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Troubling the gender binary: Church uniform and gender inequality in Zion churches in Pietermaritzburg (KZN).

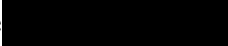

By Slindokuhle Ndlovu (216059830)

Supervised by Reverend Mantima H. Thekiso

Thesis presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Theology (Gender, Health and Religion Programme) at the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

DECLARATION

By submitting this thesis, I declare that the entirety of the work contained therein is my own original work, that I am the authorship owner thereof (unless to the extent explicitly otherwise stated), and that I have not previously – in its entirety or in part – submitted it for obtaining any qualification.

Student signature  ... Supervisor signature..... 

Date: ...03 August 2023.....

DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to all Zion churches and its members who are out there doing the Lord's work in their congregations, allowing churches to be a place of refuge when other institutions are not. Moreover, I dedicate this study to the Zionists who were willing to participate in this study.

I dedicate this study to everyone who is currently feeling marginalised in faith spaces; not only by words spoken but also by symbols that are considered as an important part of the church. I hope they find their inner strength to gain their visibility and inclusivity as they form an integral part of African Independent Churches (AICs).

To my late parents, I hope this study makes you proud of how you raised me in a Christian home and growing consciousness of my ethnicity.

To all African theologians who are committed to exposing injustices that take place in faith spaces. Keep up the good fight.

ABSTRACT

Church uniform is a significant and meaningful symbol in African Independent Churches (AICs) that speaks to common identities that are reinforced, retained, and sustained over time. The aim of this study is to problematise¹ the use of church uniform in Zion churches as a method to reinforce the gender binary and prescribed gender roles which inform and maintain the patriarchy in the church. This research aims to respond to the main research question of how religious and cultural dress can be reimagined as gender-inclusive adornment in the Zion churches. Borderlands theory is employed in this study in order to read and understand the history of African churches and their epistemologies before colonisation and/or Apartheid took place in South Africa. This study does this with the intention to resist, protest, and deconstruct the dominant cultural epistemologies that have been imposed on AICs through the adoption and use of church uniform. Moreover, to conscientise churches in contemporary (south) African societies to resurrect and re-read epistemologies that speak to African ways of living, and to preserve African ways of worship. Findings of this study show that the existing church uniform in Zion churches speaks to the restrictive and prescriptive nature of a church uniform that directly inform gender roles. It also informs how these gender roles constitute the accepted heteronormative patterns of sexuality in those who adhere to the church uniform. Thus, not only establishing visual identity for religion, but also gender identity to exert control over bodies of individuals. Individual and group interviews were conducted with fourteen participants, and thematic analysis was used to analyse themes that emerged from the interviews. This thesis seeks to argue that the re-imagining of religious and cultural dress to be gender-inclusive in the Zion church is possible – through Borderlands theology and through proposing a shift to an asexual type of church uniform.

¹ In the title, I use the term "troubling." For me, it means problematizing or interrogating a phenomenon in order to find new ways of thinking about and framing it. However, after careful consideration and reflection, I decided to be more explicit in the use of the words problematize, interrogate and reimagine throughout the project. This also helps to frame the research, as it does not seek to discard the uniform, but rather to facilitate a discussion about taking a more nuanced approach to the topic of church uniforms when reflecting on gender and human sexuality issues.

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CHAPTER 1- INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the study

For centuries in Monotheistic religions such as traditional Christianity, God is represented as a man, therefore everything, including pictures, images, symbols and statues are male dominated (Tekcan, 2005). This resulted in the history of women in religion being treated with little to no importance. This is also due to the way in which people interpreted certain texts such as the creation story in Genesis 1 and 2. Church fathers like Augustine and Thomas and philosophers like Plato and Aristotle, whose writings were and still are very influential and have attested in their classic writings to the inferiority of the woman's body compared to the male's body, also contributed to this phenomenon (Kisitu & Siwila, 2016).

In resistance to monotheistic doctrines like the one above, African Independent Churches were formed (Seeley, 1984). In recent history, African Independent Churches (AICs) are seen or presented as an African church that embraces African traditions. The AICs are also seen as custodians of African culture through the preservation of African ways of worship (Sithole, 2019). Therefore, AICs were formed in resistance to colonial missionary churches because Africans had encountered severe and dehumanising changes due to colonisation and strongly felt they had to sustain their way of worship (Shange, 2013). However, their resistance towards missionary churches/ traditional Christianity resulted in alienating and creating discomfort in other African bodies in the society, because AICs have their own religio-cultural traditions that look at women's bodies in a certain way,(Kisitu & Siwila, 2016). By this, the scholars mean that women bodies are always seen and looked upon as subordinate to patriarchal control despite the fact that women bodies have power to control both societal and spiritual realm as argued by other scholars.

Against this backdrop, scholars like Haddad (2016) have done work in holy symbols like church uniform, and they portrayed it as a positive holy symbol for women. These scholars argue that the church uniform allows African women space to be recognised and to recognise one another, even if they are from different denominations. Its portrayal, however, is still only one side of the coin because it also excludes many other women and people who are gender diverse. Moreover, church uniforms are also given to people who are socially and traditionally/

culturally accepted in terms of gender conformity, sexual orientation and gender identification way before class and race. Church uniform includes behaviours related to the control of the body; what the body should do and how the body should be conducted (Arthur, 2021). For many centuries, uniform has maintained the gender binary element, and in the Zion churches there is only a church uniform for people who identify themselves as men or women, and these people are living heterosexual lives which then maintain customs and traditions of their cultural society (Arthur, 2021).

By adopting a church uniform, religions establish a visual identity and simultaneously control the individual identities of its members by symbolically denoting dress code as needing control (Haddad, 2016). Religions create dress codes to overtly define morality and modesty while covertly controlling sexuality. Therefore, this thesis seeks to propose a shift towards inclusive holy symbols, and specifically, an inclusive church uniform, through which people are not identified according to their gender and sexuality, and that will make every church member feel safe, free and included in a church space. However, this study acknowledges that church uniforms have a crucial function to play in society and in the formulation of identities. Therefore, this study does not advocate for a total removal of church uniform, but rather for a shift in re-imagining holy symbols, such as church uniform, to be inclusive.

1.2 Motivation of the study

This study was motivated by my experience as an African woman in the Zion Church as my faith space. I grew up in Zion Church, and as a young person I saw how important church symbols are and somehow, they convey certain unspoken messages to church members. In the Zion church that I grew up in, I observed how church uniform played a crucial role towards behaviour of congregants. Moreover, I observed that gender non-conforming bodies have no type of uniform the way that men and women have. I also noticed that when people are wearing church uniform they behave differently; women become respecting and submissive, and men act powerful (strong) – one could even see from the way they talk, walk, start songs or even initiate church rituals. Then I understood that there is something to the church uniform; a hold that it has over church members. Initially I thought it was spiritual, but as time went by, I concluded it is more than that. I say this because I still vividly remember each and every

incident that happened in my church whenever a gender non- conforming individual entered the church.

1.3 Key research question

The main research question for this study is ‘How can religious and cultural dress be reimagined as gender-inclusive adornment in the Zion Church?’

1.4 Research sub-questions

1. What is the history and purpose of religious dress and uniforms amongst the Zion churches?
2. What are the gender and sexuality perceptions that exists in Zion churches?
3. What theological and cultural ideas inform the gendered assignment of uniform in the Zion churches?
4. How does church uniform inform gender binary and patriarchy in the Zion Church and how can it be reimagined?

1.5 Research objectives/ aims.

1. To critically evaluate the impact of the uniform in the Zion Church, looking at the advantages and disadvantages of the church uniform.
2. To critically evaluate what informs the gender and sexuality perceptions that exists in Zion churches
3. To reimagine gender-inclusive uniform patterns that may open safe spaces to accommodate gender-diverse church members.
4. To propose a shift in the uniform phenomenon towards the formulation of non-gender binary church uniform.

1.6 Limitations of the study

The initial limitation that this study encountered was that it was conducted during the Covid-19 pandemic restrictions; it was difficult to recruit participants because there were regulations to be followed. Furthermore, during the recruitment process some participants kept postponing their interviews, which ended up taking much longer than estimated. The second limitation was that gender-nonconforming people were uncomfortable to participate, which left this study with only fourteen participants instead of twenty-one. I discuss this further in Chapter 5’s data analysis section. However, this was something that had been anticipated because people who

are gender-nonconforming generally prefer not to openly declare their sexuality due to hostility experienced in Zion faith spaces.

1.7 Structure of Dissertation

The structure of the dissertation will consist of five chapters.

Chapter 1 discusses the details of the background of the study, what motivated this study, and key research questions and limitations of the study. Chapter 2 draws from scholarly literature research on African Independent Churches (AICs) and those who have specifically focused on church uniform in AICs. Furthermore, Chapter 2 investigates the existing history of the church uniform, focusing on Christian religion and narrowing it to AICs, and specifically Ethiopian Zion Churches. The chapter proceeds to look at the introduction of church uniform in precolonial, colonial and postcolonial eras, and how church uniform has functioned in societies and faith spaces. This is done through generating a literature survey on how church uniform has functioned according to different AICs' scholars. This chapter also looks at how culture and religion constitute the existing gender and sexuality perceptions in AICs that enable the church to overtly gain control over the physical body through a church uniform.

Moreover, Chapter 2 draws from existing literature: the thoughts of feminists on church uniform, how church uniform has been seen as an oppression tool that is used to control women's bodies, and how women should conduct their bodies in society. This stands in total contradiction to what some other scholars have found, which is that church uniform is a source of strength. I then propose a viable option of having an asexual type of a church uniform, which takes into account that church uniform can in some ways be oppressive – not only to women but also to people who are gender non-conforming. This seems as a viable option, as this type of church uniform would accommodate what other scholars have been putting forward, which is that church uniform is an important symbol that gives hope, respect, integrity and strength to its adherents. Hence, this study does not advocate for the complete removal of the church uniform but proposes a shift for it to be inclusive and accommodating to all existing bodies in African societies.

In order to clearly understand the postcolonial aspect of how the church uniform has functioned, the chapter appeals to Radcliffe-Brown's theory on structural functionalism, which will assist in providing an anthropological emphasis on the contribution of phenomena in order to maintain social order (Radcliffe-Brown, 1890). This will further assist in understanding how identities are formed, maintained, and reshaped in faith spaces such as Zion churches. In

addition, it analyses how society functions and communicates correct' messages in creating identities and their meaning in order to maintain social orders, such as patriarchy in Zion churches. Lastly, in Chapter 2, border thinking is proposed as a possible theory that would assist in the re-imagination of inclusive holy symbols such as images, pictorials, statues, and by extension, church uniform. This will speak to how coloniality has taken away the ability to rely on African ways of knowing. Here, the research proposes reading in the history of South Africa, how colonialism has indoctrinated Africans into believing gender and sexuality essentialism. Reading South African history is done to make Africans aware that what is seen as African culture has been diluted post- colonisation. Furthermore, it necessitates and encourage Africans in Zion churches to look back at their own ways of knowing and be able to confidently apply and rely on them in the case of gender and sexuality. This will also bring consciousness amongst South African about the dominant culture of rationalization as not the only truth that exists, and not being absolute.

Chapter 3 of this study discusses how the church uniform in Zionist churches is located within the church doctrines and ecclesiology which then formulates one's identity. This chapter continues to give definitions of what ecclesiology is according to different scholars. This is important for this study because it speaks to the location of this particular study which is within ecclesiology and liturgical symbols of the Zionist Churches. Notably this study does this with an aim to situate Zionist Churches within the broader strand as an AICs and highlight its particularities as a church movement within South Africa. As this chapter continues, it locate this this study within the broader theological studies whilst also highlighting the intersections between the Zionist Church doctrines and the contemporary gender questions around church rituals and symbols. This chapter further seeks to expand on Sundkler work on Zionist. Sundkler is one of the prominent scholar when looking for liture regarding Zionist. However, in this chapter I expand on his work because given the current times his work on Zionist church seems narrow because he only focuses on the fact these churches are charecterised by charisma and healing only.

Furthermore in Chapter 3, this study looks Zionist churches in relation to their doctrines inoder to be able to look at their theologies in different issues facing the church today which includes issues such as church uniform, gender and sexuality but focusing on the marginalized groups such as women and LGBTQIA+ community. By doing this, this chapter will not only give clear image of the Ethipian Zionist Churches but it also give clear bases on why this study advocate for reimagining inclusive church symbols such church uniform in a asexual form.

In Chapter 4 the Borderlands theory by Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) is employed. This is an ethno-socio-cultural theory of deconstructed-reconstructed identity. Borderlands can be used metaphorically as Anzaldúa (1987) permits. Borderlands have also been applied metaphorically in this study because this study is not dealing with physical borders. However, it deals with social borders which cannot be witnessed by the physical eye. This allows this study to look at the ideological epistemologies that colonisation has brought into South Africa through the church. These epistemologies had a considerable impact on powerful societal structures such as hierarchy and patriarchy in Zion churches, which are mostly shaped by dualism. Furthermore, this chapter employs terms such as '*Nepatla* state' – a state of in-betweenness, according to Anzaldúa (1987) – to encourage confrontation or reaffirmation of our own identities before looking for doctrines that exist in Zion churches. The point of this state is to allow bodies in the Zion Church to gain self-consciousness about their different identities and embodied experiences, and to get comfortable in their bodies. Another state employed in Chapter 4 is the '*Coatlicue* state', which creates consciousness around ancient myths and fiction stories, how they constitute the reality of different bodies, and the 'how' of the bodies that exist in society (Anzaldúa, 1987). This state/ understanding/ consciousness will assist to revisit the African gender and sexuality epistemologies that existed before colonisation, and to read the underlying intentions of the postcolonial myths and fiction stories about different bodies with understanding.

Chapter 5 outlines the methodology of this qualitative study, which employs two types of sampling to recruit the participants. The study employs both purposive and snowball sampling with a sample size of fourteen, and thematic analysis is used to analyse data. A rationale for this choice of research tools will be shared whilst also outlining the criteria around selecting Pietermaritzburg specifically will also be discussed. The chapter further outlines ethical considerations applied in this study.

Chapter 6 presents data and the analysis of the findings from the field work and offers recommendations. The presented data is from fourteen people who met the selection criteria. Through use of thematic analysis, six themes emerged, which, in short, portray religio-cultural traditions that exist in Zion churches. Data is represented according to all objectives that the study initially mentioned, which were the pros and cons of church uniform; re-imagining gender-inclusive patterns and proposing a shift in uniform phenomenon. The findings indicated

that there are advantages and disadvantages to having a church uniform, but that people tend to ignore the cons. The data also shows that church uniform is indeed restrictive and sometimes it detaches the emotions from the body. There are prescriptions that come with church uniform that forms the identity. Furthermore, in this chapter, it becomes clear that some congregants are still uncomfortable with the shift in the church uniform because it seems like the non-negotiable phenomenon. Moreover, what transpires is the colonial legacy of dualism that is embedded in the church uniform. This dualism also reinforces restrictive patterns and behaviour to its conveyers inside the church and in the larger communities. Furthermore, this dualism reinforces heteronormative patterns and gender roles. In recommendations, this study proposes both new initiatives as well as readily available tools such as Contextual Bible Studies, to be applied to AICs in order to address the existing injustices such as gender and sexuality essentialism in identity formation. This is in light of how most scholars posit the importance of the restudy of biblical text such as Genesis 1 and 2 in dealing with gender issues. Chapter five further suggests that allowing embodiment and embracing of different experiences is a necessary part of history, just as Jesus Christ is an embodiment of both divinity and humanity.

CHAPTER 2

Review of literature

2.1 Introduction

In the first section of this chapter, I will be looking at how church uniform, holy adorning, or holy dressing came into existence in the precolonial, colonial, and postcolonial eras in African societies. I will also look at feminists' thoughts around the issue of church uniform, and what feminists have argued regarding women's role, or the role given to women, in the church. Secondly, I will be looking at what views the Zion Church holds about gender and sexuality in contemporary African society and how that informs the gender binary, which then exacerbates the powerful societal structures like patriarchy and hierarchy. Furthermore, in this section, the study will look at structural-functionalism theory as a guideline for an anthropological analysis of how uniforms function in African societies and African Independent Churches (AICs), how identity is constituted, and what identity means to every member. This theory will also help analyse how these identities are formed and retained. This would be very useful because although there is a lot of research done on AICs, not much research has been done in AICs, particularly Zion churches, with regards to what the factors are that make and shape gender and sexuality perceptions. There are questions that have never been answered like, 'What informs Zion churches' dressing code?' and 'How does this code match with their culture and religion?' The third section will be discussing how we can use tools such as border thinking in helping to re-imagine inclusive holy symbols such as images, pictorials, statues, and by extension, church uniform – a uniform that is asexual in nature and gives people the freedom to live in border bodies.

2.2 History of religious uniform, dress, and embodiment

Christianity has been using patriarchal language for centuries (Tekcan, 2005:12). Therefore, language, pictorial representation, and iconography have been male-dominated (Tekcan, 2005:12; Klingorova & Havlicken, 2015:3). Tekcan (2005) further claims that other scholars such as Elizabeth Johnson (1997) have argued that the fatherhood of God is and must remain the predominant Christian symbol. Magata (2009) concurs with Tekcan and further attests that it is evident that men were always the ones that constructed images of worship, churches, monasteries and temples that form part of the heritage of their religion (Mataga, 2009:181).

