierarchies, despite their essential agency and contributions to the vitality of religious communities.

Together, these scholars opine that eradicating 'othering' within the church entails more than reforming gendered prejudices, since contemporary racial hierarchies in South African religions also deserve apprehension. The specific ways in which 'othering' has been theorized will be outlined in this section, beginning with how the concept has been utilised about the

Methodist Church before proceeding to a more nuanced analysis of its effects on the position of women in Soweto's Methodism.

2.3.2. Historical Instances of 'Othering' in the Methodist Church

As Kumalo (2009:69) has pointed out there are quite several examples of 'othering' in the history of the Methodist Church in Southern Africa including the exclusion of Black women from leadership positions. It is also important to note that during the apartheid era, the Methodist Church, like most religious denominations, largely failed to challenge or disrupt the prevailing racial and gender hierarchies entrenched in South African society (Cragg and Millard, 2013:29). Rather than actively standing against the oppression of Black women, the church's approach was often cautious and insufficient, effectively allowing discriminatory practices to persist unchallenged.

In this sense, the church's lack of decisive action contributed to the marginalisation of women within both the religious institution and the broader context of apartheid, raising critical questions about its complicity in sustaining systemic injustice. Mkhwanazi and Kgatla (2015:180-197) have also noted that women were particularly confined to performing tasks like the organisation of church programmes, administration, or management of the church's social programmes, whereas men occupied dominant positions like pastors and leaders of the church. The nature of these separations of tasks aggravated not only the patriarchal schemes within the sphere of the church, but also the general social exclusion of women.

However, the practice of 'othering' in the context of the Methodist Church particularly in Kenya, was not only a gendered one; it was racially informed too (Kithinji, 2023:254). As Gage (2023:17) pointed out, Black women in particular experienced enormous difficulties in effective participation and leadership within the church. On this aspect, Madise (2021:5) posits that while they played a significant role in the social and spiritual nature of the church organisation, their roles were dismissed or had little value ascribed to them. For instance, the Manyano women's organisation within the Methodist Church illustrates this reality; although Black women were essential to the church's daily operations, they were largely excluded of official decision-making roles; a dynamic that was well understood by those within the church community (Mkhwanazi and Kgatla, 2015:180). On one hand, they were able to exercise leadership and participate in community activism through the Manyano but on the other it still

signified the lack of promotions that women received in the church structure (Kumalo, 2024:39).

Sifo (2016:165) and Preston (2007:8) have noted that women in the Methodist Church were ‘othered’ not just because of socially constructed prejudices, but due to the exclusionary actions of the church itself. They argue that a lack of action from the church on these matters produced serious implications for women’s position in the church and played a role in creating a history of marginalisation that informs women’s position in the current Methodist Church. This part will discuss three concrete examples of ‘othering’ within the Methodist Church to describe how such practices were rationalised and what consequences the practices had for women in the Church.

2.3.3. Impact of 'Othering' on Women's Roles in Soweto’s Methodism

Theilen (2005:50) reaffirms that women of the Methodist Church were ‘othered’, meaning that they were socially constructed as the ‘other’, and this social construction of ‘otherness’ had significant effects on genders in Soweto’s Methodism in the period from 1950–2000. This era has been characterised by heightened social and political activism, where church functioned as a place of safety during protests. However, women were restricted within the church from being fully involved in such activities, engaging only in supportive roles that did not meet the approval of the church’s male hierarchy (Sifo, 2016:172). However, the women in Soweto’s Methodist Church navigated the patriarchal structures and emerged with some opportunities to exercise agency and power.

As Mkhwanazi and Kgatla (2015:181) pointed out in their study that the Manyano movement, for instance, changed to be a significant platform in which women channelled their activism in matters of social and political concerns, which appeared to have been sidelined and dominated by the church leadership. Women’s agency can also be perceived in their capacity to form and assemble their communities, the Manyano importantly supported the anti-apartheid movement and met the social needs of the communities (Kumalo, 2024:39). However, the ‘othering’ process meant that these contributions were often overlooked, dismissed, or trivialized within the mainstream, especially, the contributions of women who worked within the church framework who were negated, and seen as supplementary to the main church work.

In Griffin (2021:84), the writer notes that this marginalisation had deep and calamitous consequences given that the Methodist Church’s denial and diminishment of women’s aptitude

for spearheading and guiding confined their potential within the institution and underscored the strict gender division of labour. Gage (2023:90) notes that women drawn into the Methodist Church today are still subjected to 'othering' and restricted opportunities to participate and have leadership roles. This section will focus on how Sowetan Methodists 'othered' women, the experiences, and the opportunities women encountered as they engaged with these constructions and how they delivered the organisation and the surrounding community with their talents.

A growing body of scholarship has critically engaged the multiple dimensions of exclusion and 'othering' experienced by women within the Methodist Church, particularly in the Soweto context. These studies interrogate the historical and theological structures that have shaped women's roles in the church, revealing patterns of marginalisation that persist into the present. The analysis of key scholars like Phiri (2002:9), Mkhwanazi and Kgatla (2015:182), and Kumalo (2009:84), reveals not only the historical causes of such exclusion, but the women's position in the church today. The review of the sources adheres to the principles of feminist critical historiography as it grapples with the idea of investigating the history of women's involvement in the development of the Methodist Church, which remains marginalized or completely ignored in traditional historiology. This approach not only subverts the patriarchy, but also provides a better perspective as to the status of women in Soweto's Methodism.

Moreover, the review shows the applicability of intersectionality to the analysis of the position of women in the Methodist Church, focusing on the interplay between gender and race as the systems that produce specific kinds of exclusion. However, by exploring the difficulties of Black women in the church, the review gives a thorough analysis of the religious organisation's power relations in Black communities. The purpose of this critical analysis is significant in constructing a more holistic and inclusive history of the Methodist Church, recognising the role of women in its progression, and acknowledging the current difficulties they face within the institution.

While this dissertation foregrounds persistent barriers to women's leadership in the MCSA, the tradition also shows incremental correctives, notably the ordination of Rev. Constance Oosthuizen in 1976 as the first woman presbyter, and the later election of Bishop Purity Malinga to the Bishop office, events that mark institutional learning amid struggle (Kumalo,

2016:174–190). Reading these milestones alongside enduring exclusions yields a more nuanced account. Indeed the gains are real but uneven, and women's grassroots agency (e.g., the Women's Manyano) has often outpaced formal structures in driving ecclesial renewal.

2.4 Black Christian Women and Their Response to Apartheid

2.4.1. Historical Overview of Black Christian Women's Resistance

The Black Christian women's resistance during apartheid is another important aspect of South Africa's liberation history that remains widely unknown. These women were not mere spectators in their respective societies; instead, they participated in different types of resistances, with religion providing them with hope and even guidelines to follow as they fought (Mahlaba, 2023:33). Their resistance was not only political, but also social and economic whereby they fought against the apartheid system in various ways, and at various levels. Madise (2021:8) states that Black Christian women not only used their roles in the religious organisations as anchors that helped to support their communities' spirits by praying for them, but also as empowering agents of change who demanded the end of injustices against them within the religious institutions. This duality of providing spiritual direction and exercising political influence was crucial in preventing the demoralisation of the oppressed populace during the worst of apartheid days.

In the same respect, Mkhwanazi and Kgatla (2015:181) have also stressed that huge gaps exist in the historical writing of the liberation struggle of South Africa, and more so, the writings only focus a little on women, more especially Black Christian women. Nevertheless, modern research has started filling this gap by drawing paramount importance to Methodist women's activities. For example, Erlank (2022:29) posited that the experience of race, gender, and religion made Black Christian women's experience different, and afforded them a vantage point that empowered them to resist apartheid. According to the research done by Mkhwanazi and Kgatla (2015:182), religious beliefs were used to justify the resistance and to mobilize support, which was vital in their struggle. In the same vein, Van der Merwe (2022:69) argues that these women were not only actors in the struggle, but also organizers and masterminds who employed their theological roles to rally people for liberty.

Nevertheless, the role of Black Christian women is not celebrated or recognised fully in the fight against apartheid in South Africa. Albeit the recent research in this area has been highly informative, there are still some scholars who argue that the mainstream accounts of resistance

are insufficient for proper analysis of the agents and entrepreneurs of apartheid, as Van der Merwe (2022:77) noted. To support her argument, Van der Merwe (2022:78) refutes the idea that men's leadership and activism are critical to society's progress, as women's contribution is downplayed. Such an oversight becomes a logical consequence of the kind of historical and cultural biases rooted in sexism and patriarchal attitudes toward women. Thus, the nature and scope of Black Christian women's engagement in resistance movements remain partially concealed, which underlines the need to pay more attention to the specific aspects of what these women did and how religious convictions influenced their actions.

2.4.2. Case Studies of Women's Resistance within the Methodist Church

For Black Christian women, the MCSA provided both a religious community in which they could seek solace and a means by which they could challenge oppression (Haddad, 2004:5). The Manyano movement which is a women's organisation in the church was a crucial platform for the organisation of women against apartheid (Kumalo, 2024:41). This movement was particularly influential in Soweto where it became a symbol of organisation and political struggle. Breier (2023:739) notes that through the formation of the Manyano, women gained leadership roles, protested apartheid's policies and gave a show of support to families who were affected by the repressive policies of the apartheid government. Theilen (2005:61) echoes that the movement also helped in the creation of an 'us' factor for Black Christian women; that was instrumental in the frame working of togetherness and unity.

According to Kelly (2024:72), a prominent figure in the Manyano was Mama Nokukhanya Luthuli, who led the church and played a crucial role in mobilizing women in manyano. This is not to say that Luthuli was only active in church affairs; she participated in other political organisations, the African National Congress Women's League. Her contribution to Manyano reflects ways that Black Christian women engaged religion in politics to speak against oppression even when it was deemed forbidden by religious authorities (Ngcobozi, 2020:49). Analysing the chapter on Luthuli's work in the church, it also becomes possible to understand the role of religious organisations in the fight against apartheid and demonstrate how women could affect social change through their positions in these organisations.

Another important example is women's prayer meetings that evolved into a kind of clandestine opposition to the Methodist Church (Lamola, 2021:181). Although these prayer sessions were strictly religious, they also provided an opportunity to discuss and plan politics. Kumalo

(2009:114) stresses that these meetings enabled women to talk of the effects of apartheid and plan on how they could resist the effects of apartheid. The prayer groups also gave emotional and spiritual support to people involved in the fight, which was important for the enduring continuity of the struggle (Lamola, 2021:184). This example shows aspects of taking power by women within church practices as political too, given the ardent religious dynamics in practice.

However, the position of these women in the struggle has been an object of some debate. Although male leaders, such as those within the Methodist Church, were unsure or openly opposed to females participating in political activism. According to Lloyd (2013:71), this opposition to women's authority in the church is rooted in the traditional patriarchal culture in which women were expected to remain in their homes. Still, women in the Methodist Church in Zimbabwe did not relent in their activism due to resistance from outside forces mentioned above, as well as internal resistance within the church structure (Madise, 2014:126). Women's activism not only served the struggle against apartheid, but also addressed the patriarchal structure within the church organisation.

2.4.3. Theological and Social Implications of Women's Resistance

This thesis argues that the resistance of Black Christian women within the Methodist Church was both theological and societal, and had significant and long-lasting outcomes for both the church itself and for society in South Africa. Seitisho and Siwila (2017:157) assert that the significance of such resistance emerges from recognizing religion as a form of situated knowledge, historically instrumental in shaping gendered concepts and constructions of knowledge itself. Spiritually, these women questioned religious doctrines, which allowed subjugation of women and particularly African women (Wood, 2019:75). In claiming their authority as leaders and activists, they challenged the patriarchal power system within the church and provided hermeneutic frameworks that emphasized justice, equality, and liberation. Phiri (2002:27) would note that this re-interpretation of scripture was an act of subversion, because it challenged the very theological frameworks upon which apartheid and women's oppression in the church were justified.

Furthermore, the role of the Black Christian women within the church had an impressing social impact, especially in the area of the organisation of the community. Mkhwanazi and Kgatla (2015:184) echo this sentiment by pointing out that in the Manyano and other women groups, these women established strong networks that provided essential support to their communities

during the most difficult periods of apartheid. These groupings were not only religiously related, but also venues for social and political interactions, which enabled women to seek for ways of meeting the requirements of their societies, as well as organising themselves for the formulation of necessary plans for female activism (Kumalo, 2024:48). Kumalo (2009:129) explains that such groups allow Black Christian women to be agents of change and can play the active roles in their religious communities and the liberation process.

Nevertheless, women's protest history within the space of the Methodist Church can be said to be equally blurred and paradoxical. Preston (2007:19), for example, states that this church has not completely embraced these women activists' impact, mainly because of the issues of theological work. Haddad (2000) further identifies the church as a "site of struggle" for women, pointing to the tension between their active engagement in social and political resistance and the church's reluctance to grant women equal spiritual and leadership roles. Preston (2007:43) argues that the continued exclusion of women within the church is further evidence that people are not willing to confront the inherent misogyny of society. What this implies is that although the resistance of Black Christian women was liberating on many fronts, there is still a long journey ahead of eradicating exclusionism in the church to have the Black women's history and theologies represented fully.

In view of this theological perspective, Dube calls for a decolonized feminist reading of the Bible that centres African women's experiences, challenging the androcentric biblical hermeneutics that deny their spiritual authority and agency (Dube, 2000:145). Dube emphasizes that African women's leadership in Christianity is vital for disrupting colonial and patriarchal narratives that have long dominated church history (Dube, 2020:88). Phiri agrees with Dube on the need to foreground African women's experiences but emphasizes the role of African women in resisting both gender and racial oppression within the church and society. Phiri highlights the active participation of African women in church leadership roles, noting that they have often used their positions to advocate for social justice, gender equality, and racial inclusivity (Phiri, 2016:201). She also explores the tensions women face as they navigate these roles, arguing that while they have made significant contributions to both the church and the broader struggle against apartheid, their efforts have too often been met with resistance from entrenched patriarchal structures.

An analysis of Black Christian women's resistance to apartheid in the Methodist Church reveals the complex interplay of religion, gender, and politics. According to Phiri (2002:45) and Theilen (2005:112-113), these women navigated both church and apartheid oppression in nuanced ways. Denise Ackermann and Isabel Phiri note that their resistance was active and intentional, using faith as a tool for freedom (Ackermann, 1996:59; Phiri, 2002:47).

The general outlook of how the women exercised resistance within the Methodist Church, especially with reference to the Manyano movement and the prayer groups paints a complex picture of their activism. Considering these examples, it is apparent that religion and politics intermingled in terms of offering women the faith and frameworks for combatting apartheid. But the opposition they encountered in the church itself, more specifically from male members of the church shows that the fight was not only for women's liberation in the church, but it was also for overcoming the gender-based barriers (Robertson, 2020:29).

Women's opposition holds deep theological and social significance, because it raises evident questions as to how the scripture has been translated and the social structures of the church uphold patriarchy. These women left a mixed legacy which still sparks debate today about the adequate appreciation of the role of these women and the further need to address the gender bias in the church. Thus, the study postulates that, we are only seeing the beginning of the incorporation of Black Christian women's resistances within the history and theology of the church. This emphasizes the need for furthering research engagements in the area not only to address the gaps in the existing historiography but also to contribute to the current discourse on gender, religion, and justice.

2.5. Methodist Women and Their Response to Apartheid

2.5.1. Women's Leadership in the Methodist Church During Apartheid

Methodist women in leadership during apartheid offers a rich narrative on how the South African women could overcome oppression both in gender and race domains. In the past, Mkhwanazi noted that apartheid in South Africa entailed an aggressive racially based policy of Black South African marginalisation. As depicted in this oppressive environment of the time, the MCSA emerged as the key territory that enabled women to practice leadership, albeit in limited ways (Preston, 2007:69).

The church, especially in terms of its leadership, was widely patriarchal, and turned into an institution where female subjects, particularly Black ones, created spheres of agency and control (Mkhwanazi and Kgatla 2015:187) The Methodist Church as described by Attwell (1997:49) reserved subordinate roles for women, but these women gained their independent power structures by creating certain movements such as the Manyano movement. These women were not only leading the Church activities, but they were sociopolitical activists who offered support for the anti-apartheid movements.

Challenging the dominant patriarchal framework that dominated the church and restricted women's activities to household or supportive roles (Tetelman, 1997:117), these women claimed leadership in various, explicit, and subtle ways. Theilen (2005:42) elaborated that women in Methodist Church during apartheid period of South Africa was not only active, but did significant transformation by extending the realm of women's appropriate work within the church. This change was not only a natural response to pressure, but a performative act of subverting the very structures imposed by the church and society regarding women's roles and abilities, signifying their agency to manage and transform the prescribed gender norms despite the opposition.

Furthermore, Mkhwanazi and Kgatla (2015:189) have regretfully noticed that the historiographical histories, which have been written, did not pay much attention to women leadership in churches, a fact that Mkhwanazi and Kgatla (2015:189) attribute to the continued patriarchy ingrained in the societies as well as historians who write histories. Noticeably, these historical narratives fail to capture how women wielded power in a more nuanced manner, bearing in mind the gendered and cultural demographic of medieval society and the Church.
However, the authority of women in the Methodist Church in apartheid particularly in the management and leadership of the church was significantly restricted. However, women' leadership roles were limited by the church's conservative approach to gender, which placed woman in subsidiary positions outside the formal decision-making circles (Madise, 2014:123). According to Dube (2006:190), this marginalization reflects a common phenomenon within the global context, where women's participation and roles are systematically suppressed, allowing patriarchy to further entrench itself.

Kumalo (2009:154) notes that, despite women's active participation, they rarely held organisational power or clergy positions, reflecting both internal church misogyny and broader

societal gender norms that kept women subordinate. However, the experiences of Methodist women in apartheid reveal that women effectively surmounted these limitations and sought to harness institutional mechanisms and grassroots movements to spearhead leadership roles within the church and the fight against apartheid.

2.5.2. Contributions of Manyano Women

The Manyano, had an influential role as the voice of the oppressed in its fight against apartheid and in advocating for the transformation of the socio-political landscape of the country (Preston, 2007:71). Manyano translated to 'union' or 'coming together' in Nguni, allowed Black Christian women to participate in religious, social, and political matters (Carline, 2023:91). Kumalo (2024:57) opined that the Manyano became central in creating a platform where women could mobilise in the fight for the social justice, welfare of the society and political emancipation. Through this movement, women from various parts of Soweto were encouraged to join together, feel like they belonged to a group and that they had to fight for the rights of all the females who were denied by the apartheid government. The Manyano also became an influential force in the liberation struggle not only combating apartheid's racial oppression, but also gender violence within the church and South African society in general (Mkhwanazi and Kgatla, 2015:191).

This paper aims at arguing that Church, more specifically the Manyano, had a complicated role in combating apartheid. The movement had major tactics of engaging in prayer and religious meetings as a mode of protest. Mkhwanazi (2002:105 and Maluleke (2000:31) define these as 'engaging in the most passionate, the most vibrant and the most prophetic forms of praxis'. Although these meetings were religious activities, in fact, they acted as secret sessions for political deliberations. Ndlovu (2024:82) has noted that the Manyano assisted the church and the broader anti-apartheid struggle movement through its resources and networks by providing resources to activists and their families.

The movement also served educational and activist structure, appealing to the faith's principles and utilizing them to debunk the racist ideology of apartheid as well as to promote equality (Theilen, 2005:74). Through embracing religious agency, Manyano women were thus able to justify their revolt against social injustices within Christian circles and in society generally. Thus, triggering reactions that disrupted the mainstream discourses that sought to confine them to inferiority.

However, the Manyano was not only involved in secret operations during the time of resistance. This movement also did more radical activities including protests, strikes, women and children issues advocacy among others (Ndlovu, 2024:92). In the opinion of Phiri (2002:111), religious beliefs were at the heart of the Manyano's activism both in terms of driving motivation and moral imperative. It was this religiously motivated activism and resistance that was not only a reaction to the outside influence of apartheid, but also a reaction to the inside control of the church as an institution that tried to maintain the status quo and keep women in subordinate homebound positions. Gaitskell (2000:279) asserts, the Manyano's contributions, therefore, constituted a critical frontier of faith and politics, whereby religion was effectively harnessed in the pursuit of social and political change.

Nevertheless, the Manyano's contributions have often been overlooked or underappreciated in both historical and contemporary accounts of the anti-apartheid struggle. Mkhesu (2020:157) critiques the tendency to focus on male-dominated organisations and leadership within the liberation movement, arguing that this focus has obscured the significant contributions of women's groups like the Manyano. Denis (2004:178) similarly notes that church history has often ignored the religious agency of Black women, shaped by both African traditions and Christian commitments. This erasure reflects patriarchal biases embedded in church and society, and calls for oral history as a tool to recover these silenced voices.

Therefore, by re-examining the Manyano's role in the resistance, this study seeks to highlight the critical contributions of Methodist women to the anti-apartheid struggle, challenging the dominant narratives that have marginalized their efforts and recognizing the ways in which their faith informed and sustained their activism.

2.5.3. Feminist Critical Historiography of Methodist Women's Agency

Through a lens of methodological feminism, this study reinterprets the experiences and involvement of Methodist women during apartheid by questioning the dominant historiographical paradigms that have excluded or deemphasized the agency of Methodist women (Simpson, 2018:13). The current approach to writing history therefore seeks to undo this by bringing to the foreground women's narratives especially those whose experiences have not been seen as worthy to be documented (Browne, 2013:128). As pointed out by Braude (2004:565), feminism in historiography is not just about incorporating women into history, but

about completely rewriting and reimagining what history is all about. This rethinking is particularly relevant to the Methodist Church in apartheid, where women's performances and roles have been marginalized or erased and substituted by more male-oriented conventional history.

This research aims to write the excluded Black Methodist women's history of apartheid South Africa through the methodology of the feminist critical historiography. Browne (2013:129) notes that conventional historical accounts are often deficient in their portrayal of women's involvement because many of these women's activities did not receive state endorsement or, indeed, documentation. According to Braude (2004:569), the failure can be attributed to the androcentrism prevalent in historiographical traditions and the general socially constructed subordinate status of women in society. Feminist critical historiography, thus, aims at eradicating these biases by concentrating on day-to-day and practical tactics employed by women, considering how they avoided and contested apartheid and the church (Lewis and Baderoon, 2021:59).

Further, Rotramel (2020:308) explains that feminist critical historiography acknowledges intersectionality in regard to women's experiences, which means that gender is not the only social category affecting women. In the recent past, Antonio (2022:55) insisted on the importance of not always and only focusing on the race and religions of the Methodist women involved in the apartheid process and claimed that their agency cannot be considered without taking into account their class as well. This inter-sectional approach is especially pertinent in considering the Manyano movement of women's resistance where race and religion also played an influential role in resistance (Gaitskell, 2002:379). Exploring how these interacting identities of gender, race, and class influenced the actions, feminist critical historiography offers a richer and more inclusive view of women's agency during apartheid.

However, it must be highlighted that feminist critical historiography is not devoid of certain problems. Grant (2020:18) calls into question the specificity of feminist historians in proposing women's resistance as the most relevant fact in post-civil war transformations, while at times, women easily collaborated with patriarchal systemic norms. This critique becomes even more pertinent in the context of the Methodist Church, whereby the roles of women were defined by the same religious and cultural paradigm they were fighting against. Reflecting on these issues, the feminist critical historiography can encompass a more nuanced and more critical portrayal

of women's agency and their acts of both defiance and compliance with the structures that governed their lives.

2.5.4. Challenges and Opportunities for Methodist Women

However, Methodist women during the apartheid period, as discussed in this paper, worked hard to achieve the goals of the church in every aspect, but they experienced lots of challenges in the church and society. Of difficulty was the issue of gender discrimination which restricted women from obtaining formal authority positions in the church and its decision-making mechanisms (Madise, 2021:9). Kumalo (2009:168) notes that, although women were engaged actively in community organisation and activism, they had little decision-making power within the church, since the latter continued to be controlled by men. This exclusion was more than a self-regulation of gender relations within the church; it reaffirmed and replicated the societal norms of suppressing women.

Nevertheless, such difficulties created opportunities for women to gain agency and become active agents in their lives at a new level. Thus, according to Phiri (2002:87), women had to look for other avenues through which they could negotiate leadership and authority in the church, which were less formal and more local. These other forms of leadership were not only oppositional to apartheid but also paved the way for the generations of women to press on for gender equity in the church. Thus, Methodist women during apartheid period contributed immensely not only to the development of the Methodist Church, but also in the progression of the struggle for social justice in South Africa (Madise, 2014:125).

Examining Methodist women's leadership under apartheid highlights a vital, often overlooked link between gender, religion, and politics (Ngunjiri, 2010:9). Using feminist critical historiography, it becomes evident that these women navigated complex intersections of gender, faith, and politics in their actions. These women were not only acting against an external antagonist, but were also acting within the framework of their religious beliefs, as well as challenging the internal structures of the church. It is crucial to understand the complexity of their fight in the context of race, gender, and faith, each of which was an essential factor in their actions and outcomes (Gaitskell, 2002:387).

The Manyano movement is again such a good example of how women within the Methodist Church of South Africa co-existed, and struggled against the apartheid regime and patriarchy that prevailed during this time (Mkhwanazi and Kgatla, 2015:194). Through religious authority and the operations of the Manyano association that provided communal forums for action for these women, they were able to gain power within their society and participate in the liberation process. Nevertheless, the obstacles they encountered during the process, as well as at the church and in society in general, proved that the fight for women's rights is still present in religious organisations. Despite the challenges they faced, the opportunities they took show the importance of the development of gender equality within the church and modern society.

In general, the critical interpretation of Methodist women's actions during apartheid not only contests the existing historical discourses that tend to subordinate women's contributions, but also provides a richer and more inclusive perspective on women's activities. Consequently, by using feminist critical historiography as a theoretical framework, this study aims to reveal the hitherto untold stories of women's leadership and agency, as well as acknowledging the threats and opportunities associated with it. This approach not only serves to enhance the understanding of the role played by the Methodist Church during the apartheid era, but also adds to existing debates on gender, religion, and social justice in Southern Africa. Haddad (2021:3) describes this as a pivotal act of agency through which Black women actively challenge and dismantle the notions of 'victimhood,' asserting instead their role as resilient, theological, and transformative subjects within both church and society.

2.6. Feminist Critical Historiography: Rewriting Women's Histories

2.6.1. Overview of Feminist Critical Historiography

Williams (2020:247) notes that Feminist critical historiography is the type of historiographical analysis that aims at altering and deconstructing the patriarchal epistemologies present within the extant historical accounts. At the core of this framework is the acknowledgement of the responsibility to search for, restore, and rewrite the histories of women who have been sidelined, silenced, or erased by historical accounts. As Browne (2013:145) points out, feminist critical historiography is not simply a call to add history that is about women back to the historical narrative; it proposes a complete transformation of the organisation and representation of historical knowledge. It entails challenging the procedures and the sources through which history has been built as these appear to have been developed based on the gendered perceptions and dominative cultural relations within the corresponding periods.

Feminist critical historiography thus, aims to problematise these assumptions to reveal how women and their contributions have been marginalised or written out, especially in religious, social and political contexts.

This approach is especially useful in an exploration of the position of women in religious contexts like the Methodist Church during apartheid. Routinized historiographical approaches have long been inclined to emphasize the role of male elites, as well as the impact of females, particularly those not in high-level positions (Browne, 2013:180). Applying methods of feminist critical historiography, scholars can reveal women's histories and contributions that were often ignored when studying religious movements. This method also focuses on how women's interactions with the world cannot be fixed on gender, but will also include race, class, and other forms of social constructions of power (Gaitskell, 2002:389). When viewed through this lens, an exploration of Methodist women during apartheid can uncover how these women participated in religious resistance, understood their position in social power structures, and attempted to challenge the oppressions of apartheid while simultaneously being subjects of patriarchal and colonial power themselves.

2.6.2. African Feminist Perspectives

Thus, African feminist theories offer a theoretical framework to analyse the roles of women in African settings concerning the religious and political realms. While African feminism can be compared to Western feminism, it is more focused on African women's cultural, social and historical realities (Yafeh-Deigh, 2020:81). Phiri (2002:139) and Cornwall (2005:62) believe that African feminism owes consideration to how gender complements race, colonialism, and religion in shaping African women. This perspective is quite pivotal in comprehending the involvement of the Methodist women in Soweto during apartheid, as it can reveal how such women proved themselves to be subversive of both gender apartheid as well as the racial form of it in the context of South Africa.

Siwila and Mukuka (2022:21-22) and Yafeh-Deigh (2020:89) pointed out that one of the main principles of African feminism is to define women's agency through cultural and religious perspectives. Contrary to some other Western feminisms, which might perceive religion as hostile to women, African feminists may point out how women have employed religion in its institutions and frameworks as a tool of resistance (Zwissler, 2012:359). For example, the Manyano movement in the Methodist Church represents a form of agency where African

women were able to turn their religious stations into organisational, educational, and mobilizing platforms against apartheid. This form of resistance was based due to their faith, showing how different African feminist analysis can be used to provide a better understanding of women in religious practices.

Also, African feminism rejects the imposition of Western feminist paradigms in understanding African women's experiences, since they may not be fully appropriate (Zwissler, 2012:362). According to Wane (2011:20) and Oyěwùmí (1997:121) the challenges that affect African women are not arbitrary, but rather have their roots in colonialism, and the effects of neo-colonialism. Consequently, an African feminist historiography entails a way of writing history that aims at empowering African women, embracing their agency within society, as well as taking an anti-colonial stance against unjust structures. In the context of the Methodist Church, this perspective enables the reader to gain further insight into how women struggled and survived against apartheid and patriarchy, all while resorting to or drawing on their religion and indigenous culture.

2.6.3. Reinterpreting Methodist Women's Roles through a Feminist Lens

A feminist reinterpretation of the roles of Methodist women during the apartheid era calls for a deliberate re-evaluation of how their contributions have been portrayed or, more often, overlooked in historical narratives. The historiography of the Methodist Church's struggle against apartheid has typically centred on male figures, frequently neglecting the vital roles played by women who mobilised communities and offered essential support within their own spheres of influence (Phiri, 2002:147). By applying this feminist framework, scholars can challenge these androcentric histories and reveal how women exercised leadership and agency within the spaces afforded by both religious and secular structures.

These readings do not only underscore the ability and determination of Methodist women, but also presents critique on the patriarchal approaches employed in writing history. Feminist historiography writing thus offers a broader perspective of the history of society and religion since it considers the roles played by women in social and religious revolutions. This approach also invites new forms of analysing the connections between gender, race, and religion, which in turn provides reconceptualized and more detailed pictures of Methodism and the churches' participation in the fight against apartheid (Gaitskell, 2002:393).

2.6.4. Who then are these women?

These women are often seen as "ordinary," yet their stories and oral testimonies reveal that they are far from ordinary. These are women who willingly render us their personal stories. Riessman (2008:23) asserts that when individuals recount their histories, they do not merely relay facts but actively construct meaning, shaping their identities in the process. They are Black women affiliated with the Methodist Church and the Women's Manyano, a uniformed organisation within the MCSA. African feminist scholars contend that Black women have been central to shaping religious and social landscapes such as Soweto, particularly through movements such as the *Manyano* -women's prayer groups (Oduyoye, 1999:191; Haddad, 2004:4; Ngcobozi, 2020:35-36; Mujinga, 2023:1-2).

Oduyoye emphasizes that these women have used their participation in the *Manyano* to navigate and resist both racial and patriarchal oppression, highlighting how their religious devotion became a platform for socio-political activism (Oduyoye, 1999:191; Oduyoye, 1996:162–163). Ackermann further notes that these "uniformed" women, despite operating within traditional gender roles, redefined these roles to exert influence within both the church and broader society, creating spaces for communal solidarity and leadership (Ackermann, 2016:80). The study's focus on women serves to uncover the complexities of their contributions, moving beyond the simplistic categorisations set forth by theorists such as Plakoyiannaki *et al.* (2008:101-112). Plakoyiannaki *et al.* (2008) demonstrate how online advertising typically confines women to traditional or decorative roles—such as housewives or sex objects—thus narrowing public perceptions of women's capabilities. Similarly, Tsichla and Zotos (2016) observe that print media continues to portray women predominantly in dependency or family-oriented roles, reinforcing simplistic categorizations and undermining the complexity of women's lived experiences.

2.7. Gaps and Limitations in the current literature

Another more crucial omission that has been noted in literature on the Methodist Church during apartheid is lack of extensive study on the role of women in the church (Robertson, 2020:32). Historiography in traditional history has also been male-centred and focused on male social roles, for instance patriarchal roles within the church (Browne, 2013:187). According to Oduyoye and Kanyoro (2005:1), this approach perpetuates the problematic pattern where African women's experiences and voices are represented by men, . This male-centred approach has reduced the consideration given to women's involvement in the church's history and their diverse roles in religious and political matters.

Indeed, Phiri (2002:198) establishes that the exclusion of women's input in historical overviews not only erases them as agents, but also reinforces male-led endeavours that have traditionally suppressed female voices. This omission is especially striking within the framework of the Manyano movement, which played an essential role in organising the women's struggle against apartheid and maintaining the believers' spiritual experiences. In overlooking these aspects, prior scholarship has created a void in understanding the church's part in the anti-apartheid campaign. Furthermore, the trend of omitting women from history has important implications for history education and interpretation. Mkhwanazi and Kgatla (2015:195) convey that such exclusion reaffirms that leadership and agency are male-associated attributes and fictitious gender perspectives that persist in the modern world. Thus, there is a desolate lack of the rich diversity of inclusive historical narrations that would encompass women and particularly the women of colour within the church, and without presenting them merely as the supporting cast in the fight for justice and equality, but as the leading characters.

Thus, the question is not one of historical comprehensiveness, but of the imperative for women's history as a means of adequately addressing societal gender bias in historical archives. Historiography of the past era has been the representation of the past as an area dominated by male experiences and male dominant account, and having little concern for the women (Gage, 2023:94). This exclusion has placed a skewed perception of history where the role of women, particularly in social, political, and religious transformations, is denied fully. According to Robertson (2020:44), there is a need to reverse this trend, because including marginalised historical narratives helps to get a true and accurate picture of how the different groups in society have been involved in shaping history.

