

**THE IMPLICATIONS OF QUEER SEXUALITY
IN MINISTRY: THE EXPERIENCES OF QUEER
CLERGY IN THE METHODIST CHURCH OF
SOUTHERN AFRICA**

By

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DECLARATION

The research described in this thesis was carried out at the School of Religion, Philosophy and Classics, at the University of KwaZulu-Natal – Pietermaritzburg campus under the supervision of Professor Philippe Denis.

I.....declare that:

1. The research reported in this thesis, except where otherwise indicated, is my original research.
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Date.....

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DEDICATION

To the queer clergy in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa

ABSTRACT

The question of whether the Church should or should not solemnise same-sex unions is a burning issue in the churches in South Africa. The Methodist Church of Southern Africa has been in conversation over same-sex unions since the year 2001, to date. The conversation began with great hope of inclusion and affirmation when the 2001 conference adopted the principle that the Methodist Church seeks to be a community of love rather than rejection. This study evaluates whether the community of love has been in praxis or it is only reflected on paper.

I have noticed that heterosexual people, especially men, have been in the forefront of the same-sex conversation in the Methodist Church. The LGBTIQ+ persons in the MCSA have been left behind in the conversation. Therefore, this study explores the lived experiences of queer ministers who minister in a church which holds different views on same-sex relationships. This study contributes to the growing literature on the same-sex debate in the Methodist Church and in the broader Christian communities. Lastly, the significance and uniqueness of this study is that it documents the lived experiences of queer clergy in the Methodist Church.

Queer ministers encounter a lot of resistance from the church and society in general because of their sexuality. It is evident through the experiences of the participants that when people are open about their queer sexual identity in the church, problems arise, especially from homophobic congregants. As a result, queer ministers choose to remain in a closet in order to avoid alienation. There are four themes that seemed to be evident in the lives of all queer ministers interviewed. These themes were: stigma and shame, fear and rejection, trauma, and spirituality in the ministry. Although queer ministers are being alienated, they have maintained an undying passion for ministry and social justice as well as the desire to serve the people of God.

Table of Contents

DECLARATION	2
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	3
DEDICATION	5
ABSTRACT.....	6
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND	9
Background of the study.....	9
Motivation and contribution of the study	13
Research problem	14
Key research question	15
Research sub-questions	15
Research objectives	15
Location of the researcher.....	16
Literature Review.....	17
Conclusion.....	24
CHAPTER 2: THEORY AND METHOD	26
Introduction	26
Queer theological framework.....	26
Oral history research method.....	31
Data Collection.....	33
Ethical Considerations	35
Conclusion.....	38
CHAPTER 3: NARRATIVES OF PARTICIPANTS	40
Introduction	40
Brief background of participants	40
Sexual orientation and coming out	43
Resistance in the Church	49
Resistance in society.....	52
Support in the church	54
Conclusion.....	55
CHAPTER 4: ANALYSIS.....	58
Introduction	58
Stigma and shame.....	58
Fear and rejection.....	61

Trauma	63
Spirituality in the ministry	66
Conclusion.....	68
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION.....	70
Personal reflections	70
Summary of findings	71
Summary of contribution.....	73
BIBLIOGRAPHY	75
APENDIX A: ETHICAL CLEARANCE	81
APENDIX B: CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPATION	82
APENDIX C: INTERVIEW RELEASE FORM.....	86
APENDIX D: COUNSELING LETTER	89
APENDIX E: LETTER FROM THE GATE-KEEPER	90
APENDIX F: LETTER OF REQUEST FOR PARTICIPANTS	91
APENDIX G: QUESTIONNAIRE	92
APENDIX H: TURNITIN REPORT CERTIFICATE.....	94

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Background of the study

The same-sex dialogue was officially initiated in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA) by the Doctrine Ethics and Worship Committee (DEWCOM) meeting that was held on the 11th -12th of July 2000. In that meeting, James Gribble, introduced a very helpful chronology of conference¹ resolutions on human sexuality since 1980.² Since South Africa became a democratic country, the rights of people who belong to the LGBTI+³ community had to be reviewed not only by the state but by the church too. According to Bentley, this led to the beginning of the same-sex marriage debate in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa by the year 2001.⁴

The conversation began with great hope for inclusion and affirmation when the 2001 conference adopted the following principle: “The MCSA seeks to be a community of love rather than rejection”.⁵ This meant that the MCSA welcomed all people despite their sexual orientations. The church obliged itself to make a decision that would not be harmful to anyone. This meant that whatever resolution that was going to be taken by the MCSA on this matter, would be of love rather than exclusion of people because of their sexual orientations. However, many church members complain that the situation on the ground has not changed. They think that the community of love was just on paper, and not in practice.

In 2003, the MCSA recognised that it was not easy to take a stand in this matter while many people, especially in rural circuits⁶ did not clearly understand homosexuality. In that case, the

¹ Conference is the MCSA’s governing authority and supreme legislative body which provides direction and inspiration for the church.

² Methodist Church of Southern Africa, *Yearbook 2000/2001* (Cape Town: Methodist Publishing House, 2000/2001) p. 218

³ Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex and other

⁴ Wessel Bentley, “A Decade of the Same-Sex Debate in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa, 2001-2011” *Studia Historiae Ecclesiae* 38, (2012) p. 2

⁵ Methodist Church of Southern Africa, *Methodist Book of Order* (Cape Town: Methodist Publishing House, 2016) p. 225

⁶ A circuit is a combination of several Methodist societies in a particular geographical area or town. Circuits oversee and coordinate the work of Societies

church saw the need to educate the Methodist people about human sexuality. In 2004, “a study guide on same sex relationships was presented and referred to by the conference for discussion by circuits and districts⁷.”⁸ The conversation was moved from the synods and conference to the people in the grassroots. This was a wise initiative because there are very few people who are members of conference and this matter required not only the views of conference members but the views of all Methodist people. In 2005, after a robust debate over the years, the conference acknowledged the diversity on the same-sex debate within the MCSA. This conference made the following call: “The MCSA to commit to an ongoing journey of discovering what it means to be part of a church which embraces many different and even opposing views, on this issue”.⁹

The state had declared in section 9 (3) of the Bill of Rights: “The state may not unfairly discriminate directly or indirectly against anyone on one or more grounds, including race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language and birth”.¹⁰ This resulted in robust conversations on the same-sex unions which led to the endorsement of the Civil Union Act of 2006. The Civil Union Act of 2006 which allowed same-sex marriage in South Africa laid a lot of pressure on the same-sex dialogue in the church. There was a contradiction between the state law and the church polity. Methodist ministers were authorised by the state to be marriage officers which included officiating same-sex marriages as per the Civil Union Act of 2006. However, the church did not allow them to officiate same-sex marriages. Ministers were caught in the middle. Despite the Civil Union Act of 2006, the Connexional Executive of 2006 declared: “The MCSA continues to recognise marriage as only between a man and a woman”.¹¹ Moreover, the conference stated it clearly that there was no same-sex marriage that was going to be officiated or blessed by a Methodist minister.

⁷ A district is a combination of circuits in a particular geographical area or province.

⁸ Methodist Church of Southern Africa, *Yearbook 2004* (Cape Town: Methodist Publishing House, 2004) p. 264

⁹ Methodist Church of Southern Africa, *2006 Yearbook and Directory* (Cape Town: Methodist Publishing House, 2006) p. 75

¹⁰ Constitutional Assembly, *The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996* (Cape Town: National Legislature, 1996) p. 6

¹¹ Methodist Church of Southern Africa, *2007 Yearbook and Directory* (Cape Town: Methodist Publishing House, 2007) p. 50

In 2010, the Reverend's Atwell, Alistoun and Scholtz published a book under the title *In Search of Grace and Truth: Christian Conversations on Same-Sex Relationships*. This book was adopted as the official material to be used to conduct workshops and teach people in the societies¹² about human sexuality and the same-sex dialogue in the MCSA. As Wessel Bentley, a Methodist theologian put it: "Disappointingly, the church did not engage this material and entire sections of the MCSA, specifically black rural communities, refrained from discussing the issue at all, deeming it a white problem which is a taboo in black communities".¹³ It is a pity that even today, there are societies that have never discussed this matter, especially black societies in the MCSA.

According to Bentley, there are homosexual people in almost every Methodist society in the connexion and some have left the church because of exclusion.¹⁴ This exclusion has been extensively seen in the case of Reverend Ecclesia de Lange, which attracted the attention of the media in South Africa. According to Kumalo, De Lange was discontinued as a Methodist minister after she told her congregation in 2009 that she had intentions to marry her partner who was also a female.¹⁵

The position of the MCSA is expressed in the following statement:

Among us are those who believe that the Bible is clear in its condemnation of all homosexual acts as contrary to the will of God. Also among us are those who believe that the Bible does not condemn all homosexual acts, namely those between two consenting adults in a mutually loving, faithful and committed relationship.

Among us are those who believe that the biblical norm for marriage is between one man and one woman only and that any deviation from this pattern is against the express will of God. Also among us are those who believe that God's primary concern is for the quality of our loving, and that two people of the same gender who truly love each other can enter into the bonds of marriage with the blessing of God and the Church.

¹² A society, is a local Methodist congregation. It is known as a parish in other denominations.

¹³ Bentley, *A Decade in the Same-Sex Debate*, p. 7

¹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 1

¹⁵ Raymond Kumalo, "Us and Them in the One and Undivided Church: The Methodist Church and the Same-Sex Sexuality Debate", *Journal of Gender and Religion in Africa* 17, 2. (2012) p. 180-181

Among us are those who believe that those in loving, faithful and committed same-sex relationships can serve as leaders of the Church and be ordained as Ministers of the gospel. Also among us are those who believe that those in such relationships cannot serve in these ways. All of us believe that the Church is called to be a community of love and not rejection with a responsibility to extend pastoral care to all people irrespective of their sexual orientation, and that no-one should be excluded from any aspect of the Church's life and ministry solely on the basis of their sexual orientation. We believe that any form of victimization, hatred or violence towards homosexual people should be condemned in the strongest possible terms.

We believe that there is far more that binds us together than what divides us, and that not even our different convictions on this issue need compromise the essential unity that is ours in Christ.

We believe that the grace of God is such that even in the shortcomings that are ours as people, we can still point others to the great truth of the unconditional love of God that Christ has made known and the Spirit has brought near.

We re-affirm that the MCSA is not yet ready to apply for its ministers to officiate at same-sex unions because there is still a need for further conversation in relation to the theology of marriage, the exercise of conscience, pastoral implications and the perceived marginalisation of people in same-sex relationships. Conference directs ministers to facilitate a conducive environment for the church to listen to the silent voices.¹⁶

The MCSA still recognises marriage between a man and a woman.¹⁷ However, the 2017 conference allowed ministers to follow their conscience in providing pastoral care to LGBTI+ people. This includes officiating in same-sex marriages. It is upon the conscious of a minister to officiate a same-sex marriage. Those who do not want to officiate, are not obligated to officiate same-sex marriages. In this case, the church had decided not to be prescriptive in this matter. However, it has given room for those ministers who are willing to officiate in same-sex marriages. The MCSA has requested all those who officiate in same-sex marriages to utter these words at the beginning of the ceremony:

¹⁶ Methodist Church of Southern Africa, Book of Order, p. 228

¹⁷ Ibid, p. 226

I am officiating here today in my capacity as a Methodist minister. But I need to acknowledge that within the Methodist Church of Southern Africa there are widely differing convictions when it comes to the issue of same-sex relationships. The Methodist Church has acknowledged, honestly and courageously, that we are not all of one mind on this matter. There are colleagues of mine who do not agree with my participation here today, but who allow me the freedom to act according to my conscience to exercise the kind of pastoral care that I feel called to offer to [A.B.] and [C.D.]. For this I am grateful.¹⁸

I am also aware that there are many pressing challenges in the MCSA besides the same-sex conversation. Firstly, it is gender identity and culture. This is stressed by the recent saga of Reverend Vukile Mehana who has referred to women ministers as inferior to men. The sad part is that he said this ‘in the name of culture’.¹⁹ There are many cases of this nature where women ministers are degraded and humiliated even after more than 40 years the MCSA resolved to ordain women. Secondly, it is the ongoing influence of whiteness. It is particularly white heterosexual men who have been in the forefront of the same-sex conversation. It is also in mostly white dominated Methodist societies where the conversations of same-sex relationships take place. It seems as if many black Methodists are not willing to discuss this matter. Thirdly, ethnicity and tribalism are serious issues facing the MCSA today. Monoametsi, a Methodist minister, states: “The greatest struggle of the MCSA family is that of being a Sotho, Tswana, Xhosa, Ndebele, Venda, Swati, etc. and being sons, daughters, followers and disciples of Jesus.”²⁰

Motivation and contribution of the study

2018 marks the 19th year of the MCSA’s engagement on the issue of the same-sex dialogue. It has been evident over the past years engagement that the Methodist people are divided on this matter. The fact that this dialogue has taken so long, means that it is not easy for the church. Therefore, it requires a contribution of every person in the church. I was motivated by the

¹⁸ Methodist Church of Southern Africa, 2018 Yearbook and Directory (Cape Town: Methodist Publishing House, 2018) p. 104

¹⁹ Zipho Siwa, “Communique on Rev Dr Mehana and Raymond Sibanga’s Recording”, (Office of the MCSA Presiding Bishop press release, December 31, 2018).

²⁰ Kamogelo Monoametsi, “The elephant in the room: which kingdom are you representing?” Dimension Newspaper, January, 2017, p. 7

MCSA's call for an ongoing conversation which is reflected below, to contribute to this dialogue by documenting the lived experiences of queer clergy:

The MCSA calls for an ongoing process of respectful dialogue and truthful engagement between those holding differing views, not with the intention of ultimately having one mind on the issue, which is unlikely, but rather to come to a deepened understanding of what it means to be the one body of Christ.²¹

I have noticed that heterosexual people, especially men, have been in the forefront of the same-sex conversations in the MCSA. The LGBTI+ people in the MCSA have been left behind in the conversations. Moreover, there is no voice of queer ministers or queer lay persons in the existing literature in the MCSA. There are not many instances of LGBTI+ people taking part in conversations on sexual issues in the MCSA. The matter, however, is not well documented. In this case, there is a gap in the academic literature. Therefore, this study seeks to explore the lived experiences of queer ministers who minister in a church that hold different views on human sexuality and same-sex relationships. This study will contribute to the growing literature on the same-sex debate in the MCSA and in the broader Christian communities. Lastly, the significance and uniqueness of this study is that it documents the lived experiences of queer clergy in the MCSA, which has never been done before.

Research problem

It is a fact that the MCSA is home to many people who belong to the LGBTI+ community. As mentioned before, the MCSA has professed to be a church that seeks to be a “community of love rather than rejection”.²² However, this has not been evident in the practical life of the church. The MCSA seems to be good in adopting excellent resolutions that give a nice picture of the church. These resolutions are not often taken into praxis. The case of a queer minister, Reverend Ecclesia de Lange who was discontinued by the MCSA, suggests that the MCSA is not a community of love as it claims in its constitution. It was in December 2009 when Ecclesia told the congregation she served in Cape Town about her sexual orientation and the intentions

²¹ Methodist Church of Southern Africa, Book of Order, p. 226

²² Ibid, p. 225

to enter a civil union with Amanda, a same-sex partner. She stated: “I have come to see that it is better to be rejected for who I am than to be accepted for who I am not.”²³ In the same month she got married. Ecclesia’s status as ordained minister was discontinued. She married a same sex partner while the MCSA recognised “marriage as only between a man a woman.”²⁴ By doing so, she had breached the laws and discipline of the MCSA. This means that the MCSA only tolerates queer ministers if they remain celibate. Although there has been no case where the church has disciplined a minister because of disclosing his or her status, many queer ministers remain in a closet because of fear of alienation. Refusing queer clergy to marry their same-sex partners is denying them an opportunity to exercise their right. Denying ministers to officiate same-sex marriages is limiting the ministers in exercising pastoral care which is part of their call.

Key research question

The main research question is: What have been the experiences of queer clergy in ministry in the MCSA?

Research sub-questions

The first question is about the implications of queer sexuality in ministry in the MCSA as described by the queer clergy who will be interviewed. The second question is about the theological and social motivations of queer clergy who will be interviewed to remain in ministry despite them being alienated by the church. The third question is about the challenges queer clergy who will be interviewed have encountered in the church and society.

Research objectives

The objectives of this study is to explore the gender implications of queer sexuality in ministry in the MCSA; the theological and social motivations of interviewed queer clergy to remain in

²³ Judith Kotze and Ecclesia de Lange, “Suspended, disciplined and discontinued: A practical approach towards inclusion”, *Journal of Gender and Religion in Africa* 17, 2. (2011), p. 197

²⁴ Methodist Church of Southern Africa, “2007 Yearbook and Directory” (Cape Town: Methodist Publishing House, 2007) p. 50

ministry; and the challenges encountered by interviewed queer clergy in the MCSA and in societies they serve.