Therefore, patriarchy in African churches is nurtured by androcentric and gender-biased interpretations of the Bible (Chisale, 2020:2).

Christianity takes many forms in Africa and apart from the considerable number of missionary churches, there is also a large expanding body of African Independent Churches (Seeley, 1984). Seeley (1984) continued to put forward that AICs can be defined as autonomous church groups with all-African membership and all-African leadership. AICs have often been portrayed as being a reaction of resistance to colonial oppression, but it is more than that. These groups provide certain benefits to their members, especially women, who get caring support networks outside of official formal structures of society, as well as opportunities for personal advancement (Seeley, 1984:59).

AICs are a very broad topic. Hence, scholars like Sundkler (1976) classified the churches into two categories. Firstly, the Zionist, which is characterised by its charisma and its emphasis on healing. Secondly, Ethiopians, which is a group focused on the structure of mainline churches from which they withdrew (Sundkler, 1976:15). Thus, in this study, I refer to the Zion Ethiopian churches, as my church tradition emanates from it. The Ethiopian churches are mostly known for having kept the Christian liturgy, while worship in Zionist bodies include traditional healing ceremonies, beating of drums and dancing to the rhythm of African songs (Sithole, 2019:27). There has been very little literature available about how AICs uniform came about. According to Khuzwayo-Magwaza (2021), this is because indigenous people, as owners of knowledge, have lost this privilege due to the limitations of oral traditions like storytelling. Documenting and writing were not part of their indigenous culture. Furthermore, Khuzwayo-Magwaza (2021) argues that the gap in writing and documenting was spotted by non-indigenous people, which comes with disadvantages such as that postcolonial studies on culture and religion rely solely on colonial writings whose agenda was more on African wealth than human behaviour (Khuzwayo Magwaza, 2021:52)

According to Sithole (2019) the Ethiopian Zionist church makes a large part of AICs across Southern Africa. Ethiopian Zionist conveyed Africans' protests against all forms of racial discrimination as practised by Europeans. Some Africans resented the action of prejudiced missionaries who stripped them of their identity, undermined their institutions, and imposed an alien religion upon them. They consequently set out to establish their own churches (Lahouel, 1986:681). They were initially called the 'separatist' church by the missionaries from 1937-1942 however, Sundkler in 1948 came up with 'Bantu Independent Church' as a new term for

this church. In South Africa the first person who expressed their wish to combine Christian beliefs with the African cultural legacy was Nehemiah Tile from Tumbuland who was initially ordained a minister of the Wesleyan Methodist Church in 1880 (Karis & Carter 1972: 157). Then later he founded the Tumbu National Church which was the first Ethiopian church in South Africa even though it wasn't initially declared and included in the church, but the theology of the church was of Ethiopian Zionist nature (Lahoul,1986). This is why today the Zion Ethiopian churches are known for keeping Christian liturgy while worship in Zionist bodies included traditional healing ceremonies, beating of drums and dancing according to the rhythm of African songs (Lahoul,1986:681).

In literature recently, Ethiopian Zionist churches has been of interest in terms of origins, their belief systems, their theology as well as liturgies. Most studies have focused interest in researching on the uniqueness of their liturgy including healing power, songs of worship, rituals, church uniforms and spirituality of AICs (Afriyie,2023). Nevertheless, studies about AICs have also picked up interest around gender and sexuality issues that exist in the church. Since most AICs are monotheistic, studies done are mostly looking at what gender role does an image of God as male play in influencing patriarchy as well as women's role in the church. Most scholars especially African feminists have argued that women are marginalized in faith spaces like Zion churches where God is predominately seen as a male. As AICs such as Zion churches continues to across Africa, there comes a greater need to not only look and study the issues of gender and sexuality on women only as the marginalised group, but to also look these issues around other bodies that exists in the church which always had existed in African societies.

2.3 Pre-colonial, colonial era, and post-colonial

In this study, the term pre-colonial era' is used to describe the period before colonisation took place in Africa. Ndamane (2018) highlights that before colonisation, African indigenous people were autonomous nations, free from the oppression of other nations, even though tribal and ethnic wars existed. Religious indoctrination and cultural, social and economic integration perpetuated mental oppression (Ndamane, 2018:11). Nwosimiri describes the colonial era as the indescribable crisis disproportionately suffered and endured by the African peoples in their tragic encounter with the European world, from the beginning of the fifteenth century through the end of the nineteenth into the twentieth' (Nwosimiri, 2015:9). Furthermore, Nwosimiri argues that the colonial period is a period marked by the horror and violence of the transatlantic

slave trade, the imperial occupation of most parts of Africa and the forced administrations of its peoples, and the resilient and enduring ideologies and practices of European cultural superiority (ethnocentrism) and 'racial' supremacy (racism)' (Nwosimiri, 2015:9).

Ndamane (2018) further argues that the negative impact of colonialism was so powerful and so persistent that it turned the lives of all the colonised upside down and inside out. Africans could no longer fully practice their own culture and traditions after colonialism, and they lost full control of the youth in society. Those were undoubtedly major steps backwards in authentic African development (Ndamane, 2018:17). This is a direct result of the missionary influence in South Africa. The influx of missionaries and their education system changed African ways of living, including cultural dressing, and this was what gave rise to the idea of introducing a church uniform. Van der Walt (1992) argues that above all, the missionaries were also involved in forming an education system that undoubtedly was a form of separate education, divorcing the indigenous people from their traditional culture and values.

All the changes that Westerners brought to Africa were too much to accept and very oppressing, thus a postcolonial era was needed in order to move beyond and away from the imposed epistemologies. According to Settler (2018) post-colonialism is concerned with "unmasking the guises of colonialism in particular, ways in which colonialism institutionalised differentiation between settler and native, that continue to be replicated well after formal demise of colonisation" (Settler, 2018:103). The year 1994 was ground-breaking for South Africa – it became a democratic country, and the postcolonial era became a reality to South Africans. This is why the postcolonial era can be described as the period post--1994, when South Africans gained freedom from colonial and apartheid's oppressive political systems (Ndamane, 2018:20). However, Van der Walt (1992) mentions that Christian missionaries are portrayed as supporters of the apartheid system of education in South Africa.

Religious uniform is not a new phenomenon; it has always existed in different materials and designs. Nevertheless, studies done on religion show that South-East Africa was a major point of Christian missionary activity during the colonial era in the 19th and 20th centuries, and as a result, there were visible changes in holy adorning material (Brown, 1996). There is no evidence of formal or official types of holy clothing that Africans used during the precolonial era. Only in the early 19th century, popular dress consisted of articles made from animal skin and fibres. Thus, the use of woven cloth and tailored clothing was part of colonial missionary penetration into African religion (Etherington, 1978). Ever since then, worldwide religious

beliefs are embedded in and maintained by material practice through objects, images, symbols, and spaces of religious devotion (Mataga, 2009:89). In the study 'White Robes For Worship: The Umnazaretha of the Nazareth Baptist Church In South Africa' (1996), Brown claims that even though uniform for males and females are similar, it has functioned to differentiate gender and social status (Brown, 1996:231; Kiernan, 1979:14). Cooke (2014) concurs with Brown (1996) and further states that the introduction of church uniforms for female converts was a crucial factor in maintaining power dynamics, because church uniform always comes with status in relation to the overarching patriarchal structures. Brown (1996) further claims that what Cooke attested to can be seen among group leaders and other individuals with authority wearing extra garments to indicate their status (Brown, 1996:231). I strongly concur with the points that Brown (1996) and Cooke (2014) highlighted, because in Zion faith spaces, people in leadership positions always wear extra garments that show their position. Furthermore, Chisale (2020:2) argues that the issue of holy garments that portray status and hierarchy is problematic. Chisale (2020) continues to argue that when confronted with issues of gender equality, church leaders often fear that conceding to a gender analysis of the church structure will change the status quo even though the structure is unjust towards women. However, Cooke (2014) highlights that one cannot deny that part of the introduction of church uniform was to function as a sign and instrument of women's conversion that was visible throughout South Africa. This is more in line with what Haddad (2016) saw as one of the functions of church uniform for *Manyano*².

Haddad (2016) studied Anglican women's church uniform for a group called *Manyano* and concluded that uniform has functioned as a symbol that is very important to the *Manyano*. It provided the members with autonomy, status, and dignity. Furthermore, Haddad (2016:167) and Kiernan (1979:19) also mentioned, in *The Weapons of Zion*, that the church uniform has functioned as a healing tool that heals any type of illness and oppression. It also functions as a tool that helps their participants escape the hard oppressive realities of life. Sundkler (1976) has a different perspective on the origins of the uniform and its functions. He claims that the issue of the uniform lies in the personal vision of early African church members, and its function is to just differentiate Zionist churches from other churches. However, according to Arthur (1999), Christian missionaries introduced uniform as a means of civilisation that

² The prayer groups of African women, nurtured by female missionaries with a focus on the home, were established at a time when increasing industrialization was threatening family life. By the early 1920s these groups were known as *manyanos* (prayer unions). The term, *manyano* was first coined by the Methodist women to refer specifically to their weekly meetings known as prayer unions.

intended to enforce 'appropriate ethnocentric behaviour'. Mukonyora (2007) agrees that the introduction of uniform could have started with the arrival of missionaries during colonisation, but states that it was just introduced as part of evangelism.

Most, if not all, scholars that have attested to the functions of church uniform, have a common point that they agree upon, which is that church uniform gives the members a new corporate identity (Haddad, 2016:167; Brown, 1996:229; Kiernan, 1979:17; Mukonyora, 2007). Furthermore, Skelton (2009), in their research on the Zion Christian Church (ZCC), the largest AIC that is part of African Zionist movement, makes us aware that ZCC members are already performing their culture and their religious identities by wearing their church uniform. Also, by complementing it with its accessories, such as the badge (Skelton, 2009:56). This can be seen in how by wearing their badge in normal daily activities outside of church services, their identity is communicated as those belonging to the ZCC. Coupled with that are the prescriptions of dress code for women when wearing the badge outside of the church uniform; for example, having to wear a dress or a skirt and covering their hair. Therefore, this means that spiritual symbols like church uniform reinforce Zionist identity in various ways when present in conjunction with behaviours and acts that have religious significance pertaining to the Zionist belief system. Skelton (2009) argues that in this way, identities are considered to be embedded in symbolic performance. To take this a step further: if we were to concur with Judith Butler's (1990) assertion that identity is a performance and that behaviour and actions are forms of this performance, then the effect that rituals and symbols, like church uniform, have on behaviour is indeed a construct of identity.

For example, baptism or blousing ceremonies are regarded as essential Christian identity markers and offer fundamental spiritual experiences for many followers in church spaces (Brown, 1996:232; Haddad, 2016:162). Through baptism ritual or blousing ceremony, new members are given a new Zionist identity through issuing of church uniform. This separates the profane life, which is impure and believed to be against a Zionist way of living from sacred, pure life (Skelton, 2009). Many mainline and AIC churches such as ZCC, Nazareth Baptist church, Zionist, Anglican church, Methodist church etc issue a church uniform immediately after baptism or blousing ceremony because this ritual is regarded as essential in the life of church members (Brown, 1996). This is also the case in the Zion Church. Hence, when one talks about a certain church, they immediately associate it with a church uniform (Chitando, Gunda & Kugler, 2014). The church uniform is seen as a sign of both membership and living a sacred life in the church. Moreover, the uniform largely relates to the notion of purity, and

there are strict rules determining the appropriate wearing of church uniform. For example, all members cannot wear a uniform if they have been engaging in sexual intercourse, for, women they cannot wear uniform if they are on their menstruation cycle, because this is regarded as being impure. Furthermore, there must be a cleansing ritual before they can wear their uniform again (Brown, 1996). There is no formal mechanism that are in place to detect if one has erred or is in their menstrual cycle, the church solely rely on the honesty of the members as well as the presence of '*Umoya*' the Holy spirit to point out the erred. After one has come forward or been pointed out by the *Umoya*, they go outside the church with *Umkhokheli* (*female leader*) to do the cleansing using the holy water.

AICs are too broad, and their church uniforms differ in colour, one church from another. While the symbolism of dress in mainline churches is generally New Testament orientated, the same cannot be said about all AICs church uniforms. Chitando, Gunda and Kugler (2014) claim that the basic church uniform in most AICs is made of long white garments, even though there is no universal dress code. Generally, in AICs, every liturgical activity is performed for a purpose and every activity is represented by different colours and a type of uniform (Vengeyi & Mwandayi, 2014:206; Brown, 1996:233). The colours range from white for purity and innocence, green for life, red for fire or blood, purple for the administration of penance and black for funeral. However, the most imperative factor is that these garments are worn over daily or ordinary clothes, which is a symbol that the members are now separating the profane and sacred life. Furthermore, the church uniform links church members to both traditional religious conventions and newly adopted ideas of African Christianity (Brown, 1996:233).

In African Independent Churches such as the Zion Church, church uniforms are unique but still resemble the colonial element of ecclesiastical garb worn by missionaries as well as biblical figures in illustrations found in Zulu language Bibles, prayer books, and Bible stories published in the 20th century (Brown, 1996). The sources of these uniforms were established from prophetic visions as a gift from ancestors or the Holy Spirit; a gift that will protect a church member from the physical reality and oppression they might be experiencing. When these uniforms come through a prophetic vision, they never have a gender element attached to it. Only the authority of the church, along with church members, attach the element of gender by using certain colours and designs that are thought to be feminine or masculine. In Africa's contemporary society, before colonisation took place, the element of gender was not of importance (Oyewumi, 1998) (Lugones, 2007) (Boris, 2018) (Goerg, Odile; Rodet, Marie; Vince, Natalya, 2007). The Nguni proverb *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*, which translates to a

person is a person through other persons,' encapsulates the *Ubuntu* ethic that Africans lived by. This proverb is about how Africans reach the notion of human personhood/humanness; the fundamental respect of a person as a whole, regardless of what gender a person might have. However, due to the colonial penetration of religion, gender binary became an essential category (Nwoye, 2017).

Most scholars have shown how uniforms came to exist and how it functions in societies and within faith spaces (Sundkler,1976; Mukonyora,2007; Haddad,2016; Brown,1996). Although most of the assertions made are positive, some scholars have hinted to the possibility of church uniforms not having done any justice to 'other' people in the churches (Cooke,2014; Haddad,2016; Brown,1996). Brown (1996) has alluded to the fact that uniforms might be similar but are also a visible indicator of a hierarchy that comes with it in terms of social status and gender. Haddad (2016) points out that not every woman in the Methodist Church was allowed to have a *Manyano* uniform; single mothers and divorced women were 'othered' or alienated through the use of uniform. Even though this has evolved with both single and divorced women being able to join the *Manyano*, the stereotypes around their marriage status still remain a challenge to their full integration in traditional societies. Cooke (2014) asserts that church uniforms play a part in maintaining power dynamics because uniform always comes with status in relation to the overarching patriarchal structures.

2.4 African Feminist thoughts on church uniform

Patriarchy is still one of the major causes of exclusion, oppression, and discrimination of the marginalised. Furthermore, patriarchy still exists in AICs, and it is a problem that African feminist theologians have identified (Kisitu & Siwila, 2016; Mukonyora, 2007:101; Andrews, 2005:31; Arthur, 1999:3; Oduyoye1995:131). African feminist theologians have also pointed out that patriarchy results in the fundamentalist reading of the Bible and the selective understanding of general African cultures (Frahm-Arp, 2015:3). Therefore, movements like the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians (hereafter The Circle) were initiated and they were too significant to be ignored in religious spaces. The Circle is concerned about the embodied experience of African women in faith spaces and their collaboration to share those experiences, including the cultural, political and socio-economic (Phiri, 2009). Therefore, in simple terms, feminist movements like The Circle exist as an act of protest against any form of exclusion and any form of discrimination in faith spaces and societies (Phiri, 2009). Many African women still have a problem with the term feminist as it does not cover all the

experiences and issues that African women in different geographical areas face. Therefore, many African women prefer the term 'womanist', while some African women scholars like Emetcheta Buchi, in her book *Joys of Motherhood*, defines herself a feminist with a small 'f'.

In 'Redefining ourselves: A *bosadi* (womanhood) approach', Madipoane Masenya (1997) concurs with 'problematizing the term feminist' and prefers the term *bosadi*, which translates to 'womanhood'. Masenya asserts that the *bosadi* approach is relevant for a reading from a Northern Sotho/ African woman (Masenya, 1997:441). Masenya (1997) attests that *bosadi* revives the positive or liberation elements of the African culture, because it observes that there is no value-free interpretation of the Bible, hence its adherents, as already argued, are women at the bottom of the occupational ladder of South Africa. Moreover, the *bosadi* approach is necessary because it ensures that the reading of biblical text considers both the reader and the text.

Consequently, the term 'African womanist theologians', instead of 'African feminist theologians', will be the preferred term throughout this study. African womanist theologians have emphasised that there is still an urgent call for liberation theology in faith spaces that continue to promote male dominance through the pictures, images, symbols, and statues that are in church spaces (Kisitu & Siwila, 2016). This male dominance oppresses women's bodies through how the church uniform and its supplementary parts, like staves, are made in different colours and even in sizes. They further attest that church uniform worn by members in AICs is a frame of their culture because it attests to unspoken rules, regulations, concepts, and fundamental categories of that particular culture (Arthur, 1999). Oduyoye (2001) further claims that double culture leads to double oppression that marginalises people's experiences. Since AICs church uniform clearly expresses hybrid cultures, the marginalised, which are mostly women, face double oppression (Oduyoye 2001).