It is especially important to have inclusive narratives when there are historical issues like apartheid involved, which is the case with the Methodist Church. Mkhwanazi and Kgatla (2015:197) echo the same sentiments by noting that women, especially those in the Manyano have been marginalised in past works on the role of the church in the struggle against apartheid. By ignoring these voices, the existing literature not only marginalises the efforts of women, but also oversimplifies the role of the church in the struggle against apartheid. Gage (2023:115) declares that the 'inclusion of different perspectives is critical in disputing patriarchal assumptions within the historiography and in offering a fuller and more diverse history.'

Based on the aforementioned gaps and limitations of prior research, several conceptually related avenues for research can be identified. There is literature that requires femicide analysis in religious movements during apartheid, excluding the formal leadership of religious movements.

Scholars such as Oduyoye and Siwila have contributed significantly to the discourse on African Christian women's movements, including, but not limited to the Women's Manyano. However, their analysis has generally been from broader African contexts and perspectives, positioning them as external observers when addressing specific local realities such as those found within Soweto. This geographical and contextual gap necessitates studies that deeply engage the unique historical, cultural, and socio-political nuances experienced specifically by women within Methodist communities in Soweto.

Additionally, notable scholars like Gaitskell (1997:88) and Haddad (2007:123) have examined women's roles broadly in South African church contexts, but their insights similarly often lack the intimate engagement with grassroots realities and localised histories specific to Methodist women in Soweto. Beverley Haddad's analysis on the intersection of gender and development in South Africa presents important insights, particularly her assertion that for African women, concepts such as liberation, reconstruction, and transformation are premature, as their theology is primarily one of survival (Haddad, 2007:123).

While Haddad emphasizes the plight of economically disempowered women and acknowledges the church's potential to serve as an agent of change, her focus remains on the institutional structures rather than the lived experiences of women within these spaces. This gap in Haddad's approach highlights the need for a deeper examination of the roles that Black women in the church have historically played, not only as subjects of survival, but also as active agents of faith, resistance, and social transformation—an area that this study has addressed by cantering the narratives and contributions of Black women in the MCSA, particularly in Soweto.

Thus, this study has sought to address these existing scholarly gaps by foregrounding the localized voices, narratives, and lived experiences of women who directly shaped and were shaped by Methodism in the distinct historical landscape of Soweto.

2.8. Conclusion

This research has brought to light the important but unnoticed role of Methodist women in combating apartheid regime in South Africa. The study has revealed the experiences of women in leadership, especially within Manyano, and called for more diverse historical tales by using the tools of feminist critical historiography. It has also revealed some important areas of omission in the literature including lack of emphasis on women or incorporation of intersectionality analysis. These findings stress the necessity to reread history to acknowledge women's agency in constructing both the church and the liberation process. Appreciating and acknowledging the parts played by women in church history is also useful to ensure that the right history is told, together with the Church's history. Most historical overviews are male-centred, and the voices of women have been censored or omitted, and therefore strengthening and perpetuating patriarchal views existing in modern society. Posing the narratives of dispossessed women as a counterpoint to hegemonic male history, feminist critical historiography problematises and supplements the information presented. The recognition of gender, specifically the role of women in the Methodist Church during the apartheid period is not simply a historical exercise and paradigm shift, but an act of recognition and justice due to a system that has marginalised and silenced them.

CHAPTER 3

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1. Introduction

Serving as the theoretical pillar of this research, the theoretical framework provides an analytical framework for scrutiny of the positions and contributions of women in the MCSA in Soweto from 1950 to 2000. This framework intends to support the analysis by interacting with theories that deal with the suppression and marginalisation of women in both religious and social-political settings. A vigorous theoretical foundation helps to anchor the research in recognised intellectual frameworks, thereby providing a thorough grasp of how women managed intersecting systems of oppression in apartheid. This research focuses on making clear the women's agency from a critical feminist viewpoint, investigating how their contributions have been either set aside or neglected in stories of the past.

This research leans majorly on feminist critical historiography, a theory that seeks to undermine male-dominated narratives by recovering and raising the visibility of women's voices (Radhakrishnan, 1989:192). The theory of intersectionality strengthens the analysis by reviewing how race, gender, and class combined to generate individual experiences for women under apartheid (Gouws, 2017:21). These two theories harmonize by providing a theoretical model that analyses gender and achieves a rich understanding of oppression. According to Ndinda and Ndhlovu (2022:99), in settings like apartheid South Africa, race and gender were intrinsically linked in determining the lives of women.

The study further employs two supplementary frameworks—social constructivism and decolonial theory—to capture both how “knowledge” about gender is made and how colonial power continues to shape that knowledge. Social constructivism shows us that gender roles, norms and identities are not “natural” or fixed but are produced through ongoing social interaction, institutions, and discourse (Berger and Luckmann, 2016; Scott, 2007:1067; Smith, 2012:47). By attending to the processes through which Methodist women learn “appropriate” roles—through worship practices, pastoral structures, and educational programmes. Social constructivism helps us see how race, class, religion, and gender become embedded as mutually reinforcing categories. At the same time, decolonial theory reminds us that these very processes remain haunted by colonial legacies (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018:45;

Mignolo, 2021:725). It insists on “delinking” from Eurocentric assumptions about authority, personhood, and knowledge production so that the voices and strategies of Black women under apartheid and beyond can be heard on their terms (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018:102; Mignolo, 2021:734).

Bringing these frameworks into dialogue makes for a balanced intersectional analysis. Social constructivism uncovers the everyday mechanisms by which Methodist women internalize norms—how catechisms, liturgies and community expectations co-construct gendered subjectivities (Berger and Luckmann, 1966:112; Scott, 1986:1075). Decolonial theory then pushes us to ask: whose norms? Whose history? It exposes how apartheid’s racial ordering and colonial mission structures shaped not only material inequalities but also the very language through which “womanhood” was defined (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018:67; Mignolo, 2021:730). In combination, these lenses enable us to map both the social production of gender and to contest the colonial matrices that have rendered Black Methodist women’s agency invisible—thereby informing a feminist agenda rooted in both critical reflexivity and emancipatory praxis (Smith, 2012:161; Phiri, 2002:13; Kumalo, 2009:51).

This comprehensive perspective reveals that social justice cannot be achieved through isolated reforms, but requires a fundamental transformation of the systems and structures that perpetuate inequality. Therefore, these frameworks not only provide documentation and analysis of women’s historical contributions. but collectively take a critical stance in addressing issues of social justice. Bulmer and Solomos (2004:111) concur that the fundamental premise of blending theories in a study such as feminism, social constuctivism, decoloniality etc. acknowledges that the researched phenomena is inherently social. Though this theoretical broadening may be alarming, de Vos *et al.* (2011:306) stress that such a broad formulation of theories in case study design is essential for guiding and assisting in data structuring processes, rather than inflating the study.

3.2 Feminist Critical Historiography

3.2.1 Definition and Key Concepts

Feminist critical historiography is a theoretical approach that interrogates historical narratives through the lens of gender, challenging traditional male-dominated historical accounts that have long marginalised or ignore women’s roles. Scott argues that "the core of feminist historical work lies in analysing how gender operates as a way of signifying relationships of

power" and how traditional historiography often erases women's contributions from social, political, and religious developments (Scott, 1986:1067). Similarly, Riley critiques the historical category of "women" itself, contending that it has been inconsistently constructed in ways that render women's experiences invisible or marginal, depending on prevailing social and ideological norms (Riley, 2020:147). Feminist historiographers therefore seek to recover these lost narratives by critically engaging with historical sources, questioning how women have been represented, or misrepresented, in dominant discourses.

Central to feminist critical historiography is the belief that history is not neutral, but it is shaped by the perspectives and biases of those who write it. Chikwendu (2023:18) and Weir (2021:12) have argued that historical records, including religious texts, often reflect the patriarchal values of the societies in which they were written. These scholars highlight the need for a feminist re-reading of history that foregrounds the experiences and contributions of women, particularly in contexts where they have been systematically excluded. A key concept within feminist critical historiography is the notion of "recovery," which involves reclaiming the voices and stories of women who have been overlooked or silenced in traditional historical historiography (Jaques, 2022:38).

Also, this method illustrates the key importance of intersectionality in making sense of the historical experiences of women. Crenshaw (2013:139) coined the term intersectionality to refer to how multiple social factors, like race, class, and sexuality, blend to create unique forms of oppression. Consequently, feminist critical historiography is concerned with more than gender; it also looks at how other aspects of identity define women's roles and experiences in history. This multi-dimensional perspective facilitates a richer understanding of women's roles, recognising that they have often been doubly marginalised based on their race and class, as well as their gender (Scott1986:1065; Watson, 2023:15).

3.2.2 Relevance to Uncovering Marginalised Voices

To ensure that feminist critical historiography succeeds in correcting the systematic exclusion of their contributions from history, it is necessary to recover and elevate the voices of marginalised groups such as women. In discussions about religious history, women tend to be either sidelined or missing altogether from the narratives surrounding religious organisations and faith-based movements (Scott, 2020:319). With the goal of opposing these male-centric stories, feminist historiography seeks to reinterpret historical narratives through a broader,

more inclusive lens that values the vital contributions women have made in establishing religious and social structures.

Feminist critical historiography uncovers marginalised voices, in part, by critically evaluating primary sources and historical records to recognise the gaps and omissions linked with contributions from women. According to scholars such as Kling (2022:14), power dynamics of the time often shape historical texts, with those in authority, usually men, running the narratives. According to feminist historiographers, dominant narratives are disputed by the act of recovering unconventional sources of historical knowledge, including oral histories, personal journals, and letters, which typically reveal rich thoughts about women's lives that official records fail to capture (Weir, 2021:13).

In the history of religion, particularly regarding the MCSA, feminist critical historiography helps to lighten the contributions of women to religious movements and their roles in the spiritual and social life of their communities. For example, during apartheid, women in Soweto's Methodist Church were usually the solid foundation of the social outreach activities, giving critical aid to their communities with little formal recognition (Lamola, 2021:115). Feminist historiography provides a more complete understanding of religious history by concentrating on these ignored contributions, which encompass both the experiences and influence of women (Rotramel, 2020:305).

This approach also shows how the gender frameworks intersect with other marginalising forces, particularly race and class, which have significant relevance in South Africa. The system of apartheid enforced hierarchies based on race and gender, causing Black women to suffer from a particular form of double oppression (Msebi, 2021:17). A feminist critical lens in historiography permits a complicated investigation into how these women steered through their marginalised positions to effect influence and assume leadership in religious institutions (Collins and Bilge, 2020:59). The recovery of these narratives allows feminist historiography to dispute the obliteration of women's contributions and results in a more accurate and inclusive historical account.

3.2.3 Application to the Study

In the scope of this research, feminist critical historiography serves to bring to light the obscured contributions of women in the MCSA, especially in Soweto throughout the apartheid

years. In this period, women occupied key positions in religion and socio-politics, though historical narratives have ignored their influence (Bafford, 2022:91). This framework supplies a perspective from which to uncover these women's stories and properly acknowledge their contributions to the Methodist Church and the greater social environment.

To critically investigate the primary sources such as church records, minutes of meetings, and archival documents, feminist historiography will be put to use, as all these sources have typically reflected male-dominated perspectives on church leadership. Often, these sources fail to recognise the important unstructured contributions that women made in sustaining the spiritual and social aims of the church. The study looks to underscore the fundamental role of women's activities, including community organising, leading prayer meetings, and directing charitable projects in the success of the church, amid the political unrest by reanalysing these records through a feminist perspective (Gouws, 2017:19).

Also, oral histories will provide an important methodological tool for this study, since they make it possible to incorporate voices omitted from written historical sources. Women within the Methodist Church contributed greatly to the community's development, but their stories are still unheard (Kathenya, 2021:112). This study seeks to recover these narratives through interviews and personal testimonies, thereby giving voice to those long kept silent. This is in harmony with the feminist historiographical aim of recovering "silenced" voices and acknowledging and valuing women's contributions (Harris, 2020:52).

Textual analysis will assist in exploring how historical accounts of the Methodist Church represented or misrepresented women. The study will explore primary and secondary sources to find patterns of marginalisation and exclusion, evaluating how patriarchal structures might have affected historical narratives. In pursuing this, feminist critical historiography will establish the necessary structure to challenge and dismantle these narratives, delivering a more comprehensive and correct view of the role of women within the Methodist Church of Soweto during apartheid. This thorough analysis will contribute to a developing body of work that aims to correct the historical neglect of women's roles in religious and social environments.

3.3 Intersectionality Theory

3.3.1 Definition and Key Concepts

According to the framework known as intersectionality, the goal is to analyse how identity categories including race, gender, class, and sexuality interact to shape a person's experiences of oppression and privilege (Crenshaw, 2013:139; Collins, 2000:299). Developed from feminist and critical race theories at the end of the 1980s, intersectionality is a term introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw to highlight that various social inequalities are connected rather than taking place separately (Crenshaw, 2013:140). The intersectionality theory indicates a frequent tendency to segment social categories into distinct units, contending instead that they engage in interplay through overlap, which leads to a complex interaction of oppression and privilege.

Intersectionality focuses on the concept that people hold multiple social roles in unison, and their identities can either boost or restrict their encounters with marginalisation or privilege (Ndaye, 2022:61). As an illustration, consider a Black woman. Although she might endure both gender and racial discrimination, her experience is much more than merely the aggregate of these oppressions; it is a unique experience that grows from the intersection of her racial and gender identities (Collins and Bilge, 2020:61). This opinion contrasts with simplified analyses of oppression that usually focuses on one identity classification, like race or gender, without considering how these categories interact.

Yet another vital concept in intersectionality is the awareness that power systems such as patriarchy, racism, and capitalism function through these intersections to generate systems of inequality (Overstreet *et al*., 2020:779). The reinforcement of these power structures leads to varying forms of marginalisation for individuals whose identities intersect. It is impossible to analyse the experiences of Black women throughout apartheid in South Africa without addressing both race and gender. Racial and gender hierarchies formed the fundamentals of the apartheid system, and intersectionality allows for a more holistic framework to analyse its effects on people (Dlamini, 2013:37).

The idea of intersectionality illustrates the requirement for inclusive social justice movements that are respectful of and responsive to the diverse ways in which different groups interpret their oppression. Due to this technique, intersectionality takes aim at significant societal structures and, additionally, actions taken by movements that ignore the varied experiences of marginalised groups. This model is vital for understanding the intricate dimensions of oppression, especially in complex settings like apartheid South Africa, where women's experiences were profoundly shaped by the interplay of gender, race, and class.

3.3.2 Relevance to the Context of Apartheid and Post-Apartheid South Africa

A critical framework for analysing the lived experiences of Black women in South Africa, particularly within highly racialised and patriarchal systems, is intersectionality. In addition to being a racial regime, apartheid was profoundly gendered, positioning women, especially Black women, to endure different forms of discrimination and marginalisation because of their position as intersections of both racial and gender hierarchies (Phaswana, 2021:204). Intersectionality allows analysing how the legal and social systems of apartheid maintained multiple kinds of oppression together.

During apartheid, Black women faced the double burden of institutional racism from the state and the deeply rooted patriarchy found in both public and private spaces (Bridger, 2021:29). Often, they were confined to domestic duties and denied leadership posts in political, social, and religious organisations. Still, despite their marginalisation, many Black women contributed vital roles to resistance movements aimed at challenging racial and gender oppression (Gouws, 2017:21). The complexities of these women's resistance are made clear through intersectionality; they engaged in a fight not just against racism or patriarchy, but against a system that validated both types of oppression.

An illustration of this is the apartheid legal framework that used laws including the Group Areas Act and the Population Registration Act to enforce racial segregation, while also limiting women's rights through patriarchal law. Because of their race, Black women were doubly marginalised, with patriarchal norms in their communities further limiting their positions (Collins and Bilge, 2020:64). Thanks to intersectionality, one can understand how these various systems of oppression crossed, which resulted in Black women's experiences under apartheid being special from those of Black men or white women.

In the post-apartheid era, while significant strides have been made in addressing racial inequalities, gender disparities continue to persist. Black women, particularly in religious institutions, continue to navigate the legacies of both racial and gender-based oppression. Intersectionality remains relevant in this context as it provides a framework for understanding the continued marginalisation of women within social, political, and religious spaces (Crenshaw, 2019:144). In sum, intersectionality offers a critical tool for analysing how apartheid's legacy continues to shape the lives of Black women in South Africa, particularly those involved in leadership within institutions such as the Methodist Church.

3.3.3 Application to Understanding Women's Roles in the Methodist Church

Intersectionality is distinctively useful in interpreting the functions of Black women within the MCSA throughout and after the apartheid period (Mokhoathi, 2020:11). Within the church, Black women occupied the intersection of gender and race-based oppressions, steering through both patriarchal institutional structures and the racist systems of the state (Wiesner, 2021:77). This framework serves to bring to light the complexities surrounding their experiences; they frequently found themselves excluded from formal leadership positions and yet were essential to supporting the ongoing sustainability of the church and its social justice work.

The Methodist Church, just like other faith institutions faced considerable restrictions on women's leadership due to patriarchal traditions. Women typically remained in peripheral roles, leading prayer groups and coordinating charitable causes, while men commanded formal positions of authority within the church (Phaswana, 2021:206). In addition to regular gender discrimination, those Black women in the Methodist Church had to deal with the racial injustice of apartheid, which further curtailed chances for advancement (Du Toit, 2022:51). Intersectionality promotes a more detailed perspective on how the women managed the two sets of restrictions, effectively claiming their agency in informal, but major ways.

During the apartheid era, Black women participated in the Methodist Church, focusing on community outreach and social justice efforts that supported people dealing with political and economic difficulties (Chikwendu, 2023:32). Even though they were absent from formal leadership, these women played a key part in keeping the church's moral and social missions alive. When viewed through an intersectional lens, their contributions appear to be the product of both their marginalisation as women and their marginalisation as Black South Africans (Msebi, 2021:24). The standing in the church for them was not only about gender or race, but a complicated negotiation involving both.

In addition, intersectionality offers a knowledge of how the post-apartheid church continues to reflect the legacies of these overlapping oppressions. The visibility of Black women in leadership positions of the church has increased, but they persistently deal with challenges that stem from the racial and gender inequalities of history (Gouws, 2017:20). According to intersectionality, a critical approach emerges from understanding the progression of Black women's experiences within the Methodist Church, revealing the challenges they still face in asserting their full recognition and leadership in religious organisations (Harris, 2020:64).

3.4 Social Constructivism Theory

3.4.1 Definition and Key Concepts

Social constructivism proposes a theoretical viewpoint that suggests knowledge, identity, and roles develop not through biology, but rather through the social construction that comes from cultural, political, and social dynamics (Phaswana, 2021:199). This perspective, based on Berger and Luckmann (2016:52), suggests that both individuals and collectives construct and carry on meanings and realities through the joint actions of society, usually influenced by existing power dynamics (Jovanovic, 2021:69). At the centre of social constructivism is the belief that gender roles and responsibilities do not present themselves naturally, but are formulated and enforced by societal expectations and norms influenced by historical and cultural factors (Amineh and Asl, 2015:13).

In terms of gender, social constructivism asserts that the roles assigned to men and women within institutions like the family, the workplace, and religious organisations are products of socio-political conditions (Cislaghi and Heise, 2020:409). These roles are maintained through language, symbols, and shared practices. Gender expectations are not only culturally specific, but also politically enforced, as seen during apartheid in South Africa where Black women, were relegated to subservient roles both within society and religious institutions (Collins and Bilge, 2020:72). By exploring the construction of these roles, social constructivism helps to reveal the mechanisms by which gender and power are intertwined within societal structures.

3.4.2 Application to the Study

According to the study, social constructivism gives a structure for understanding the shaping of women's gender roles in the MCSA by the socio-political context of apartheid. The interplay between race and gender was extremely important in defining the positions women could assume in both the religious and social realms during that time. The apartheid regime divided people based on race and, at the same time, bolstered traditional gender roles that marginalised women, mainly Black women, who were sidelined to perform secondary institutional roles in religion (Tshipani, 2021:86).

Social constructivism reveals that the roles of women within the Methodist Church were not only a result of theological doctrine, but also of the political and cultural expectations prevalent at that time (Maher, 2022:21). Women were commonly viewed as caregivers and nurturers, roles that coincided with the larger social mission of the church, but which restricted them to

the private sphere, far from formal leadership opportunities. Rudman and Glick (2021:145) point out that the fashioning of women's roles in religious scenarios commonly mirrors larger societal expectations regarding gender.

Nonetheless, the study brings attention to the tactics by which women in the Methodist Church of Soweto encountered these socially prescribed roles. Women discovered methods to assert power and influence in the church, even with the formal restrictions imposed by both the apartheid system and church authorities, via community work, prayer groups, and social justice efforts (Hohlo, 2020:48). This strengthens the claim put forth by scholars including Gouws (2017:22), who believe that even though social constructivism explains the generation of gender roles, it still provides perspectives on how individuals and groups challenge and adapt these roles.

The political framework of apartheid implemented rigid racial and gender hierarchies, while social constructivism illustrates that the church, being a social entity, both mirrored and defied these norms (Jini, 2023:82). Although women were formally shut out of leadership positions in the Methodist Church, their unofficial impact was key to sustaining the church's functions and its social outreach. This behaviour supports Collins and Bilge (2020:84)'s belief that gender roles, while they are socially constructed, are mutable and can be taken on and adjusted through community actions. As a result, social constructivism gives us the lens to examine how women traversed the oppressive structures of apartheid-era South Africa and produced spaces for their agency within the church.

3.5 Decolonial Theory

3.5.1 Definition and Key Concepts

Decolonial theory emerges as an intellectual and political response primarily from Latin American scholars such as Walter Mignolo, Aníbal Quijano, and Ramón Grosfoguel, who critique the enduring structures and epistemologies of coloniality that persist long after formal political colonialism has ended (Mignolo, 2011:12). Central to this theory is the concept of "coloniality," which Quijano defines as the patterns of power that originated during colonialism, but persistently permeate knowledge production, cultural expression, and social hierarchies (Quijano, 2000:533). Decoloniality, therefore, calls for a systematic dismantling of these entrenched power relations, epistemic injustices, and cultural hegemonies (Grosfoguel, 2007:214).

A critical aspect of decolonial theory is its emphasis on the "epistemic disobedience" advocated by Mignolo (2009:159). Epistemic disobedience seeks to break away from the Eurocentric knowledge systems that continue to marginalize and invalidate non-Western ways of knowing, particularly those from the global South. Thus, it offers a pathway towards the recognition and affirmation of indigenous epistemologies, identities, and histories which have been suppressed under colonial conditions (Mignolo and Walsh, 2018:28).

3.5.2 Application to the Study

In this research, the decolonial theory offers a robust analytical framework that distinctly surpasses the explanatory power of postcolonial theories. Unlike postcolonial theory, which frequently centres its critique on the cultural legacies of colonialism primarily in literary and cultural discourse. Decolonial theory explicitly targets systemic and epistemological oppression inherent in knowledge production and religious structures, rendering it particularly suitable for analysing the lived realities of Black Methodist women in apartheid South Africa (Grosfoguel, 2011:5).

Decolonial theory uniquely positions this study to address the epistemic violence that marginalizes Black women's theological insights, leadership, and historical contributions within the Methodist Church. It provides the necessary critical tools to interrogate not merely the historical narrative, but also the underlying colonial matrices of power that sustain gendered and racial hierarchies within religious communities (Dube, 2019:145). Employing a decolonial feminist lens enabled the researcher to recover and validate the suppressed voices and experiences of Black women, challenging the traditional patriarchal and Eurocentric historiographical methods that perpetuate their invisibility and erasure (Mignolo and Walsh, 2018:35).

For instance, applying a decolonial lens aligns effectively with Dube's advocacy for a feminist biblical hermeneutics that centres African women’s lived realities and spiritual authority, thus challenging the persistent coloniality within biblical interpretation and church leadership (Dube, 2019:146). The narratives of Black Methodist women from Soweto, when viewed through decolonial theory, emerge not merely as acts of resistance, but as critical assertions of epistemic agency, highlighting their roles as active contributors to the theological and societal evolution within South Africa (Madise, 2014:123).

Therefore, the choice of decolonial theory is not merely methodological, but profoundly ethical, aligning with this research topic's advocacy stance to foreground marginalized epistemologies and provide historical justice to Black women overlooked contributions within Methodism in Soweto.

3.6 Justification for Selected Theories

Feminist critical historiography is especially helpful for this work because its primary goal is to counter the erasure of women from history, especially in relation to religion and politics. Historiographies of religious organisations such as the Methodist Church have tended to draw on patriarchal discourses which erase women or position them in subsidiary roles (Weir, 2021:14). In this context, the feminist critical historiography offers a valuable counter-narrative by not only pointing to the presence of women in these stories, but also by questioning how historical records have been produced and mediated by gendered power relations (Scott, 2020:334).

This theory is particularly useful for understanding women in the MCSA during apartheid, because it analyses the stories of women who were barred from both history and religion. Women in Soweto, for instance, played crucial roles in maintaining the spiritual and social missions of the church, yet their contributions have often been relegated to the background (Overstreet *et al*., 2020:780). Feminist critical historiography allows for a re-examination of women's roles in South African history by challenging dominant male-centered narratives that have long excluded or diminished women's contributions. As Ntwape and Kriel (2018:152–155) argue, the groundbreaking edited volumes by Cherryl Walker and Nomboniso Gasa actively confront these silences by recovering and foregrounding the agency of women—especially Black women—in resistance movements and religious spaces. Their work demonstrates that understanding the role of women under apartheid requires a critical engagement with the historical gaps and the erasures produced by patriarchal historiography.

Moreover, feminist critical historiography is useful because it deals with the notion of 'recovery', which is a key focus of this work. This framework enables the reclamation of stories that have been silenced or excluded from dominant historical narratives using oral interviews, individual narratives, and documents (Collins and Bilge, 2020:97). Within the framework of the Methodist Church, this theory allows the study to reveal women's informal power positions, for example, they could lead prayer meetings or coordinate charitable events that were vital for

the functioning of the church, but were not always mentioned in the church chronicles (Hohlo, 2020:62).

Furthermore, the theory of feminist critical historiography offers a way of understanding how history is written and how some groups are excluded from it. This theory not only adds women into history, but also analyses the historical narrative and processes of its construction to erase women. This is particularly significant in South Africa, where race and gender combined during apartheid to oppress Black women even more. Following Spivak, the use of feminist historiography is to uncover the histories of 'the subaltern' who are not included in historical accounts (Kathenya, 2021:117). Thus, feminist critical historiography becomes a valuable lens for analysing how women's religious and social roles were discursively constituted, elided, and negotiated concerning both the church and the apartheid state.

Therefore, the choice of feminist critical historiography as the primary theoretical approach is warranted, because it is the most relevant to this study's goal of exposing the erasure of women from historical and religious narratives, and of reinserting their voices, agency, and contributions into the broader story of the Methodist Church under apartheid. This enables the recounting of history from a viewpoint that focuses on women's roles, thus subverting the misogynistic telling of religious organisations' histories. In doing so, it gives an account of women's involvement information of the church and social and political movements in apartheid South Africa in a more comprehensive manner.

Intersectionality is the other important theoretical frame for this study since it encompasses the relationship between race, gender, and class, specifically in the apartheid South Africa. First developed by Crenshaw (2013:149), intersectionality means that the categories of race, gender, and class, for example, do not exist in isolation, but rather are interconnected, which results in multiple forms of oppression and discrimination. This framework is particularly helpful in analysing the experiences of Black women in South Africa who were oppressed based on their race during apartheid and on their gender within their communities and religious organisations. The use of intersectionality is relevant in this study because it offers a more complex understanding of the experiences of women in the Methodist Church of Soweto. Under apartheid, Black women were doubly marginalised, they were marginalized by the state based on racist policies, and at the same time they could not assume leadership positions within the church because of patriarchal culture (Phaswana, 2021:205). Intersectionality allows for an

analysis of how these women navigated these intersecting systems of oppression, offering insights into the ways they resisted both racial and gender hierarchies.

Specifically, intersectionality helps explain how women in the Methodist Church could lead both religious and political struggles in apartheid South Africa. For instance, Black women in the church mobilised their religious belief to fight for justice and equality; they understood that Black women's suffering as women is connected to Black women's suffering as Black South Africans (Lamola, 2021:109). This dual struggle is best explained by the concept of intersectionality, and the ways in which women experience oppression cannot be boiled down to one identity. In doing so, this research can apply intersectionality to show how women in the church were capable of contending against the patriarchal structures of the church and the apartheid's racial oppression, thus asserting themselves as leaders in religious and political domains.

Moreover, intersectionality is justified as a framework because it allows for an analysis of the continued marginalisation of Black women in post-apartheid South Africa. While apartheid is theoretically no longer in existence, the sociopolitical and economic systems that rendered Black women marginalised are still apparent, especially in religious organisations (Bafford, 2022:97). Intersectionality provides a tool for analysing how women continue to navigate these systems of oppression, while also recognising the progress they have made in achieving leadership roles within the church (Turner, 2023:163). This framework, therefore, provides a holistic view of both the past and the present difficulties that women encounter in the Methodist Church, and as such, is crucial for the study's goals and objectives.

The use of decolonial theory in this study is critically justified by its ability to interrogate and dismantle entrenched epistemological frameworks that have historically marginalized Black women's narratives within both church and societal histories. While feminist critical historiography uncovers gender biases within historical accounts, intersectionality examines how overlapping social identities such as race, gender, and class compound marginalization, and social constructivism elucidates how social realities and identities are shaped through interaction and cultural discourse. Decolonial theory uniquely critiques the persisting colonial matrices of power, knowledge, and spirituality embedded in the religious and historical contexts of Soweto's Methodism. It thus allows for a comprehensive analysis of the oppressive epistemic structures that silence Black women's theological agency and leadership

contributions, advocating for a paradigm shift towards epistemic justice and recognition (Mignolo and Walsh, 2018:28). Therefore, decolonial theory provides essential analytical depth, complementing the other selected theories by emphasizing the necessity of recovering suppressed voices and fostering an emancipatory historiography that validates African women's spiritual and societal agency within the historical narrative.

3.7. Conclusion

Feminist critical historiography and intersectionality theory have been identified as the primary theoretical frameworks for this study. Feminist critical historiography offers a useful framework for giving voice to women who were oppressed in religious organisations such as the Methodist Church in apartheid South Africa. By challenging the male-centric historical narratives, it allows for a more inclusive recounting of women's roles in shaping both religious and socio-political movements. Intersectionality affords a fuller account of this by stressing the interactions between race, gender, and class, and how Black women in apartheid South Africa managed their oppression in these intersections. When applied at the same time, these theories provide a suitable framework for understanding women in the Methodist Church. Feminist critical historiography ensures that the contributions of women, previously overlooked or marginalised, are brought to light, while intersectionality highlights the specific challenges faced by Black women under apartheid's dual systems of racial and gender oppression. Together, they provide a multidimensional understanding of the significant roles that women played in both religious leadership and political resistance, offering a more accurate and holistic portrayal of their experiences.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1. Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodological framework adopted in this study, which investigates the role of Black women in shaping Soweto's Methodism between 1950 and 2000. Rooted in an interpretivist paradigm, the methodology acknowledges that reality is socially constructed and best understood through the subjective meanings and experiences of those who live it Mazabow, 2007). This is especially relevant for a study seeking to foreground the often-silenced voices of Black Methodist women in apartheid and post-apartheid South Africa. By employing a qualitative case study approach and drawing on feminist critical historiography, the research prioritizes depth, context, and complexity over generalisability.

The study is further enriched by purposive sampling, oral history interviews, archival research, and document analysis. These tools are most suited to excavating hidden narratives and epistemologies marginalized by mainstream historical and ecclesial discourses. Through this methodological design, the study not only captures lived experiences but also challenges dominant historiographies and theological frameworks that have historically sidelined Black women's contributions to faith, leadership, and resistance. Each methodological choice is deliberate, grounded in the belief that storytelling and memory are powerful instruments for social and epistemic justice.

4.2. Research Philosophy

The research philosophy used in this study is interpretivist, because it presupposes that reality is constructed based on actors' interpretation of it (Tamminen and Poucher, 2020:535-549). This philosophy can be said to fit well with the purpose of the study, which has focused on the employment of UMC in Soweto of women in the MCSA, since it favours the participants' stories and accounts.

The ontology of interpretivist research, as suggested by Williamson (2021:39), focuses on the meanings that people ascribe to what they do in their social world. The experiences documented by women who played a part in the development of Methodism in Soweto are of most use for the present research in terms of agency and impact. Compared to positivist paradigms this

paradigm allows the analysis of various details of women's lives, which are often left unnoticed and not included in official histories as it provides a deeper, qualitative focus on history and experience (Creswell and Poth, 2016:61). Interpretivist is chosen further, because the presented research is concerned with applying the method of feminist critical historiography for re-contextualizing the historical accounts from the epistemological perspective of women's subjectivity (Merriam and Tindall, 2016:12). One of the noted challenges of this type of qualitative research is negotiating the shifting space between insider and outsider roles; researchers must constantly navigate the tension between empathic engagement with participants and the analytical distance required for rigorous interpretation, while also balancing contextual realities with theoretical abstraction (Corbin & Strauss, 2014: 45; Dwyer & Buckle, 2009: 56).

4.3. Research Approach

This study employs a qualitative research approach to answer the research question. Qualitative research is widely recognized as an appropriate methodology for studying people in their social contexts (Opie, 2019:127), which aligns with the aim of this study—to explore the experiences and roles of Black women in the MCSA in Soweto. This approach is particularly well-suited for capturing the lived realities and social dynamics that shape human experience, especially when focusing on historically marginalized or hidden voices.

Considering this, the study adopts a feminist historical approach, allowing for an in-depth exploration of the agency of Black women and their contributions to Methodism within Soweto. As Flick (2022:58) argues, qualitative research is most appropriate when the goal is to access suppressed or overlooked narratives. This is affirmed by Maher and Dertadian (2018:171), who emphasize that qualitative methods are useful for understanding unique individual experiences of broader social processes, precisely the focus of this research. Furthermore, qualitative research is advantageous due to its flexibility in data gathering and analysis. According to Hennink *et al.* (2020:178), this adaptability allows the researcher to respond dynamically to the evolving nature of the study and the insights emerging from data, especially when engaging with oral histories and historical documents. In historical research, such flexibility is invaluable, as new perspectives often arise through the analysis of interviews and archival materials.

Additionally, this methodological choice is further justified by the study's concern with the intersectionality of gender, race, and religion within a context deeply influenced by both apartheid and post-apartheid socio-political realities. Braun and Clarke (2023:33) argue that qualitative methods are particularly effective in unpacking the layered complexities of gender roles within faith-based movements. Similarly, Sebele-Mpofu (2020:1838706) notes that qualitative approaches are essential for capturing the depth, richness, and nuance of individual experiences and viewpoints. Smith (2012) also reinforces this, arguing that qualitative inquiry is crucial in uncovering how power structures and relational dynamics unfold in lived religious experiences.

