



**THE FUNCTIONS OF DREAMS AND VISIONS IN THE *IBANDLA*
LAMANAZARETHA AT INANDA.**

BY

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**A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT FOR THE
AWARD OF MASTERS OF ARTS DEGREE, DEPARTMENT OF
ISIZULU LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE, FACULTY OF HUMAN
SCIENCES, UNIVERSITY OF NATAL.**


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SEPTEMBER 2003.

DECLARATION

I declare that “The Functions of Dreams and Visions in the *ibandla lamaNazaretha* at Inanda” is my own work, both in conception and execution. All the resources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references. This study has not been submitted for any degree or examination in any University.

Signature: (candidate) 

Signature: (supervisor) 

Date: 11-09-03

DEDICATION

To Isia Shembe for developing a new African theology in which the Zulu (and Africans) can retain their rich cultural heritage.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I wish to express my sincere gratitude to:

1. My supervisor, Dr Thenjiwe Magwaza, whose enthusiasm for the *ibandla lamaNazaretha* initially sparked my interest in the Shembe religion, which resulted in this project. Without her hard work and untiring commitment it would not have come to fruition. Her friendliness and calm and collected attitude in the face of mounting pressure and the looming deadline made the project that bit easier. "*Ngiyabonga Thenji, ukwanda kwaliwa ngumthakathi!*"
2. Khethiwe Mthethwa, who was a great help in the collection of data, transcribing and translating interviews and for discussion and explanation of many aspects of Zulu culture and Shembeite life.
3. All of those Shembeite respondents who freely provided great insight into their dreams and visions.
4. My family – the support system. Thank you for your encouragement, help in reading and re-reading my work and for creating a stable environment in which I could work.
5. My sweetheart Emme, for her love, understanding and acceptance of the all-consuming nature of research.
6. My friends, Terry, Rich, Braudee, And, Dom, Shaun and also to Damon Albarn.

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the function of dreams and visions in the Shembe church at Inanda. It looks at who Isia Shembe (the church founder) and his lineage are to Shembeites, the nature of the relationship between Shembe and the *amadlozi* (ancestors) and what roles they play in Shembeite life. The data was collected using qualitative methodology – in-depth interviews that were transcribed and where necessary, translated. The study is best understood within a structural-functionalism framework, which accounts for the social and cultural aspects of the religion. The study concludes that Isia Shembe and his lineage are generally thought of as prophets through whom God works. Shembe and the *amadlozi* often work as a unit and perform the roles of converter, purveyors of good fortune and guides or directors. In addition, Shembe solely performs the roles of cultural leader and mediator between Shembeites and the *amadlozi* and between Shembeites and God. Dreams and visions function to guide Shembeites, as communication with the spiritual realm, as a method of conversion and as re-affirmations of faith.

GLOSSARY OF SHEMBE-SPECIFIC TERMS USED

- AIC – African Independent Church
- Shembeite – A follower of the Shembe religion.
- Nazarite – A follower of the Shembe religion.
- Nazareth Church – The Shembe church.
- *ibandla lamaNazaretha* – Meaning “a group of Nazarites”. Refers to the Shembe church.
- *idlozi* / *amadlozi* (pl.) – An ancestral spirit that appears in dreams.
- *ithongo* / *amathongo* (pl.) – A synonym for *idlozi*, an ancestral spirit.
- *isibonakaliso* / *izibonakaliso* (pl.) – Revelatory dream or visions.
- *iphupho* / *amaphupho* (pl.) – Normal, everyday dreams.
- *uMvelinqangi* – Meaning “the one who appeared first”. Traditional name for God.
- *uNkulunkulu* – Meaning “the old, old or great, great one”. Missionary name for God.
- *isangoma* / *izangoma* (pl.) – A traditional diviner who interprets dreams.
- *umfundisi* / *abafundisi* (pl.) – High-ranking priest in church.
- *umvangeli* / *abavangeli* (pl.) – Meaning evangelist. A knowledgeable, old man who is source of information in church.
- *umshumayeli* / *abashumayeli* (pl.) – Meaning preacher. Lower-ranking preacher.
- *umkhokheli* / *abakhokheli* (pl.) – Group leader for females.
- *umphathi* / *abaphathi* (pl.) – Group leader for young girls.
- *umthandazi* / *abathandazi* (pl.) – Prayer person who is normally female.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Title page..... i

Declaration..... ii

Dedication..... iii

Acknowledgement..... iv

Abstract..... v

Glossary..... vi

Table of contents..... vii

Chapter One Introduction

1. Life, culture and religion..... 2

2. Dreams and signs..... 3

Chapter Two Theoretical framework and research methodology

1. Theoretical framework..... 7

1.1 Structural-functionalism..... 7

1.2 Zulu cosmology..... 9

1.3 Hierarchy in the *ibandla lamaNazaretha*..... 9

2. Research methodology and methods..... 10

2.1 Qualitative research..... 10

2.2 Method of data collection..... 12

2.3 Selection of respondents..... 12

2.4 Details of respondents..... 13

2.5 Difficulties encountered during research..... 15

Chapter Three Literature review

1. The *amadlozi* and dreams.....18

1.1 General studies on Zulu culture that include the *amadlozi* and dreams..... 19

1.2 Studies that focus wholly on the Zulu religious system.....23

1.3 Other studies that include sections on traditional Zulu religion.....24

2. Dreams and visions in African Independent Churches and perceptions of Isia Shembe.....26

2.1 Dreams and visions in African Independent Churches.....26

2.2 Who is Shembe? Perceptions of Isia Shembe.....32

Chapter Four Presentation of data

1. Respondents38

2. *Iphupho* vs *Isibonakaliso*.....39

3. Who is Shembe? Shembeite perceptions of Isia Shembe and his lineage.....41

3.1 Shembe as a prophet.....42

3.2 Shembe as a Black Messiah.....43

3.3 Shembe as God.....45

3.4 Isia Shembe and his lineage.....47

4. Roles of Shembe and the *amadlozi* in Shembeite life.....48

4.1 The relationship between Shembe and the *amadlozi*.....48

4.2 Social and religious life in the *ibandla lamaNazaretha*.....49

4.3 The roles of Shembe and the *amadlozi* in Shembeite life.....50

4.3.1 Roles performed by Shembe.....50

4.3.1.1 Cultural leader.....51

4.3.1.2 Converter.....	52
4.3.1.3 Mediator.....	52
4.3.1.4 Retriever, cleanser and converter of <i>amadlozi</i>	56
4.3.2 Roles performed by Shembe and the <i>amadlozi</i>	59
4.3.2.1 The role of converter.....	59
4.3.2.2 Purveyors of good fortune.....	59
4.3.2.3 Guides or directors.....	62
5. The functions of dreams and visions in the <i>ibandla lamaNazareth</i> a.....	62
5.1 <i>Izibonakaliso</i> as communication with the spiritual realm.....	63
5.2 <i>Izibonakaliso</i> as a means of conversion.....	64
5.3 <i>Izibonakaliso</i> as guidance.....	65
5.3.1 <i>Izibonakaliso</i> as guidance from God.....	65
5.3.2 <i>Izibonakaliso</i> as guidance on problems pertaining to the <i>amadlozi</i>	66
5.3.3 <i>Izibonakaliso</i> as general guidance from Shembe and the <i>amadlozi</i>	66
5.4 <i>Izibonakaliso</i> as responses from Shembe and the <i>amadlozi</i>	69
5.5 <i>Izibonakaliso</i> as re-affirmations of faith.....	70
6. Further aspects of <i>izibonakaliso</i>	71
6.1 The form in which Shembe and the <i>amadlozi</i> appear to followers in <i>izibonakaliso</i>	71
6.2 The frequency of Shembe and the <i>amadlozi</i> in <i>izibonakaliso</i>	72
6.3 Stimuli used to induce <i>izibonakaliso</i> of Shembe.....	73
6.4 Interpretations of <i>izibonakaliso</i>	73
6.5 Recurring and standard patterns in <i>izibonakaliso</i>	75

Chapter Five Conclusions

1. Conclusions.....77

1.1 *Iphupho Vs Isibonakaliso*.....77

1.2 Shembeite perceptions of Isia Shembe and his lineage.....78

1.3 The relationship between Shembe and the *amadlozi*.....79

1.4 The roles performed by Shembe in Shembeite life.....79

1.5 The roles performed by Shembe and the *amadlozi*.....80

1.6 The functions of dreams and visions – *izibonakaliso* – in the *ibandla lamaNazaretha*.....81

1.7 Further aspects of *izibonakaliso*.....81

2. Recommendations for future studies.....83

Bibliography.....84

CHAPTER 1

Dreams and visions in the Shembe religion are the portal to the spiritual realm that is so important in Zulu and African culture. They function as communication with Shembeites' ancestors or *amadlozi* and with the current Shembe leader and his lineage (former Shembe leaders). In dreams and visions Shembeites are given general life-guidance from their *amadlozi*, Vimbeni Shembe (the current leader) and his lineage (past Shembe leaders). They are seen as a channel for Shembe and the *amadlozi* to convey advice on issues Shembeites have prayed about or requested help with. Dreams and visions are also used, to an extent, in converting non-followers to the Shembe religion and as re-affirmations of faith.

The Shembe church today

The Nazareth Baptist Church of Shembe is one of Kwa-Zulu Natal's earliest African Independent Churches with a very large Zulu following. Shembe followers number more than one million, most of whom are drawn from KwaZulu-Natal. A large number of the devotees live at Inanda (north of Durban) which is regarded as the capital of the Shembe sect. Zulu Zionism, and the Shembe faith in particular, have been pre-eminent in the syncreticising of apparently disparate religious worlds – "African tradition" and "orthodox Christianity". To date there is inadequate research output on these local adaptations of globalised Western religion and more specifically for this study, on the dreams and visions that feature prominently in the religion. A more comprehensive documentation of such important expressions of local religious genius is necessary.

Background to the Shembe religion and traditional Zulu religion

Isia Shembe (1867 – 1935) was one of the most important messianic figures in South Africa. He founded the Church of the Nazarites or *ibandla lamaNazareth* in 1910, which he felt was the fulfilment of God's will that had been revealed to him through visions and a divine voice.¹ Shembe adopted all references to the Nazarites (the poor of God) of the Old Testament for his movement (Oosthuizen, 1968: 2). He established a new, African theology basing it on traditional Zulu

¹ <http://www.ecu.edu/african/sersas/Papers/TishkenSpring2003.htm>

religion and culture, practices from Christianity, Old Testament references to the Nazarites and his own visions from God. In doing so he developed a new symbolic and religious system that revitalised past Zulu customs and religious practices (in particular ancestor veneration) but in a new framework that also incorporated Christian elements. It is necessary to distinguish between the natural, traditional Zulu religion (acknowledgement of the supernatural) and orthodox religion such as Christianity. A further consideration is the revelations through Shembe's visions (on which the religion is partly based) and hence the significance of visions in the religion. The Bible is interpreted in the context of Zulu religion and what is taken from the Old Testament is understood in the context of Zulu society (Canonici & Zungu, 1997: 3).

1. Life, culture and religion

Religion is the mainstay of Zulu culture, as there is hardly an aspect of Zulu life in which religion does not play a part (Krige, 1965: 280). Oosthuizen writes that God, or *uMvelinqangi*, plays a minor role in the lives of the Zulu.² He is all-powerful and worshipped but practically unknown (Oosthuizen, 1968: 7). The veneration of the *amadlozi*, or ancestors, is the dominant force in Zulu religion. The *amadlozi* attend to the needs, well-being and fortune of their living relatives, assist in times of trouble and guide them with life in general. They also assume the role of medium, interceding between the Zulu and *uMvelinqangi* in a similar way to the saints in Christian belief. The *amadlozi*, in return, are dependent upon their living descendants to venerate them, sacrifice animals for them and give offerings to them (Krige, 1965: 283). The collected data shows that much of what has been written about the *amadlozi* in traditional Zulu culture is applicable to the Shembe religion, which is expected given the focus of Zulu tradition in the religion. Ancestor veneration is central and sacrificial slaughtering for the *amadlozi* also occurs. However, the addition of the Shembe leader must be noted. The leadership of the church is based on succession from the same line of

² *uMvelinqangi* and *uNkulunkulu* are both Zulu names for God and either can be used. However, *uMvelinqangi* (the one who appeared first) is the traditional Zulu word for God while *uNkulunkulu* (the old, old one) is the name missionaries used to refer to God. Due to the focus on Zulu tradition in the Shembe religion I have chosen to generally use *uMvelinqangi*.

descent and so the eldest son of the previous leader assumes this position.³ He assumes the position of greater authority and in many cases he and the *amadlozi* perform as a unit or at least with interaction and communication. The Shembe leader has also adopted many of the roles performed by the *amadlozi* in the traditional Zulu context. A clear idea of the leader is therefore necessary. In this respect there is a focus and much speculation on Isia Shembe's identity because of his status as the founder and prevailing significance in dreams and visions.

2. Dreams and signs

The *amadlozi* appear to the Zulu in certain ways. Ancestor manifestations include the *amadlozi* revealing, "themselves to human beings by seizing on some part of the body and causing illness" (Krige, 1965: 288) and appearing as 'spirit-snakes' but more prominently (and relevant to this study) through dreams (Berglund, 1976: 94 – 100). Berglund states that he cannot overstress the important role that dreams play in Zulu life. There is cause for anxiety when people do not dream and without them "uninterrupted living is not possible" (Berglund, 1976: 97). Dreaming as a channel of communication with the *amadlozi* is still central in Zulu culture and therefore the Shembe religion, once again with the addition of the past and present Shembe leaders. The living leader, Vimbeni, and his lineage all feature in Shembeite dreams in much the same way the *amadlozi* do. They also appear in waking visions. We can therefore see the importance of dreams and the *amadlozi* in Zulu culture and consequently the occurrence and significance of dreams, visions and the *amadlozi* in the Shembe religion.

The problem

There is a great interest in dreaming in African culture (Jedrej & Shaw: 1992) and a numbers of studies have been conducted on dreaming in African societies and more importantly for this study, in African Independent Churches (AICs).

³ Zulu culture is inherently patriarchal or male-dominated. Therefore, it is unsurprising, given the revitalisation of Zulu culture in the Shembe religion, that the Shembe leaders and other church members in positions of authority or power, are predominantly male.

However, the functions of dreams and visions in the *ibandla lamaNazaretha* have not been academically recorded, which shows the importance of this dissertation.

Research and publications on Zulu religion are extensive and the documentation of ancestor contact through dreams is thorough. It is safe to say that past research has yielded conclusive results about Zulu religious beliefs, in particular (with regard to this study) on the *amadlozi*'s contact with their living descendants through dreams (see Callaway, 1870: 228 – 35, Berglund, 1976: 94 – 100, Krige, 1965: 286 – 288). The *amadlozi* are believed to watch over people, and are thought to be in control of peoples' fortune and happiness and should therefore be kept satisfied. Misfortune is often attributed to the *amadlozi*'s unhappiness in which case they must be appeased, particularly through sacrifice (see Sundkler, 1961: 21, Berglund, 1976: 197, Krige, 1965: 283). This study does not propose to research further what the actual beliefs of the Zulu are and how the *amadlozi* and living relatives interact, but will use already published material as a basis to achieve the research goals.

There is a varied amount of published and unpublished work, and visual documentation on the Shembe movement.⁴ Past and present studies have been conducted on the separate aspects of this dissertation – Isia Shembe and his lineage, the *amadlozi* and dreams and visions. Some studies, such as Sundkler (1961), include all three. Perceptions of Isia Shembe are key to this study because of the prominence of Isia Shembe and his lineage in Shembeite dream patterns. These perceptions are also essential in understanding the nature of the relationship between the *amadlozi* and Shembe leaders and their roles in the church. From this we can derive the functions of dreams and visions. Mthembeni Mpanza (1994: 7 – 8, 11) writes that Isia Shembe was a prophet who had

⁴ Past research on the Shembe has concentrated on clothing and its significance and meaning (Thenjiwe Magwaza Ph.D. Thesis, 1999 and Geraldine Morcom, Masters Thesis, 1994) and *izihlabelelo* (hymns), music and dance of the Shembe (Bongani Mthethwa in *Symposium on Ethnomusicology*, Vol 3, 1982, University of Natal and Vol 10, 1991, Rhodes University, Carol Muller, Ph.D. Thesis, 1994). More general studies of Shembe the man and Shembe the movement have also been done. These include Oosthuizen's *The Theology of a South African Messiah* (1967), Gunner's article on the Nazareth Church in *Oral tradition and literacy: changing visions of the world*, University of Natal (1985), Lynn Acutt's video *Isaiah Shembe: the portrait of a black messiah* (1996) and Absolom Vilakazi's *Shembe: the revitalisation of African society* (1986).

Shembe (the Holy Spirit) working within him and that he spoke on behalf of the Holy Spirit (cf. Vilakazi, 1986: 104, Ngobese in Oosthuizen and Hexham, 1992: 98), which is largely confirmed by the respondents. However, there is also evidence to suggest that in some peoples' eyes Shembe may be considered God or a Black Christ (see also Sundkler, 1961: 282 – 86, 329 – 30, Oosthuizen, 1967: 12, 14, 17, 21, 23, 32, 36, 41 – 42 and Kitshoff).⁵ There is widespread documentation of dreams, visions and their functions in a number of African Independent Churches (AICs).⁶ Dreams and visions are generally seen as messages from God and communication with God or the spiritual realm. They function in a variety of ways in AICs – they serve to convert people, strengthen faith, as guidance in church matters and as guidelines for proper living in general.

We can therefore see that although some studies have touched on the dreams and visions of the *ibandla lamaNazaretha* (Sundkler, 1961), an in-depth and holistic study of the functions of dreams and visions in this church has not yet been done. This dissertation holds theoretical significance, as it will contribute to developing a body of knowledge, and social significance as it will provide insight into, and better understanding of a non-Western culture and religion, which has significance to society at large.

Specific objectives of dissertation

The study explores a number of aspects of the dreams and visions of members of the *ibandla lamaNazaretha* at Inanda. Based on the data gathered it determines the similarities and differences between *isibonakaliso* (vision) and *iphupho* (dream) in the Shembeite mind. It investigates who Isia Shembe is to his followers and the nature of the relationship between Isia Shembe or his lineage and the *amadlozi*. The study explores the roles played by Shembe and the *amadlozi* in the religious and social life of the Shembeites. It also establishes the functions and significance of dreams and visions and documents how followers

⁵ <http://www.ucalgary.ca/~nurelweb/books/shembe/papers/ven-kits.html>

⁶ Bengt Sundkler and Jim Kiernan have investigated the dreams and visions of Zulu Zionists. Richard Curley and Simon Charsley have done the same in the True Church of God in Cameroon and in the African Israel Church in Western Uganda respectively.

became converted to the Shembe religion. The study looks at the form in which Shembe leaders and the *amadlozi* appear to followers in dreams and visions and the frequency of these appearances. It finds out who interprets and explains the messages in dreams and visions and takes into account whether any stimuli are used to induce dreams and visions of the Shembe leaders. The study also considers whether the content and symbolism of dreams and visions of Shembeites display recurring and standard patterns. This is done at a surface level as the study does not psychoanalyse the content of dreams and visions but considers the surface trends (see Sundkler, 1961: 265).