Moreover, the African womanist theologians such as Kanyoro (2002) and Oduyoye (2001) further attested that religion as a system was made to oppress women. Therefore, the empowerment of women in the church is very critical in dealing with injustices that are found in faith spaces (Kanyoro, 2002). Thus, African womanist theologians are proposing a shift in holy symbols like church uniforms to be more inclusive because for them, this is a viable option that seeks to protest the injustices and discrimination caused by the current status quo (Oduyoye,1997). Therefore, this research seeks to meaningfully contribute to affirming the need for this shift and proposing ways in which this shift can be realised in my own church.

Oduyoye (1997) posits that when the word fails, the symbol takes over. By this, Oduyoye (1997) is referring to how the text or word was written under different imperial powers, which resulted in one way of reading the Bible which is the white man's version (gendered). As a result, this study sees it important to make change through symbols, as these symbols speak of imperial powers to its adherents. Hence there is a necessity for change and change in Zion faith spaces should be made through symbols such as church uniform. The church uniform is one of the enormous and important symbols which has failed to be accommodating and inclusive. Zion churches, through symbols such as church uniform, take on the form of patriarchal hierarchies, accepting the materialistic assets provided by marginalised bodies but refusing to listen to and accommodate their experiences. This is why it is important to make change through church uniform as an immensely important and meaningful symbol, as it would serve as empowerment to bodies in the church, giving them the right to self-identify and feel safe. Furthermore, a shift in church uniform to the proposed asexual style will not only ensure that we are all equal before the eyes of the Lord, as the Bible says in Genesis 1:26. It will also ensure that we shy away from the norm of biblical use, which accepts one interpretation as the absolute truth in terms of how the church, or bodies in the church, should be conducted.

Africa has diverse cultures that largely influence gender and sexuality and, with each culture being different, members experience these two phenomena in very different and unique ways, although at times there are similarities (Amadiume, 2006). Kanyoro (2001) adds that even though there is diversity in Africa, some theologians have found a link between what was happening at the church and what was happening at homes. Therefore, making a shift in faith spaces could also make a shift at home. Therefore, I concur with Oduyoye (1997) and Kanyoro (2001) that change for women must also happen in the church (Oduyoye, 1995:5). This speaks to the volumes of work and extensive challenges that we are currently facing in Africa, and the need to not only engage our theologies academically but also translate these engagements into helpful ways to bring change in our own societies (Kanyoro, 2001).

Phiri (2009) suggests that as a starting point to the suggestion by Kanyoro (2001) churches like the AICs can start by making meaningful collaborations between males in the leadership of their churches and males in the academia. This is due to the fact that they are also the ones who have written more about women's bodies in faith spaces and formulate church laws. Moreover, if they are allies of African womanist theologians, this will ensure that women are no longer spoken for, to and against (Phiri, 2009:11). AICs have been formed to resist the traditional body theology and to redeem the African way of worship, which moves away from an image

that forces women into accepting roles that deny them their right to freedom and total humanity (Shange, 2013). However, in my observation, the Zion and other AICs do not seem to align with their initial aim or mission to preserve African ways of worship for African bodies. These churches continue to alienate women and other bodies in the church besides cisgender men, because their way of worshiping is more embedded in their postcolonial cultures and traditions. This continues the legacy of male dominated traditions and cultures that result in patriarchy and hierarchy.

2.5 Gender and sexuality in the Zion Church

One can argue that the African way of perceiving the world is very religious, with religion permeating all realms of life to the extent that life is perceived holistically without separating the sacred from the profane (Moyo, 2004). Moreover, Sithole points out that although in South Africa the constitution passed the law to include sexual orientation as a right, the same may not be shared in some countries like Zimbabwe, Botswana, Uganda, and Tanzania where homosexual acts are punishable by life in prison' (2019:15). However, the reality is that having the right to sexuality and sexual orientation is still ridiculed by South African society, which is the underlying reason to understanding that what Sithole (2019) has asserted remains a challenge. It is important to acknowledge that one cannot speak about Africans without talking about culture and religion, which then informs the fundamental societal perspectives and perceptions on gender and sexuality in AICs and Zion Church (Kisitu & Siwila, 2016).

Religio-cultural traditions in many African societies have their own perceptions about living bodies. Hence, Linda points out that church uniforms simultaneously express ethnicity, gender norms, and level of religious involvement (Linda, 2021) This means that through symbols like uniforms, physical bodies exhibit the normative values of social bodies. As a result, it still remains hard for Zion churches under AICs to open spaces for gender nonconforming persons. This is a result of the already established ways of controlling the bodies of cisgender men and women to heteronormative patterns by the use of uniforms in the church. Therefore, to a certain extent, AICs have created a considerable force to influence how the body of a woman is perceived in contemporary societies. This is done through using symbols like holy adorning and cultural dressings, which differs in designs and material to always highlight the gender of that person. Most of these perceptions and conversations about women's bodies are closely linked to their sexuality (Kisitu & Siwila, 2016).

Due to colonisation, patriarchy, and religio-cultural ideologies derived from both the missionary church and African culture, the autonomy of women's bodies is always limited. The spaces these bodies occupy in many faith spaces seem to be embedded in a constant terrain (Kisitu & Siwila, 2016). Ugbedejo Eje (2019) adds by asserting that generally women are seen as the weaker sex and, therefore, reduced and limited to a subordinate position in the family, the church, and society at large. Zion churches are no exception to this misery and oppression. In the Zion Church, women's bodies are located in a space where it seems to be 'safely controlled' to save them from vulnerability (Kisitu & Siwila, 2016). Hence, sexuality is central in keeping their bodies in certain powerless positions in society. For centuries in African contexts, sexuality has been used as a powerful tool to determine the what, when, where, and how of sex; be it socio-economically or religio-culturally (Moyo, 2004). Since the Zion Ethiopian churches fall under the umbrella term AICs, they definitely have their own religio-cultural epistemologies. These epistemologies allow them to have their own holy symbols, which maintain the inferiority of women's bodies in comparison to men's bodies in the church.

As evidence to this, one can look at symbols like *Izikhali*, which are the long sticks carried by the Zion church members and are a symbol of spiritual weapons. They vary in size and shape; women get the thin and weak ones, whereas the men get the thick and strong ones as they should be involved in heavy and hard liturgical activities. In addition to this, rituals like *ukhlonywa kwezikhali* which can be explained as a ritual prayer for *Izikhali* and is usually done immediately after service opening. Such rituals are never done by female bodies because it is seen and known as a sacred ritual that requires strength and pureness, which are qualities female bodies seem to never have – not only in church but in society at large. After all, they go through menstruation, which is a sign of impureness.

The aspect of religion is very important to look at because it influences people's ideas, their ways of thinking, and living their lives daily (Shange, 2013). African cultures have been diluted over the years due to colonisation and apartheid. For example, previously in African societies, women occupied important positions in faith spaces, but when colonisation and apartheid penetrated Africa, women's bodies and roles were reduced to domestic roles. Women have been fighting this ever since, and Shange (2013) claimed that apartheid and colonisation left Africans divided. In fact, it seems that colonisation and apartheid have never left South Africa; only the colonisers left. This means that when one looks at the different angles of gender, sexuality, class and race, colonial legacy is still very visible, and it still divides. Eje (2019) attests that although many factors account for gender troubles in Africa, but culture and religion

are the most prevalent and they affect women more than their male counterparts. Although Eje (2019) is referring to Zimbabwe in this context, Zimbabwe has many things in common with other African countries. One cannot help but notice that there has been a significant interaction between religion, culture, and how people dress in the contemporary Africa (Arthur, 2021). Therefore, allowing people with their different cultures and allowing people equal dignity and full humanness through inclusive holy symbols, like a church uniform, is a possible way to reunite African people.

Culture has interfered greatly when it comes to arguing over women's sexual and reproductive organs (Amadiume, 2006). Culture, according to this study, can be defined as daily interactions of individuals with each other and with social systems that are in place. It is a way people live their daily lives. According to Shange (2013), in an African context, it is important to note that culture can be used as a tool to oppress, but also as a tool for the pursuit of freedom, liberation, and creation of new identities. In this context, it is important to understand that we are talking about culture in the AICs, like the Zion Church, which is used to unify Africans in the church. It is also important to note that this study notes religion as a sub-version of culture.

2.6 Appealing to structural functionalism theory.

Radcliffe-Brown developed this theory, which emphasises the contribution of phenomena in order to maintain social order, in 1980. The theory implies that society is a system of relationships connecting through cybernetic feedback (Radcliffe-Brown 1980). On the other hand, institutions are orderly sets of relationships whose function is to maintain society as a system (Radcliffe-Brown, 1980). To apply this theory to this part of the study, what Radcliffe-Brown (1980) states means is that religion serves as a body organ, and the individuals serve as blood cells in the social organism called society and the system it communicates. Radcliffe-Brown's (1980) theory is notably more concerned with group identities and needs rather than with individual identities or needs. Hence, Radcliffe-Brown (1980) sees individuals as replaceable and transient occupants of social roles.

Therefore, appealing to structural-functionalism by Radcliffe-Brown (1890) helps this study to do an in-depth analysis of why these group identities are maintained and reproduced in religious societies including AICs like the Zion churches. The study will look at how society functions, and how it communicates supposedly correct' messages in creating group identities and their meaning in order to maintain social orders, like patriarchy and hierarchy, in faith spaces. Furthermore, through lenses of this theory, one can trace how the Zion Church is able

to alienate 'other' bodies through cultural performances or practices. By looking at the roles and expectations assigned to people from birth and through cultural performances and socialisation, one can see how society tightens the binary of gender boxes. Furthermore, as this study looks to this theory, it becomes visible how group identities are maintained and passed on from one generation to the next through these cultural performances. Analysis through the theory of structural functionalism emphasises that various customs and beliefs of people or a group form an integrated system, parts such as the church and culture cannot be understood in isolation from each other, nor from the whole system, because each has a definite relation to the others, and each has its own function to perform on behalf of society (Radcliffe-Brown, 1980). For this reason, as attested by Brown (1980), this study comes to understand that the reason why religious communities like AICs keep *othering* persons outside the heteronormative gender formulations. This is because they seem to disrupt social order and the communication of the correct messages of gender socialisation, gender roles, and sexuality, which are the necessary conditions to maintain a harmonious and stable society.

Through the lenses of this theory, we also get a sense of the reason why church spaces are able to easily eliminate 'other' bodies. Radcliffe-Brown (1980) suggests that in the larger society, individuals are seen as irrelevant and replaceable; they are simply occupants of social roles. Therefore, if an individual cannot perform their social roles such as gender and sexuality roles, which contribute to social life, they must be replaced by individuals who can. An example I offer to better understand what Radcliffe-Brown (1980) is talking about, is marriage. Marriage is a repetitive social activity that functions to reinforce heteronormativity through procreation as a legitimate way of contributing children to society as new members in order to preserve and maintain' continuity of societal structures. Therefore, if an individual can not conform to the heteronormativity that contributes to the betterment and stability of society, they are eliminated through various ways which may involve hate crime or homophobic crime. As a direct consequence, the society is able to continue silencing and the pretence these individuals do not exist. As a direct consequence, society is able to both silence and ignore such an individual.

Thus, uniform in the Zion Church serves a purpose to maintain the social orders of gender and sexuality, which satisfies social needs of conforming to binary gender in order to promote heteronormativity. This, in turn, further promotes patriarchy and hierarchy in a church setting. These societal systems maintains by virtue the identities of being female as being a woman and being male as being a man for procreation purposes to keep society harmonious. Siwila and

Kisitu (2016) assert that this is because religio-cultural perspectives show and maintain gender power relations during various rituals in churches. In this regard, congregants have to wear a certain type of uniform, and the body has to conform to the dictates of culture and society. Thus, through church uniforms, bodies are regulated by power systems.

African people have always been motivated by the urge to protect against shame, whether it be face shame or soul shame. This involves protecting against and avoiding engaging in behaviours that will either dent or tarnish one's social image and the group's image (Nwoye, 2017:50). Therefore, since AICs are made of African epistemologies, they are always trying to protect against shame or against engaging in behaviours that are outside the 'norm', such as dating a person of the same sex. People who are seen as offenders are pressured by their church members or even by their peers to conform to the 'norms. According to Nwoye (2017), when that mission is achieved, the offender needs to repent or do a ritual of cleansing intended to reverse the individual's state of sinfulness.

African ways of living have their pros and cons. Most of the ways have been advantageous to men. This is the way structures have been maintained in pursuit of keeping African contemporary societies in order' for centuries (Nwoye, 2017). However, the emphasis on prioritising the collectiveness of the identity means that people should be (and are) passive, and lack self-consciousness, and self-identity. This is not the entire truth because it is the people that constitute their way of living in the first place. People make and change a culture over time. A study by Sithole (2019) titled 'An exploration of religio-cultural concepts of transgender identities in Ethiopian Zionist churches in the Midlands, KZN'. Sithole's study gives evidence of what seems to be a limitation to African societies like the Zion churches. The Zion churches do not believe in allowing space for a person to think for themselves and create their own way of living and still be part of a group. A person may only choose one. Transgender participants were not allowed to wear church uniforms that are in line with their current gender identity (Sithole, 2019:72-74). This is not because there are none, but mostly because their normative only operates in binaries. Therefore, looking at this study, it is clear that in African societies, it is punishable and a disgrace if one invents or finds comfort in a way of living that is outside the 'norm'. This was evident in Sithole (2019) study, where some participants commented on their expectations to be banned from the church because they didn't repent or regret their gender identities or sexual orientations.

In a statement similar to Radcliffe-Brown (1980) Moyo (2004) argues that in an African context, the identity of a collective is more important than the identity of an individual. Nwoye (2017) argues that this is because Africans are taught from birth, to recognise the priority of a community and social support. Societal systems, like the church, are there to maintain social orders that make the society function 'effectively' through the socialisation of gender and sexuality. In church, this is done through the enforcement of adorning church uniforms which reminds individuals who they are, who they should be and their place in society. Therefore, church uniform in AICs is a visible manifestation of cultural values. It serves as a holy symbol that exerts social control. The control extends to a personal level where self-regulation is evident, even when the individual is not with the group, and even when the individual is no longer wearing the church uniform (Linda, 1999).

Womanhood in African societies is now reduced to a second-best gender or phase, and it seems to be an absolute truth that a woman's place is in the kitchen only (Makama, 2013). Many African societies are patriarchal in nature and this unequal distribution of power enables men to dominate women in all spaces (Makama, 2013). For example, the belief that only a male child should get an education automatically establishes inequality in the household and it helps the male child to gain a favourable position compared to the uneducated female child. As such, this is visible evidence that cultural traditions have dictated how the relations of men and women should be, and through cultural performances, male domination is instilled (Makama, 2013).

From childhood onwards, society sets perimeters for women that only allow them to occupy a domestic or less important position in society. Patriarchy starts at home when the father as the 'head' of the house distributes power and resources unevenly between his female and male children (Makama, 2013). Moreover, this culture, together with religion, has formed practices such as polygamy, virginity testing and forced marriages to justify women's oppression in contemporary Africa (Rwafa, 2016). Monotheistic religions such as AICs still promote and maintain male social dominance within societal structures and women are only inclined to be participants in religious life as opposed to women being integral part of life in society and being equal participants with their male counterparts (Kamila & Tomas, 2015). In addition to this assertion, Rwafa (2016) continues by attesting that oppression in faith spaces is two-fold. It is cultural, and it is the literal interpretation of the Bible. Verses like Genesis 1:26 in the Bible, which says, 'God created man in his image' is the reason why anything that is male is seen as Godly. However, Phyllis Tribble (1973) assists by offering us different lenses through which to

look at biblical translation and interpretation. She uses the Creation story to reject the idea that Genesis affirms male superiority by analysing the ambiguity and original Hebrew meaning of words in the text. Tribble (1973), in her article 'Depatriarchalizing in Biblical Interpretation', shows how Yahweh possesses both men and women's attributes, although the Old Testament often pictures Yahweh as a man. Tribble (1973) further argues that the creation of man before woman constitutes a ring composition whereby the two creatures are parallel. In no way does the order of creation disparage women (Tribble, 1973:36). She also highlights that the first created being was androgynous (meaning genderless) and therefore, there is no hierarchy of gender in the creation order (Tribble 1973). She further gives us a Hebrew interpretation of '*adama* (human being), as used in Genesis 1:26, arguing that '*adama* does not refer to a male but just to a human being (Tribble, 1973:36-37).

Nevertheless, the status of women in a religious community reflects how women's roles are interpreted in religious texts and are perceived in both a cultural and religious context (Kamila & Tomas, 2015). The relationship between culture and religion is reciprocal; gender roles are constructed through culture and religion. Practices of religion vary according to historical and cultural relations, but there are still religious norms, traditions and even rituals that contribute to the formation and maintaining of gender inequality. These practices of religion also keep women in subordination in societies. In some African cultures, men exercise power over women mostly by marrying them (Baloyi, 2013). A man can marry as many women as he wants. The first wife has to give consent for each marriage, and she must be happy for her husband because it speaks to the masculinity construction and formation of her husband. To an extent, a man is seen as a real man when they have many wives. In some contexts, the first wife can help in looking for a 'sister'-wife (Baloyi, 2013:168). On the other hand, feminists who write on cultural re-evaluation have pointed out how this cultural act is a result of the misinterpretation that polygamy was not for the benefit of the man but that of the woman. Dr Zamambo Mkhize, in her 2015 PhD thesis in Polygyny & Gender 'The Gendered Narratives of Adults Who Were Raised In Polygynous Families', posits that there is a new trend of women choosing to be married into polygynous families. The study shows that women claim that a polygynous marriage is more advantageous than a monogamous one, because there are other women available to take care of the children, maintain the household, and even attend to the needs of their husband, whilst they focus on their professional careers (Mkhize, 2015:18).