4.4. Research Design

Given the complexity of the research problem and the need for contextual depth and comparative analysis, this study adopted a case study research design to investigate the role of Black women in the development of Methodism in Soweto between 1950 and 2000. The case study approach is particularly suitable for examining historical, social, and religious phenomena within their natural settings (Yin, 2018:79). In this instance, the focus is on the lived experiences and agency of women in the MCSA during apartheid and post-apartheid South Africa.

As a method of historical and contextual analysis, the case study design facilitates a comprehensive and layered exploration of the chosen phenomenon. Yazan (2015:47) supports this by arguing that case studies allow for both collective and individual analyses, as well as the identification of cultural and social factors influencing human behaviour. In this study, the design enables an in-depth examination of how ordinary Black women engaged in and shaped religious and community life under racially and patriarchally stratified conditions.

Ridder (2017:81) further emphasizes that case studies are especially valuable in unpacking complex, multifaceted social dynamics such as those relating to gender, religion, and political transformation. This is echoed by Harrison *et al.* (2017:241), who suggest that case study research is particularly effective for understanding social relations within bounded systems, a characteristic that fits well with the focus on Soweto's Methodist societies.

The study concentrated on three ordinary Black women whose lives and religious contributions offer critical insight into the broader themes of gender, faith, and resistance. According to Priya (2021:95), a case study involves an in-depth examination of a subject—be it an individual,

group, organisation, or phenomenon. This allows for a focused yet richly detailed analysis of each woman's unique context and agency within the life of the church.

Yin (2018:17, 47) further asserts that case study research facilitates rich, detailed exploration of subjects and uncovers insights that might be missed by broader, more generalised methods. Stake (1995:4) adds that case studies offer flexibility, enabling the researcher to adapt the inquiry as new themes or data emerge. This adaptability is essential for this research, especially given its historical and oral dimensions, where new narratives and perspectives may surface through archival materials and interviews.

It is acknowledged, however, that case studies present certain limitations—notably challenges in generalizability and the potential for researcher bias due to the interpretive nature of qualitative analysis (Creswell, 2014:102). Despite these concerns, the design remains especially valuable for capturing the overlooked, marginalised, and hidden narratives of Black women. It aligns well with the aims of feminist critical historiography, offering space to reconstruct and reframe historical understanding by focusing on detailed lived experiences within faith-based and socio-political frameworks.

4.5. Study Population and Context

The study population consists of women who were active in the MCSA in Soweto between 1950 and 2000, including church leaders, congregants, and community activists. The emphasis on time in this period is useful, because it has highlighted the apartheid period, the struggle for liberty and sustenance of apartheid, as well stage of rebuilding in South Africa. Socio-political changes made a significant shift in the role of women in the church because women were active in religious as well as political activities (Adasi, Abdulai and Churchill, 2013:105).

Soweto is preferred as the setting of this research given that it was a focal point of apartheid's social struggle, and the church as an important pillar of spiritual and social organisation in the Black community (Thinane, 2019:111). This applies to any woman who was affiliated with the church in any way they were in leadership, attending meetings, or conducting church errands during this period. According to Linguli (2017:15) the participants stressed that the church is not only religious, but the church was the only place where women could exercise self-governance and leadership despite the rules that were placed by the church as well as in the

society. This context is useful for understanding how women function also in the church and how they function in the social and political spheres, respectively.

4.6. Study Sample and Sample Size

This study employed a purposive or judgemental sampling method to select its participants. Given the researcher's upbringing and familiarity with the Soweto context, this sampling strategy was appropriate for identifying participants who were most relevant to the research objectives (de Vos *et al*., 2011:232). The 'insider' perspective enabled the researcher to exercise informed judgment in choosing participants whose lived experiences could provide deep insight into the historical and social dynamics of Black women's involvement in the MCSA. This view is reinforced by Flick (2018:72), who states that researchers familiar with their context are better able to build rapport and elicit detailed, authentic responses.

A sample size of three women was used as case studies. These women were either former or current members and leaders within the MCSA in Soweto, and had been actively involved in church and community life during the period under study (1950–2000). The selection of the participants was based on their capacity to offer rich, contextually grounded narratives that aligned with the study's feminist historiographical framework.

While the study focuses on a small number of participants, Braun and Clarke (2023:2) contend that findings from such purposively selected samples can still offer significant insight into broader social patterns, especially when the aim is to foreground marginalised voices and deepen understanding rather than to generalise statistically.

4.6.1 Sampling Logic and Saturation in Oral History

This study adopts a small-N oral history design to privilege depth, insider vantage, and period coverage (Flyvbjerg, 2006:241; Dwyer & Buckle, 2009:58; Atkinson, 2002:123, 126). The purposive selection of three information-rich cases enabled extended narrative elicitation, iterative probing, and contextual reconstruction, all essential for recovering marginalised women's histories and showing how agency was exercised within the MCSA in Soweto (1950–2000). The purpose is analytic depth rather than statistical generalisation; accordingly, the design seeks information-rich cases that illuminate the phenomenon under study (Patton, 2015:264–266; Braun & Clarke, 2023:165–176).

To enhance credibility and saturation, interview data were triangulated with denominational and local records (Minutes of Conference/District Synod; Yearbooks; the denominational

newspaper *Dimension*), alongside document analysis. This combination provided institutional time-depth, corroborated key claims, and supported "thick description" of setting and practice (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016:187–199; Bowen, 2009:30–33). Taken together, the strategy meets qualitative standards of trustworthiness (credibility, transferability, dependability) and is fit-for-purpose for an oral-historical dissertation focused on depth and contextual understanding (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016:242–247).

4.7 Sampling Methods and Procedure

This study employed a purposive sampling method, a non-probability sampling technique where participants are deliberately selected based on their knowledge, experience, and relevance to the research focus (Etikan *et al*., 2016:4). This method was applied to ensure that the participants chosen had first-hand knowledge and lived experience concerning the role of women in the MCSA during the apartheid and post-apartheid periods in Soweto.

The purposive strategy was operationalised through clear inclusion criteria and a typology-based frame so that the three cases together covered the conceptual terrain of women's roles relevant to the study (Campbell *et al.*, 2020:629) study phenomenon. Participants were therefore not chosen randomly, but purposefully identified based on their embeddedness within the historical context under investigation.

To strengthen the methodological clarity and analytical potential of the study, the sampling procedure was informed by the Women Role Stereotype Theory, as outlined by Plakoyiannaki *et al*. (2008) and Tsichla and Zotos (2016). This theory categorises women's roles into three primary groups:

1. **Traditional roles** – such as wives, caretakers, homemakers, or dependent figures.
2. **Non-traditional roles** – such as professionals, authority figures, independent figures. and women in leadership.
3. **Neutral roles** – women presented alongside men, often in collective or activist contexts.

Accordingly, the sampling procedure selected three women, each representing one of these typologies, to ensure a strategic and conceptually grounded diversity within the sample. For the purpose of this study, these participants were categorised as:

1. **The Good Wife** – symbolising the traditional woman within faith-based and domestic spaces.

2. **The Professional** – representing the woman operating in non-traditional or leadership roles.
3. **The Activist** – reflecting the neutral woman engaged in broader social, political, or communal struggles.

The selection of three types of women—the good wife, the professional, and the activist—allowed the study to illustrate the diverse ways Black women in Soweto's Methodism embodied and transcended these stereotypical categories. Even as "good wives," women in the *Manyano* negotiated spaces of power within a patriarchal church structure, while professionals balanced career and religious commitments, and activists utilized the platform of faith-based groups to challenge apartheid-era injustices (Masenya, 2019:15). This approach aligns with African feminist historiography, which seeks to complicate narratives that frame women solely as passive followers or dependent caretakers (Nadar, 2018:233).

In such sampling cases, Mouton (2001:188) uses the concept of "thick description," originally articulated by Denzin (1989: 83), as a methodological approach that provides a detailed, nuanced account of the experiences and contexts of individuals. This approach involves exploring the lived experiences of subjects within their specific environments, such as their homes, careers, and church communities. By employing this method, this study intentionally identified these three women figures aims to capture their narrated realities and interactions, whose roles within their communities will be examined through a rich, contextual lens.
This typological representation ensured a methodical alignment between the research aim and the selection of participants. As argued in 4.6.1 and Braun and Clarke (2023:165), a reduced sample size is both appropriate and effective in case study research, particularly when the goal is to capture depth and nuance rather than breadth.

4.8. Data Collection

Data for this study were collected using a combination of semi-structured interviews, archival research, and document analysis. These methods were selected to complement each other to explore both historical and contemporary perspectives on the role of women in the MCSA in Soweto. The combination of these methods represents a form of data triangulation, which enhances the validity and credibility of the findings by corroborating evidence across multiple sources (Flick, 2022:62). This triangulated approach was essential for uncovering

both preconceived and evolving understandings of Black women's contributions to Methodism in Soweto and for constructing a more nuanced and comprehensive historical account.

4.8.1 Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were used as the main data collection method, due to their capacity to provide flexible and detailed responses from participants (Magaldi and Berler, 2020:4539). This method proved appropriate for a qualitative study focused on individual and social experiences, allowing participants to elaborate on significant events and emotional realities while addressing the study's core research questions. According to Clarke and Braun (2017:298), semi-structured interviews are particularly effective in examining varied social realities, because they allow participants to expand their responses and introduce aspects not originally considered by the researcher. The interview questions were shared with participants in advance to help prompt memory recall, as Abrams (2016:83) notes that recollection is often triggered by cues that jog the memory into remembering.

The interviews were designed with broad, open-ended questions to elicit the personal testimonies of women who participated in the MCSA in Soweto between 1950 and 2000; a period encompassing both apartheid and post-apartheid eras, during which the church played a pivotal role in religious and socio-political affairs (Basu, 2018:6). Key themes addressed during the interviews included women's involvement in church leadership, their responsibilities within organized church and community outreach programmes, and the socio-political influences that shaped or constrained their participation.

The semi-structured format enabled the researcher to follow up on participants' responses with probing questions, which allowed for deeper contextual insights (Patton, 2014:69). This flexibility was particularly important in uncovering how women navigated the patriarchal structures of the church, influenced the church's social and political agenda, and experienced the impact of apartheid.

Regarding anonymity, participants were initially offered the option of remaining anonymous in all reporting. However, two of the participants explicitly expressed their desire not to remain anonymous, understanding the nature and historical value of the study. They viewed their participation as a form of legacy-sharing and contribution to the visibility of women's stories in church history, contrary to what the researcher had initially proposed.

4.8.2 Archival Research

Archival research was conducted to understand the historical background of the study and to corroborate or expand upon data gathered from interviews. Historical documents were examined, including minutes of meetings, church newsletters, daily records, journals, and other archival materials relevant to women's involvement in the Methodist Church. These records were sourced from the Methodist central archives in Makhanda, Rhodes University, Corry library and Pietermaritzburg, Seth Mokitimi Methodist Seminary, Rev Dr Simon Gqubule Archives, local Soweto church archives, and national repositories.

The use of archival data supported the reconstruction of institutional memory regarding the formal and informal participation of women in the church. According to Johnson and Sylvia (2018:61), archival sources are critical for identifying the evolution of roles and decisions over time. Hodder *et al*. (2021:9) describe archival data collection as particularly valuable for qualitative research with historical aims, as archives offer direct insight into the actions, decisions, and lived realities of historical actors.

These documents were instrumental in identifying how church leadership viewed and represented women. For example, meeting minutes revealed patterns in decision-making that included or excluded women's voices, while printed church materials such as MCSA yearbooks, minutes of Synods and Conference, the Dimension News etc., illustrated the portrayal and recognition of women's contributions. This analysis allowed for cross-validation of oral testimonies and added depth to the historiographical framework of the study (Merriam and Tisdell, 2015:14).

To strengthen credibility and saturation, archival materials were read alongside denominational documentary sources; notably the Minutes of Conference and District Synod, MCSA Yearbooks, and the denominational newspaper Dimension—to corroborate interview testimony and trace how women's contributions were framed institutionally over time. This archival–document triangulation provided institutional time-depth and enabled cross-validation of key themes (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016:187–199; Bowen, 2009:30–33).

4.8.3 Document Analysis

Document analysis was used to supplement both interview data and archival research. The focus was on texts produced by the church such as newsletters, pamphlets, circulars, and spiritual guidance publications that contained references to women's participation in church

life. This method allowed for a comprehensive review of how women's activities, duties, responsibilities, and spiritual contributions were represented over time.

As Bowen (2009:29) notes, document analysis serves as a triangulation tool in qualitative research, offering an opportunity to cross-check themes and interpretations from various data sources. In this study, document analysis was used to extract and interpret narratives that aligned with or challenged findings from the interviews and archival records, particularly in relation to the visibility, roles, and symbolic representations of women in the church's evolving theological and social frameworks.

4.9. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The inclusion criteria for the study were as follows: participants had to have been members of the Methodist Church in Soweto between 1950 and 2000 and to have led or participated in various church activities, events, or community-related work. These criteria ensured that participants possessed relevant experiences to meaningfully contribute to the research questions (Connelly, 2020:29).

The exclusion criteria applied to individuals who were not active in the Methodist Church during the study period or who lacked sufficient understanding of the church's operations. These criteria were necessary to define the scope of the research and to ensure data relevancy in addressing the study's objectives (Patton, 2014:76).

4.10. Data Analysis Methods and Procedure

The data were analysed using thematic analysis, a step-by-step conceptual method used to identify, analyse, and report patterns or themes within qualitative data (Braun and Clarke, 2023:168). This analytical method was particularly effective for providing depth and contextual richness in understanding the multifaceted roles and contributions of women within the MCSA in Soweto.

The first step in the thematic analysis involved familiarization with the data. The researcher read interview transcripts, reviewed archival documents, and engaged thoroughly with these materials. This stage enabled a deep empathetic understanding of the content and context of the data (Castleberry and Nolen, 2018:809). Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis was best suited for this oral history study because it respects the narrative depth, reflexivity, and meaning-making process of lived experiences essential when documenting marginalised voices, such as Black Methodist women in Soweto. Unlike Radner and Lanser's coding

strategy, whose method is developed primarily for literary text analysis, it is more rigid and formalist, prioritizing predefined textual patterns over lived experience (Radner and Lanser, 1987:415–423). In this case, it may not capture the nuance, voice, and evolving context present in oral testimonies

Following coding, the researcher proceeded to identify themes—broader patterns within the data that addressed the research questions. Themes identified in this study included concepts such as "women in leadership," "religious engagement," and "struggle against apartheid" (see Mohr *et al*., 2018:144). Themes speak to grouping codes with shared meanings and analysing their relationships. At this juncture, pattern matching is a valuable technique in qualitative research as it enables the researcher to systematically code and analyse data, thereby effectively addressing the research questions (Mohr *et al*., 2018:138).

The final step involved refining these themes, checking them against the raw data to ensure they were consistent and coherent. This phase included evaluating whether the concepts derived from the themes accurately reflected the data and were supported by multiple sources. The synthesis of these themes enabled the researcher to articulate findings that were not only valid, but grounded in the lived realities of the participants (Castleberry and Nolen, 2018:815).

4.11. Data Management

All research data collected during the study were handled with strict confidentiality and secure storage practices. Mobile communications used during interviews were deleted after use. Transcripts and other digital data have been stored in an encrypted and password-protected laptop of the researcher. Physical data, such as handwritten notes and printed archival documents, is securely kept in a locked cabinet. After the mandated retention period of five years, physical data will be shredded, and electronic files will be permanently deleted as per data protection protocols using industry-standard overwriting techniques (Raptis *et al.*, 2019:49). Throughout the research process, participants were assured that their identities would remain confidential and anonymous under ethical standards (Creswell and Poth, 2016:76).

However, it is important to note that two of the participants expressly declined anonymity, stating their understanding of the historical value of the study and their desire for their contributions to be publicly acknowledged. This was contrary to the researcher’s initial

proposal for full anonymity, and the decision was respected within the framework of informed consent.

4.12. Ethical and Safety Considerations

4.12.2 Ethical Considerations and Permissions

Prior to commencing fieldwork, I sought formal approval from the Office of the Presiding Bishop of the MCSA to conduct this study. Permission was granted through an official letter issued by the General Secretary on 20 January 2025, authorizing me to interview the three MCSA members and access records, including past Conference and district minutes of the MCSA.

In addition, I applied for ethical clearance from the University of KwaZulu-Natal, which was approved and granted on 27 January 2025 under protocol reference number HSSREC/00008117/2025.

4.12.2. Informed Consent

In alignment and compliance with ethical research standards and considerations, all participants provided printed informed consent forms before participation by way of completing and signing detailed consent forms (Okun, 2002:282). Each participant was thoroughly briefed on the nature and purpose of the study, the research procedures involved, potential risks, and anticipated benefits. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any point without penalty.

As Nijhawan *et al*. (2013:136) emphasize, informed consent is a fundamental component of ethical research practice, ensuring that participants voluntarily agree to take part in a study with a clear and comprehensive understanding of their rights, roles, and responsibilities. In this study, the researcher took deliberate steps to ensure that all participants fully understood the nature and scope of their involvement. At the request of the participants, independent witnesses were present during the consent process to further affirm and document their voluntary participation.

4.12.2 Confidentiality and Anonymity

Strict measures were implemented to ensure participant confidentiality and anonymity. Participants were assigned pseudonyms in all research reports and publications to prevent identification. Personal identifiers were removed from the dataset, and all information was

masked to protect participant privacy (Hoft, 2021:225). Given the sensitive nature of the study, particularly references to experiences during apartheid, these steps were crucial for participant safety and for enhancing the credibility of the data.

As previously noted In Chapter 1, two participants in this study chose to be identified by name, recognizing the importance of making their voices visible within women's historical narratives. This decision was respected in line with ethical research principles, which emphasize participant autonomy and the right to choose anonymity or identification (NIH, n.d.; University of Oxford, n.d.). Informed consent was obtained with full disclosure of potential risks and implications, ensuring participants' decisions were voluntary and well-informed. Their choice reflects not only personal agency, but also a conscious contribution to challenging the historical erasure of Black women's voices in church history

4.12.3 Trustworthiness of the Study

The trustworthiness of the study was upheld through the application of qualitative research criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Kyngäs *et al*., 2020:117). Data Triangulation is useful as it leverages different sources and methods of data collection; data triangulation—using semi-structured interviews, archival research, and document analysis—helped consolidate findings and strengthen validity. Member checking was employed to enhance credibility, whereby participants reviewed the interpreted results to ensure accurate representation of their experiences (Birt *et al*., 2016). The issue of transferability was met by ensuring the reader is fully informed of the research situation-Soweto's Methodism Church between 1950 and 2000, and consequently, the reader is in a position to judge the applicability of the study in other settings.

Reliability was achieved by documenting the research procedures, sampling decisions, and methods of data collection and analysis in detail, enabling reproducibility in similar research contexts (Kyngäs *et al*., 2020:129). Lastly, confirmability was ensured through the maintenance of an audit trail and a commitment to objectivity throughout the study (Elo *et al*., 2014:204). In addition to that, the researcher also practiced reflexivity, by way of disclosing any potential biases and their management throughout the research process (Adler, 2022:599). These cumulative strategies safeguarded the reliability, transparency, and accuracy of the data received and subsequently the study findings.

4.13. Conclusion

In this chapter I have demonstrated that the chosen methodological approach is both appropriate and necessary for achieving the aims of the study. By combining interpretivism with qualitative inquiry and a case study design, the research offers a layered, human-centred account of how Black women navigated faith, gender, and race within a deeply segregated society. The methodological choices, particularly the use of feminist historiography and purposive sampling, reflect a decolonial and intersectional commitment to knowledge production that centres marginalized voices and experiences. Through triangulated data collection methods and a rigorous thematic analysis, the study safeguards its credibility, dependability, and ethical integrity. More than a procedural blueprint, this chapter has been an act of witness for a historical study. A reminder that methodology is never neutral: it shapes whose stories are told, how they are heard, and what futures those stories make possible.

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the analysis of data collected to explore the role of Black women in shaping Methodism in Soweto between 1950 and 2000. It aims to reveal the hidden narratives, agency, and leadership of these women within the MCSA, in the context of apartheid and its aftermath. The findings are framed within the lens of feminist critical historiography, which emphasizes the intersection of race, gender, and religion in reconstructing historical knowledge.

The data presented here is derived from semi-structured interviews with three women who symbolize different expressions of womanhood in the church: the traditional (minister's wife), the non-traditional (professional artist and faith leader), and the activist (political and religious figure). Their stories provide a textured understanding of women's contributions, the challenges they faced, and the strategies they employed to exert agency within a patriarchal, racially stratified society.

This chapter is structured around key themes aligned with the study's research objectives. Before delving into those themes, the next section provides a summary of the methodology used in the study.

5.2. Summary of Methodology

This section outlines the methodology employed in data collection and analysis in accordance with the study objectives. Considering the study objectives of recovering repressed narratives and evaluating the lived experience of Black women in the MCSA in Soweto, a qualitative study was most relevant.

5.2.1. Research Design

A qualitative case study design was used to explore the lived experiences, role, and agency of Black women in Soweto's Methodist Church during the period 1950-2000. The case study method provided an in-depth, rich-context examination of social and historical occurrences based on personal accounts of carefully chosen participants. The study focused on three women, who epitomised a special form of womanhood: the minister's wife, the professional

artist and religious leader, and the activist. They were chosen to reflect the variety of Black women's roles and challenges within the Methodist movement.

5.2.2. Sampling Strategy

The study employed purposive sampling, wherein the participants were selected according to their relevance to the study (Campbell *et al*., 2020:653) and previous participation in the Methodist Church of Soweto within the stipulated time. The researcher's familiarity with local religious life within Soweto facilitated approaching the participants and building trust and rapport when conducting interviews. This type of sampling was aimed at representing diversity in role, social position, and agency types.

5.2.3 Data Collection Methods

Information was gathered with the aid of semi-structured interviews, providing room for flexibility while ensuring a well-defined structure aligned with the objectives of the study (Ruslin *et al*., 2022:22). The interviews touched on issues like women's contributions, leadership, personal challenges, and their outlook on their legacy. Participants were invited to respond openly and give accounts in their own words, providing room for descriptive, rich, and detailed accounts. All interviews were recorded, thereafter transcribed verbatim. The researcher also took additional notes to document contextual details, affective tone, and other observations while conducting the interviews

5.2.4 Data Analysis Process

Thematic analysis was employed in the research, following Braun and Clarke's (2006:16-21) six-step model. The steps were:

1) *Familiarization with the data* – reading and re-reading the transcripts to immerse in the content.
2) *Generating initial codes* – identifying key features of the data relevant to the research questions.
3) *Searching for themes* – organising codes into potential themes that reflect broader patterns.
4) *Reviewing themes* – refining themes to ensure coherence and accurate representation of the data.
5) *Defining and naming themes* – clearly articulating the meaning of each theme.

6) *Producing the report* – presenting findings in a structured, narrative format supported by direct quotes.

Data analysis was guided by the theoretical framework of the research that drew on feminist critical historiography to reveal silenced voices, challenge dominant historical narratives, and deconstruct intersections of race, gender, religion, and power (Riley, 2024:147; Crenshaw, 2019:139). Intersectionality and decolonial theory also guided findings interpretation to achieve a sensitized understanding of how historical, structural, and social processes shaped women's experiences in the church (Gouws, 2017:21; Mignolo, 2021:113).

5.3. Participant Profiles

This section introduces the three women upon whose life stories this study is based. Every participant of the study holds a different position and viewpoint within the MCSA in Soweto. Their narratives provide valuable insights into the way Black women negotiated faith, leadership, and resistance in a patriarchal and racially fragmented society. The identity of the first participant is pseudonymised to maintain anonymity, while the rest are publicly known figures.

Table 4.1: Summary of Participant Profiles

Participant	Role	Age	Ethnic Background	Church Involvement	Occupation	Community Engagement	Residence
The Good Wife (Pseudonym)	Traditional	77	Xhosa	- Women's Manyano (District President) - Women's Association	Professional Teacher	- Outreach to poor households, hospitals, old age homes,	Orlando East and Dobsonville
Mrs. Marah Teboho Louw	The Professional	72	Sotho, Xhosa, Khoisan	- Women's Manyano (early 2000s) - Music Association Chorister (Church Choir)	Artist: singer, actor, author	- Operation Hunger Concerts (charity through music)	Mzimhlophe
Mrs. Priscilla Iris Noah	The Activist	92	Xhosa	- Women's Manyano - Class Leader - Music Association (Chorister & Conductor)	Dressmaker	- CCS outreach for over 20 years to hospitals, old age homes, poor communities.	Dube

5.3.1 The Good Wife *(Pseudonym)*

The first participant, referred to here as The Good Wife to protect her identity, is a 77-year-old Xhosa woman and retired professional teacher. A widow, she lived her adult life immersed in the spiritual, communal, and logistical demands of ministry as a clergy spouse. Between 1975 and 2008, she resided in Orlando East, although her life was marked by mobility, moving frequently across circuits in response to her husband's pastoral appointments. Despite these displacements, her faith, resilience, and devotion to church life remained unwavering.

Her involvement in the MCSA was extensive. She served as the Central District President of the Women's Manyano, a powerful prayer and service society that plays a central role in spiritual nurture, charity, and leadership among Methodist women (Mkhwanazi and Kgatla, 2015:180; Kumalo, 2024:57). She also participated in the Women's Association, including its Coloured Methodist women's branch, reflecting her capacity to build bridges across racial lines during apartheid. Notably, through her work in Christian community-based initiatives, she ministered in hospitals, informal settlements, and among the elderly, embodying a theology of care deeply rooted in service.

Her impact is profound within the Roodepoort Circuit, where she and her husband spearheaded the establishment of multiple churches. What began as humble preaching stations, Silvertown, Braamfischerville, and Matholeville under her support, eventually grew into formal societies. According to the Methodist Book of Order (2016:84), Societies are assessed entities with over fifteen full members, appointed stewards, and functional mission groups. These Societies now form a vital part of the circuit's identity and pride, particularly among Black Methodists who were once relegated to marginalised worship schedules.

Her legacy extends beyond numbers or infrastructure. During apartheid, Black congregants, especially domestic workers, were often forced to attend afternoon services after white congregations had finished using church buildings. By helping establish autonomous churches within Black townships, The Good Wife played a critical role in dismantling this unequal arrangement. Her leadership enabled Black Methodists to worship with dignity, at appropriate times, and in spaces that they could truly call their own.

This participant represents a quiet, but resolute form of leadership, one grounded in tradition, yet radically transformative in its outcomes. She defied the limitations placed on clergy wives by becoming a builder of congregations, an organiser of women, and a spiritual mother to the

community. Her life reflects the nuanced interplay of submission and subversion, where her supportive role enabled her to exercise real theological and institutional agency. As she reflected in her interview, "The appointment of vice-chair ladies... strengthened Manyano's role in people's lives", a simple phrase that echoes her legacy of nurturing structured, women-led spiritual communities across Soweto.

5.3.2 The Professional – Mrs. Marah Teboho Louw

Mrs. Marah Teboho Louw is a distinguished cultural icon, activist, and lifelong member of the MCSA. Born in 1952 and currently 72 years old, she identifies with a rich heritage of Sotho, Xhosa, and Khoisan lineage. Raised in Mzimhlophe, Soweto, she has remained deeply connected to her roots and community despite the demands of a high-profile artistic career. , Her sense of identity and spiritual grounding have remained strong anchors throughout her life. Professionally, Mrs. Louw is widely celebrated as a singer, actress, writer, and producer. Her rise to fame during apartheid, as a Black woman artist recognised both nationally and internationally, served not just as personal triumph but as a collective symbol of Black excellence, resilience, and hope. In defying the apartheid regime's efforts to suppress Black cultural achievement, her public success became a quiet form of protest and affirmation. Her presence on international stages communicated a clear rejection of the narrative of Black inferiority that underpinned apartheid ideology.

Her personal life was no less courageous. Her marriage across racial lines, during the height of apartheid's *Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act*, was a direct challenge to a legal system designed to divide. This act of defiance highlighted her commitment to justice and dignity, both in the public eye and in private life, and reflected her broader ethos of liberation and human equality.

Spiritually, Mrs. Louw's journey with the Methodist Church began in her youth, primarily through music. Her involvement in the Church's Music Association and choir laid a foundation for lifelong faith. She joined the Women's Manyano in the early 2000s, after her divorce, defying deeply embedded social stigmas that marginalised divorced women in religious spaces. Her decision to formally join Manyano at that point in her life was a profound act of spiritual self-assertion and theological protest. She affirmed that a woman's worth, calling, and leadership within the church are not defined by marital status, but by faith, service, and moral conviction.

Her contribution to the church and community is most vividly embodied in her leadership of music-driven social initiatives, such as the Operation Hunger Concerts. Here, music became a vehicle of spiritual and social transformation. Through her public platform, she mobilised resources for impoverished communities and fused cultural expression with theological conviction.

Mrs. Louw's profile adds a critical dimension to this study. She exemplifies how non-traditional forms of spiritual leadership, anchored in public life, creativity, and activism, can enrich and expand the church's social witness. Her life is a testament to the intersection of faith, justice, and cultural power, challenging narrow definitions of religious womanhood and demonstrating the liberatory potential of lived theology.

5.3.3. The Activist – Mrs. Priscilla Iris Noah

Mrs. Priscilla Iris Noah, affectionately known in her community as a tireless servant-leader, is a 92-year-old Xhosa woman who has lived in Dube, Soweto, since 1954. A widow and lifelong resident of the area, that worked professionally as a dressmaker, but her most enduring contribution has been through her unwavering service to the MCSA. Her life reflects a seamless integration of spiritual devotion, community upliftment, and creative agency.

Her long-standing commitment to the church is most visible through her involvement in the Women's Manyano, where she served not only as a member but also as a class leader—a highly respected position of spiritual mentorship and administrative stewardship in Methodist tradition. Her passion for music also placed her at the heart of the Church's cultural life, where she participated as a chorister and assistant conductor in the Music Association. Through music, she nurtured both spiritual identity and cultural memory in the congregation.

Mrs. Noah's activism found powerful expression in her over two decades of service through Christian Community Secretary (CCS) portfolio, where she led hospital visitations, ministered to the elderly, and reached out to the poor. Her ministry during apartheid extended beyond pastoral care into social resistance, representing the convergence of faith and political courage. In embodying the dual role of caregiver and resister, she became a living testament to the transformative power of women's faith-based leadership in South Africa's liberation narrative. Even today, Mrs. Noah remains influential through her skilled hands. At 92, she continues to sew garments for the Women's Manyano, including uniforms that are worn as symbols of

pride, dignity, and spiritual identity by women across generations. Most notably, she was central to the design and production of the Manyano General President's iconic three-piece fishtail uniform—a distinctive ceremonial outfit that signifies female authority, spiritual maturity, and institutional agency. Her decision to design this garment independently, without seeking male input or validation, was a profound act of ecclesiastical resistance. It asserted that women could define their own leadership aesthetics and spiritual symbolism without patriarchal oversight.

Mrs. Noah's profile stands as a testament to generational endurance, spiritual courage, and creative resistance. Her story challenges traditional patriarchal norms and affirms that leadership in the church can also be stitched into fabric, sung in harmonies, and lived in everyday acts of compassion and justice.

5.4 Data analysis and presentation

In this section, the findings of the study are presented and analysed thematically, based on the five research objectives outlined in Chapter 1. The analysis is grounded in the principles of feminist critical historiography, which centres Black women's lived experiences and uncovers their often-overlooked contributions to church history, leadership, and community development. Using thematic analysis, each objective is explored through clustered themes and sub-themes, supported by verbatim quotes from participants.

5.4.1 Roles and Contributions of Black Women

Participants were engaged through a series of in-depth interviews, with follow-up questions aimed at clarifying their lived experiences in the Methodist Church. The analysis of their responses revealed five key themes that reflect their multifaceted contributions to church growth and community upliftment. Table 4.2 below presents these themes alongside a brief description of each.

Table 4.2: Key themes about the roles and contributions of black women

Theme	Theme Description	Sub-Themes
Spiritual and Structural Leadership	Women's contributions to church planting, organising spiritual groups, and shaping the structure of the local church.	- Church planting in Dobsonville, Braam Fischer, Matholeville, Crown Mines. - Coordination of vice-chair ladies for Manyano.

Community Care and Outreach	Direct involvement in welfare support, including feeding schemes, clothing drives, and health advocacy in townships.	- Soup kitchens and meals for the sick. - Clothing and grocery distribution - Sanitation and hygiene campaigns - HIV/AIDS awareness and nursing support.
Evangelism and Faith Expansion	Leading religious revivals and using worship activities to attract and grow congregational membership.	- Izimvuselelo and hymn-led evangelism.
Interdenominational and Ecumenical Relations	Building spiritual unity across denominations through regular inter-church prayer and fellowship gatherings.	- Joint prayer meetings with Anglican and Lutheran churches.
Cultural Mobilization and Resource Building	Utilizing creative and cultural platforms to raise funds and promote church causes.	- Organising concerts to fundraise for church needs.

5.4.1.1 Theme 1: Spiritual and Structural Leadership

Black women in Soweto's Methodist Church played vital leadership roles in establishing new congregations and nurturing the spiritual infrastructure of the church. The Good Wife described how she actively participated in planting churches in communities like Dobsonville, Braam Fischer, and Crown Mines:

> *"When we arrived in Dobsonville, I actively helped in gathering people." – The Good Wife, pseudonym (2025).*

She also emphasised the organisational structure within women's groups, particularly the appointment of vice-chair ladies within the Manyano to better manage the growing responsibilities of women in the circuit:

> *"The appointment of vice-chair ladies... strengthened Manyano's role in people's lives." – The Good Wife, pseudonym (2025).*

In addition to organising spaces of worship, women led administrative and organisational development of church organisations and played a critical role in ushering in sustainability as well as outreach. As Mkhwanazi and Kgatla (2015:180) explain, the Manyano women typically held important church functions and assumed grassroots leadership roles central to congregational life. Kumalo (2024:57) supports this, noting that women's spiritual and organisational contributions were foundational despite being historically overlooked. These gifts demonstrate that Black women were not peripheral assistants, but central architects of congregational life. Theologically, this aligns with feminist critical historiography, which asserts that marginalised voices, especially those of women, must be repositioned within the

historical narrative (Riley, 2024:147; Scott, 2020:324). Through this lens, women's oral testimonies and spiritual labour are treated as valid archives of ecclesial history (Chikwendu, 2023:18; Jaques, 2022:38).