Location of the researcher

It is always impossible to be neutral in a research project. Therefore, it is important for me to locate myself so that the reader can be able to see the things that influence my thoughts and reasons. Firstly, I am an insider in this study because I am a member of the MCSA. Being an insider has both advantages and disadvantages. The advantage is that I know the right people to go to and I have been following the same-sex dialogue inside the church. Although it may be easy to find information as an insider, it has been difficult for me to find participants in this study. Most of queer ministers in the MCSA are in a closet. It is possible that having only four participants is simply because I am an insider.

I grew up in *Nhlangwini*, a village outside Harding town. This is a village of a black Zulu community where Zulu traditional customs are very important. There was no space for homosexuality. As a result, my mother found out that my older sister was dating another girl in the village and she was beaten for that. They were called *isitabane* or *inkonkoni*, which are terms used to describe homosexual persons in my language. I also used those terms because I didn't think of them as offensive. The idea was that once someone acts as a gay or a lesbian, they shall be beaten in order for them to come back to their senses. Even at school, we were never taught about something else besides male and female. That is even far, we were never taught even about sex, although it was there in our learner's books.

I was confirmed as a member of the MCSA at the age of fifteen. The subject of homosexuality was never there in my local church. It is something we did not talk about. Although the conference had directed ministers to convene workshops on sexuality but it was never initiated in the Methodist circuit in Harding. I would pick up at times from senior members in the church referring to homosexuality as a sin. I believed that without even reading carefully into the scriptures. Therefore, I grew up knowing that homosexuality is sinful and it was a no-go zone for a Christian. As a result, I distanced myself from people who were perceived as gays or lesbians in my village, school and church.

My first encounter with LGBTIQ+ persons who were open about their sexuality was in 2014 when I arrived at the university. Although I embraced them as friends, I maintained that homosexuality was sinful. I had that perception until 2017 when I received formal education on gender studies in a course entitled: “Issues of Masculinity and Gender”.²⁵ This course helped me with tools to read the bible with an open mind in relation to homosexuality. I also gained a lot of knowledge on terminology related to sexuality and the depth of queerness. It was through this course that my thinking was transformed. I dropped the notion of thinking of homosexuality as a sin and began to embrace queer people around me. I believe that the LGBTI+ persons, like heterosexual beings, resemble the greatness of God who in his mightiness created different kinds of people. I decided to embark on this study because I believe it will help some individuals and the church to embrace and affirm LGBTI+ persons.

Literature Review

Lived experiences of LGBTIQ+ in South Africa

One of the earliest published work on the lived experiences of people with queer sexuality in South Africa is a book edited by Mark Gevisser and Edwin Cameron (1994) under the title, *Defiant Desire: Gay and lesbian lives in South Africa*. At the time of the publication, Mark Gevisser was a journalist for the *Weekly Mail* while Edwin Cameron was a practising human rights lawyer and academic at the Centre for Applied Legal Studies at Wits University. This is an edited book with a collection of articles on the lived experiences of gays and lesbians in South Africa.

In a chapter under the title “A drag at Madame Castello’s: Cape moffie life and the popular press in the 1950s and 1960s”,²⁶ Chetty takes us back to the 1950s events where gays and lesbians in the Cape came out from the closet to the public. These were the concerts where gays and lesbians paraded on the streets. Therefore, this article gives us insight of homosexuality in

²⁵ Issues of Masculinity and Gender is an introductory course for Honours students on the complexities in sexuality and religion offered by the School of Religion Philosophy and Classics at the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

²⁶ Dhianaraj Chetty, “A drag at Madame Castello’s: Cape moffie life and the popular press in the 1950s and 1960s”, in *Defiant Desire: Gay and lesbian lives in South Africa*, ed. Mark Gevisser and Edwin Caemeroon (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1994), p. 115-127

the 1950s in South Africa. However, the limitations of this chapter is that it portrays only the lives of white and coloured gay people. Lewis and Loots²⁷ in a book chapter under the title “*Moffies and manvroue: Gay and lesbian life histories in contemporary Cape Town*” tell the story of two gay and lesbian couples in Cape Town. Peter and Hennie, a gay couple in the 1970s. Trish and Derese, a lesbian couple in the 1980s. This work emphasises the implications of coming out and the consequences of rejection faced by these couples in their families because of their unaccepted sexualities.

McLean and Ngcobo²⁸ in their chapter under the title “Abangibhamayo bathi ngimnandi (Those who fuck me say I’m tasty): Gay sexuality in Reef townships” record the lived experiences of fourteen gays who are members of the Gay and Lesbian Organisation of Witwatersrand (GLOW). The focus of the story is from the first time they realised they were gay, their first experience of having sex with other men, coming out, marriage, sex for money in the mines, social life and AIDS. This is a very interesting chapter since it is based on the lived experiences of gay men. However, the author focused a lot on sex as if homosexuality is only about sex. I think there is a lot that the author should have explored given the opportunity to interview people. This chapter could have been more fascinating if the author also included the aspects of family life of the gay men interviewed.

Sam²⁹ in a chapter under the title “Five women: Black lesbian life on the Reef records the lived experiences of five black lesbians” records the lived experiences of five black lesbians. Bongie is a chicken lesbian, Thandazo comes from a homophobic family, Tilla is a dyke, Zubeida comes from a Muslim family and Sibongile is a sangoma. Interestingly are the intersections in the lives of these lesbians.

²⁷ Jack Lewis and Francois Loots, “Moffies and manvroue: Gay and lesbian life histories in contemporary Cape Town”, in *Defiant Desire: Gay and lesbian lives in South Africa*, ed. Mark Gevisser and Edwin Caemeroon (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1994) p. 140-157

²⁸ Hugh McLean and Linda Ngcobo, “Abangibhamayo bathi ngimnandi (Those who fuck me say I’m tasty): Gay sexuality in Reef townships”, in *Defiant Desire: Gay and lesbian lives in South Africa*, ed. Mark Gevisser and Edwin Caemeroon (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1994) p. 158-185

²⁹ Tanya Sam, “Five women: Black lesbian life on the Reef records the lived experiences of five black lesbians”, in *Defiant Desire: Gay and lesbian lives in South Africa*, ed. Mark Gevisser and Edwin Caemeroon (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1994) p. 186-197

Vimbela and Olivier³⁰ in a chapter entitled “Climbing on her shoulders: An interview with Umtata’s first lesbian” accounts the life story of Vera, the first lesbian who publicly came out of the closet in Umtata. The complexity is coming out in a black community that had suppressed homosexuality which result to stigmatisation and shame. Nkoli³¹ in a chapter entitled “Coming out as a black gay activist in South Africa” records his lived experiences as a black gay in South Africa. The emphasis is on the implications of coming which suddenly changes the way in which people perceive you.

The book by Zandile Nkabinde³² under the title *Black Bull, Ancestors and Me: My Life as a Lesbian Sangoma* is very important in this study. This book is about the lived experiences of a lesbian traditional healer. Nkabinde mentions that she hardly menstruated because she had the spirit of Nkunzi, a male ancestor.³³ She would only menstruate when a female ancestor is within her. This book contributes to the debate of whether homosexuality is African or not. If homosexuality is not African, the ancestors would not have called Zandile, a lesbian to be a sangoma. Nkabinde claims that the ancestors called her and continue to use her as a traditional her despite her sexuality.³⁴ Zandile was requested by her trainer and some elders to hide her sexuality. This means that the elders only appreciates Zandile if she is in a closet. This book dismisses the notion that homosexuality is alien in Africa.

Marc Epprecht³⁵ is one of the leading scholars in the history of gender and sexuality in Africa. In his book under the title *Sexuality and social justice in Africa, rethinking: rethinking homophobia and forgetting resistance* mentions that “the three main groups of faith in Africa (Traditional, Christianity and Islam) have been interpreted wrong to say they are against homosexuality”.³⁶ In fact, they are more inclusive than exclusive. This book will help to understand the beliefs that influence the homophobic people. It will also be useful in providing

³⁰ Vela Vimbela and Mike Olivier, “Climbing on her shoulders: An interview with Umtata’s first lesbian”, in *Defiant Desire: Gay and lesbian lives in South Africa*, ed. Mark Gevisser and Edwin Caemeroon (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1994) p. 193-197

³¹ Simon Nkoli, “Coming out as a black gay activist in South Africa”, in *Defiant Desire: Gay and lesbian lives in South Africa*, ed. Mark Gevisser and Edwin Caemeroon (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1994) p. 249-257

³² Zandile Nkabinde, *Black Bull, Ancestors and Me: My Life as a Lesbian Sangoma* (Auckland Park: Fanele, 2008)

³³ *Ibid*, p. 19

³⁴ *Ibid*, p. 9

³⁵ Marc Epprecht, *Sexuality and social justice in Africa, rethinking: rethinking homophobia and forgetting resistance* (London: Zed Books, 2013)

³⁶ *Ibid*, p.66

tools for social justice in sexuality that can also be applied in the church since this study is located in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa. Another important book by Marc Epprecht³⁷ in this study is under the title *Hungochani: The history of a dissident sexuality in Southern Africa*. Hungochani is a Shona term meaning homosexuality. Therefore, if there is a term in an African indigenous language meaning homosexuality, people cannot brag that homosexuality is alien in Africa.

An important book to understand queer sexuality in South Africa is by Mikki van Zyl and Melissa Steyn under the title *Performing queer, shaping sexualities 1994-2004*. This book is a collection of chapters which explore people's shaping and reconfiguring sexualities that are not perceived as straight. It is about queer people's identifications and expressions of sexuality, and what they say about their lives since democratisation. This book is important for this study because the research participants who were interviewed share the same sentiments of rejection and stigmatisation as those mentioned in the book. It will be useful in this study because it contains the experiences of South African queer people since this study is also about exploring the experiences of queer. Since this book tells the story of ordinary South Africans, this study contributes with the stories of queer clergy in the Christian church.

Another important source in the study of sexuality in South Africa is an article by Donald Donham³⁸ under the title "Freeing South Africa: The modernisation of male-male sexuality in Soweto". Donham in this article takes us into the township of Soweto and gives us a picture of a queer person's funeral in the township through the funeral of Linda, the founding member of GLOW (Gay and Lesbian Organisation of Witwatersrand). This article gives us an idea of how sexuality is perceived in black communities and townships. In this study there is also one black gay minister who serves in a black community. It is communities which shape and influence the Methodist people because they belong to them.

³⁷ Marc Epprecht, *Hungochani: The history of a dissident sexuality in Southern Africa* (London: McGill-Queens University Press, 2004)

³⁸ Donald Donham, "Freeing South Africa: The modernisation of male-male sexuality in Soweto", *Cultural Anthropology* 13, 1. (1998)

A very important book on homosexuality in South Africa is by Graeme Reid³⁹ under the title *How to be a real gay: Gay identities in small town South Africa*. In this book, Reid offers an in depth ethnography of changing forms of self-understanding and social organization amongst gays living in the South African small communities in a time of democratic transition. This book is significant of its special focus on the everyday practices of local gay people in hair salons, churches, taverns, and meeting halls.

This study is located in the discipline of History of Christianity. It is important therefore to trace the history of homosexuality in South Africa. Ken Cage⁴⁰ has done extensive research on this area in his book under the title *The language of kinks and queens: A history and dictionary of gay language in South Africa*. In this book, Cage (2003) traces the origins of the gay language and terms associated to homosexuality in South Africa. He also document the developments of gay culture in South African history. This book is significant in my study because it provides the history of queer persons in South Africa. Through this book we learn of the development of the gay culture over the years. Cage mentions the views of the Church on homosexuality in the past but does not mention any story of a homosexual church leader. My study will then contribute to this history by the lived experiences of queer clergy in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa.

Church and same-sex sexuality in South Africa

An important book in the study of homosexuality and the Christian faith in South Africa is by Paul Germond and Steve de Gruchy⁴¹ under the title *Aliens in the household of God: homosexuality and Christian faith in South Africa*. Germond and de Gruchy record the stories of ordinary homosexual Christians in South Africa. Most importantly in this book it is recorded the lived experiences of queer ordained ministers of different denominations in South Africa. The ministers who share their experiences are from the Dutch Reformed Church, Anglican

³⁹ Graeme Reid, *How to be a real gay: Gay identities in small town South Africa* (Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2013)

⁴⁰ Ken Cage, *The language of kinks and queens: A history and dictionary of gay language in South Africa* (Houghton: Jacana Media, 2003)

⁴¹ Paul Germond and Steve de Gruchy, *Aliens in the household of God: homosexuality and Christian faith in South Africa* (Cape Town: David Philip Publishers, 1997)

Church and the Roman Catholic Church, excluding the Methodist Church of Southern Africa. Therefore, my study will fill the gap by exploring also the lived experiences of queer Methodist clergy. Again, documented in this book are only the stories of white priests and lay Christians. This is the limitation of this book because the experiences of a white gay minister can never be universal.

The above book is similar to what Heather Garner and Michael Worsnip⁴² writes of their life stories as homosexual clergy in an article under the title “Oil and water: the impossibility of gay and lesbian identity with in the Church”. Both these sources are useful in this study to bring the lived experiences of queer clergy. However, in both of them, there are no stories of queer Methodist ministers. The experiences of an Anglican gay priest is not necessarily representative of the experiences of the other ministers, especially in other denominations in South Africa.

Another important source in the study of sexuality and the church is an article by Cheryl Potgieter and Finn Reygan⁴³ under the title “Disruptive or merely alternative: A case study of a South African gay church”. In this article, Potgieter and Reygan do a case study of the South African Good Hope Metropolitan Community Church (GHMCC), which has its origins abroad and is attended by gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (LBGT) congregants. This article is useful in this study which through it we will explore on how the GHMCC managed to be an inclusive church to the LGBTI community while it exist in a homophobic society.

One of the important books on the same-sex dialogue in the MCSA is written by Atwell, Alistoun and Scholtz⁴⁴ who are Methodist ministers directed by conference under the title *In search of grace and truth: Christian conversations on same-sex relationships*. This book was adopted as the official material to be used to conduct workshops and teach people in the societies about human sexuality and the same-sex dialogue in the MCSA. It contains deep

⁴² Heather Garner and Michael Worsnip, Oil and Water: “The impossibility of gay and lesbian identity within the Church”, In *Towards an Agenda for Contextual Theology: Essays in honour of Albert Nolan*, ed. McGlory Speckman and Larry Kaufman (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2001)

⁴³ Cheryl Potgieter and Finn Reygan, “Disruptive or merely alternative: A case study of a South African gay church”, *Journal of Gender and Religion in Africa* 17, 2. (2011)

⁴⁴ Tim Attwell, Ray Allistoun and Roger Scholtz, *In search of grace and truth: Christian conversations on same-sex relationships* (Cape Town: Cingela Press, 2010)

questions on homosexuality and the love of God. However, this book is written by white heterosexual Methodist ministers. Secondly, it documents stories of white homosexual Christians. Thirdly, this book was intended to educate Methodist people about homosexuality but it was never translated into the languages that are commonly spoken in the black Methodist societies.

Kumalo in his article under the title “Us and Them in the one and undivided church: the Methodist Church and the same-sex sexuality debate” investigates the causes of divisions among Methodists on the issue of same-sex. Kumalo notes the fundamental cause of division on the matter which is culture.⁴⁵ This article is significant in this study to help explore the causes of divisions among the people called Methodists in Southern Africa on same-sex. This article simply brings to our attention that South African cultures are against same-sex relationships or marriages. The logic then is that church members are members of the community in which same-sex is rejected. Therefore, culture influence congregants in one way or another.

Kotze and de Lange⁴⁶ in this article entitled “Suspended, disciplined and discontinued: A practical approach towards inclusion” trace Rev. Ecclesia de Lange’s painful journey towards exclusion, and documents the role that faith-based organizations such as Inclusive and Affirming Ministries (IAM) can play toward affirming and including people of same-sex sexual orientation. This article is therefore significant since it demonstrate the experiences of one of the MCSA’s clergy who was brave enough to disclose her sexuality. Moreover, this article demonstrate exclusion in the church which the participants in this study have experienced over the years. Therefore it is useful in this study since it reveals the lived experience of one among many queer clerics in the MCSA.

Bentley in an article under the title “A decade of the same-sex debate in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa, 2001-2011” provides the history of the same-sex debate in the Methodist

⁴⁵ Kumalo, “Us and Them”, p. 186

⁴⁶ Judith Kotze and Ecclesia de Lange, “Suspended, disciplined and discontinued: A practical approach towards inclusion”, *Journal of Gender and Religion in Africa* 17, 2. (2011)

Church of Southern Africa. This article is significant because it gives us the emergence and the development of the same-sex sexuality debate in the MCSA which is a study I hope to contribute. Bentley outline the resolutions taken by conference on the issue of same-sex from year 2001 to 2011. This article helps us to gain insight on the history on the same-sex debate and its development in the MCSA. However, I do not agree with Bentley that “the MCSA should not rush into declaring its mind on this issue”.⁴⁷ I believe that the church knows the right decision to take but it is afraid of losing homophobic members. The more the church delays, the more queer members suffer.