Nevertheless, Makama (2013) exhibits that as much as subordination of women in a society has to do with biological determinism, it is based more on a cultural construction of their gender

and sexuality. This in turn is based on what it means to be a man or a woman in their societies. Therefore, implications of sexuality in our African cultures make it anything but comfortable for us to address this topic; the subject is taboo. However, when taking a closer look, one realises that culture and religion are socially constructed and they are constantly in flux, meaning roles that are defined and given out by culture and religion can be challenged, as they change over time. This is in line with what Judith Butler (1990) argues in her book *Gender Trouble* – that social and gender roles prove to be performances that make up identity that purported to be. Henceforth, our bodies can challenge the norms we encounter, but we also recreate those norms through our bodies. Below, this chapter offers border thinking in re-imagining church uniform as a symbol as it speaks to social needs to be satisfied by social institutions, and as a form of challenging what our bodies have adapted to as a norm.

2.7 Border thinking in re-imagining inclusivity of holy symbols, images, pictorials, statues and by extension, church uniform

Because of colonial origins and imported curriculum contents in Africa, young Africans have become conditioned to perceive the world in binaries and dualism (Nwoye, 2017). In the church, this is done through older women teaching younger women how to be acceptable' women in their communities. Inherent in this is the belief that women are the custodians of acceptable behaviour (Moyo, 2004). This clearly shows that women are the custodians of culture, but it always results in them and other invisible bodies in the church being subjected to positions of powerlessness compared to male bodies. In engaging in border thinking of church uniform in the Zion churches in South Africa, the work of Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) helps provide the fundamental conception of this thinking. However, it would be very sensible to complement Anzaldúa's work with Maria Lugones (2007); it will allow the blending-in of people with different identities and different embodied experiences to focus and recognise the shared deep desire to make space and honour the embodied experiences of being marginalised.

Humans fear the supernatural – both the undivine (the animal impulses such as sexuality, the unconscious, the unknown, the alien) and the divine (the superhuman, the god in us) (Anzaldúa, 1987). Culture and religion seek to protect us from these two forces. The female, by virtue of creating entities of flesh and blood in her stomach, bleeding every month and not dying, therefore being in tune with nature's cycles, is feared. This is because according to Christianity and most other major religions, a woman is carnal, animal-like, and closer to the undivine, so she must be protected from herself (Anzaldúa, 1987:16).

Even AICs are influenced by both missionary Christian doctrines and their culture and traditions (Skelton, 2009). Currently, the Zionist Church's identity has been influenced by many factors, such as socio-political factors rooted in the history of South Africa, taking into consideration the contribution of the apartheid era to history. When two or more cultures begin to interact with each other through human experiences, identities may begin to merge. Considering what has been mentioned above, it means that in South Africa, new identities have already emerged. This also applies to AICs. The Zion churches are syncretic churches according to their doctrine. However, it becomes a problem when it comes to accommodating bodies embracing the very same experience of being syncretic in faith spaces. Lugones (2008) argues that gender is a colonial concept that has permeated all spheres of life in Africa. Furthermore, according to the coloniality of gender perspective, colonisation altered the indigenous sense of self and identity, as well as understandings of cosmology and gender relations. In doing so, coloniality implemented European understandings of gender and sex, erasing the various conceptualisations of sex and gender that pre-existed European colonial gender systems (Lugones, 2008).

As stated above, the Zionist religion can be identified as syncretic because when it was formed, two cultures merged, the traditional Christian culture and the African culture. Zionist culture, just like any culture, develops over time. In this century, in South Africa, people live their lives openly and they come out in terms of how they gender identify. For them it is now compulsory to identify, since colonial penetration emphasised and reinforced the essentialism of categorising gender, unlike the precolonial era, when there was no pressure on gender identification (Donham, 1998).

Therefore, engaging border thinking in the Zion Church affords all people spaces where they can embrace their different embodied experiences, while also creating a space where the differences do not matter. Thus, placing focus on the common goal of worshipping God as you are and meeting the need to be allowed space and recognition. Through this decolonial thinking, there will be a discursive shift from male-dominated holy symbols, images, pictorials, and statues by deconstructing the myths that were used to oppress the marginalised. Through this shift, inclusive holy symbols like a church uniform which will be asexual in nature, and it will be hard to categorise people into socially constructed boxes. Such boxes create discomfort and feelings of alienation to some bodies in the church. This literature chapter has assisted with an understanding of how the church uniform has functioned over the years and the role it has played in maintaining and retaining certain identities that are culturally favourable. Which is

how the African's perspectives on acceptable gender, gender roles and sexuality, are informed. Furthermore, looking at the factors that influence, maintain and sustain African perceptions on gender and sexuality. In the next chapter, I will be focusing on the theoretical framework which informs the argument of this research.

Conclusion

In this chapter, this study has drawn from scholarly literature research on African Independent Churches (AICs) and those who have specifically focused on church uniform in AICs. The study in this chapter investigated the existing history of the church uniform, focusing on Christian religion and narrowing it to AICs, and specifically Ethiopian Zion Churches. It looked at the introduction of church uniform in precolonial, colonial and postcolonial eras, and how church uniform has functioned in societies and faith space. This chapter also looked at how culture and religion constitute the existing gender and sexuality perceptions in AICs that enable the church to overtly gain control over the physical body through a church uniform. Moreover, drawing from existing literature the thoughts of feminists on church uniform, it has been clearly shown that the church uniform has been seen as an oppressive tool main for women and other marginalized bodies in faith spaces. In the following chapter I will be then looking at intersections between the Zionist Church doctrines and the contemporary gender questions around church rituals and symbols.

CHAPTER 3

Introduction

The chapter on borderlands locates the study on how religion/church uniform locates one's identity. Here the study of how the uniform is located in the church's identity and doctrine. Ecclesiology studies focus on a range of topics related to the church. Hill (2017) discusses the origins, nature, and purposes of the church, including its attributes and structures, with a particular focus on legal theology as a branch of ecclesiology. Loades (2018) provides a comprehensive overview of ecclesiology, covering its historical origins, structures of authority, doctrine, ministry and sacraments, unity and diversity, and mission, as well as its relation to the state, civil society, and culture. This study seeks to locate Zionist Churches within the broader strand as an AIC and highlight its particularities as a church movement within South Africa. Furthermore, this section seeks to locate my study within the broader strand of theological studies, whilst also highlighting the intersections between the Zionist Church doctrines and the contemporary gender questions around church rituals and symbols. This study further seeks to illuminate how the symbols and rituals are central to the group identity of the Zionist Church whilst they also have implication on the bodies of those who participate in them. This will allow this study to expand further than Sundkler who defines the Zionist Churches in a much narrower way as churches that are characterized by charisma and a strong emphasis on healing. This will be looked at in terms of their doctrines, and theology on different issues that are facing the church today, issues such as church uniform, gender, and sexuality but focusing on the marginalized groups such as women and LGBTQIA+ community. Discussing what I have mentioned above will not only assist with providing a clear image of the Ethiopian Zionist churches, but it will also provide a firm bases as to why this study advocates for an asexual type of a church uniform as a possible way of reimagining the cultural and religious inclusive dress in the church.

3.1 Ecclesiology of the Zionist Church

Ecclesiology, the study of the Church, has evolved from its traditional meaning of church building and decoration to a focus on the nature and existence of the Church (Rowell, 2001). The word "ecclesiology" originates from the Greek "ekklesia," meaning "church," and "logos," meaning "word" or "study." It has evolved to encompass the study of the nature and existence of the Church, as well as the various ways in which this teaching has been

understood and practiced throughout history (Rowell 2001; Brodd, 2006). This includes the concept of operative ecclesiology, which explores the role of church piety and liturgy in shaping the self-understanding of different traditions (Brodd, 2006). More recently, the term has been associated with Eucharistic ecclesiology, which emphasizes the church as the people of God, existing from the sacramental Body of Christ (Dieter, 2018). Ecclesiology, which is the study of the church, is a crucial aspect of theology, as it shapes our understanding of the church's role in the world and its relationship with God. The location of the church, both physically and in terms of its role in the community, is a key aspect of ecclesiology. Feldhans (2016) and Bagshaw (2000) both explore the relationship between the local church and the broader ecclesiastical structure. Pauw (2020) attests to the importance of the church's historical and contextual embeddedness, emphasizing its role as a visible, earthly community that is called to live alongside others.

The categorization of African Independent churches (AICs) as a movement started with the first break-away from the missionary churches (Millard 1995:1). The Ethiopian church became the foundation of the 'Ethiopian movement', because of its connection with the American-based African Methodist Episcopal church was considered an 'anti-white' and was viewed with fear and suspicion by the missionary government and white leaders of the church (Millard 1995:1). AICs then become known as 'Separatist Churches' a term that is considered derogatory by AICs members today (Masondo 2005) (Masuku 2019).

Zionist churches have been classified as African Independent Church by scholars such as Oosthuizen 1996; Anderson 2001; Sundkler 1976; Cavallo 2011. Nonetheless, for Zionism history among both White and Blacks in South Africa, Sundkler's work of 1976 is largely relied upon (Millard 1995:61). Zionism began as a religious movement instigated by Whites, who had been influenced by the philosophy and writings of John Dowie. Dowie founded the first Zionist Church in Zion City, Illinois in 1896 and there claimed the title of the First Apostle of Jesus Christ (Mosupyoe 1999). The central belief in Dowie's messianic message was that of divine healing, a phenomenon that Dowie believed could be consummated without the use of medication or doctors. Dowie's teachings also involved taboos on eating pork, and the use of alcohol or tobacco. In his monthly publication, *Leaves of Healing*, Dowie set forth his message of healing based on the "Gospel of Jesus Christ as Savior, Sanctifier, Healer, and Coming King" (Millard 1995).

In 1889 Dowie's teaching captured the interest of other Evangelists. The first evangelists who was interested in these teachings was Johannes Buchler who was a Swiss evangelist who was then located in Johannesburg, Buchler became a missionary to the Coloreds, and soon after, in 1895, organized a congregation of Coloreds into a Zionist church, so named because they used the Moravian hymnal Zions Liedere (Williams 1982:63). In 1897, Buchler began a program of healing through immersion which Dowie supported. Later they (Dowie and Buchler) were joined by Daniel Bryant who was an American missionary who also pursued the healing activities. It is said that Bryant was the first among the Whites and later among the Zulus to perform such activities. Bryant was deployed by Dowie to South Africa "to take command of all there is to take command of in South Africa" (Sundkler 1976:36). According to Mosupyo 1999 Bryant was further instructed to divide South Africa into four provinces for which overseers would be appointed. From the early historical record, Dowie's missionary strategy was designed to win both white and black South Africans to Zionism (1999:64).

Notably, when Bryant arrived in South Africa, he was the first missionary to inaugurate an intensive campaign of baptizing and healing which drew hundreds of Whites and Blacks to Zionism (Mosupyo 1999). Baptism is still seen as an important ritual among Zionists in South Africa today especially the Ethiopian Zionist churches. Moving forward, due to the rift between Black and White Zionists in 1905 that emanated from racial, economic, and political discrimination the Black Zulu Zionist faction inaugurated Daniel Nkonyane a convert from the Dutch Reformed Church (Williams 1982). He was inaugurated as a form of resistance to racial discrimination in the country. Nkonyane as a new leader was baptized at Wakkerstroom, Snake River which was the same river that Bryant used for his first baptism event when he was baptizing hundreds of South African Zionists. Furthermore, continued successfully to open more than ten Zionist congregations amongst the Zulus, and five of those were situated in the then Natal, currently known as KwaZulu-Natal province.

In 1927 many elements were added to the Zionist doctrines including forms of structural organization and worship. Nkonyane introduced the element of the "Holy Spirit" to the church and also included this element in the name of his then original church; The Christian Catholic Apostolic Holy Spirit Church in Zion (Williams 1982). Adding this element to the name of his church is noteworthy because, to a certain extent, it speaks to the independence of the church as the one that uses the Holy Spirit which is something different from the White-led Zionist churches. This is also noteworthy because some Zionist churches even nowadays do include

some elements of their liturgies in the names of their churches. Thus, when one gets to know the church's name can have an idea of its doctrines or liturgies.

Williams 1982 asserts that Zionism in South Africa has followed several Zulu customs and traditions in its historical development (1982:66). I would like to argue that Williams' conclusion is a result that his study was only focusing on the Zulu Zionist only and thus this conclusion can only be applied in the KwaZulu-Natal province where this study was conducted, or other places dominated by Zulu speaking people. South Africa is a diverse country it has 11 official languages. Thus, concluding that all Zionist churches follow Zulu traditions and customs can be problematic because there are a lot of factors to concede when speaking about the ecclesiology of a church, factors such as language and geographical location to name a few. Evident to this, Mosupye (1999) in her study "How Women in the Zion Christian Church of South Africa Mediate Patriarchy and Non-with their Social Development" speaks about the fundamentalism of understanding the people's indigenous languages and their geographical area in relation to the church, in this case, she speaks of Sepedi, Setswana, and Sesotho in her section of Bapedi and early Christianity (Mosupye 1999:61-62). However, with this being said, it is important to acknowledge that the Ethiopian Zionist churches that this study is focusing on belong to the Nguni strand which is different from those Mosupye is referring to which belong to the ZCC.

Receiving the Holy Spirit, or Spirit Possession, is a fundamental practice in Zionist church services and is central to the process of healing and prophesying (Anderson, 2000). In this church prayer is a highly ritualist sacred time of healing and care, and it is part of worship (Moripe 1996). Once the healing begins, even the minister-preacher is himself transformed into a low-keyed participant. Prophets (umprofethi) and others designated as healing specialists shed their communal anonymity and take over the limelight. Healers and prophets can be either men or women (Kiernan 1976:358) (Moripe 1996:87). What Kiernan and Moripe are attesting to is to show that spiritual gifts are not gender specific however, due to the fact that organising roles are gender specific, men are always seen as outstanding prophets or healers (Kiernan 1976). Furthermore, Kiernan attest that although healers have strengthening powers to communicate to the sick through prayer and physical touching of affected parts, only the prophet can divine the cause of the affliction and prescribe the remedy. The male prophet is therefore the leading figure at this stage of the work (1976:358).

Williams posits that from the very beginning, Zionism has been almost entirely male-led and male-administered movement (Williams 1982). During the early decades, South African Zionists relied on male leadership, after 1920 a few women did assume visibility as leaders of specific Zionist churches including Mrs. Grace Tshabalala and Ma Nku who was a prophetess who introduced the concept of healing illnesses by using blessed water (Williams 1982). By 1951 Zionism had become firmly established among the Zulu as a charismatic movement. According to Williams (1982), approximately 21% of all Zulu speakers were identified by the South African government as affiliated with “Bantu Separatist churches” However, the exact number of Zionists could not be specified exactly at that time because the government of that time could not differentiate between Zulu Zionist strand churches from other strands such as Apostolic Zion and Zion Christian Churches (ZCC’s). Sundkler (1976) adds on this and reports that in the early 1951, there were estimated to be around 2,200 Bantu Churches in South Africa but only 81% of these churches were recognized by the South African government. Differentiating the types of Zionist churches are still a struggle to some even today. Thus, below I will then discuss in detail who and what are Ethiopian Zion churches as a point of departure to give clear image on the church this study is focusing on.

3.2 Ethiopian Zionist Church

According to Lahouel (1986), Ethiopianism conveyed African protests against all forms of racial discrimination as practiced by Europeans (1986:681). Lahouel (1986) further argued that some Africans resented the action of prejudice from the missionaries who stripped them of their identities, undermined their institutions, and imposed an alien religion on them. Africans consequently established their churches, yet Africans were so eager to feel at ‘home’ and as a result they did not completely throw out Christianity, they kept some of its elements (Lahouel 1986:681).

Thus, why Sundkler 1961 in his study drew a conclusion that Zionism could be appropriately defined as a syncretic Bantu movement with healing, speaking in tongues, purification rites/rituals, and taboos a main expression of faith (1961:55). A similar characterization set forth by West (1975) who specialized in surveying almost a thousand independent churches in Soweto, which were known to be situated in Johannesburg, in the Gauteng province. West did a summary on the Zionist (amaZayoni) as a Pentecostal, apostolic movement, stressing the influence of the Holy Spirit and divine healing and combining both African and European cultural elements (1975:16).

Lahouel (1986) asserts that there are two broad types of African churches that are considered to be Ethiopian and Zion, they both constituted emanations of African aspirations but did not call the Christian faith into question. Ethiopian churches kept Christian liturgy worship while Zionist liturgy includes traditional healing ceremonies, beating of drums and dancing according to the rhythm of African songs (Lahouel 1986:682). West (1975) adds on this by asserting that if any church exhibited these six features; healing, prophets, drums, dancing, night communions, and river baptism, they could be classified as Zionist (1975:71). Both West and Sundkler accounts for the origins of these features of Zionism but Sundkler more than West traces the charter of Zionism to Mount of Zion in Jerusalem, specifically, the charter is believed to have been revealed in a dream and is reported to have been laid down by the biblical figure central in the Zionism, John the Baptist (Williams,1982).