Limitations of the dissertation

The study documents the dreams and visions of 13 respondents at Inanda. Consequently, it represents the dreams and visions of that group. The group is an even split of rural and urban respondents. However, urban Shembeites can be considered as from Inanda as this is the religious headquarters of the religion. Eight of the respondents are female and the remaining five are male. They range in age from 27 – 71 years old. Therefore, the study is specific to a particular group and is by no means the conclusive study on dreams and visions in the *ibandla lamaNazaretha*.

Organisation of the dissertation

In Chapter 2 the theoretical framework, on which the study is based and within which it can be understood, is defined and discussed. The research methodology used in obtaining the data is also presented. In Chapter 3 previously published literature on Zulu religion and the significance of dreams and the *amadlozi* in Zulu culture is reviewed. Dreams and visions in African Independent Churches in general and aspects of the Shembe religion are also discussed. In Chapter 4 the data is presented and analysed and provisional conclusions are drawn. In Chapter 5 final conclusions are put forward and recommendations and suggestions for future research in this field are provided.

CHAPTER 2

1. Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework is the necessary structure through which the study is understood and against which hypotheses are tested. Shembeites display a social and religious life that is essentially amalgamated and traditional Zulu culture is prominent in the religion. Therefore, these factors need to be taken into account when deciding on a theoretical framework. Structural-functionalism emphasises the links between various aspects of society and considers how they are interrelated.

1.1 *Structural-functionalism*

Lanternari (1963: v – vi) proposes that the study of religious movements can be done from a variety of approaches. He offers the phenomenological approach wherein the researcher is concerned with ‘discovering and identifying the universal and unchanging religious “structures.”’ However, Vilakazi (1986: ix) comments on this approach saying that it expresses “nothing about the way in which religious and secular life impinge upon each other, or interact.” Lanternari’s second approach is the morphological approach. This approach places all religious manifestations under specific categories such as solar cults, agrarian cults or sky worshippers, irrespective of their various backgrounds. Vilakazi notes once again that this approach does not account for the socio-cultural or historical situation of the religion. Krige (1965: 280) writes that in Zulu culture religion pervades almost every aspect of life. As the revitalisation of traditional Zulu culture is a focus of the Shembe religion, the social and religious life of followers is largely integrated. As a result, the socio-cultural situation of the religion needs to be accounted for and it is ideal that the theoretical framework incorporates this situation.

Therefore, this study adopts a structural-functionalism approach as utilised by Absolom Vilakazi in *uShembe: the revitalization of African society*. Structural-functionalism is a theory that stresses the interconnectivity between various

social institutions, for example how society and culture can affect religion. It takes as its point of departure the idea of society as a holistic, integrated system. The structural-functionalism approach is also useful in understanding kinship and lineage systems, which are prevalent in non-Western tribal societies and both pertain to the Shembe religion.¹ Vilakazi (1986) states that this approach takes into account 'the social situation' of a religious movement and tries to give socio-cultural explanations for those movements. Lanternari (ibid: v – vi) points out that this approach attempts to account for the nature, function and origin of a religious movement as well as trying to show its internal and external dynamics caused by factors inherent in the socio-cultural situation, and the impact of outside forces on the culture. This approach also maintains that religions can only be understood within their secular context. This theory is therefore useful in discussing aspects of the Shembe religion.

The main features of Shembeite life that pertain to this study are dreams and visions, the Shembe leaders and the *amadlozi*.² These features span society, culture and religion, and are largely integrated. Dreams and visions must be read in a social context. The data (dreams and visions as told to the researcher) are the dream or vision experiences recollected in a social act, which leads to the analysis of dreams as social assets (Kiernan, 1990: 184). The material that is being dealt with is not the original experience but people's recollection and account of it (ibid: 200). The *amadlozi* are prominent in Zulu culture and religion and Shembe leaders are dominant in the Shembe religion. Therefore, the structural-functionalism approach is ideal as, with reference to the aims of the study, it takes into consideration the interconnectivity between the cultural (*amadlozi*), religious (Shembe leaders and the *amadlozi*) and social (dreams, visions and social context) aspects of the Shembe religion.

¹ http://www.anthrobase.com/Dic/eng/def/structural_functionalism.htm

² I have discussed the objectives of the study in Chapter 1. To re-iterate briefly, the study investigates who Isia Shembe is to his followers, the roles played by Shembe and the *amadlozi* in Shembeite life, aspects of dreams and visions and their function and significance in the *ibandla lamaNazareth*. These are discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.

1.2 Zulu cosmology

Zulu cosmology is another significant theoretical aspect that, like structural-functionalism, demonstrates interconnectivity. Canonici in Smit (1999) offers some relevant ideas on African cosmology.³ He states that the individual, or *umuntu*, is never considered alone but rather a member of the greater society. He also offers that the underlying social organisation reflects the cosmological system of many African cultures, including the Zulu. The Zulu cosmos is divided into five concentric kingdoms with man at its centre. Other kingdoms include the animal, spirit and ancestor kingdoms. Although these kingdoms are independent and self-contained, contact between them occurs. Therefore, it is necessary to note the interconnectivity between man, spirits and ancestors in Zulu culture. As Oosthuizen (1968: 3) writes “Zulus live in a symbiotic union with the unseen spirits and powers which to them are so real that their very existence depends on them and their whole being is, as it were, penetrated by them.” The theory is useful in understanding Shembeite dreams and visions as social yet spiritual entities, and the significance of them in a Zulu context. It also helps in considering the relationship between man and the *amadlozi* in the Zulu cosmological context.

1.3 Hierarchy in the *ibandla lamaNazaretha*

A further framework, although not expressly theoretical, is the church hierarchy. This hierarchy is helpful in understanding the status in the church of respondents and thus to better appreciate their responses and opinions on dreams and visions. The *ibandla lamaNazaretha* hierarchy (in order of status) is as follows:

- Vimbeni Shembe – church leader
- *umfundisi* – a priest or pastor in senior position, performs church duties and preaches

³ Mazisi Kunene, well-renowned for his publications on Zulu cosmology, provides a similar departure in his book, *Anthem of the decades* (Kunene, 1981).

- *umvangeli* – literally an evangelist who preaches occasionally
- *umshumayeli* – a preacher, leader of temple⁴
- *umkhokheli* and *umphathi* are female group leaders of women and young girls respectively
- *umthandazi* – no ranking, can be men and women but generally women

An *umfundisi* is a priest in a senior position. He supervises one or two districts (each normally consisting of 4 to 6 temples) and lower-ranked members. He is not attached to any one temple and may preach at the temples he visits. An *umvangeli* is generally an elderly man who is considered knowledgeable and a valuable source of information on church matters and life in general. He preaches from time to time. The *umshumayeli* is the leader of a temple. He preaches and manages his temple. *Abakhokheli* (plural) and *abaphathi* (plural) are female group leaders for women and young girls respectively and work in the local temples. The *umshumayeli* will be the leader of a temple as his status as a male ranks him above *umkhokheli* and *umphathi*. An *umthandazi* is a predominantly female prayer person that has heightened awareness of the spirit world. The *umthandazi* does not hold any specific status in terms of the church hierarchy but deserves mention, as two of the respondents are *abathandazi* (plural).⁵

2. Research methodology and methods

2.1 Qualitative research

A qualitative research approach is used in this study. Neuman (1999: 144 – 46) writes that qualitative researchers discuss cases in their social context and show how people attach meaning to events. He notes that qualitative data are empirical in that they involve documenting real events, what people say (with words, gestures and tone) and observing specific behaviours. He also

⁴ This is commonly an open space that is demarcated by a circle of white painted stones. Some temples are, in addition, surrounded by a wiring or concrete fence.

⁵ Shembe informant

emphasises the importance of the social context for understanding the social world. He explains that when a researcher removes social data from the social context in which it appears, or ignores the context, the social meaning and significance are distorted. He continues by stating that attention to the social context means that the researcher considers what surrounds the focus of study, which implies that the same events or behaviours can have different meanings in different cultures. This ties in with the structural-functionalism approach discussed in 1.1 above, in that the researcher considers the specific social context in which the study is conducted and therefore accounts for the interconnectivity between society and culture and their influence on each other and on the study.

Therefore, we can see that qualitative research depends on spoken and observed data or behaviour. This research design excels in telling a story from the respondents' viewpoint thus providing the rich descriptive data necessary in documenting dreams and visions. Qualitative methods are generally used for identification, description and explanation, which is ideal for this type of research (Crabtree & Miller in Crabtree & Miller, 1992: 7). The study relies on "snowballing", which utilises a network of connected people (in this case Shembeites) whereby information from one person or information source leads to another (Neuman: 199). A further consideration of qualitative research is that the researcher must remain open to the unexpected and be willing to change the direction or focus of the study, possibly abandoning the original research question in light of developments in the field (ibid: 146). A clear example of modifying research questions as the study progresses is my initial assertion that only Isia Shembe featured in Shembeite dreams and visions. When I discovered, through recurrent reference to leaders other than Isia, that all past and present leaders made appearances, I had to change this question accordingly. Finally, a case study approach is adopted to focus on this group of Shembeites as representative of a typical Shembeite group. The study is by no means the conclusive study on dreams and visions in the Shembe church. It represents the

dreams and visions of rural and urban Shembeites of a particular age group at Inanda.

2.2 Method of data collection

The study utilises unstructured but intensive in-depth and face-to-face interviews with respondents in order to gain access to their dream lives, experiences of visions and personal perceptions. Unstructured interviews allow for probing and prompting by the researcher in order to gain further insight. Respondents are also allowed to expand on the questions they find relevant. The interviews are conducted in both English and Zulu, depending on respondents' grasp of the English language, and a translator is used where necessary. The interviews are tape recorded, transcribed and translated (if required) for careful analysis of views and opinions of the respondents. If necessary, the respondents are contacted post-interview in order to verify information and to clarify ideas on the content and symbolism of dreams.

2.3 Selection of respondents

Respondents are drawn from Inanda religious villages, i.e. Ebuhleni and Ekuphakameni. They are chosen, with regards to their age, sex and hierarchical status, to be as wholly representative of the adult Shembeite population as possible in order to provide a wide spectrum of opinions on dreams and visions in the church. They have experienced dreams, visions or both. The respondents (from age 27 and upward) are four males and four females, with a further male church elder (*umvangeli*) and two female *abathandazi*. These respondents (13 in total) are drawn from rural (Inanda) and urban areas. Urban Shembeites can be considered as from Inanda as this is the religious headquarters of the religion. Although attempts were made to have respondents who are as representative as possible, the female respondents are generally older than the male respondents. This was due to some fortunate "snowballing" (see Research methodology and

methods above) with an older woman who led me to a number of her (older, female) friends. The difficulty in approaching highly-ranked members must be noted. I attempted to interview an *umfundisi* who refused outright with “*Akuvunyelwe*” or “It is not permitted”. This is due to the fact that some members of the church, particularly those in power (high-ranking) see outsiders (researchers) as interfering in the *ibandla lamaNazaretha*.⁶

2.4 Details of Respondents

1.1 Nkululeko Mthethwa

Age: 27

Lives in: Umlazi

Occupation: Trainee manager in a wholesale shop

1.2 Godfred Mzimela

Age: 29

Lives in: Nazareth, Pinetown

Occupation: Petrol Station Manager, Westville

1.3 Silo Dlomo

Age: 31

Lives in: Newlands East

Occupation: Accounting Assistant, University of Natal, Durban

1.4 Rupert Nduku

Age: 33

Lives in: KwaMashu

Occupation: Messenger, University of Natal, Durban

⁶ Shembe informant

1.5 Julius Xulu (*umvangeli*)

Age: 53

Lives in: Umlazi

Occupation: Computer Operator, University of Natal, Durban

1.6 Ma Mthethwa (*umkhokheli*)

Age: 47

Lives in: Umlazi

Occupation: Student Affairs Warden, Mangosuthu Technikon, Umlazi

1.7 Zodwa Mkhize

Age: 56

Lives in: Mayville

Occupation: Pensioner

1.8 Dudu Gwala

Age: 33

Lives in: Cato Crest

Occupation: Unemployed at time of interview but now has employment that was not specified.

1.9 Sikhonzile Zulu (*umthandazi*)

Age: 42

Lives in: Nongoma

Occupation: Foreseer – helps people with problems pertaining to their *amadlozi*

1.10 Sukelene Mhlongo (*umthandazi*)

Age: 57

Lives in: Matubatuba

Occupation: Foreseer – helps people with problems pertaining to their *amadlozi*

1.11 Thoko Chiliza (*umkhokheli*)

Age: 65

Lives in: Cato Crest

Occupation: Pensioner

1.12 Ziphi MaKhomo

Age: 63

Lives in: Ndwedwe

Occupation: Pensioner

1.13 MaShange

Age: 71

Lives in: Efolweni (South Coast)

Occupation: Pensioner

2.5 Difficulties encountered during research

Empirical fieldwork relies on observation and not theory. Therefore, due to the nature of the research, difficulties in the field are inevitable. It is not book bound and therefore has many more variables – uncontrollable and unforeseeable aspects and contexts. It is naïve to think that everything will run as smoothly as one has planned and below I give factors that can be seen as limiting and obstructing the progression of data collection and the study in general. Time constraints (due to looming deadlines) must be noted, as must the scope of the study – it is a 50% Masters dissertation, which limits the amount of data that can be presented and therefore the degree to which the topic can be explored.

To begin with, the language and colour barrier must be considered. I am an English-speaking white man and therefore by far the minority in Inanda. I have studied Zulu for four years but I am by no means fluent, particularly when dealing with such an ethereal subject as dreams and visions. Therefore, as an outsider

(culturally, racially and linguistically) respondents may have felt less willing to assist in my research. Some Shembeites may also have been opposed to outside “interference” as was the case with the *umfundisi* in 2.3 above. My young age (23) may also have been a limiting factor because in Zulu, and much of the world’s thinking, wisdom comes with age. Therefore, I may have been seen as lacking sufficient knowledge on the Shembe religion and Zulu culture to properly comprehend what respondents were saying.

One must also bear in mind the context in which the respondents were interviewed. A number of the interviews took place at a religious festival at Inanda, which has implications. Respondents interviewed at the festival were no doubt focussing their attention on the Shembe religion and may have been distracted by my interviews. The festival, a joyous and celebratory time, may also have been interrupted by my research. When interviewing respondent 1.13 it felt as if my translator and I had disturbed her festival experience. This was reiterated when respondent 1.13’s friends refused to be interviewed following her interview. The urban situation also presented difficulties as I interviewed respondents at their workplaces. They were no doubt involved in their daily work tasks, which I interrupted. Time constraints in the working environment (lunch breaks and deadlines, for example) also made it difficult to probe respondents for information other than their initial responses.

The interviews themselves must also be given attention. A number of respondents were late for appointments or missed them completely, which added to the difficulty of collecting the data. The interviews conducted in English were relatively concise as I was leading and controlling them. This provided for straightforward answers to the research questions but not as much detail of dream and vision experience as in Zulu interviews. This must also be attributed to English as the respondents’ second language, which limited detailed explanations whereas in their mother tongue respondents provided comprehensive data. The interviews conducted by both the translator, Khethiwe,

and I provided rich and detailed accounts of dreams and visions but often rendered me unable to control the line of questioning, which led to very long accounts from which relevant data had to be extracted.

The physical context in which the interviews were conducted must be acknowledged. External noises, the weather, traffic in urban areas, inquisitive passers-by, the group in which the interview took place, and the time of day all affected the data gathered. For example, I noticed that the concentration on the interview of two elderly female respondents was directly affected by the cold, winter afternoon.

Finally, preconceived ideas and altered perspectives in the field must be mentioned. Neuman (1999: 146) writes that qualitative researchers must remain open to the unexpected and be willing to change the focus of a research project, possibly even abandoning the original research question in the middle of the project. During the data collection I had to alter certain questions in light of developments and new information I had acquired in the field. This can be seen as a difficulty as it meant I had to change my focus and approach to interviews in order to get the most relevant and realistic information. One of the main preconceptions I had at the beginning of the study was that Isia Shembe was the only leader who appeared to Shembeites in dreams and visions. This soon proved invalid as all past Shembe leaders and the current leader, Vimbeni, feature in dreams and visions. Based on preliminary discussions with Shembeites I assumed that followers mainly converted through dreams (predominantly from their *amadlozi*). This was not the case as there was only minor occurrence of conversion through dreams and in these cases the Shembe leaders featured more prominently than the *amadlozi*. Another postulation I made was that stimuli might be used to induce dreams and visions but the data did not reveal any real occurrence of this.

CHAPTER 3

The elements of Zulu culture and life in the *ibandla lamaNazaretha* that are pertinent to my research are the ancestors or *amadlozi* and dreams involving them, and dreams and visions within the Nazareth Church. The identity of the founder, Isia Shembe, and the roles in Shembeite life played by him and the *amadlozi* are also important. Therefore, one can define the scope of significant literature quite clearly. Relevant literature includes general studies of Zulu culture that in part focus on the religious beliefs of the Zulu (predominantly the ancestors) and dreams as a channel of communication between the living and their ancestors.¹ Other studies are solely devoted to the Zulu religious system. As dreams and visions in the Shembe church have not been academically documented before, studies on dreaming and visions in African Independent Churches, with a particular focus on Zulu Zionist churches (the Shembe religion and Zionism are similar; both stemming from a traditional Zulu cultural background) are essential. There is no clear, dogmatic perception of Isia Shembe. Surveyed literature provides a fluid body of statements that is often conflicting. Due to the prominence of Isia Shembe and his lineage in Shembeite dreams, the perception of Isia Shembe in the eyes of his followers needs qualification.

1. The *amadlozi* and dreams

Research and publications on Zulu religion are extensive. The religion of the Zulu people and the importance of dreaming have been documented since the arrival of missionaries in KwaZulu-Natal. Publications on Zulu religion that I have accessed are:

¹ Religion is the backbone of Zulu culture, as there is hardly an area of Zulu life in which religion does not play a part (Krige, 1965: 280). God, or *uMvelinqangi*, plays a minor role in the lives of the Zulu. He is all-powerful and worshipped but practically unknown (Oosthuizen, 1968: 7). The veneration of *amadlozi* is the prevailing force in Zulu religion (Krige, 1965: 283).

- 1.1 Studies on Zulu culture that include research on Zulu religious beliefs, the *amadlozi* and dreams.
- 1.2 Studies that focus wholly on the Zulu religious system.
- 1.3 Other studies that include sections on traditional Zulu religion.

1.1 General studies on Zulu culture that include the amadlozi and dreams

Axel-Ivor Berglund's *Zulu Thought Patterns and Symbolism* (1976) is a comprehensive study of the mind of the Zulu, their belief system and symbolism within the culture. Berglund's study provides insight into communication by the ancestors through dreams and also documents a variety of other circumstances in which interaction with the ancestors occurs.