Mtshiselwa⁴⁸ in an article under the title “How the Methodist Church of Southern Africa Read Leviticus 18: 22 and 20: 13 in view of homosexuality” introduces the Wesleyan methodology for theological reflection in the discussion of homosexuality in the MCSA: scripture, tradition reason and experience.⁴⁹ There is a gap in the element of experience in this paper. It is that element that this project is bringing in this discussion through exploring the lived experiences of queer clergy in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa.

Another important source in the study of sexuality in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa is an article by Sifiso Khuzwayo⁵⁰ under the title “God and Caesar: A queer debate on interpretation in South African Church”. In this article, Khuzwayo investigates how texts that are regarded as authoritative may be used to foster unity within a community in which divergent ethical views exist. His particular reference is the homosexuality debate within the Methodist Church of Southern Africa. A comparative analysis of models of reading authoritative texts such as the Christian scriptures and the South African constitution is employed. Therefore this article is useful to my study because it displays a conversation between the South African constitution, the Bible and the Methodist Laws and Disciplines.

⁴⁷ Bentley, “A decade of the same-sex debate”, p. 7

⁴⁸ Ndikho Mtshiselwa, “How the Methodist Church of Southern Africa Read Leviticus 18: 22 and 20: 13 in view of homosexuality”, *Old Testament Essays* 23, 3. (2010) p. 769-787

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, p. 722

⁵⁰ Sifiso Khuzwayo, “God and Caesar: A queer debate on interpretation in South African Church”, *Journal of Gender and Religion in Africa* 17, 2. (2011)

Conclusion

It is clear in the background of the study that the MCSA has changed gradually on the same-sex dialogue over the past 18 years. The first step towards change was the formal initiation of the conversation on same-sex relationships in 2001. The second step was to move the dialogue from the conference for discussion by the people in the local churches. Although it has been many years, it is better that the conversation continues than dismissing or ignoring it. The MCSA have come to understand that its people are divided on the matter, and the church seeks not to find one voice but to encourage the Methodist people to embrace and respect each other despite their differences. I say the MCSA is gradually changing because it has given permission to ministers who are willing to preside over same-sex marriages.

There is a lot of literature on the lives and experiences of queer persons since the 1950s to post-apartheid South Africa. The literature covers the intersectionality of race, class and age as it is about different kinds of people in South Africa. It is interesting that the literature also covers the topic of homosexuality and Christianity in South Africa. Moreover, there is literature on the lived experiences of ordained ministers in South Africa. However, there is no specific study that has been conducted on the lived experiences of queer clergy in the MCSA. This study contributes to the existing literature with the lived experiences of queer clergy in the MCSA.

CHAPTER 2: THEORY AND METHOD

Introduction

In this chapter I describe the theoretical framework and methodology used in this study. Queer theory and oral history have been combined to explore the lived experiences of queer clergy in the MCSA. This is done as a way to collect, organise and represent the experiences of persons who often feel silenced, or whose narratives, life stories and professional experiences are discussed and framed by a largely heteronormative church community. In this chapter, I explore in depth the queer theory as a framework to approach this study, and oral history as a method to explore the life histories of queer clergy in the MCSA. I further discuss the data collection process which includes sampling and the interviewing process. Lastly, I discuss the ethical considerations since this study deals with a vulnerable community.

This study is located in a qualitative, interpretive research paradigm because through oral histories I hope to collect, understand and interpret the lived experiences of queer clergy in the MCSA. According to Flick “Qualitative research studies participants’ knowledge and practices”.⁵¹ This means that this type of research is practical and deals with the social lives of people in their daily life experiences. In this case, it is through a qualitative study that the lived experiences of queer clergy in the MCSA can be explored. In this study, I seek to understand and interpret the participants’ articulation of their lived experiences.

Queer theological framework

Queer theology is derived from queer theory, which was widely known through the works of Michel Foucault, a gay philosopher, historian and activist. According to Cheng⁵², queer is a term which refers to persons who do not identify in the so called normal way of heterosexuality. These include lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and others. Secondly, queer is a transgressive term which is much more positive than the old terms such as homosexuality which has many negative connotations. Lastly, queer theory removes the boundaries in sexualities. In other

⁵¹ Uwe Flick, *An Introduction to Qualitative Research* (London: SAGE Publications, 2002), p. 6

⁵² Patrick Cheng, *Radical Love: An introduction to queer theology*, (New York, Seabury Books, 2011), p. 3

words queer theory challenges the traditional notion that sexuality and gender identity are simply about male and female or man and woman. Queer theory is against the gender norms.

Cheng⁵³ therefore defines queer theology, as a queer talk about God as far as theology is a talk about God. This means queer theology is a theology for queer people who are making sense of God in their lives. Butler⁵⁴ argues that queer theology rises to contest and oppose the perceived normality in sexuality. In that case, queer theology destabilises the norm and disturbs the perceived status quo. This study interrogates the perceived truth of accepted sexuality in the Christian faith, especially in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa. Through the lenses of queer theology, the perceived sexualities in the MCSA will be disturbed. Through this theory the tables of heterosexualist thought are turned around for the sake of the church to understand that God did not make a mistake by creating LGBTI people and that they have all the right to serve God in all the spheres of the Church including priesthood and to marry the people they wish to under the “greatest commandment of love”.⁵⁵

Adrian Thatcher⁵⁶ and Patrick Cheng⁵⁷ introduce us to the four sources of queer theology: scripture, tradition, reason and experience. Cheng⁵⁸ argues that scripture has been used throughout the existence of the Church as a tool to oppress queer persons. There are many biblical texts in the Bible that are often used to condemn homosexuality. The famous text is Genesis 19. However, queer theologians have argued that this text is merely about bad hospitality, not homosexuality. Therefore, queer theology dismisses the negative notions that have been built on homosexuality through scripture. Again, queer theology reclaims the Bible to retell the stories in a queer perspective.

Tradition is defined by Cheng⁵⁹ as that which has been taught by the church authorities. In the Christian tradition, marriage is a union between a man and a woman. This is also the stance of

⁵³ Ibid, p. 9

⁵⁴ Judith Butler, “Critically Queer”, *A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 1 (1993) p.18

⁵⁵ John 13: 34

⁵⁶ Adrian Thatcher, *God, Sex and Gender: An introduction* (West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 175-189

⁵⁷ Cheng, *Radical Love*, 11-22

⁵⁸ Ibid, 12

⁵⁹ Ibid, 11

the MCSA. Cheng⁶⁰ argues that the Christian tradition has always been anti-queer. Since queer theology is merely about disrupting the norms in sexuality, the important question raised by Thatcher is: “Can tradition change?”⁶¹ Tradition is a construct. Anything that is constructed, can be deconstructed and reconstructed again. Therefore, through queer theology, tradition can change in respect of the context in which it exists.

Thatcher emphasises the three components of reason as follows: “Firstly, God had given us minds to understand the world. Secondly, God has given us a world, outside ourselves yet including ourselves. And thirdly, God has allowed for the possibility of human knowledge by creating a structure of intelligibility.”⁶² Therefore, if God has given us minds, it is logical that the world is not only limited to male and female or man and woman. It is through reason that queer theology has been born and exists to challenge the limitations of gender and sexual identities in society.

The most important element of queer theology is experience. I say so because queer persons have been oppressed through the other three elements: scripture, tradition and reason. It is through experience that queer theology makes sense because this is a lived experience. Cheng asserts that: “Indeed, queer experience is an important-if not critical-source for doing theology from a queer perspective”.⁶³ It is for that reason that this study invites queer clergy to tell their lived experiences because this is an important element in queer theology. Thatcher made the following statement: “We have just seen how people’s experience of injustice, persecution, cruelty, and so on, has proved decisive in several cases where the Church has changed and deepened its moral teaching.”⁶⁴ Thatcher here stresses the importance of experience for change. In the apartheid era, when the Church felt the heat of apartheid, the ministers took it upon themselves to advocate for freedom in South Africa. The case of same-sex marriages in the church does not affect the heterosexual men who are leading the church. Hence, the matter is not given the attention it deserves. Therefore, it is important for queer persons to rise and make their voice heard in this matter.

⁶⁰ Ibid, 14

⁶¹ Thatcher, *God, Sex and Gender*, 176

⁶² Ibid, 180

⁶³ Cheng, *Radical Love*, 18

⁶⁴ Thatcher, *God, Sex and Gender*, 188

Stuart emphasises that queer theology is about “breaking the silence”⁶⁵. Stuart further argues that the silence “has allowed others to speak about us, for us and at us, but not with us”.⁶⁶ This is also evident in the MCSA. Heterosexual men have been in the forefront of the same-sex conversation debating over queer persons in the church. It is for this reason that Shari Stone-Mediatore mentions that queer theology “reclaims the agencies of people who have been excluded from cultural and political centres and for whom epistemic and political agency remains a struggle.”⁶⁷ This means that queer theology seeks to raise the voices of queer persons which have been silenced in the past. Before 1976, there was no woman minister in the MCSA. Through their hard work in raising their voices which had been silenced women were heard. As a result, today, the General Secretary of the MCSA is a woman. Therefore, through queer theology the voices of queer clergy will be raised in this study with the hope that they will be heard.

According to Marcella Althaus-Reid⁶⁸ queer theology is based on the same principle as indecent theology, which is that one should produce a theology that fits reality rather than to re-order reality. Indecent theology seeks to understand God in relation with people who work and live a life that is perceived heathen by societies. These include among many, sex workers and queer persons. Queer persons are often viewed as unethical, heathen and sometimes also as an abomination by their respective communities. Since queer theology deals with queer persons, it is also an indecent theology. Queer theology together with indecent theology seeks to raise the suppressed stories of marginalised people which have been excluded in the past. It is for that reason that I have interviewed queer clergy about their lived experiences. Lastly, indecent and queer theologies are a liberation theology. Liberation theology has been developed to address the matter of oppressed people in different contexts. Likewise, queer theology rises to address the matters of queer persons who experience oppression.

⁶⁵ Elizabeth Stuart, *Religion is a queer thing: A guide to the Christian faith for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered people* (London: Cassel, 1997) p. 5

⁶⁶ Ibid

⁶⁷ Shari Stone-Mediatore, *Reasing Across Borders: Storytelling and knowledges of resistance* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003), 150

⁶⁸ Marcella Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology: Theological perversions in sex, gender and politics* (London: Routledge, 2000), 45

It is important to note some of the work that has been done on queer theology in South Africa since it is the context of this study. One of the important work is by Gerald West, Kapyra Kaoma and Charlene van der Walt entitled, *When Faith does Violence*. West, Kaoma and van der Walt⁶⁹ emphasise that the first step for religious communities is to affirm queer people in their churches because it will be difficult to have a queer talk with people whom the church does not embrace. West⁷⁰ has suggested to use contextual Bible studies in religious and local communities in order to understand the experiences of the oppressed and the voice of God to the context. West, Kaoma and van der Walt⁷¹ call the Church to repent as it did in the Kairos document, and affirm queer persons who deserve respect and dignity just like heterosexual people. Adriaan van Klinken,⁷² a professor of Religion and African studies at the University of Leeds, suggests that it is critical for queer Christians to start talking and writing about their experiences.

In his work on queer theology, Ward⁷³ points out that people should not be identified through their sexual orientation but be identified as humans. Therefore, queer theology seeks to restore the dignity of queer people in the Bible in and in society. Cheng makes a point that queer theology is built in the foundation of love:

Radical love is the heart of Christian theology because we Christians believe in a God who, through the incarnation, life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ, has dissolved the boundaries between death and life, time and eternity, and the human and the divine. Similarly, radical love is also at the heart of queer theory because it challenges our existing boundaries with respect to sexuality and gender identity as social constructions and not essential, or fixed, concepts.⁷⁴

⁶⁹ Gerald West, Kapyra Kaoma and Charlene van der Walt, *When faith does violence* (Johannesburg: The Other Foundation, 2017), 7

⁷⁰ Gerald West, "Do two walk together?: Walking with the other through contextual Bible study", *Anglican Theological Review* 93, 3. (2011), 433

⁷¹ West, Kaoma and van der Walt, *When faith does violence*, 10

⁷² Adriaan van Klinken, "Autobiographical Storytelling and African Narrative Queer Theology", *Exchange* 47, 3. (2018), 217

⁷³ Graham Ward, "There is no sexual difference", in *Queer Theology: Rethinking the Western Body*, ed. Gerald Loughlin (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 76-85

⁷⁴ Cheng, *Radical Love*, 1

Oral history research method

The research methodology that is applied in this study is that of oral history. According to Perks and Thomson⁷⁵, oral history is a tool that is used to understand the past through oral testimonies. In the case of this study, we seek to understand the past experiences of queer clergy through their oral testimonies. According to Thompson, “oral history is a history built around people. It thrust life into history itself and it widens its scope. It allows heroes not just from the leaders, but also from the unknown majority of people.”⁷⁶ This means that oral history is much more than an additional source of documentation. It is new knowledge based on the interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee. Oral history documents more than any other technique the subjectivity of the narrator and the manner in which he or she deals with the past. Thompson adds that “Oral history offers a challenge to the accepted myths of history, to the authoritative judgement inherent in its tradition.”⁷⁷ Therefore, this method brings forth the stories which have been neglected in history. Morrissey⁷⁸ adds that oral history interviews are significant to fill the gaps in the written sources. Portelli⁷⁹ concludes that oral history tells us less about events than their meaning.

Oral history is defined by Andrew Port as a method that “focuses on the lives of ordinary people, with an eye to their struggles, everyday practices, beliefs, values, and mentalities.”⁸⁰ As Winston Churchill says, “history is written by victors”, Bhattacharya notes that we face the problem that the history presented as ours is only part of our history. Therefore, oral history seeks to document the untold stories of the non-victors. Bhattacharya writes a story of a Tsar of Russia who, when told of Pushin’s plans of writing the history of the peasant leader Pugachev, responded that such a man had no history. Oral history rises then to make known the stories of the marginalised people who are perceived to ‘have no history’. I quote from the presentation of Dr Elizabeth Williams at Seth Mokitimi Methodist Seminary in 2017 who said:

⁷⁵ Robert Perks and Alex Thompson, *The Oral History Reader* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), viii

⁷⁶ Paul Thompson, “The Voice of the Past: Oral History”, in *The Oral History Reader*, ed. Robert Perks and Alex Thompson (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), 39

⁷⁷ Ibid

⁷⁸ Charles Morrissay, “Oral History Interviews: From Inception to Closure”, in *Handbook of Oral History*, ed. Thomas Charlton and Lois Myers and Rebecca Sharpless (New York: Alta Mira Press, 2006), 171

⁷⁹ A Portelli, “What makes oral history different”, in *The Oral History Reader*, ed. Robert Perks and Alex Thompson (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), 52

⁸⁰ Andrew Port, “History from below, the history of everyday life and Microhistory”, in *International Encyclopaedia of the Social and Behavioural Sciences*, ed. J Wright (New York: Elsevier, 2015), 108

“If you do not write your history, history will write you off”. Oral history raises the voices of those who have been written off by history.

The researchers of oral history focus “on the actions, practices, habits, values, beliefs, mentalities, and feelings of the oppressed, excluded, pauperized, and marginalized: those who have traditionally been excluded from historical accounts and remained largely anonymous in history – the ‘nameless’ multitudes in their workaday trials and tribulations.”⁸¹ In this study, queer people in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa can be considered as people in the peripheries. The aim of this method is to fill up the gaps in the written history by raising the voices of the voiceless and documenting the unwritten history of marginalised people.

Oral History and Memory

It is impossible to know the past because it has gone forever. However, oral history and memory relate because in order to reconstruct the past we need to rely on the memory of the people who have lived the past. Lynn Abrams, a professor of gender history, describes memory as “a process of remembering: the calling up of images, stories, experiences and emotions from our past life, ordering them, placing them within a narrative or story and then telling them in a way that is shaped at least in part by our social and cultural context.”⁸² This means that oral history is dependent on the memory of the interviewee.

Abrams also notes that “memory recovered through oral history is not always 100 per cent reliable in objective or measurable terms though it has a truth value for the person remembering.”⁸³ This means that oral history is contested. Therefore, it is important to verify the facts that have been produced by the interviewee. It is also important to note that oral history through the memories of interviewees’ produces new knowledge. It is new knowledge because it is stories which have not been documented. Through oral history, this study seeks to produce knowledge that has never been documented about the lived experiences of queer clergy in the MCSA.

⁸¹ Ibid

⁸² Abrams, *Oral History Theory*, 79

⁸³ Ibid

Trauma and redemption

It is important to reflect on oral history and trauma since all the participants interviewed in this project have been through different traumatic events. Most traumatic experiences are related to the sexualities of the ministers interviewed. Those who have been through traumatic events do not wish it for anyone because it is a painful experience. Although trauma destroys the lives of some people, queer clergy have developed resilience and managed to live a good life despite the trauma. For them, the traumatic events strengthened their desire to serve in the church.