Their leadership challenged male-centred models of ecclesial power and redefined women's roles as integral to both the spiritual and structural development of the church. This reflects the argument by Braude (2004:555) and Williams (2020:247) that reclaiming women's agency in church history is both a historical and theological necessity. Moreover, intersectionality theory, especially in apartheid South Africa, shows how women's leadership emerged despite the overlapping racial and gender-based exclusions (Crenshaw, 2019:139; Gouws, 2017:21; Ndinda and Ndhlovu, 2022:99).

5.4.1.2 Theme 2: Community Care and Outreach

The Methodist Church in Soweto became a hub for community support, largely due to the efforts of women who led compassion-based ministries. This included feeding schemes, grocery distribution, and hygiene awareness, particularly in impoverished or informal settlements. As The Good Wife (pseudonym) (2025) shared:

> *"They would buy soup packets... ensuring they had something to eat."*
>
> *"We collected clothing... and provided basic groceries such as mealie meal and vaskoti."*

Her leadership extended into promoting sanitation and health education:

> *"We invested in cleaning materials... encouraging people to maintain better hygiene."*

During the rise of the HIV/AIDS crisis, women stepped up with caregiving and support roles, distributing diapers and health information:

> *"Mrs Sunduza... brought information flyers and diapers to assist those who were very sick." The Good Wife (2025).*

These initiatives were not sporadic acts of benevolence, but a structured theology of compassion based on the practices of women's organisations like the Manyano. As demonstrated in Chapter 2, women's community outreach functioned as both ministry and resistance, offering dignity, healing, and sustenance in contexts where the state had failed (Kumalo, 2024:41; Mkhwanazi and Kgatla, 2015:182).

Feminist critical historiography recognises these caregiving acts as historically significant, reframing "women's work" as strategic and theologically grounded (Phiri, 2002:147; Chikwendu, 2023:19). This aligns with African feminist theology, which reclaims nurturing roles as central expressions of faith and justice (Oduyoye, 1995; Nadar, 2004).

Their work transformed the concept of ministry as both sacred and civic, positioning the church at the forefront of healing, empowerment, and resistance. Through this praxis, Black Methodist women redefined leadership by embodying theology through action—feeding the hungry, visiting the sick, and restoring dignity to the marginalised. As Scott (2020:324) notes, lived faith becomes a counter-narrative when it restores humanity in oppressive contexts. In doing so, Black Methodist women expanded the definition of spiritual leadership to include caregiving, community building, and grassroots activism. This not only disrupted colonial and patriarchal visions of leadership but also established care as a radical and transformative force within Black theology.

5.4.1.3 Theme 3: Evangelism and Faith Expansion

Black Methodist women also served as evangelists, bringing new members into the faith through hymn singing, acts of kindness, and practical outreach. Evangelism was not confined to the pulpit but woven into everyday interactions, especially during community initiatives:

> *"We would evangelize during clothing distributions... people responded and joined the church." – The Good Wife, pseudonym (2025).*

This form of evangelism, rooted in relational care and mundane acts of service, is a demonstration of what the literature in Chapter 2 describes as lived theology, where faith is enacted both in word and deed (Theilen, 2005:63; Kumalo, 2024:48). As noted by Phiri (2002:150), evangelism for African women is often "performed through presence" rather than pulpit, rooted in daily service and relationship-building. This aligns with feminist critical historiography, which validates oral practices, embodiment, and music as theological actions (Scott, 2020:325; Chikwendu, 2023:21). Women's hymn-led evangelism blurred the boundary between spiritual and cultural life, bringing worship into public streets and homes, a powerful redefinition of sacred space.

Through the convergence of spiritual motivation and material aid, women extended the boundaries of traditional evangelism to make it applicable and empowering among their

communities. Their outreach was also contextual, addressing social crises through a faith lens, echoing Nadar's (2009) view that African women's theology must speak into the practical realities of the oppressed. This integrative approach to ministry both developed personal faith and served church health and flourishing. Through song, scripture, and care, Black Methodist women reframed evangelism as an embodied practice of witness rooted in everyday life. In doing so, they moved beyond doctrinal evangelism, practising what Mkhwanazi and Kgatla (2015:179) call "spiritual mobilisation", an inclusive and life-affirming outreach that responded to both soul and society.

5.4.1.4 Theme 4: Interdenominational and Ecumenical Relations

Women were also instrumental in fostering spiritual unity across denominational boundaries, initiating spaces of fellowship and shared worship. The Good Wife (pseudonym) recalled how regular prayer meetings were held with Anglican, Lutheran, and other Christian congregations:

> *"We met every 2 months... trying to give spirituality to these churches. They became sister churches to us." (The Good Wife, 2025).*

This theme aligns with Chapter 2's emphasis on women's role in building interdenominational networks through faith-based solidarity. Women's religious leadership, as noted by Mkhwanazi and Kgatla (2015:182), would cross denominational lines to create spaces of communal prayer, mutual care, and ecumenical cooperation. Kumalo (2024:41) also highlights the way women's efforts promoted shared religious purpose among churches facing similar social problems. These collaborations extended beyond spiritual affinity—they fostered grassroots ecumenism, where women became bridges between theologies, cultures, and congregations (Phiri, 2002:153).

Chapter 3's framework of feminist critical historiography supports this interpretation, affirming that such collective practices by women should be seen as valid historical acts of spiritual leadership (Scott, 2020:324; Riley, 2024:149). Their ecumenical roles offered an alternative model of church diplomacy, relational, inclusive, and service-driven. These inter-church gatherings were not merely spiritual exercises, they were acts of communal diplomacy, led by women who used their faith to build unity and healing in a polarized society. They also subverted the male-led institutional barriers to ecumenism by engaging in informal, affective, and relational ministry. Their leadership allowed church borders to be reimagined as sites of collaboration rather than division. In doing so, they operationalised a decolonial praxis of

community formation, privileging relationship and healing over hierarchy (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018:51; Lamola, 2021:113).

5.4.1.5 Theme 5: Cultural Mobilization and Resource Building

Marah Louw demonstrated a distinct form of faith-based leadership through her cultural and artistic work. Drawing from her career as a celebrated performer, she mobilised music as a powerful tool for community impact and church fundraising:

> *"We raised R180,000 from the concert... I got top names to perform to support Jabavu Manyano." – Marah Louw, the professional (2025).*

Rather than relying solely on traditional church fundraising, she used her public influence and artistic excellence to draw attention and resources to Methodist causes. This aligns with Kumalo's (2024:48) argument that women in the church found creative ways to integrate spirituality with activism and resource-building. Her approach exemplifies a redefinition of ministry and ecclesial leadership beyond the pulpit or church hierarchy. As discussed in Chapter 2 (Theilen, 2005:63), cultural expression—particularly music—has long served as a theological and strategic tool for women's witness, resistance, and empowerment. In this context, Louw's concerts were not merely entertainment but acts of spiritual mobilisation, challenging the boundaries of sacred and secular spaces.

Chapter 3 reinforces this through decolonial theory, which calls for the affirmation of indigenous, embodied, and creative forms of theological expression (Mignolo, 2021:113; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018:45). Louw's integration of music and ministry reflects a decolonial reclaiming of faith spaces, whereby marginalised voices repurpose cultural tools to serve divine and communal ends. Additionally, her international visibility during apartheid became a source of collective pride and resistance, asserting Black excellence on the global stage and defying state-imposed racial inferiority. Her defiance of apartheid's racialised legal system, particularly her interracial marriage, was not only a private act but a bold challenge to the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act.

Her decision to join the Women's Manyano after her divorce further subverted church-based patriarchal norms. In doing so, she reasserted the dignity and spiritual value of divorced women, thereby disrupting exclusionary definitions of womanhood within Methodist contexts. Overall, Marah Louw's contributions speak to what feminist critical historiography (Chapter

3) defines as counter-archives—forms of resistance rooted in lived experience, culture, and embodied theology (Scott, 2020:324; Harris, 2020:52). Her life and ministry thus become a living text of Black female ecclesial agency.

Summary

The findings reveal that Black women played foundational and multidimensional roles in shaping the Methodist Church in Soweto between 1950 and 2000. Their contributions ranged from formal leadership to informal yet vital grassroots initiatives. The Good Wife, for instance, was instrumental in establishing congregations like Dobsonville and Braamfischerville, preaching stations that evolved into self-sustaining Societies under the Book of Order (2016:84).

Mrs Noah sustained cultural and spiritual life through musical leadership and caregiving, while Marah Louw mobilised cultural capital to fundraise and build community through the arts. These women were church planters, caregivers, spiritual mentors, cultural leaders, and social activists.

As affirmed in Chapter 2, their roles were not auxiliary but central to the church's survival and mission, offering both spiritual guidance and community empowerment (Mkhwanazi and Kgatla, 2015:180; Kumalo, 2024:57). Rooted in feminist critical historiography, these narratives challenge dominant, male-centric church histories and reclaim women's informal ministries as essential archives of faith (Riley, 2024:147; Scott, 2020:324). Their leadership not only sustained the church but also redefined it from below.

5.4.2 Evolution of Women's Roles (1950–2000)

Participants were engaged through a series of in-depth interviews, where they reflected on how their roles in the MCSA changed over time. The analysis of their narratives revealed six key themes that trace the progression of women's participation, leadership, and public presence in the church. Table 4.3 below presents these themes alongside their descriptions.

Table 4.3. Key Themes related to the Evolution of Women's Roles (1950–2000)

Theme	Theme Description	Sub-Themes

Transformation of Women's Church Roles Over Time	Shifts from silent support roles to visible leadership in both formal and informal church structures.	- From supportive roles to recognized leaders. - Rise of female choir conductors and musical leadership. - Joining Manyano after years of informal participation.
Spiritual Maturity and Growth	Personal and collective development in faith, theology, and organisational understanding.	- Deeper theological and organisational understanding.
Increased Public Visibility of Women	Emergence of women in visible leadership roles and recognition from the wider church community.	- Leading programs and being recognized publicly.
Creative and Cultural Leadership	Innovative contributions through music, worship, and the arts to express faith and build spiritual communities.	- Formation of independent worship choirs.

5.4.2.1 Theme 1: Transformation of Women's Church Roles Over Time

Over the fifty-year period between 1950 and 2000, Black women's roles in the MCSA evolved from background support to visible and strategic leadership. Through persistence, cultural innovation, and spiritual maturity, women began to move from the margins of church life into recognised positions of influence, both formally and informally.

- **Sub-theme 1: From Supportive Roles to Recognized Leaders**

In the earlier decades, women were expected to operate behind the scenes, cooking, cleaning, or serving tea, while leadership was male. However, this began to shift in the 1980s and 1990s, as women like The Good Wife emerged as district-level leaders. Her leadership as Manyano President is emblematic of this transformation

> *"In the 70s, we were supporters, but by the 90s, we started to be seen as leaders in our own right." – The Good Wife, pseudonym (2025).*

This evolution reflects not only the changing structure of the MCSA but also the theological and cultural maturation of women over time. As Chapter 2 notes, Black women were not passive recipients of church roles, but strategic in claiming space within systems historically designed to exclude them (Mkhwanazi and Kgatla, 2015:187; Theilen, 2005:42). Their transition into leadership also exemplifies feminist historiographical goals of recovering agency within spiritual narratives.

- **Sub-theme 2: Rise of Female Choir Conductors and Musical Leadership**

Breaking into male-dominated roles in public worship, such as choir conducting, was a turning point in the 1980s. Mrs. Noah, for example, was among the first women to conduct church choirs in Jabavu and around Soweto, a role that required not only musical skill but courage to challenge male dominance in visible spaces:

> *"Yes, here in Jabavu... in the 80s... Everything was done by males; it was the males that were conducting. I was one of the first women." – Mrs. Noah, the activist (2025).*

Breaking into these roles required not just talent but resilience and a willingness to challenge long-standing norms. The presence of women in musical leadership positions made them visible in new ways and redefined what was possible for younger generations of women in the church. This shift supports the claims of Chapter 3's decolonial analysis, which critiques the gendered and eurocentric restrictions on church leadership by elevating musical and embodied spiritual leadership as equally valid theological expressions (Lamola, 2021:115; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018:45).

- **Sub-theme 3: Joining Manyano After Years of Informal Participation**

Some participants, like Marah Louw, engaged with the church long before joining formal structures. Her later decision to join the Manyano, especially post-divorce, was both spiritual and political, challenging norms that tied women's religious legitimacy to marital status:

> *"I hadn't worn isambatho in Bryanston or Norwood, but I thought let me join here for support." – Marah Louw, the professional (2025).*

This act represents a feminist assertion of women's dignity beyond heteronormative constraints, aligning with intersectional and decolonial critiques of womanhood within the church (Crenshaw, 2019; Mama, 1995). It also illustrates what Riley (2024:147) describes as embodied historiography, where personal memory and choice become archival contributions to theology. This theme illustrates that the transformation of Black women's roles in the Methodist Church was not simply a product of top-down institutional reform but rather the outcome of persistent grassroots agency and theological engagement. Framed through feminist critical historiography, as emphasised by Scott (2020:324) and Riley (2024:147), these shifts highlight how lived experience and oral testimony function as valid historical sources in reshaping ecclesial memory.

Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 2019:139; Collins and Bilge, 2020:61) further clarifies how women's progress unfolded amid overlapping racial, gendered, and class-based exclusions, while decolonial theorists such as Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018:45) call for reclaiming African knowledge systems within church life. These women's evolution, from invisible supporters to strategic leaders, redefined spiritual leadership to include domains like music, mentorship, and caregiving. Their visibility was not only symbolic but transformative, reconfiguring Methodist identity from the ground up. In so doing, they helped re-centre Black women in South African church history, as agents of both spiritual and structural change.

5.4.2.2 Theme 2: Spiritual Maturity and Growth

This theme highlights how Black women's engagement with the Methodist Church deepened over time, resulting in significant spiritual, intellectual, and organisational growth. Their journey was not one of sudden empowerment, but rather one forged through years of faithful service, reflective learning, and active participation in church life. Women like *The Good Wife* describe how spiritual maturity led to a clearer understanding of the theological and bureaucratic workings of the MCSA, enabling them to navigate church structures more confidently and effectively

- **Sub-theme 1: Deeper Theological and Organisational Understanding**

For many women, especially those married to clergy or actively serving across multiple circuits, maturity developed through direct engagement with Methodist processes. This was not only a personal spiritual evolution, but also a form of leadership preparation. Their increased competence allowed them to influence mission decisions, lead women's ministries more strategically, and provide theological insight that challenged male-dominated norms of leadership.

> *"I got growth spiritually... and now understanding the church and its processes." – The Good Wife, pseudonym*

This trajectory reflects what Kumalo (2024:48) and Phiri (2002:147) identify as the emergence of theological literacy among African women as a key form of religious agency. Instead of merely occupying devotional roles, these women began contributing to organisational stability and pastoral governance, spaces from which they were historically excluded. Framed through feminist critical historiography (Scott, 2020:324), their stories reposition lived experience as a source of ecclesial knowledge.

Importantly, intersectional theory (Crenshaw, 2013:139) helps us understand how race, gender, and class intersected in their leadership journeys, especially in an apartheid context where Black women faced layered exclusions. Yet, as this study reveals, women transformed these constraints into platforms for ministry. Their spiritual growth was both theological and strategic, empowering them to shape the church from within. This theme underscores that spiritual leadership was not confined to preaching, but was cultivated through active, informed, and reflective church participation. In this way, Black women became theologians, administrators, and faith educators—often without formal titles, but with profound institutional impact.

5.4.2.3 Theme 3: Increased Public Visibility of Women

This theme highlights the visible shift in how Black women's leadership was recognised within the MCSA, particularly from the 1980s onwards. While women had always worked faithfully in support roles, their growing confidence and capacity eventually led to more prominent, public-facing forms of leadership. Visibility, both literal and symbolic, marked a generational transformation in church culture, disrupting patriarchal norms that had long confined women to the background.

- **Sub-theme 1: Leading Programs and Being Recognized Publicly**

Recognition was often informal, yet highly meaningful, earned through years of service, mentorship, and consistent presence.

> *"People respected us, even as women. They called me CCS for life because I served for decades." – Mrs. Noah, the activist.*

The public acknowledgment of women like Mrs. Noah, who was affectionately called "CCS for life," affirms that sustained service gradually earned women not only respect but a form of institutional memory and recognition. These roles, though sometimes unofficial, symbolised a shift in the church's understanding of leadership and authority. As noted by Kumalo (2024:57), visibility matters in theological spaces, particularly where Black women have historically been seen but not heard. Their presence in program leadership, music, and community service functions as a theological statement, asserting that leadership is earned through faithfulness and spiritual authority, not just clerical office.

This development aligns with feminist historiographical calls to reinterpret ecclesial memory by including women's public roles (Riley, 2024:147; Chikwendu, 2023:18). Through increased visibility, women did not only reshape their spiritual identities, but they also provided models of leadership for younger generations. Their growing presence on stages, pulpits, and in governance meetings redefined what was possible for women within the Methodist tradition.
Theologically, this shift can also be interpreted through intersectionality, as visibility disrupted the intersection of gender and racial marginalisation within the church (Crenshaw, 2019:139; Gouws, 2017:21). Women's emergence as visible leaders not only challenged patriarchy, but also reclaimed Black women's right to be spiritual exemplars in public space, expanding both the imagination and practice of church leadership.

5.4.2.4 Theme 4: Creative and Cultural Leadership

This theme highlights how Black women in the Methodist Church used cultural expression, especially music, as a powerful form of spiritual leadership. Without holding formal offices, women like Marah Louw exercised theological authority and contributed to the preservation and evolution of Methodist identity through song, performance, and artistic innovation.

- **Sub-theme 1: Formation of Independent Worship Choirs**

Marah Louw represents a unique example of this leadership through music. She not only formed choirs, but revived and recorded traditional Methodist hymns, offering a return to deeply spiritual modes of worship.

> *"I formed a choir called Hymns of Africa... we brought back the deep traditional hymns with piano only, no band." – Marah Louw, the professional (2025).*

Marah Louw's establishment of Hymns of Africa, a choir focused on traditional Methodist hymns performed with piano and voice, represents a form of creative resistance and renewal. Her work did not merely entertain; it revived theological memory and reinforced the spiritual depth of African Methodism. As reflected in Chapter 2, music in African churches is more than liturgical ornament—it is a theological act (Theilen, 2005:63; Kumalo, 2024:48). Louw's recordings offered a form of embodied theology that preserved worship heritage for younger generations while expanding access to the church's cultural assets.
From a theoretical lens, feminist critical historiography helps us recognise Louw's contributions as part of a broader struggle to archive women's voices and leadership in spiritual history (Riley, 2024:147; Scott, 2020:324). Her music functions as both testimony and archive,

capturing how spirituality is experienced, transmitted, and defended through cultural practice. Decolonial theory also provides key insights here. By restoring indigenous hymn traditions outside Western musical arrangements, Louw reclaimed African worship aesthetics and re-centred them within Methodist theology (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018:45; Lamola, 2021:115).

Her public role as a divorced woman joining the Women's Manyano further deepened the significance of her cultural leadership. It challenged social norms around marital respectability and affirmed that women's faith contributions could not be measured by domestic status alone. In these ways, Marah Louw's example illustrates that creative and cultural expression is not separate from the ministry; it is ministry. Her leadership demonstrates that faith can be lived, sung, and remembered as both resistance and renewal.

Summary

This theme affirms that the evolution of black women's roles in the Methodist Church from 1950 to 2000 is one of unambiguous progress from behind-the-scenes, supportive roles to open, strong leadership Black Methodist women, particularly figures like Marah Louw, exercised spiritual leadership not only through structured ministry roles but also through creative and cultural expression. Louw's revival of traditional hymnody, coupled with her decision to record and perform spiritual music independently, demonstrated that music was both theology and activism. As noted in Chapter 2, this aligns with broader trends in African women's spiritual leadership, where liturgy and song are used to articulate theology, identity, and resistance (Kumalo, 2024:48; Theilen, 2005:63).

From the lens of feminist critical historiography, such practices reclaim women's voices in ecclesial memory, while decolonial theory reveals the significance of restoring African worship forms stripped away by Eurocentric liturgical norms (Riley, 2024:147; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018:45). The contributions of women like Louw expand the Methodist understanding of leadership, affirming that music, memory, and cultural preservation are sacred forms of ministry deserving of theological recognition and historical preservation.

5.4.3 Socio-Political Influences on Women's Agency

The complex interplay between race, gender, and religion during apartheid significantly shaped the lived experiences of Black Methodist women. Participants were engaged through a series of in-depth interviews, with follow-up questions aimed at understanding how apartheid and

broader socio-political conditions shaped their experiences in the Methodist Church. The analysis revealed five key themes that illustrate how political oppression intersected with gendered church participation. Table 4.4 below presents these themes alongside brief descriptions.

Table 4.4: Key themes about socio-political influences on women's agency

Theme	Theme Description	Sub-Themes
Apartheid-Era Racial Segregation in the Church	Explores the racial divisions imposed within church spaces, mirroring the larger apartheid system.	- Designated separate services for Black worshippers. - White congregants' rejection and social exclusion. - Racism from church members outside worship settings.
Apartheid-Era Gender and Power Dynamics	Examines how apartheid reinforced patriarchal church structures that limited women's leadership opportunities.	- Suppressed women's leadership within church hierarchy.
Resistance to Racial Oppression Through Presence	Highlights moments of defiance against racially segregated church practices.	- Refusal to submit to segregationist worship norms.
Protective Social Status Against State Repression	Demonstrates how personal privilege or public visibility could offer some Black women a degree of protection.	- Celebrity status as a shield from apartheid enforcement.

5.4.3.1 Theme 1: Apartheid-Era Racial Segregation in the Church

The first theme that emerged from the data analysis was Apartheid-Era Racial Segregation in the Church. Participants echoed that racial segregation within the Methodist Church during apartheid mirrored the broader socio-political order of separation, control, and exclusion. Despite a theological commitment to unity, many Methodist congregations practiced racial differentiation that undermined the very ethos of Christian fellowship. Black congregants were routinely directed to separate, poorly resourced services and made to feel unwelcome in predominantly white spaces. These lived experiences underscore the contradictions between Christian ideals of love and justice, and the institutional complicity with apartheid ideology.

- **Sub-theme 1: Designated Separate Services for Black Worshippers**

Despite being part of the same faith community, Black congregants were often assigned to separate worship times considered more appropriate for their social standing. These designations were based on racial stereotypes rather than spiritual needs.

> *"They told me I should attend the 3:00 PM service for people who work in kitchens... I said, I don't work emakhitshini." – Marah Louw, the professional (2025).*

This reflects how racialised assumptions deeply structured spiritual life in the church. As Chapter 2 notes, the Methodist Church often failed to protect its Black members from social marginalisation, instead replicating apartheid spatial logics within sacred spaces (Kumalo, 2024:42). These church practices imposed spiritual hierarchies based on race, undermining the liberative promise of the Gospel.

- **Sub-theme 2: White Congregants' Rejection and Social Exclusion**

In racially mixed congregations, Black worshippers were often met with silent rejection and discomfort from white congregants. These moments of exclusion reveal how racism persisted, even when not explicitly enforced by policy.

> *"When I walked into the all-white congregation, the room fell into an awkward silence... No one wanted to shake my hand." – Marah Louw, the professional (2025).*

This aligns with intersectional insights from Chapter 3, where Crenshaw (2013:139) argues that racism and sexism often work together in subtle but powerful ways, creating emotionally taxing environments for marginalised individuals. The emotional toll of being visibly unwelcome, even within one's faith, reveals the extent to which apartheid's ideology was internalised by white congregants.

- **Sub-theme 3: Racism from Church Members Outside Worship Settings**

Racist sentiments were not limited to church services but extended to social settings and casual conversations among church members. This environment often made it difficult for Black congregants to fully belong, even outside the formal context of worship.

> *"He said, 'Now that this Kaffer has been released, our country is going to the dogs!'... I broke their teacup and left." – Marah Louw, the professional (2025).*

Such moments highlight the deep emotional and spiritual labour required of Black women to remain committed to institutions that frequently denied their humanity. As discussed in Chapter 2, even faith-based spaces became battlegrounds for racial dignity (Mkhwanazi and Kgatla, 2015:179). These everyday indignities reinforce why Black women's persistence and resistance must be seen as acts of spiritual defiance and theological importance.

Overall, this theme demonstrates that the church was not a refuge from apartheid, but often an extension of it. Yet, Black women's continued presence, defiance, and leadership within this hostile environment constitute a profound theological response to racial injustice. Their stories demand a re-evaluation of the Methodist Church's history through the lens of racialised gendered faith, affirming the critical importance of spiritual resistance.

5.4.3.2 Theme 2: Apartheid-Era Gender and Power Dynamics

The results of the analysis also showed that the apartheid regime did not only implement racial separation, it also entrenched patriarchal norms that governed the role of women within society, including within the church. The MCSA, while publicly opposing apartheid, often mirrored its gendered power structures internally. Black women, despite forming the spiritual and operational backbone of the church, were frequently relegated to supportive roles, with limited formal authority or recognition.

- **Sub-theme 1: Suppressed Women's Leadership within Church Hierarchy**

Black women frequently found themselves excluded from positions of leadership or visibility, despite being central to the church's survival and growth.

> *"At that time, women's leadership was very limited, we were really suppressed." – The Good Wife, pseudonym (2025).*

This statement reflects how women's leadership was constrained by institutional and theological norms that privileged male authority. As highlighted in Chapter 2, women were central to ministries like the Manyano, which carried out caregiving, teaching, and worship functions; yet their leadership was informal, undervalued, and largely undocumented (Mkhwanazi and Kgatla, 2015:180; Kumalo, 2024:57).

From a theoretical standpoint, intersectionality helps explain how race and gender co-constituted forms of exclusion. While Black men in the church also faced racial marginalisation, Black women experienced dual oppression—subordinated by both race and

gender within ecclesial structures (Crenshaw, 2019:139). Feminist critical historiography, as discussed in Chapter 3, challenges these silences by validating informal, oral, and embodied forms of leadership as legitimate sources of historical and theological knowledge (Scott, 2020:324; Chikwendu, 2023:18).

The invisibility of women's contributions was not merely an oversight; it was a systemic erasure that mirrored the wider social order under apartheid. As women like The Good Wife sustained circuits, led organisations, and educated congregants, their exclusion from church governance reveals a church struggling to reconcile its mission with its internal biases.
This theme highlights that Black women's spiritual authority often existed in tension with institutional structures. Yet, even within these limitations, their influence was enduring and transformative, compelling a re-examination of how power, leadership, and gender operated within Soweto's Methodist history.

5.4.3.3 Theme 3: Resistance to Racial Oppression Through Presence

Although apartheid imposed rigid racial boundaries in every aspect of South African life, some women resisted these constraints not through overt protest, but through intentional, everyday acts of presence. These forms of resistance, though quiet, were nonetheless radical, redefining belonging in sacred spaces and challenging church complicity in racial segregation.

- **Sub-theme 1: Refusal to Submit to Segregationist Worship Norms**

By refusing to follow racially designated practices, women like Marah Louw redefined what it meant to belong in sacred spaces.

> *"I said I will not attend the 3:00 PM service. I will attend the morning one because it suits my schedule." – Marah Louw, the professional (2025).*

This account by Marah Louw reflects how Black women used their bodies and choices to challenge the racial hierarchy embedded within church structures. Attending services designated for white congregants was not simply a scheduling decision, it was a deliberate assertion of spiritual equality and social dignity. As discussed in Chapter 2, the MCSA, while publicly anti-apartheid, often mirrored state racial practices in worship arrangements (Phiri, 2002:147; Kumalo, 2024:41). Churches held late-afternoon services for Black domestic workers (Onomakhitshi), reinforcing their social subordination even within spiritual life. Women like Marah Louw rejected this marginalisation, using presence as protest.

Feminist critical historiography positions such acts as counter-narratives that resist erasure and assert agency through lived experience (Scott, 2020:324; Riley, 2024:147). Intersectionality is especially relevant here, as these women navigated both racial and gendered exclusion simultaneously, exposing how apartheid operated within the sanctuary as much as in the state (Crenshaw, 2019:139). These everyday refusals, often unacknowledged in formal histories, were powerful interventions. They challenged theological complicity, demanded spiritual visibility, and expanded the church's ethical imagination. In doing so, Black women redefined what resistance could look like within the walls of the church, transforming presence into praxis.

5.4.3.4 Theme 4: Protective Social Status Against State Repression

While most Black women in apartheid South Africa faced systemic surveillance, movement restrictions, and legal discrimination, a few, by virtue of their public stature—were able to exercise limited freedoms. This theme explores how symbolic capital, especially in the form of celebrity and public recognition, could serve as a protective shield from direct state punishment.

- **Sub-theme: Celebrity Status as Shield from Apartheid Enforcement**

Public recognition and visibility sometimes offered a buffer against state-imposed punishments, especially for women who were seen as cultural or national figures.

> *"They couldn't arrest me for marrying a white man... it would've been international news." – Marah Louw, the professional (2025).*

Marah Louw's high-profile career allowed her to defy apartheid's *Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act* with relative impunity. Her international acclaim meant that state actors risked public scandal if they targeted her, which created a paradoxical space of freedom within repression. This phenomenon aligns with intersectional theory, which acknowledges how privilege and marginalisation can coexist (Crenshaw, 2019:139; Collins and Bilge, 2020:61). As a Black woman, Marah was structurally disadvantaged, but as a celebrity, she occupied a socially elevated position that complicated her vulnerability to state control.

From a feminist historiographical lens, her story complicates binary narratives of victimhood and resistance. Rather than resisting solely through suffering, Marah's life illustrates a form of

resistance through visibility—where public identity became both shield and platform (Chikwendu, 2023:18; Scott, 2020:324).

Furthermore, decolonial theory invites us to see her defiance as an embodied refusal of the racialised and gendered control imposed by colonial systems. By publicly marrying across racial lines and continuing to serve in church and cultural life, she transgressed both legal and theological expectations embedded in apartheid ideologies (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018:45; Lamola, 2021:115).

Summary

The socio-political context of apartheid had a profound impact on how Black women experienced and navigated church life. Participants depicted stories of race exclusion, gender suppression, and institutionally rooted discrimination in Methodist spaces, reflecting what Chapter 2 describes as religious institutions internalising apartheid hierarchies (Phiri, 2002:16; Kumalo, 2009:154). But they also demonstrated resistance, asserting presence, resisting segregationist norms, and, in extraordinary situations, using social status as a shield against state repression (Mkhwanazi and Kgatla, 2015:182).

These experiences illustrate the intersectionality of race, gender, and class under apartheid and how the regime of oppression both constrained and shaped women's religious agency (Crenshaw, 2019:139; Gouws, 2017:21). Despite institutional complicity, women made space for leadership, spiritual authority, and dignity in a church that too often replicated the inequalities of broader society.

5.4.4 Challenges and Opportunities Faced by Black Women

This section examines the structural, cultural, and relational barriers that hindered Black women's full participation in the Methodist Church. While women demonstrated resilience and leadership, their contributions were often constrained by gendered norms and exclusionary practices. Thematic analysis revealed recurring challenges, but also moments of potential and agency. **Table 4.5** below outlines these themes with corresponding sub-themes and participant insights.

Table 4.5: Key themes related to challenges and opportunities faced by black women

Theme	Theme Description	Sub-Themes
Institutional Barriers and Gender Inequality	Structural restrictions on women's access to leadership roles, public speaking, and liturgical authority.	- Exclusion from preaching and public speaking. - Male-dominated leadership and worship roles.
Cultural Norms and Internalized Patriarchy	Deep-rooted gender beliefs that limited women's leadership aspirations—even among women themselves.	- Resistance to female superintendents by women themselves.
Judgment and Peer Policing Within Women's Groups	Social control and surveillance among women based on class, appearance, and conformity.	- Class-based prejudice in the Manyano. - Gossip and shaming within church-based women circles.
Silencing and Exclusion from Decision-Making	Marginalization of capable women through exclusion from strategic church discussions and leadership input.	- Lack of invitation to strategic church spaces.

5.4.4.1 Theme 1: Institutional Barriers and Gender Inequality

Despite their consistent commitment to the life of the church, Black women faced institutional restrictions that limited their visibility and authority in public worship and leadership. These barriers reflected not only patriarchal church traditions but also a lack of intentional inclusion from male leaders.

- **Sub-theme 1: Exclusion from Preaching and Public Speaking**

Women were not permitted to speak publicly, even when married to church leaders. Their roles were seen as supportive, not participatory in public liturgy or governance.

> *"Even as the minister's wife, I never had the privilege to stand and make a notice myself." – The Good Wife, pseudonym (2025).*

This quote reveals how systemic exclusion was embedded in everyday practices, where even respected women were denied basic visibility and voice. This exclusion functioned as a mechanism of symbolic silencing, reinforcing a gendered theology that located women as helpers rather than as prophets or preachers (Dube, 2003:135). The act of silencing maintained male dominance and curtailed women's potential to shape church discourse.

- **Sub-theme 2: Male-Dominated Leadership and Worship Roles**

Leadership spaces, particularly those related to worship and liturgy, were male and rarely open to women.

> *"Everything was done by males; it was the males that were conducting." – Mrs. Noah, the activist (2025).*

This entrenched male visibility ensured that women's work remained peripheral or invisible, both spiritually and structurally. This created not only a symbolic exclusion but also a practical one—limiting opportunities for women to develop leadership skills and be spiritually affirmed in public. The pattern reinforced the idea that women's contributions were secondary or invisible in the sacred space. From a feminist critical historiography perspective, such exclusion signals a historiographical gap in how religious authority is recorded and remembered (Scott, 2020:324).

This theme illustrates the deep entanglement between institutional theology and patriarchal governance. Intersectionality helps clarify how Black women, situated at the margins of both race and gender hierarchies, encountered compounding exclusions (Crenshaw, 2019:139; Collins and Bilge, 2020:61). Yet, as the data shows, their marginalisation was met not with retreat, but with strategic and resilient forms of agency. As Phiri (2002:27) argues, women in African churches were "present but not counted," contributing to ministry without institutional acknowledgment. Chapter 2 reinforces this, showing that formal leadership structures in the MCSA remained overwhelmingly male-dominated throughout the apartheid era (Kumalo, 2024:57; Mkhwanazi and Kgatla, 2015:180).