Berglund explains that the *amadlozi* are part of Zulu society and that a separate realm between the living and ancestors does not exist.² Ancestors are sometimes looked upon as the intermediaries between the Lord-of-the-Sky (God) and humans – they pray to the Lord-of the-Sky on behalf of the living and then give the acquired knowledge to the living through dreams and visions (ibid: 37). Dreams are considered a channel of communication between the living and the ancestors and a lack of dreams is cause for great concern as it is seen as a communication breakdown (ibid: 98). Berglund cannot overstress the importance of dreams in Zulu-thought patterns and that without them uninterrupted living is not possible. As one of his diviner respondents says, “dreams are the most important thing to us” (ibid: 114). In dreams, the *amadlozi* communicate coming events and dangers, express their desires and impart knowledge and advice (ibid: 37, 99, 197). According to Berglund the ancestors appear in dreams only

² Ancestors are limited in their activities to their lineage in a given clan and the living and their ancestors are interdependent on each other. The Zulu venerate their *amadlozi*, have a constant fire for them during, leave tit-bits, unwashed pots and beer for them and are conscious of their presence (Berglund, 1976: 197).

when bearing good news and when this occurs it is cause for rejoicing. If something bad is to be reported they will appear in another manner (ibid: 98). However, he also writes that some bad dreams can be considered good as they will cause a person to return to a better living (ibid: 101). Ancestral dreams as warnings of coming danger are interpreted in the opposite as the *amadlozi* (spirit) are opposite to the living Zulu (man) (ibid: 371). Berglund also notes dreams caused by witchcraft and sorcery that can be treated with strong medicines, women dreaming frequently at the start of a pregnancy and *amaphupho nje*, which are normal everyday dreams. The latter are also understood in the reverse (ibid: 99 – 101). Dreams in other contexts are also mentioned.³

Berglund discusses the forms in which the ancestors appear to the Zulu. These manifestations are in the forms of pains in certain parts of the body (ibid: 137 – 38), a variety of omens (ibid: 197), "spirit-snakes" and more importantly for this study, dreams (ibid: 94 – 100). The *amadlozi* in dreams is central to this study as it serves as a basis for understanding how, in the Shembe context, the *amadlozi* and Shembe leaders feature in dreams and visions. With this knowledge one can better understand the functions of dreams and visions in the *ibandla lamaNazareth*. In dreams the *amadlozi* are white, which allows them to be seen at night (ibid: 100, 371) (cf. Kiernan, 1990: 192).

From the above one can see that the *amadlozi* are a very real and ever-present part of everyday Zulu life. They manifest themselves in a variety of ways; as "spirit-snakes", through omens and pains in the body and most prominently through dreams. The messages in dreams are warnings of danger, imparted

³ Dreams are a very important instrument through which the ancestors call their servants – the diviners. These dreams are both frightening and unclear and are often accompanied by visions that are as incomprehensible and fear-filled (Berglund, 1976: 136). Dreams are sometimes used to signify the end of an aspiring diviner's training (ibid: 161). One must also note that diviners occasionally see visions of the ancestors in the day (ibid: 98).

knowledge and advice. Messages containing warnings are interpreted in the opposite as the *amadlozi* are seen as opposite to the living.

Eileen Krige, in her book, *The Social System of the Zulus* (1965), also documents Zulu religion and therefore the *amadlozi*. Krige writes about the unclear and ill-defined ideas that the Zulu have of heavenly powers.⁴ With regard to the Shembe religion I cannot wholly accept this assertion. The influence of missionaries on African religious beliefs in general and more particularly the Christian elements in the Shembe religion have resulted in a more concrete idea of God as the Almighty Being. Shembeites largely exhibit a more defined idea of God than Krige suggests (see Sundkler, 1961: 20). Krige continues that the Zulu do not focus on these (heavenly) forces and that the real and vital religion of the Zulu is ancestor worship or veneration. This is true of the Shembe church today, as the *amadlozi* are still a big part of the Shembe religion. According to the data gathered the *amadlozi* as a focal point may be attributed to the fact that Shembeites need something tangible (like the *amadlozi* that appear in dreams) as a focus. Krige goes on to say that the ancestors take a real interest in their progeny, guard them against harm and attend to their needs. In return the living make sacrifices to the *amadlozi* and venerate them. Krige also notes that all prosperity and hardship are attributed to the ancestors' happiness and anger (ibid: 283).

Krige defines the term *idlozi* (sing.) as an ancestral spirit. She explains that when an *idlozi* wants to return to the world it materialises into a recognised "spirit-snake" (ibid: 284 – 85).⁵ The ancestors reveal themselves in omens as a warning

⁴ The Zulu believe in "vague powers" such as *uNkulunkulu* (the old, old one) or Creator and *uMvelinqangi* (the one who appeared first), which are both names for God. They also believe in *uNkulunkulu*'s daughter, *Nomkhubulwana* and the personification of natural phenomena such as *Inkosi yezulu*, "The Lord of Heaven" (Krige, 1965: 280 – 282) (cf. Berglund, 1976: 32 – 53, 64 – 74).

⁵ Old women may also return in the form of a little lizard or *isalukazana*.

of coming disaster and through illness by seizing on some part of the body and causing illness in it. This indicates that they wish an animal to be slaughtered for them as a sacrifice of appeasement (ibid: 288). Krige says that the third way the *amadlozi* manifest themselves and reveal their desires is through dreams (in which they often warn people against enemies or coming danger). However, she writes that angry *amadlozi* can also cause people to die through supposedly stabbing them in their dreams.⁶ Krige considers dreams from the *amadlozi* as easily recognisable because they generally come with a message from the dead, but not all dreams are sent by the *amadlozi*. She writes that wizards are capable of sending dreams, often those in which a man dreams he is being stabbed and dies of pleurisy. Ordinary people can also send someone a dream by means of medicines. There are just ordinary dreams that have no real meaning, which are understood in the reverse. The respondents of this study confirmed the former but did not say that everyday dreams were understood in the reverse. Krige continues, saying that the dreams of diviners and others that are able to become ecstatic are considered to be true and not confused like the dreams of ordinary people. She also notes that summer dreams are more often true as winter produces "confused imaginations". She writes that the sacrifice is the way in which the living can contact the *amadlozi* to ask for favours or thank them for their blessings (ibid: 286 – 89). The respondents confirmed that this is common practice in the *ibandla lamaNazareth*.

Krige's points on the *amadlozi* and dreaming generally re-iterate those of Berglund. She concludes that the *amadlozi* manifest themselves as "spirit-snakes", through omens, pains in the body and through dreams. Messages in dreams are the *amadlozi*'s desires, warnings of coming danger, questions and advice (Krige, 1965: 285 – 88) (cf. Berglund: 94 – 100, 137 – 38, 197). However, Berglund notes that only good news is brought in dreams while bad news is

⁶ This causes pleurisy, an inflammation of the pleura (a membrane enveloping the lung). If you dream that you are being stabbed by your *amadlozi* you are sure to die.

brought in another manner (ibid: 98). Another difference is that Krige (ibid: 287 – 88) writes that everyday dreams are understood in the opposite while Berglund (ibid: 371) considers some *amadlozi* dreams to be interpreted in this way. This incongruity may be attributed to the fact that although *amadlozi* dreams may be true, they still require interpretation. Krige adds that wizards and ordinary people are also able to send dreams. The *amadlozi* (and wizards) can cause death through “stabbing” the dreamer in the dream.

1.2 Studies that focus wholly on the Zulu religious system

In his *Religious System of the AmaZulu* Callaway writes that dreams and apparitions are intimately wrapped up with the *Amatongo*, the *amadlozi*. Callaway’s documentation of dreams and ecstasy (visions) is presented as narratives related to him by Zulu respondents.

The heading of the first account is “The *Amatongo* (*amadlozi*) make revelations by dreams”. The narrator relates a number of dreams in which the *amatongo* or *amadlozi* reveal themselves and messages to the living in dreams.⁷ He also explains how a man’s *idlozi* came to him and warned him of coming attacks from enemies. The man may ignore this but the *idlozi* will return until his sleep is sufficiently upset to take notice of the message of the dream and act on it. An *idlozi* does not appear in dreams in the form of a snake but comes as if he was not dead (Callaway, 1870: 228 – 31) (cf. Kiernan, 1990: 197).

⁷ Examples from Callaway’s respondents are that if you dream that a man you thought your friend does you harm (“stabs you”) in a dream then that man is not to be trusted as you believe the “dream does not lie”. A dream in which a beast is chasing you is a sign that you should be careful when hunting the following day. If you dream of relatives that you have not seen for a long time and see them unhappy, when you go to them you will find out the cause of their unhappiness (Callaway, 1870: 228 – 29).

The second narrative documents a man, *Undayeni*, who predicted things through receiving revelations from his ancestors in dreams, and was able to achieve ecstasy (visions) (ibid: 232 – 35). Everyday dreams are interpreted in the reverse, “because we have dreamt of his death he will not die.” This is not always the case but dreams of someone who is sick or dying are understood “by contraries” (ibid: 236 – 38). The respondent also notes that winter dreams are more confusing than summer dreams (ibid: 238). Dreams from the *amadlozi* as true messages from the dead and everyday dreams, generally interpreted in the opposite, are also discussed (ibid: 239 – 46).

Callaway’s conclusions are in line with Berglund’s and Krige’s. The *amadlozi* reveal themselves through dreams and in the form of snakes. They express their wants, needs and forthcoming events. Callaway strengthens Krige’s (1965: 287 – 88) argument that everyday dreams are interpreted in the reverse and adds that *amadlozi* dreams are considered as truth. They also agree on the point that winter dreams are less clear than summer dreams (Callaway, 1870: 228 – 29, 238) (cf. Berglund: 94 – 100, 137 – 38, 197, 371, Krige, 1965: 284 – 89). A point on which Berglund differs is the form in which the *amadlozi* appear in dreams. He writes that they are white, which allows them to be seen at night (ibid: 100, 371) (cf. Kiernan, 1990: 192) while Callaway notes that ancestors appear as they were when living (ibid: 230 – 31).

1.3 Other studies that include sections on traditional Zulu religion

Bengt Sundkler in *Bantu Prophets in South Africa* notes the vague idea of heavenly powers that the Zulu have, but also suggests that “modern half-Christian prophetic movements” (such as the Shembe religion) have a more developed idea of a heavenly Lord (God) (Sundkler, 1961: 19 –20). He writes that the real religion of the Zulu is ancestor worship. The *amadlozi* look after

peoples' well-being in all respects and must therefore be kept happy. Any misfortune is attributed to the *amadlozi*'s unhappiness and they must be appeased, particularly through sacrifice. The *amadlozi* reveal themselves in the form of snakes and through dreams, wherein they warn and lead their descendants. The most powerful revelation of an *idlozi* takes place during the initiation of a diviner (Sundkler, 1961: 21 – 22, 266)(cf. Berglund, 1976: 197, Krige, 1965: 283). Although brief, Sundkler's understanding of Zulu religion (and communication of the *amadlozi* through dreams) match those of other studies above (cf. Callaway, 1870: 228 – 35, Krige, 1965: 284 – 88, Berglund, 1976: 37, 94 – 100, 136, 197).

One can conclude that the *amadlozi* manifest themselves to their living relatives as "spirit-snakes", through omens, pains in the body and through dreams. It is uncertain as to whether the *amadlozi* appear in dreams as they were when living or as white nondescript entities. Messages in dreams are the *amadlozi*'s desires, warnings of coming danger, questions, advice and forthcoming events. Everyday dreams are understood in the reverse while *amadlozi* dreams are considered as truth. Summer dreams are more easily understood than winter dreams. The data gathered reveals that these conclusions are largely applicable to the *ibandla lamaNazaretha*, as dreams are the most common and prominent means of communication from the *amadlozi*. However, in the Shembe context, the addition of Shembe leaders in dreams and visions must be noted. Shembe and the *amadlozi* can be seen as the authors of dreams and visions. Therefore, with an understanding of how and why Shembe leaders and the *amadlozi* appear in dreams and visions, one can determine their functions.

2. Dreams and visions in African Independent Churches and perceptions of Isia Shembe

Dreaming and visions in Shembe's Nazareth Church can be correlated with the larger context of dreaming in Zulu culture (particularly with the Zionist Church due to its traditional Zulu cultural background) and further with African Independent Churches. This type of research is vital to this study. General studies (that include Isia Shembe) of African Independent Churches leaders, the Shembe religion in general and more specific studies on Isia Shembe are also relevant.

2.1 Dreams and visions in African Independent Churches

Bengt Sundkler in his book *Bantu Prophets in South Africa* did a pioneering study on Zulu-Christian (specifically Zionist) dreaming. He focuses on "call dreams"; the call of a founder to establish a church or the call to join a church, the latter also referred to as conversion dreams. Sundkler documents "stereotyped symbolism and interpretations" in conversion dreams and in Zionist dreaming in general. He states that there are elements in Zionist conversion dreams that always recur and that these appear as a stereotyped series that also have standard interpretations.⁸ Sundkler also notes general dream content in Zionist churches as stereotyped and standardised. He attributes some of this to the monopolising of certain dream symbols by the Zionist Church and that Zionists are "trained" in proper ways of dreaming (Sundkler, 1961: 265, 270 – 72). He further writes that stereotyped dreams are considered true and prophetic and Zionists "dream what their church expects them to dream" – only dream elements that fit into the accepted dream pattern of the church are remembered. This is not so in the *ibandla lamaNazaretha*. The data gathered from respondents shows that

⁸ Recurring symbols in dreams include light, shining cloths, rivers or pools, a group of Christians on the other side of a river calling the dreamer over, baptism, white luminous figures and snakes. More discernible content is a choice between two alternatives symbolised by e.g. two mountains, two rivers and ethical conflicts.

although church elements may emerge in dreams, particularly as Shembe church leaders appear in them, Shembeites' dreams are their own and dream content is not limited to the church. Sundkler continues that Zionists are expected to relay their dream testimonies (which are considered communication from Jehovah) in church services and these are used as a means of communal worship. He writes that to dream rightly shows loyalty to the church and that this allows the church to exercise totalitarian control over the individual's psyche by moulding him into a standard follower. He also notes that if a man has a dream that is in contradiction with the Bible it is a dream from Satan (ibid: 273 – 75).

Writing on AICs in general in *Dreams in African Churches*, Simon Charsley challenges much of what Sundkler has said. Charsley largely disagrees that stereotyped dreaming and recurring symbolism in African Independent Churches (AICs) occur to any great extent (cf. Kieman, 1990: 207). He initially writes that dream-telling is not a common occurrence but later documents it in various AICs.⁹ Dream-telling as a means of communal worship and as part of the church service does not occur in the *ibandla lamaNazaretha*. Charsley considers interest in dreams to be erratic and that there is generally inconsistent use of them in AICs, which is incongruent with other studies on the topic (Charsley in Jedrej and Shaw, 1992: 156 – 58). In the *ibandla lamaNazaretha* dreaming is an important aspect of the Shembe religion, which discounts Charsley's statement. Charsley classifies dreams into various groups thereby classifying their functions. He looks at foundation dreams wherein a leader is told to start a church. He also writes that due to Sundkler's (1961: 265 – 74) preoccupation with another dream group, "call dreams", when people are focussing on allegiance to a new church, it is obvious that recurring church-related symbols would occur and that the monopolising of church-related symbols is not sustainable. However, a more in-

⁹ Discussions with long-term Zulu Zionists proved equally ambiguous. Some say that dreams are only brought up in church when someone has dreamt of something that is relevant to a specific member of the church while others say that dream-telling is used as part of the church service.

depth study of this type of dream (Daneel, 1974: 143 – 53) revealed a greater variety of contexts, symbols and combinations of these. He also notes that these conversion or call dreams are used in some AICs as a means of entry or establishing a newcomer into the church. The dreams are not due to the church dictating what followers should dream but more likely due to the desire to receive a significant dream or through new members' processing of church teachings (ibid: 160 – 62, 165) (cf. Curley, 1983: 27 – 31). Charsley (ibid: 162) continues, rather contradictorily, by saying that conversion dreams were prevalent in The True Church of God (elsewhere considered an AIC, Kieman, 1990: 184) but not in AICs (ibid: 164).

Having earlier dismissed the regular occurrence of dream-telling and interest in it (ibid: 156 – 58), Charsley documents the telling of dreams to varying degrees in various AICs as part of the standard service as a means of preaching or communal worship. Both leaders and ordinary members recount dreams depending on the church (ibid: 163). Charsley offers examples from the AIC that he studied, stating that the interpretation of dreams was considered a gift. However, there was also focus on certain parts of a dream while others were disregarded, revealing subjective interpretation (ibid: 166 – 67).

Jim Kieman has written about the dreams and visions of urban Zulu Zionists in South Africa. Having noted the lack of definition between dreams and visions in previous literature on AICs, Kieman differentiates between the two modes of revelation. He writes that they differ firstly in context, sleeping state versus waking state and that visions are only experienced by prophets (and those aspiring to prophecy) and "only emerge on the tide of fervour released by communal prayer" whereas dreams can be experienced by anyone during sleep. He also notes that the Holy Spirit is the author of visions while the ancestors are the source of influential dreams (Kieman, 1990: 189, 193). Interpretation of

dreams and experience of visions is the “prerogative of prophecy” – prophets who have a heightened awareness (ibid: 186, 193, 195 – 96). A diviner may also interpret ancestral dreams (ibid: 198).

Kiernan looks at ancestral dreams saying that they can lead to conversion, reveal things and generally function as seen in 1 above. Non-ancestral dreams (or dreams in which ancestors are indistinct) are important in conversions and supplying guidance in church matters. These dreams are considered to be as frequent as ancestral dreams. Visions provide messages from the Holy Spirit that are symbolic (and require some interpretation) or less common direct messages. Kiernan also writes that ancestral dreams need more interpretation while visions are generally more explicit (ibid: 189 – 97). He continues by stating that dream-telling as a performance can be used tactically in Zulu Zionist churches and other AICs (cf. Curley, 1983: 35 – 36) to compete for status and manipulate social relationships. Yet he also notes that dreams are not part of the standard contribution to a Zionist meeting (ibid: 200 – 01). Similarly, dreams are not part of a meeting in the *ibandla lamaNazareth*a. Visions are used in individual healing and less frequently as a warning of danger to the whole congregation. Less noticeably, they serve to validate the reputation of a prophet. Kiernan concludes that there are a variety of uses and varied instances of dreams, and that while the conveyance of visions is normally used to strengthen followers’ faith and cause them to conform to Zionist practice, dreams are the follower’s own personal thoughts (ibid: 203 – 07). This discounts Sundkler’s idea of recurring symbolism (cf. Charsley in Jedrej and Shaw, 1992: 156 – 58).