Most of the time, people who are survivors of wars, rape, natural disasters, and other forms of communal and subjective violence are likely to experience trauma. Rogers⁸⁴ introduces us to trauma narratives and redemption narratives. The similarity between the two is that they are both built on trauma events. The difference is that trauma narrative is established of life threatening events that can destroy the survivor's life while redemption narrative depicts victory in those traumatic events. In this study, some participants have been destroyed by the traumatic events in their lives while some have encouraged by the traumatic events. Abrams states that "people who experience trauma are left vulnerable, hurting and confused."⁸⁵ In redemption narrative, the survivor looks beyond the traumatic event and its negatives effects and point out what is positive which may include them being saved, able to escape, etc. According to Rogers, "For some individuals, redemption narratives provide the turning point that inspires or frames subsequent personal choices."⁸⁶

Data Collection

Sources for the study

In this study, both primary and secondary sources, have been consulted. Primary sources in history are original documents whether oral or written. The primary sources that have been consulted in this study are the oral interviews of queer clergy. The minutes of MCSA conferences and the Methodist yearbooks have been used to trace the history of the same-sex

⁸⁴ Kim Rogers, "Trauma Redeemed: The Narrative Construction of Social Violence", in *Interactive Oral History Interviewing*, ed. Eva McMahan and Kim Rogers (New York: Routledge, 2011), 31-47

⁸⁵ Lynn Abrams, *Oral History Theory* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 93

⁸⁶ Rogers, *Trauma Redeemed*, 33

debate in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa. Published books, chapters of books, and journal articles were consulted as secondary sources.

Sampling

Most of the queer ministers in the MCSA are in a closet. Therefore, it is impossible to know how many they are and who they are because they never talk about their sexuality in public. It is for that reason that I circulated a letter which was a call for queer ministers to participate in the study. The letter had a description of the research project. The letter was circulated through the Communications Office of the MCSA to all the ministers in the MCSA. Those who identify as queer, and willing to share their stories, then responded to my email address which was indicated in the letter. For the reasons I have outlined, it is impossible to create a representative sample of the queer ministers in the MCSA. Therefore, I have identified a few cases, hoping that they will at least give a rough of idea of the situation of queer ministers in the MCSA. There are only four queer ministers who responded to the email to share their stories. I am aware that there are more than four queer ministers in the MCSA. There are some who have publicly disclosed their status but did not respond to the call for participants. This is a sensitive study. It can cause harm since it deals with people who are in vulnerable life circumstances. For this reason I would not have been able to interview them even if I had known their names. I only interviewed those who responded to my invitation to share their stories. I am aware that four people can never represent all queer ministers in the MCSA. The intention is to give a general overview of the experiences of some of the queer clergy in the MCSA.

Interview questions

All of the interviewees were given time before the interviews. This may have given them an opportunity of reconstructing their story. Giving people time before the interview has its advantages and disadvantages because a person is able to think of those things to share and those which they want to reserve. Abrams states that, “in a general sense, we only remember something that we have recorded or encoded at the time we experienced it.”⁸⁷ The advantage of giving a person some time to think about something is that it enables them to remember more. Informing the interviewee prior may give them time to go and look back at their diaries,

⁸⁷ Abrams, Oral History, 83

photo albums or any other places which can bring back the memories. In that case, the interviewee is able to recall the events and tell a clear story. The disadvantage may be that the interviewee will use the time given to select what they want to share and what they don't want to share and may omit useful information. They will be more likely to reconstruct their stories to make them fit their current situations and opinions.

The questions were divided into three sections. The first section of questions were about the participant's family background, educational background and their early years before joining ministry. The background of a person is very important because it is the context which we come from that influence us in ways of thinking and living. The second section of questions focused on the sexuality of the participants. These were questions related to their sexual orientation, circumstances of coming out and the relationships of participants. This section also had questions related to the support and challenges of participants within their families, friends and colleagues as a result of their sexual orientations. The third section of the questionnaire was about queer sexuality and ministry. This section had questions on the challenges encountered by queer clergy in ministry and in the church as a result of their sexual orientation, their views on the stance of the MCSA on the same-sex debate, their theological and personal motivations of queer clergy to remain in ministry despite them being alienated by the church, and their unique contribution in ministry.

Ethical Considerations

Before I began the fieldwork, I requested permission to do such a study from the office of the Presiding Bishop in the MCSA. I received a letter from the General Secretary of the MCSA granting me permission to embark on this study. The letter permitted me to interview queer clergy and consult minutes of previous conferences of the MCSA. I also requested ethical clearance from the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Ethical clearance was granted with this protocol reference number: HSS/0963/018M.

To prevent stigmatization and victimization, all interviews have been anonymised. The interviewees are given pseudo-names in this study. The circuits in which they serve are not mentioned in the study. Any information that might hint the reader about the identity of the participants is not included in this study. The confidentiality of the participants is sealed in consent forms that I, together with the interviewees, have signed. Included in the consent form is the nature and purpose/s of the research; the identity and institutional association of the researcher and supervisor/project leader and their contact details; the fact that participation is voluntary; that responses will be treated in a confidential manner; any limits on confidentiality which may apply; that anonymity will be ensured where appropriate; the fact that participants are free to withdraw from the research at any time without any negative or undesirable consequences to themselves; the nature and limits of any benefits participants may receive as a result of their participation in the research.

I have also followed the four basic principles that are outlined by Denis in a chapter entitled “The Ethics of Oral History”.⁸⁸ Firstly, the autonomy and respect for people’s dignity. This has been done by seeking informed consent before conducting interviews and guarantee them of confidentiality. Secondly, the non-maleficence, that it is my duty to ensure that there should be no harm from the interview process. Thirdly, the interviewees should also benefit from the project in which they have contributed to. In this case I will provide a copy of the dissertation to each of the interviewees. In light of the sensitivity of this study in which participants are a vulnerable population and the possibility for re-traumatization exists. I have arranged for participants who voice the need to be offered emotional support and follow-up counselling at the Student Support Services on the Pietermaritzburg campus of the University of KwaZulu-Natal. All costs concurred due to the offering of support to participants will be covered by the MTh Gender and Religion program at the School of Religion, Philosophy and Classics at UKZN. In terms of feedback, an email to inform participants about the completion of the study will be sent to all participants. All participants will presented with a copy of the thesis.

Validity, reliability and rigour

⁸⁸ Philippe Denis, “The Ethics of Oral History”, in *Oral History in a Wounded Country*, ed. Philippe Denis and Radikobo Ntsimane (Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2008), 67-70

According to Mays and Pope, “qualitative researchers give attention to the validity of their findings.”⁸⁹ This is achieved through comparing the data collected and analysis to other already existing sources in the same field of research. The findings of this study are compared to other oral testimonies and written sources on queer clergy. This is of critical importance since “validity determines whether the research truly measures that which it was intended to measure or how truthful the research results are.”⁹⁰

Mays and Pope state that, “the main ways in which qualitative researchers ensure the retest reliability of their analyses is in maintaining meticulous records of interviews and observations and by documenting the process of analysis in detail.”⁹¹ Since the heart of this study is the oral interviews, I have kept the audio tapes and all the verbatim texts with the permission of the research participants, to allow future researchers to revisit them one day if they want to take the research further.

According to Mays and Pope “The basic strategy to ensure rigour in qualitative research is systematic a self-conscious research design, data collection, interpretation, and communication.”⁹² I have ensured this by doing justice on data collection and analysis. Moreover, the method of data collection and capture is clear in a manner that another researcher could analyse the same data in the same way and come to fundamentally the same conclusion as myself.

Location of the researcher

The researcher is an insider. I am a member of the MCSA. Moreover, I am a student minister in the MCSA. This simply means that the interviewees are my seniors in ministry. According to Drever “In order for a research to be successful, the researcher must be aware of the fact that any information the participants would give him depends on what the participants

⁸⁹ Nicholas Mays and Catherine Pope, “Rigour and Qualitative Research”, *British Medical Journal* 311 (1995), 110

⁹⁰ Nahid Golafshani, *Understanding Reliability and Validity in Qualitative Research*, *The Qualitative Report* 8, 4 (2003), 599

⁹¹ Mays and Pope, *Rigour and Qualitative Research*, 110

⁹² *Ibid*

think about the researcher and what they think the research is”.⁹³ In this case it is possible that some queer clergy who are in a closet did not participate because I am an insider and belong to the same church they do not want it to know about their sexualities.

It is important to write the anticipated limitations in this study. I believe that there are some things that I might have taken lightly as a heterosexual person which a queer person would have paid attention to. On the other side, as a straight person, this study offered me an opportunity to gain more insight on queer sexualities, not only on paper but through the lived experiences of queer clergy. My position as a MCSA probationer affected my reading and analysis of the transcripts because I am expected by the church at all times to follow the resolutions which the MCSA conference has agreed upon. In that case, being an insider has limited my freedom of speech. Despite my limitations, through this study I have tried to be in the shoes of a queer person. Queer ministers are stigmatised because of their sexual orientation. Since I was doing this research, some people at the seminary assumed that I was queer and I was stigmatised. Some queer seminarians who were fascinated by this study began to build a close relationship with me. As a result, I was not invited in a braai by my male colleagues because they thought I would bring my queer friends with me. There is this one seminarian, who, whenever I bumped into him at the male toilet, he would say: “What are you doing here? Aren’t you supposed to be in the other side?” This is one of the many, silly and annoying comments I received. This means that the church still has a long way to go.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have explored in depth the queer theory as a framework to approach the study, and oral history as a method to explore the life histories of queer clergy in the MCSA. Queer theology is relevant since this study is about queer ministers who are alienated in the church and queer theology breaks the silence and destabilise the perceived oppressive norms in sexuality. Queer theology is a liberation theology that rises to address the matters of queer persons who are oppressed in different contexts. I have used oral history as a tool to understand the past through oral testimonies. I also explored memory and trauma in oral history since both

⁹³ E Drever, *Using semi-structured interviews in small-scale research* (Edinburgh: The Scottish Council for Research in Education, 1995)

these elements are relevant in the stories of the participants. I further discussed the data collection process which included sampling and the interviewing process. Lastly, I discuss the ethical considerations since this study deals with a vulnerable community. Lastly, this study is a qualitative research because it is practical and deals with the social lives of people in their daily life experiences.

CHAPTER 3: NARRATIVES OF PARTICIPANTS

Introduction

This chapter deals with the lived experiences of the participants in the way they retold them. It is intended to give a relatively comprehensive impression of who the participants are as people in their social location. There are four participants who have been given pseudo names for the sake of the sensitivity of this study. They are: Emmanuel, Thando, Agape and Phoebe. This chapter will give a brief background of each of the participants. The main points that will be highlighted in the background sections are the family and upbringing of each of the participants. It is important to begin with the background because every person is moulded by their background and it influences the way people think and behave. All of the participants are ministers. Therefore the background also will cover their encounter with God and the call to the ministry of word and sacraments in the MCSA.

This chapter will also focus on the sexual orientation of the participants. Before we move onto the lived experiences of the participants and the dynamics of queer sexuality in ministry it is important to know the sexual orientation of the participants and why they identify themselves so. This chapter also includes the circumstances of coming out for queer clergy in their families, churches and societies.

In this chapter I also explore the challenges and also the motivations of queer clergy to remain in ministry despite being alienated by the church. Firstly, I explore the challenges experienced in the church by Emmanuel and Phoebe. In this chapter also I outline the challenges faced by queer clergy in the broader community in which they serve. Although there is resistance in the church and in society, there are also individuals who are supportive of queer clergy. Therefore this chapter also outlines the stories of supportive congregants in the lives of queer ministers.

Brief background of participants

Emmanuel

Emmanuel was born into a white family during the apartheid era in South Africa. This already locates him among those who were privileged in the “system”. He is the last born of his parents. Emmanuel attended a Methodist school where his Christian character was formed. It was in 1984, at the age of 21, when he joined the ministry of word and sacraments in the MCSA. Emmanuel claims that his call began in high school: “And my call in reflection I saw it come through my hostel years”.⁹⁴ Emmanuel struggled with his call in the early years because of two components: Firstly, Emmanuel could not speak with other people and was a shy person. Secondly, Emmanuel was very young. However, Emmanuel pointed out that it was revealed to him that Jeremiah had the same excuse that he could not speak to people and he was young but God was able to use him. Therefore, Emmanuel responded to the call of the ordained ministry of word and sacraments in the MCSA at the age of 21. Emmanuel has been in the ministry for 34 years to date and knows no other life outside the church. He was married at the young age of 23, in 1986. It was expected of him to be married early since he was born into a Christian family and he was a minister. It was in that marriage that his two children were born. His children are old now, both the son and the daughter are in their 20s.

Thando

Thando was born into a black Xhosa family of 5 children. He is the eldest of all his siblings. Being the eldest, especially in black families, comes with the responsibility of being a role model to one’s siblings. Thando’s case was different to what is commonly known of black children growing up in the apartheid era. He says: “I had a good upbringing”.⁹⁵ He attended a vernacular primary school in his early years. In 1994 when South Africa became a democratic country, Thando was privileged enough to attend a private primary school and a later a boy’s high school. He traces his Christian foundation to his parents who were devoted Christians. As a Xhosa boy, he went through the rite of passage called *ulwaluko* (circumcision). He explains: “I was excited to go there. I embraced it. Before and after, I do not think it has bearing to determine how masculine I am”.⁹⁶ Unlike Emmanuel, Thando had another career before he candidated for the ministry of word and sacraments in the MCSA.

⁹⁴ Emmanuel, interviewed by Ntobeko Dlamini, October 4, 2018.

⁹⁵ Thando, interviewed by Ntobeko Dlamini, October 5, 2018.

⁹⁶ Ibid

Agape

Agape was born in the height of apartheid, to parents who had a middle to upper class background. She has a younger sister. She describes her parents as “liberal”.⁹⁷ Agape explains: “They didn’t support the government of the time. So I was brought up to think of all people as people”.⁹⁸ However, Agape grew up as an independent child. She states: “My father passed away in 2004 and my mother is still alive. They stayed married but they also had a firing relationship. There was no abuse in the family but my mother and father used to argue a lot”.⁹⁹ Their mother had a close relationship with Agape’s younger sister and she felt neglected. She believes that her mother has a narcissist personality and that she is unaware of other people’s pain. Those are the conditions Agape grew under. Agape’s Christian roots can be traced back to her parents who were devoted Methodists. In that manner, Agape grew up and was confirmed in the Methodist Church. Agape joined the ministry of word and sacraments at a later stage of her life. Agape’s call to ministry is founded on her love for social justice.

Phoebe

Phoebe identifies herself as a mixed race person. Her father would identify as Indian and her mother as Coloured. Phoebe explains: “I call myself mixed race. I hate the terms Indian and Coloured because they are constructs that were handed to us by apartheid”.¹⁰⁰ Phoebe describes her early years as follows: “I had a really hard family life and it was quite brutal”.¹⁰¹ Phoebe’s spiritual formation can be traced to her grandparents who were devoted Methodists. Being the eldest child in the family, she had to take care of her siblings. In that case, Phoebe had to grow up quickly as she also took care of her young disabled brother. Moreover, Phoebe’s father was very abusive in the family. Phoebe recalls these moments:

I needed to play peace keeper in the family because when there was no peace at my house. My dad would beat my mother and I would get beaten. To prevent my own harm I would monitor my father’s behaviour, his moods and intervene before it became a problem. Inevitably it always became a problem because there is only so much that a young child can intervene in and there is only so much that a young child can perceive.

⁹⁷ Agape, interviewed by Ntobeko Dlamini, October 6, 2018.

⁹⁸ Ibid

⁹⁹ Ibid

¹⁰⁰ Phoebe, interviewed by Ntobeko Dlamini, October 6, 2018.

¹⁰¹ Ibid

It became a cycle. Generally we would have a week of peace and a week of tension, a huge fight which would end up in beatings and just a sense of fear.¹⁰²

Family life was very hard for Phoebe. As a result she would spend most of the time in the neighbourhood with friends avoiding to go back home. The only place in which Phoebe found peace was the church because it was a place where her parents did not go to. It is for that reason that Phoebe became involved in the church at a very early age. Phoebe adds: “I enjoyed my grandfather’s tales, especially the people he spoke about and how God took up those broken people and the amazing things which happened with their lives. Those stories gave me a sense of hope that even in this horrible mess of my life, something good could happen”.¹⁰³ However, Phoebe had never thought of becoming a minister. Growing up in a horrible setting, she had big dreams of being a physicist or a game ranger or a mathematician or an engineer. However, Phoebe had a burning desire to give hope to people who are in situations like those which she encountered. According to her, being an engineer or a mathematician could do it. As she has been involved in the church, it was revealed to her that it is through ministry that Phoebe can fulfil this burning desire.