In South Africa Nehemia Tile was the first person to express the wish to combine Christian beliefs with African cultural legacy (Lahouel 1986:682). Tile was born in Tumbuland, he received a formal education at Boloto and later studied theology at Healdtown in Lovedale. He was initially ordained as a minister of the Wesleyan Methodist Church, and he left in 1884 to set up a Tembu National Church which was the first Ethiopian Zion church in South Africa (Sithole 2019:30). Sithole (2019) attests that even though Tembu National Church did not have 'Ethiopian church' in its title however, it was the first Ethiopian church to exist not only in South African but in Africa as whole.

The movement continued and was joined by many ministers such as Mangena M Mokone, and Lucas Thomas Madhleni left their respective church denominations (Lahouel 1986:683). This movement caused a lot of commotion between the blacks and whites, some missionaries viewed these African churches with hostility mainly because they deprived Europe part in their church especially when it comes to leading the church, thereby undermining their influence (Lahouel 1986). Sithole adds to this by attesting that Ethiopianism conveyed African's protest against all forms of racial discrimination as practiced by Europeans. Some Africans resented the action of prejudiced missionaries who stripped them of their identity, undermined their institutions, and imposed an alien religion upon them (2019;21). The development of these churches led missionaries to fear that the eventual setting up of these churches would hinder the 'evangelism' of African people and outcast the white men from the country (Lahouel 1986).

3.3 Ethiopian Zionist Churches leadership structures

Kiernan (1976a) has shared considerable light on leadership roles found among Zionists in urban areas. He argues that a compromise has been worked out between the roles of the Zionist preacher and prophet, or, from a different perspective, between institutionalized and charismatic expressions of authority, where overall control in all Zionist services is asserted by the minister (*umfundisi*). Reflecting the minister's role, as identified by Zionists, are aspects of authority that are similar to those customarily exhibited in the Zulu homestead. Which shows how the elements from traditional societal structures of the Zulu society have been carried over to the church and combined with Christian notions of authority based on power and spiritual gifts (Williams 1982:74. One example would be looking at the organization of all Zionist services the preferred seats, usually chairs or benches, are occupied by men. In contrast, women sit on grass mats or rugs which have been rolled out on the floor. Preference towards males is also exhibited by the Zionists in the granting of almost all major leadership positions to men and in the recognition that healing and prophesying functions are predominantly men's activities. One element of the social structure in Zulu society which the Zionists continue to emphasize is the recognition that within any social unit, group, or organization, individual statuses are defined. Zulus have historically allocated statuses according to kinship principles or based on age and sex.

In Ethiopian Zionist Churches, the services are both institutionalized and charismatic. The leadership of the church leads the services according to their spatial and temporal shift which is determined by the statuses and power. For example, the Bishop or Archbishop is the only person who delegates or authorizes delegation when it comes to liturgies of the church, the Bishop as a top member of the hierarchy chooses someone who will maybe lead a main sermon during the service only after then short sermons can be delivered in a hierarchical order, starting with the one with the highest position and power. Another example would be a service where the charismatic leadership prays for the ill (*ukukhulekelwa kwabagulayo*). These services would be only led by a prophet/s or prophetess as this type of service requires connectedness with *umoya* (Holy Spirit), God, and ancestors to heal the ill. This type of service usually yields a lot of emotions in the form of crying and/or screaming outbursts. Specifically, there are times when these outbursts occur. During the beginning of the services Zionist members form a circle moving faster and faster which is called *ukuzungeza*, this is believed to be done with the aim to acquire the power of the Holy Spirit, the church members remain organized by a church uniform and later during segments of the services which is allocated to healing. Each Zionist

Church service follows more or less the same procedures each Sunday, and these procedures are characterized by similar manifestations, such as the circular dance movement (Skelton 2009). Zionist church services are highly organized and follow very specific structures, routines, and time frames. These services occur primarily on Sunday afternoons, whether they are 'normal' services or a variant ritual such as those marking the death of a member's spouse. Supplements such as staves, uniforms, and bibles, are used to facilitate the religious performances. This way religious identities are reproduced, retained, and maintained. Furthermore, this shows that through rituals the church maintains borders that are not easily seen by the naked eye.

Seeley (1984) argues that women form a great part of AICs and in the previous year religious studies have shown that greater attraction of religious faith and religious participation to women than to men (1984:59). Women in particular often gain a caring support network outside the formal structures of society, and the opportunity for personal advancement (Seeley 1984). Barrett (1968) claims that it is in the independent church movements of Africa that women had the chance to recover some of their traditional status and position which had been undermined by the teachings of the mission churches. Missionaries had often criticised and undermined the African forms of religious expression in which women had a part to play. Lehmann (1963) suggests that many women were attracted to the independent churches because they replace the functions of customary institutions that were weakened by culture change.

African women within the Christian churches found that they were not permitted to hold positions in the ministry nor the executive structure of the church. Wives of polygamists suffered if their husbands became Christians because the man was only permitted to keep one wife and the others were often sent away suffering the stigma of rejection and disgrace. Robins (1979) suggests that women joined independent movements seeking religious legitimation for the rejection of polygynous unions. This interpretation of Christianity gave women the opportunity to be involved in Christian activities not as silent observers but as participating actors.

Perrin-Jassy (1973) remarks that women in the independent churches exercise everywhere responsibilities distinct from those of men. It is they who direct the singing, who organise prayers for the sick, mutual help, and social activities. Women in the independent churches (and in some of the more evangelical and Pentecostal established churches) have a voice and a

role. They can dream dreams, they can sing and pray, they can be born again, and like men hold a belief in the access to salvation and the healing power of God. Those who pray for others, particularly if they have a healing or prophetic gift have an opportunity to contribute to the well-being of the group in a way that is meaningful to the membership.

Kernan (1976a) through his observations, attests that the Zionist church members during services are more than a collection of individuals. He asserts that “it is an organization of social statuses (1976a:358). This points out what was underlined by West (1975) in his references to the ecclesiastic ladder that describes different administrative hierarchies for various independent African churches.

In a nutshell for Ethiopian Zionist ecclesiastical ladder reaching from the bottom to the top includes the preacher (umshumayeli), evangelist (umvangeli), deacon (umdeaconi), minister (umfundisi), overseer (Isanusi), prophet (Umprophethi) and Bishop (UmBhishop). All these different positions, people who occupy them in the church have different statuses shown by the number and color of church garments.

3.4 Ethiopian Zionist Churches theology on Uniform

Church uniform as a meaningful symbol is one of the significant factors that contributes to the ecclesiology of Zionist churches because when one thinks or talks about of a certain church, they always associate it with a particular church uniform. In the Ethiopian Zionist church, the church uniform and wearing of particular color of church uniform during the services is seen as an important means of certifying one’s identity within the church (Williams,1982). Scholars have not yet reached a common ground as to why church uniform was introduced and how it has functioned in societies (Vengeyi and Mwandayi 2014:203). However, Cooke (2014) argues that through church uniform one can differentiate gender and social status of each member of the church. Brown 1996 attests that this is visible by looking at the number of garments a member is wearing and the design of their garments.

The church uniform is understood as a very sacred symbol to Ethiopian Zionist churches. Similar to most mainline churches s such as Nazareth Baptist church, Anglican church, Methodist church, etc., church uniform holds a sentimental value. Through the church uniform, members believe that all types of illness can be cured in both the spiritual and physical realms (Haddad 2016) (Kiernan1979). Furthermore, church uniform is seen in relation to gender roles in the church which makes it easy for heteronormative gender roles to extend to larger societies

and vice versa. Most importantly church uniform is seen as a tool that offers space for the gender duality that subscribes to the heteronormativity of genders.

Sundkler (1961) connects the reason for wearing a particular church uniform with specific dreams and prophecies and West (1975) links wearing a particular uniform among Zionists as some kind of agreement on color interpretations. Ethiopian Zionist churches are known to use the colors white, green, blue, purple, yellow, and purple for their church uniform. Scholars such as West, Oosthuizen, Sundkler, Vangeyi and Mwandayi have done studies on what each color means and when is the appropriate time to wear that color. Vangeyi and Mwandayi (2014) attest to this by positing that liturgical activities in the mainline churches are performed for various purposes and the purpose of each activity is usually symbolized by the color of vestments that are used for that particular occasion (2014:206). The scholars (Vangeyi and Mwandayi) continue to say the white color denotes purity, innocence, and glory and this color is usually used in festivals. Green is worn during ritual services like the one mentioned above *ukukhulekelwa kwabagulayo* to overcome and prevent illness because this color is known for life and protection (Oosthuizen 1992:16)

3.5 Ethiopian Zionist Churches theology on LGBTQIA

The issue of sexuality in the church is the one that is very difficult one to engage in. Mazibuko (2021) attests to this by arguing that this is because in “African countries when compared with other countries from other continents, homosexuality, and same-sex relations are less accepted, and are illegal. However, South Africa is among the first countries in Africa to legalize homosexuality” (2021:23). Sithole 2019 attests that even though the rights of the LGBTQIA community have been legalized the reality is that many members of this community remain excluded. Moyo (2014) posits that Africans are very religious-centered people and most of them are Christian. Moreover, religion permeates all realms of life to the extent that life is perceived holistically without separating the 'sacred' from the 'profane' (Moyo 2014:72).

Earlier in this chapter, this study highlighted that studies done on Zionist churches have little to almost no literature available on this type of Zionist church. Since Ethiopian Zionist churches have elements of Christianity and African traditions. This study will then lean on both Christianity and African culture in understanding the theology of Ethiopian Zionist churches as it will allow this study to discuss their theology on LGBTQIA issues. Sithole (2019) put forward that members of the LGBTQIA community who are Christians always find themselves in contested spaces and are often forced to find other places of worship when they would be

fully accepted. Mazibuko (2021) concur with Sithole (2019), and she further argues that the LGBTQIA community seems to be faced with a choice to always choose between their sexuality and their religion, which makes their spiritual fulfillment not to be pleasant (2021:23)

Oyewumi argues that before colonization in Africa, gender and sexuality was not of importance and same-sex relationships have existed way back (Oyewumi 1997)., I believe, is still visible in Ethiopian Zionist churches when one looks at how they somewhat accept members of the LGBTQIA community as one possessed by Spirits (*Imimoya*). The most common Spirit is the *ubungoma* where one is possessed by ancestral spirits which further believed that that ancestral spirit could be of a male possessing a female body hence one becomes a lesbian, or be of female possessing a male body hence a gay person. The phrase ‘somewhat accept’ is intentionally used with the aim of further arguing that even though sexuality may be accepted in Ethiopian Zionist churches in a form of a Spirit, the uniform issued to the individuals is according to their biology there is nothing in between. This signals that the Ethiopian Zionist churches accept the LGBTQIA community as persons who are presenting with illness rather than a positive expression.

3.6 Ethiopian Zionist Churches theology on Women

Ethiopian Zionist churches have become part of recent literature and research. Furthermore, Sithole (2019) posits that the focus on these studies have been hugely on the origins, development, liturgy, and healing as their contribution to the growth of literature of AICs. One of the mainly focused areas in these churches is gender as the organizing principle since Ethiopian Zionist Churches are monotheistic, God is represented as male. Scholars have urged that one gender has the upper hand compared to the other. The gender with the upper hand was male gender, which these scholars argue may be due to the effect of androcentrism and patriarchy that dominate most religious traditions (Mapuranga,2010) (Daniel, 2010). Moreover, studies have looked at the role of women in AICs as a whole but little about the Ethiopian Zionist church.

The role of women in the Ethiopian Zionist Churches in KwaZulu-Natal is perceived to be embedded in the traditional Zulu culture which is very patriarchal (Williams 1982). Maria-Frahm-Arp (2015) shows through interviews that in Zionist churches women are called to be submissive to their husbands and to be obedient to the male authorities over them (2015:4). Ethiopian Zionist churches reference their liturgies by the use of Biblical text as they use the Bible as their Holy book. In the history of African prior colonization women occupied very

important positions in the church. One example of this would be Mrs. Grace Tshabalala who was a preacher and was involved in the formation of Ethiopian Zionist Churches in South Africa. However, in the post-colonial era in South Africa due to the negative impact of apartheid or colonization on the church, the religio-cultural ideologies derived from both missionary and African culture is now celebrated as the original culture of South Africans which raises many questions.

In this era, women in Ethiopian Zionist churches are rarely ministers in their own right but they are often as wives of the ministers. However, they are allowed space as prophetess and healers (Syrier 1984:4). Syrier (1984) continues to say African women have had their say in their churches for a very long time (1984:3). They have expressed their wishes and imprinted their own thoughts from the earliest days. Syrier argues that African women have expressed themselves in two roles; as founders and healers/prophetess in the smaller congregations and in their women's organizations which every AICs has (Moripe 1996:72). Generally black African women make their presence felt through these church organizations and they seem according to Syrier to do more than just serving the tea and refreshments.

On the contrary, Frahm-Arp (2015) argues that in both the church and religious premises on which they shape and regulate a "good Christian woman", women are seen as the help mate of their male counterparts, and they should submit to them. This cultural understanding is then read into the Biblical texts such that religion is used to support cultural construct of patriarchy (Frahm-Arp 2015:4). For example, one can look at how they use Leviticus 15:19 when they argue that a menstruating woman is not allowed to cook for her husband, nor she is allowed into the holy site of the church or any other holy place. This is applicable also in Ethiopian Zionist churches where women who are on their menstrual cycle do not wear church uniform and they sit behind the door parallel to the women's side as no men in the church should see them during the services nor should they participate in the church services.

William (1982) also speaks about the roles of women in the Zionist church. He highlights that in this church there are certain roles that can only be occupied by men in the church such chief leadership roles like Archbishop or evangelists. He continues to say, men are the ritual leaders, preachers and healers in the church, all important rituals such as baptism and holy communion, and the slaughtering of sacrificial animals are usually presided over and conducted by men (William 1982). On the other hand, women are the ones to recruit new members into the church, and prepare food that is served following all night services or Good Fridays. Women are further

responsible for sewing church uniform for new converts. Kiernan (1979) points out that the wife of any Zionist minister is a strategic resource because she is the organizing force behind the church, and she represents hub of communication network of the church.

Conclusion

This chapter has located the Zionist churches within the broader AICs movements in South Africa. It has further located this study in ecclesiological studies, with a focus on liturgical symbols of the Zionist churches, and intersections between gender and religion. This study has looked at intersections within the broader strand of theological studies, whilst also highlighting the intersections between the Zionist Church doctrines and the contemporary gender questions around church rituals and symbols. This study further seeks to illuminate how the symbols and rituals are central to the group identity of the Zionist Church whilst they also have implication on the bodies of those who participate in them. In the next chapter I will be looking on the framework or the lenses that assist us to reimagine inclusive church symbols.

CHAPTER 4

Theoretical framework

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I introduce the Borderlands theory by Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) as a theoretical framework for this study. The Borderlands theory is about the ethno-socio-cultural theory of deconstructed-reconstructed identity. The term ‘borderland’ can be used metaphorically, in reference to psychological, physical, mental, emotional and social borders (Anzaldúa, 1987). The theory allows this study to look at ideological epistemologies that are socially constructed, and their impact on power structures in the Zion churches such as patriarchy and hierarchy, which are sometimes hard and unclear to identify while creating borders and restrictions on identity (Mendoza, 2008). Secondly in this chapter, from Borderlands theory I employ and explain concepts such as ‘*Nepantla* state’, which is a state that allows us to confront or reaffirm our own identities before looking for doctrines that exist in our churches. According to Anzaldúa (1987), *Nepantla* is a state of in-betweenness. Furthermore, it is important to include this state because it allows this study to look at how one body shifts into different identities from time to time. For example, one can be a woman, mother, lesbian, lecturer and head of the household – simultaneously in the same day using one body. This state assists us to openly allow people in the church to move fluidly in the spectrum of society, without having to be categorised to fit into one specific box that is constructed by society. The point of this state is to allow bodies in the church to gain self-consciousness in their different identities and in the embodied experiences that one body could have. The state of in-betweenness is also necessary in order to create comfort in their bodies. The aim of this state is also not to find out who these people in the Zion Church are, but to resist the categories that are constantly forced by the church and society upon certain bodies. This will also allow the study to look at different ideological epistemologies in African society that existed years before the dominant colonial epistemologies. Thirdly, I will employ and further explain the ‘*Coatlicue* state’, which is another concept of borderland in Anzaldúa’s writing (1987). Anzaldúa (1987) uses this state to create consciousness around the good and bad sides of ancient myths and fiction stories. This is enabled by looking at how they constitute the reality of different bodies that exist in society with the aim of distributing certain amounts of power to certain types of people (Anzaldúa 1987). Therefore, this study will use the *Coatlicue* state to deconstruct the myths and fiction stories about women’s bodies in African societies. Furthermore, the *Coatlicue* state is used (or

applied) to promote liberation theology in faith spaces such as African Independent Churches (AICs). The state allows the right to choose in the embodied experiences which one they will take from homelands (history) to future lands. This is a very important key point in creating inclusivity. This is attested by Settler (2022) who argues that it is important to include embodied experiences in the process of decolonising oneself and the socialisation that goes with it. Lastly, in this chapter, I will further suggest that border thinking is helpful in re-imagining inclusive use of holy symbols, images, pictorials, statues, and by extension, church uniform. I will also advocate for an asexual type of uniform. However, it is important to start by looking at African epistemologies, and at those constructed by the colonisers, which seem to permeate all spaces.