Richard Curley has also documented dreams in an AIC in West Africa. Curley’s study concentrates on call or conversion and contribution dreams or dream-telling. The latter surface through the church’s social organisation as well as from the psyche of the members while the former do not demonstrate any formula

(Curley, 1983: 20, 29). This supports Charsley's claim that stereotyped dreaming and recurring symbolism do not occur in AICs (Charsley in Jedrej and Shaw, 1992: 157, 161 – 62, 165) (cf. Kiernan, 1990: 207) but refutes Sundkler's claims (Sundkler, 1961: 270 – 75). Dreams are seen as a channel of communication with the spiritual realm and with God. They are considered important as it is likely they will contain information that will be valuable for all members of the church. Dreaming is regarded as a sign of faith and helps to reaffirm one's membership in the congregation. Many of the church members recount their dreams publicly. These are interpreted by an elder of the church, by a deacon (the interpretation here used as an instruction to the congregation) or by the narrator of the dream. The interpretation is understood according to church hierarchy with church leaders offering a more authoritative interpretation. Dreams that contain clear statements about the spiritual realm or religious elements function as communication with God. Dreams with secular content are viewed as a message that, with proper interpretation, could be used to solve past and present problems or offer a glimpse into the future (here seen as informal divination). All dreams have some relevance as The Holy Spirit is considered the force behind all of them (ibid: 25 – 26). This differs from Kiernan (1990: 189, 193) who feels that the Holy Spirit is the author of visions and the ancestors the authors of dreams. This, however, may be due to cultural differences and the prominent place of the ancestors in Zulu thought patterns.

Curley continues by giving further evidence of the uses of call and contribution dreams. Dreams are an essential part of conversion and a relevant dream is often necessary as an indication of commitment to the church or contact with divinity in order to gain entry and full acceptance into the church.¹⁰ Accordingly, converts are told to expect such a dream. Conversion dreams help converts to

¹⁰ Curley writes that a typical convert is introduced to the church when faced with a critical problem, most commonly illness, that cannot be solved by conventional means. Preliminary research into the *ibandla lamaNazaretha* reveals that this could feature in a fair number of Shembeite conversions.

acclimatise to their new religious situation (and to later confirm this situation through the telling of these dreams). They may also be used (through dream narration) to extract guidelines for proper living and are used generally to maintain the religious community in the church (ibid: 27 – 31). Contribution dreams are part of the church's regular service. Curley writes that the dream-telling is used to demonstrate and reconfirm religious commitment, to compete for social status in the church¹¹ (cf. Kiernan, 1990: 200 – 01) and to praise it (ibid: 20, 26, 33, 35).

Charsley has also written a more specific article (1973) documenting dreams and their role in an AIC, the African Israel Church, in Uganda. He notes that dream narration occurred regularly in the church. Dreams were seen as contact with the dead (cf. The *amadlozi* and dreams, above). They could also reveal the unknown (foretelling) (cf. Curley, 1983: 26) and affect everyday life once told (for example confessions, which lead to forgiving). The latter occurred through instructional dreams (a message to tell somebody to do something) or dreams that cast other members in an unfavourable light. I feel that this second type of dream is not a common occurrence in AICs (cf. Curley, 1983: 34). Dreams were also taken as messages from God and revelations in general. Praying for dreams before sleeping was thought to induce them, therefore prayer can be seen as a stimulus for dreams. Charsley also distinguishes between dreams (what people saw while sleeping) and visions (what people saw while praying) (cf. Kiernan, 1990: 189). Interpretation of dreams was considered a gift, as dream-messages were often jumbled and unclear. Charsley writes that nobody was favoured in dream interpretation although prophets with special powers were often given difficult or important dreams to work out and religious leaders dealt privately with dreams unfit for public narration. Dream narration was also a means of gaining status by contributing valuably to church life (cf. Curley, 1983: 35 – 36, Kiernan, 1990: 200

¹¹ Those who can describe vivid religious images are considered more devout, which leads to competition between dream narrators and interpreters.

– 01). The recorded dreams were highly varied and Charsley once again counters Sundkler's claim of recurring symbolism in dreams in AICs (Charsley, 1973: 247 – 50, 252, 256).

There are a number of conclusions that can be drawn from the reviewed literature on dreaming and visions in African Independent Churches. Dreams play a part in converting people to AICs and may be used in familiarising converts with the church and its teaching. In some churches a relevant religious dream is necessary in gaining entry to the church. Dreams are generally narrated in AICs but are not always part of the standard service and are told by leaders and followers alike. Elders, leaders, prophets or those with special powers generally interpret the dreams. There is no stereotyped symbolism or standard interpretations in AIC dreams. Any common elements in dreams might be attributed to converts processing church teachings or members focussing on their faith. Dreams are seen as messages from God and communication with God or the spiritual realm, and therefore dreaming is considered a sign of faith and commitment to the church. Dreams are used as guidance in church matters and as guidelines for proper living in general and are used to compete for and gain status in the church. The difference between dreams and visions is also noted. Visions were not discussed to any great extent. Visions are used to strengthen the faith of Zulu Zionists and exercise pressure on them to conform to Zionist norms (Kieman, 1990: 207) and this is relevant to the present study.

2.2 Who is Shembe? Perceptions of Isia Shembe

Perceptions of Isia Shembe are key to this study due to the prominence of Isia Shembe and his lineage in Shembeite dream patterns. They are also integral in understanding the nature of the relationship between the *amadlozi* and Shembe.

In *Shembe: the revitalization of African society*, Absolom Vilakazi discusses the sacralisation of Isia Shembe and touts him as a prophet.¹² He shows how, in Zulu cosmology, upon dying parents become lesser divinities (the equivalent of Western saints) who commune with *uMvelinqangi*, the creator, on behalf of their progeny. What differs in Shembe's case (read Isia) is that he transcends the traditional process of death as he was proclaimed 'holy' while living and his holiness is derived not from traditional religion, but rather from his new faith. Vilakazi goes on to compare Shembe with prophets of the Old Testament who went through a period of "purification". He writes that through Shembe's frugal lifestyle, sexual abstinence and selfless acts he cleansed his soul, which allowed for 'catharsis of the spirit'. He was purified or sacralised and therefore sacred in the eyes of his followers.

Vilakazi defines a prophet and his characteristics and then connects these with Isia Shembe. He notes that prophets exert power through their personal gifts, that doctrine is at the core of their vocation and that they practice healing and counseling without charge. Vilakazi also draws comparisons between Moses and Isia Shembe. He shows how they both had missions to establish a new social order to liberate their people. Moses aimed to free his people in Egypt and Shembe aimed to introduce a new syncretistic religious system and a new social order to replace the order that had been disrupted when black people came under white rule. This was to be achieved through the covenant that Shembe had with God and it was this covenant that led to the sacralisation of the leader. Other factors contributing to Shembe's sacralisation are the miracles he performed and the fact that after receiving instructions from God to return to his wives, they both conceived sons, thereby continuing the holy line by direct blood inheritance (Vilakazi, 1986: 37 – 41).

¹² Vilakazi writes that Shembe himself accepted this designation and saw himself as a prophet who was sent to the black people as Jesus had been sent to the Jews and Mohammed to the Arabs.

Mike Kitshoff, in his article *From Veneration to Deification of Isaiah Shembe: Reflections on an Oral History* discusses, as might be expected from the title, the veneration and possible *jesufication* and deification of Isia Shembe as well as a variety of designations of Shembe.¹³ He makes reference to an oral history of how a Sotho family was led to Isia Shembe, to Vilakazi's book above and draws biblical parallels with what is said in the oral history.¹⁴

Various designations for Isia Shembe used in the oral history and their significance is also considered. Shembe is called the "great prophet". Kitshoff confirms the parallels drawn between Shembe and prophets in the Bible by Vilakazi (1986: 38 – 41, 104) but says that although the title shows reverence to Shembe, it should not be considered *jesufication* (Jesus is referred to as the "great prophet", Luke 7: 16). Shembe is also called the "Son of *uNkulunkulu*" or "Son of God".¹⁵ Kitshoff argues that, given the context, this name can be considered *jesufication* and with the divinity attached to Jesus, the title son of God can be seen to convey evidence of deification and veneration. This is true for other titles such as the "king of heaven" or "king of kings" which Kitshoff considers to express both *jesufication* and deification. Thus far Kitshoff provides no concrete conclusions as to who Isia Shembe is to his followers, but hints at Shembe as a prophet (on a par with Jesus), a Black Christ or at least associated with the divine.

Kitshoff considers Shembe further by studying another vision from the oral history wherein Shembe has three bodies and is glorious. The "voice of voices" says that

¹³ <http://www.ucalgary.ca/~nurelweb/books/shembe/papers/ven-kits.html>

Kitshoff, Mike (Ed.) (1996). *African Independent Churches Today*, Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen Press. The article is the final chapter in this book.

¹⁴ In the narrative the storyteller details the sound of drums, singing and a bright light from the sky and joy in the hearts of those who saw this. These features are shared with the birth of Jesus. A vision explained these occurrences as Jesus who had returned to live "among Black people...in the form of Black people". In another vision the narrator was being baptised by a man who resembled Jesus but later turned out to be Shembe with wounds on his feet and hands.

¹⁵ *uNkulunkulu* is the name Europeans gave to God.

Shembe has existed in his same form for a long time. This brings to mind the Christian Trinity and Kitshoff notes that the vision claims that Shembe was “not one-body-bound nor space-bound” while the voice claims that he was “not time bound nor change-bound”. Kitshoff concludes that if Shembe is not considered God Eternal he definitely has divine attributes. He also looks at Isia Shembe as co-creator based on an unusual declaration by the man in which he claims to have created the earth with his father. Kitshoff draws definite parallels with Jesus who was considered to have co-created the earth (John 1:3, Heb 1: 2-3, Col 1:15 – 17) (cf. Sundkler, 1961: 285).

Kitshoff concludes that there is no verification of the different designations offered for Isia Shembe. He offers that it was perhaps his followers, influenced by Shembe’s charisma and deeds, who ascribed these designations (cf. Vilakazi, 1986: 115). He further suggests that praise-singing, oral tradition and the desire for a Black Messiah or incarnation of the Holy Spirit in one of their people may have added to his designations.

Bengt Sundkler in *Bantu Prophets in South Africa* provides evidence that Isia Shembe can be considered a Black Christ. He writes that this is due to Shembe’s self-testament as a prophet (although he was also known as the “Promised One” based on other statements of his), vision-inspired declarations by certain members of the church and “the need of the mass to worship and to believe in a Man of Miracles”. Shembe thought of himself as a prophet, a liberator like Moses (cf. Vilakazi, 1986: 39 – 40). Sundkler notes that he was more than a prophet and liberator. He bases this argument on the insignificant amount of references to Jesus in Shembe’s hymnbook and the omission of Jesus’ name in important religious formulae and the Nazarites’ *credo*. Sundkler writes that Isia Shembe is represented as the Christ of the Zulu and has usurped the place of Jesus in his followers’ minds – “Jesus came first as a White man. But now he has come as a

Black man, in the flesh, through Shembe.” He is re-enacting what Jesus did for the Jews in a Zulu context and fulfills the criteria of a Black Christ – the power of healing and resurrection from the dead. Yet some followers (p. 286 & 329) consider him *uMvelinqangi*, God, while his son maintained he was a prophet (Sundkler, 1961: 282 – 86, 329 – 30).

This is Oosthuizen’s assertion in *Isaiah Shembe and the Zulu World View*, although he also briefly mentions Shembe as the Black Christ (Oosthuizen, 1968: 11). Oosthuizen considered the deification of Isia Shembe as an effort to have contact with a world the Zulu feared they were losing due to the disruption of their society (ibid: 3, 9) (cf. Vilakazi, 1986: 40). He writes that in his followers’ eyes Shembe I (Isia Shembe) is *uMvelinqangi*, “the prominent one who appeared before anyone else”, who “reigns over all being and action” but can be approached directly. He is also the one who made all things (creator) (cf. Shembe & Becken in Hexham, 1994: xlii – xliii). He backs this up with an etymological explanation of *uMvelinqangi* and goes on to say that Shembe has now usurped the position of God (who is distant and unapproachable) and has more intimate contact with the ancestors than anybody else (ibid: 8 – 9). Oosthuizen follows a similar line of argument in *The Theology of a South African Messiah*, in which he claims that the names for God used in Shembeite hymns really refer to Isia Shembe. He offers that Shembe is both the Black Christ and the Supreme Being (Oosthuizen, 1967: 12, 14, 17, 21, 23, 32, 36, 41 – 42). Sundkler proposes a simple explanation of these names as *izibongo* (praise names) for God. He disputes Oosthuizen’s etymological explanations as over-analysis and writes that these designations must be understood in the context of the *ibandla lamaNazaretha* (Sundkler, 1976: 190 – 92).

I feel that this review would be incomplete without the addition of primary source literature in the form of Mthembeni Mpanza’s *uShembe nobuNazaretha* (1994),

which provides invaluable insight into the Shembeite psyche and perceptions of Isia Shembe. Mpanza writes that to devotees Shembe is equivalent to the Holy Spirit, he is *uNkulunkulu*, God (Mpanza, 1994: 1). However, he qualifies this by saying that a person filled with the Spirit of God and whose life and actions the Spirit controls can also be termed God. His example is Jesus – he was one with God, therefore he was God (ibid: 7). This can be applied to Isia Shembe too as will be seen below. Mpanza further explains that Shembeites have difficulty in differentiating between Shembe and God as “Shembeness” was “covered” with Godliness – Shembe the man was “covered” by Shembe the Spirit (ibid: 5 – 6). Shembe had a vision in which the Holy Spirit emerged from his body. Therefore, Isia was not God but a prophet with Shembe (the Holy Spirit) working within him. Shembe the Holy Spirit was present long before Isia was even born – Isia Shembe spoke on behalf of the Holy Spirit (ibid: 7 – 8, 11). This is confirmed elsewhere by Vilakazi (1986: 104) who considers Shembe the prophet medium of the Holy Spirit, and Ngobese in Oosthuizen and Hexham (1992: 98) who documents Shembe’s work under the direction of the Holy Spirit. Mpanza adds that it is possible to be confused with the forms in which Shembe appears (another comparison with Jesus is made) – he could be a man, God, the Son of God, or God in the form of a spirit (ibid: 10).

There are a number of designations (with attached meanings) offered for Isia Shembe. He is considered a Black Christ, God Eternal, the Supreme Being, a prophet through whom the Holy Spirit works (similar to Jesus or Moses) or a combination of these. The latter holds the most sway with me. These designations will be considered and my own conclusions will be drawn either confirming or challenging them.

CHAPTER 4

This study explores a number of issues pertaining to the dreams and visions of members of the *ibandla lamaNazaretha* at Inanda. Based on the data gathered it defines *isibonakaliso* (vision) and *iphupho* (dream) in the Shembeite mind by determining the similarities and differences between them. It investigates who Isia Shembe is to his followers, the nature of the relationship between Isia Shembe or his lineage and the *amadlozi*, and the roles played by Shembe and the *amadlozi* in the religious and social life of the Shembeites. The study examines the function and significance of dreams and visions in the *ibandla lamaNazaretha* and documents how followers became converted to the Shembe religion. It looks at the form in which Shembe leaders and the *amadlozi* appear to followers in dreams and visions and the frequency of these appearances. It determines who interprets and explains the messages in them and takes into account whether any stimuli are used to induce dreams and visions of the Shembe leaders. It also considers whether the content and symbolism in dreams and visions of Shembeites reveal recurring and standard patterns.

1. Respondents

The full details of the respondents are provided in *2.4 Details of Respondents* in Chapter 2. The following list of respondents will be used to illustrate in greater detail the results of the study and will be referred to when individual opinions are discussed:

- 1.1 Nkululeko Mthethwa
- 1.2 Godfred Mzimela
- 1.3 Silo Dlomo
- 1.4 Rupert Nduku
- 1.5 Julius Xulu (*umvangeli*)
- 1.6 Ma Mthethwa (*umkhokheli*)
- 1.7 Zodwa Mkhize
- 1.8 Dudu Gwala

- 1.9 Sikhonzile Zulu (*umthandazi*)
- 1.10 Sukelene Mhlango (*umthandazi*)
- 1.11 Thoko Chiliza (*umkhokheli*)
- 1.12 Ziphi MaKhomo
- 1.13 MaShange

2. *Iphupho Vs Isibonakaliso*

A clear definition of an *iphupho* (dream) and *isibonakaliso* (vision) is imperative to this study. In the reviewed literature Jim Kiernan (1990: 186 – 87, 193) is the only author that makes any real distinction between a dream and a vision. He notes that until fairly recently the Zulu saw no need to distinguish between dreams and visions as according to Berglund (1976: 102) “Dreams seen in the daytime are ignored, for the night is the time of the shades and witchcraft.” In his study of Zulu Zionists Kiernan differentiates between the two modes of revelation. He writes that they differ primarily in context – influential dreams occur in a sleeping state and visions occur in a waking state (ibid: 189). Charsley (1973: 247) also distinguishes between dreams (what people saw while sleeping) and visions (what people saw while praying). Kiernan uses the term *umbono*, which is the direct translation of a vision or very attractive sight. *Isibonakaliso* proves a more apt description in the case of the Shembeites. *Isibonakaliso* means proof, sign or revelation. An *iphupho* is a dream (Dent and Nyembezi, 1999: 318 – 19, 460).

Hence, before accessing any data one can already assume that an *iphupho* may be an everyday dream while an *isibonakaliso* is something revelatory and significant. The respondents largely confirmed this. Only three respondents felt that *isibonakaliso* and *iphupho* were the same thing. Two of the three (1.12 & 1.13) were the oldest respondents interviewed. The age factor may account for their opinions based on Kiernan’s contention that in the past the Zulu did not differentiate between the two. The rest of the respondents felt that an *iphupho* is an everyday dream, the processing of what “is in your brains”. *Isibonakaliso* on

the other hand is revelatory. It is an important dream or vision with a message that needs to be understood, heeded and acted upon. *Izibonakaliso* (visions) are clear while *amaphupho* (dreams) are everyday ambiguous dreams. This confirms Krige's (1965: 287 – 88) and Callaway's (1870: 236 – 46) conclusions that dreams from the *amadlozi* (and now Shembe) are true and understandable messages. Yet, these messages often still require interpretation. In this (Shembe) context this is true for dreams and visions from Isia and his lineage. Alternatively, everyday dreams (*amaphupho*) are generally interpreted in the opposite; they are unclear.

In the Shembeite mind there is no clear distinction drawn between *isibonakaliso* as a dream or as a vision. Perhaps this can account for three respondents having trouble differentiating the two? Although they are not the same thing, a dream in which a message is communicated and a message through a waking vision can both be considered an *isibonakaliso*. Therefore, in the Shembe context Kiernan's influential dreams and waking visions can be subsumed under the term *isibonakaliso*. An *isibonakaliso* is a revelatory experience irrespective of the waking or sleeping context. Kiernan (1990: 189) considers the *amadlozi* the author of influential dreams and the Holy Spirit the author of visions. Daneel (1974: 141), writing on Southern Shona Independent Churches, notes that the (Holy) Spirit manifests Himself in dreams and visions. In the *ibandla lamaNazaretha* Isia Shembe or his lineage is generally the author of waking visions. This may be seen as the Holy Spirit working through the Shembe leaders. Hence, the Holy Spirit may be the original author of visions, which are conveyed through the Shembe leader. Although more the exception than the rule, there is evidence to suggest that the *amadlozi* may accompany any Shembe leader in a waking vision. Shembe (through whom the Holy Spirit works) and the *amadlozi* share the authorship of revelatory dreams. A Shembe leader, the *amadlozi* or a combination of the two might reveal something in a dream. The *amadlozi*'s manifestation in dreams is in line with Zulu thought-patterns (Berglund, 1976: 94 – 100, Krige, 1965: 286 – 88, Callaway, 1870: 228 – 46,

Sundkler, 1961: 21) and the addition of Isia Shembe or his lineage is a logical progression.