Sexual orientation and coming out

Emmanuel

Emmanuel identifies himself as a gay male. In this study, gay refers to a man who is attracted to other men. It has been a long journey for Emmanuel for being able to say boldly that he is a gay male. Emmanuel spent many years discerning his sexual orientation. There are many factors that prohibited him from exploring and living his true sexual life.

Firstly, being a son of devoted Christian parents who belonged to a church that accepts nothing other than heterosexual relationships, there was no way he would have deviated from that norm. Secondly, Emmanuel attended a Methodist school that was intensely based on British culture. As a young boy he was expected to show the strong aspects of masculinity. Emmanuel adds:

¹⁰² Ibid

¹⁰³ Ibid

“So in my culture, the whole idea of being gay was just not there”.¹⁰⁴ Thirdly, it was fear. Although he might have been aware that he was different, he feared to explore his true sexuality. Emmanuel recalls an event in the early 1980s:

Interesting enough, in my late teen ages I had a gay friend, and I saw what they went through and I had a very early experience which probably entrenched my thoughts even more. We went to a gay night club in Durban in the early 1980s. And it was illegal. They had loud music and everyone was dancing. They had a set of blue lights and the doors locked and you had to get special entry to go in. and if the police would arrive, they would flick the blue lights. And everyone would stop dancing if they were dancing with somebody of the same gender. A guy would grab a girl and they would dance as a heterosexual couple while the police walked around, checked, and walked out again. And I suppose some of that fear of what I saw, entrenched the thought even further for me and certainly as a Christian, there was no way that would take place.¹⁰⁵

Fourthly, Emmanuel got married at a very early age into a heterosexual union. Although there was an awareness that he was different, he had vowed to be faithful to his wife. Again, he was in a committed relationship with two children. Lastly, Emmanuel is an ordained minister. Even if he wanted to be in a relationship with a man of his choice, there was no room for that in the MCSA, especially for an ordained minister. It was only after his divorce that he began to explore a life with a same sex partner and accepted himself.

Although Emmanuel had always known that he was different, he only came out about his sexual orientation after his divorce. Emmanuel recalls the first instance of coming out:

I went to Johannesburg where I met with the Connexional Secretary. I said to him: I am not going to lie to anybody, this is me, this is who I am, I don't know what my future is in the church, I don't know what you want to say to me, but this is me, I don't want anyone to come to you and say: This is Emmanuel. That is why I came myself. And Ross¹⁰⁶ stood with me and said that the leadership of the church will stand with me.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ Emmanuel, interviewed by Ntobeko Dlamini, October 4, 2018.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid

¹⁰⁶ Ross Olivier was the General Secretary of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa from 2001 to 2003

¹⁰⁷ Emmanuel, interviewed by Ntobeko Dlamini, October 4, 2018.

So when Emmanuel had made up his mind that he wanted to live openly as a gay man, he saw it important to inform the authorities of the church. He knew that the news would start spreading and reach the leadership of the church. It is for that reason that he took it upon himself to face the leadership and open up about his sexual orientation. The most difficult part of coming out for Emmanuel was to tell his children about his sexual orientation. There are many questions that were in Emmanuel's mind about coming out to his children. "How do I tell my children? Why do I want my children to know? Do I want them to support me or is it that I want them to know so they will cope with life. So those were huge struggles through those years".¹⁰⁸

The complexity of coming out with Emmanuel is that he has told some people about his sexual orientation but he has not told everyone. He explains: "I have never made an announcement of it. I have never stood on a pulpit and said this is who I am but people have got to know and I am not afraid of being who I am. Between then and now, there is not many people in my district who don't know. If they don't know, they are stupid [laughs]".¹⁰⁹ Coming out for Emmanuel is not to tell everybody about your sexual orientation, but people who are really close to you.

Thando

Thando identifies himself as a gay man. It has been a long journey also for him to be bold enough to bear out that he is gay. He mentions that he notices now when he reflects that from a very early age, in the early 1990s, there was something different in him to what was the norm. "From my primary school days. In *ekasi*¹¹⁰, boys play soccer and I was never a soccer person... I would rather be in a cheering line and sit there and doing nothing".¹¹¹ Although Thando had noticed at an early age that he was different, society had no room for that. Firstly, Thando was born into a family that valued Xhosa cultures and traditions which are mainly patriarchal. In that case there was no room to explore life as a gay. Secondly, Thando was the first born of his parents. Gender is understood by Connell¹¹² as associated roles assigned to one by society in terms of their embodiment. The two, gender and sexuality, are parallel because they are both

¹⁰⁸ Ibid

¹⁰⁹ Ibid

¹¹⁰ Slang term for township

¹¹¹ Thando, interviewed by Ntobeko Dlamini, October 5, 2018.

¹¹² Raewyn Connell, *Gender* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2002), p. 8

creatures of culture and society. According to Komarovsky¹¹³ in Africa, a man is perceived to be the head of the family. As the head of the family the man is supposed to be a provider. Therefore Thando was expected to follow the footsteps of his father and play the role of a provider to his younger siblings. Thirdly, Thando attended a boy's high school which put a lot of emphasis on masculinity. He adds: "When I went to high school, I played rugby and did everything that any heterosexual masculine male would have done".¹¹⁴ In that case there was never room for him to explore and live his true sexuality. Again, Thando is a Christian. "I have always been a Methodist. I was born into a Methodist family".¹¹⁵ Moreover, he is a minister of word and sacraments. Therefore, he is not expected by both society and the church to live a life other than that of a heterosexual man.

For Thando, the most difficult part about coming out was to tell his parents about his sexual orientation. Thando recalls the circumstances of his coming out to his parents:

I was 27 years old when I went to my family to tell them who I am. And the first experience was serious rejection. It was a very painful rejection to the point that I was cut off and disowned by my family. My father couldn't understand his child was gay. It did not make sense to him. So I was cut off and I stayed 3 and a half years away from siblings and my very own my mother. It was a very painful period and it was a period where I was entering in the journey of ministry. So I found myself at a point where I wanted to please my family and society to even to the extent of getting married to a woman which lasted for about 3 and a half years after which I had to take a decision on who I am and what I was living for. In 2015, I was already at the circuit, I sat down with my ex-wife, we called off the marriage and we got divorced, and after that I lived my life. I live my life today not actually limiting myself to social construct and family prefabs. My family has come to embrace who I am currently.¹¹⁶

Coming out for Thando resulted in him being rejected by his own biological father. Thando's father was homophobic to the extent that he chose not to have a child rather than to have a gay

¹¹³ Mirra Komarovsky, *The Unemployed Man and his Family: The effects of unemployment upon the status of the man in fifty-nine families*, (Walnut Creek: Altamira Press, 2004)

¹¹⁴ Thando, interviewed by Ntobeko Dlamini, October 5, 2018.

¹¹⁵ Ibid

¹¹⁶ Ibid

son. Sam¹¹⁷ tells a story of a black lesbian by the name of Thandazo who came from a homophobic family. Thandazo became an outcast after coming out to her parents. Therefore, coming out in homophobic families is a turning point because it changes the relationship between the parents and the person coming out. Thando also came up about his sexual orientation at the church he serves. “I introduced myself openly to the leadership when I met them for the first time. Later on I had an opportunity to then address the church and I spoke freely about my sexuality”.¹¹⁸ He adds: “I did not feel any rejection. There was no negative response from the church”.¹¹⁹ In Thando’s story of coming out, it is clear that there are some people who will reject you and there are some who will embrace you. In some cases, those you need most, reject you.

Agape

Agape identifies herself as gender fluid. In this case, gender fluid refers to an identity which is not limited. Agape describes her experience in the following terms:

I do not like the labels that are there because they do not fit with me. And I do not believe that human beings are only male and female. I found that I am attracted to a person’s spirit, to a person’s essence and it does not anything to do with what sexual organs they have. It has to do with who they are as a person. That is why I would say my sexuality is fluid because I am attracted to people, not labels.¹²⁰

Agape recalls her first relationship with a woman:

I probably had my first sexual experience with a female at high school but I didn’t think it was anything other than a once off thing. But it was there in the back of my mind although I never spoke about it even though I have a lot of gay friends. When I met a woman whom I was very attracted to, it was for the first time I thought there is a part of me that is attracted to women. I spoke to a friend about it and a couple of months

¹¹⁷ Tanya Sam, “Five women: Black lesbian life on the Reef records the lived experiences of five black lesbians”, in *Defiant Desire: Gay and lesbian lives in South Africa*, ed. Mark Gevisser and Edwin Caemeroon (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1994) p. 186-197

¹¹⁸ Thando, interviewed by Ntobeko Dlamini, October 5, 2018.

¹¹⁹ Ibid

¹²⁰ Agape, interviewed by Ntobeko Dlamini, October 6, 2018.

later, a woman asked me out and I said to her I am not gay and she said you are. So that was my first same sex relationship. I started to ask myself whether I was bisexual. But the term didn't fit with me. I realised that I am only attracted to people. And it is okay to not have a label.¹²¹

Agape is also attracted to men. As a result, she has been in relationships with male partners. These were serious relationships. As Agape says, "I nearly got married twice. I was engaged twice."¹²² Therefore, she is not limited by gender. When she was asked whether she is in a closet, she answered that, "Maybe I am, but not completely because there are people who know. My friends know, my family knows but my church does not know".¹²³ She adds: "In the church I told one person whom I truly trusted and she said I should never let the church find out because they will not support me".¹²⁴ Agape feels that the church is not a safe space for coming out. It is for that reason that she remains in a closet about her sexual orientation at church.

Phoebe

Phoebe identifies herself as queer. She adds: "I am not male or female. I am certainly not supposed to have breasts and a vagina and bleed every month, but I do. I am not a man and I am not a woman...So I call myself queer because to wear the term lesbian is not accurate".¹²⁵ She is physically attracted to women. When she was a child during primary school days, she became friends with both girls and boys because it didn't matter at that time. It was only at the age of 11 when she went through puberty that she noticed that there were parts of the body that she did not like. "I remember going on holiday and coming back on my final year at primary school and I realised that I cannot be part of the boys. The boys didn't want me to be part of them and the expectations of fitting in as a girl was stronger and a lot of it has to do with the fact that there were a lot of changes happening".¹²⁶ Phoebe adds:

My body was like an alien thing. I remember the time when I realised I had to get a bra and I couldn't handle it. I cried. It was very hard. I would wear a bra but then I would wear a vest and school uniform. And on top of that I would wear a jersey. Even if it

¹²¹ Ibid

¹²² Ibid

¹²³ Ibid

¹²⁴ Ibid

¹²⁵ Phoebe, interviewed by Ntobeko Dlamini, October 6, 2018.

¹²⁶ Ibid

was super-hot outside. The female bits of me were contained and I felt that at least I could skip that for a little while as long as it was maintained.¹²⁷

Phoebe knew at a very early age that she was different but she did not tell her family about it. She recalls: “My family never knew that I had major problems with the fact that my head was telling me something else about who I was and my body was doing something else and I couldn’t interact with this body the way I understood myself to be”.¹²⁸ There was always conflict at Phoebe’s house when she grew up. So there was no chance to talk about her queer sexuality. However, the church knows about her sexual orientation. Today, she lives openly as a queer minister. As a result, she is married to a woman whom they live together with their son.

Resistance in the Church

Emmanuel’s story

Most of queer clergy live in a closet because they fear the results of coming out. Coming out for Emmanuel marked the beginning of his alienation both by the church and society. Emmanuel recalls a story of stewards who wanted to get rid of him simply because he was gay:

I had a society steward in my church, I will not tell you the name, but he was the person that Ross has spoken about, and he went all out to have my ministry destroyed. There were meetings that took place. Then this society steward started influencing the other society stewards. We came to a meeting where I was called to make an account of things because they were unhappy. So I asked them what they were unhappy about and no one would give me an answer. So I said then what are you unhappy about? Are you worried about what I may be doing in my bedroom? And one was honest enough to say yes”.¹²⁹

This is ridiculous because you hardly hear of a heterosexual minister called in a meeting to account on what they are doing in their bedrooms. So the stewards were satisfied with Emmanuel’s preaching and pastoral work but they were ready to let him go simply because he was gay. It was unprofessional for the stewards to do so because the love life of a person is a private matter. Although church members always find a way to sneak into the private life of a

¹²⁷ Ibid

¹²⁸ Ibid

¹²⁹ Emmanuel, interviewed by Ntobeko Dlamini, October 4, 2018.

minister, that doesn't dispute the fact the love life of a person is a private matter. The church has its stance on marriage as a union between a man and a woman, but the Methodist Book of Order does not prevent anyone from dating the person they like. The church is only concerned with marriage. It is for that reason that I argue that Emmanuel's love life was a private matter and he did not violate any law of the church since he lived in his private property. Secondly, it is very difficult for some people to discuss their love lives and what they do in their bedrooms in an open space, is in fact, it is an insult.

When Emmanuel moved to his current station, he lived in his own house because he had a partner by then. He did not live in the church's manse. Emmanuel did this intentionally because he knew that some congregants would have a problem if he lived with his partner in the manse. Emmanuel alluded to this when he said: "The circuit steward said to me: I am giving your partner two months to vacate, and no homosexual people shall visit your home again".¹³⁰ The steward went to the extent of monitoring who visits Emmanuel in his own property. This means that the steward was watching every move that was made by Emmanuel. The important question to ask in this regard is: Do stewards monitor the love life of a heterosexual minister?

The hardest thing is that Emmanuel had to go through these challenges in front of his parents who were dying. Emmanuel recalls the last conversation he had with his mother:

The most painful part of that was that my parents who were both in their 80s had moved to be with me. So they spent the last 3-4 years of their lives with my congregation and my mother died during that period. And the night before she died, she said to me 'Emmanuel what is going to happen to you in the church? Because they are after you. What is going to happen to the children?' I have to be honest, if I look back in to those years, they hurt me. The hardest thing for me was that my mother died with the pain. It took me a long time to forgive that person for what he did to my mother when she was dying. That was a very big thing for me.¹³¹

¹³⁰ Ibid

¹³¹ Ibid

The resistance of homophobic congregants do not only affect the minister, but also the family of the minister. It is unfortunate that Emmanuel's parents had to die witnessing their child being alienated by the church.

Phoebe's story

The challenge for Phoebe was to reach the level of acceptance. She feels that the church resists and fails to accept who she really is. Again, the church does not recognise her marriage. Phoebe is married to a female partner. The fourth rule in the Wesleyan rules of a helper is, "Take no step towards marriage without solemn prayer to God, and consulting your colleagues".¹³² Phoebe followed all the rules of the church before getting married. She informed both her superintendent and the bishop before entering marriage. None of them seemed to disapprove it. However, Phoebe's marriage was never recognised by the District in which Phoebe serves. "We were married in March then at synod the secretary announces all the people who have just married or had children. I felt a really sense of hurt for not being part of the people who are being celebrated".¹³³

This means that Phoebe serves a church that doesn't embrace her sexual identity. She adds: "The church community has been really an important part of my life. That raised a certain questions in me. Who I am in the church? Am I valuable or I am only valuable because I can fulfil this particular role?"¹³⁴ In this case, we can conclude that Phoebe's church doesn't really care about her as a person but the most important things are the services she offers to the church.

Phoebe recalls a horrific event that happened in the year of her ordination:

I think the worst thing that ever happened, it was during my ordination year. I visited a family in our society who were like trusted friends. She and her husband were close to me. I remember sitting there telling them how I feel and I don't think there is space for me in the church. And then some weeks passed I went to do a pastoral visit in the same home because the husband got ill. So I walked in and greeted this old man who was

¹³² Methodist Church of Southern Africa, Book of Order, p. 182

¹³³ Phoebe, interviewed by Ntobeko Dlamini, October 6, 2018.

¹³⁴ Ibid

working and he said: ‘boss is sleeping’ and I said: it is fine I will wait. I went in and sat at the table. He was not sleeping. He was hiding in the lounge and he had a shotgun and he was pointing it at me. When his wife came in and saw the gun, she ushered me out of the house and she said: ‘you better leave because husband wants to kill you’. Later that night the husband called me to his house. I was very scared. He had the shotgun on the table. He had gathered his son, his daughter and his wife. And he sat me down and he said: ‘I want to know if you are in love with my wife’ and he was basically saying: ‘I am going to shoot you because you are turning the church gay and you are bringing all these gay people into the church’...I phoned the bishop and he gave me two weeks off. But I had to go back and give him Holy Communion.¹³⁵

This is a very terrifying story. Firstly, you see that this family was fine and welcoming to Phoebe until she opened up about her true sexual orientation. This means that some congregants embrace queer ministers only if they live in a closet. Although congregants may notice that certain things in the life of the minister are different, as long as that cleric keeps it to himself/herself, it is fine. Secondly, when Phoebe opened up about her sexuality, the man thought she was after his wife. People have a bad tendency of thinking of queer people as immoral people who are after everyone. Thirdly, when Phoebe reported this case to the bishop, she was given two weeks away, but this was not the solution because after two week Phoebe had to come back to the same church again. In this case she did not only need time away but she also needed to go through some counselling because being pointed with a gun was a traumatic event for her. Moreover, when she came back to the church again, she had to serve Holy Communion to the same man who pointed her with a gun. In this case, the church was unsupportive to Phoebe.