5.4.4.2 Theme 2: Cultural Norms and Internalized Patriarchy

In addition to institutional constraints, cultural beliefs about gender roles were internalized by many women themselves, making the push for equality more complex. In some cases, women resisted leadership not because of external opposition, but because of long-held social conditioning.

- **Sub-theme 1: Resistance to Female Superintendents by Women Themselves**

Some women themselves questioned the legitimacy of female leadership in the church, drawing from social and cultural scripts rooted in patriarchal traditions.

> *"We grew up believing that a man is the head of the household... Why do we now want to place ourselves above men?" – Mrs. Noah, the activist (2025).*

This illustrates the phenomenon of internalised patriarchy, where women adopt and reproduce gendered ideologies that limit their own potential. As noted by Mama (1995), patriarchal power is most enduring when it is naturalised within everyday cultural and familial structures.

Chapter 2 highlights this dynamic within the Manyano, where leadership was highly respected but often still confined to roles deemed acceptable for women—nurturing, organising, and supporting rather than leading doctrinally (Mkhwanazi and Kgatla, 2015:182). Even within supportive women's spaces, the belief in male spiritual authority remained largely unchallenged. Feminist critical historiography helps unpack how these beliefs have historically constrained women's voices while also recognising that such norms are culturally constructed and, therefore, open to contestation (Riley, 2024:147). Through this lens, Mrs. Noah's comment is not merely a reflection of individual belief but part of a larger social theology that has shaped women's roles in religious life across generations.

Intersectionality further reveals that women's resistance to leadership was not only shaped by gendered belief systems but also by generational experience, class background, and geographic setting (Crenshaw, 2019:139). Thus, this theme highlights the need to address not only institutional exclusion but also internalised norms that inhibit transformation from within.

5.4.4.3 Theme 3: Judgment and Peer Policing Within Women's Groups

Ironically, some of the most painful exclusions came not from men, but from within women's spaces such as the Manyano. These groups, while offering spiritual support, could also become sites of judgment, gossip, and class-based exclusion.

- **Sub-theme 1: Class-Based Prejudice in the Manyano**

Appearance, speech, and economic status often shaped how women were accepted—or excluded—by their peers.

> *"They said, 'Ngumlungukazi lo'—a white woman—just because of my red nails... I stayed quiet but I saw them gossiping." – Marah Louw, the professional (2025).*

This comment reflects the subtle yet powerful ways that respectability politics and class dynamics shaped belonging in the Manyano. As noted by Theilen (2005:63) and Kumalo (2024:57), women's roles were often governed by unspoken rules of conformity tied to middle-class ideals of modesty and decorum. Those who deviated, whether through fashion, education,

or confidence, were subtly policed through gossip and silence. This highlights the subtle but powerful ways social policing can be used to enforce conformity and exclude difference, even within spaces that should offer sisterhood and solidarity.

- **Sub-theme 2: Gossip and Shaming Within Church-Based Women Circles**

Women who defied expectations—whether through dress, confidence, or career—often found themselves subject to silent critique or outright ridicule.

> *"There's this snobbery. They never said anything, but the stares, the attitude—it's clear when you're being judged." – Marah Louw, the professional (2025).*

As Gouws (2017:21) notes, such peer policing is a feature of internalised patriarchy, where women monitor each other to maintain behavioural standards aligned with dominant gender expectations. These experiences are compounded when intersected with issues of class and public visibility, as in Marah Louw's case. From the standpoint of feminist critical historiography, these interactions matter because they shape which women feel included in the theological and communal life of the church (Riley, 2024:147). They also demonstrate that patriarchy is not only upheld from above but is also reproduced in everyday interactions among women themselves.

Intersectionality further reveals that class, public identity, and even language shaped women's reception in church spaces (Crenshaw, 2019:139; Mama, 1995). Therefore, this theme complicates assumptions of female solidarity, reminding us that spiritual sisterhood was not always an unproblematic source of empowerment.

5.4.4.4 Theme 4: Silencing and Exclusion from Decision-Making

Even women who were capable, experienced, and respected were often excluded from strategic conversations within the church. This form of silencing was not loud or overt, but occurred through omission and disregard.

- **Sub-theme 1: Lack of Invitation to Strategic Church Spaces**

Despite their capacity and long service, women were often not consulted in matters of church governance or mission planning.

"No one asked women like Mrs. Radikeledi for input, even though she was highly capable." – The Good Wife, pseudonym (2025).

This quote underscores how institutional sexism can function through absence. Excluding women from leadership conversations denies the church the benefit of their wisdom and reinforces a narrow vision of authority and capability.

Summary

Black women in the Methodist Church faced a myriad of difficulties rooted in institutional sexism, cultural beliefs, and peer internal policing. Their exclusion from public speaking, leadership, and decision-making positions reflected deep structural and cultural boundaries, as Chapter 2 indicates, when women's ministries were constrained by patriarchal theology and traditional gender roles (Phiri, 2002:13; Kumalo, 2009:51; Mkhwanazi and Kgatla, 2015:182). Even within women's organisations like the Manyano, respectability politics and judgment dynamics energized exclusion through internal policing (Theilen, 2005:50). They continued to serve, to lead, and to stake their claim. Framed within the intersectional lens, their accounts illuminate the multiply oppressive character of race and gender—and the unobtrusive resilience with which Black women navigated these limiting spaces (Crenshaw, 2019:142; Gouws, 2017:21).

5.4.5 Personal Narratives and Historical Significance

This section explores the personal stories and recollections shared by participants, revealing how memory, music, and testimony serve as tools for preserving women's contributions to Methodism. Through storytelling, women documented their own faith journeys, honoured those overlooked by institutional records, and celebrated the spiritual legacies passed through generations. Table 4.6 below presents key themes that emerged, alongside their descriptions and corresponding sub-themes.

Table 4.6: Key themes related to personal narratives and historical significance

Theme	Theme Description	Sub-Themes
Recognition of Overlooked Women Leaders	Honouring past women who contributed to church life but remain absent from formal records.	- Naming and honouring past women leaders - Advocating for visibility of capable women sidelined by leadership

Creative Expression as Testimony	Using music and artistic expression to document faith and Methodist heritage.	- Musical recordings of Methodist hymns to preserve memory - Concerts and albums to document worship traditions
Silencing and Exclusion from Decision-Making	Marginalization of capable women through exclusion from strategic church discussions and leadership input.	- Sharing of family legacy and photographs from ministry

5.4.5.1 Theme 1: Recognition of Overlooked Women Leaders

In the absence of formal recognition, participants used oral storytelling to name, honour, and preserve the legacy of women whose contributions were instrumental to church growth and spiritual life. These recollections challenged institutional silences and affirmed that leadership existed beyond titles and church offices.

- **Sub-theme 1: Naming and Honouring Past Women Leaders**

Participants remembered and spoke with admiration about women who had made significant yet unrecognized contributions within their congregations. Women like Mrs. Noah spoke with reverence about forgotten leaders such as Mama Makgetla and Mama Masombuka, highlighting their quiet yet foundational roles in the church. These women were remembered not for holding office but for their spiritual strength, compassion, and unwavering service.

> *"Mama Makgetla... she did her job... Mama Masombuka... very much dedicated and down to earth women." – Mrs. Noah, the activist (2025).*

These oral tributes reconstruct an alternative genealogy of leadership, bypassing official archives and re-inscribing women's legacies into communal memory. As noted by Chikwendu (2023:18) and Jaques (2022:38), feminist historiography privileges oral testimony as a source of knowledge often overlooked by institutional record-keeping. In affirming these elders, participants challenged the silencing of Black women's faith labour and engaged in what Scott (2020:324) calls "the work of memory as resistance."

- **Sub-theme 2: Advocating for the Visibility of Capable Women Sidelined by Leadership**

In some cases, women who were exceptionally gifted were intentionally sidelined by church leadership, their contributions ignored or dismissed due to internal politics or patriarchal biases.

> *"Mrs Radikeledi was very intelligent, but they did not even want to use her." – The Good Wife, pseudonym (2025).*

This reflects broader patterns discussed in Chapter 2, where the institutional church consistently undervalued women's theological and administrative contributions (Kumalo, 2024:39; Mkhwanazi and Kgatla, 2015:181). By voicing these injustices, participants used narrative as a form of advocacy, making visible what the formal church had ignored. These recollections not only honour the silenced but also expose the systemic nature of gendered exclusion. Through these acts of memory and advocacy, women reclaimed ecclesial history from the margins, asserting that leadership existed beyond liturgical platforms, in homes, prayer meetings, and community care. These stories are theological artefacts that reframe what counts as sacred authority in African Methodism.

5.4.5.2 Theme 2: Creative Expression as Testimony

Beyond conventional church roles, Black Methodist women exercised leadership through artistic expression—especially music—which became a medium for spiritual witness, cultural preservation, and theological reflection. For women like Marah Louw, the act of singing, composing, and producing hymns was not merely performance but a form of religious authorship and public ministry.

- **Sub-theme 1: Musical Recordings of Methodist Hymns to Preserve Memory**

Marah Louw used her artistic platform to create a spiritual archive through sound. By returning to traditional hymn styles, she preserved the emotional depth and theological richness of older Methodist worship practices.

> *"I formed a choir called Hymns of Africa... all Methodist hymns but brought back to the old way, just my voice and piano." – Marah Louw, the professional (2025).*

Marah Louw's revival of traditional Methodist hymns—rendered with only voice and piano—constituted what scholars term a "spiritual archive" (Scott, 2020:324; Jaques, 2022:38). Her recordings served to conserve a theological tradition at risk of erasure in the face of modern liturgical shifts and commercialised gospel culture. This practice aligns with African feminist theological approaches that prioritise oral tradition, performance, and embodied memory as valid theological sources (Phiri, 2002:21; Oduyoye, 1995:77). Louw's return to ancestral sounds was a countercultural act, safeguarding the emotive and doctrinal depth of Methodist heritage in a way that formal archives could not replicate.

- **Sub-theme 2: Concerts and Albums to Document Worship Traditions**

Marah also blended her public influence with her faith identity to produce worship albums rooted in African spiritual expression. Through her public platform, Marah translated her spirituality into accessible cultural products, concerts, albums, and choir initiatives, which made African Methodism visible and celebrated in broader society. These efforts blurred the lines between worship and activism, art and ministry.

> *"I did another album... 'Marah worships the African way'... just hymns, no band. A return to deep spiritual sound." – Marah Louw, the professional (2025).*

As highlighted in Chapter 2, such work exemplifies the intersection of faith and cultural leadership, where music becomes both theology and social witness (Kumalo, 2024:48; Theilen, 2005:63). Her artistic leadership also represents an alternative form of ecclesial power—one that operates outside formal structures but carries profound theological weight.

Decolonial theory helps illuminate how this form of leadership resists Eurocentric ecclesiology by affirming African sonic and spiritual epistemologies (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018:45; Lamola, 2021:115). Through music, Louw modelled a decolonised, woman-centred ministry rooted in memory, ritual, and cultural pride. Ultimately, her creative contributions reflect a theology of sound, where worship is not just sung but archived, not just remembered but reimagined.

5.4.5.3 Theme 3: Personal Storytelling as Historical Record

Personal storytelling emerged as a central method through which participants asserted their presence in ecclesiastical history. These narratives functioned as counter-archives, resisting institutional silence and reconstructing Methodist history through the lens of lived, female experience. Women did not simply recall the past; they curated it as a form of spiritual heritage and theological insight.

- **Sub-theme 1: Sharing of Family Legacy and Photographs from Ministry**

Participants proudly traced their lineage through mothers, grandmothers, and great-grandmothers who were involved in church life, treating photographs and memories as sacred inheritance.

> *"That's my grandmother... my great-grandmother... this is me with Tata Madiba. This is my story, it's all part of the church too." – Marah Louw, the professional (2025).*

Marah Louw's act of narrating her spiritual journey through family photographs, oral recollections, and intergenerational memory exemplifies how storytelling becomes a theological act. Her linking of lineage from her grandmother to herself—illustrates how Black women's faith is often passed down outside formal church texts, through embodied memory and practice. These informal records—family albums, spoken accounts, and ancestral ties become sacred repositories of religious meaning. This approach reflects the emphasis in feminist critical historiography on recovering silenced voices and valuing narrative as valid knowledge (Scott, 2020:324; Chikwendu, 2023:18). As noted in Chapter 2, such storytelling resists dominant historical methods that prioritise textuality and male authority, instead centering women's experiential contributions to faith (Phiri, 2002:19; Kumalo, 2024:40).

From a decolonial perspective, these stories dismantle eurocentric theological frameworks by asserting African ways of knowing, where memory, kinship, and oral tradition serve as legitimate historical sources (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018:45; Lamola, 2021:115). In doing so, Black Methodist women reclaimed their spiritual inheritance, offering a richer, more inclusive history of the church. Furthermore, this theme also reflects intersectional dynamics, as women's stories intersected gender, race, and class, framing the act of remembering as both personal and political (Crenshaw, 2019:139; Mama, 1995). Storytelling is revealed here not as sentiment, but as strategy—a way of archiving faith, resisting erasure, and affirming the theological agency of Black women in shaping South African Methodism.

Summary

The personal narratives offered by participants reveal the depth of historical significance of Black women's work within the Methodist Church. Through remembering overlooked leaders, creating music that prolonged worship practices, and sharing intergenerational narratives, women reclaimed space within church history often denied to them. As Chapter 2 illustrates, oral testimonies and cultural practices serve as counter-archives that recover lost histories and legitimate women's religious leadership (Kumalo, 2024:9; Theilen, 2005:63). Framed by feminist critical historiography, these accounts are not isolated but rather part of a collaborative counter-narrative that cannot be silenced institutionally and revises historical remembrance (Jaques, 2022:38; Riley, 2024:147). Taken collectively, they celebrate legacy and substantiate the critical role of Black women to Southern African Methodism.

5.5 Cross-Case Comparison

The narratives of the three participants, The Good Wife (a traditional Manyano leader and clergy spouse), Mrs. Priscilla Noah (an activist deeply rooted in community ministry), and Marah Louw (a cultural leader and public performer), offer a complex yet coherent picture of Black women's leadership in the MCSA from 1950 to 2000. Despite their distinct roles, their stories converge in powerful themes of resilience, faith-based activism, and the pursuit of agency within and beyond church structures.

All three women reported experiencing gendered marginalisation, particularly in leadership and decision-making contexts. The Good Wife, despite her decades of service and leadership in the Manyano, was often excluded from formal recognition or strategic spaces. Mrs. Noah similarly noted a lack of formal acknowledgement for her leadership as a class leader and cultural contributor. Marah Louw's account revealed another dimension, her social class and artistic persona often attracted judgment and exclusion within women's groups, particularly in the Manyano. These experiences affirm the insights of feminist theologians like Phiri (2002:20) and Kumalo (2024:39), who argue that religious institutions mirror societal structures of power and exclusion, with Black women doubly burdened by both racism and patriarchy. Yet, these women also carved out and asserted agency through different strategies.

The Good Wife worked within traditional ecclesiastical boundaries, using her position as a minister's wife to plant churches, lead prayer groups, and uplift community women. She exemplifies what Walker (1995:108) describes as "subversive conformity," where agency is exercised through service, strategic adaptation, and quiet authority rather than overt resistance. Her leadership helped develop congregations that still exist today, including Dobsonville and Braamfischerville, now fully recognised societies (Methodist Book of Order, 2016:84). Her legacy contributes to the pride and identity of Black Methodists in the Roodepoort Circuit.

Mrs. Noah's story represents an early model of women crossing into male-dominated spaces, particularly through her leadership in music. As a choir organiser and assistant conductor, she disrupted gender norms in church worship, while her seamstress role in crafting iconic Manyano uniforms added aesthetic and symbolic power to women's religious identity. Her collaborative design and crafting of the Manyano President's fishtail garment underscores what Nadar (2009:557) calls "the embodied theology of resistance," where creative acts become assertions of autonomy and sacred leadership.

Marah Louw's narrative stands out as a radical counterpoint. She did not conform to traditional ecclesiastical frameworks, but rather leveraged her celebrity status, and artistic influence for faith-driven activism. Through concerts like Operation Hunger and albums like Marah Worships the African Way, she elevated African spiritual aesthetics, preserved hymn traditions, and redirected public attention towards Methodist values. Her marriage across racial lines during apartheid and her unapologetic entry into the Manyano post-divorce signal a powerful redefinition of what qualifies as spiritual legitimacy. This aligns with decolonial feminist scholars like Mama (1995) and Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018), who insist on recognising resistance as both structural and cultural.

Framed through feminist critical historiography (Riley, 2024:147; Scott, 2020:324), these narratives challenge the exclusionary tendencies of official church histories. The women's oral testimonies function as counter-archives (Chikwendu, 2023:18), foregrounding lived theology, memory, and emotional labour as central components of religious leadership. Their contributions also embody the intersectional nature of faith leadership, as argued by Crenshaw (2013:139) and Gouws (2017:21), who notes that gender, race, and class intersect in shaping how agency is enacted and recognised.

5.6. Continuities and Change in the Women's Manyano (2000 to present)

Core practices continue, including disciplined prayer, class meeting accountability, home visitation, funeral care, and uniformed witness. Ministries have also adapted to realities after apartheid through skills workshops, bursary schemes, hospital and soup kitchen outreach, and partnerships with youth (Mkhwanazi and Kgatla, 2015:187–193). Formal organisation remains central to growth, and societies are consolidated and recognised in line with MCSA criteria (MCSA, 2016:84). Memory is actively sustained rather than lost. Uniforms function as a living liturgy of dignity and continuity, and denominational reportage such as Dimension in 1987 and 1993, including the Year of Biblewomen, publicly commemorates women's leadership. At the same time, participants note uneven institutional recognition. Contemporary Manyano praxis is therefore both a bearer of inherited charism and a site of ongoing renewal.

5.7. Conclusion

This chapter presented an in-depth analysis of the qualitative data collected from three Black Methodist women in Soweto, highlighting the centrality of their roles in shaping the church

between 1950 and 2000. Through thematic analysis aligned with the study's five research objectives, it revealed how women exercised spiritual leadership, enacted care-based ministries, expanded evangelism, promoted interdenominational cooperation, and mobilised cultural resources. Despite operating within structures marked by gender, racial, and institutional exclusions, these women displayed remarkable agency-sometimes by working within traditional roles and other times through subversive or creative interventions.

The stories shared by the participants reveal unique contributions that stand out, offering invaluable insights into their personal experiences. The chapter also highlighted the socio-political constraints of apartheid, the power dynamics within the church, and the personal and communal strategies used by women to resist and thrive. Narratives emerged as not only personal recollections. but as valid theological and historical archives, affirming feminist historiography as a crucial tool for reclaiming silenced voices. Overall, the findings demonstrate that Black women were not marginal participants, but foundational agents of spiritual, social, and cultural change in the Methodist Church of Soweto.

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

6.1. Introduction

This chapter critically reflects on the findings presented in Chapter 5 through the lenses of feminist critical historiography, intersectionality, and decolonial theory. While the previous chapter thematically organised participants' narratives around the five research objectives, this chapter goes further by interpreting those themes to uncover deeper meanings, theoretical insights, and historical implications. The goal is not only to describe what women did, but to understand how their actions, beliefs, and resistance practices redefined spiritual leadership, challenged patriarchal ecclesiology, and expanded the scope of South African Methodist history.

Through this interpretive process, the chapter affirms that Black women's roles were foundational, not peripheral, to the Methodist Church's growth, survival, and social relevance in Soweto from 1950 to 2000. It argues that caregiving, storytelling, music, church planting, and even resistance through presence must be seen as theological and political acts that challenge dominant narratives of church history. The discussion that follows is structured around the five objectives of the study, linking key findings with theoretical insights and broader scholarly debates.

6.2. Summary of Key Findings

This section synthesizes the main findings of the study in relation to the five research objectives outlined at the beginning of the inquiry. By juxtaposing participant narratives with each objective, this section underscores the alignment between lived experiences, emergent themes, and the overall purposes of the study. The synthesis demonstrates how the contribution, challenges, and leadership of Black women in the Methodist Church were framed by, and addressed, the socio-political and gendered environments of their eras.

6.2.1. Research Objective One

Objective 1: *To uncover the roles occupied by Black women in the Methodist Church in Soweto and evaluate how these roles influenced the church's development and community engagement.*

The first objective of this study was to uncover the roles played by Black women in the Methodist Church in Soweto and evaluate how these roles influenced the church's development and community engagement. The analysis revealed five key themes (Figure 6.1 below) that illustrate how women played critical roles in shaping both the spiritual and social fabric of their communities. These roles extended far beyond traditional support functions, encompassing leadership, caregiving, evangelism, inter-church collaboration, and cultural mobilisation.

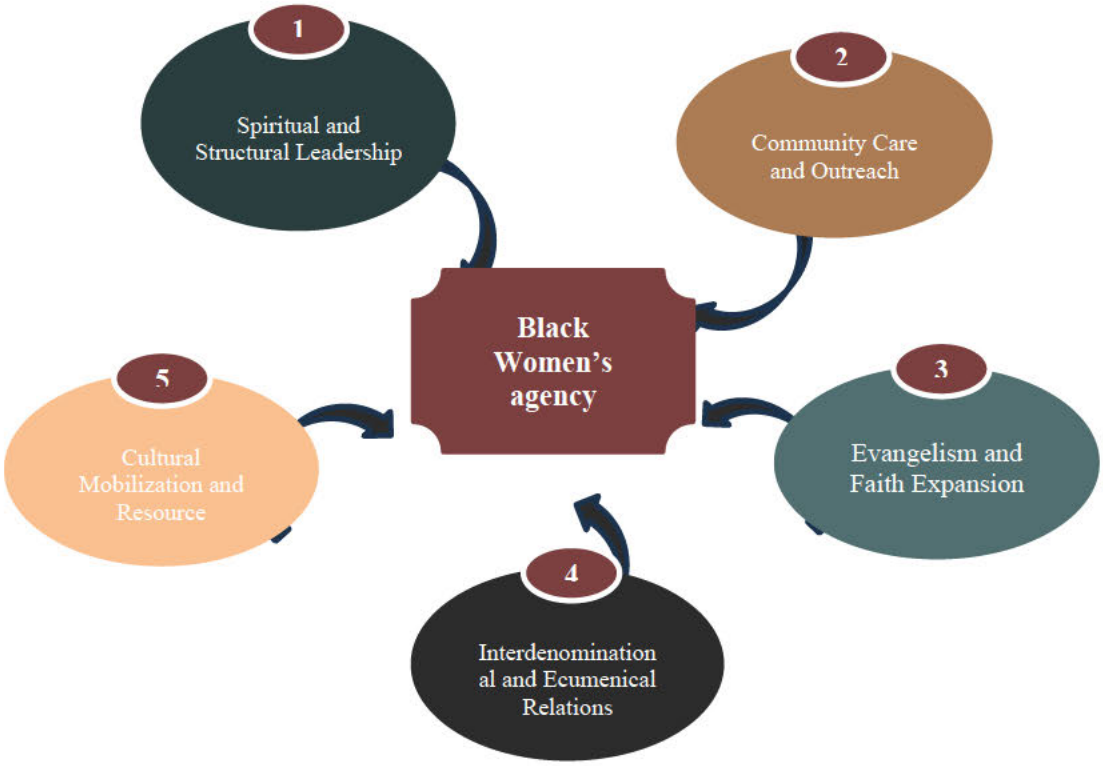

Figure 1. Thematic Map of Black Women's Roles in the Methodist Church

6.2.1.1. Spiritual and Structural Leadership

The findings revealed that Black women in Soweto's Methodist Church played essential roles in church planting, spiritual administration, and institutional stability. *The Good Wife's* active involvement in founding congregations in Dobsonville, Braam Fischer, Matholeville and Crown Mines, as well as her coordination of vice-chair ladies within Manyano, demonstrates how women held both spiritual and structural authority, despite not holding formal leadership titles. These churches, particularly Dobsonville and its feeder stations like Silvertown and Braamfischerville have since evolved from preaching stations into fully assessed societies with appointed leaders and active ministries, in line with the Methodist Book of Order's criteria (Methodist Book of Order, 2016:84). This lasting institutional legacy affirms The Good Wife's profound contribution to church-building and Black spiritual autonomy during apartheid.

This notion is supported by Van der Merwe (2022:69), who emphasizes that women in this context were not merely passive participants; instead, they were critical organizers and leaders shaped by their theological conviction to pursue justice and liberation. Furthermore, Phiri (2002:27) argues that the reinterpretation of religious doctrines by women challenged the patriarchal structures within the church, underscoring their agency and influential roles. The Manyano movement, as discussed by Mkhwanazi and Kgatla (2015:191), serves as a significant example of how women effectively led grassroots religious organisations while being systematically excluded from formal ecclesiastical authority, thereby preserving the church's longevity and resilience even in adverse conditions.

It is also crucial to highlight women who exercised agency beyond the Manyano, such as Kuzwayo, who played a pivotal role in establishing the Methodist Women's Association (MWA), a separate and distinct body within the MCSA aimed at uniting women across race and class divides. Her leadership provides evidence that Black women's influence in the church was not monolithic, but expressed through multiple organisational pathways. Similarly, Madie Beatrice Hall, wife of Dr A.B. Xuma, a social activist and an elite churchwoman in Sophiatown, contributed to the public and intellectual representation of women in the MCSA, using her social status to advocate for gender justice within elite church circles (Hendricks, 2022). These examples demonstrate that women's leadership in Methodism took diverse forms beyond prayer unions and reveal a broader terrain of Black ecclesial feminism.

Siwila (2011:14) underscores the necessity of addressing gender inequality within African religious institutions, emphasizing that women's leadership roles are often marginalized despite their significant contributions. This aligns with the observations of Dweba and Rashe (2021:1-5), who argue that Scripture, when read holistically, affirms the inclusion of women in ministry and governance, highlighting shared spiritual authority and the theological foundations for women's leadership in Black South African churches. Similarly, Frahm-Arp (2010) highlights how professional South African women in Pentecostal contexts gained legitimacy through the public performance of faith and leadership in visible ministries, while Duncan (2019:6) observes how South African Presbyterian women gradually pushed boundaries in ministry despite institutional resistance.

Framed through feminist critical historiography, this kind of leadership challenges traditional masculinist church historiography that defines leadership through formal offices only (Braude,

2004:565; Browne, 2013:128-129). These women's "unofficial" leadership was both foundational and transformative, forming a parallel governance system within church life. Kumalo (2024:48) confirms this by highlighting that women, through the likes of Manyano, were able to establish leadership networks effectively that not only mobilized society, but also created resilience and activism in the face of systemic oppression.

6.2.1.2. Community Care and Outreach

Participants described how Black women in the Methodist Church took on crucial responsibilities in feeding the hungry, distributing clothing, offering health education, and supporting the sick, particularly during the rise of HIV/AIDS. These were not ad hoc gestures, but structured ministries rooted in faith and social justice. As *The Good Wife* shared, "They would buy soup packets… ensuring they had something to eat." This form of compassionate service transformed the church into a refuge of practical care and dignity. Women like Mrs. Noah provided care for decades through the Christian Community Secretary (CCS), becoming synonymous with caregiving in their circuits, so much so that she was affectionately called "CCS for life." Her long-term hospital ministry exemplifies what feminist theology calls a spirituality of solidarity. Even at the age of 92, she remains actively involved in producing Manyano garments, showing that care extends beyond health into spiritual aesthetics and symbolic affirmation.

The July 1985 issue of *Dimension* acknowledges the contributions of the "Methodist Relief Food Scheme," which marked its 20th anniversary, highlighting the involvement of women from Soweto's Jabavu, Zola communities. Among those honoured were women like Mrs Diana Moshapa, wife of Lutheran church minister in Chiawelo, who, despite not being a Methodist, had actively participated in the initiative since 1980 (Dimension, 1985:5). Other women mentioned on the article are Angela Madikane, a bible woman, and Mrs Anna Squair.

Such acts reflect the active involvement of women in the Methodist Church noted by Mkhwanazi and Kgatla (2015:191), who emphasize that their role was crucial in fighting racial oppression and gender violence within the church and society. Similarly, Kumalo (2024:41) notes how, through being part the Manyano movement, women not only helped repressed family members by providing aid, but became integral practitioners of the well-being and health of the people as well as bringing social action into a blend of spiritual compassion.

However, women's outreach was not limited to Manyano structures. Figures like Ellen Kuzwayo, through the Women's Association and other formations, helped coordinate food drives and social support projects in areas where the church lacked strong Manyano leadership (Kuzwayo, 2004:263). These women created ecumenical alliances with non-Methodist or Christian women, expanding outreach beyond denominational and religious borders. This challenges the idea that caregiving was confined to one structure and instead shows it as a broad, theological commitment among Methodist women.

Rooted in African feminist theology, such service can be understood as a political and theological praxis, where nurturing the vulnerable becomes an act of resistance and renewal. As Rakoczy (2011:32) notes, feminist spirituality arises from women's lived trust in God amidst structural injustice, while Ackermann frames caregiving as a "spirituality of risk" that fuses faith with justice in violent and unequal contexts (Ackermann, 1994:125). Moreover, social constructivism argues that gender roles are socially constructed through cultural, political, and historical dynamics, influencing women's positions within societal institutions (Jovanovic, 2021:69; Berger and Luckmann, 2016:52). At the centre of social constructivism is the belief that gender roles and responsibilities do not present themselves naturally but are formulated and enforced by societal expectations and norms influenced by historical and cultural factors (Amineh and Asl, 2015:13).

The above ministries reveal how faith was embodied not only in prayer, but in feeding, healing, and protecting life itself. Caregiving, when viewed through feminist critical historiography, redefines religious leadership, not as pulpit-bound or title-driven, but as embodied, sacrificial, and quietly revolutionary. The work of women like The Good Wife and Mrs. Noah challenges masculinist ecclesiology, showing that institutional survival often depended on this unpaid, pastoral labour. Their stories reframe caregiving not as support work, but as central to the church's theological identity.

6.2.1.3. Evangelism and Faith Expansion

The findings showed that Black Methodist women in Soweto were central to expanding the church's spiritual reach through relational, embodied forms of evangelism. Rather than preaching from pulpits, women ministered through hymn singing, food distribution, prayer, and acts of everyday compassion. As The Good Wife (2025) explained:

"We would evangelize during clothing distributions… people responded and joined the church."

This model of outreach reflects a deeply Africanised spirituality, where faith is shared through presence, service, and music. As highlighted by Theilen (2005:32), women in the Methodist Church were instrumental during apartheid, providing support that went beyond the spiritual realm. Their commitment to social justice and community wellbeing underscored their vital contributions to South African society and faith. Recent literature reinforces these insights. Kangwa (2017:34-36) highlights how indigenous African women expanded Christianity by integrating social care and local tradition into teacher-evangelism.

Marah Louw's ministry through music represents a non-traditional form of evangelism. By performing sacred music in concerts and producing hymn albums such as *Marah Worships the African Way*, she expanded spiritual outreach across class, age, and denominational boundaries. Her evangelism was artistic, yet deeply theological, using sound to evoke memory, faith, and healing. This affirms Oduyoye's (2001) call for African women's theology to engage with lived cultural expressions and the creative arts as mediums of spiritual formation and outreach.

From a feminist critical historiography lens, these findings affirm that women's faith work, often dismissed as informal, has historically functioned as strategic, spiritual leadership. Their evangelism was holistic: nurturing souls while building community and expanding the Methodist Church through love in action. Such embodied forms of witness, including music, food-sharing, and caregiving, also echo what Ackermann (1996:34) calls a "spirituality of praxis"—a blend of justice and compassion grounded in daily acts of care. Through their grassroots evangelism, women operationalised the Gospel in Soweto's streets, homes, and informal settlements, building the church not by sermon, but by solidarity.

Social constructivism and intersectionality similarly provide insightful understandings of Black Methodist women's work in Soweto. Jini, 2023:82) argues that the political framework of apartheid implemented rigid racial and gender hierarchies, while social constructivism illustrates that the church, being a social entity, both mirrored and defied these norms (Jini, 2023:82). Social constructivism emphasizes how gendered roles in the church were shaped by cultural and political conditions, and intersectionality emphasizes the double burden of race and gender under apartheid (Collins and Bilge, 2020:6; Hohlo, 2020:4). Both underscore the significance of women's unofficial leadership and local evangelism as predominant aspects of

socio-political activism and spirituality in the church. Notably, Helen Kuzwayo, who helped establish the Methodist Women's Association outside the Manyano, embodied evangelism through ecumenical outreach and women-led Bible studies. Her work highlights the multiplicity of spaces through which Methodist women spread the Gospel, reinforcing that evangelism in Soweto was not the sole domain of clergy or traditional structures.

6.2.1.4. Interdenominational and Ecumenical Relations

The findings reveal that Black Methodist women were instrumental in fostering ecumenical relationships with other Christian denominations during the apartheid era. Through prayer meetings, joint services, and collaborative ministry, they created spaces of shared worship and mutual care across denominational lines. These interactions not only enhanced spiritual cohesion but also challenged apartheid's racial and religious segregation. The Good Wife recalled coordinating regular prayer fellowships with Anglican, Lutheran, and Catholic women's groups, describing them as "sister churches," thus using her leadership in Manyano as a bridge across ecclesial divides. Her work illustrates how women leveraged their networks for theological diplomacy and resistance.

As discussed in Chapter 2, the Manyano movement offered a significant platform where Black Christian women could organize themselves against apartheid, creating a sense of unity and collective voice among women from varying backgrounds (Kumalo, 2024:41). This movement not only provided room for spiritual solidarity but also facilitated interdenominational collaboration, as women were involved in collaborative efforts that transcended traditional ecclesial boundaries (Breier, 2023:739). Through mutual worship, prayer and mutual support, these women themselves contributed to the subversion of apartheid's segregationist policies, thereby promoting ecumenical relations that strengthened their faith and social activism.

Importantly, not all interdenominational initiatives came through the Manyano. For example, Ellen Kuzwayo, a prominent Methodist layperson, helped form the Methodist Women's Association (MWA), which provided women with an alternative space for worship, advocacy, and ecumenical outreach outside the traditional Manyano structure (Encyclopedia.com, 2021:1). Her work alongside other elite Black (American) methodist women like Madie Hall Xuma, who hosted church gatherings in Sophiatown and supported interfaith events, proves that Black women's ecumenical efforts were diverse and far-reaching (Encyclopedia.com, 2021:1; Hendricks, 2022:162; Kuzwayo, 1985:222). These women extended their faith witness

and influence through civic engagement and elite networks though the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA), showing that ecumenism could be enacted both from below and above.