Kiernan (1990: 189) writes, "Visions can emerge only on the tide of fervor released by intense communal prayer." The data suggests that this is true for the *ibandla lamaNazaretha* in that visions occur at religious festivals or memorials. However, visions are not confined to this type of occasion. They can also occur in everyday circumstances. Kiernan (ibid: 189) also notes that visions are the "property of the prophet" whereas the dream is open to all. This is mostly true for the *ibandla lamaNazaretha*. *Abathandazi*, who have prophetic powers and a more definite link with the spirit world, are prone to visions. However, there are instances in which everyday members have experienced visions but the revelatory dream is a far more common experience. In considering dreams and visions in the *ibandla lamaNazaretha*, perhaps a more appropriate consideration is normal, everyday dreams and *izibonakaliso* (revelatory, message-bearing dreams or visions).

3. Who is Shembe? Shembeite perceptions of Isia Shembe and his lineage

Perceptions of Isia Shembe are integral to this study. He is the founder of the church and is still prominent in dreams and visions of followers. As a result, an understanding of Isia Shembe's identity is required to appreciate how he interacts with other people's *amadlozi* and the roles they both perform in the church. With a clearer idea of who Isia Shembe is one can understand how Isia's lineage continues the religion he developed and performs the same roles he did in the past. From these roles one can extract the functions of dreams and visions in the church.

There are various perceptions of Isia Shembe resulting in no fixed identity. The collected data and the literature combined provide no concrete consensus but establish that the Holy Spirit is the force behind any designation of Isia Shembe

and therefore behind any member of his lineage. He has been dubbed a prophet, the Black Messiah and God. The bulk of the data points to Isia Shembe as a prophet of the same status as Jesus, Moses and Mohammed. However, his identity faces further interpretation by the reader. At the risk of opening a theological can of worms by attempting to establish Jesus' religious status, depending on one's beliefs, there is evidence to suggest that Isia Shembe can be considered a Black Messiah. Stated crudely, if one believes that Jesus is a prophet, Isia Shembe can be considered a black prophet of similar status. If one believes Jesus is a Messiah, there is evidence to suggest that Isia Shembe can be considered a Black Messiah. Isia Shembe as God seems a less viable option.

3.1 Shembe as a prophet

The majority of the respondents (8 of 13) believe that Isia Shembe was a prophet – “a mediator between people and God”. A further two respondents (having initially touted him as God) agreed to this when asked. He is seen on a par with Jesus, Moses and Mohammed. The validity of this designation in the Shembeite mind is supported by Isia Shembe's miraculous deeds, his teachings, his development of an African-oriented theology and through church teachings. His communication with God and the belief that the Holy Spirit works within him further validates this title. This is largely confirmed by the reviewed literature. Absolom Vilakazi (1986: 38 – 41, 104) promotes Isia Shembe's status as a prophet and Mike Kitshoff confirms the parallels between Isia Shembe and prophets in the Bible drawn by Vilakazi.¹ Mthembeni Mpanza (1994: 7 – 8, 11) writes that Isia Shembe had Shembe (the Holy Spirit) working within him and that he spoke on behalf of the Holy Spirit. There are similar departures by Vilakazi (1986: 104) who considers him the prophet medium of the Holy Spirit, and Ngobese in Oosthuizen and Hexham (1992: 98) who writes about the Holy Spirit directing Isia Shembe in his work.

¹ <http://www.ucalgary.ca/~nurelweb/books/shembe/papers/ven-kits.html>

Parallels are also drawn between Isia Shembe as a prophet and Moses the prophet. He is thought to have come to save the African people and had a covenant with God. This substantiates Vilakazi's (1986: 39 – 40) argument. Vilakazi demonstrates how both Moses and Isia Shembe had missions to establish a new social order to liberate their people. Moses planned to liberate his people in Egypt while Shembe had a covenant with God that he would lead the Zulu from white oppression. This was to take the form of the establishment of a new syncretistic religious system and a new social order to replace the order that had been disrupted under white bondage. Further evidence to corroborate Shembe's standing as a prophet can be derived from the Bible. Two respondents (1.4 & 1.12), in justifying Shembe's position, quoted Deuteronomy 18: 18 in which God speaks to Moses saying: "I will send them a prophet like you from among their own people. I will tell him what to say, and he will tell the people everything I command." There is conclusive evidence to verify Isia Shembe as a prophet to his followers.

3.2 Shembe as a Black Messiah

As I have stated above, the perception of Isia Shembe as a Black Messiah is dependent on the reader's belief of who Jesus Christ was. We have seen how Shembe can be considered a prophet similar to Jesus. It then follows that he can be considered a Black Messiah if Jesus is thought of as a White Messiah. The reviewed literature as well as references to Jesus from the respondents in explaining Isia Shembe's identity gives sufficient evidence to substantiate this line of argument.

Mike Kitshoff considers the *jesufication* of Isia Shembe based on names found in oral narrative.² Shembe is called the "Son of *uNkulunkulu*" or "Son of God", which Kitshoff regards as evidence of *jesufication*. Shembe is also described as the co-

² <http://www.ucalgary.ca/~nurelweb/books/shembe/papers/ven-kits.html>

creator due to an unusual declaration by him in which he claimed to have created the earth with his father. However, there is no other evidence to substantiate this claim. Kitshoff derives convincing comparisons with Jesus who was considered to have co-created the earth (John 1:3, Heb 1: 2-3, Col 1:15 – 17) (cf. Sundkler, 1961: 285). In *Bantu Prophets in South Africa* Bengt Sundkler argues that to his followers Isia Shembe was a Black Christ. He bases this argument on the insignificant reference to Jesus in Shembe's hymnbook, the omission of Jesus' name in important religious formulae and the Nazarites' *credo* and his followers' beliefs, "Jesus came first as a White man. But now he has come as a Black man, in the flesh, through Shembe." One of the respondents (1.2) gave a very similar testimony explaining that "when Jesus died the Holy Spirit from Jesus was alone and God expected one of Shembe's family to accept the Holy Spirit". Sundkler believes that Shembe has usurped the place of Jesus in his followers' mind and is seen as the Christ of the Zulu. He is recreating what Jesus did for the Jews in a Zulu context and fulfils the criteria of a Black Christ through the power of healing and resurrection from the dead. Sundkler offers further perspective. He suggests that there are two stages of declaration in Shembe's self-testimony. The first is his official claim as a prophet. The second is based on statements in which he claimed to be more than a prophet, "The Promised One". Sundkler believes that although the second claim was not the official self-statement Shembe made it was understood by the initiated (his followers) as true (Sundkler, 1961: 282 – 86, 329 – 30). Sundkler (ibid: 283) also notes that the "Lord called Shembe in his mother's womb" (based on the Shembe hymn 197). Respondent 1.3 commented on similarities between Jesus' and Shembe's births as well as noting the "Angel of God" speaking to Shembe's mother prior to his birth. A similar account is found in Mpanza (1994: 1 –2) in which Shembe's mother is told that she will give birth to an extraordinary person who will save people.

A further consideration is the statement made by two respondents (1.3 & 1.9) that Isia Shembe performed greater deeds than Jesus did.³ However, this may be subjective interpretation of the Bible to substantiate and confirm their religious belief. Nevertheless, surely such a statement reflects an opinion that (in his followers' eyes) Isia Shembe is greater than Jesus or at least on a par? This substantiates claims of *jesufication*. Perhaps the most blatant and telling validation of Shembe's position as a Black Messiah is part of respondent 1.10's narration of her dream: "One day I was sleeping and Isia (Shembe) came and he was with Jesus. Jesus was standing on one side and Shembe was standing on the other. I did not want to believe in any human (meaning she didn't want to believe in anyone or either of them). When I was standing there I went towards the white person (Jesus) knowing that he was the god of people (due to missionary influence). When I went to Jesus, he shook his head and pointed to Isia. Shembe said 'Come here, people like you come to me.' " Respondent 1.6 also offers her take on Jesus Christ, which shows definite parallels between Isia Shembe and Jesus. "Because we talk Zulu, we are African. Jesus cannot understand Zulu. That's the difference. When we go to heaven we via to Shembe (go via Shembe). We can't via to Jesus because our culture is different. Jesus is for whites. The Lord sent Jesus to earth for white people and sent Shembe for Africans." One can argue with certain conviction that Isia Shembe is seen as a Black Messiah if Jesus is the White Messiah. There is sufficient comparison and allusion to Jesus in determining Isia Shembe's identity to suggest this as a possible status for the Shembe founder.

3.3 Shembe as God

The remaining three respondents felt that Isia Shembe was God based on his deeds and miracles and because Shembe provides what is asked for. A further two respondents (1.9 & 1.12) initially proclaimed him as God but when asked if

³ This, I was told, is based on Jesus' declaration that those who believe in his deeds will do greater things than those deeds (John 14: 12).

he was a prophet similar to Jesus they agreed. This is an interesting occurrence and testament to the difficulty in correctly portraying Isia Shembe. However, Mthembeni Mpanza is able to shed light on the subject. He writes that Shembeites have difficulty in differentiating between Isia Shembe and God as “Shembeness” was “covered” with Godliness – Shembe the man was “covered” by Shembe the (Holy) Spirit (Mpanza, 1994: 5 – 6). Mpanza explains that to devotees Shembe is the equivalent of the Holy Spirit – he is *uNkulunkulu* or God (ibid: 1). However, he later qualifies this by explaining that in Zulu culture a person filled with the Spirit of God and whose life and actions the Spirit controls – someone who represents the Spirit, can be termed God (similarly a person filled with an evil spirit can be referred to as *uSathane* or Satan). He offers Jesus as an example. He was one with God, therefore he was God (ibid: 7). This lends itself to the argument that Shembe is a prophet but due to cultural interpretation he may be called God. Another consideration is that the Shembe leader (who shares the same status as Isia Shembe – see 3.4 below) will say “*Inkosi ikubusise*”, “God bless you” when you “report” to him to request something or explain a problem. If he were God Himself surely he would not describe himself in the third person?

Yet the fact that 5 of 13 respondents (including 1.9 & 1.12 who initially called him God) consider Isia Shembe as God must have some significance. This argument is also supported by the reviewed literature. Mike Kitshoff analyses an oral narrative in which various names are given to Shembe. He gives evidence that they show both *jesufication* and deification. He also writes that based on the titles used by his followers if Shembe is not considered God Eternal he definitely has divine attributes.⁴ Oosthuizen in *Isaiah Shembe and the Zulu World View* writes that to his followers Shembe I (Isia Shembe) is *uMvelinqangi*, “the prominent one who appeared before anyone else”, who “reigns over all being and action” but can be approached directly and who made all things (creator) (cf. Shembe &

⁴ <http://www.ucalgary.ca/~nurelweb/books/shembe/papers/ven-kits.html>

Becken in Hexham, 1994: xlii – xliii). He substantiates this with an etymological explanation of *uMvelinqangi* and believes that Shembe has usurped the position of the unapproachable and remote God (Oosthuizen, 1968: 8 – 9). In *The Theology of a South African Messiah* Oosthuizen claims that the names for God used in Shembeite hymns really refer to Isia Shembe. He offers that Shembe is both the Black Christ and the Supreme Being (Oosthuizen, 1967: 12, 14, 17, 21, 23, 32, 36, 41 – 42). This is refuted by Sundkler for the most part (1976: 190 – 92). There is evidence to suggest that Shembe is God. However, care must be taken not accept this at face value. It is better understood through consideration of cultural interpretation.

3.4 Isia Shembe and his lineage

Isia Shembe's identity has been given much attention due to his status as the founder of the religion and the amount of speculation surrounding who he was. However, the identity of his lineage is also important as all Shembe leaders feature in *izibonakaliso*. The respondents' opinion of Isia's lineage as prophets, through which Shembe (the Holy Spirit) works, was unanimous. Respondents explained that the same spirit that worked in the founder works in all Shembe leaders as the Holy Spirit moves from one leader to the next and therefore all leaders have the same power. Respondent 1.11 recounted a dream to me that exemplifies this perception. In the dream she saw Johannes Galilee and his son Amos (successor to the Shembe leadership) meld into one new person. This indicates that they are one and the same and one can postulate that it reveals similarities in power. The data points to Shembe leaders as prophets with the Holy Spirit working through them and this is the theory I find most probable. Therefore, (as respondent 1.3 puts it, "Shembe is a spirit not a body") it must be understood that the Holy Spirit is the force within all and any Shembe leaders. As such, much of the data is applicable to all (past and present) Shembe leaders and when I refer to "Shembe" below I am referring to all and any Shembe leader unless otherwise specified.

4. Roles of Shembe and the *amadlozi* in Shembeite life

One should take note of the addition of Shembe to the traditional religious relationship between the living and the *amadlozi* as it has implications. He is the more powerful force in the Shembe mind and as such assumes some of the roles that were traditionally performed by the *amadlozi*. He also co-performs some roles with the *amadlozi* that are traditionally performed by the *amadlozi* alone. Therefore, the importance of the relationship between Shembe and the *amadlozi* must be given due consideration as it is within this relationship that various roles of Shembe and the *amadlozi* emerge. This is relevant as it is through the comprehension of this relationship and the (combined and independent) roles fulfilled by Shembe and the *amadlozi* that the functions of dreams and visions in the *ibandla lamaNazareth*a can be derived. As we have established in 2 above, past and present Shembe leaders and the *amadlozi* are the authors of revelatory dreams and visions in the Nazareth Church. Hence, as the authors of dreams and visions they control them and determine their functions.

4.1 *The relationship between Shembe and the amadlozi*

Given the revival and prominence of Zulu tradition in the Shembe faith and the *amadlozi* as the “real, vital religion of the Zulus” (Krige, 1965: 283), it is unsurprising that they feature so highly in this syncretistic religion. However, whereas the *amadlozi* were once the dominant force in Zulu religion, in Shembeite belief Shembe has appropriated the position of greater authority. Consequently, a relationship wherein the two forces work in conjunction has developed and in certain instances their roles have become intertwined. The current Shembe leader, Vimbeni, and his *amadlozi* (the previous Shembe leaders) are able to interact and communicate with anyone’s *amadlozi*, including those of non-followers. They interact as spirits. Respondent 1.5 explained that “Shembe is like a body but the Spirit went into him and the Spirit communicates with *amadlozi*.” Mpanza (1994: 7 – 8, 11) believes that Isia Shembe was a

prophet who had Shembe (the Holy Spirit) working within him (see section 3.1 above). In light of this one can understand that the Holy Spirit (that has worked in each Shembe leader) now works within Vimbeni Shembe, the current leader, and it is this spirit that is in contact and communicates with the *amadlozi*. It follows that the past Shembe leaders are also able to interact and communicate with *amadlozi*, as they are (Vimbeni's) *amadlozi* themselves. The respondents have noted that all past Shembe leaders help the current leader when a request for assistance is made to him. This interaction with the *amadlozi* is in line with Zulu thinking as the *amadlozi* are included in everyday life and Magwaza (1993: 13) writes that they are informed of traditional ceremonies when they occur. Shembe and the *amadlozi* work together in guiding Shembeites, granting their requests and advising them.

4.2 Social and religious life in the ibandla lamaNazaretha

In looking at the roles of Shembe and the *amadlozi* and the functions of dreams and visions in the *ibandla lamaNazaretha*, consideration of the social and religious lives of the members is a worthwhile exercise as there is generally little distinction made between the two. Dr Thenjiwe Magwaza pointed this out when we were translating and transcribing interviews. She noticed that respondents were hesitant in answering questions regarding the social importance of dreams and visions and the roles of Shembe and the *amadlozi*'s in social life. Answers to these questions were on the whole undefined and often unrelated. The language used also reveals the way followers feel about the church – they personalise religion and consider the church a home.⁵ Hence, one can surmise that (social) life separate from religious life is not a real consideration. Respondent 1.7 declares, "Shembe is my whole life" as did respondent 1.11, "Shembe is life". The passion for the religion and the fact that "Shembe is life" (infiltrates all aspects of life) to the Shembeites is apparent in the numerous stickers (often reading "Shembe is the Way") that adorn vehicles, office doors and any personal

⁵ Respondent 1.12 commented on how she felt much healthier at religious festivals than at home.

property. During my last trip to Inanda I also received a pamphlet advertising “Shembe is the Way” umbrellas, which shows that while others wear their hearts on their sleeves, Shembeites wear their beliefs on their umbrellas. Respondent 1.1 provides further insight, “There is a combination of religious and social life. Social life influences religious life – they influence each other. There is harmony between them. Church is very important as Shembeites know that Shembe has authority over *amadlozi*, which is so unique.” This may also be attributed to the prominence of religion in Zulu culture. As Krige (1965: 280) notes there is hardly an aspect of Zulu life in which religion does not play a part. Nazareth Church belief infiltrates everyday social life, prohibiting drinking and smoking, the eating of pork and even appearance as shaved heads are not allowed and men do not shave their facial hair. Curley (1983: 27) has documented a similar situation in the True Church of God, an AIC in Cameroon. Consequently, even though dreams and visions, and the roles that Shembe and the *amadlozi* play in Shembeite life may deal with the social system of the Zulu through the revitalisation of old Zulu traditions and behaviour, these should be considered and understood in the prevailing socio-religious context.

4.3 The roles of Shembe and the amadlozi in Shembeite life

There are a number of roles that Shembe and the *amadlozi* play in the *ibandla lamaNazareth*. As I have explained in 4.1 above, there are occurrences in which Shembe and the *amadlozi* work in conjunction and as such their roles in the Nazareth Church are sometimes integrated. However, there are instances in which they will perform the same roles (such as the role of converter) independently of each other as well as specific roles alone.

4.3.1 Roles performed by Shembe

These roles, some of which were traditionally the *amadlozi*’s, are now performed by Shembe alone. Roles performed by Shembe alone and Shembe and the

amadlozi (see 4.3.2 below) are vital in determining the function of dreams and visions. Shembe and the *amadlozi* are the authors of dreams and visions (see 2 above) and will therefore determine their function in the *ibandla lamaNazaretha*.