Resistance in society

Emmanuel’s story

Every community has a ministers fraternal. This is where ministers meet for comradeship and discuss matters affecting the church and the local community in which they serve. Emmanuel

¹³⁵ Ibid

has never been welcome in the ministers fraternal of the community in which he serves. He asserts, “In the community here, the ministers fraternal do not meet with me. I am not invited to their meetings. In fact the ministers fraternal in this area had a prayer session and they stood in the gates here to pray for this church because I was the devil”.¹³⁶ In this case, the ministers did not only exclude Emmanuel, but went to the extent of organising a prayer for him for God to deliver him from homosexuality. The fact that are ministers who are convinced that queer people are possessed with demons, shows that the same sex debate is far from being over in the church.

As mentioned earlier, it is a challenge to be involved in community projects as a queer minister because there are people who are very homophobic. Emmanuel recalls:

I went to a community project with my partner. On Monday morning at the primary school the principal spoke about how disgusting it was that I was there. He made up a lot of stories about what I was supposedly doing there with my partner. One of the members of my church is a teacher there and she went to him and said: ‘this is not the discussion for the school and you will go and apologise to the staff and tell them that you were lying, otherwise I will go to the school governing body’. So he was forced to make an apology.¹³⁷

Phoebe’s story

Phoebe is unpopular in the community in which she serves, especially to old people. She states: “At this community currently there is a group of women who hand out bible verses and faith-based pamphlets here at the local Spar. Apparently they pray for this church because the devil has come in the disguise of a minister. It is hard to live with that. But I can’t let it destroy who I am”.¹³⁸ Phoebe adds: “Society work is different because you are at core face. People reject you. And it is very hard to sit or journey with somebody who thinks you are an abomination, you are the reason there are floods and droughts”.¹³⁹ The notion of homosexual people as the result of floods and drought is common in South Africa. Lesole reports that the leader of the

¹³⁶ Emmanuel, interviewed by Ntobeko Dlamini, October 4, 2018.

¹³⁷ Ibid

¹³⁸ Phoebe, interviewed by Ntobeko Dlamini, October 6, 2018.

¹³⁹ Ibid

Nazareth Baptist Church, Mduduzi Shembe, announced that gay people were to be blamed for the drought in some parts of South Africa in 2015.¹⁴⁰

Support in the church

Emmanuel's story

It was in the early 2000s that Emmanuel's contract came to an end in his station. The stewards did not want to renew it because they had learnt that he was gay. A very interesting thing that happened is that the older ladies of the society were very angry because they knew that Emmanuel was a good pastor. Therefore, they decided to start a petition because they felt that what was done to Emmanuel was unfair. The women started petitioning at a Sunday service and the same society stewards came in and told them it was illegal. Therefore, the women went to the office of the bishop to plead with the bishop to re-examine the rejection of Emmanuel. As a result of these 60 elderly ladies, Emmanuel's invitation was re-examined and Emmanuel was re-invited. These ladies did not see a homosexual in Emmanuel but they saw a pastor. This shows that there is much more to a person than their sexual identity. Although there are people who are against queer clergy but there also people who are supportive of queer clergy. Emmanuel adds that "I have always had the support of each presiding bishop. I have always had a support of each of my bishops".¹⁴¹

Although Emmanuel had a difficult time with stewards in his previous station, there were some who accepted him. Emmanuel mentions that every year, in the early 2000s, they would have a Christmas function with the society stewards and their spouses. Emmanuel came with his partner at the first function and there were mixed emotions among the stewards. Emmanuel kept coming with his partner in all the functions until they got used to it. Emmanuel concludes: "I think the more they got to know Emmanuel, the less it became an issue. Until they didn't know who Emmanuel was, it was an issue".¹⁴² Therefore, as long as a pastor is an abstract person, people will interpret and treat the pastor as a saint and not expect any perceived wrong

¹⁴⁰ Thabo Lesole, "Gay rights group demands clarity from Shembe Church", eNCA, November 24, 2015, <https://www.enca.com/south-africa/church-leader-under-fire-disparaging-comments-against-homosexuals> (Accessed: November 2, 2018).

¹⁴¹ Emmanuel, interviewed by Ntobeko Dlamini, October 4, 2018.

¹⁴² Ibid

doings by the pastor. However, if the pastor goes down to the level of the people it is easy for people to understand the pastor as a human being.

Thando's story

Thando, when he arrived in his current station, he openly introduced himself as a gay person to the leadership. Later on, Thando had an opportunity to address the church and told them about his sexuality. Thando regards himself as being fortunate to be in a black church that has never discriminated him because of his sexuality. Thando has never felt any rejection or push backs in the society in which he serves. Although there may be those who are against his sexuality because the MCSA is divided in this matter, they have respected him enough not to confront him about his private life. Thando adds: "I have friends in ministry who are comfortable with my sexuality as much as I am, and we support each other academically, spiritually, emotionally and otherwise".¹⁴³

Phoebe's story

Although Phoebe's sexuality has never been embraced by the church, the church has given her a platform to exercise her call despite her sexuality. Again, Phoebe serves in a district that she calls "a protected space".¹⁴⁴ She has served the church in many high positions and she adds that when you serve well and people may know who you are, they pretend to not know. Phoebe adds: "As long as you pitch up and do what is expected of you and you do it as best as you can people leave you alone".¹⁴⁵

Conclusion

It has been clear through the background of the participants that they are different in terms of their racial groups, stations, sexual orientations and experiences. In her article under the title 'Gender: An Intersectionality Perspective', Shields raises the question: "Which women's

¹⁴³ Thando, interviewed by Ntobeko Dlamini, October 5, 2018.

¹⁴⁴ Phoebe, interviewed by Ntobeko Dlamini, October 6, 2018.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid

experience?”¹⁴⁶ That means that the experiences of a white woman may not be the same as that of a black woman, although both of them are women. For this study too, the experiences of a black gay minister will differ from the experiences a white gay minister although both of them are gay. It is for that reason that Phoenix and Pattynama¹⁴⁷ notes that every person is located and that there are intersections in terms of race, gender, class, etc. Therefore, there is no such thing as a “universal experience”.¹⁴⁸ Intersectionality helps us to understand the complex nature of identities. In this chapter we learn that there are three racial groups in the Methodist Church, namely: black, white and mixed race.

In the section on the sexual orientation of the participants we learn that there are different sexual identities in this study. The noticeable similar experience is that for all of them it has been a struggle to come to a conclusion on their gender identities. This is because their identities are not what is regarded as the norm in their different societies. Although they come from different societies, all of their societies are patriarchal and heteronormative. As I pointed out earlier, all the participants were raised in Christian families in which homosexuality is not a way to go.

In the section on the resistance in church, Thando and Agape are not included because their sexual identities are not known by many in the church. Therefore, both of them have not been confronted to direct resistance to their sexual identities like Emmanuel and Phoebe. It is for that reason that they are not included in the first section. It is evident through the experiences of Emmanuel and Phoebe that when one is open about their sexual identity in the church, problems arise especially on the part of homophobic congregants. As a result, Thando and Agape have never encountered direct challenges because they are in a closet. Therefore, for one to live in the open as a queer clergy in the MCSA, there is a price to pay.

¹⁴⁶ Stephanie Shields, “Gender: An intersectionality perspective”, *Sex Roles* 59, (2008), p. 302

¹⁴⁷ Ann Phoenix and Pamela Pattynama, “Intersectionality”, *European Journal of Women’s Studies* 13, 3 (2006) p. 187

¹⁴⁸ Leslie McCall, “The Complexity of Intersectionality”, *Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 30, 3 (2005) p. 1771

Secondly, the alienation of queer clergy in the church does not only affect the ministers but also their families and loved ones. Lastly, the MCSA does not offer support such as psychological counselling to their ministers when they go through traumatic events. Again, there is very little intervention of the church when the life of a minister is in danger. In relation to resistance in the community, it is evident through the experiences of the ministers that homosexuality is perceived to be evil by some congregants. Both the ministers mention that certain members of the community would pray for them because they believe that they are possessed by an evil spirit. In that case it means that there is a perception that homosexuality can be cured because those who pray believe that God will deliver the minister from homosexuality. Lastly, for one to live a life of as an open queer minister has a price to pay, a price of exclusion and stigmatisation.

It is evident through the experiences of the ministers in the section on support by the church that the MCSA is divided on the matter. Although queer ministers are being alienated in the church because of their sexual identities, there are also members of the church who are supportive of queer ministers. This is also in the MCSA's profession of faith in the 2016 Methodist Book of Order:

Among us are those who believe that the Bible is clear in its condemnation of all homosexual acts as contrary to the will of God. Also among us are those who believe that the Bible does not condemn all homosexual acts, namely those between two consenting adults in a mutually loving, faithful and committed relationship.

Among us are those who believe that the biblical norm for marriage is between one man and one woman only and that any deviation from this pattern is against the express will of God. Also among us are those who believe that God's primary concern is for the quality of our loving, and that two people of the same gender who truly love each other can enter into the bonds of marriage with the blessing of God and the Church.

Among us are those who believe that those in loving, faithful and committed same-sex relationships can serve as leaders of the Church and be ordained as Ministers of the gospel. Also among us are those who believe that those in such relationships cannot serve in these ways.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁹ Methodist Church of Southern Africa, Book of Order, p. 228

CHAPTER 4: ANALYSIS

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I introduced the participants by narrating their lived experiences in the way they retold their stories. The intention was to give a comprehensive impression of who they are, and their social location. In this chapter, I provide an analysis of the interviews. I have selected four themes in the interviews. They are: stigma and shame, fear of rejection, trauma, and desire. In this chapter, I unpack these four themes as they appear in the interviews of the participants. Moreover, I align them with the experiences of other queer people in the already existing literature for the reliability, validity and rigour of this study.

Stigma and shame

Stigma defined by INERELA+¹⁵⁰ as “a social mark that singles individuals or groups for disgrace, humiliation, and rejection.”¹⁵¹ This act is done mostly to people who are perceived to be abnormal. In some cases, stigma results in violence because when people are stigmatised, they are viewed as less human or inferior, hence rendering them susceptible to abuse. In South Africa, we have a typical example of stigma which resulted to violence in the life of Gugu Dlamini¹⁵². She was an HIV positive mother who spoke out publicly about her status. Immediately after the community heard about her status, she was attacked. Therefore, many people choose to be a closet about their HIV statuses because they have learnt from Gugu that coming out may result in stigmatization, violence and in some cases death. It is the same with queer people. When one comes out about their sexual orientation, they are stigmatised by society. It is for this reason that many people choose to remain in a closet because they fear stigmatisation. In the next section I will elaborate more about fear.

¹⁵⁰ International Network of Religious Leaders living with or affected by HIV & AIDS. This is an organisation for religious leaders living with HIV & AIDS who are committed in using their positions within their faith communities in a way that breaks silence, challenges stigma and provides delivery of evidenced-based prevention, care, and treatment services.

¹⁵¹ INERELA+, *SAVE Toolkit: A Practice Guide to the SAVE Prevention Methodology* (Church of Sweden, 2012), 3

¹⁵² Gugu Dlamini was beaten to death by the community in Durban when she came out about her HIV status on national television. It was in 1998 and many people were not clearly informed about HIV and AIDS. There were many superstitions associated with HIV. The stigma around HIV and AIDS did not allow anyone to reveal their HIV status because people who had HIV were viewed as immoral.

Shame is defined by INERELA+ as “a painful feeling arising from the realisation that one has done something dishonourable, improper or ridiculous.”¹⁵³ The qualification of an act as shameful is determined by the community. When people do something that is perceived to be against the culture or the social norms of a particular society in which they belong, they are deemed to have brought disgrace to their families and the entire community, and that is a shame. The perception of an act as shameful differs for each society. In my village, Nhlanguwini¹⁵⁴, sex outside marriage, pregnancy or homosexuality is a shame. Shame, like stigma, may sometimes result to violence. Eudy Simelane, who was a player of the South African national football team, was gang raped and killed simply in 2008 at KwaThema Township because she was a lesbian.¹⁵⁵ Declaring herself in public as a lesbian was deemed to be shameful by her community. As a result, it ended up in violence since she was raped by several men and killed.

It is evident through the experiences of the interviewees that people with queer sexualities are stigmatised and shamed. Both Emmanuel and Phoebe live openly in church and in society with their sexualities. As a result, they are stigmatised. Phoebe explains: “In this community, there is a group of women that hand out Bible verses at the market. Apparently, they pray for this church because they believe that the devil came in the disguise of a minister. It is hard to live with that. But I can’t let that destroy who I am.”¹⁵⁶ In this case, it is evident that queerness is seen as a shameful sexuality in some societies, especially for a minister. The fact that women in the community met together about the sexual orientation of Phoebe means that her sexuality was not perceived as the norm in that community. This means that queer sexuality is against the societal values of the community that she serves. As a result of that, it is considered to be a shameful act. Queer ministers are treated as outcasts, not only in the church but in the extended community. When people are stigmatised, they are dehumanised. As a result, the women refer to Phoebe as ‘Satan’. She is seen as a demonstration of evil because of her queer sexuality. She is no longer seen as a minister or a human, but as the most evil creature. Her

¹⁵³ Ibid

¹⁵⁴ Nhlanguwini is a rural village outside Harding town, in the south coast of KwaZulu-Natal.

¹⁵⁵ Willem Van Vollenhoven and Christo Els, “The human rights paradox of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender students in South African education”, *De Jure* 46, 1. (2013), 263-284

¹⁵⁶ Phoebe, interviewed by Ntobeko Dlamini, October 6, 2018

sexual orientation has made the women in the community to view her as one who uses ministry as a disguise of her evil deeds.

Phoebe adds: “Society work is difficult because I am in the spotlight. People reject me. It is very hard to sit or to journey with somebody who thinks that you are an abomination, you are the reason there are floods and droughts. I have had people leave the church.”¹⁵⁷ In this case, Phoebe is viewed as corrupting the moral and the material cosmos. The community makes the connection between her sexuality and the natural disasters. Phoebe is faced with the responsibility to minister to people who believe that the world is punished because of her sexuality. The notion of homosexual people as the cause of floods and drought is common in South Africa. Thabo Lesole, a journalist, reports that the leader of the Nazareth Baptist Church, Mduduzi Shembe, announced that the gay people were to be blamed for the drought in some parts of South Africa in 2015.¹⁵⁸ Theoretically, when people are called an abomination, they are treated as “the Other”. This means that they are perceived to be different from the norm. As a result, their dignity is taken away from them. In this case, queer sexuality is seen as the cause of hunger and starvation. This means that it is viewed as a source of death.

Emmanuel had to get rid of his partner in his own house because the stewards were not pleased about him living with a partner of the same sex. This was regarded as a shameful act. The stewards of his church did not want people to know that their minister was gay because it would bring shame to the church. Kate Hunt, a lesbian minister of the Anglican Church, adds: “For so many years I was told, explicitly or implicitly, by those in authority in the church that to be a lesbian was either sinful or pitiful.”¹⁵⁹ It is clear in the experiences of these ministers that queer sexuality is perceived as a shame in the church. Queer ministers are stigmatised. Agape lives in a closet because the consequences of coming out result in stigma, and she is not ready for that. According to the experiences of Emmanuel and Kate, one who identifies themselves

¹⁵⁷ Ibid

¹⁵⁸ Thabo Lesole, “Gay rights group demands clarity from Shembe Church”, *eNCA*, November 24, 2015, <https://www.enca.com/south-africa/church-leader-under-fire-disparaging-comments-against-homosexuals> (Accessed: November 2, 2018).

¹⁵⁹ Kate Hunt, “The rise and fall of a lesbian ordinand”, in *Aliens in the Household of God: Homosexuality and Christian Faith in South Africa*, ed. Paul Germond and Steve de Gruchy (Cape Town: David Philip, 1997), 34

as queer, is a disgrace in society. It is for this reason that some queer ministers prefer to live in a closet.

Emmanuel stated that the ministers in the community he served once came to his church and prayed for him. They prayed for him because they believed that God could deliver him from homosexuality. There is a perception among some people that homosexuality is a disease or an evil spirit which can be cured. Vera Vimbela was the first lesbian to come out about her sexuality in Umtata. She came out openly and shook the whole village while she was in standard 6. Vimbela states: “My grandparents and I were called before the village chief and his council of elders. The whole village turned up for the hearing, to insult me and make nasty comments.”¹⁶⁰ Vimbela’s sexuality was perceived as an act that was against the norms of her village. She was undressed for people to see whether she had both genitals or not. They held the belief that a homosexual person should have two genitals. When they found that Vimbela had a vagina, she states: “The chief ordered that I be lashed.”¹⁶¹ She was beaten with the belief that she would come back to her senses. Like Emmanuel who was prayed for, some people believe that homosexuality is a disease or an evil spirit that can be cured.