4.2 African epistemologies versus ideologically constructed epistemologies

Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) begins her book by giving us the history of the Chinos, also known as *Aztecas del norte* (US-Mexican blood-line). She complements this with a poem that expresses how she felt in the time of being separated by the long-barbed wire which represents the beginning of colonial penetration in their land. This analogy is significant for this study because it shows that every society has had their own ways of living and knowing before colonisation took place. The poem also shows that when colonisation encroached upon these societies, it introduced an entirely new structure – barbed wire fences – something that was totally new to the Chicanos. Moreover, this poem does not only refer to physical structural changes, but also to changes in structures that cannot be seen with the physical eye such as the ways of living or knowing. These changes were through introduction of social borders, boundaries, and categories.; Some of them were physical, mental, psychological, social, and cultural. Furthermore, in this poem, Anzaldúa (1987) clearly express the hardships she faced in accepting colonizers' epistemologies. Similarly, this is the case of African societies' pre-19th century, especially in South Africa. When colonisers arrived, they introduced and coerced a westernised way of living and knowing which, according to them, was seen as a civilised way of living; a belief that remains an insult to these societies (Cooke, 2014; Amisiko Kisiang'ang, 2004; Oduyoye, 2001).

Anzaldúa (1987) further talks about her desires, how she wishes to feel the sea breeze close, but the only thing stopping her is this border that has been installed by colonisers. The only thing she can do is to walk to the hole in the fence and then fit in her hands in the hole although the wire is wounding (Anzaldúa, 1987). Again, this is very important for this study because it

makes us aware that the supposed European Civilisation' caused more harm than good. Furthermore, it shows that people are always willing to 'cross over' to meet their desires, even if those desires are outside of what is acceptable for a certain body, and even if the consequences are wounding. It also important for this study to note that Anzaldúa (1987) is trying to show that even though it is punishable and could lead to death to place the body out of place' people will continue to search for their desires, or rather, their freedom.

Western civilisation injected Africans with a culture that differentiates 'us' from 'them' (Said, 1994). Anzaldúa (1987) concurs with Said and further attests that as much as she talks about physical borders that separate the United States and Mexico, one cannot be ignorant of the fact that the differentiation is also in psychological, political, sexual, spiritual, economic, and social borderlands, since they are no exception. Anzaldúa (1987) states that borderlands are present when two or more cultures edge each other. In this case, we witness religious and cultural borderlands when people of socially prescribed gender identities and sexual orientations occupy one religious territory, which in this case is the Zion faith space. According to Anzaldúa (1987), a border is a dividing line, a narrow strip, and a long a steep edge. While we are noting that borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary, it is also important to note that borderlands are in a constant state of transition. The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants.

'Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish *us* from *them*' (Anzaldúa, 1987). Naomi Scheman (1993) speaks in relation to what Anzaldúa (1987) has attested. She adds by asserting that the ways people knew their places in the world had to do with their bodies and the histories of those bodies. Scheman (1993) further attests that when bodies violated the prescriptions for those places, they were punished; often spectacularly. This means that the moment one is not adhering to the power structures or the rules (social norms), one is subject to being punished. For centuries post colonisation, women and other bodies have been marginalised as I have shown in my literature chapter. Now, by virtue, people with marginalised bodies such as women's and gender nonconforming bodies, which this study is interested in, know how their bodies are supposed to function, how they are supposed to be or how they should be conducted, according to the heteronormative prescription. They also know that it is punishable to do what is outside the norm.

Colonial encounter is something not to be taken lightly. Anzaldúa (1987) talks about how it left people of her kind with different scars that resulted in many people running away from

their homes to seek freedom. Similarly, in South Africa's history of colonisation and apartheid, Africans were stripped of their cultures through religious penetration that resulted in homophobia, even in faith spaces. Anzaldúa (1987), in a poetic sense, defines it as a fear of going home where the colonisers imposed their doctrines on African churches, which resulted in gender inequality through creating binaries. Mazibuko (2021) contextualises what Anzaldúa (1987) has attested to, saying that if people in South Africa openly identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and/ or intersexed (LGBTIQA+), they are automatically vulnerable to violence due to gender and sexual orientation. Hate speech, hate crime, discrimination and murder are just some of the forms of violence that these people face (Mazibuko, 2021:98).

Furthermore, colonisation caused people to fear returning to their homelands, even in the post-colonisation era. This is because their indigenous cultures had been diluted with the European way of doing things that continue to categorise and differentiate *us* from *them*. This still creates discomfort in some bodies, even though we are living in the supposedly democratic era. People are still in borderlands, and they cannot be fully accepted in their homelands because of the borders that still exist, but mostly because these borders refuse to accept their 'Shadow Beast'. Anzaldúa (1987) when she speaks of Shadow Beast, she is referring to sexuality as something that is growing inside her and even if she tries to hide it, it feeds on her desires. It always shows up, and it still forms a large part of her. What is terrifying is that this 'Shadow Beast' cannot be caged by any circumstances that exist in homelands anymore, thus not returning home seems to be the only option in the pursuit of freedom. However, I think the big significance of calling her sexuality the Shadow Beast is because homosexuality was considered inhuman and unpleasant in previous years.

Mendoza (2008) further attests that confronting Anzaldúa's (1987) borderlands is difficult because the aspects of this theory are socially constructed. Unlike physical borderlands, these are hard to pinpoint and be aware of, as they do not seem natural or absolute. Mendoza (2008) and Anzaldúa (1987) further insist that in order to depict emotional and ideological borderlands, one has to look at fixed structures of power. In this case, my research interest is in Zion churches with regards to factors that make and shape gender and sexuality perceptions. My research also explores Zion churches' dress code and how this code matches with their dominant African culture and religion, which exacerbates patriarchy and hierarchy in the church. Anzaldúa (1987) attests that people who experience borderlands are people who are confronted with the fact that they are constantly rejected because of their colour, class, gender, or sexual preference. Ideological borderlands may be present when social hierarchies imply

that there is only one way of being and living, and rigid categories of superiority versus inferiority (Mendoza, 2008).

African epistemologies include the African conception of the nature of knowledge, the ways in which knowledge could be gained, the ways in which one can justify an epistemic claim, and the role that it plays in human existence (Nwosimiri, 2019). Scholars such as Nwosimiri (2019) and Jonh (2009) argue that African ways are not so distinct and unique from the Western . Oyewumi (1997) adds to clarify this point by arguing that western discourses around ways of knowing are primarily conceived by sight. I firmly stand with Oyewumi on this point. In the West, philosophy, and the understanding the world have developed through a method of rationalism that doesn't necessarily apply to other societies, world views, or even experiences. Therefore, western rationalism has become, in a sense, a scientific method. One can look at what Oyewumi called the 'Western Gaze' on the body. She claims that the world is primarily conceived by sight in the West, the differentiation of human bodies in terms of sex, skin colour, and cranium size is the testament to powers attributed to seeing' (Oyewumi, 1997). In other societies such as Africa, seeing is one way of knowing, but not the only way. For example, some people in South Africa value what they feel, touch, dream and smell more than what they can see, and surprisingly, they will instinctively know what it means or at least know that there is something happening around them.

Due to colonial account, it is important to now understand that societies are constituted by bodies, and we must acknowledge that through historical events, bodies have been used as text, as a system of signs to be deciphered, read and read into. Bodies are textualized, read by others as expressive of subject psychic interior (Grosz, 1994). This means that westerners believe that a person has an intrinsic person that is represented by the body. Thus, according to Western discourses, a body represents who you really are inside. It is important to be aware of these discourses as they have dominated many societies, including African societies, through colonisation. They have also informed how the body begins to be gendered, racialised and classed.

These discourses have caused people to see the body as a storehouse of inscriptions and messages between its external and internal boundaries. The discourses also generated or constructed the body's movements into behaviour which had both interpersonally and socially identifiable meanings and functions within social systems (Grosz, 1994). Oyewumi (1997) emphasises that while the body is constantly on view, the constant gaze is on gender. This can

be contested for the LGBTQIA+ community, but when Oyewumi (1997) is talking about gender gaze, she is talking about a person's sex or state of being male or female. This is visible even in faith spaces such as Zion churches; married females would sit on one side, unmarried females on the other, and same goes for males.

Thus, problematising the 'seeing' as the only way of knowing is necessary as it automatically constructs the 'other body'. When Anzaldúa (1987) explains borderlands, she attests that borderland is produced by feelings of alienation and discomfort with the dominant culture that denies 'others' as equals and rejects them for all that they represent, which usually occurs after 'seeing' (Anzaldúa, 1987). Borderlands is a theory of process; it involves a series of actions aimed at a particular goal. According to Anzaldúa (1987), the goal is to reverse the colonisation that has been passed on to oneself and many others through cultural practices and construction of myths. These operate in everyday discourses, and the reversal of these discourses is the dream of every marginalised body. Anzaldúa (1987) further attests that the dominant culture (Western) has created its own version of reality and her work counters it with another version; the version of coming from the place of in-betweenness: '*Nepantla*'). Anzaldúa adds to the above insertion that there are many ways of knowing and looking at reality, which includes other genders and sexuality. This theory simply affords people the right to self-identify but also a sense of self-representation, or '*autohistoria*'.

Complementing Anzaldúa's assertion that colonisation created rigid ways of doing things, Lugones (2008) attests to how coloniality permeates all social existence and gives rise to new social and geo-cultural identities, thereby creating gendered identities. In addition, Connell (2014) assists us by highlighting that the precolonial conception of gender is complex and structured differently in every context in the world, but it is important to note that these conceptions are totally different from European conceptions. Moreover, according to Kisitu and Siwila (2016), and Donham (1998), African society are no exception to what Connell is asserting. AICs like Zion churches have African precolonial epistemologies that allowed women to occupy important positions in the church and society, and sexuality was not of importance before colonisation (Donham, 1998). Therefore, people who were gender and sexually diverse didn't encounter as many problems in faith spaces as they do now.

4.3 *Nepantla* state (in-betweenness)

According to Anzaldúa (1987) this is a pathway to change. *Nepantla* is included in Borderlands theory as a metaphor. In describing metaphoric processes of psychological, physical and mental

matters, Anzaldúa (1987) incorporates some elements that existed in the etymological meaning and adds her own version. Anzaldúa emphasises that *Nepantla* ‘*es el lugaren medio de todos los lugares*’; it is the space of in-betweenness, liminal stage, or transitioning of identity formation (Anzaldúa and Keating, 2000: 5, 238).

According to Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) we travel through *Nepantla* to challenge, confront, or reaffirm our own identities before the point of stasis. Moreover, we need to go through this state in order to be confronted with the fact that there are many ways of knowing; that epistemologies also exist outside the western ideology of seeing. In addition, we open ourselves to many possibilities of learning, being, and expressing outside the rigid categories that aim to construct people’s identity in one particular way. Furthermore, Anzaldúa (1987) recommends and encourages the strength of rebellion as an important factor in this state. She argues that the strength of rebellion is required in order to be self-aware. She further used her strength of rebellion as a tool that empowered her to seek liberation and freedom by running away from home or running away from being ‘caged’ or categorised. Anzaldúa ran away from home because she had recognised who she really was inside, and it was not well displayed by the outer physical body that her society used to define her. She recognised the ongoing strength of her ‘Shadowed Beast’, her unpleasant or inhuman side; she couldn’t be fully embodied and embraced in her home setting due to colonised epistemologies that made it hard for her family and society to accept her as a lesbian. She hated constraints of any kind, such as her culture, since it is the basis for an individual belief system, and it often goes unquestioned and unchallenged (Anzaldúa 1987). She further showed that in the culture of the Chicanos, women only had three places in society – to be a nun, mother, or a prostitute. Anzaldúa (1987) introduces the fourth choice: to self-actualise. She also reveals that the fourth choice is hard because men in society fear such women, and they try with all possible means to keep them in subordinate positions.

In Zion churches under AICs, women’s bodies are not only influenced or regulated by the African cultural tyranny, but also by the Western epistemologies of what it means to be a woman in society and in church spaces. Most of the time women’s bodies are spoken for with the aim to locate them in the subordinated hierarchy of society, and these structures appear to be more secured by the patriarchal rhetoric that cuts secular and religio-cultural traditions (Kisitu & Siwila, 2016). Oyewumi (1997) explains to us that in African society, gender was not an organising principle. Prior to colonisation, there was no gender system in African cultures and societies (Oyewumi 1997). Hence, Federico Settler (2018), attests that Africa has

been presented as a place that people run to in pursuit of liberty and modernity. He further argues that crossing over borders is more than simple crossing. It involves lengthy bureaucratic entanglements with agencies, laws, and institutions, and all of these become borderlands for migrants' bodies and values, and entitlements are contested and reformed (Settler, 2018). As much as Settler (2018) attests to the physical and political borderlands of migrants, the same applies to sexual and gender borderlands in faith spaces. The lives of people living in those borderlands are constantly placed under constraints because of scripted cultural or sexual practices that are embedded into the heteronormativity of gender and sexuality. Van der Riet and Sofika (2017) describe scripted cultural and sexual practices as the most influential cultural script in heterosexual relationships has been found to be the traditional script. This script prescribes roles in which men are the initiators of relationships, and women the gatekeepers who are expected to refuse or accept men's sexual advances (Sofika & Van der Riet, 2017:5).

Settler (2018) adds that people in borderlands stay there until their 'application' for entry into a particular country or space is processed. This is also the case with the Zion Church— you have to wait until your gender and sexuality is approved by the faith space. For example, in Zion faith spaces, one has to go through baptism in order to be allowed membership. However, it is important to note that being given a chance to be baptised automatically means the church has accepted you in terms of gender and sexuality, and it is safe for it to be associated with you. Thus, if the Zion Church can engage through *Nepantla*, they will be exposed to other ways of viewing and knowing, more readily able to access knowledge derived from inner feelings, imaginal states and outer events, and to see through them with mindful, holistic awareness.

4.4 *Coatlicue* state

According to Anzaldúa (1987), this state is both painful and elucidating in the process of borderlands. In this part, Anzaldúa (1987) as an Indigenous woman, is concerned about the fact that ancient myths and fiction stories were used and continue to be used to produce realities that work to the detriment of women. Anzaldúa (1987) uses an example of a female goddess, Earth Mother (*Coatlicue*), who is a goddess of light and darkness, which is a contradictory depiction of Aztec philosophy and the incarnation of the cosmic process.

In this state Anzaldúa (1987) uses female characters to show how the Bible and other books and societal structures use myths to portray women as negative, deceiving and spiteful human beings. She uses the story of Eve and how she is held responsible for limited human longevity in the Holy Bible. Furthermore, she uses Tonaltzing, better known as La Maliche, who was

considered as the female traitor of the Mexican nation since she was not only Hernan Cortes' mistress, but it is believed that she helped him to defeat the Aztecs (Anzaldúa 1987). However, Anzaldúa (1987) claims that history hides the fact that La Malinche was given to Cortes as a slave by Aztec Emperor Moctezuma, and this is why Anzaldúa writes 'not me sold out my people, but they me'. The *Coatlicue* state allows people in Zion faith spaces to acknowledge the good and bad side of all bodies that exist in society, especially the female body.

Gunda (2011) argues that gender prejudice in African contexts is based on religious fundamentals, especially elicited from the reading of the creation story in Genesis 1 and 2. Reading works by great philosophers such as Descartes (1586-1650), who emphasises the inferiority of women's bodies compared to the superior bodies of men, also contributes to the prejudice. Therefore, authors like Stuart Cloete (1958) claim that African women are only beautiful without souls, they are bold without innocence (Cloete, 1958:51). Joyce Cary went as far as claiming that women and girls of Africa are just passive individuals who do what they are being told (Cary, 1961:170). Gunda (2011) says this makes sense because the Bible, among other books, is a book that is readily available to almost everyone and people are encouraged to read the Bible in good and bad times. Through reading these narratives, men and women tend to have a negative attitude towards womanhood, leading to the ideas that sustain inequality between men and women.

The most critical contribution of religion is that through the Bible, gender, sex and sexuality are interpreted as closely associated or as the same thing. In Christian thinking, it is assumed that revelation of gender differentiation in Genesis 1 and 2 aims to promote dualism of gender; one gender viewed as superior and good, whereas the other is viewed as weak and inferior. It is important to note that it is through the literal interpretation of this biblical text or the Bible reader's interpretation thereof that assumptions are formed, such as that the fundamental differences between men and women are divinely ordained together with the privileges for genders respectively (Gunda, 2011).

Coatlicue's role in this theory is to balance dualities and fuse opposites. Furthermore, this state is where one stops to digest all the knowledge gained in the *Nepantla* and begins to confront the past identities against those awaiting in the future. However, as stated above, this state is a state that 'is a dark night of the soul' (Reuman, 2000:13). *Coatlicue* is a symbol of life and death, the process with the task to take all that we have been, destroy it, and reconstruct it. One may ask why one would want to go through this state. The answer to this is simple and forces

us to make the connection that in order to reach borderlands, we need to go through the process of being aware or recognising through *Nepantla* state. This state serves as only our transitioning channel to different worlds, meanings, concepts and categories through the use of the body – we cannot expect to achieve transformation just by going through it.