4.3.1.1 Cultural leader

Many of the respondents spoke about Shembe's role as a cultural leader. This stems from Isia Shembe's promotion of traditional Zulu culture and revival of the "old ways". He established the religion, basing it partly on traditional Zulu religion and culture and in doing so he revitalised certain past Zulu customs and religious practices (particularly ancestor veneration). In a fast-paced modern and unfeeling society this is part of the appeal of the religion. As respondent 1.3 puts it, "You get taught about humanity and how your forefathers lived". The revitalisation of Zulu culture is still a focus in the church. In the *ibandla lamaNazaretha* elements of traditional Zulu culture such as polygamy, traditional Zulu dress (at religious festivals) and traditional Zulu dance are all promoted. Virginity testing is also done and Shembeites venerate and slaughter sacrificial animals for their *amadlozi* (although this is now done through Shembe). The revitalisation of old Zulu culture also reinforces the old social system of the Zulu. Respondents noted that in the *ibandla lamaNazaretha* girls and boys are taught their social standing in society and how to behave appropriately. This includes respect of elders and from the data collected a focus on pre-marital sexual relationships.⁶ Respondents explained that this is due to the ever-growing threat of HIV-AIDS. The church, however, claims an HIV-infection rate among members of 0%, based on polygamy and no doubt virginity testing, the prohibition of dating and the revitalised social system.⁷ A Shembeite informant confirmed this statistic.

⁶ Krige (1965: 157 – 58) writes that a girl who has been seduced faces degradation from older women and her peers while anger will be directed at the boy who has tainted her before marriage.

⁷ http://www.arc.org.za/A_The_Shembe_way.htm

4.3.1.2 Converter

Although the data reveals considerably less incidence of conversion through *izibonakaliso* in which Shembe leaders featured, this does still occur. This decline in conversion through *izibonakaliso* can be attributed to the fact that the Shembe religion is now well established with a large and growing following and as a result a number of Shembeites (5 of 13 respondents) have been born into the religion. Respondents that had converted through experiencing an *isibonakaliso* were generally older, which supports this assertion. Different methods of conversion such as the reception of a blessing from Shembe have also affected the amount of people converted by an *isibonakaliso*. The data indicates that the most prominent of these is through healing and the provision of children. These roles of Shembe as a healer and provider of children have been subsumed under the title purveyor of fortune in 4.3.2.2 below. Conversions through healing and provision of children were quite prominent with 3 of 13 respondents converting after healing while a further two women (one had been infertile for 10 years) converted after receiving the children they had requested from Shembe. Curley (1983: 27) writes that in the True Church of God a typical convert is introduced to the church when faced with a serious problem, most commonly illness, that cannot be solved by conventional means. Shembe's role as a converter has also extended to the *amadlozi*. This is discussed in 4.3.1.4 below.

4.3.1.3 Mediator

Shembe's role as mediator is twofold. Firstly, Shembe is the mediator between the living and the *amadlozi*, and secondly between the living and God. The relationship between Shembe, the *amadlozi* and people has already been discussed in 4 above but this relationship adds detail to their interaction. Shembe's role as a mediator between the living and the *amadlozi* role is also linked with Shembe's role as a purveyor of good fortune in 4.3.2.2 below. Vimbeni Shembe can be seen as the mediator between people and the *amadlozi*

as requests are made personally to him. He then communicates with the *amadlozi* and they decide whether or not it should be granted. They will convey the outcome in a dream to the person who has made the request. This communication works both ways, as respondents explain that the *amadlozi* will get authority from Shembe before approaching people. Shembe as a mediator, however, is not limited to interaction based on Shembeites' requests. He also acts as a mediator in traditional situations in which he was previously absent. Whereas in a non-Shembeite context the living interact directly with the *amadlozi*, such as speaking directly to them, in the *ibandla lamaNazaretha* interaction with the *amadlozi* is through Shembe. A number of respondents mentioned Shembe as a mediator when they venerate the *amadlozi* through sacrificing an animal and when they communicate directly with the *amadlozi*. Respondent 1.13 says: "Followers don't eat meat that has been slaughtered and not reported to the leader. My parents were traditional and had to drop some traditions like slaughtering for *amadlozi* and speaking directly to them. When in the church they have to go through Shembe." Sacrificing is a means whereby the living can come into contact with the *amadlozi* to thank them and ask for favours (Krige, 1965: 289 – 96). In the traditional context this was a matter between the living and the *amadlozi* but in the Shembe context Shembeites must inform Shembe if they wish to slaughter animals for the *amadlozi* or *ukuhlabela amadlozi*. The same applies when the living talk, *ukuthetha*, literally to nag, with the *amadlozi*. This is done by burning *imphepho* (*Helichrysum miconiaefolium*), a small, long lasting plant that is dried (Berglund, 1976: 113).⁸ In the Shembe context followers are required to notify Shembe if they plan to communicate with the *amadlozi*. Similarly Shembe is notified when followers plan to *ukubika umuzi*, literally to report the homestead, wherein they inform their *amadlozi* that they have moved house so that the *amadlozi* know where the new house and family are. We can thus see how Shembe is the mediator in communication, requests and praise pertaining to the *amadlozi*.

⁸ Explanation from Zulu informant

Shembe's role as mediator between people and God can be further distinguished as he mediates between God and the living and on the behalf of the dead in securing salvation.

i) Mediator between God and the living

The definition of a prophet is "person regarded as revealer or interpreter of divine will; spokesman or advocate" (Allen, 1990: 592). It follows then that a prophet is someone who has a relationship with the divine (God or the Holy Spirit), communicates with Him and is a spokesman (to the people) on God's behalf. As I have already shown in 3.1 above the majority of the respondents (8 of 13) believe that Isia Shembe is a prophet – "a mediator between people and God". I have also noted in 3.4 above that the Holy Spirit is the force behind the Shembe leaders. Reviewed literature essentially confirms this prophet status and refers to Isia Shembe's association with the divine (cf. Vilakazi, 1986: 38 – 41, Mpanza, 1994: 7, 11, Kitshoff).⁹ We have seen in 3 above how this is also applicable to his lineage. Shembe's role as a mediator between people and God is therefore understandable.

The role of mediator between people and God is traditionally the *amadlozi*'s. Berglund (1976: 37) wrote that the *amadlozi* are sometimes looked upon as the intermediaries between the Lord-of-the-Sky (God) and humans. They pray to the Lord-of-the-Sky on behalf of the living and then give the acquired knowledge to the living through dreams and visions. Vilakazi (1986: 37) also notes that the *amadlozi* "commune with *uMvelinqangi* (God) on behalf of the living progeny and with the living themselves". Shembe as the mediator between God and the living works in a similar manner. He communes with God on behalf of the living (his followers) and delivers the knowledge he acquires from God to Shembeites. The respondents felt that through this role Shembe interacts with God on their behalf (respondent 1.1 states: "We use him to approach God as he was sent to us by God") and spreads God's word (knowledge) through preaching. The religion is

⁹ <http://www.ucalgary.ca/~nurelweb/books/shembe/papers/ven-kits.html>

also partly based on Isia Shembe's visions from God and the covenant that he made with God. This shows Isia Shembe's communication with God and it follows communication between God and his lineage. This role as mediator can be associated with the role of director or guide in 4.3.2.3 below.

ii) Mediator on behalf of the dead

The respondents also commented on Shembe's role as a mediator between Shembeites and God with regard to salvation. They discussed the way in which the wandering spirit of the deceased has to "return home" to their *amadlozi* before being presented to God. This is done through the *ukubuyisa* ceremony. Krige (1965: 169 – 70) writes that through the *ukubuyisa* (cause to return) ceremony the spirit of the deceased is brought home from the grave to the village and incorporated into the group of ancestors. This generally takes place a year or two after the deceased's death. The *amadlozi* are thought to be near *uMvelinqangi* or God. Therefore, in traditional Zulu belief returning to your *amadlozi* through the *ukubuyisa* ceremony, becoming an *idlozi* and fulfilling your duties to the living is considered one's final destination.¹⁰

However, with the advent of missionaries and their influence, the Christian construct of heaven has penetrated the Zulu and Shembeite mind. Sundkler (1961: 290) writes that in the Nazareth Church Shembe is seen as the mediator as he intercedes with God on their behalf in gaining access to heaven. He is seen as the gatekeeper of heaven ("The Holder of the Keys") and it is only through him that entrance into heaven can be achieved. This is a logical progression in the Shembeite mind. Shembe is the one who imparts God's teachings in life and through following them Shembeites will gain access to heaven, once again through Shembe. The respondents largely confirmed Shembe's status as a mediator in getting to heaven. As respondent 1.8 asserts, "Since I was a member of the church it is clear that Shembe is the way I should

¹⁰ Explanation from various Zulu informants.

follow as when I die in the graveyard he is the person who will receive me and take me to heaven.”

4.3.1.4 Retriever, cleanser and converter of amadlozi

Shembe's roles as a retriever, cleanser and converter of *amadlozi* are central in the mind of Shembeites at Inanda with all but two respondents commenting on one or more of them. I have included these roles under one heading as they pertain specifically to the *amadlozi* and often occur as a combination in that it is not uncommon for Shembe to retrieve, cleanse and convert an *idlozi*. Although this role can be associated with the conversion of non-followers, distinction must be drawn, as the conversion is not performed through healing or provision of blessings (as in 4.3.1.2 above) or through *izibonakaliso* (as in 4.3.2.1 below) and occurs in the spirit realm.

i) Retriever

Shembe's role as a retriever of *amadlozi* can be correlated with the *ukubuyisa* ceremony discussed in 4.3.1.3 (ii) above. In the past the Zulu fought wars against both the British Army and the Boers. A person who died in battle was often unable to be found and thus could not be retrieved. Therefore he was not *buyisa*-ed or “caused to return” home in order to become an *idlozi*. Consequently, no communication could occur between the wandering spirit and its family (it was not yet an *idlozi* and thus could not communicate with the family through dreams). As a result it was left out in the spiritual cold. This could lead to *amadlozi*-related problems such as those described by respondent 1.10 below. Shembe's role in revealing unresolved and unknown problems relating to the *amadlozi* is discussed in 4.3.2.2 below.

Respondent 1.10's dream provides greater insight into this phenomenon. In the dream she saw a group of *izangoma* in blue clothing with long dreadlocks. One of them was Mzazele, Isia Shembe's father, and there was something coming out of

his mouth that looked like frosty breath. He blew this freezing breath towards her (to call her to become an *isangoma*) and she said, "I do not want to be an *isangoma*."¹¹ He replied, "Now that you don't want to be an *isangoma* go and release your ancestors who died during battles of Cetshwayo's time."¹² They are at Blood River." In the dream she went to Blood River and when she arrived there her great grandfather was holding seven men whose bodies were rotting. He said, "All the people who died here during the wars are relieved (retrieved) by Shembe". She asked, "How does my father do this?" Her grandfather replied "Take the whole family to Shembe and make a 20c donation and ask Shembe to come and fetch us here as no human being can fetch us here." He showed her different patches of worn grass and explained that they were where other *amadlozi* had been sitting until Shembe relieved them. He said, "They are now back with their families." Although the above demonstrates the retrieval or *buyisa*-ing of old spirits it is also applicable to the modern day situation. Respondent 1.6 confirms that Shembe can reveal where the bodies of lost people (both past and present) are, and return their spirits to the homestead.

ii) Cleanser and converter of amadlozi

Shembe's role as a cleanser of *amadlozi* is the Shembeite description of him as a forgiver of the *amadlozi*. Respondent 1.2's opinion of Shembe as a cleanser is typical and representative of the group. He asserts that Shembe has the authority to forgive *amadlozi* for sins they have committed during their lives. He explains that if your father (ancestor) has done something wrong while living, it is your duty to go to Shembe and ask for forgiveness.¹³ The *amadlozi*'s sins can be any number of offences. Respondent 1.2 offered that while living, his father was continuously fighting with his neighbour and therefore had to be forgiven for this.

¹¹ Traditionally one of the activities of the ancestors was to "brood" (*ukufukamela*) over a person who was to become an *isangoma* or diviner (Berglund, 1976: 127). Diviners are not permitted in the *ibandla lamaNazaretha* and this is an example of lost and forgotten *amadlozi* exercising their unhappiness.

¹² Anglo-Zulu War (1878-79)

¹³ This is achieved by asking Shembe to cleanse your *amadlozi* and making a donation to the church and slaughtering a goat to tell the *amadlozi* "this is the goat we are confessing your sins with".

Fighting during battles as in 4.3.1.4 (i) above also requires cleansing. Respondent 1.3 suggested that if your grandparents had not been married in a traditional way (Shembe promotes Zulu tradition) they would have to be cleansed. According to the respondents this cleansing process is necessary, as an *idlozi* must be cleansed in order to enter heaven and to join the *amadlozi* to function correctly as an *idlozi*. Not cleansing an *idlozi* may result in problems relating to the *amadlozi* as in respondent 1.10's dream wherein her old *amadlozi* were trying to make her into an *isangoma* because she had not *buyisa*-ed them. Respondent 1.3 says of the *amadlozi*, "If you don't ask Shembe to cleanse them, and forgive (them) and if you are smoking in church maybe your *amadlozi* are using you to smoke through. Even if your ancestors were *izangoma*, all of a sudden you may start becoming an *isangoma* as you haven't yet cleansed them." Shembe as the converter of the *amadlozi* is a role very similar to Shembe the converter of people except that it is carried out in the spiritual realm. The respondents noted that other religions do not know that an *idlozi* can be cleansed and converted. This is dual process in the sense that when a person cleanses his *amadlozi* he generally converts them. Respondents felt that if the *amadlozi* wished to be converted they would contact you through an *isibonakaliso*, perhaps wearing an *umnazaretha* – the white robe of Shembeites. With regard to the cleansing and conversion process two respondents noted that a 50c donation was necessary while another three suggested the slaughtering of a goat. A 50c donation is the weekly donation for cleansing at church services (which I presume is what the respondents were referring to) and I think insufficient for a cleansing and conversion. Slaughtering an animal is in line with slaughtering for the *amadlozi* in order to venerate them. Therefore, cleansing and conversion of the *amadlozi* is achieved by asking Shembe to cleanse your *amadlozi*, by possibly making a small donation to the church and slaughtering a goat to tell the *amadlozi* "this is the goat we are confessing your sins with". The reviewed literature does not show any information on converted *amadlozi* except for Sundkler (1961: 260) who makes very brief mention of *amadlozi* that have been baptised. An interesting angle on conversion is that if someone receives an

isibonakaliso in which an *idlozi* asks to be converted that person must be a member of the church and if not he must convert at the same time.¹⁴

4.3.2 Roles performed by Shembe and the *amadlozi*

These roles are executed by both Shembe and the *amadlozi* as a unit or at least with interaction and communication between them.

4.3.2.1 The role of converter

Based on the respondents' answers it seems that there is less occurrence of conversion through *izibonakaliso* than there may have been in the past. I have accounted for this in 4.3.1.2 above. However, there are still instances in which conversions occur by Shembe and the *amadlozi* through *izibonakaliso*. Of the respondents who experienced conversion dreams (4 of 13) a Shembe leader approached three of them while only one received instructions to join the church from her *amadlozi*. Respondent 1.3 experienced an indirect call to convert. His friend received a message in a dream from Amos Shembe (a former Shembe leader) in which he was told to instruct 1.3 to be baptised and join the Shembe religion. This is a new phenomenon expanded upon in 5.3.3 below. These results seem incongruent with preliminary discussions on how conversions occur. Shembeites told me that the *amadlozi* were usually the initiators of the conversions (through dreams). Respondents 1.1 and 1.2 also mentioned this, saying that it occurred quite often, which does not seem to be the case. Perhaps this is a topic that future researchers can investigate.

4.3.2.2 Purveyors of good fortune

Shembe and the *amadlozi*'s combined role as purveyors of good fortune features in almost all aspects of Shembeite life and can be applied to any number of

¹⁴ Shembeite informant

situations. Examples from the respondents include the healing of illness, the provision of children to women who were thought infertile, the acquisition of employment, education, money and material objects. Even as simple a matter as getting enough money to get to the religious festival was recognised as Shembe's and the *amadlozi*'s favour.¹⁵ Krige writes that the *amadlozi* take a real interest in their progeny, guarding them against harm and attending to their needs. All success and adversity are attributed to the ancestors' happiness and anger. The living must therefore sacrifice to the *amadlozi* and venerate them (Krige, 1965: 283). This is applicable to the modern day situation with the addition of Shembe. Whereas in the past the living would have requested help from the *amadlozi* alone, they now request their help as well as asking Shembe personally and praying to him. A number of the respondents explained that if you want something you go to Vimbeni Shembe and make a request. He will then discuss your request with your *amadlozi* and it is up to them to give you what you want. They may refuse your request and explain to Vimbeni that this is because you have not done what they have commanded or required of you. This ties in with the respect of elders and *amadlozi* that is promoted in the Shembe religion. Respondents noted that Shembe could not do anything for a follower if he has done nothing for his *amadlozi* (such as cleansing them).

According to the data gathered there seems to be a trend in which Shembe and the *amadlozi* play a prominent role in professional and academic life. Perhaps this is due to education and employment as normal societal priorities. The securing of a job or success in examinations will be attributed to Shembe and the *amadlozi*. With regard to employment there are even instances in which the *amadlozi* will confirm the company in which the follower will be employed. Respondent 1.3 recounts the incident in which he specified his ideal job and received it. There is a reciprocal system in place wherein a follower's care of his *amadlozi* results in good fortune. Respondent 1.12 dreamt of her dead sister. The

¹⁵ Respondent 1.12 said that she did not have enough money to get to the festival at which I interviewed her. She prayed to Shembe and had a dream of an *umkhokheli* giving her money. She then went to an informal casino and gambled with R5 and won R955.

sister was in a forest, holding a suitcase full of money and explained to respondent 1.12 that she could not give her the money as she was stuck in the forest – unable to return home. Respondent 1.12 realised that she had to *ukubuyisa* her sister in return for which she felt her sister would assist her in winning the Lotto (lottery), the equivalent of a suitcase full of money. Respondent 1.2 helped the *idlozi* of his grandfather by cleansing him and soon after received a desired promotion. Alternatively, we must not forget the *amadlozi*'s anger when dissatisfied and the consequences of it. Respondent 1.1 explains that if you have not slaughtered for the *amadlozi* they can bring you bad luck and even kill you (cf. Krige, 1965: 286 – 87). Respondent 1.2 confirms this, explaining that if you do not do what your *amadlozi* say then there is the possibility that you will be on the receiving end of misfortune.

A number of respondents commented on unresolved problems relating to the *amadlozi* that were often unknown to them. Examples of these are found in 4.3.1.4 above. Based on the data these problems were generally to do with uncleansed *amadlozi* and *amadlozi* that have not been *buyisa*-ed. Shembe's role here is either to resolve the issues with the *amadlozi* (if the living are aware of the problems) or to reveal these problems to the living and then resolve them. I have put this role under purveyors of good fortune as it is through Shembe revealing and/or solving problems pertaining to the *amadlozi* that Shembeites' lives improved. Respondent 1.3 gives a typical example of this. He explains, "A desperate man went to Shembe and asked for something. Shembe said 'God bless you'. The man went to his house. In the middle of the day he heard a noise knocking the window. He was sitting on the bed and then he saw Shembe come with his two grandfathers. Shembe asked, 'Do you know these people?' The man replied 'I know one of them'. Shembe said 'This is your father's dad and this is his father'. Shembe told him the problems with the *amadlozi*. The man went to the farm (home) and did what he was told and he got what he needed."