Fear and rejection

In the interviews of participants, the elements of rejection in family, church and society have been visible. Thando describes his circumstances of coming out as follows: “I was 27 years old when I decided to disclose my sexuality to my family and tell them who I am. The first experience was serious rejection and it was very painful to the point of being cut off by my family. My father couldn’t understand how his son could be gay. It did not make sense to him.”¹⁶² Thando was rejected by his father because of his sexual orientation. Thando had always been embraced and treated with respect and dignity by his parents since he was born. However, immediately after telling his parents about his sexual orientation, he became an alien

¹⁶⁰ Vera Vimbela and Mike Olivier, “Climbing on her shoulders: An interview with Umtata’s first lesbian”, in *Defiant Desire: Gay and lesbian lives in South Africa*, ed. Mark Gevisser and Edwin Cameron (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1994), 194

¹⁶¹ Ibid

¹⁶² Thando, interviewed by Ntobeko Dlamini, October 5, 2018

in his own home. Thando had to live without his family for years, which was a very difficult situation in his life. Coming out for Thando resulted to rejection by the very people who were supposed to love and support him. Family is supposed to be one's support system, their pillar of strength and people to journey with in joyful and sad times. Queer people are supposed to feel at home with family members when the whole world has turned its back on them. However, for Thando this wasn't the case. His father became his enemy simply because he was gay. Therefore, one's sexuality can determine the level of acceptance or rejection in some families.

For Thando to be accepted again by his family, he had to act as a heterosexual man because there was no room for a gay person in his family. Thando was rejected by his father at a time when he had just embarked his journey into the ministry of word and sacraments. Therefore, he needed his family more than anything. As a result, he took a decision to marry a woman in order to gain appreciation again from his father. Thando had to engage himself to a heterosexual marriage while he was gay for the sake of being accepted by his family and this resulted in divorce. The rejection of queer people by their families and communities propel them to partake in heterosexual marriages because of the fear of rejection and the longing for approval. When Thando's father passed away, he divorced his wife because there was no longer a need to keep her. Thando's story is not universal but the heteronormative families and society contribute to the high rate of divorce by ministers. Phoebe did not tell her family about her sexuality because she feared being rejected. The heteronormative society also contributes to the high level of depression in society. People become depressed because they do not want to talk. In some communities, it is not safe for people to talk about their queer sexuality because they may be rejected.

Queer ministers also face rejection in the church. When Emmanuel began to live openly as a gay man, the stewards refused to renew his contract. In 2010, Reverend Ecclesia de Lange was suspended and discontinued in ministry in the MCSA when she announced in the church that she had the intention of marrying her partner of the same sex. Pierre de Vos, a journalist, notes: "Although Church officials knew that she and her partner had been living together in the church manse at Grassy Park since 2004, the church took no action against her as long as she

remained discreet about her sexuality.”¹⁶³ Kate Hunt, also notes: “Coming out as a lesbian was not part of the church’s curriculum for ordinands.”¹⁶⁴ This means that some church members can tolerate a queer minister only if they are in a closet. Kate Hunt had lived in a closet for years. When she decided to live her life openly as a lesbian, it was the end of her journey in ministry in the Anglican Church. Emmanuel had lived in a closet for many years until he decided to live his life openly as a gay man, his contract was terminated. Therefore, to live openly as a queer minister, there is a price to pay, and that price is rejection. Although the experience of Emmanuel does not apply to all queer clergy, we learn that queer ministers are rejected by the congregants and the church institution because of their queer sexuality.

The rejection of queer clergy is the reason why queer ministers choose to remain in a closet because they fear that they might lose their jobs and stations. This rejection is also in the wider community. The case of Emmanuel who was rejected by the ministers fraternal in his community and Phoebe who was rejected by women in her community, demonstrate that some people reject ministers if they are queer. In order for them not to lose their dignity in their society, queer ministers choose to live in a closet.

Trauma

Trauma is defined by Lisa Levers as suffering from “events that are extremely difficult and overwhelming for an individual.”¹⁶⁵ These events may include: rape, war, natural disasters, etc. Kaminer and Eagle state:

For those who hold very positive assumptions, an experience of trauma violates their existing understanding of the world, leaving a vacuum, while for those who hold very negative assumptions, a trauma experience may reinforce their belief that the world is dangerous and unpredictable and that they themselves are unworthy and incompetent.

¹⁶³ Pierre De Vos, “The Methodist Church is Confused and Irrational”, *Daily Maverick*, November 24, 2015, <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/opinionista/2015-11-24-the-methodist-church-is-confused-and-irrational/>. (Accessed March 20, 2018)

¹⁶⁴ Hunt, The rise and fall of a lesbian ordinand, 34

¹⁶⁵ Lisa Lopez Levers, “An Introduction to Counseling Survivors of Trauma: Beginning to Understand the Context of Trauma”, in *Trauma Counseling: Theories and Interventions*, ed. Lisa Lopez Levers (New York: Springer Publishing Company, 2012), 9

In both cases, the trauma survivor is left with a heightened sense of vulnerability and lack of control.¹⁶⁶

This means that all human beings are vulnerable. For every traumatic event, the victims would try to find the reasons for that particular event, especially their survival. In trying to find meaning, there are survivors who accept that one can never predict that nothing bad will happen to them. Some survivors tend to believe that the trauma they experienced was due to bad luck. Others find meaning in blaming themselves for being in the space where the traumatic event took place. Others, especially religious people draw meaning of a traumatic event in a belief that it was the plan of God. In traditional African communities including Nhangwini my home village, some traumatic events are attributed to witchcraft. In some cases it is believed that trauma was caused by the ancestors because of something done wrong, or was not done.

Other survivors draw the meaning of the experiences of trauma from the beliefs they have about the perpetrators. They view the perpetrators as cruel or mentally troubled. Others, especially in cases of people who rob and steal from others, believe that the perpetrator is influenced by the economic factors. Kaminer and Eagle state: “Another way in which trauma survivors try to make sense of the event and its impact is by redefining the event to minimise the degree to which it disrupts the survivor’s existing assumptive framework.”¹⁶⁷ The survivors compare their experiences to some people who had much more critical experiences, and view themselves as fortunate. Survivors often regard themselves as lucky to live beyond the trauma.

All of the interviewees have been through traumatic events in their lives. In this section I will explore the causes and consequences of these traumatic events. Moreover, I will explore how the participants overcame trauma and continued to serve. The most traumatic event of Emmanuel’s life was when he had to go through a divorce of his heterosexual marriage in 2002. The church that he had served since his early years, did not offer any support through this traumatic period. There is no procedure set in place by the church to offer psychological

¹⁶⁶ Debra Kaminer and Gillian Eagle, *Traumatic Stress in South Africa* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2010), 62

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid*, 71

counselling to ministers who go through traumatic events. Phoebe was also pointed with a gun by one of her congregants because she had told him that she was queer. She reported the case to the bishop and she was given two week's leave. After two weeks, she was sent back to the same congregation and she had to face and serve Holy Communion to the very person who had pointed a gun at her. Phoebe concludes: "I think the church doesn't know how to support us when we are in this kind of trouble. When situations like that come up, we do not have support from the church because the church doesn't know what to do with us."¹⁶⁸ Both Emmanuel and Phoebe had to find their own way of healing and overcoming these traumatic events.

Divorce appears in the interviews of Emmanuel and Thando. Due to his homophobic father who rejected him because of he was gay, Thando had to marry a woman in order to be accepted into the family again. After the death of his father, Thando divorced his wife because he wanted to be true to himself. What does divorce mean in the case of Emmanuel and Thando? Both Emmanuel and Thando are gay men but they were married to women while being unconscious of their sexual orientation, and of the fact that they are attracted to men. Both of them were influenced by heteronormative pressures to engage themselves in these heterosexual civil unions. This means that a homophobic society contributes to the high rate of divorce, since queer people involve themselves in heterosexual marriages because they want the approval and acceptance by society. Divorce in the case of Emmanuel and Thando was a turning point in their lives. It marked their liberation because it was after the divorce that they were able to live their lives in accordance with their true sexuality.

Agape has suffered severely from depression in the past seven years. She thinks that a lot of it comes from the fact that she lives two lives. She explains: "I live a life of a celibate single woman and people think that I am single. In my mind I feel that I am not authentic because I am not telling people that my sexuality is fluid. I believe that I am not authentic to myself because I am in the church, and I struggle with that."¹⁶⁹ The church knows her as a celibate woman while she is a gender fluid person. She is also in relationship with a same-sex partner. Agape fears to tell the church about her sexuality because she thinks she might be alienated and rejected. Depression has affected Agape a lot. As a result, she had to take sick leave for

¹⁶⁸ Phoebe, Interviewed by Ntobeko Dlamini, October 6, 2018

¹⁶⁹ Agape, interviewed by Ntobeko Dlamini, October 6, 2018

the whole month in 2017 and a two months sick leave in 2018 to deal with her health. Depression has caused anxiety and doubt in Agape regarding her decisions as a leader and preacher. It has also resulted in loneliness that is brought by self-exclusion from society and fellowship. However, it has also strengthened her faith and humbled her as a person. She explains: “I rely heavily on God’s providence.”¹⁷⁰ Agape refuses to become a victim of depression. As a result, there are certain means she does to overcome depression. She states: “I am still learning to talk about it, because mental health affects 1 out of every 4 people.”¹⁷¹ Agape ensures that there are mental health awareness workshops in her church and try to teach about sexuality where she is able to. Currently, Agape sees a psychologist and a psychiatrist. She is on medication, and she tries to be more disciplined with sleep, eating and exercise.

The most traumatic event for Phoebe was at primary school when she realised that she was trapped in the wrong body. Phoebe states: “I call myself queer. I am not male or female. I am certainly not supposed to have breasts and a vagina and bleed every month, but I do.”¹⁷² This means that there are certain parts of her body that she is not pleased with. There are also certain cycles that are happening in her body that she is not satisfied with. This is transsexual. Talia Bettcher defines transsexuality as a “misalignment between gender identity and sexed body.”¹⁷³ There are many people who feel trapped in wrong bodies. As a result, there are transman and transwoman people because they are not pleased with their bodies that are in conflict with their sexual identity. There is no space for a minister in the MCSA to transition from one sex to another. Therefore, Phoebe remains trapped in her body with no choice of transitioning because she is a minister in the MCSA.

Spirituality in the ministry

All the participants were asked about their personal and theological reasons to continue with ministry while they are being alienated by the church. It is evident through their answers that they are influenced by the roots of the Methodist movement of social holiness, which is the

¹⁷⁰ Ibid

¹⁷¹ Ibid

¹⁷² Phoebe, interviewed by Ntobeko Dlamini, October 6, 2018

¹⁷³ Talia Mae Bettcher, “Trapped in the wrong theory: Rethinking trans oppression and resistance”, *Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 39, 2. (2014), 383

flourishment of life for all human beings. It is for this reason that queer ministers, despite all challenges, remain in ministry for the will of God to be done. Queer ministers believe that the will of God is for the MCSA to be a LGBTI+ affirming church. The queer ministers remain in ministry because they believe that they are a gift to the MCSA to be a diverse church that reveals the magnificent of God.

Emmanuel has been a minister for 35 years now. For Emmanuel, it is God who gives him strength to conquer the challenges before him and continues with his journey in ministry. Although Emmanuel has been through a lot of challenges over the past three decades, the only thing that gave him courage is God's providence. Emmanuel states that it is the Psalm 139 that is his source of strength in this journey.

Although queer ministers are alienated by the church, it would never make Thando leave ministry. He states: "I believe that I don't have to leave the MCSA and I don't have to be at my 100% comfort to achieve what God has called me to do."¹⁷⁴ He remains in ministry despite the challenges because he believes that God has called him and because the MCSA needs his voice, especially as a queer minister at a time where the church doesn't know what to do with queer people. He claims that a comfort zone is not a productive place. Therefore one has to be in a challenging space in order to be productive. Thando adds: "I think I will be doing injustice to the call if I leave the church in this context of same sex conversation in the MCSA."¹⁷⁵ Among many things, he believes that he is called to serve and contribute to the ongoing struggle of the same-sex conversation in the church. He concludes: "I might die without the church granting me the right to marry to a partner I love, but what I fight for, is that in the next coming years, whoever is the minister in this church who is homosexual like myself, can live those benefits."¹⁷⁶

Agape joined the ministry of word and sacraments because of her heart for social justice. Her convictions to remain in ministry has nothing to do with sexuality, but has everything to do

¹⁷⁴ Thando, interviewed by Ntobeko Dlamini, October 5, 2018

¹⁷⁵ Ibid

¹⁷⁶ Ibid

with the poor, marginalised and those with broken hearts. Agape remains in ministry because of her desire to serve and her passion for ministry and social justice.

Phoebe has been really privileged to be given a lot of space to exercise her call and ministry. She states: “The institution, theologically, can’t handle the queerness of me, which is the reason for me to stay.”¹⁷⁷ She believes that God created different kinds of people with different sexual identities. She believes that this is something to be celebrated. The diverse people reveal the magnificent of God. As a queer minister, she is a gift to the church, which is a community of different people seeking God. Phoebe adds: “The other reason I stay is because the church carries within itself a story bigger than us.”¹⁷⁸ This means that the MCSA is not a church because it is a good institution but it is a church because it actually births the story of Christ wherever it is. She concludes: “I want to recalibrate the system.”¹⁷⁹ The system is that in the white church, if you do not present yourself in a particular way, there is no way you can actually find community. In a black church, if you don’t wear uniform, you can never find community. The system needs to be changed and she is an agent of that change. She is convinced that one is not supposed to follow these systems in order to find community but one should just be themselves. She believes that it is time for the church to acknowledge that every person is different from another.

Conclusion

It is clear that four themes are present in the interviews. They are: stigma and shame, fear and rejection, trauma, and spirituality in the ministry. I have also illustrated them with the experiences of other queer people in the already existing literature for the reliability, validity and rigour of this study. It is evident through the experiences of the interviewees that queer sexuality is stigmatised and shamed. Queer ministers are treated as outcasts, not only in the church but in the extended community. They are dehumanised to the extent of being referred to as Satan or an abomination. The stigma and shame are the greatest hindrances of coming out by queer clergy.

¹⁷⁷ Phoebe, interviewed by Ntobeko Dlamini, October 6, 2018

¹⁷⁸ Ibid

¹⁷⁹ Ibid

In the interviews, elements of rejection in family, church and society have been visible. Ministers who live openly as queer people face rejection. This means that the church can tolerate queer ministers only if they are in a closet. The rejection of queer clergy is the reason why some queer ministers choose to remain in a closet because they fear that they might lose their jobs. All of the interviewees have been through traumatic events in their lives. Despite the fact that the church did not support queer ministers in difficult times, they were able to overcome trauma and they continued to serve because of their passion for social justice and ministry.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

Personal reflections

This study has placed me in a vulnerable position in the church. Immediately after I had received permission from the General Secretary of the MCSA, Reverend Charmaine Morgan, to conduct this study, I circulated a letter that was a call for participants. The letter was circulated among all MCSA ministers. Included in the letter was: my name, title and description of the research project, aims and objectives, and a call for queer ministers who were willing to share their lived experiences. As an insider and a student minister in the MCSA, most of the ministers who received the letter knew me personally. I was confronted by many heterosexual colleagues who felt that I was taking this conversation too far. I was asked questions such as: “*Uyisaphi le Cawa?*” (Where are you taking this church to?). This is a popular question in the MCSA when people are dealing with unpopular matters such as same-sex conversations. I was made to feel bad about conducting such a study in the MCSA. I was stigmatised to the extent that some had been calling me *isitabane*, which is a term used to refer to a homosexual person. Through this study, I did not only do research and interview queer clergy but I also felt the stigma directed to queer ministers in the MCSA.

2017 was the first time I took a formal course on gender and religion. I must say that the course was productive in adding to my vocabulary terms related to gender and sexuality which I had misused in the past. However, the course did not necessarily change the way I had viewed the same-sex conversation in the MCSA. I admit that I was one of those people who did not care about this conversation because I felt as if it had nothing to do with me. I was also amongst those who felt comfortable about the conversation being prolonged because I believed that the MCSA should not allow same-sex marriages because it was unethical. I was also one of those people who used terms such as *isitabane* to refer to queer people. Although I knew it was an insult, I felt nothing wrong about using the term because that is how people refer to homosexual people. Lastly, I had a belief that homosexuality was escapable. In my village, there was a young girl who came out as a lesbian. She was beaten up hard by her father with the hope that she was going to change. After that, she acted like a girl again. As a child, I thought she had changed, only to find that she suppressed who she was in the attempt of pleasing her parents. The fact that nobody talked about these things while I was growing up made me to think that

this was alien because even those who were gays or lesbians suppressed their true sexual orientations. This study totally changed my mind about queer persons and the same-sex conversation in the MCSA.