Theoretically, this theme affirms the decolonial and intersectional view that Black women often exercised power in liminal, overlooked spaces (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018:45; Mignolo, 2021:113). Additionally, feminist critical historiography challenges dominant, male-cantered accounts of church diplomacy by recovering women's role in building ecumenical ties from the ground up. Mercy Amba Oduyoye (2001) highlights that African women theologians have long drawn on relational theology to bridge divides, serve as healers of broken communities, and negotiate peace in divided contexts. This resonates with the actions of women like Mrs. Noah, who led multi-church hymn festivals and inter-congregational services despite limited formal recognition.

Additionally, Uzukwu (2024:65,74-76) notes that African ecumenism often emerges from below, through shared liturgy, song, and Spirit-led collaboration rather than elite theological forums. This supports the finding that women in Soweto used informal spiritual diplomacy to enact unity and resistance simultaneously. By foregrounding the interdenominational labour of women like The Good Wife, Ellen Kuzwayo, and Madie Hall Xuma, this study recovers the varied and nuanced ways in which ecumenism served as a form of political theology grounded in care, song, shared struggle, and faith.

6.2.1.5. Cultural Mobilization and Resource Building

This study found that Black women's cultural contributions extended far beyond traditional ministry roles. Participants like Marah Louw exemplified how artistic gifts, especially music, were strategically used to mobilize resources and galvanize spiritual life in Soweto's Methodist Church. Through benefit concerts, musical recordings, and choir formations, women transformed culture into a tool of fundraising, worship, and spiritual revival.

Marah Louw's work was particularly ground-breaking. She raised R180,000 through a benefit concert in Jabavu, drawing prominent performers to support Methodist causes; an act that combined her faith with her national artistic platform. Moreover, her international prominence as a Black woman performer during apartheid made her a living symbol of cultural resistance and Black pride. By producing albums such as *Marah Worships the African Way*, she reintroduced traditional hymns, demonstrating that African spiritual expression was both sacred and politically empowering.

As noted in Chapter 2, the literature supports Black Methodist women's spiritual transformative and cultural mobilizing roles. Kumalo (2024:57) points out that the Manyano movement provided women with the authority to mobilize around religious and social concerns, typically integrating culture into the activism. Similarly, Theilen (2005:74) points out how prayer meetings were employed as spaces of resistance and unification, intertwining religion and cultural performance. Such facilities offered the avenue for women to reclaim presence and agency through song and social mobilization as activities of fundraising, anti-apartheid struggle, and revitalizing religious life at Soweto's Methodist Church (Mkhwanazi and Kgatla, 2015:191).

Notably, Marah Louw's leadership occurred outside the formal structures of the Manyano, further demonstrating the multiplicity of Methodist women's agency. Louw's decision to join the Manyano after her divorce was a bold and strategic move that challenged both societal stigma and the gendered expectations of her time. In a context where divorced women were often marginalized and viewed as spiritually or socially 'tainted,' her act of joining the Manyano defied the normative assumptions of patriarchal structures that sought to limit women's roles based on their marital status. By choosing to become part of the Manyano, Louw made a theological statement that affirmed her spiritual belonging and leadership were grounded not in her marital status, but in her conviction, faith, and sense of community.

Scholars such as Barnes (2005:985-986) confirm that gospel music (songs) and public prayer networks in Black churches serve as vehicles for community mobilisation and collective action. Similarly, Öhman (2017:1) argues that gospel music by African and African American women embodies both sacred tradition and feminist activism, where music functions as cultural work and spiritual leadership (Öhman, 2017). From a feminist critical historiography lens, these artistic acts are forms of counter-hegemonic resistance, challenging patriarchal models that devalue women's ministry when it occurs outside pulpits or synods. As Mercy Amba Oduyoye (2001) affirms, African women theologians have long articulated faith through poetry, song, and storytelling—what she terms "narratives of survival." Marah Louw's musical testimony thus functions as theology-in-action, an archive of both protest and praise

As discussed in Chapter 3, this approach recognises creativity as theology, and cultural labour as sacred leadership. These women did not only raise funds; they reshaped how the church

sang, gathered, and bore witness to faith in a fractured society. Marah's legacy affirms that spiritual leadership can emerge through music, cultural restoration, and artistic testimony—a necessary expansion of what we recognise as ecclesial authority.

6.2.1.6. Summary of Objective One

This objective revealed that Black Methodist women in Soweto were foundational to the spiritual and structural development of the church from 1950 to 2000. Through church planting, community mobilisation, spiritual caregiving, and cultural leadership, women shaped the theological and institutional life of the Methodist Church, often without formal recognition. Figures like The Good Wife exemplified how grassroots organisation, vice-chair coordination, and congregation-building laid the groundwork for what are now fully assessed Societies in the Roodepoort Circuit (Methodist Book of Order, 2016:84).

Marah Louw demonstrated how spiritual leadership could be expressed through public music ministry, fundraising, and defiance of apartheid norms. Mrs. Noah's legacy in caregiving and garment design for the Manyano continues to influence Methodist women's identity. These contributions affirm the feminist critical historiography approach, which recognises lived experience and oral testimony as valid archives of spiritual authority (Riley, 2024:147; Chikwendu, 2023:18). This objective therefore challenges traditional patriarchal historiography and repositions Black women's labour at the heart of South African Methodism's story.

6.2.2. Research Objective Two

Objective 2: *To explore the evolution of Black women's roles and contributions within the Methodist Church of Southern Africa in Soweto from 1950 to 2000.*

The second objective of this study was to explore how Black women's roles in the Methodist Church evolved over five decades of social, political, and ecclesiastical change. The analysis identified four key themes that reflect shifts in women's participation—from support roles to visible leadership, from informal involvement to formal membership, and cultural silence to creative expression. These themes illuminate how the boundaries of acceptable female agency were gradually expanded by women themselves through personal growth, institutional persistence, and spiritual creativity. Their narratives reflect not only personal transformation, but also broader shifts in church culture and gendered expectations.

6.2.2.1. Transformation of Women's Church Roles Over Time

Over the decades, the role of Black women in the Methodist Church of Soweto evolved from silent supporters to visible leaders. Participants recalled how women's involvement during the 1970s was mostly limited to behind-the-scenes roles like cooking, organising events, and supporting male-led initiatives. However, in the 1980s, traditionally male-dominated roles such as conducting choirs began to open to women, as Mrs. Noah, the activist, noted, *"I was one of the first women."* By the 1990s, women began taking on more public-facing leadership responsibilities within congregations. This transition was shaped by both institutional change and women's growing confidence in asserting their roles within spiritual spaces.

Chapter 2 supports this progression, with Mkhwanazi and Kgatla (2015:187) observing that women used organisations like the Manyano to cultivate leadership and influence even though they faced marginalisation. Kumalo (2024:39) describes this as a deliberate evolution, where women's quiet strength and persistence led to visible authority in the church by the end of apartheid. Theilen (2005:42) further argues that the rise of women's leadership occurred as they slowly resisted traditional gender prescriptions, especially in worship and music ministries.

Theoretically, this shift aligns with feminist critical historiography's emphasis on recovering voices erased from male-dominated church histories (Weir, 2021:12; Scott, 2020:324). Women's leadership in this context was not simply a response to opportunity, but a political-theological act of reclaiming space and memory (Kathenya, 2021:117; Harris, 2020:52). Intersectionality adds depth to this analysis. Crenshaw (2013:139) together with Collins and Bilge (2020:59) observe that Black women's leadership can be understood through the combined influences of race, gender, and class. In Soweto's MCSA, attaining visible leadership involved navigating the intersecting factors of patriarchy, apartheid segregation, and economic marginalisation (Phaswana, 2021:204; Msebi, 2021:17). Thus, this transformation was not just institutional; it was theological, cultural, and deeply political. It symbolised a profound shift in women's self-perception and how the church came to recognise their authority.

6.2.2.2. Spiritual Maturity and Growth

This theme captures how women within Soweto's Methodist Church moved from passive religious participation to active spiritual engagement and leadership. This spiritual growth was not linear, but evolved through years of service, exposure to church structures, and increasing

confidence in navigating ecclesial spaces. Through the decades of service, particularly as wives of ministers or leaders within women's auxiliaries, participants developed a deeper theological understanding and organisational confidence. Women like The Good Wife reflected on how their involvement across various circuits fostered both theological insight and administrative expertise. This growth, as the data suggests, was cultivated in the everyday work of pastoral support, event coordination, and participation in district structures, not through seminary education, but through deep engagement and spiritual discipline.

Crucially, this spiritual maturity was not confined to women in formal organisations like the Manyano. For instance, Mrs. Noah's spiritual authority emerged through her decades of music leadership and pastoral outreach, while Marah Louw deepened her faith through cultural ministry, using music and public activism as tools for worship and social healing. These diverse trajectories show that women's spiritual growth occurred within and beyond formal church auxiliaries.

This finding aligns with Chapter 2's detailed account of how Soweto Methodist women's spiritual maturity was cultivated through constant service and involvement in church life. Mkhwanazi and Kgatla (2015:184) point out that women's involvement in institutions like the Manyano cultivated theological reflection and spiritual maturity, particularly in planning, praying, meetings, and support networks communally. Kumalo (2024:48) continues that these women learned leadership and theological insight from their continuous participation in church governance and pastoral care. Marah Louw's later joining of the Manyano after years of informal spiritual labour also exemplifies how non-traditional faith journeys contribute meaningfully to the church's theology and growth.

Their theological reflection was not shaped by seminary education but by practical engagement in church administration, worship planning, and social outreach. Theilen (2005:63) affirms that this experiential learning allowed women to practice resistance and ministry together, combining spiritual conviction and pragmatic wisdom. These everyday acts of service were also sites of theological formation, which allowed women to assert moral authority and lead with confidence in ecclesial settings traditionally dominated by men.

Feminist critical historiography recognizes ordinary service as a theological formation space where excluded women develop authority by experience rather than formal ordination (Scott,

2020:334; Kathenya, 2021:117). Social constructivism supports this by illustrating how gendered spiritual roles are culturally constructed so that women can reconceptualise leadership through continued church participation and relational authority (Phaswana, 2021:199; Jovanovic, 2021:69). From an intersectional lens, their growth was shaped not only by gender but also by class, age, and public visibility—factors that affected how each woman accessed and exercised spiritual authority in a racially and patriarchally stratified church.

6.2.2.3. Increased Public Visibility of Women

As women's roles in the Methodist Church of Soweto evolved, so too did their visibility in public ministry. While women initially worked behind the scenes, coordinating events, supporting spouses in ministry, or leading devotionals in small circles, over time, women began taking on prominent roles in church programming, worship services, and broader congregational leadership. Public acknowledgment marked a significant shift in church culture and validated the long-standing contributions of women to the life of the church. However, Mrs. Noah, the activist, pointed out that recognition was often informal, yet highly meaningful, earned through years of service, mentorship, and consistent presence.

Marah Louw's increasing visibility as a cultural icon further stretched the bounds of what female religious leadership looked like. Through her benefit concerts, gospel albums, and bibliography authorship, she carved out a space for public-facing, faith-based leadership outside traditional church offices. Her bold public persona and unapologetic return to traditional hymn styles revealed a theology of spiritual resistance through sound. Her very presence in visible religious and artistic spaces redefined the idea of religious authority and legitimacy.

Importantly, not all women rose to visibility through the Manyano. Figures like Ellen Kuzwayo, founder of the Methodist Women's Association (MWA), demonstrated that Black Methodist women shaped faith communities through varied organisational channels. Unlike the Manyano's prayer and service orientation, the MWA catered to working-class and professional women, creating a separate but equally impactful space for women's leadership in church governance, education, and outreach. Similarly, elite women such as Madie Hall, wife of ANC leader A.B. Xuma, used their influence and positional access to raise the visibility of women's voices within the church. Hall's civic activism and Methodist identity exemplified how gendered leadership was exercised by women who were not officially aligned with the

Manyano but still profoundly shaped MCSA's public ethos. These examples broaden the scope of visibility and underscore that religious authority was not confined to auxiliary structures.

Chapter 2 highlights this transition by noting how the Manyano also served as a proving ground for women's leadership and spirituality, enabling them to gain prominence and visibility through sustained service (Kumalo, 2024:57; Mkhwanazi and Kgatla, 2015:191). The Manyano provided the space for women to transition from traditional ancillary roles to central actors in the spiritual, social, and political life of the church (Ndlovu, 2024:82; Theilen, 2005:74). Through activities such as coordinating worship services, organising prayers, and representing communities in district forums, women became more visible in church activities (Mkhwanazi, 2002:105; Kumalo, 2009:114). The Good wife (2025) notes this visibility as women preachers began to be accepted into the local preacher's department in the late 90s. Not only did their spirituality become more visible, but also the patriarchal tradition that had isolated them from visibility before was broken.

These events marked a series of groundbreaking milestones in the life of the church, most notably the historic ordination of Rev. Mavis Mbilini in 1985—the first Black woman to be ordained in the MCSA. While this momentous occasion made headlines, its representation in the November 1985 *Dimension* issue was telling: Rev. Mbilini's photograph was modestly placed in a corner, while the central image featured Rev. Ernest Baartman, the then MCSA President, greeting the Vice-President of the British Methodist Conference, highlighting how even significant strides in gender and racial progress were visually overshadowed by institutional priorities (Dimension, 1985).

Recent research supports this view. Dweba *et al*. (2021:1-5) argue for the theological and scriptural basis of including women in both ministry and governance roles within Black South African churches, challenging exclusionary interpretations of scripture. Similarly, Frahm-Arp (2010) observed that professional South African women in the Pentecostal contexts gained legitimacy through public performance of faith and leadership in visible ministries.
In the lens of feminist critical historiography, increased public visibility marks a disruption of male-dominated ecclesial narratives, reclaiming women's suppressed contributions to religious leadership (Scott, 2020:324; Weir, 2021:12). Intersectionality theory explains how women's public emergence disrupted interlocking systems of gender and race exclusion (Crenshaw, 2019:139; Phaswana, 2021:204), and social constructivism illustrates how evolving roles recast

gendered expectations in spiritual institutions (Phaswana, 2021:199; Jovanovic, 2021:69). This visibility, forged through song, care, organising, and resistance, signifies more than individual success, it affirms a collective theological reconfiguration of leadership in Black South African Methodism.

6.2.2.4. Creative and Cultural Leadership

The data reveal that Black women's church leadership in Soweto also emerged through cultural and artistic expression, particularly through music. Women like Marah Louw did not lead from the pulpit, but through performance, artistic curation, and musical preservation. By forming choirs and recording traditional hymns, she not only preserved the Methodist identity but also made worship accessible and meaningful for broader audiences. This work was not decorative—it was theological and strategic.

Marah Louw's contributions were unique in their impact. On the other hand, Mrs. Noah's long-standing leadership in the Music Association as a chorister and assistant conductor was equally significant. She was one of the first women in her congregation to lead church choirs, an act that disrupted male dominance in worship leadership. There were others such as Elizabeth Sebole, a bold, and discipline commanding choir conductor (Dimension, 1985). Their roles permitted other women to step into musical leadership, transforming choir spaces into platforms for female empowerment.

The Good Wife's leadership in mentoring Manyano women also had a cultural dimension. Through prayer meetings, uniformed identity, and spiritual discipline, she cultivated a distinct Methodist womanhood rooted in cultural dignity. Her guidance in church conduct and worship style helped shape not just organisational structure but also the ethos of Black Methodist femininity.

Black Methodist women's cultural and creative leadership is well documented in Chapter 2. Theilen (2005:63) speaks about how women utilized religious space to combine artistry and spirituality, particularly in music and performance. Kumalo (2024:48) confirms that such forms of expression were not only cultural but also of a theological nature, building communal identity and resilience. Women's choirs, hymn recordings, and performance-based worship became deliberate acts of leadership, upholding Methodist tradition but asserting spiritual presence in masculine domains. This aligns with Öhman (2017:300-306), who argues that

women in gospel music function as “cultural workers,” using music to preserve spiritual heritage and assert feminist agency.

Similarly, Faseun and Bello (2017:388-389) note that African churches have historically limited women’s musical leadership, yet exceptional women have expanded their influence through sheer talent and cultural capital. From a feminist critical historiography perspective, all three women’s contributions illuminate how creative leadership exists beyond pulpits. These cultural practices were spiritual acts and vehicles of memory, unity, and resistance. Intersectionality shows how musical and cultural leadership helped women navigate and subvert their multiple oppressions. Social constructivism affirms that their leadership was not inherited, but constructed through years of artistic and communal engagement. Framed through feminist critical historiography, this form of leadership redefines what counts as ministry. Artistic labour becomes a site of theological meaning-making, where women lead spiritually, emotionally, and culturally, reshaping the Methodist Church through song, service, and symbolic power.

6.2.2.5. Summary of Objective Two: Evolution of Women’s Roles

The findings under Objective Two demonstrate a clear trajectory of Black women’s evolving roles within the Methodist Church in Soweto from 1950 to 2000. Initially confined to background support, women gradually emerged as spiritual leaders, conductors, administrators, and culture-shapers. Their transition was marked by increasing public visibility, deeper theological insight, and growing organisational confidence, much of which was cultivated through persistent grassroots involvement rather than formal ordination.

While women like The Good Wife gained influence through traditional pathways such as the Manyano, Mrs. Noah challenged gendered liturgical norms through musical leadership, and Marah Louw redefined leadership by blending public artistry with faith. Their collective contributions show how women expanded the definition of church leadership and disrupted patriarchal constraints. These findings affirm feminist critical historiography’s commitment to recovering marginalised voices and recognising embodied ministry. Intersectionality reveals how women navigated race, class, and gender oppression, while social constructivism explains how they reimagined church roles on their own terms, advancing both spiritual and structural transformation in the MCSA.

6.2.3. Research Objective Three

Objective 3: *To understand the impact of South Africa's socio-political context from 1950 to 2000 on Black women's agency, leadership, and participation in the Methodist Church.*

The third objective of this study sought to understand how apartheid and broader socio-political dynamics shaped the leadership, visibility, and agency of Black women in the Methodist Church in Soweto. The analysis revealed four interrelated themes that illustrate the tension between systemic oppression and spiritual resistance. These themes explore how racial segregation, gendered church hierarchies, personal acts of defiance, and public standing shaped women's ability to lead and participate fully. By centering their narratives, this section highlights how women's faith and ministry were deeply entangled with the politics of race, gender, and power during apartheid.

6.2.3.1. Apartheid-Era Racial Segregation in the Church

The findings reveal that apartheid-era segregation deeply shaped the spiritual and emotional lives of Black Methodist women in Soweto, highlighting the contradictions between Christian teachings of unity and the church's silent complicity in systemic racial oppression. Participants testified to being restricted to poorly timed services, such as 3 pm slots designated for domestic workers, and facing both overt and subtle racism within white-dominated congregations. Marah Louw, for example, recalled being treated with suspicion and silence when attending an all-white service, illustrating how racial boundaries extended into sacred spaces.

These findings echo existing scholarship that critiques the Methodist Church's internalisation of apartheid-era racial structures. Although the MCSA did not overtly support apartheid, it failed to resist or reform its racialised hierarchies (Phiri, 2002:16; Kumalo, 2009:51, 69). Kithinji (2023:243, 249) and Mkhwanazi and Kgatla (2015:180–182) argue that Black congregants, especially women, were consistently marginalised through processes of ecclesial "othering," where whiteness was positioned as normative and authoritative, and Black spirituality was rendered secondary or invisible.

From an intersectional perspective, this racial exclusion was compounded by gendered marginalisation. Black women were doubly burdened by a system that not only racialised them, but also denied them access to leadership and voice within the church. Crenshaw (2013:139) and Gouws (2017:21) emphasise that oppression functions through interlocking systems, where race and gender cannot be understood in isolation. Within apartheid church structures, this meant that Black women bore the full weight of both forms of exclusion.

Decolonial theory further critiques the Eurocentric norms entrenched in ecclesial life. As Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018:45) and Mignolo (2021:113) argue that colonial legacies shaped not only the architecture of worship, but also the theological frameworks privileging whiteness and clerical elitism. The marginalisation of Black women within such spaces was not incidental, but the outcome of a racial-spiritual hierarchy that privileged European expressions of Christianity while delegitimising African ones.

In sum, the data demonstrate that apartheid-era racial segregation in the church was experienced as both spiritual and social violence, silencing Black women's agency, distorting their worship experience, and reinforcing the broader logics of apartheid under the guise of ecclesiastical order.

6.2.3.2. Apartheid-Era Gender and Power Dynamics

The experiences of Black Methodist women in Soweto reflect the dual oppression of race and gender under apartheid. Participants revealed that their leadership was often suppressed, and even their voices were marginalised within male-dominated church hierarchies. Despite their active contributions to church life, organising services, leading auxiliaries, and nurturing congregations, women were institutionally denied opportunities to lead from the pulpit or participate in formal decision-making. This theme illustrates how apartheid reinforced patriarchal norms within spiritual spaces, rendering women structurally invisible.

This finding is in harmony with Chapter 2 literature, which outlines patriarchal assumptions that are part of South African church traditions (Phiri, 2002:16; Gaitskell, 2002:387). Even within spaces like the Manyano, women were often asked to uphold traditional roles more than challenge gender hierarchies. Mkhwanazi and Kgatla (2015:180-182) note that while women were a pivotal component of the church life, preparing programs, leading auxiliaries, and assisting communities, they were intentionally excluded from official leadership roles and decision-making structures. Similarly, Kumalo (2009:154) mentions that while women played an active role in church outreach as well as community work, institutional structures continued to deny women authority. This reflected how apartheid ideologies solidified patriarchal dominance within the church.

The Good Wife's experience illustrates this vividly. Despite being a minister's wife and former District President of the Women's Manyano, she reported never being allowed to even make announcements during church services, highlighting how symbolic visibility was denied even to the most committed women. This suppression is compounded by her reflection: "Even as the minister's wife, I never had the privilege to stand and make a notice myself." Her marginalisation speaks to how institutional patriarchy constrained even women in highly respected roles. Mrs. Noah's account further reflects how musical leadership roles, traditionally reserved for men were only accessible to women after persistent service. Her role as one of the first female choir conductors in Jabavu signified a slow, but powerful breach into male-dominated church liturgies. These stories affirm that change was driven not by policy, but by women's resilience and insistence on presence.

African feminist theologians such as Mercy Oduyoye and Lilian Siwila argue that women's marginalisation in church structures often mimics societal gender hierarchies, and that theological spaces must be reinterpreted from women's lived realities. As Siwila (2015:6) notes, "religious institutions have become sites of negotiated power, not just exclusion." Women like Marah Louw, who joined the Manyano after her divorce, defying norms around marital respectability embody this negotiation. Her choice to join a traditional group as a divorced woman challenged both church and societal narratives that tied spiritual worth to marital status.

Feminist critical historiography reveals how patriarchal church tradition blinded women's agency, calling for a rewriting of ecclesial history that centres their agency (Braude, 2004:555; Browne, 2013:145). Intersectionality reveals how apartheid embedded gender domination, rendering Black women invisible within both religious and public life (Phiri, 2002:13; Kumalo, 2009:51). African feminist scholarship substantiates that women resisted by immersed religious rituals, reinterpreting power from the inside (Yafeh-Deigh, 2020:89; Gaitskell, 2002:393).

In short, the participants' testimonies reveal that even in sacred spaces, apartheid's logic of racial and gender hierarchy persisted—yet was constantly being challenged by women who refused to be confined by silence, support roles, or invisibility.

6.2.3.3. Resistance to Racial Oppression Through Presence

Though apartheid imposed rigid racial boundaries, many Black Methodist women resisted not through protest marches, but through small, deliberate acts of presence and defiance. Refusing to attend segregated services or quietly occupying spaces where they were unwelcome became radical spiritual assertions of dignity. This resistance through presence demonstrates how agency could be exercised not only through organised protest, but through everyday choices that challenged exclusionary norms.

This theme of resistance through presence aligns with insights in Chapter 2, which highlights how Black Methodist women engaged in subtle yet powerful acts of defiance within apartheid structures. As Theilen (2005:50) and Kumalo (2024:41) note, women's participation in worship, prayer meetings, and communal gatherings often doubled as political resistance, asserting their right to spiritual belonging in spaces that marginalized them. Mkhwanazi and Kgatla (2015:181) further explain that groups like the Manyano enabled women to reclaim church spaces by organising and leading faith-based activities, demonstrating that embodied presence was both a spiritual commitment and a challenge to racial segregation.

Marah Louw's refusal to attend the 3 pm segregated "domestic worker service" and instead insisting on attending the morning worship reserved for white congregants was a bold spiritual assertion of equality. Her account, *"I said I will not attend the 3:00 PM service. I will attend the morning one because it suits my schedule" (Louw, 2025)*—was more than personal convenience. It was a direct refusal to comply with the *Group Areas Act* and a racialised ecclesial order designed to humiliate and marginalise. Such everyday decisions, often dismissed in formal political narratives, constituted deeply embodied acts of resistance. This confirms Kumalo's (2024:39) argument that Black women's spirituality was intrinsically political—offering care, presence, and prophetic witness in hostile spaces.

Intersectionality theory (Crenshaw, 2019:142; Phaswana, 2021:204) explains how gender and race worked together to locate Black women's spiritual presence as a double resistance. Feminist critical historiography situates such bodily resistance as historical recovery against the dominant narrative that had forgotten women's resistance in church memory (Weir, 2021:12; Riley, 2024:147). Their presence itself resisted both apartheid and patriarchal erasure. Moreover, from a decolonial lens (Mignolo, 2021:113; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018:45), women's quiet insistence on belonging in white-dominated church spaces challenged not only local apartheid practice but also the broader colonial logic of spatial and spiritual segregation.

Through their presence, they asserted an alternative ecclesiology—one grounded in justice, equality, and human dignity.

In sum, this theme underscores how the women's presence was not merely physical; it was theologically and politically charged. By insisting on their visibility, they unsettled racial hierarchies and redefined what it meant to belong within sacred spaces.

6.2.3.4. Protective Social Status Against State Repression

Though the overall experience of Black South African women during apartheid was one of outright repression, some, such as Marah Louw, were able to move through these repressive structures with a marginally greater degree of autonomy because of their public profile or celebrity status. Her account of avoiding arrest after marrying a white man point to how public visibility could function as a buffer against apartheid's harshest penalties. She stated, "They could not arrest me... It would have been international news", her name recognition granted her symbolic protection, but this was neither absolute nor universally accessible.

This is also reflected in Chapter 2, where certain Black Christian women are observed to have managed apartheid's repressive institutions with a bit more room for maneuver due to their community status or religious institutional roles. Kumalo (2024:41) notes that older women in the Manyano, due to their religious leadership status, sometimes enjoyed protective social capital that shielded them from more severe state scrutiny. Likewise, Kelly (2024:72) characterises women such as Nokukhanya Luthuli, whose political and church activism provided her with public legitimacy that challenged state repression. Nevertheless, as Mkhwanazi and Kgatla (2015:182) observe, this protection was uneven and gendered to the core, even though celebrated women were susceptible to silencing and exclusion from ecclesial spaces. Their visibility may be accompanied by symbolic power, but not by immunity, so that such autonomy remains weak and situational in church as well as state institutions.

Crucially, this theme must extend beyond the lens of the Manyano to include Methodist women who shaped the church through alternate channels of leadership. For instance, Ellen Kuzwayo played a pivotal role in forming the Methodist Women's Association, a body distinct from the Manyano. Her work in women's empowerment demonstrates how women exercised agency within the MCSA using structures not bound to traditional auxiliaries. Similarly, Madie Hall Xuma (wife of Dr. Alfred Bitini Xuma) leveraged her elite status in Sophiatown to support Methodist and social courses and model Black excellence in public religious life. Though less

discussed in church historiography, such figures reveal a broader spectrum of women's leadership that was not dependent on the Manyano model alone.

Translated through the lens of feminist critical historiography, Louw's life provides nuanced understanding of the multifaceted dynamics of power and privilege among Black women whose symbolic authority contested historical erasure (Weir, 2021:12; Riley, 2024:147). Intersectionality theory further reveals how her partial immunity was shaped by intersecting identities, race, gender, and status, demonstrating that even visibility and influence did not fully dismantle patriarchal and racial subjugation (Crenshaw, 2019:142; Phaswana, 2021:204).

6.2.3.5.Summary of Objective 3:

The findings under Objective 3 confirm that apartheid-era socio-political structures profoundly influenced Black women's agency within the Methodist Church in Soweto. Racial segregation in worship, white congregants' rejection, and systemic exclusion mirrored South Africa's broader racial hierarchies, marginalising Black women spiritually and socially (Phiri, 2002; Kumalo, 2009). Gender discrimination, deeply entrenched in church governance, compounded this marginalisation, excluding women from leadership while demanding their service. Yet women's spiritual presence itself became a form of resistance: through refusing segregated worship slots, asserting space in mixed congregations, or leading services informally, they reclaimed spiritual authority. Marah Louw's experience of relative protection through celebrity and Mrs. Noah's local activism illustrate how intersectional identities shaped resistance differently. Theoretically, these dynamics are best understood through intersectionality, which reveals how race, gender, and class operate simultaneously (Crenshaw, 2019), and feminist critical historiography, which recovers women's agency erased by church histories (Scott, 2020; Riley, 2024). These findings affirm that Black Methodist women were not passive victims, but strategic agents navigating faith, power, and oppression.

6.2.4. Research Objective Four

Objective 4: *To investigate the challenges faced by Black women in their involvement with the Methodist Church from 1950 to 2000 and identify the opportunities that enabled them to exercise agency and influence.*

This objective aimed to unpack both the barriers and enabling factors that shaped Black women's experiences within the Methodist Church of Soweto. The analysis revealed three interrelated themes: institutional and gender-based exclusion, cultural and peer policing within women's groups, and moments of empowerment despite marginalisation. These themes

illustrate how structural inequality intersected with internal church dynamics, yet also reveal how women resisted, adapted, and redefined their roles in ways that affirmed their agency. Their experiences offer a window into the tension between oppression and opportunity within a church navigating both spiritual growth and patriarchal tradition.

6.2.4.1. Institutional Barriers and Gender Inequality

Despite their vital contributions to spiritual and administrative life, Black women in the Methodist Church of Soweto were excluded from formal leadership structures and denied public visibility. Participants highlighted persistent exclusion from preaching, liturgical roles, and decision-making spaces, even when they were married to male clergy or had demonstrated leadership capabilities. For instance, the Good Wife, a pseudonym, mentioned, "*Even as the minister's wife, I never had the privilege to stand and make a notice myself".* To which Mrs. Noah, the activist, added, *"Everything was done by males; it was the males that were conducting."* These barriers were not only institutional but deeply gendered, reflecting an entrenched patriarchal theology.

These barriers were not only institutional but also reinforced by deeply entrenched cultural beliefs and gendered expectations that women — and even men — had internalized as normative. As Kumalo (2016:176) notes (citing Runyoro et al. 2001), within many African Methodist contexts, "men and women are not understood as equals," and both sexes are socialized into a framework of gender inequality that renders the idea of a woman's leadership almost unthinkable. This pervasive mentality is reflected in participants' repeated assertion that "abafazi (women) were like children," a metaphor that both justifies and perpetuates women's subordinate status. Indeed, according to Runyoro et al. (2001, in Kumalo 2016), "culturally men have internalised the prejudices against women and women have learnt to conform to what is expected of them to the extent that they do not seek to change," so that efforts to promote gender equity must confront not only formal rules but also the invisible, everyday assumptions that continue to circumscribe women's agency.

This finding is clearly pronounced in Chapter 2, where the deeply entrenched patriarchal structures within the MCSA are accounted. Phiri (2002:16) and Kumalo (2009:154) state that, despite being at the centre of religious and public life, Black women were denied formal leadership and decision-making structures. Mkhwanazi and Kgatla (2015:180) also emphasize that even within influential groups like the Manyano, women's leadership was often informal,

their contributions deemed supplementary rather than authoritative. Theilen (2005:50) also adds that women's voices were hardly heard in positions of the pulpit or the leadership of churches, confirming male dominance. These institutional exclusions, as explained by Sifo (2016:165) and Madise (2014:123), were not random but were rooted in a broader theology and cultural logic that sustained gender hierarchies and structurally rendered women invisible within ecclesial leadership.

Moreover, African feminist theologians such as Mercy Amba Oduyoye (2001) and Lilian Siwila caution that the complicity of women in sustaining these norms, through peer policing, silence, or acceptance of male authority, must be interrogated. The internalisation of patriarchy, as seen when women resisted female superintendents, shows that exclusion is not only imposed but culturally conditioned. Theologically, feminist critical historiography challenges this exclusion by interrogating patriarchal religious narratives that have historically erased women's leadership in ecclesial spaces (Scott, 2020:324; Weir, 2021:12). It calls for a rewriting of Methodist history that centres women's ministry as both legitimate and foundational, rather than supplementary. Social constructivism explains how church leadership norms were not divinely fixed but socially produced through gendered expectations within apartheid culture (Phaswana, 2021:199; Jovanovic, 2021:69), thereby institutionalizing male authority and marginalising women.

6.2.4.2. Cultural Norms and Internalized Patriarchy

Beyond formal exclusion, one of the most entrenched barriers faced by Black women in the MCSA was the internalisation of patriarchal cultural norms. Participants revealed that deeply rooted beliefs about male headship and gender roles were not only externally imposed but also subtly reinforced within women's consciousness. This internalisation shaped how many women viewed spiritual authority, often leading them to question their leadership capacity. For example, some participants expressed discomfort with the idea of female superintendents, citing long-standing ideas that "a man is the head of the household," a view they extended into church leadership.

This finding confirms broader literature outlined in Chapter 2, which discusses how patriarchal ideologies have long shaped ecclesiastical and social expectations in South African churches (Phiri, 2002:16; Gaitskell, 2002:387). Within structures like the Manyano, women were often expected to affirm rather than challenge these roles, functioning within frameworks that

reinforced male leadership. As Kumalo (2009:69) and Mkhwanazi and Kgatla (2015:180) demonstrate, women were institutionally confined to "supportive" spaces, such as administration and hospitality, which reinforced traditional gender hierarchies under the guise of service.