4.3.2.3 Guides or directors

In the past the *amadlozi* guarded people from harm and guided them by revealing truths and forthcoming events through dreams (Callaway, 1870: 228 – 45, Krige, 1965: 283, Berglund, 1976: 37, 99, 197). As might be expected, given the focus on Zulu tradition, the data reveals that Shembeites consider the *amadlozi* to work in much the same way. Respondents explained that the *amadlozi* contribute to what is happening in the family, give people insight on issues that are troubling them and guide them through revealing possible dangers. Shembe's role as a director or guide differs in some respects. He can offer guidance on issues that are troubling people (often pertaining to the *amadlozi*'s unhappiness – see 4.3.1.4 above) and guide them, for example, in how they should go about securing employment or what methods are needed to cure an ill person.¹⁶ However, according to the data the focus of his role is directing Shembeites as to how God wants them to live. The respondents described how Shembe teaches people to live better by following the church rules. For example, the church prohibits drinking, smoking and fighting, which leads to improved living. Shembe also directs people in their interaction with their *amadlozi* (see 4.3.1.3 above) and by promoting the spirit of *ubuntu* or humanity, an element of traditional Zulu thinking and life. Through Shembe's instruction of how God wants Shembeites to live, Shembe can be seen as directing people to God and ultimate salvation (see 4.3.1.3 (ii)). As respondent 1.6 states, "Shembe is like our director for everything – in life and in death."

5. The functions of dreams and visions in the *ibandla lamaNazaretha*

We have discussed at length the various roles played by Shembe and the *amadlozi* in the *ibandla lamaNazaretha*. In 2 above I write that the *amadlozi*, the current Shembe leader, Vimbeni, and his lineage are the authors of revelatory

¹⁶ In an *isibonakaliso* respondent 1.3 saw his friend unwell and was shown by Shembe how he needed to be cured – by going to see a medical doctor as it was not "a problem of the soul". This was before he knew that his friend was sick.

dreams and visions (*izibonakaliso*) in the Nazareth Church.¹⁷ These *izibonakaliso* are thus the property of Shembe and the *amadlozi* and it follows that the functions of *izibonakaliso* will be determined by what Shembe and the *amadlozi* use them for. Therefore, *izibonakaliso* can be seen as the tools used by Shembe and the *amadlozi* in performing a number of roles in Shembeite life.¹⁸ Thus we can determine the functions of dreams and visions by examining the many situations in which Shembe and the *amadlozi* use them. As with the roles performed by Shembe and the *amadlozi*, a good deal of the functions of *izibonakaliso* are interrelated and therefore contain common elements. There are four general categories under which the function of *izibonakaliso* can be classed. These are *izibonakaliso* used in conversion, used in guidance, as responses from Shembe and the *amadlozi*, and *izibonakaliso* as re-affirmations of faith.

5.1 *Izibonakaliso as communication with the spiritual realm*

First and foremost it is necessary to consider *izibonakaliso* as a channel of communication with the dead (*amadlozi*), Shembe and with God. Contact with the *amadlozi* is the traditional role of *izibonakaliso* in Zulu culture and thus in the Shembeite mind. Contact with Shembe and therefore God (through Shembe the mediator) is a Shembe addition to the equation. Many respondents commented on this as the primary function of *izibonakaliso* (cf. Curley, 1983: 25 – 26, Charsley, 1973: 248). In the Shembe context this obviously includes contact with past Shembe leaders and the living leader, Vimbeni. However, one cannot simply declare *izibonakaliso* as contact with Shembe, the *amadlozi* and God without considering the numerous elements that come into play. What are the specifics of these *izibonakaliso*? What purpose do they serve in Shembeite life? In which situations do they emerge?

¹⁷ I re-iterate what I have said in 2 above about Shembeites drawing no distinction between the European idea of dreams (sleeping state) and visions (waking state) – an *isibonakaliso* (vision) can occur when sleeping or awake. Therefore dreams and visions have both been subsumed under the term *izibonakaliso* (revelatory dreams and visions) unless otherwise specified.

¹⁸ One must remember that not all the roles performed by Shembe and the *amadlozi* are related to *izibonakaliso*.

5.2 *Izibonakaliso* as a means of conversion

The reviewed literature on AICs reveals a high incidence of dreams as a means of converting non-followers to the church. This was not the case with the respondents due to a variety of factors.¹⁹ Jim Kiernan looks at dreams in Zulu Zionist churches and writes that both ancestral and non-ancestral dreams led to conversion. Certain respondents suggested that ancestral dream conversion was generally the case in the *ibandla lamaNazaretha* but the data reveals otherwise. Only one respondent had experienced an ancestral conversion dream compared to a further three who had been converted through the appearance of a Shembe leader in their dreams. One can only assume that ancestral conversion dreams were a trend in the past. The respondents' conversion dreams did not exhibit recurrent symbolism and standard interpretation and therefore serve to discount Sundkler's (1961: 265 – 75) claim that conversion dreams display these traits. An interesting occurrence are *izibonakaliso* in which *amadlozi* request to become Shembeites. Although Shembeites tend to convert their *amadlozi* when they themselves convert, some respondents explained that the *amadlozi* would contact the living through *izibonakaliso* if they wish to be converted [see 4.3.1.4 (ii)].²⁰ Other aspects of conversion dreams that the reviewed literature displayed were "stereotyped symbolism and interpretation" in Zionist dreaming (Sundkler, 1961: 266- 74), which does not occur in other AICs (Curley, 1983: 20, 29, Charsley in Jedrej and Shaw, 1992: 157,161 – 62, 165, Kiernan, 1990: 207, Daneel, 1974: 143 – 53). Conversion dreams are also used in some AICs as a means of entry or establishing a newcomer into the church and are likely to develop through the desire to receive a significant dream or through new members' processing of church teachings (Charsley 1973: 160 – 62, Curley, 1983: 27 – 31). The data shows no "stereotyped symbolism and interpretation" in conversion dreams. Shembe leaders were the only recurrent feature in this type

¹⁹ I have accounted for this in 4.3.1.2 above. Factors that have caused less conversion through *izibonakaliso* are the Shembe religion's large and growing following resulting in a number of Shembeites who were born into the religion and different methods of conversion such as the reception of a blessing from Shembe and healing by him.

²⁰ Respondents and Shembeites informant.

of dream but this is logical as it is a role they perform (see 4.3.1.2 and 4.3.2.1 above). The data also indicates that conversion dreams are not used to establish a new member in the church and the desire to receive one does not exist.

5.3 Izibonakaliso as guidance

The data gathered shows that *izibonakaliso* as a general channel of guidance is by far the most prominent function of *izibonakaliso* in the *ibandla lamaNazaretha*. This is because guidance from Shembe and the *amadlozi* permeates so many aspects of Shembeite life. It extends to direction from God (through Shembe) on how followers should live and what they are doing wrong in their lives as well as guidance on how to eradicate problems in followers' lives (often matters pertaining to the *amadlozi* solved through retrieving, cleansing and converting them). It includes direction on how to fulfil the *amadlozi*'s desires and needs, and guidance from harm by the revelation of possible dangers. *Izibonakaliso* also guide people in everyday aspects. Examples include where followers should go to seek work and how to go about curing the sick.

5.3.1 Izibonakaliso as guidance from God

Although there are no explicit examples of *izibonakaliso* as communication from God some respondents commented on this and it deserves brief mention but requires further qualification (see 5.1 above). All of these respondents considered Shembe a prophet through whom God works and communicates with people. Therefore, Shembe communicates *izibonakaliso* from God to people. We have seen in 4.3.1.3 (i) above how Shembe delivers the knowledge he acquires from God to Shembeites. This knowledge can be seen as divine guidance as it is through this knowledge that Shembe teaches or guides his followers as to how God wants them to live.

5.3.2 *Izibonakaliso as guidance on problems pertaining to the amadlozi*

We have seen in 4.3.2.2 above that the *amadlozi* need to be kept happy for fear of their retribution. In that section we also saw how a number of problems in Shembeite life are related to (known or unknown) neglect of the *amadlozi* resulting in unhappy *amadlozi* and subsequent misfortune for the living. These problems were generally to do with *amadlozi* that needed to be cleansed or *buyisa*-ed. It is through *izibonakaliso* that Shembe or the *amadlozi* approach Shembe followers to inform them of situations such as these and to guide them as to how they should go about rectifying them. 7 of 13 respondents commented on the function of *izibonakaliso* as a means whereby Shembe and the *amadlozi* could reveal problems pertaining to the *amadlozi*. I have given accounts of *izibonakaliso* of this nature in 4.3.2.2 (respondent 1.3) and 4.3.1.4 (i) (respondent 1.10) above.

5.3.3 *Izibonakaliso as general guidance from Shembe and the amadlozi*

Berglund (1976: 37, 99, 197) states that in dreams (read *izibonakaliso*) the *amadlozi* communicate coming events and dangers, express their desires and impart knowledge and advice (cf. Callaway, 1870: 228 – 45). *Izibonakaliso* from Shembe and the *amadlozi* function in much the same way in the *ibandla lamaNazareth*.

5 of 13 respondents commented on *izibonakaliso* as guiding people from harm. However, there were few examples given. Respondents 1.2 and 1.5 suggested similar instances in which this function might come into play. Respondent 1.2 states that in an *isibonakaliso* he might see someone being chased. He felt this was an indication that the same would happen to him and he should be cautious of this possibility. Respondent 1.5 felt that if he dreamt of someone stabbing him on his usual route home he would know to alternate his route or to take care on the usual route.

Only two respondents mentioned *izibonakaliso* as revealing future events. Examples of this type of *isibonakaliso* are respondent 1.11 seeing her mother very ill (in an *isibonakaliso*). A short while later the mother was dead. Charsley (1973: 248) notes that dreams can reveal the unknown and gives the example of foretelling deaths. Curley (1983: 26) also writes that dreams can sometimes be seen as a glimpse into the future. In an *isibonakaliso* respondent 1.3 saw his friend in poor health. This was before he had known that his friend was actually ill. Shembe showed respondent 1.3 what was needed to cure his friend.

Izibonakaliso as a channel for the *amadlozi* to express their desires (guiding followers on what they should be doing for them) is another function that must be given attention. These desires range from being venerated and the sacrifice of animals to needing to be cleansed or converted. 10 of 13 respondents felt that this was an important function of *izibonakaliso*. This is unsurprising given the wrath and misfortunes the living would incur if they ignored the *amadlozi* and did not do what they requested (see Krige, 1965: 283). This exposes another function of *izibonakaliso*. Some of the respondents commented on *izibonakaliso* as a warning from the *amadlozi* of what they were doing wrong but none gave examples.²¹ This may be correlated with 5.3.2 or anything that the living is doing that is "causing them harm".

General guidance is also acquired through *izibonakaliso* as they guide Shembeites on problems in their lives. These may be everyday trivial troubles such as respondent 1.12's *isibonakaliso* in which Vimbeni Shembe revealed the whereabouts of her lost washing. They also guide followers on more pressing issues like securing employment and healing someone sick, both of which seemed to be a focus (see 4.3.2.3 above). For example respondent 1.8 explained that in *izibonakaliso* Shembe showed her where to look for work and how to cure her sick child. The data gathered shows that this type of guidance may originate from

²¹ I feel a lack of examples from respondents in this section may be because the appearance of *amadlozi* in *izibonakaliso* is inherent in Zulu culture and therefore respondents could not see to exemplify their responses.

Shembe or the *amadlozi*. As we have seen in 4.3.2.3 above Shembe's role also extends to giving guidance to people as to how God wants them to live. There is no clear evidence to confirm that Shembe appears in *izibonakaliso* to give guidance of this sort. However, as we have seen in 5.3.1 above some respondents felt that God communicates through Shembe in *izibonakaliso*. Therefore, there is the possibility of this but no real proof. Curley (1983: 30) is the only author (within the limits of the reviewed literature) to document a similar occurrence in an AIC. In the True Church of God guidelines for proper living were extracted from conversion dreams.

Another interesting function of *izibonakaliso* as guidance is the "instructional *isibonakaliso*" in which a follower receives a message that needs to be told to another person, other people or the church and which generally needs to be acted upon. Charsley (1973: 251) writes about instructional dreams in the AIC he studied and notes that they can be used in a variety of ways. Examples include instructing someone to read a biblical passage or sing a particular hymn, or instructing one person to forgive another. The *ibandla lamaNazareth*a also displays a variety of situations in which this type of *isibonakaliso* could occur. It may be something church-related or something in everyday life that one should or should not be doing. Respondent 1.9 (an *umthandazi*) explained that Shembe had come to her in *izibonakaliso* to tell her what changes needed to be made in the church. Kiernan (1990: 191) deals with a similar situation in Zulu Zionist churches, where non-ancestral dreams (or dreams in which ancestors are indistinct) are important in supplying guidance in church matters. Respondent 1.3 provides the incidence of his conversion as an example of an instructional *isibonakaliso*. He explains, "Before I got baptised there was another guy living near me. I was doing something in the day outside and this other guy was sleeping and then saw *Inyang*a yeZulu (Amos Shembe, former Shembe leader) coming through the roof. Shembe told this guy to tell me to go and get baptised. This man got up and told me that I must go and be baptised." Instructional *isibonakaliso* are also applicable to spiritual conversion. Respondent 1.1 gave

details of an *isibonakaliso* in which his recently deceased friend appeared to him. The friend instructed respondent 1.1 to tell the deceased's family to donate to Shembe for him. The family members were not Shembeites but did what was instructed. The friend re-appeared as a "spiritual member" of the church to thank respondent 1.1 for what he had done. Respondent 1.1 also commented on an occurrence that he felt was quite common in the *ibandla lamaNazaretha*. He explained that one's *amadlozi* might go to another person and instruct them to tell you to do something. He says, "Someone with a different surname, who is not related to you can come to you and say 'Your father came to me in the night and told me that you must do this and this for him so that you will be able to resolve all the problems you have been having'". Berglund (1976: 197) writes that ancestors are limited in their activities to their lineage in a given clan, which respondent 1.1 confirmed, adding that *amadlozi* approaching non-family had never happened in the past but did occur now.

5.4 Izibonakaliso as responses from Shembe and the amadlozi

In 4.3.2.2 above I have discussed Shembe and the *amadlozi*'s combined role as purveyors of good fortune and how Shembeites request help from the *amadlozi* as well as asking Shembe personally and praying to him. In the *ibandla lamaNazaretha izibonakaliso* function in conveying this good fortune to followers as responses to prayers or requests made by them. According to Berglund (1976: 98) the ancestors appear in dreams only when bearing good news. If something bad is to be reported they will appear in another manner. Only one respondent did not comment on *izibonakaliso* as a channel for Shembe and the *amadlozi* to convey advice and results on issues Shembeites had prayed about or requested help with. Responses from Shembe and the *amadlozi* cover a number of aspects of Shembeite life but I have demonstrated the focus on education and employment in 4.3.2.2 above. As might be expected, examples of this type of were largely job-oriented. Respondent 1.8 was unemployed and asked Shembe and the *amadlozi* to help her in securing a job. On the day of the

interview she had an *isibonakaliso* that revealed that someone would hire her. My Shembeite informant told me that a few days after the interview she was employed. Respondent 1.1 also commented on this, "You go to Shembe and ask for a job. Your grandfather (*idlozi*) will come to you and say I have heard you asking for a job from Shembe. We are going to give you a job." I noticed that responses from the *amadlozi* pertained to specific requests while response or contact from Shembe covered anything that might be troubling a person. A number of respondents commented on that fact that if you saw Shembe in an *isibonakaliso* any problems in your life would soon be solved and any ailments would be cured.

5.5 *Izibonakaliso* as re-affirmations of faith

Kiernan (1990: 207) states that the telling of visions in Zulu Zionist churches is normally used to strengthen followers' faith. Although the public telling of *izibonakaliso* does not occur in the *ibandla lamaNazaretha*, the experience of them can be seen to function in a similar way. The data reveals that *izibonakaliso* as re-affirmations of faith do not have any particular message but serve to confirm the power of the religion in followers' minds. Respondent 1.11 was at a meeting in September 2002. It was an *isikhumbuzo* or memorial for Amos Shembe and a ceremony was being performed at night. She explains how a number of people saw Amos Shembe's face in the sky, which caused everyone to *halalisa* or rejoice. Respondent 1.12 recounted an experience that occurred in July 2002. She was asleep and a friend woke her up. They saw four paths in the sky. Three were paths of stars and the fourth was a path of rainbow. This is a reference to Vimbeni Shembe who is also known as *uThingo lwenkosazana*, the rainbow of *Inkosazana*, a Zulu deity. Respondent 1.13, who has been plagued by illness throughout her life, related an *isibonakaliso* in which she dreamt she was dead. Shembe appeared and patted her on the back preventing her from "being too comfortable in the land of the dead". All of these experiences re-affirm to

Shembeites that (as a number of bumper stickers suggest) “Shembe is the way”, that their religion is the way they should follow.

6. Further aspects of *izibonakaliso*

There are a number of features of *izibonakaliso* that need further explanation. These include the form in which Shembe leaders and the *amadlozi* appear to followers in *izibonakaliso* and the frequency of the *amadlozi* and Shembe in these *izibonakaliso*. Other aspects are whether stimuli are used to induce *izibonakaliso* of Shembe, who interprets and explains the messages in them, and whether the content and symbolism in *izibonakaliso* reveal recurring and standard patterns.

6.1 The form in which Shembe and the amadlozi appear to followers in izibonakaliso

There is conclusive evidence on the form in which Shembe leaders and the *amadlozi* appear to Shembeites in *izibonakaliso*. Eleven respondents gave direct answers to this question and they all said that the *amadlozi* appear as they were when alive, in human form. Respondent 1.3 offered that this is how a person identifies his *amadlozi*. This discounts what Berglund (1976: 100, 371) has written about the *amadlozi* being white, which allows them to be seen at night. Kiernan (1990: 192) also writes that the shades (*amadlozi*) are associated with whiteness. The data confirms what Callaway (1870: 230 – 31) has said about *amadlozi* appearing as if they were not dead (cf. Kiernan, 1990: 197). Respondent 1.10 added that when *amadlozi* are members of church they appear in *umnazaretha*, the white robe that Shembeites wear. She also felt that if they had not been cleansed they would appear miserable and that if they appeared as snakes (see Krige, 1965: 285) it was an indication that they had not been cleansed in the right way. All the respondents felt that the Shembe leaders (examples of all past leaders and the present leader were given) appear as they

did in real life. However, the data reveals a few variations. Respondent 1.6 explained, "They (the Shembe leaders) look normal but you can't face them. They have a glittering light from God. It is very bright." Respondent 1.8 noted that any Shembe leader might appear in *izibonakaliso* wearing an *umnazaretha*, traditional Zulu dress or just normal clothes. She said that if you see any leader naked it is not him but Satan or a demon impersonating Shembe. In contrast to much of what was said on the subject, respondent 1.9 felt that if your eyes met with Shembe's in an *isibonakaliso* you would die.