According to Settler (2018), religious sites and institutions also emerge as sites where migrants resist hegemonic ideas about them being victims or villains and assert religious ways of knowing and being that emerge from their life worlds in borderlands. However, Settler (2018) adds to this by offering us an interesting perspective of borderlands in saying that the ambiguous zone of borderlands also emerges as a productive zone where conventional binaries related to secular and sacred religious beliefs and practices are increasingly contested and reformed. In this study, Borderland theory helps us to understand the lack of attention paid to agency of the people who live in borderlands in Zion faith spaces. With the significantly increasing transnational movements of people due to constitutional laws in South Africa, societies are ignorant that it is not only about people living in borderlands or those who are crossing over but it also about changing those borders which seem to be illegal as qualified by colonisation to cross to legal crossing in faith spaces as adaption to accommodate how the context that people occupy change (Anzaldúa, 1987).

Settler states that nowadays, people who are living in borderlands of faith spaces reimagine religion, erect and produce religious sites of potential religious discourses about knowing and being' (Settler, 2018). With this, Settler (2018) means that people living in borderlands have already started to create 'illegal' faith spaces for themselves where they disrupt the categories through tools such as the Contextual Bible Studies (CBS). Therefore, proposing a shift in the current uniform in Zion churches will not only unmask the disguises of colonisation injustices and the ways in which colonisation institutionalised differentiation between legal citizen and illegal citizen of the church. It will also encourage the right to self-represent and identify and still feel safe but also fight against ways of knowing that continue to be replicated well after the formal demise of colonisation. To suggest an asexual type of church uniform as opposed to a unisex type of uniform is preferred in this study. The reason for this is that an asexual church uniform can be defined as a type of a uniform that does not revolve around a person's sexuality, which will cater to people who are sexually and gender nonconforming, whereas a unisex church uniform would still be reinforcing the binary of gender (man and woman). In addition, unisex church uniform will continue to alienate and marginalise other bodies that are in faith spaces and still deny the freedom of self-identification that this study advocates for.

Eurocentric power is everywhere, including in religious spaces. Therefore, destabilising narratives that reproduce dominant ideas will allow the creation of spaces for permitting and recognising different epistemologies. This will be in contrast to colonisation, which constituted the how and what the knowledge must be that informs the lived reality (Icaza, 2017). Coloniality constituted binomial and structure management, which operates by controlling the economy, authority, epistemologies, subjectivity, gender and sexuality. This resulted in heterogeneous ways of doing things, and it is believed that the Western thinking of binomials is the totality of reality. When Settler (2018) argues that religious symbols are still a problem because they represent the colonial existence, it highlights again what has been discussed earlier in the literature chapter. Thus, troubling these symbols allows the transformation that will lead to inclusive symbols. However, it is important to note that shifting to inclusive symbols is not only a matter of appearance, but also about our bodies being given space to belong.

Thus, the representation of the marginalised bodies through the use of an asexual church uniform is very important for African Independent faith spaces, like Zion, to legitimise and restore the dignity and humanity that were taken away by Eurocentric/Western epistemologies and their supposed civilisation towards African societies. Claire Cooke (2014) makes interesting assertions around her interpretation of the photos of women wearing African Methodist Episcopal missionary church uniforms. She asserts that women's church uniforms always portray and maintain power dynamics. Furthermore, what is more interesting to Cooke (2014) is that the church uniform is in relation to women's bodies. She asserts that a close analysis of the photographs suggests women were clothed according to their status in relation to the overarching patriarchal mission family (Cooke 2014).

Thus, *Coatlicue* is crucial to the theory, because it is the stage where one has obtained courage to kill the colonised self and everything one has learned through the process of colonisation. This state is necessary in order to recognise that one's identity goes through stages where it has to confront all the identities acquired, imposed, and desired in order to identify where the discomfort or oppression comes from (Anzaldúa, 1987). This state compels us to recognise the social constructions of how a certain body should belong in society or in a certain space. Moreover, this state is where we deconstruct myths about women's bodies through the use of a church uniform that will afford equality to every other body that exists in Zion faith spaces.

Hence, the postcolonial era necessitates that Zion churches read history as a product of hegemonic relations between power and knowledge, as it requires that particular attention must be paid to the privileging of those experiences, as well as the ways of knowing and of being that have been marginalised in the history of religion, gender and sexuality (Settler, 2018). Church uniform in Zion in the postcolonial era should take as its premise the idea of mutual incorporation – that both the identity of the colonised and coloniser are reshaped by the encounter. Thus, we can conclude that in Zion churches, through a shift to an asexual type of church uniform, both the oppressor and oppressed acknowledge that their identities were refuted through colonisation.

Therefore, it is necessary to revise and restructure the established relations between power and knowledge. For this reason, this asexual church uniform advocates for decolonisation of knowledge and of rigid boxes of gender and sexuality that exist in African contemporary contexts, and it disrupts the epistemologies that were seen as relevant in AICs. Furthermore, this uniform does not only decolonise the idea of what constitute Zion churches, it also decolonises how religious knowledge work is a product in the context of gender and sexuality through visible holy symbols. When we engage in borderlands in Zion through church uniform, to only critique the norms of knowledge production is not sufficient. We must also interrogate the very taxonomies that sustain such norms and offer alternative schemas to explain and incorporate experiences of the ‘other’ people who are living in borderlands between rigid categories of gender and sexuality, and the other gender and sexualities that exist.

Decolonial thinking precisely introduces border thinking as an epistemological position that contributes to shifting in forms of knowing in which the world is thought from the concrete incarnated experiences of colonial difference and the wounds left (Icaza, 2017). Icaza (2017) continues to add that through border thinking, the violence of the dominant epistemology grounded on abstract universality as ‘a zero point’ of observation and of knowledge is seen as disdainful by all other perspectives and forms of knowing. As such border thinking is seen as a ‘fracture of the epistemology of the zero point’ and as a possibility for a critical re-thinking of the geo and body politics of knowledge, of the modern/colonial foundations of political economy analysis, and of gender (Icaza, 2017:2).

Furthermore, border thinking is about being aware of what our bodies know and feel in the contradiction of duality, and according to authors like Settler (2021) and Icaza (2017), vulnerability is central to decolonisation. Icaza (2017) further claims that border thinking is not

just a discursive strategy to destabilise dominant narratives over women or other bodies – it helps us not only to know and theorise on it but also to show how the fleshly, material existence of bodies is deeply embedded in political relations, including the aspect of coloniality. Furthermore, this theory prepares us to engage in political action in order to seek overall transformation of society. As this study is about people's lived experiences, I outline in detail, in the next chapter, the tools employed and how they apply to this qualitative research.

Conclusion

This chapter helps one to understand how one's identity is formulated, shaped, maintained and retained in the larger society. Borderlands have also been applied metaphorically in this study because this study is not dealing with physical borders. However, it deals with social borders which cannot be witnessed by the physical eye. This allowed this study to look at the ideological epistemologies that colonisation has brought into South Africa through the church. These epistemologies had a considerable impact on powerful societal structures such as hierarchy and patriarchy in Zionist churches, which are mostly shaped by dualism. This chapter continued to use *Nepantla* and *Coatlicue* states to deconstruct and reconstruct South African people's identities in the Zionist churches.

In the next chapter I discuss my research methods in details. Looking at different tool used to collect data.

CHAPTER 5

Research methodology

5.1 Introduction

African Independent Churches (AICs) have attracted a lot of attention over the past few years. According to Shange (2013), studies that have been done on AICs have concluded that they have little influence over its members. However, according to Seeley (1984), AICs are initiated and growing in Africa every day, and they are not only a religious response to the past and contemporary social structures, but they are also part of broader society (Seeley, 1984:59). As scholars continue to conduct their research in, about and/or for AICs, there has been a constant gap that is visible in churches like the Zion churches. The gap in terms of bold, broad symbols like existing church uniforms in the Zion churches reinforces gender binary by shaping, maintaining and controlling how gender and sexuality is perceived in contemporary African societies (Kisitu & Siwila, 2016). Furthermore, these church uniforms, as one of the symbols, promote patriarchy in the Zion faith spaces. Thus, asking how religious and cultural dress can be reimaged as gender inclusive adornment in the Zion churches, is a gap and a question of interest for this research. Therefore, in this chapter, I will outline the research design and how it is useful to the study. I will also discuss the sampling method, selection criteria, location of the study, positionality and reflexivity, data collection and procedure, research instruments, method of data analysis, and ethical considerations.

5.2 Research design

Kothari (2006) argues that research design assists the researcher to plan in advance for the methods to be adopted for collecting the relevant data, and techniques to be used during analysis. This study is using literature research to get history of a church uniform. However, qualitative research would be the main research technique, as this study aims to explore the gender binary problems caused by existing church uniform in a church landscape, particularly in the Zion Church under AICs. In qualitative research, the researcher becomes part of the study as an instrument of data collection and analysis, which requires observing, listening, describing and interpreting skills (Blanche, 2006). Since this study looks at how church uniform informs gender binary and patriarchy in the Zion Church, qualitative exploratory research design is relevant, because it allows you to analyse and make meaning of the way people express themselves through behavioural observations and the use of language (Blanche,

2006). Furthermore, it highlights the importance of contextualising lived experiences by ensuring that meaning is contextualised according to each person's understanding of human creations, beliefs, actions, words and experiences (Blanche, 2006).

5.3 Sampling technique

This study followed the purposive sampling when recruiting cisgender participants, and snowballing sampling techniques when recruiting gender nonconforming participants. Sampling techniques that were used are non-probability in nature and they were used to ensure that the identified participants be the best to co-produce the data that is required for analysis and theorisation of the research question. Purposive sampling refers to when the researcher decides the purpose they want an informant to serve, and then finding the appropriate informant (Noy, 2008):. Since this study is a qualitative study, the targeted sample is small to gather in-depth and contextualised data. The purposive convenience sampling style was seen appropriate for this study because the participants in the study are readily available and representative. This study consisted of participants from Pietermaritzburg (KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa) because this geographic area is rich with Zion churches that wear different church uniforms and has many organisations that assist in creating safe, affirming and inclusive spaces for people who are gender or sexually nonconforming. Therefore, it assisted in facilitating the recruitment process. According to Chaim Noy (2008), snowball sampling is when a researcher accesses informant through contact information that is provided by other informants (Noy, 2008:330). According to Neumann (2011), snowball sampling is a technique used to identify potential participants where one person refers the researcher to the next, especially in cases where there might be difficulty in finding participants.

5.4 Selection criteria

This study recruited fourteen participants who are Zionists: seven cisgender men and seven cisgender women from the University of KwaZulu-Natal ATEZS (Association for Tertiary Zion Students) and Ukuphila Kwama of God in Zion Church, and zero people who are gender nonconforming. 7 participants were married and 7 were not. These participants are from different congregations within the Zion churches, and they have two or more years of membership, because it is believed that they have clear knowledge and understanding of rules and regulations of their congregations when they have been members for this period of time. The age range of participants for this study was from eighteen years and older – it is easier to

get consent from this age group because in South Africa, by constitution, you are considered an adult when you are 18 years old and you are capable of making your own decisions.

5.5 Location of the study

This study was conducted in Pietermaritzburg in Kwazulu-Natal. This geographic area is predominantly made up of Zulu speaking people and whose lives mostly are centred on religion and culture. There is also a wide range of Zion churches with different church uniforms. According to Taylor et al (2016), the ideal research setting is one in which the researcher obtains easy access, establishes an immediate rapport with participants, and gathers data directly related to research interest. KwaZulu-Natal mostly accommodates Zulu-speaking people, and the Zulu community is known to be very much patriarchal in its traditions, culture and Christian religion. Moreover, in Pietermaritzburg, there are a lot of organisations that advocate for and create safe and affirming spaces for queer people or the LGBTIQA+ community. Organisations such as Uthingo Network were helpful in terms of trying to recruit gender nonconforming and sexually diverse individuals to participate in the study and to get them to talk about their church experiences. However, none of them were willing to participate. Being someone that was born and raised in one of the townships in Pietermaritzburg myself, conducting this study in Pietermaritzburg facilitated easy access to participants, but it was not as easy to access gender nonconforming participants, because I am cisgender. Having conducted this study in Pietermaritzburg offered an opportunity for me to engage with Zionists from other congregations, as this study did not only obtain participants from one Zion congregation.

5.6 Positionality and reflexivity

I, as the researcher of this study, identify as an African woman. I have been a member of Ukuphila Kwama of God Church in Zion from an early age. Being a woman in the Zion Church means to be constantly constrained especially when one has entered the adolescence stage. Your freedom and agency are immediately taken away from you through the use of the church uniform. As a young woman growing up in the church and in society, one faced many challenges while still learning to adapt to given gender roles and to fit into ‘what does it mean be a woman in a church uniform’.

Growing up in a home that consisted of more females than males, yet still very patriarchal, was the challenge to me every day. Part of me really wanted to be seen as a good young woman

and to just comply and conform to the rules and regulations of the church. However, as I was growing and moving up in leadership positions in the church, it kept getting worse. I saw how much women's lives were constrained through the use of the uniform. The uniform did not only separate the profane from sacred life – it also separated men from women and people who are living heterosexual lives from those living as LGBTQI+.

As this study resulted from my own observations and experience, I am fully aware of my biases and attachment to the study. However, analysis made from this study will not be from my personal experiences; the participants will be the only source of data. Even though I am aware that my own views and experiences are not fully divorced from this process, I have gained critical distance through the use of theory. I did this by producing transcribed final thematic analysis write-ups, and convincing presentation of data findings and analyses showing what is collected from the field or from the participants.

There was a need to further explain certain concepts from English to Zulu as I anticipated most of my participants were Zulu-speaking. Hence, I acknowledge that in part I brought up analysis from my own experiences and that of other participants as a source of data. In this study, I acknowledge that I may have to further explain certain concepts from English to Zulu as I project most of my participants to be Zulu speaking. Furthermore, I am cautious of my interconnectivity to the study. I will remain objective at all times as I conduct this study by not allowing my values, bias, experiences, and views to impact on the findings and analysis of this study, and by only reporting on findings of the data collected from the recruited participants.

As a researcher who is an African woman from the Zion Church and who identifies as a heterosexual, cisgender person, I am aware that there might be uncomfortable feelings in people who are gender and sexually diverse to share their experiences and views of Zion church uniforms with me. However, my interview questions have been crafted in such a way that they do not provoke any feelings or offense to any of the participants.

5.7 Data collection, procedure and research instruments

Consent was obtained from each participant before data collection. I started the interview with a declaration that all views are equally welcome, and that none of the material will be shared. I used in-depth individual semi-structured interviews, and focused group interviews and questionnaires were conducted with each participant in order to collect in-depth and first-hand contextualised information. Minimal encouragers and open-ended questions were used. Interviews were recorded with the permission of the participants. Each interview lasted about

35 minutes to an hour. Prior to conducting these interviews, informed consent was also obtained from gatekeepers of the churches for conducting interviews with the congregation members. Consent was also obtained from gatekeepers to use congregation archives to recruit members that have more than two years of membership. The interviews were conducted by using Zoom calls or WhatsApp video calls. Field notes were compiled to capture and describe the non-verbal cues observed during the interviews. The audio recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim into textual materials that were manually and independently analysed using thematic analysis.

The interviews were conducted in isiZulu and English for the purposes of easy communication and analysing data. The research also ensured that all interviews are conducted in a conducive environment to allow participants to speak openly about their experiences in terms of how the church uniform has functioned, and how it has informed and maintained their gender roles. Furthermore, participants could share what the adorning of a church uniform means to them and why.

5.8 Data analysis method

For this research study, I used thematic analysis, because it is a flexible and useful research tool which can potentially provide a rich and detailed account of data. Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) is a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns or themes within data. It minimally organises and describes your data set in rich detail (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis is suited to a wide range of research interests and theoretical perspectives and is useful as a basic method, because firstly, it works with a wide range of research questions, ranging from those about people's experiences or understandings to those about the representation and construction of particular phenomena in a particular context. Secondly, it can be used to analyse different types of data from secondary sources such as media, transcripts of focus groups, or interviews. Thirdly, it works with both large and small data-sets, and lastly, it can be applied to produce data-driven or theory-driven analyses (Braun & Clarke, 2006:80-81).

Analysis in qualitative research is interesting because you discover themes and concepts embedded throughout your interviews. For this study, I adopted the six phases of thematic analysis as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006) to identify and analyse the themes that emerged from the data. Phase one is familiarising yourself with data and transcription of verbal data. In this phase, the researcher's task is to familiarise themselves with the data collected from

the field until they are familiar with the data. Then the researcher has to transcribe the verbal data, such as interviews, into a written form in order to conduct the thematic analysis. Phase two is generating initial codes. In this phase, the researcher has to read and re-read the data and code important features of the data that appear important to them. Phase three consists of searching for themes. The researcher sorts the different codes to formulate themes that emerge as a common theme. Phase four is the reviewing of themes; the researcher has to review the emerging themes and refine how these themes co-relate and fit and assess whether they form enough data to support the theme. Phase five consists of defining and naming themes. The researcher has to identify the essence of what each theme is about and what aspect of the data each capture. Phase six is producing the report and pinning down what the interpretive analysis entails. In this final stage, the researcher has to produce the report for final thematic analysis to write up a convincing presentation of data showing the validity of what is collected from the field or from the participants.