These patterns reflect not merely social exclusion but what Madise (2021:5) terms "internalised subordination," where women unconsciously adopt and reproduce patriarchal logics. This perspective is corroborated by Theilen (2005:50), who highlights how women's spiritual labour was framed as obedience rather than leadership, further marginalising their theological voice.
Feminist critical historiography provides a lens for reinterpreting these dynamics, exposing how dominant historical narratives erased women's roles and justified their subjugation (Scott, 2020:324; Riley, 2024:147). It insists that the silence surrounding women's leadership is not accidental but a product of historiographical exclusion. Intersectionality theory (Crenshaw, 2019:139; Gouws, 2017:21) further clarifies how gender and race intersect to reinforce self-limiting beliefs, especially within religious institutions shaped by colonial and apartheid-era ideologies.

These frameworks reveal how cultural norms were not just externally enforced but internally sustained, making resistance to patriarchy not only structural but psychological.
The data suggest that transforming women's leadership in the church requires not only changing policies but also disrupting deep-seated cultural narratives that shape women's self-perception. These internalised attitudes are a legacy of intersecting racial and gender-based oppression, calling for a liberationist theological reimagining of authority and spiritual worth.

6.2.4.3. Judgment and Peer Policing Within Women's Groups

This theme reveals how exclusion and power dynamics were not limited to male-led church structures but were also reproduced within women's circles like the Manyano. Participants described experiences of gossip, judgment, and class-based snobbery from their peers, particularly around appearance, perceived status, and non-conformity. Rather than finding solidarity, some women encountered environments of social surveillance, where deviations from traditional dress, speech, or lifestyle were met with critique. These dynamics show that internal policing of gender and respectability norms served as a barrier to authentic community for many Black Methodist women.

This finding is supported by Chapter 2, which indicates that exclusionary forces were not restricted to male-dominated church leadership but were also in women's organisations like the Manyano. Mkhwanazi and Kgatla (2015:180-182) note that although the Manyano offered a space for sociality and activism for women, it also reproduced respectability politics and class, where members were judged on appearance, manner, and social status. Similarly, Theilen (2005:50) documents that women who broke from expected norms of dressing or demeanour were sometimes ridiculed or morally stigmatized by others, illustrating how internal policing-maintained conformity, and stifled diversity in the group. This internal discipline especially affected women like Marah Louw, whose career and personal expression challenged traditional churchwoman ideals, leading to isolation and gossip rather than affirmation.

From a theoretical standpoint, this theme aligns with feminist critical historiography and intersectionality, as discussed in Chapter 3. Feminist critical historiography not only challenges male-dominated histories but also examines how women themselves can bolster exclusionary norms tempered in patriarchy (Scott, 2020:324; Riley, 2024:147). It interrogates how female-led institutions can replicate dominant systems of power under the guise of tradition and morality. Intersectionality also illustrates how intersecting identities—such as race, gender, and class—converge to create complex social hierarchies within marginalized groups (Crenshaw, 2019:139; Gouws, 2017:21). In this context, peer policing becomes a form of internalised oppression, where the enforcement of cultural and religious norms disproportionately affects those already marginalised by divorce, appearance, or class status. Consequently, the peer policing observed in the Manyano amounts to internalized respectability politics that reflect broader systems of oppression, demonstrating how women challenged and replicated patriarchal systems among themselves.

6.2.4.4. Silencing and Exclusion from Decision-Making

Despite their consistent and capable service, Black women in the Methodist Church were routinely excluded from key decision-making spaces. Participants reflected that their wisdom and long-standing contributions were rarely sought when strategic matters of church governance were discussed. This form of silencing was often subtle, not outright rejection but quiet omission, rooted in longstanding assumptions about gender roles and leadership legitimacy. This silencing also extended to women who operated outside the traditional Manyano structure, such as Ellen Kuzwayo, who was instrumental in forming the Methodist Women’s Association.

Unlike the Manyano, which was often entangled with traditional norms, the Association opened spaces for middle-class and professional women to influence church life. Yet, Kuzwayo's influence was not fully integrated into the church's formal leadership structures, reflecting the same patterns of marginalisation seen elsewhere. Similarly, Madie Hall Xuma, a prominent figure in Sophiatown and wife of ANC leader Dr. A.B. Xuma, brought visibility and legitimacy to the MCSA through her elite status and activism. However, her contributions were rarely institutionalised within the church's governance frameworks. These examples highlight that even women with significant social capital were structurally sidelined, reinforcing the church's patriarchal orientation.

This finding is strongly corroborated in Chapter 2, where it is illustrated that the exclusion from decision-making was a persistent challenge for Black Methodist women, despite their myriad contributions. Kumalo (2009:154) and Madise (2014:123) note that while women were vital to the church's social outreach and spiritual initiatives, they were systematically excluded from positions of real power. Mkhwanazi and Kgatla (2015:180) point out that in organisations like the Manyano, women were confined to supportive roles, and their wisdom was not included in leadership circles. Theilen (2005:50) explains that the silencing used to be subtle, women's voices were not openly rejected, but quietly ignored in strategic spaces, consolidating patriarchal power.

Moreover, this silencing aligns with feminist critical historiography, which condemns male-stream histories of the church that routinely exclude women's voices in society and church (Riley, 2024:147; Scott, 2020:324). Feminist historiography illustrates how religious institutions have historically excluded women's input from leadership and decision-making records, ensuring their invisibility. It calls for an active rewriting of church memory to re-centre these silenced figures, and recover erased legacies.

Intersectionality theory extends this, illustrating how Black women were doubly excluded, by gender and race, within apartheid's intersecting systems of oppression (Crenshaw, 2019:139; Gouws, 2017:21). It also reveals how institutional cultures—even in faith communities—can replicate broader societal injustices, reinforcing the need for theological critique that includes race, gender, and class.

6.2.4.5. Summary of Objective 4: Challenges and Opportunities Faced by Black Women

This chapter's analysis reveals that Black Methodist women in Soweto between 1950 and 2000 faced layered challenges, including institutional exclusion, cultural marginalisation, peer policing, and persistent silencing in decision-making spaces. These constraints were reinforced both structurally and culturally—within male-led church hierarchies and among women themselves through internalised patriarchy and respectability politics. Institutional barriers blocked women from preaching or leading worship publicly, while patriarchal theology naturalised their exclusion. Cultural norms shaped by African traditions reinforced ideas of male headship, which were internalised by women and expressed through resistance to female leadership roles. Additionally, within women's organisations such as the Manyano, judgment and class-based peer policing curtailed full participation for women perceived as different or non-conforming.

Despite these constraints, women carved out spaces of influence through informal leadership, caregiving, spiritual authority, and cultural production. The cases of The Good Wife, Mrs. Noah, and Marah Louw show how women redefined ministry on their own terms. Notably, other figures like Ellen Kuzwayo and Madie Hall Xuma highlight that women's leadership also occurred beyond the Manyano, in spaces that were nonetheless marginalised.

Theoretically, these findings affirm feminist critical historiography's call to re-centre silenced narratives and recover women's contributions long excluded from institutional memory (Scott, 2020; Riley, 2024). Intersectionality further demonstrates how race, gender, and class combined to reproduce exclusion at multiple levels, even within religious institutions. Together, these frameworks reveal how Black Methodist women challenged marginalisation, not just through overt resistance, but by navigating, reshaping, and often transforming the very systems that excluded them.

6.2.5. Research Objective Five

Objective 5: *To analyse the personal stories and recollections of Black women integral to the Methodist movement in Soweto and explore how these narratives contribute to the understanding of Southern African Methodism today.*

This objective focused on unveiling the lives of Black women as valuable sources of historical knowledge and theological reflection. Three overlapping themes emerged in the analysis: (1) the recognition of identifying overlooked women leaders, (2) creative expression

as testimony, and (3) the utilization of personal story as historical record. These motifs illustrate that personal stories are vital documents of religious resilience, leadership, and marginalized memory. They reveal women's emotional and cultural labour to preserve and pass on Methodist identity through generations.

6.2.5.1. Recognition of Overlooked Women Leaders

The study revealed how participants used oral storytelling to preserve the legacy of women whose foundational contributions to Methodist life in Soweto were often ignored by institutional narratives. These testimonies challenge ecclesiastical silences and foreground women's faith work beyond titles or formal authority. Through the voices of elders like Mrs. Noah, women such as Mama Makgetla and Mama Masombuka were remembered for their prayer leadership, wisdom, and sacrificial service to congregational life even though they held no official office. This finding aligns with Chapter 2, which underscores the importance of remembering women's informal leadership in African churches. Mkhwanazi and Kgatla (2015:180–182) argue that women's caregiving, prayer organisation, and moral authority sustained church life during apartheid, but were often unacknowledged in church records. Similarly, Kumalo (2024:41) notes how women created powerful spiritual spaces through auxiliary networks like the Manyano, building forms of leadership that were foundational yet unrecognised.

From a feminist critical historiography perspective, this recovery of memory constitutes a political and theological act. As Scott (2020:324) and Riley (2024:147) contend, dominant church histories have marginalised women's roles by erasing them from archives. Oral recollection and storytelling thus function as counter-archives, resisting historical amnesia and re-inscribing women into ecclesial memory. This aligns with Chikwendu (2023:18) and Jaques (2022:38), who insist that oral testimony is a valid theological source that must be taken seriously in decolonial and feminist research.

This also confirms that legacy-building among Black Methodist women was not defined by position but by impact—community trust, spiritual wisdom, and generational mentorship. Their work demonstrates that theological authority can emerge from sustained presence and spiritual discipline rather than clerical status. In this sense, their remembrance by peers is itself an act of theological justice.

6.2.5.2. Creative Expression as Testimony

Creative expression, particularly through music, emerged as a significant way in which Black Methodist women in Soweto documented and preserved their faith. For women like Marah Louw, music became both a spiritual offering and a historical record. Her work, including traditional hymn recordings and African worship albums, reflected a deep desire to protect and share Methodist liturgical heritage. These acts go beyond performance; they represent theological reflection through art, offering an embodied archive of worship, memory, and resistance.

Evidence from literature discussed in Chapter 2 affirms that music and artistic expression were not merely aesthetic presentations but essential spiritual practices for Black Methodist women. Theilen (2005:63) highlights that women's musical activity in Soweto was theological expression and social resistance, and in it they affirmed identity and community amid marginalization. Kumalo (2024:48) confirms this by illustrating how religious music, and particularly traditional hymns, were employed as vehicles for preserving Methodist heritage and resisting cultural erasure during apartheid. These creative actions, typically introduced by women, became forms of liturgical witness, narrating faith, suffering, and hope through song and remembrance.

Additionally, Marah Louw's cultural work functioned as a public form of evangelism and protest. Her international music career positioned her as a symbol of resilience and Black excellence under apartheid. Her recordings and concerts offered spiritual and cultural resistance, contesting both ecclesial and national silencing. She defied apartheid laws not only through her interracial marriage but also by elevating African Christian identity on the global stage.

Beyond Marah Louw, it is critical to broaden the scope by highlighting women such as Ellen Kuzwayo, who founded the Methodist Women's Association (MWA) as a distinct structure from the Manyano. The MWA provided women with creative and theological space outside traditional norms, further proving that faith-based agency was not limited to Manyano involvement. Similarly, Madie Hall Xuma, as a leading churchwoman and wife of ANC President Dr. A.B. Xuma, shaped the Methodist public witness in elite Sophiatown circles. Her home became a site of political, cultural, and spiritual exchange, proving that Black women exercised leadership not only through music or auxiliaries but also through hospitality, influence, and intellectual contribution.

The theoretical insights from Chapter 3 also validate this theme through feminist critical historiography, which values other forms of historical record, such as oral memory, artworks, and embodied practices, as authoritative expressions of marginal voices (Riley, 2024:147; Weir, 2021:12). These creative works are archives that disrupt textual traditions that are dominated by men. Additionally, intersectionality theory also frames this musical practice as multi-layered resistance: Black women like Marah Louw used music to negotiate intersecting racisms, patriarchies, and class oppressions, both protecting liturgical culture and communal memory (Crenshaw, 2019:139; Gouws, 2017:21). In this way, music served not only as devotion but as subversive historical testimony.

6.2.5.3. Personal Storytelling as Historical Record

Personal storytelling emerged as a crucial means through which participants constructed and preserved their faith identities and family legacies. Bamberg (2011:7) notes that storytelling fosters a sense of agency, allowing individuals to position themselves within broader social and historical contexts. These oral histories offered more than individual memories, they served as intergenerational archives, transmitting spiritual values, historical knowledge, and theological insight from one generation to the next. Through photographs, stories of ministry, and family lineage, women positioned their lives as part of a broader sacred narrative. As Marah Louw stated, *"That's my grandmother... this is me with Tata Madiba. This is my story, it's all part of the church too."*

In Chapter 2, Phiri (2002:16) and Mkhwanazi and Kgatla (2015:180) affirm that the oral testimonies of women provide an alternative church history that normally does not appear in the official documents. Oral narration is one form of counter-resistance to the erasure of Black women's labour in Methodism. The chapter highlights how personal accounts and memories are grassroots archives that account for the traces of spiritual leadership and spirituality. Kumalo (2024:9) and Theilen (2005:50) note that these lived accounts challenge dominant male-centric narratives by validating everyday spiritual labour as historical and theological. In memories, images, and genealogy narratives, women plant their journeys of faith in a sacred common memory resistant to institutional forgetting.

This is further exemplified by the participant testimonies of Mrs. Noah and The Good Wife, whose recollections of ministry, outreach, and family heritage formed a tapestry of spiritual resilience. Their memories serve not only to preserve the past but also to shape how future

generations understand women's religious authority. Mrs. Noah's account of her mother and grandmother's involvement in the church affirms how spiritual lineage operates as theological identity. Similarly, The Good Wife traced the establishment of churches in Dobsonville, Silvertown, and Mathole as part of her family's collective witness—blending personal history with ecclesial legacy.

Recent studies support this view; Tanksley (2023) calls these oral recollections "feminist archival bricolage," a patchwork of memory that reclaims erased herstories. Likewise, Hua (2013:34–35) emphasizes that oral memory allows African women to preserve identity and resist dominant narratives through storytelling. The significance of personal narrative is deeply aligned with the theoretical foundations established in Chapter 3, specifically feminist critical historiography. This framework argues that history is not objective but is shaped by patriarchal interests and tends to marginalize women's lived experiences (Scott, 2020:324; Riley, 2024:147). Personal narrative, as described by Jaques (2022:38), becomes a recovery act, reclaiming silenced voices and reconstituting history from the margins. It is through the oral tradition that these women assert their place in Methodist history, not as passive recipients of male-led narratives, but as active constructors of communal faith memory.

Intersectionality further reveals that these stories were not told from a singular position. Rather, they were shaped by gender, class, and race, layered with the complexity of living under apartheid. For instance, the reverence afforded to older women in some circuits was not always consistent with broader church exclusion—revealing the textured and contingent nature of recognition (Crenshaw, 2019:139; Gouws, 2017:21). These women's narratives, therefore, function both as spiritual biography and as counter-histories, capable of shifting how Methodist ecclesial authority is defined and remembered.

6.2.5.4. Summary of Objective Five

The findings under Objective Five demonstrate that Black Methodist women in Soweto preserved, asserted, and transmitted their spiritual legacies primarily through personal storytelling, oral memory, and creative expression. These non-institutional forms of leadership, rooted in music, family history, and visual symbols, function as alternative archives that challenge the exclusion of women from formal church historiography. Through hymns, photographs, intergenerational stories, and embodied liturgical practices, participants created counter-histories that affirmed women's agency in shaping Methodist theology and identity.

As shown through figures like Marah Louw, The Good Wife, and Mrs. Noah, leadership was not confined to pulpits or synods but was expressed through song, sewing, remembrance, and the formation of spiritual lineage. These testimonies contest patriarchal silence and highlight the theological power of lived experience. Framed through feminist critical historiography and intersectionality, the study confirms that storytelling and memory are not merely nostalgic but function as resistance, leadership, and sacred knowledge transmission. Women's voices, long suppressed in church records, now emerge as central to understanding the Methodist Church's past and future.

6.3. Theoretical Reflections: Feminist Critical Historiography in Practice

This study's use of feminist critical historiography enabled a radical re-reading of the Methodist Church's history in Soweto by centering the lived experiences and agency of Black women. Traditionally, church histories have relied heavily on male-dominated narratives, rendering women, especially Black women, functionally invisible (Braude, 2004:569; Riley, 2024:147). Feminist critical historiography, however, disrupts these narratives by actively recovering, reclaiming, and reinterpreting women's contributions. In this study, oral testimonies, storytelling, music, and informal leadership were treated as legitimate historical sources, consistent with feminist demands for the inclusion of subaltern voices (Harris, 2020:52).

Drawing on scholars such as Phiri (2002:16) and Kumalo (2024: 9, 41, 48, 57), this approach contests androcentric traditions in ecclesiastical writing that framed women as auxiliary to the church's mission. Instead, women's leadership in movements like the Manyano, their community-based ministries, and their spiritual labour are recognized as central, not supplementary. The women interviewed in this study named their foremothers, curated oral archives, and produced cultural texts, all which function as counter-histories that expand theological and institutional memory. As Braude (2004:569) emphasizes, feminist historiography is not only about inclusion, but about transforming historical thought itself.

The application of this framework also aligns with African feminist critiques of universalist Western feminism. By engaging intersectionality and decolonial theory (Crenshaw, 2019:139-144; Mignolo, 2021:113), the research acknowledged that Black women's realities in apartheid South Africa were shaped by compounded structures of race, gender, class, and faith. The theoretical synergy of intersectionality and feminist historiography helped illuminate how

women maneuverer between exclusion and agency, often acting within institutions that simultaneously oppressed and empowered them (Ndinda and Ndhlovu, 2022:99; Gouws, 2017:19-22).

Methodologically, this required privileging oral histories and spiritual expressions as archives, affirming the feminist insight that "what counts" as historical data is itself a political question (Chikwendu, 2023:18, 32; Weir, 2021:12-14). Marah Louw's hymns, family photographs, and performances were thus not supplementary anecdotes but vital testimonies of theological agency and ecclesial memory. This reflects what Watson (2023:15) calls "embodied historiography," where song, storytelling, and relational memory are tools of historical reconstruction.

Furthermore, feminist critical historiography enables the re-reading of church leadership beyond formal offices. Women's caregiving, coordination of worship, and community organising are reframed as political and theological work. In doing so, the study expands the categories of "leadership" and "ministry" to include everyday acts of survival, resistance, and transformation (Collins and Bilge, 2020:59-64; Lamola, 2021:109, 115).

This theoretical lens does more than recover forgotten narratives, it interrogates how institutional memory is constructed and who is allowed to speak within it. It repositions Black Methodist women not just as participants in history, but as theologians, historians, and architects of religious life. Their stories complicate dominant narratives and call for a reimagining of what counts as sacred leadership. As such, feminist critical historiography was not merely a framework in this study; it was an act of justice and epistemic repair.

6.4. Conclusion

This chapter critically discusses the findings of the study, linking participant narratives to existing literature and theoretical frameworks. It revealed that Black women in the Methodist Church of Soweto between 1950 and 2000 played indispensable roles as spiritual leaders, caregivers, church-builders, cultural preservers, and historical narrators. Their leadership occurred both within and outside formal church structures, often through informal, but impactful avenues such as the Women's Manyano, community outreach, hymnody, and oral storytelling. Despite facing institutional exclusion, cultural patriarchy, and apartheid-era

segregation, these women exercised strategic and spiritual agency that shaped the church's survival and growth.

The chapter also broadened the scope of analysis beyond the Manyano by highlighting the contributions of figures like Ellen Kuzwayo and Madie Hall Xuma, affirming that women's influence in Methodism was diverse and multi-sited. Theoretically grounded in feminist critical historiography, intersectionality, and decolonial theory, this chapter asserted that Black Methodist women were not peripheral actors, but central to the ecclesial, cultural, and theological life of the church, challenging patriarchal norms and asserting their rightful place in church history.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1. Introduction

This final chapter draws together the key insights of the study and reflects on their broader significance within the fields of theology, gender studies, and African church history. From Findings to Interpretation. Chapter 6 traced three interlocking themes—spiritual agency, social welfare leadership, and resistant respectability—across participant narratives. Moving beyond description, this chapter interprets how these dynamics recalibrate Methodist historiography in Soweto and delineates their implications for contemporary leadership. A Consolidated View. Rather than reprising thematic summaries, the discussion synthesises interview testimony with denominational records to demonstrate how Women's Manyano practices constituted a grassroots ecclesiology of survival and growth. The analysis articulates consequences for policy, ministerial formation, and the memory-work of the Connexion.

The chapter further offers practical and policy-oriented recommendations for church institutions, women's organisations, and theological education spaces. It closes with a reflection on the broader academic and societal impact of the study, its limitations, and directions for future research. In doing so, it reaffirms the importance of centre women's spiritual labour as both historical truth and theological necessity, offering a corrective to church history that has long silenced these voices.

7.2. Overview of the Study

This study used oral history (small-N, information-rich) triangulated with MCSA records to recover Black Methodist women's agency in Soweto. Chapter 6 presented the evidence and analysis; Chapter 7 therefore concentrates on what the findings mean for theory, practice, and future research.

7.3. Summary of Key Findings

This section summarises the core findings that emerged from the study, drawing on both existing literature and primary data. It outlines how previous scholarship shaped the study's foundation, and how participants' narratives extended, deepened, and sometimes challenged those scholarly perspectives.

7.3.1. Summary of Findings from Literature Review

A review of the literature and theoretical frameworks revealed that Black women in the MCSA have historically played foundational roles in the development of the church, particularly in Soweto during the apartheid era. Despite this, they have remained marginalised in theological scholarship and institutional records. This erasure, as noted in Chapter 2, underscores the urgent need for feminist critical historiography to recover and re-centre women's narratives (Braude, 2004:555; Phiri, 2002:16).

Phiri (2002:138) and Kumalo (2024:9) argue that although women were deeply embedded in the social, spiritual, and operational life of the church, their contributions were often treated as invisible or secondary. The Manyano, the women's prayer and service group within the MCSA, served as a site of immense influence, organising prayer meetings, supporting ministers, and maintaining the moral and material fabric of congregations (Mkhwanazi and Kgatla, 2015:180). Yet these acts of spiritual labour were rarely documented in formal leadership histories, affirming the importance of alternate historiographical tools to redress these omissions.

The review also brought forward the concept of sacred silence—a condition where women are vital to the church's functioning yet kept out of decision-making and theological discourse (Phiri, 2002:143). Kumalo (2024:39) explains that while women were active in expanding the church's mission through education, evangelism, and community outreach, they were often regarded as helpers rather than leaders. The review suggests that their spiritual authority operated within informal or relational frameworks, which were no less powerful but often overlooked in patriarchal systems of recognition.

Chapter 3's theoretical framework applies feminist critical historiography, as the key theory of this study. The theory questions the dominant narratives produced by male ecclesiastical elites and reclaims marginalised voices through memory, storytelling, and embodied faith practices (Scott, 1986:1065; Phiri, 2002:147). This perspective treats oral history not as anecdotal, but as a valid epistemological tool for reconstructing the past. As the chapter argues, women's testimonies are not mere recollections but serve as counter-archives that challenge the exclusionary tendencies of traditional church historiography.

Additionally, intersectionality, as articulated by Crenshaw and applied in Chapter 3, helped identify how Black women were doubly marginalised: by race within apartheid society, and by

gender within church systems. The literature demonstrates how these layers of oppression informed the lived realities of women, influencing their opportunities for leadership and recognition. Women were not simply left out of leadership roles, they were often systematically denied access to theological education, public speaking opportunities, and decision-making structures (Phiri, 2002:140).

The review further acknowledges how Black women actively navigated these constraints. Gaitskell (1990:254) and Kumalo (2024:42) describe how women engaged in creative forms of resistance through hymn singing, clothing rituals, and community-based spiritual practices. Their ministry was not always on the pulpit, but often found in caregiving, advocacy, and mobilising support for families affected by poverty, apartheid violence, and illness. These roles blurred the sacred and the social, forming what Santos (2024) calls "everyday theologies of care".

Finally, the literature highlights that these gendered exclusions were not only imposed externally but also internalised. Manyano women themselves often policed each other through dress codes, silence, and class-based judgements (Kumalo, 2024:40). These dynamics reveal the complex ways patriarchy is reproduced even within women-led spaces, reinforcing the need for feminist theological critique that is both liberatory and self-reflective.

In summary, the literature affirms that the exclusion of Black women from Methodist leadership narratives was not due to a lack of contribution, but to a failure of recognition. Their spiritual labour sustained the church during one of South Africa's most turbulent eras. This study, grounded in feminist critical historiography, positions those stories not as supplementary but as central to a reimagined history of Methodism.

7.3.2. Summary of Findings from Primary Sources

This section presents the key findings derived from the in-depth interviews with three women in Soweto's Methodist Church. Drawing from their lived experiences, it reveals how women's spiritual labour, evolving leadership, and narrative testimony shaped the church amidst systemic challenges and societal transformation.

7.3.2.1. Roles of Black Women in the Methodist Church and Community Development

The findings of this study showed that Black women played original roles both in church growth and in community advancement. Their contributions were expressed in terms of church

planting leadership, spiritual growth, and service bodies such as the Manyano. Women like The Good Wife coordinated the establishment of new congregations, notably helping to plant Dobsonville, Braamfischerville, Matholeville, and Silvertown—all of which have now developed into assessed societies within the Roodepoort Circuit, as defined by the Methodist Book of Order (2016:84). Her coordination and affirmations of vice-chair systems also provided grassroots administrative continuity. These actions contributed to Black Methodists securing dignified, community-based worship spaces during apartheid, as opposed to the racially imposed 3 pm services.

Others spearheaded feeding programs, clothing drives, and HIV/AIDS ministry, dissolving boundaries between holy ministry and social justice activism. Mrs Noah exemplified this dual role as a spiritual and cultural contributor, not only through leadership, but also by designing and sewing the iconic fishtail uniform worn by the Manyano General Presidents—an aesthetic and theological symbol of women's power crafted without male validation. As caregivers, organizers, and spiritual guides, they made the church a place of healing and hope.

Marah Louw's legacy further demonstrates how Black women's ministry extended beyond church walls. Her cultural and musical leadership, combined with her global visibility as an artist during apartheid, symbolized Black excellence and spiritual resilience. Her interracial marriage defied apartheid law, while her decision to join the Manyano after divorce challenged church respectability norms and reframed what dignified female leadership looks like. Their diverse involvement resonated with theological practices of embodied faith, where religious expression entailed acts of kindness, advocacy, and innovative fundraising.

The data confirmed that Black women's spaces were central, but not marginal to Soweto Methodism's existence and survival, and these spaces whether within the Manyano, the MWA, or through cultural diplomacy, defy previous histories that relegated them to the fringes of mainstream church history and leadership narratives.

7.3.2.2. Evolution of Black Women's Roles and Contributions Over Time

The narratives indicated a clear shift in women's roles between the 1950s and 2000, marked by growing prominence, confidence, and leadership within the church. The Good Wife reflected on how women initially had supporting roles behind their husbands, taking care of meetings, and nurturing church members, but gradually asserted their authority. Her leadership in the

Roodepoort Circuit led to foundational church planting efforts and the development of governance systems like the vice-chair structure within the Manyano. These contributions laid the groundwork for female-led administrative continuity and spiritual authority across multiple circuits. By the 1990s, women within the church were increasingly acknowledged as independent leaders, recognized for their own contributions rather than simply in relation to their husbands.

Mrs. Priscilla Iris Noah exemplified early female liturgical leadership. As one of the first women to conduct choirs in the 1980s, she disrupted gendered expectations in worship leadership. Her courage to assume public musical and spiritual roles—previously the exclusive domain of men—paved the way for other women to step into more visible ministerial positions. Furthermore, her ongoing role as a seamstress and designer of the Manyano General President's fishtail uniform shows her enduring contribution to both the symbolic and aesthetic identity of women's ecclesial leadership.

Marah Louw's journey offers a contrasting yet equally powerful evolution. Initially involved as a cultural benefactor, she later joined the Manyano formally after a high-profile interracial marriage and subsequent divorce. Her embrace of the Manyano uniform, post-divorce, challenged the stigma around single or divorced women in church life. Through worship albums and traditional hymn recordings, she expanded the Methodist faith's musical and theological archive, asserting a womanist spirituality grounded in artistry, resistance, and healing.

These accounts represent more than an institutional change; they signify spiritual and individual transformation. Drawing on Smith's critique of Western conceptions of time and space (2012: 52–59), these women refused to be confined by linear, colonial chronologies and imposed spatial hierarchies. By asserting an enduring, relational presence that is rooted in indigenous rhythms of communal becoming they moved from the periphery into the heart of ecclesial life. In doing so, they challenged the very epistemic frameworks that had marginalized them, asserting theological agency to redefine leadership, holiness, and belonging on their terms. Their journey of boundary-breaking and self-determination testifies not only to resilience, but to a decolonial reclamation of faith, where spiritual authority is re-grounded in indigenous understandings of time, space, and community.

7.3.2.3. Impact of Socio-Political Context on Black Women's Agency and Participation

The Chapter 6 analysis already detailed how apartheid and post-apartheid dynamics shaped agency (e.g., removals, urban precarity, GBV, unemployment) and how women leveraged Manyano structures in response. What matters here is the implication: these dynamics produced a grassroots ecclesiology in which disciplined prayer, welfare, and evangelism were fused by women as the operational heart of congregational resilience and growth. For evidence and examples, see Chapter 6.

Ultimately, their stories reflect how apartheid's intersecting oppressions were met not only with survival but with spiritual creativity, communal leadership, and a deeply contextualized theology of resistance.

7.3.2.4. Challenges Faced and Opportunities for Agency

The research reveals that Black women within the Methodist Church of Soweto faced entrenched institutional and interpersonal barriers. The Good Wife reported that despite being a minister's wife, she could not make public announcements, highlighting structural exclusion from available leadership roles and public religious expression. This silencing, deeply rooted in patriarchal ecclesial culture, reinforced gender norms that conflated women's value with submission and invisibility.

Mrs. Noah indicated that leadership during worship and music remained male-dominated for decades. Her testimony also revealed how women were systemically overlooked for conducting choirs or leading services—functions considered symbolic of spiritual authority. Yet, through persistence and reputation, she became one of the first to challenge that boundary. Furthermore, women were also frequently judged within the Manyano itself; Marah Louw recalled being quietly policed for wearing red nail polish, which others viewed as inappropriate or elitist. This reflected internalized patriarchy, where women, in enforcing respectability politics, became gatekeepers of male-defined standards of holiness and decorum.

Despite these challenges, each woman exemplified a unique mode of agency. Marah Louw used her musical platform not only to raise funds but to shape a theologically resonant soundscape that preserved Methodist identity and embraced African aesthetics. The Good Wife expanded the church's community footprint through social outreach and church planting, showing how caregiving and administration were acts of strategic leadership. Her legacy in

helping form key congregations within the Roodepoort Circuit demonstrates that even constrained roles could be sites of transformative influence. Mrs. Noah, through decades of seamstress work, designed and produced the fishtail garment for the Manyano General President—a symbolic and material assertion of women's spiritual authority and dignity.

7.3.2.5. Personal Narratives as Contributions to Methodist History and Theology

Participants' life stories emerged as vital sources of historical memory and theological reflection. Their narratives not only filled the silences in institutional church records but also offered a grassroots archive of faith, leadership, and resilience. Mrs. Noah honoured obscure women like Mama Makgetla and Mama Masombuka (clergy wives), whose quiet service sustained congregational life even in times of political fear and resource scarcity. By naming them, she enacted a spiritual form of archiving that affirms women's memory as sacred history. The Good Wife advocated for women like Mrs. Radikeledi, who were intelligent and dedicated but overlooked by institutional leadership. Her emphasis on recognizing sidelined figures reveals the depth of unacknowledged spiritual leadership in Soweto's Methodist history. In doing so, she disrupted ecclesial forgetting and elevated pastoral care, mentoring, and community service as theological acts.

Marah Louw's own photographs and multigenerational stories grounded her ministry in family tradition and national memory, with images of her alongside Nelson Mandela representing the convergence of faith, politics, and Black cultural identity. Her musical recordings, too, acted as a spiritual archive, capturing traditional Methodist hymns and verifying African Christian expression. Her artistic witness not only preserved worship styles but also redefined theology as sound, resistance, and cultural memory.

These narratives challenge the normative frameworks of historical knowledge production. Rather than relying solely on church minutes, clergy records, or synodal statements, this study affirms oral testimony, storytelling, and cultural production as theological texts in themselves. This approach echoes the feminist critical historiography promoted by Scott (2020) and Riley (2024), which insists that women's lived experiences constitute legitimate archives of religious meaning and authority.

Intersectionality further reveals how these stories reflect the entangled identities of Black women navigating race, class, gender, and faith (Crenshaw, 2019; Gouws, 2017). Their

testimonies were not simply recollections—they were theological claims, historiographical interventions, and political critiques. Methodologically, these life stories underscore the value of narrative inquiry as a decolonial practice, reclaiming history from the margins and centering voices long silenced by institutional and academic traditions.

Together, these personal accounts do not merely support Methodist theology—they expand it, embedding it in the rhythms of women's caregiving, song, suffering, and resistance.

7.3.3. Reflection of Contemporary Society

The findings of this study continue to resonate strongly with the realities of contemporary ecclesial and social life in South Africa. Participants such as *The Good Wife* and *Mrs. Noah* highlighted the continued exclusion of women from formal church leadership, despite their decades of dedicated service. *The Good Wife* recounted how, even as the spouse of a minister, she was never permitted to make public announcements during worship, a practice still common in some circuits today.

Mrs. Noah, at 92, reflected on how musical and liturgical leadership remains male-dominated, noting that "everything was done by males." *Marah Louw* described judgmental attitudes and class-based exclusion within the Manyano that continue to alienate women perceived as different. These lived experiences mirror broader patterns of patriarchy, internalised misogyny, and classism that persist in the MCSA today. Worship segregation remains a reality in some areas, with Black congregants still assigned inconvenient service times. Respectability politics and peer policing continue within women's groups, enforcing narrow standards of femininity and spirituality.

Thus, the study not only reflects historical injustices but also reveals how entrenched gender, race, and class inequalities continue to shape women's ecclesial participation and spiritual recognition in the present day. It proves relevant to contemporary discussions around the intersection of gender, race, and faith, particularly within post-apartheid contexts. As feminist scholars and decolonial theologians critique Eurocentric ecclesial histories, this thesis contributes by centering the lived experiences of Black Methodist women. Their grassroots leadership, cultural labour, and theological agency offer critical insight for rethinking ecclesial power and inclusion today.