6.2 The frequency of Shembe and the *amadlozi* in *izibonakaliso*

This question was a difficult one for respondents to answer, as one cannot always keep tabs on how often one experiences *izibonakaliso* (here revelatory dreams) and they are often forgotten. Nevertheless, I was able to draw clear conclusions from the respondents' answers. Kiernan (1990: 191) is the only author who provides any insight into the frequency of dreams and his data "gives grounds for believing that they (non-ancestral dreams) are as frequent as explicitly ancestral dreams." The data on the *ibandla lamaNazaretha* proves otherwise. Nine of the respondents gave specific answers while the remaining respondents felt they could not put a number to the frequency of their *izibonakaliso*. Of the nine respondents that attached numerical value to their *izibonakaliso* all of them reported *izibonakaliso* in which the *amadlozi* featured more frequently than *izibonakaliso* in which a Shembe leader featured. Respondent 1.1 said he had *izibonakaliso* of Shembe once or twice a year and a further 4 of 9 respondents confirmed this by giving the same figure for their *izibonakaliso* in which Shembe featured. The general consensus was that *izibonakaliso* in which the *amadlozi* appeared occurred three to four times a year. However, there were also extreme cases – respondent 1.8 said she was lucky and received bimonthly *izibonakaliso* of Shembe while respondent 1.4 said it was not guaranteed that he would receive a message from his *amadlozi* in a whole year. A few respondents added that in the case of an important message or

serious problem that needed to be communicated to a person, the frequency of *izibonakaliso* from Shembe and the *amadlozi* would increase to ensure the person received the message. One can generally conclude that *izibonakaliso* in which Shembe leaders feature occur less often than *izibonakaliso* in which the *amadlozi* feature.

6.3 Stimuli used to induce *izibonakaliso* of Shembe

9 of 13 respondents felt that stimuli could not induce *izibonakaliso* of Shembe. However, the remaining four respondents gave examples of stimuli that could result in an *isibonakaliso* from Shembe. Two respondents suggested fasting as a stimulus. Respondent 1.4 added that if you fasted for seven days you would expect some kind of answer (through an *isibonakaliso*) for what you have been praying and fasting for. The other two respondents suggested praying before sleeping as a stimulus for *izibonakaliso*. Charsley (1973: 248) also writes that praying for dreams before sleeping occurred in the African Israel Church. Respondent 1.8 offered cleanliness as another possible stimulus. She says, "You must be clean, your place of sleeping must be clean. Don't use pills or any Zulu medication." We can therefore see that although Shembeites generally feel that stimuli cannot induce *izibonakaliso* from Shembe there are measures that can be taken (cleanliness, prayer before sleep and fasting) that might result in an *isibonakaliso* that brings an answer to or advice on an issue that is troubling someone.

6.4 Interpretation of *izibonakaliso*

All of the respondents said that messages from Shembe were "straight messages" in that they did not require any interpretation. Messages from the *amadlozi* are part of a "well recognised system of symbols". For example, if a man or woman dreams of rivers with dirty water it is an indication that somebody is pregnant (Vilakazi, 1986: 14). Callaway (1870: 228 – 29) also writes that

amadlozi dreams are considered the truth. However, Kiernan (1990: 197) says of ancestral dreams, "The details are clear but the message requires interpretation by a specialist." Hence, the need for *izangoma* (diviners) in Zulu culture although they are used less today than in the past. *Izangoma* are not permitted in the *ibandla lamaNazaretha* as can be seen by respondent 1.10's reluctance to becoming an *isangoma* in 4.3.1.4 (i) above. The question of interpretation of *izibonakaliso* therefore arises. Respondent 1.5 explains that *izibonakaliso* do not generally require interpretation as they are responses to your problems or requests.

Nevertheless, much of what has been written on the interpretation of dreams in other AICs can be correlated with the interpretation of *izibonakaliso* in the *ibandla lamaNazaretha*. Kiernan writes that the interpretation of dreams in Zulu Zionist Churches is done by prophets, who have a heightened awareness, while a diviner might interpret ancestral dreams (Kiernan, 1990: 186, 193, 195 – 96, 198). In the True Church of God studied by Curley dreams are interpreted by elders of the church, by a deacon or by the narrator of the dream. The interpretation is understood according to church hierarchy with church leaders offering a more authoritative interpretation. Charsley (1973: 250 – 51) writes that in the African Israel Church nobody was favoured in dream interpretation although prophets with special powers were often given difficult or important dreams to work out. In the *ibandla lamaNazaretha* if one does not understand the message in an *isibonakaliso* there are a variety of people whose help can be enlisted. *Amakhehla* (old men) or *ogogo* (old women, lit. grannies) are considered good at explaining *izibonakaliso* because of their wisdom, which ties in with Zulu thinking that old people who have experienced life are knowledgeable. *Abafundisi* (priests that rank highly in the church hierarchy) and *abathandazi* (who are in tune with the spirit world) are also approached to explain *izibonakaliso*. A few female respondents felt that other female church members or *abakhokheli* (female group leaders) could help in the explanation of *izibonakaliso*. Respondents also felt that friends or any church members could be

approached for their opinions on what the message in an *isibonakaliso* might mean. Finally, Vimbeni Shembe, the current Shembe leader, can explain any *izibonakaliso* that proved confusing to followers. It follows that former Shembe leaders could do the same in the past. He is in contact with everyone's *amadlozi* and could therefore ask them about the intended message. He may also have authored the *isibonakaliso* himself (see 2 above). Respondent 1.1 gave an example of a man who was planning to *ukubuyisa* his father. The man's father appeared in an *isibonakaliso* asking him to prepare traditional beer (a means of communion with the *amadlozi*, see Berglund, 1976: 209). The father was a Shembeite when living and traditional beer-drinking (and drinking in general) is forbidden in the church. The *isibonakaliso* therefore created a conflicting situation for the man. He went to Amos Shembe (the leader at the time) and asked for insight into the *isibonakaliso*. Amos explained that the man's father had not appeared in his *isibonakaliso* and it must have been an evil spirit.

6.5 Recurring and standard patterns in *izibonakaliso*

Bengt Sundkler (1961: 266 – 75) recorded "stereotyped symbolism and interpretation" in Zionist dreaming. He states that there are elements in Zionist dreaming that always recur and that followers "dream what their church expects them to dream" – only dream elements that fit into the accepted dream pattern of the church are remembered. Other authors who have studied AICs have largely refuted this (Daneel, 1974: 143 – 53, Charsley, 1973: 160 – 62, 165, Charsley in Jedrej and Shaw, 1992: 156 – 58, Kiernan, 1990: 203 – 07, Curley, 1983: 20, 29). The gathered data adds to the many authors who have discounted stereotyped dreaming and the standardised interpretation of them.²² In general the *izibonakaliso* that were recounted to me revealed no stereotyped symbols and therefore no standardised interpretation would be employed. When asked if any repeating images or symbols appeared in their *izibonakaliso*, 7 of 8

²² However, there is a traditional Zulu "system of symbols" wherein certain symbols represent certain messages. For example, according to a Zulu informant, if a man or woman dreams of fruit or being chased by cattle it is an indication that the woman is pregnant.

respondents replied in the negative. Respondent 1.12 might add validity to Sundkler's argument. She stated that most of her *izibonakaliso* (including those that recurred) were related to the *ibandla lamaNazaretha* or Shembe. This, however, might be put down to a strong faith. Four of the remaining seven respondents explained that *izibonakaliso* (and possibly the images and symbols in them) might recur if a message had not been properly received and was therefore not acted upon.²³ This is the sole circumstance that respondents offered in which a repeating message, which may or may not be accompanied by recurring symbols or images, could occur. One can therefore conclude that recurring symbolism and a standard interpretation of *izibonakaliso* does not feature in the *ibandla lamaNazaretha*.

²³ For example if an *idlozi* keeps returning there is a problem (such as cleansing or conversion) that needs to be fixed. See 4.3.1.4 (ii) above.

CHAPTER 5

1. Conclusions

There are a number of conclusions that can be drawn from the data presented in the previous chapter. The study determines the Shembeite definition of *isibonakaliso* (vision) and *iphupho* (dream). It looks at who Isia Shembe is to his followers and considers the nature of the relationship between Isia Shembe or his lineage and the *amadlozi* as well as the roles played by Shembe and the *amadlozi* in the religious and social life of the Shembeites. The study investigates the functions and significance of dreams and visions in the *ibandla lamaNazaretha* and details how followers became converted to the Shembe religion. It looks at the form in which Shembe leaders and the *amadlozi* appear to Shembeites in dreams and visions and the frequency of the *amadlozi* and Shembe in them. The study also reveals who interprets and explains the messages in dreams and visions and considers whether any stimuli are used to induce dreams and visions of the Shembe leaders. It establishes whether the content and symbolism in dreams and visions of Shembeites exhibit recurrent and typical patterns. What follows are the conclusions of the study based on the data gathered.

1.1 *Iphupho Vs Isibonakaliso*

In the Shembeite mind there is no definite distinction drawn between *isibonakaliso* as a dream or as a vision. Although they are not the same thing, a revelatory message in a dream and a message communicated through a waking vision are both considered an *isibonakaliso*. Therefore, in the Shembe context an *isibonakaliso* is a revelatory experience irrespective of the waking or sleeping context. An *iphupho*, on the other hand, is just a normal, everyday dream, which is the natural processing of past or present experiences.

1.2 Shembeite perceptions of Isia Shembe and his lineage

The data shows conclusively that the majority of Shembeites view Isia Shembe as the prophet medium of the Holy Spirit – he was a prophet through which the Holy Spirit worked. He is seen on a par with Jesus, Moses and Mohammed. Shembeite perceptions of Isia's lineage, the other Shembe leaders, largely confirm this designation. All of the respondents that commented on their identities considered them prophets with the Holy Spirit working in them. Respondents explained that the same spirit that worked in Isia, the founder, works in all Shembe leaders as the Holy Spirit moves from one leader to the next and therefore all leaders have the same power. However, there is also evidence to suggest that in some Shembeites' minds Isia Shembe is the Black Messiah or God Himself but these designations need further explanation.

Isia Shembe as a Black Messiah is dependent on one's belief of who Jesus Christ was. He is generally considered a prophet similar to Jesus. It then follows that he can be considered a Black Messiah if Jesus is thought of as a White Messiah. Isia Shembe as God also needs qualification, as this designation must not be taken at face value. In Zulu thinking a person filled with the Spirit of God, whose life and actions the Spirit controls and who personifies the Spirit can be termed God. Therefore, this designation is best understood by considering the cultural interpretation of some Shembeites. One can conclude that there is no concrete perception of Isia Shembe, although most of the data shows him as a prophet and this is the designation that I think holds the most credibility. Nevertheless, one can conclude with conviction that the Holy Spirit is the force behind any designation of Isia Shembe and therefore behind any member of his lineage. This is an area in which more intensive research can be done in the future.

1.3 The relationship between Shembe and the *amadlozi*

Despite the fact that the *amadlozi* were once the dominant force in Zulu religion, in the Shembe religion Shembe has usurped the position of greater authority. As a result a relationship in which Shembe and the *amadlozi* work in union has developed. The current Shembe leader, Vimbeni, and his *amadlozi* (the previous Shembe leaders) are able to interact and communicate in spirit form with each other and with anyone's *amadlozi*, including those of non-followers.

1.4 The roles performed by Shembe in Shembeite life

Although Shembe is in contact and works with the *amadlozi*, he also performs a number of roles alone, some of which were traditionally the *amadlozi*'s. Shembe is considered a cultural leader, which stems from Isia Shembe's promotion and revival of traditional Zulu culture. Isia Shembe's successors (his lineage) have maintained this focus on Zulu culture and it features prominently in the religion today. Shembe also performs the role of converter. There is less incidence of conversion through *izibonakaliso* as the current leader Vimbeni Shembe also converts through different methods such as the provision of a blessing or healing, which, based on the data, are more prominent.

Shembe's role as mediator is twofold. He is a mediator between the living and the *amadlozi*, and between the living and God. Shembe mediates between the living and the *amadlozi* as he features in a number of circumstances in which he was previously absent and still is in the modern traditional Zulu context. Shembeites make requests to Shembe who then discusses them with the person's *amadlozi*, whereas in the non-Shembeite context requests are made directly to the *amadlozi*. Shembeites must also inform Shembe if they wish to slaughter animals for the *amadlozi* and when they speak with the *amadlozi*, which are both instances in which he did not previously feature. Shembe mediates between people and God in that he communes with God on the behalf

of the Shembeites and delivers the knowledge he acquires from God to them. Shembe is also thought of as the mediator with regards to salvation as he intercedes with God on Shembeites' behalf in gaining access to heaven.

Other roles performed by Shembe largely pertain to the *amadlozi*. Shembe is able to retrieve lost or wandering spirits that are not yet *amadlozi* and therefore cannot communicate with their living relatives. By retrieving them Shembe returns them home so that they can become legitimate *amadlozi*. Shembe is also able to cleanse these *amadlozi* of their sins (actions that are not in line with Shembe church teachings) and convert them spiritually so that they can become members of the *ibandla lamaNazaretha*.

1.5 The roles performed by Shembe and the amadlozi

There are also roles played by both Shembe and the *amadlozi* as a unit or at least with interaction between them. Shembe and the *amadlozi* convert non-followers to the Shembe religion through *izibonakaliso* although the data reveals that there is less occurrence of this than in the past. Shembe and the *amadlozi* combined perform the role of purveyors of good fortune (which was traditionally the *amadlozi's* role). This role filters into almost all aspects of Shembeite life and can be applied to any number of situations. These include the healing of illness, the provision of children to women who were thought infertile, the acquisition of employment, education, money and material objects. The data also reveals that Shembe and the *amadlozi* play a prominent role in professional and academic life. However, this may be due to education and employment as priorities in modern day society. Shembe and the *amadlozi* also perform the role of guides or directors in Shembeite life. The *amadlozi* contribute to the family situation, give people insight on issues that are worrying them, and guide them through revealing possible dangers. Shembe performs a similar role as he too offers guidance on problems that are troubling people and guides them generally, for example, how they should go about securing employment or what methods are

required to cure an ill person. Furthermore, Shembeites see Shembe as directing them on how God wants them to live by teaching people to live better lives through following the church rules and teachings.

1.6 The functions of dreams and visions – izibonakaliso – in the ibandla lamaNazareth

Shembe and the *amadlozi* are the authors of dreams and visions in the *ibandla lamaNazareth*. The functions of *izibonakaliso* can therefore be derived from the roles they perform in Shembeite life. Primarily, *izibonakaliso* function as communication with the spiritual realm. They are also used, although to less of an extent than in the past, in converting non-followers to the religion. By far the most prominent function of *izibonakaliso* is one of guidance, as guidance from Shembe and the *amadlozi* features in so many aspects of Shembeite life. *Izibonakaliso* are considered guidance from God (through Shembe) on how Shembeites should live, guidance on problems pertaining to the *amadlozi* (such as retrieving and cleansing them) and guidance in life in general. Examples of the latter are guiding people from harm and a means by which the *amadlozi* can express their desires and dissatisfaction (guide living relatives as to how they should treat the *amadlozi*). *Izibonakaliso* also function as responses from Shembe and the *amadlozi* – a channel for them to convey results on matters Shembeites have prayed about or requested help with. *Izibonakaliso* also operate as re-affirmations of faith. The data shows that these *izibonakaliso* do not have any particular message but confirm the power of the religion in Shembeites' minds.

1.7 Further aspects of izibonakaliso

The data gathered shows convincingly that Shembe and the *amadlozi* appear in human form – the *amadlozi* and past Shembe leaders as they were when alive and Vimbeni Shembe (the current leader) as he is today. A few variations were

found (such as Shembe leaders with a holy, glittering light and cleansed, converted *amadlozi* wearing the white church robe, *umnazaretha*) but were additions to the human form of Shembe and the *amadlozi*. With regard to the frequency of Shembe leaders and the *amadlozi* in *izibonakaliso*, there is definite evidence to show that the *amadlozi* feature more frequently than any Shembe leader in *izibonakaliso*. Generally *izibonakaliso* in which the *amadlozi* appear occur three to four times a year and *izibonakaliso* of a Shembe leader only once or twice a year. Stimuli as a means to induce *izibonakaliso* of Shembe were generally refuted. However, some respondents suggested fasting, praying before sleeping and general cleanliness as possible stimuli.

Although *izibonakaliso* may not require interpretation, as they are often responses from Shembe and the *amadlozi* to Shembeites' problems and requests, there are instances in which interpretation is needed and a variety of interpreters are at hand to perform this task. The elderly of the church are considered good at explaining *izibonakaliso* because of their wisdom. *Abafundisi* (priests that rank highly in the church hierarchy) and *abathandazi* (who are in tune with the spirit world) are also used in explaining them. Female church members might approach *abakhokheli* (female group leaders) to explain their *izibonakaliso*. Friends or any church members can also be approached for their opinions on what the message in an *isibonakaliso* might mean. Finally, Vimbeni Shembe can explain any *izibonakaliso* that proves confusing to followers. He is in contact with everyone's *amadlozi* and can therefore ask them about the intended message. It follows that in the past former Shembe leaders played the same role as interpreters of *izibonakaliso*.

The data reveals that recurring symbolism and a standard interpretation of *izibonakaliso* does not occur in the *ibandla lamaNazaretha*. However, *izibonakaliso* (and possibly the images and symbols in them) might recur if the message was not properly received and was therefore not acted upon.

2. Recommendations for future studies

The question of Isia Shembe's identity has been discussed to a certain extent in this study. However, there is no clear consensus on it and this should therefore be an area of exploration for future researchers. That said, further research might prove that Isia Shembe does not have one definite designation. Nevertheless, more intensive research will surely yield more conclusive results.

This study exposed surface trends in conversion that often excluded *izibonakaliso*. Methods of conversion in the *ibandla lamaNazaretha* seem to be more varied than in the past, and the provision of blessings and healing now play a large role in converting non-followers. Therefore, further studies might explore which methods of conversion are more frequent and who (Shembe or the *amadlozi*) plays a more active role in converting non-followers.

With regard to the empirical fieldwork, if one cannot speak very fluent Zulu, a Zulu translator with a good command of English is a must. This person should be briefed on the aims of the study and instructed to ask questions as they have been written so that the desired information can be collected. However, one should not be so strict as to limit the flow of information. Patience is a virtue in the field and much of the richest data gathered were the fruits of very extended stories and the recounting of certain Shembeites' *izibonakaliso* experiences. This does, however, make the job of transcribing interviews and writing up the research results a long and arduous one. A Shembeite informant (preferably the same person as the translator) is also a great advantage as he or she has knowledge of both the Zulu culture and Shembe religion. My Shembeite informant, Khetiwe, was very helpful in explaining the Shembe-specific content of some of the *izibonakaliso* as well as aspects of Zulu culture that were unknown to me.

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