I have learnt through the experiences of the interviewed queer ministers that homosexuality is not a disease or an evil spirit but a sexuality that is a gift from God like heterosexuality. I have learnt through this research to embrace queer people and embrace diversity because it is through diversity that we see the magnificence of God who can create different creatures. I have changed during the course of this study. I must say that I was even nervous to go and conduct the interviews because I was going to interview people I did not fully embrace. However, their life stories has changed my reasoning. I was a very homophobic person before I took a course on gender and religion and embarked on this study. Now, I am able to embrace all people and advocate for justice. I believe that this study can shift the paradigms of many people as it has changed mine.

Summary of findings

It is evident through the experiences of the participants that when people are open about their queer sexual identity in the church, problems arise, especially from homophobic congregants. As a result, queer ministers choose to remain in a closet in order to avoid alienation. It is a challenge for an openly queer minister to be invited to a circuit in the MCSA. For one to live in the open as a queer clergy in the MCSA, there is a price to pay. Secondly, the alienation of queer clergy in the church does not only affect the ministers, but also their families who witness the discrimination of their loved ones in the church they serve. Lastly, the MCSA does not offer support such as psychological counselling to their ministers when they go through traumatic events. This shows that there is very little intervention of the church when the life of a minister is in danger. The church does not know what to do with queer ministers.

In relation to resistance in the community, it is evident through the experiences of the ministers that homosexuality is perceived to be evil in some South African communities. Two participants mentioned that certain members of the community prayed for them because they

believed that they were possessed by evil spirits. In that case, it means that there is a perception that homosexuality can be cured because those who pray for queer clergy believe that God will deliver them from homosexuality. Queer ministers are not welcome in some community gatherings. Lastly, for one to live a life as an open queer minister, they have to pay the price of exclusion and stigmatisation.

There are four themes that seemed to be evident in the lives of all queer ministers interviewed. These themes were: stigma and shame, fear and rejection, trauma, and spirituality in the ministry. Queer ministers are treated as outcasts, not only in the church but in the extended community. It is for this reason that queer ministers prefer to live in a closet, because they fear rejection. One of the participants had to get rid of his partner in his house because the stewards were not pleased with him living with the same sex partner. This was regarded as a shameful act. The stewards of his church did not want people to know that their minister was gay because that would have shamed the church. Congregants can only tolerate queer ministers if they are in a closet. All of the interviewees have been through traumatic events in their lives, which are related to their sexualities. It is interesting that through the traumatic events and the instances of rejection, queer ministers were made stronger. They seek to serve God despite the challenges in the journey. They never quit. When I heard of all the experiences and challenges faced by queer clergy, I asked a very critical question to all the participants about the theological and personal motivations that keep them in ministry despite the alienation. One of the participants took me to the early church. She said that those early Christians were persecuted and sometimes killed. The reason we have church today is that they stood firm in the midst of persecution. In that case, he believes that this is the right time to be called to ministry as a queer cleric in a context where the church doesn't know what to do with queer persons.

The participants agreed that one does not need to fit in a fixed system in order to belong. One participant believes that God created different kinds of people with different sexual identities. This is something to be celebrated. The diverse people, of different races, languages, sexual identities, reveal the magnificence of God. Therefore, queer clergy are a gift to the church that is a community of diverse people seeking God. It is important to note that not all queer clergy remain in ministry because they want to advocate for the LGBTIQ+ community. Another participant said that she joined the ministry of word and sacraments because of her interest in

social justice. Although queer ministers are being alienated, they are kept by their passion for ministry and social justice and their desire to serve the people of God.

As I conclude this research, I commend the MCSA for opening a room for a conversation on the same-sex relationships and the church. Through this open conversation, many people, including myself, have been informed about human sexuality and also about homosexuality. However, the conversation has been going on for too long. Lastly, the church is prolonging the process because it is scared to say 'yes', and it is also scared to say 'no'. It is scared to say no, because it was very vocal in South Africa during the apartheid era and it stood for the liberation of the oppressed people, who were black. Therefore, by saying no, the church would be betraying its own stance of standing with the marginalised, which is the LGBTIQ+ community in this case. On the other hand, the church is scared to say yes, because it fears to lose its membership. There is fear that the people who are against same sex unions can leave the church if the MCSA could recognise them. It is also scared to say yes, because it is hard to stand for something you do not fully embrace.

Summary of contribution

There is a lot of literature on the lives and experiences of queer persons since the 1950s to post-apartheid South Africa. The literature covers the intersectionality of race, class and age as it is about different kinds of people in South Africa. It is interesting that the literature also covers the topic of homosexuality and Christianity in South Africa. Moreover, there is literature on the lived experiences of ordained ministers in South Africa. However, no specific study has been conducted on the lived experiences of queer clergy in the MCSA. This study contributes to the existing literature with the lived experiences of queer clergy in the MCSA.

This study contributes to the ongoing same-sex conversation and it is also a response to the call by the MCSA: "The MCSA calls for an ongoing process of respectful dialogue and truthful engagement between those holding differing views, not with the intention of ultimately having

one mind on the issue, which is unlikely, but rather to come to a deepened understanding of what it means to be the one body of Christ.”¹⁸⁰

I have noted that heterosexual people, especially men, have been in the forefront of the same-sex conversation in the MCSA and the LGBTIQ+ people have been left behind. In this study, I have explored the lived experiences of queer ministers who minister in a church that hold different views on human sexuality and on the same-sex relationships. This study contributes to the growing literature on the same-sex debate in the MCSA and in the broader Christian communities. Lastly, the significance and uniqueness of this study is that it documents the lived experiences of queer clergy in the MCSA, which has never been done before.

I have stated in introduction that the same-sex debate is not the only challenge facing the MCSA today. There are also challenges such as gender identity and culture; the ongoing influence of whiteness; and the inter-tribal conflicts within the Connexion. The manner in which these three intersections affect the identity and the discourse of the interviewees would require more reflection.

¹⁸⁰ Methodist Church of Southern Africa, *Methodist Book of Order* (Cape Town: Methodist Publishing House, 2016), 226

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APENDIX A: ETHICAL CLEARANCE



2 October 2018

Mr Ntobeko Dlamini (214540716)
School of Religion, Philosophy & Classics
Pietermaritzburg Campus

Dear Mr Dlamini,

Protocol reference number : HSS/0963/018M

Project title: **The implications of queer sexuality in ministry: The life histories of the experiences of queer clergy in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa**

Full Approval – Full Committee Reviewed Protocol

In response to your application received 22 July 2018, the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee has considered the abovementioned application 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.

The ethical clearance certificate is only valid for a period of 3 years from the date of issue. Thereafter Recertification must be applied for on an annual basis.

I take this opportunity of wishing you everything of the best with your study.

Yours faithfully

Professor Shenuka Singh (Chair)
Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

/pm

cc Supervisor: Professor P Denis
cc Academic Leader Research:
cc School Administrator: W's Nhlaso Hlophe

Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

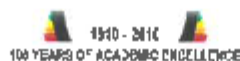
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Founding Campuses: Edgewood Howard College Medical School Pietermaritzburg Westville

APENDIX B: CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPATION

UKZN HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (HSSREC)

INFORMED CONSENT RESOURCE TEMPLATE

Information Sheet and Consent to Participate in Research

Date:

Dear Reverend

My name is Ntobeko Dlamini, a Master of Theology student (History of Christianity) from the School of Religion, Philosophy and Classics at the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

Cellphone number: 0766253061

Email address: 214540716@stu.ukzn.ac.za or ntobekodlamini1@gmail.com

You are being invited to consider participating in a study that involves research on queering ministry. The aim and purpose of this research is to explore the lived experiences of queer clergy in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa. The study is expected to enroll queer clerics who are willing to share their stories. All interviewees will be interviewed at their homes or at their place of convenience. It will involve the following procedures: an interview in which the participants will be given a questionnaire prior the interview. The duration of your participation if you choose to enroll and remain in the study is expected to be an hour (interview). The study is funded by the Church of Sweden through the Gender, Religion and Health program.

The study may involve the following risks and/or discomforts of remembering traumatic experiences of the past. The names of participants will be anonymous in the project. We hope that the study will create the following benefits: The untold stories of the interviewees will be known and each of the participants will receive a copy of the dissertation when the study has been finalized.

If the research could potentially involve risk, the participants are free to withdraw from the research at any time without any negative or undesirable consequences to themselves.

This study has been ethically reviewed and approved by the UKZN Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (approval number: HSS/0963/018M).

In the event of any problems or concerns/questions you may contact the researcher at 214540716@stu.ukzn.ac.za or the UKZN Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee, contact details as follows:

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 2604557- Fax: 27 31 2604609

Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za

Participation in this research is voluntary and that participants may withdraw participation at any point, and that in the event of refusal/withdrawal of participation the participants will not incur penalty or loss of treatment or other benefit to which they are normally entitled. If the participant feels the need to withdraw, they should inform the researcher on the email above.

The study will not cost the participants any money. All costs of the interview related to this study shall be directed to the researcher.

The names of the participants will not appear in the research project in order to protect the confidentiality of the participants. The data will be collected through an audio record then transcribed to verbatim texts and archived at the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

CONSENT (Edit as required)

Ihave been informed about the study entitled “Queering Ministry: The lived experiences of queer clergy in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa” by Ntobeko Dlamini.

I understand the purpose and procedures of the study of the lived experiences of queer clergy in the MCSA.

I have been given an opportunity to answer questions about the study and have had answers to my satisfaction.

I declare that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time without affecting any of the benefits that I usually am entitled to.

If I have any further questions/concerns or queries related to the study I understand that I may contact the researcher at ntobekodlamini1@gmail.com

If I have any questions or concerns about my rights as a study participant, or if I am concerned about an aspect of the study or the researchers then I may contact:

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 2604557 - Fax: 27 31 2604609

Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za

There will be no video-recording and no photographs of participants will be taken. It will be an audio-recorded interview as authorized by the Methodist Church of Southern Africa.

I hereby provide consent to:

Audio-record interview YES/NO

Signature of Participant

Date

Signature of Witness
(Where applicable)

Date

Signature of Translator
(Where applicable)

Date

APENDIX C: INTERVIEW RELEASE FORM



Interview Release Form

This agreement ensures that your interview is added to the archived collections of the University of KwaZulu-Natal in accordance with your wishes.

I, _____ (interviewee), hereby authorize _____ (interviewer) to audio record my story to be used in the archived collections of the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

In consideration of my participation in said recording, I agree that:

- The 'original' transcript will be conserved at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Copies will be held and made available as a public reference resource for possible use in research, teaching, publication, electronic media (such as the Internet or the World Wide Web) and broadcasting (such as radio or television). Copies may be made available, in whole or in part, in any and all media, in perpetuity, throughout the world, subject to limitations stated below.
- All public use is made in strict accordance with the uses and restrictions indicated below.
- All public use is made in strict accordance with South African copyright law and 'fair use' provisions.
- The University of KwaZulu-Natal shall hold the copyright to this transcript and I hereby cede any copyright that I may have in my contribution to it.
- Any and all revenue that might result from this transcript will be used to subsidise future research and archival projects of the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

- This agreement represents the entire understanding of the parties and may not be amended unless agreed to by both parties in writing.

The use of the transcript is subject to the following conditions (indicate preference):

1. Accessible without restrictions
2. Accessible with pseudonyms
3. Any other restrictions: _____

Interviewee signature: _____

Signed at: _____

Date: _____

In the presence of (interviewer): _____

Administrative Use Only

Interviewee details

Full names: _____

Home address: _____

Home telephone: _____ Work _____ Mobile _____

Work address: _____

Fax number _____ E-mail address: _____

Interviewer and project details

Full Names _____

Research Project title _____

Location of interview (s): _____

Number of tapes: _____ Total length of interview (s): _____

Transcribed by: _____

Additional
Comments: _____

APENDIX D: COUNSELING LETTER



20 September 2018

To whom it may concern.

I would hereby like to confirm that Ntobeko Dlamini (researcher) is currently doing a Master's level study under the topic "*Queering Ministry: The lived experiences of queer clergy in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa*". This study is for the completion of an MTh in the discipline of History of Christianity. The study has been approved by the gate-keeper, which is the General Secretary of the MCSA. As part of Ntobeko's research work he will be conducting interviews with queer ministers who are willing to share their stories.

In the light of the fact that Ntobeko's research participants is a vulnerable population and the possibility for retraumatization exists we have arranged for participants who voice the need to be offered emotional support and follow-up counseling at the Student Support Services on the Pietermaritzburg Campus of the University of KwaZulu-Natal. All costs concurred due to the offering of support to participants will be covered by the MTh Gender and Religion program at the School of Religion, Philosophy and Classics at UKZN.

If you have further questions in this regard, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Kind regards.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Charlene van der Walt", on a light-colored background.

Prof. Charlene van der Walt
Gender and Religion
School of Religion, Philosophy and Classics

School of Religion Philosophy and Classics, University of KwaZulu-Natal
P/Bag X01 • Scottsville, 3209 • Pietermaritzburg • South Africa.
☎ +27 (0) 33 260 5850 📠 +27 (0) 33 260 5858
Prof. Charlene van der Walt
E-mail: vanderwalt@ukzn.ac.za

APENDIX E: LETTER FROM THE GATE-KEEPER



The Methodist Church of Southern Africa

Tel: +27 11 615 1616
Fax: +27 11 615 1499

Methodist Connexional Office
33 Ernest Oppenheimer Ave
Bruma Office Park, Bruma
Private Bag X11
Garden View 2047

12 September 2018

Ms N Dlamini (PF 1503)
Postnet 235
Private Bag X6
Cascades
3202

Dear Ntobeko

With Reference: UKZN Studies

I refer to request the endorsement of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa for your Master in Theology studies entitled "The experiences of queer clergy in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa".

The MCSA permits you to undertake this study as directed by the University. We understand that the interviewees will remain anonymous. The Methodist Church of Southern Africa permits you to review the interviews of queer clergy in addition to the review of the minutes of meetings.

Best wishes to you in your studies

Yours sincerely

Charmaine Morgan
General Secretary

A Christ-healed Africa for the Healing of Nations

Presiding Bishop: Rev Ziphazile D. Siwa
e-mail: presbish@mco.org.za

Lay General Treasurer: Mrs Thini Ngonyama
e-mail: finance@mco.org.za

General Secretary: Rev Charmaine Morgan
e-mail: gensec@mco.org.za

APENDIX F: LETTER OF REQUEST FOR PARTICIPANTS

REQUEST FOR PARTICIPANTS IN A RESEARCH PROJECT

Dear ministers,

I hope my words find you well in life affirming spaces.

I am currently doing a study under the topic “*Queering Ministry: The lived experiences of queer clergy in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa*”. This study is for the completion of an MTh in the discipline of History of Christianity. The study has been approved by the gate-keeper, which is the General Secretary of the MCSA (see attached letter). Basically, I will interview and document the lived experiences of queer clergy in the MCSA.

I kindly request queer ministers who are willing to share their stories (both ordained presbyters and deacons) to indicate to the email/s below before the 30th of September 2018:

214540716@stu.ukzn.ac.za Ntobeko Dlamini (researcher)

The participants will remain anonymous.

Your contribution will be highly appreciated.

Kind Regards,

Ntobeko Dlamini

MTh candidate (UKZN)

APENDIX G: QUESTIONNAIRE



College of Humanities

School of Religion Philosophy and Classics

Department of History of Christianity

Masters Research Project

Research Topic: Queering Ministry: The lived experiences of queer clergy in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa

Interview Questions:

1. Describe your family background and early years.
2. Describe your educational background.
3. What influenced you to join the ordained ministry of word and sacraments in the MCSA?
4. What is your sexual orientation?
5. When and how did you realise/know you were...? (above mentioned sexual orientation)
6. Do you feel free to talk about your sexual orientation?
7. Do you feel support in your family?
8. Do you feel support among your friends?
9. Do you feel support among your colleagues?
10. Do you feel support among the members of your congregation?
11. Describe the circumstances of your coming out. When did it happen? Where did it happen?
12. Are you in a relationship/married?
13. What challenges have you encountered in your family because of your sexuality?
14. What challenges have you encountered in your community because of your sexuality?

15. What challenges have you encountered in church/ministry because of your sexuality?
16. Are you satisfied by the stance of the MCSA on the same-sex debate?
17. Do you have equal privileges as heterosexual clerics in the MCSA?
18. If not, what are the theological and social motivations of you serving a church that does not serve you?
19. What has been your unique contribution as a queer cleric in ministry?

APENDIX H: TURNITIN REPORT CERTIFICATE

Masters disserttation

by Ntobeko Dlamini

Submission date: 15-Jan-2019 02:17PM (UTC+0200)
Submission ID: 1064360059
File name: NTOBEKO_DLAMINI_MASTERS_THESIS.docx (87.49K)
Word count: 24700
Character count: 135854

Masters disserttation

ORIGINALITY REPORT

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