7.4. Theoretical Contributions

This study makes significant theoretical contributions by interweaving Feminist Critical Historiography, Intersectionality, Social Constructivism and Decolonial Theory to re-imagine the Methodist Church of Soweto's Black women's historical experiences. Each of these theories was employed to recover silenced narratives, explore intersecting oppressions, and challenge hegemonic theological and historical discourses.

7.4.1. Feminist Critical Historiography

Feminist Critical Historiography was central to this study's re-narration of Methodist history through the lived experiences of Black women. By treating oral testimonies, memory, and embodied experience as valid sources of historical knowledge, the research departed from traditional, male-centric archives that had long omitted women's voices. As highlighted by Riley (2024:147) and Scott (2020:324), this framework challenges the construction of history as neutral and unveils how patriarchal norms have shaped religious memory.

The life stories of The Good Wife, Mrs. Noah, and Marah Louw were approached as theological archives, sources of ecclesial knowledge rooted in spiritual labour, caregiving, and musical leadership. This aligns with the feminist historiographical imperative to recover the "silenced voices" of subaltern groups (Chikwendu, 2023:18; Jaques, 2022:38). As Harris (2020:52) argues, this method allows us to recognise women's leadership not simply through titles but through everyday acts of devotion, strategy, and care. The study thus contributes to a feminist rewriting of Methodist history in South Africa by affirming informal spiritual labour as historically and theologically significant.

7.4.2. Intersectionality Theory

Intersectionality helped uncover how gender, race, class, and religious identity intersected to shape the agency and oppression of Black women in Soweto's Methodist Church. As Crenshaw (2013:139) posits, women's experiences cannot be reduced to isolated categories. Participants like Marah Louw navigated dual exclusions, from apartheid's racial segregation and the church's patriarchal norms, revealing the compounding effects of structural oppression.

This framework illuminated how women were both spiritual leaders and targets of exclusion. They led outreach, formed choirs, and sustained congregational life while being excluded from governance and liturgical authority (Wiesner, 2021:77; Phaswana, 2021:206). Intersectionality

enabled the study to foreground these tensions, particularly how systemic inequalities shaped participation differently across social class and generational lines (Collins and Bilge, 2020:61). Additionally, African feminist voices such as Gouws (2017:21) and Mama (1995) underscore that Black women's struggles in religious institutions cannot be disentangled from broader social conditions. This study affirms their view by demonstrating that Soweto's Methodist women were not simply resisting patriarchy or racism, but a nexus of both. Their agency was intersectional in practice, strategically negotiated across multiple spheres of constraint.

7.4.3. Social Constructivism Theory

Social constructivism illuminated how "knowledge" about gender—and thus the roles occupied by Methodist women—was understood not as biologically ordained but as the product of collective meaning-making (Berger and Luckmann, 2016:110–122; Scott, 2007:77–97). Through liturgies, catechetical teaching and communal practices, racial and gender norms were internalized by congregants, so that Black women came to be seen primarily as caregivers and nurturers rather than leaders (Phaswana, 2021:199). By revealing these processes, the framework showed how power dynamics under apartheid became inscribed into church structures, making certain roles appear "natural" even as they served to marginalize.

In applying social constructivism to the MCSA, the study demonstrated that the intersection of race and gender was co-constructed by both institutional rules and everyday interactions (Cislaghi and Heise, 2020:409–10). Through the simplest things sauch as making notices, preaching from the pulpit and conducting choirs. Both The Good Wife and Mrs Noah strongly expressed that as a woman, one would not dare cross these lines. Under apartheid, church authorities mirrored state ideology by confining Black women to informal ministries, and these prescriptions were reinforced through language, symbols and expectations (Tshipani, 2021:86; Maher, 2022:21). At the same time, women's unofficial contributions; through prayer groups, social outreach and community networks—sustained congregational life, showing that constructed roles could be contested in practice (Rudman and Glick, 2021:145).

Reflecting on these insights, the study concluded that if gender roles were socially constructed, they could also be de-constructed and re-imagined (Hohlo, 2020:48; Gouws, 2017:22). This recognition underpinned the recommendation that future reform within the Methodist Church combine constructivist awareness-raising with intersectional policymaking (Collins

and Bilge, 2020:72), so that women's leadership might be redefined beyond both colonial and patriarchal legacies.

7.4.4. Decolonial Theory

Decolonial Theory provided a crucial lens to challenge the Eurocentric and patriarchal assumptions embedded in both church history and academic theology. It emphasized the importance of recovering indigenous theological expressions, such as the Manyano's prayer rituals and Marah Louw's revival of traditional Methodist hymns, as valid modes of worship and historical resistance (Mignolo, 2021:113; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018:45).

This approach critiques how Western historiography has shaped what counts as legitimate theology or leadership. By centering women's spiritual labour, often performed in vernacular languages, embodied rituals, and communal song, the study disrupted colonial binaries of sacred/profane, male/female, and clergy/laity. It embraced memory, music, and intergenerational storytelling as valid epistemologies within African faith traditions (Lamola, 2021:115). Thus, decoloniality enabled the study to re-theologise women's roles, not as marginal, but as central to the survival and growth of Black Methodism. In doing so, it advanced a liberatory ecclesiology rooted in local knowledge systems and spiritual praxis often erased by colonial theological frameworks.

To sum up, this study makes a significant theoretical contribution by demonstrating how feminist critical historiography, intersectionality, and decolonial theory can be applied to reinterpret the history of the Methodist Church in Soweto through the lived experiences of Black women. It challenges dominant, male-centric narratives by validating oral testimony, spiritual memory, and everyday ministry as legitimate historical sources. The study also deepens intersectional theory by showing how race, gender, class, and religion jointly shaped women's exclusion and resistance within both church and state. Through a decolonial lens, it affirms indigenous theological expressions, such as hymnody, storytelling, and Manyano practices, as valid forms of Christian witness.

Together, these theoretical frameworks reposition Black women not as passive congregants, but as active theological agents and custodians of historical knowledge, offering a model for rewriting church history from the margins inward.

7.5. Recommendations

Based on the study's findings, the following recommendations are proposed to strengthen gender inclusivity, promote historical justice, and theological innovation within the Methodist Church and beyond. Some of these if not many are a practical response to the recent and critical call of the MCSA Presiding Bishop, Rev Pumla Nzimande in "Becoming an alternative community" (Nzimande, 2024:1-14).

7.5.1. For the Methodist Church of Southern Africa

Greater Institutional Inclusion of Women

The MCSA should intentionally ensure open formal leadership pathways for women at all levels, including pulpit ministry, governance, and circuit-level decision-making, to redress historical marginalisation.

Recognition of Informal Leadership Roles

Women's contributions in caregiving, musical leadership, community outreach, and spiritual formation must be officially acknowledged as essential to church life. These roles should be included in church records, reports, and leadership evaluations.

Training and Elevation of Women in Governance

The church should provide ongoing theological and administrative training for women. Moreover, they should establish and maintain clear policies ensuring women's inclusion in leadership development programmes, ordination pathways, and institutional decision-making bodies such as the 40 percent representation requirement adopted at the 2019 MCSA conference (MCSA, 2020:100).

7.5.2. For Church-Based Women's Groups (e.g. Manyano)

Address Internalised Patriarchy

Women's groups must engage in consciousness-raising to challenge long-held beliefs that associate leadership with male authority. Reflective dialogue, theological study, and inclusive practices should be central to Manyano activities.

Encourage Intergenerational Leadership

Senior women should mentor younger members to ensure continuity of leadership, while embracing fresh perspectives. Intergenerational collaboration can foster renewal and maintain relevance across age groups.

Preserving Manyano Heritage through Research

The Connexional Women's Manyano establish a research portfolio dedicated to documenting and preserving the movement's heritage—capturing its past and present activities at conventions, triennials, and related events. These records should be archived within MCSA institutions for the benefit of future generations.

Institute an annual Manyano and Biblewomen Commemoration Sunday at circuit and district level, including a roll of honour and a brief oral-history segment during worship. Publicise the commemoration in *Dimension* and district circulars so the celebration is visible beyond local societies, and monitor progress by the number of commemorations held, pioneer names recorded, and oral histories captured (Dimension 1987; 1993; MCSA, 2016).

7.5.3. For Theological Institutions and Researchers

Promote Feminist Historiography

Higher education institutions should advance research that centres women's narratives, particularly those of Black and African women, through feminist and postcolonial frameworks that interrogate and challenge dominant, male-centric histories. In this process, it shall preserve and amplify the contributions of The Circle and its allies, ensuring their intellectual, spiritual, and activist legacies remain integral to the ongoing reimagining of church historiography and theological discourse.

Integrate Oral Histories and Women's Testimonies in Curricula

Oral storytelling, personal archives, and community memory should be legitimised in theological education and training. Curriculum reform is necessary to ensure future church leaders appreciate the value of lived experience as a source of theology and church history.

7.6. Contributions to Knowledge

This study offers several important contributions to academic knowledge across theology, historiography, and gender studies:

Originality of Contextual Focus

The research presents a rare and original focus on Soweto—a site historically associated with political resistance—as a key space for exploring spiritual leadership and gendered religious agency. By highlighting the intersection of faith, activism, and community-building in this urban context, the study bridges spiritual and socio-political historiographies.

Advancement of South African Church History and Feminist Theology

The study contributes to both South African and South African ecclesiastical history by centering the voices of Black Methodist women, whose contributions have often been excluded from formal records. It also enriches feminist theology by demonstrating how women's spiritual labour of caregiving, evangelism, storytelling, and music—constitutes theological action and institutional influence.

Expansion of Historiography Through Lived Experience

By validating oral testimonies and life stories as legitimate historical sources, the study expands the methodological boundaries of church historiography. It affirms that storytelling, memory, and personal narrative can form counter-archives, offering a more inclusive and embodied understanding of religious history in African contexts.

Repositioning of Informal Leadership as Theological Agency

By analysing women's contributions outside traditional church governance structures, the study offers a reconceptualisation of leadership itself. It shows that prayer meetings, choirs, caregiving, and community outreach are not supplementary, but central to church vitality and spiritual authority.

Integration of Intersectional and Decolonial Frameworks in Ecclesial Research

The study is among the few to weave feminist historiography, intersectionality, and decolonial theory into South African ecclesial analysis. This multi-layered approach allows for a deeper understanding of how systemic racism, patriarchy, and colonial legacies intersect in shaping church dynamics and leadership exclusions.

7.7. Topical Significance and Decolonial Insights

The timeliness of this research lies in its engagement with calls to decolonise Christianity in Southern Africa. Amid renewed emphasis on reclaiming African women's voices in theology and history, this study's focus on everyday faith-based activism by Soweto's Methodist women reflects urgent scholarly and societal needs. As South African theologians, activists, and scholars increasingly critique Eurocentric modes of church history, this thesis offers a timely and grounded response rooted in lived African experiences.

Unlike many Western-centric church history studies that prioritise ordained male leadership and formal theological discourse, this research foregrounds unofficial, embodied, and culturally-rooted leadership by Black South African women. It highlights the work of figures like *The Good Wife*, *Mrs. Noah*, and *Marah Louw*, whose ministries challenged both racial apartheid and patriarchal ecclesial systems through caregiving, spiritual organisation,

music, and creative advocacy. Their contributions show that theology is not only shaped in pulpits and seminaries but also in homes, prayer meetings, sewing circles, and community concerts.

By centering oral histories, creative expression, caregiving, and intergenerational storytelling, the research advocates for a decolonial historiography grounded in African feminist epistemologies. It expands theological categories by recognising alternative forms of knowledge—memory, embodiment, presence—as legitimate and powerful. This study thus critiques dominant Western ecclesiological frameworks and offers an indigenous, feminist methodology that amplifies silenced voices and redefines leadership, not through titles, but through lived impact and cultural agency within historically marginalised communities.

7.8. Areas for Further Research

This study opens several promising avenues for further inquiry, particularly at the intersections of gender, theology, and African church history. Future research could build on this foundation in the following ways:

Wider Comparative Studies

Expanding the research to include women from other urban and rural regions in South Africa could offer comparative insights into how context shapes women's church participation across geography and culture.

Cross-Denominational Exploration

Investigating how women's roles differ across denominations, such as Pentecostal, Anglican, or Zionist traditions, could provide a broader view of gender dynamics in South African Christianity. This could in turn guide both the SACC and WCC in advancing gender justice and promoting contextual theology by drawing from the leadership and lived experience of Black South African women in church settings. By focusing on grassroots, embodied, and culturally-informed ministry, this research encourages the councils to re-examine their own structures, expand their practices of inclusion, and give greater space to voices often left at the margins.

Institutional Perspectives

Including voices from male clergy, church administrators, and policy-makers would help illuminate how institutional frameworks support or inhibit women's leadership and participation.

Generational Shifts in Women's Church Roles

A longitudinal or generational study could explore how younger women engage with or challenge the legacies left by previous generations of Manyano leaders and spiritual matriarchs.

Role of Theology in Empowering or Limiting Women

Future studies might critically examine theological education, sermons, and liturgical texts to analyse how theological discourse either empowers or marginalises women within church settings.

Digital Archives and Women's Memory

Research could explore how digital platforms, social media, and online storytelling can be used to preserve and amplify women's voices as living theological archives.

Intersection with Queer and Non-Binary Experiences

While this study focused on cisgender Black women, future research could expand to explore how gender non-conforming individuals experience faith, inclusion, and exclusion in African church spaces.

These areas of inquiry would deepen and diversify the critical conversations initiated by this study, ensuring that African women's faith, leadership, and theological contributions continue to shape academic and ecclesial discourses.

7.9. Study Conclusion

This study set out to uncover the hidden narratives of Black women in the MCSA, with a specific focus on Soweto between 1950 and 2000. Through a feminist critical historiographical lens, the study sought to challenge dominant ecclesial histories that have marginalised women's voices and labour. It documented how Black women, often denied formal authority, emerged as powerful agents of spiritual, social, and institutional transformation. Their testimonies reflect not only resilience and faith, but also strategic leadership and theological depth exercised within constrained systems of apartheid, patriarchy, and church hierarchy.

Five research objectives guided this inquiry. The first focused on the roles Black women played in church development and community building. The findings showed that women engaged in evangelism, caregiving, leadership, fundraising, and church planting, often through informal or unsanctioned avenues. The findings align with Phiri (2002:16) and Kumalo (2024:9), who assert that women were central to both the spiritual and social life of the church, even though their contributions were often marginalised in formal church structures. Mkhwanazi and Kgatla

(2015:181) further highlight the Manyano's role in channelling women's leadership into church and community outreach under apartheid.

The second objective explored the evolution of these roles over time. Women transitioned from supportive figures to visible leaders, challenging structural limitations and reshaping the contours of spiritual authority within the church. This aligns with Theilen (2005:42), who notes that women gradually moved from supportive roles to active leadership, and Attwell (1997:49), who documents how women established their own spaces of influence within patriarchal church settings. However, Mkhwanazi and Kgatla (2015:189) lament the failure of historiography to acknowledge this transformation.

The third objective examined the impact of South Africa's socio-political landscape on women's agency. Under apartheid, women were doubly marginalized, racially and gender-wise, but their refusal to accept segregated worship spaces and their bold caregiving ministries positioned them as moral and theological actors. The dual marginalisation of race and gender is well captured in Madise (2021:8) and Mkhwanazi and Kgatla (2015:182), who show how apartheid exacerbated church-based exclusions. Erlank (2022:29) also emphasizes that Black Christian women's theological agency empowered resistance both within and outside church settings.

The fourth objective investigated the barriers women faced, from exclusion in church governance to peer policing in women's groups. Yet even within these constraints, women found avenues for influence, whether through music, prayer circles, or intergenerational mentoring. This is supported by Preston (2007:8) and Madise (2014:123), who detail institutional exclusion, as well as Phiri (2002:87), who shows how women creatively negotiated informal roles. The judgment within women's groups is addressed by Mkhesu (2020:157), who critiques patriarchal reproduction even within liberation spaces.

The final objective analysed personal stories as sources of theological and historical knowledge. Women's storytelling, memory work, and archival photos were treated as legitimate archives, expanding the boundaries of what counts as church history. This finding is grounded in Browne (2013:128) and Braude (2004:565), who advocate for feminist historiography as a method to treat personal narratives and oral memory as legitimate archives. Kathenya (2021:112) and Harris (2020:52) support this by showing how oral testimonies fill critical gaps in religious historiography.

The study contributes theoretically by integrating feminist critical historiography, intersectionality, and decolonial thought to reframe women's spiritual labour as theological agency. It also makes a methodological contribution by affirming oral history and lived experience as credible sources of ecclesial knowledge. Practically, the findings call for greater institutional inclusion, support for intergenerational leadership, and integration of feminist approaches in theological education.

7.10. Final Reflections

This study demonstrates that recovering the voices and contributions of Black Methodist women is not just a historical project but a theological imperative. It calls on church historians, practitioners, and theologians to adopt feminist critical historiography and decolonial frameworks to uncover hidden narratives and reshape the discourse of Christian history in Africa. These voices challenge the prevailing norms of religious authority and remind us that sacred history is shaped not only in church synods but also in kitchens, community halls, sewing groups, and choirs.

The findings also underscore the urgency for future research to build on these insights by employing indigenous, feminist, and decolonial methodologies. Such approaches are not supplementary; they are essential to correcting the theological and historical record. Future scholars must continue to interrogate exclusionary traditions and invest in inclusive practices that affirm the full diversity of faith leadership.

Ultimately, this study affirms that Black Methodist women in Soweto were not passive recipients of theology or mere followers within the church. They were architects of spiritual spaces, caretakers of tradition, and authors of theological meaning. By placing their stories at the centre, this research invites a rethinking of South African Methodism, not as a male-authored institution, but as a living tradition shaped and forged profoundly by women's prayer, resistance, song, and sacrifice.

As the road of history stretches before us, let us remember:

"Amaqobokazana angalala endleleni, yazini kunyembelekile" (IsiXhosa Proverb)—when the young maidens pause or sleep on the road, we know the journey's stakes are high, and our collective response must be swift and steadfast.

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Table of Statutes

1. Group Area Act No. 41 of 1950
2. Population Registration Act 30 of 1950
3. Natives Resettlement Act 19 of 1954
4. Native Laws Amendment Act No. 54 of 1952
5. The Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act, Act No. 55 of 1949

APPENDIX A: ETHICAL CLEARANCE

UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL
INYUVESI YAKWAZULU-NATALI

23 January 2025

Rev Akhona Masiza (223143441)
School of Rel Phil & Classics
Pietermaritzburg Campus

Dear Rev Masiza,

Protocol reference number: HSSREC/00008117/2025
Project title: The role of Black women in shaping Soweto's Methodism (1950-2000): Uncovering hidden narratives of Black women in a racial society through feminist critical historiography.
Degree: Masters

Approval Notification – Expedited Application

This letter serves to notify you that your application received on 02 December 2024 in connection with the above, was reviewed by the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number.

PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

Incidents of adverse events and serious adverse events (AEs and SAEs) should be reported in writing to HSSREC, the study sponsors, and any regulatory authority (where appropriate), within 7 working days of the occurrence for local sites and 14 days for all other South African sites.

This approval is valid until 23 January 2026.
To ensure uninterrupted approval of this study beyond the approval expiry date, a progress report must be submitted to the Research Office on the appropriate form 2 - 3 months before the expiry date. A close-out report to be submitted when study is finished.

HSSREC is registered with the South African National Health Research Ethics Council (REC-040414-040).

Yours sincerely,

[redacted]

Professor Dipane Hlalele (Chair)
/nng

Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee
Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban, 4000, South Africa
Telephone: +27 (0)31 260 8350/4557/3587 **Email:** hssrec@ukzn.ac.za **Website:** http://research.ukzn.ac.za/Research-Ethics
Founding Campuses: Edgewood Howard College Medical School Pietermaritzburg Westville

APPENDIX B: LIST OF INTERVIEWS

Interview 1: Ms. Marah Teboho Louw, interviewed by Akhona Masiza, February 11, 2025, Mzimhlophe.

Interview 2: “The Good Wife”, interviewed by Akhona Masiza, February 12, 2025, location withheld.

Interview 3: Mrs Priscilla Iris Noah, interviewed by Akhona Masiza, February 12, 2025, Dube.

APPENDIX C: LETTER OF REQUEST FOR PARTICIPANTS

Information Sheet and Consent to Participate in Research

Date: 31/01/2025

Greetings

My name is Akhona Masiza, a researcher affiliated with the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), within the School of Religion, Philosophy and Classics. I can be reached at [redacted] or via email at [redacted].

You are being invited to participate in a research study that focuses on uncovering the narratives of Black women in Soweto's Methodist community from 1950 to 2000, within a framework of feminist historiography.

Purpose of the Study

This study aims to document and analyse the roles and contributions of Black women in shaping Methodism within Soweto's racially divided society, highlighting their stories to deepen understanding of women's roles in religious movements. The research seeks to provide valuable insights for current theological discussions and social justice frameworks, enrolling approximately three participants who are members of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA) from Soweto.

Study Procedures

Participation involves one-on-one interviews that will last approximately **1-2 hours**. These interviews will be audio-recorded with your consent and will take place in a location convenient for you. Additional follow-up may occur to clarify information or gather further insights.

Duration of Participation

Your participation in this study is expected to be brief, with a single interview session, although follow-ups may be scheduled based on the needs of the study.

Risks and Discomforts

This study does not anticipate any significant risks. However, discussing personal experiences may elicit emotional responses. In such cases, a referral to counseling services will be offered, with initial sessions covered by the study.

Benefits of the Study

While there are no direct benefits to participants, this study aims to contribute valuable insights to the field of religious studies and feminist theology. The documentation of these narratives will benefit future research and may inform policies to improve support for women in religious and social contexts.

Ethics Approval

This study has been ethically reviewed and approved by the **UKZN Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee** (approval number: [insert number here]).

For any questions, concerns, or issues related to the study, please feel free to contact me directly. Alternatively, you may also contact the UKZN Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee at:

HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION

Research Office, Westville Campus

Govan Mbeki Building

Private Bag X 54001

Durban

4000

KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA

Tel: +27 31 260 4557

Fax: +27 31 260 4609

Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za

Voluntary Participation

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You may decline to participate or withdraw at any time without affecting any benefits or services to which you are otherwise entitled. Should you wish to withdraw, please notify the researcher, and any data collected up to that point will be securely disposed of. If the researcher identifies that participation is no longer suitable for you, they may also conclude your participation.

Costs and Compensation

There are no costs associated with participation. While no direct compensation is provided, reimbursement for transportation to the interview venue may be arranged if necessary.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality will be strictly maintained. All collected data will be stored securely and anonymized in any reports or publications. Audio recordings and transcriptions will be retained in a secure database for five years after the study's completion, after which they will be destroyed.

_____

APPENDIX D: CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPATION

UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL

CONSENT FORM

I, [Participant's Name], have been informed about the study titled ***"The role of Black women in shaping Soweto's Methodism (1950-2000): Uncovering hidden narratives of Black women in a racial society through feminist critical historiography"***, conducted by Akhona Masiza.

I understand the purpose and procedures of the study, and I have been given the opportunity to ask questions and receive satisfactory answers.

I agree that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time without affecting any benefits that I am otherwise entitled to.

I understand the available support should I experience emotional discomfort, and that all data collected will be kept confidential.

If I have further questions or concerns, I may contact the researcher or the UKZN Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee.

Principal Researcher Contact details: [email] 223143441@stu.ukzn.ac.za [c] [redacted]
Researcher supervisor contact details: [email] KumaloR@ukzn.ac.za; [c] [redacted]

Additional Consent

I hereby provide consent to:

- Audio-record my interview YES / NO

[redacted] 11th Feb 2025

Signature of Participant **Date**

[redacted] 11/2/2025

Signature of Witness **Date**

UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL

CONSENT FORM

I, PRISCILLA IRIS NOAH., have been informed about the study titled ***"The role of Black women in shaping Soweto's Methodism (1950-2000): Uncovering hidden narratives of Black women in a racial society through feminist critical historiography"***, conducted by Akhona Masiza.

I understand the purpose and procedures of the study, and I have been given the opportunity to ask questions and receive satisfactory answers.

I agree that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time without affecting any benefits that I am otherwise entitled to.

I understand the available support should I experience emotional discomfort, and that all data collected will be kept confidential.

If I have further questions or concerns, I may contact the researcher or the UKZN Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee.

Principal Researcher Contact details: [email] 223143441@stu.ukzn.ac.za [c] [redacted]

Researcher supervisor contact details: [email] KumaloR@ukzn.ac.za; [c] [redacted]

Additional Consent

I hereby provide consent to:

- Audio-record my interview YES / NO

[redacted] 12.02.2025

Signature of Participant **Date**

[redacted] 12.02.25

Signature of Witness **Date**

UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL

CONSENT FORM

I [redacted] have been informed about the study titled ***"The role of Black women in shaping Soweto's Methodism (1950-2000): Uncovering hidden narratives of Black women in a racial society through feminist critical historiography"***, conducted by Akhona Masiza.

I understand the purpose and procedures of the study, and I have been given the opportunity to ask questions and receive satisfactory answers.

I agree that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time without affecting any benefits that I am otherwise entitled to.

I understand the available support should I experience emotional discomfort, and that all data collected will be kept confidential.

If I have further questions or concerns, I may contact the researcher or the UKZN Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee.

Principal Researcher Contact details: [email] 223143441@stu.ukzn.ac.za [c] [redacted]
Researcher supervisor contact details: [email] KumaloR@ukzn.ac.za; [c] [redacted]

Additional Consent

I hereby provide consent to:

- Audio-record my interview YES / NO

[redacted] 12/02/2025

Signature of Participant **Date**

[redacted] 12/02/2025

Signature of Witness **Date**

APPENDIX E: LETTER TO THE GATE-KEEPER

Akhona Masiza
25[redacted]
[redacted]

09 January 2025

The General Secretary
Rev Musi Losaba
Methodist Connexional Office
33 Ernest Oppenheimer Ave
Bruma Office Park, Bruma
Private Bag X11
Garden View 2047

Dear General Secretary,

REQUEST FOR GATEKEEPER'S PERMISSION LETTER FOR ACADEMIC RESEARCH STUDY

I hope this letter finds you well and in good health. I am writing to formally request a gatekeeper's permission letter from the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA) to facilitate my research project.

I am currently enrolled in the master's program in Theology at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), specializing in Church History. My research dissertation is titled, ***"The role of Black women in shaping Soweto's methodism (1950-2000): Uncovering hidden narratives of Black women in a racial society through feminist critical historiography."*** As part of my research methodology, I intend to conduct a case study of three Methodist women in Soweto. These interviews aim to uncover the pivotal contributions and lived experiences of women within the Methodist tradition during the stated period. The study seeks to amplify these voices while addressing the broader themes of gender, race, and ecclesial history.

The University of KwaZulu-Natal requires ethical clearance before I can begin conducting interviews, and the gatekeeper's permission letter is a prerequisite for this process. My supervisor, Rev. Professor Smangaliso Kumalo, has guided me through this research, ensuring it aligns with ethical and academic standards. I assure you that the utmost care will be taken to respect the dignity, privacy, and autonomy of the participants were indicated so. The research will be conducted with strict adherence to the university's values and ethical protocols as stipulated by the UKZN ethics committee.

I kindly request your office to grant permission for me to access and engage with Methodist women for the purposes of this study. If additional clarification is required, I am more than willing to provide it at your convenience.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Yours sincerely,

[redacted]

Rev. Akhona Masiza

Student, University of KwaZulu-Natal

Student no.: 223143441

akhona.masiza@gmail.com

[redacted]

APPENDIX F: LETTER FROM THE GATE-KEEPER

The Methodist Church of Southern Africa

Tel: +27 (0)11 615 1616
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20th January 2025

Rev. Akhona Masiza
25 Jenkins Street
Margate

Per e-mail: [redacted]
/223143441@stu.ukzn.ac.za

Dear Rev. Akhona Masiza,

RE: ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF LETTER AND GRANTING OF PERMISSION FOR RESEARCH STUDY

We acknowledge receipt of your letter dated 9th January 2025, requesting permission to conduct your Master's research study as part of your academic program at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, under student number 223143441.

It is our pleasure to grant you permission to proceed with your study, which involves the participation of women in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa in the relevant geographic area(s). We are confident that your research interviews will be conducted with the utmost care, respect, and ethical adherence, upholding the dignity of all participants involved.

We commend your dedication to uncovering and preserving the narratives of women within the Methodist Church and pray that your study will significantly contribute to academic discourse and to the historical archives of the MCSA. May this research be a tool for both scholarly advancement and enrichment within our church and broader communities.

We wish you God's blessings as you continue this important work, and we trust that your journey will bear fruit in both your personal, academic and ministerial formation.

Yours faithfully,

[redacted]

REV 'MUSI SJ LOSABA
GENERAL SECRETARY

A Christ-healed Africa for the Healing of Nations

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APPENDIX G: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE

Semi-structured Interview Schedule

Biographic information

- Age: ……
- Gender: ……
- Ethnic or cultural background ……
- Marital status: ……
- Occupation: ……

Religious Background

- Affiliation (e.g., Methodist/other): ……
- Involvement in church activities or groups (e.g., Women's Manyano):

  ……

 Community Engagement

- Involvement in community organizations or activities
- Length of time residing in the community

Objective 1: Analyse the roles and contributions of women in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa in Soweto from 1950 to 2000, highlighting their influence on the church's development and community impact.

Interview Questions:

1. Could you describe specific roles and contributions made by you in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa in Soweto between 1950 and 2000?
2. What contributions by you and other women influenced the development and direction of the Methodist Church during this period?
3. Mention instances where women's agency/participation impacted the church's mission (community outreach or social programs)?
4. How did, the activities and initiatives led by women help address the needs of the Soweto community during times of socio-political change?

Objective 2: Evolution of the roles of (black) women.

Interview Questions:

1. Looking back at that period, how have the roles of women evolved or changed?

1

2. What was the impact of the change or evolution?
3. Which factors led to this change?
4. Did you collaborate with other women or organisation within the Methodist church and beyond to advance the development of the Methodist church and communities around it. If yes, please provide examples of those collaborations.

Objective 3: Investigate the impact of women's contributions on the Methodist Church's response to apartheid and post-apartheid transitions, thereby understanding their role in broader socio-political and economic contexts.

Interview Questions:

1. How did the socio-political context of South Africa from 1950 to 2000 affect women's agency, leadership, and participation in society (and the Methodist Church)?
2. How did black women within the Methodist Church actively respond to the challenges posed by the apartheid regime, and what impact did their actions have on the church's stance and activities?
3. Following the end of apartheid, in what ways did women contribute to the Methodist Church's efforts in supporting the community through the transition towards democracy?
4. Can you discuss the role of women in shaping the church's social justice initiatives, particularly in response to the needs arising from South Africa's socio-political transformation?
5. Reflecting on the period from 1950 to 2000, how do you view the legacy of women's contributions within the Methodist Church in the context of South Africa's broader historical narrative?

Objective 4: To investigate the challenges faced by women in their involvement with the Methodist Church during 1950 to 2000 and identify the opportunities that enabled them to exercise agency and influence

Interview Questions:

1. Can you share some of the major challenges you faced as a woman in the Methodist Church, particularly in terms of dealing with systemic oppression or gender biases? How did these challenges impact your ability to contribute to or lead within the church community?
2. Reflecting on the struggles experienced by Black women-led organizations (e.g. manyano) within the Methodist Church, what were some of the key obstacles these groups faced? How did they

navigate these challenges and what strategies or opportunities did they use to assert their presence and influence?

3. How did your theological training or religious education influence black women's involvement in the Methodist Church during the period from 1950 to 2000? Can you describe any specific teachings or experiences that empowered or constrained your participation?
4. In what ways did you or other women find opportunities to exercise agency and make a significant impact within the Methodist Church during the latter half of the 20th century? Are there specific instances or initiatives you remember that exemplified women's influence and leadership?

Objective 5: To analyse the personal stories and recollections of women integral to the Methodist movement in Soweto and explore how these narratives contribute to the understanding of Southern African methodism today.

Interview Questions:

1. How has the narrative of women's contributions within the Methodist Church been traditionally represented, and what changes do you think study could bring to this narrative?
2. Can you identify instances where women's agency within the church was particularly evident but remains under documented or acknowledged?
3. How do you think the application of feminist critical historiography can alter our understanding of the church's history and women's roles within it?
4. Are there specific women or groups of women whose stories you believe have been overlooked in the church's historical accounts?

APPENDIX H: TURNITIN REPORT

Akhona Masiza

Akhona Masiza - Masters Research Project FINAL (17 JULY 2025)

MA Theology

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APPENDIX I: EDITORS' LETTER

[redacted]

Whittlesea (5360)

Eastern Cape

09 July 2025

To whom it may concern.

RE: CONFIRMATION OF LANGUAGE EDITING

This letter serves to confirm that I have copy edited Rev. Akhona Masiza's research thesis titled *"The Role Of Black Women In Shaping Soweto's Methodism (1950-2000): Uncovering Hidden Narratives Of Black Women In A Racial Society Through Feminist Critical Historiography"*.

Should you need a copy of my certificate, kindly contact me via email at [redacted] or at [redacted]

Bizo Bomela

Master of Social Science (UKZN), Copy Editing (UCT)

[redacted]

APPENDIX J: GLOSSARY OF METHODIST AND STUDY TERMS

Band: A smaller, voluntary group for deeper confession, holiness and discipline (Wesleyan spirituality; MCSA, 2016).

Biblewomen: Lay women trained and commissioned for evangelism, pastoral visitation and teaching, historically vital to Methodist expansion and women's leadership (Dimension, 1993; Mkhwanazi & Kgatla, 2015).

Circuit: A group of local societies under one leadership team with shared oversight and mission (MCSA, 2016).

Class Meeting: A small group for mutual support, accountability, prayer and discipleship within the society (MCSA, 2016).

Connexion**:** The wider Methodist body linking circuits, districts and Conference in shared doctrine, discipline and mission (MCSA, 2016).

District Synod /Conference (MCSA): Annual/deliberative bodies responsible for oversight, discipline and mission priorities across circuits (MCSA, 2016).

Manyano Uniform: Distinctive devotional dress signalling solidarity, discipline and visible witness in worship and community (Haddad, 2016).

Society: The local congregation. In the MCSA, a Society should have at least 15 full members, appointed stewards and functional mission groups (MCSA, 2016:88).

Women's Manyano: Women's prayer/service movement oriented to spiritual formation, welfare, evangelism and leadership (Mkhwanazi & Kgatla, 2015:181–186).