5.9 Ethical consideration

The interviews of this study complied with the research ethics code of conduct, which ensures that all members that were involved in a research study were treated with respect and dignity. This study ensured that the research ethics code of conduct is adhered to by ensuring the following: informed consent from all participants, competency and confidentiality, risk-benefit ratio, and ongoing respect for the participants and the community where the study will be conducted. Participants were protected from harm and their well-being was guarded by allowing them to withdraw from participating at any time, and by not using their real names. Approval to undertake the study was obtained from the Ethics Research Committee of the University of KwaZulu-Natal (HSSREC/00003587/2021) and all interviews were conducted in a secure private place to ensure privacy on the Zoom platform, where only a researcher can allow people to get in and having a unique security code for each meeting. Informed consent was obtained from all the participants that were involved in this study and anonymity was maintained by using pseudonyms or disguising the participants' names, which will ensure participants' confidentiality. Follow-ups, debriefing and even referrals were done according to the needs of participants after the interviews.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have discussed in detail the research methods appropriate for this study, as well as some ethical considerations. In the following chapter I present and analyse the data I collected in the field.

CHAPTER 6

Data presentation

6.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter on methodology, I detailed the tools applicable to this study. In this section, I employ those tools for my data analysis. I also present data drawn from the Borderlands theory by Gloria Anzaldúa (1987), which is a theory about the ethno-socio-cultural theory of deconstructed-reconstructed identity. This allows us to look at ideological epistemologies that are socially constructed and their impact in power structures such as patriarchy and hierarchy in the Zion churches, which are sometimes hard and unclear to identify while creating borders and restrictions on identity and control of the physical body. Furthermore, in this chapter this study continues appealing to Radcliffe-Brown's (1980) structural functionalism theory for anthropology in its analysis of how society, through the use of church uniform, has been able to maintain social orders that exacerbate social structures such as patriarchy and hierarchy in the church. When I was interviewing participants, themes emerged which, in a nutshell, portray a religio-cultural window of Zionist people living in Pietermaritzburg.

While I was recruiting participants for this study, the first challenge I encountered was that gender nonconforming individuals weren't available to participate in the study, in spite of the use of snowball sampling. These individuals were not comfortable to participate in the study. Mazibuko (2021) argues that the LGBTIQ+ community as a whole has been silenced through linear reading of Bible Scriptures, which is the tough and unfortunate part. The amount of silence that is found in Zion churches and congregations speaks volumes of their religio-cultural views with regards to conversations about sex, gender and sexual orientation. Hence, I concur with Sipehele Mazibuko (2021) in her study '*Isitabane* of faith: An Auto-ethnographic Exploration of *Isitabane* lived reality in the Shembe Faith Tradition', that the reading of the Bible is hugely embedded in culture and traditions that are tremendously patriarchal. What is interesting is that the study conducted by Mazibuko is also on African Independent Churches (AICs), except that it is not on the African Zionist movement, but rather Shembe faith spaces, which have a lot of similarities with Zion faith spaces. This clearly indicates that there is a huge challenge that is faced by AICs, and in this case, Zion churches as identified by this study. This further allows this study to have a chance to problematise this

silence of gender diverse bodies in Zion churches. Furthermore, this very same silence speaks to the strong traditional hold to the binary construction that makes other bodies invisible. I concur with Mataga (2009) that worldwide, religious beliefs are rooted in and sustained by material practice through objects, images, symbols and space of religious devotion.

In an attempt to address this point from a scholarly view, I had the chance to interview Sizwe Sithole, who is one of the scholars doing studies on AICs Zion Ethiopians, and whose work I have discussed in the literature review chapter of this study. Sithole (on Zoom, 19/10/2022) said that it is still challenging to open inclusive spaces in Zion Churches. He says this in reference to his personal experience as a transgender person who is coming from AIC and having done studies in Zion churches. He asserted that the amount of silence of gender nonconforming people in Zion churches rises from the socialisation and normalisation of the church uniform that is deeply embedded in the heteronormativity and regulations of procreation. In other words, in terms of who wears what, there is an anxiety about the risk of rejection by one's family, community, and especially the church, because in these groups of individuals there is often concern about what would happen if the church finds out about their sexuality.

Sithole during the interview further attested that in his study, 'An exploration of religio-cultural concepts of transgender identities in Ethiopian Zionist churches in the Midlands, KZN (2019)', some participants have highlighted that conforming is a better and safer option, even though they have to live two completely separate lives – one inside the church and one outside the church. What Sithole (2019) attests to, is that this conforming, and the living of two lives, have been coping mechanisms for the queer community in faith spaces for centuries; one can look at Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) as evidence. As a key scholar in Borderlands theory Anzaldúa (1987) uses her oral art to paint a picture in our minds of the religio-cultural challenges she went through as a lesbian Catholic woman. She submits that she faced challenges of being seen as a rebel because of her sexual behaviour, which was seen to be against the religio-cultural heteronormative of *Chicanos* (Anzaldúa 1987). In her book she maintains 'we are afraid of being abandoned by the mother, the culture and *la raza* (the race), for being unacceptable, faulty, damaged. To avoid rejection some of us conform to values of the culture, push the unacceptable parts into shadows' (Anzaldúa, 1987: 20). When Anzaldúa (1987) says 'we', she is referring to the queer community. She further speaks metaphorically of how they, as queer individuals, would try to discard their homosexuality because they wanted to be accepted by the society of heteronormativity (Anzaldúa 1987).

Anzaldúa (1987) is a hybrid of Chicano-Latino, however, neither of her cultures accept her and when she illustrates her experiences on borderlands, she says it is not a comfortable territory to live in, and it is a place full of contradictions. Hence, she continues to maintain that she is a border woman. In her book, Anzaldúa (1987) speaks about the level of conformity she once had for the very same cultures that denied her because of her sexuality, which still brought high levels of frustration to her, because in both these cultures she was living on borderlands. Here I draw a common pattern to what Anzaldúa (1987) and Sithole (2019) argue in their work and drawing from their different contexts. I am witnessing the same pattern of conformity mechanism that Anzaldúa (1987) and Sithole (2019) attest to in their studies. It is visible in this study when you note how gender-nonconforming people were not comfortable to participate. By this, one can deduce that the level of silence that I initially referred to in this chapter, speaks to the conformity level that the gender non-conforming people or community have succumbed to because of fear of being rejected by society and all-important structures in their lives.

Moreover, when one closely examines Anzaldúa's (1987) work, she continues to use her creativity in oral art to express and embody her frustration by alternating both languages (Spanish-Mexican and English-US). She did this purposefully (alternating both her Chicano languages) with an intention of embodying and embracing, but also of wanting the reader to experience or imagine the level of frustrations she and her body went through in her culture just by reading her work. Another reason that she continues to write in her native language may be another form of protest, acknowledging how borderlands and colonisation rely heavily on the use of the coloniser's language, and using both languages shows her constant border crossing. She expressed this in one of her poems, *Life in the Borderland*, when she wrote 'To live in the borderlands means you are neither *hispana india negra espanola ni gabacha, eres mestiza, mulata*, half-breed caught in the crossfire between camps while carrying all five races on your back not knowing which side to turn to, run from' (Anzaldúa, 1987:20).

6.1.1 Pros and cons of a church uniform

The initial objective of this study is to critically evaluate the impact of uniforms in the Zion Church, looking at its advantages and disadvantages. This is motivated by the fact that many authors such as Haddad (2016), Kiernan (1979) and Seeley (1984) write about and study AICs in ways that portray one side only, which is a largely the positive side of church uniform. Almost all above mentioned scholars have attested that church uniform gives recognition, respect, integrity and status to its adherents. This may be the reason Seeley (1984) asserts that AICs offer benefits to their members, which is true and a good thing, given the apartheid history

in South Africa or African countries. However, moving beyond the colonial era, questions such as Which members of AICs are really getting benefits from church? or Are all members honestly benefiting from AICs? are necessary. While I was interviewing participants, it was clearly indicated that church uniforms in Zion churches indeed have their good and bad sides. However, seven out of the fourteen participants felt that the uniform has disadvantages that have an adverse impact on women and persons in the LGBTIQ+ community, and these seem to outweigh the advantages highlighted by other scholars who write about church uniform in AICs. The following participant narratives attest to this understanding:

Participant 3: *'My church uniform is important to me because I feel like I belong when I am wearing it and when I am not wearing it for some reasons like I am on my periods or I went kwamathanda nhliziyu (Slept at boyfriend's house). I do not feel or enjoy the service. Amandla asengubeni (the power is in the church uniform).* 16 May 2022

Participant 4: *'As much as wearing church uniform is good, the disadvantage of wearing a uniform is that people think you are no longer human hence you can't make mistakes they themselves. That is why other people don't like churches with uniform because the spotlight also makes people to monitor your behavior'* 21 August 2022

Participant 5: *'My church uniform reminds me that when I enter the church door ngingu mkhokheli wabantu abasha (I am a youth advisor). I leave and try to forget all my problems and troubles so that I can be there for izingane zami (church youth). I must be careful about how I conduct myself in front of them... because I am their leader and I must lead by example. Furthermore, when I am wearing my uniform, it not advisable to be upset, angry, to shout because God don't like that. In addition, I must first go to another umkhokheli in a different position to confess what has been bothering me and she has to take holy water and sprinkle me before I can wear my uniform.'* 21 August 2022

Participant 1: *'oh, my child... When I am wearing my church uniform, I feel differentI feel like I can conquer everything that I am facing. Most of all, I feel like the Holy Spirit is with me from the time I wear this uniform till the time I take it off. Usually, in the congregation, we have night services.* 21 August 2022

So when I am wearing my uniform, I do not feel scared that I will get mugged or something bad can happen because I am walking with the Holy Spirit.'

Participant 2: *'I love my church uniform 100%. I wouldn't want to change my church uniform. It makes me to look unique and different, it also shows that you go to church and that gives you isthunzi (respect). More to that, whenever I am wearing church uniform other people say they also wish they came with me to church because of how beautiful and clean my uniform is'* 16 May 2022

Participant 6: *'Changing a church uniform is a big step my child and I don't like to change my church uniform. If we change the uniform, then where would be the difference between us those churches whose members wear suits and kick and bhoboza shoes (formal shoes). We are known as uZayoni (Zionist) just because of how we wear.'* 21 August 2022

The above participants have shown that the uniform is sacred and it makes them feel part of the church, special, respected and recognised in spaces where danger is inevitable. This is not subjective to them only, but they believe that the communities that they live in see them as good individuals who are humble and have good moral values, but mostly as persons who have a Zionist identity. Furthermore, Participant 2 expressed that some people desire to be Zionists just by seeing Zionist members who wear their church uniform well, and keep the uniform clean. Participant 1 commented that uniform gives them courage, it makes them feel protected whether in the morning, during the day, or at night. They also commented that through the strength that they get from church uniform, they can walk a long distance by themselves, which is something that they would not even consider doing when they are wearing their ordinary clothing.

Participant 3 speaks about how her body feels out of place when not wearing church uniform during a church service. Through the lens of structural functionalism theory, I posit that one reason for Participant 3's experience is that the underlying purpose of all ceremonials is expression and transmission of sentiments, which help to regulate one's behaviour in conforming to society's needs. Hence, according to Brown (1980) there is a need to probe the meaning of the custom. However, one cannot be ignorant to the spiritual aspect that seems to be embedded in a church uniform, expressed by participants from other studies such as Haddad (2016), Brown (1996) and Kiernan (2016) but more specifically, the participants of this study. This links to what I discussed in Chapter 2 of this study. Scholars such as Kiernan (2016:19), in 'The Weapons of Zion', have also highlighted that the church uniform has functioned as a healing tool that heals any type of illness and oppression, and it also functions as a tool that assists people to escape the oppressive realities of life. Most women, young and old,

commented on the spiritual element that is embedded in church uniform and they link it with hopefulness and protection through every reality struggle. I am not ignorant to the fact that church uniform is paramount to AICs' members of this study, but I am also taking into consideration other studies that deal with church uniform. It is clear that there is a spiritual and supernatural aspect that AICs members believe church uniforms have.

For this reason, I submitted earlier that the aim of this study is not to remove the aspect of church uniform in the Zion Church. Instead, I advocate and propose a shift in the uniform to accommodate and include marginalised bodies. The church uniform conveys so much overarching power over people's lives, and gives so much courage, respect, protection, hope and dignity, all of which contribute to humanity. Hence, through proposing that church uniform should be asexual, I am advocating that the contemporary African societies, by openly welcoming the LGBTIQ+ community, would be declaring their greater protection – one which society cannot guarantee – in order to embody full humanity. This is in pursuit of the practical side of liberation theology, because as Mazibuko (2021:15) attested in her study, South Africa seems to be showing acceptance in its constitutional laws, which clearly support lesbian, gays, bisexual, transgender, intersexual, questioning and asexual LGBTIQ+ persons.. However, the voices of LGBTIQ+ people continue to be silenced by homophobic churches and societies in South Africa.

Participant 5, as a youth leader (Umkhokheli), unconsciously showed that the uniform does restrict your behaviour because there are certain things you cannot do in order to be in an 'acceptable' state to wear the church uniform. She stated this as if it is a good thing to switch off one's emotions regardless of what the body feels, just because of a church uniform. Moreover, it came out as an expectation of her from the church because she is a youth leader. In Radcliffe-Brown's (1980) terms, when some part of an organism is unable to, or fails to perform its function adequately, diseases follow, which may lead to death if not checked. He further attests that in the case of an organic structure, it can be identified by strictly using objective criteria to distinguish disease from health or pathological from normal (Radcliffe-Brown, 1980). However, it is different when it comes to societies, and one can only diagnose 'societal diseases' on the basis of certain standards or rules.

As he continues to explain this, Radcliffe-Brown (1980) employs the scientific terms *eunomia* and *dysnomia*. He defines *eunomia* as good societal order or social health, and *dysnomia* as a disorder or social ill-health (Radcliffe-Brown 1980). When he applied these terms, he asserted

that *eunomia* of society refers to the harmonious working together of its parts, or functional unity of societal institutions to create consistency in the system (Radcliffe-Brown 1980). Therefore, what Participant 5 is highlighting, is that through church uniform, congregants are reminded of the need to create and maintain consistency in the institution so that it will continue to contribute ‘meaningfully’ to the system to avoid its elimination of members from the church, because individuals are occupants and are replaceable in societies.

This analysis allows one to think that the Zion churches’ patriarchal socio-religious system, together with culture, has normalised the ‘surveillance tactic’ which is automatically silencing women in the church. Participant 5 further attests to what Oduyoye has previously highlighted, which is that African women are always told to be silent and submissive in the face of injustices and oppression (2001:30). Participant 3 and 4’s comments also show that church uniform does restrict, or rather forbid some behaviours. In order to wear a church uniform, one must be pure and not engage in behaviours that are seen as impure by the church or community at large.

Participant 4: *‘Our church uniform gives us common identity... we come from different backgrounds ...most of us...humble backgrounds so the uniform helps us to cover our backgrounds. You go to church without being worried about who will see your financial status through the clothes you wearing because you know us men when you wear clothes that are not from a certain brand ..people don’t take you serious even izintombi(ladies). Nevertheless, I believe izivatho ziyingubo yamandla (church uniform is a powerful uniform) and we all need spiritual power.’ 21 August 2022*

The above participant made it clear that having a church uniform offers relief; one does not have to worry about their financial background, because in the societies that we live in, one’s financial status is measured by the brands of clothes they wear.

6.1.2 Re-imagining gender-inclusive patterns

The second objective of this research is to reimagine a gender-inclusive pattern that may open a safe space to accommodate gender-diverse church members through symbols such as church uniform. During interviews, the participants indicated that they are aware that there are people who are gender or sexually nonconforming in their congregations. However, the conversation of accommodation and advocating for these bodies through reimagining symbols such as church uniform, is still taboo. This is because the church uniform is perceived as a symbol that has always been part of the Zion Church in the form of male and female uniforms, and it often seems as if there is no way around it because of the rigid thought that biological sex is equal to

gender identity or even sexual orientation. Below are participants' answers to the interview question, who is allowed to wear a church uniform in your church or congregation? The aim was to see whether it is hard or easy to reimagine gender-inclusive patterns through symbols such as church uniform, which have so much meaning for African Zionists.

Participant 7: *'In the congregation that I am under, everyone who has chosen God under the congregation is allowed to wear a church uniform ...yes men and women.'* 16 May 2022

Participant 8: *'Same as participant 7, everyone who can afford the uniform can wear it but it has to be prayed for before wearing it. Sometimes the congregation goes to an extent of buying church uniforms for members that cannot afford except those who are pregnant, on their periods, engaged in sexual intercourse and those who are ill cannot wear church uniforms.... yes, by everyone I mean men and women.'* 16 May 2022

Participant 9: *'In our congregation, a person going through initiation (ukuthwasa) is not allowed to wear a church uniform until aphothule (initiation graduation). Even after that, there are certain rituals needed to be done before that person can wear uniform...rituals like cleansing and ukuhlanganiswa kwe dlozi nesthunywa sebandla (connecting that person's ancestors with the congregation's sprits and angels)* 16 May 2022

The above responses from participants show how the Zionist Church's uniform conforms to gender binaries. When participants answered that 'everyone' wears the church uniform, a follow-up question was asked to understand the reason for their assertion. It became clear that 'everyone' meant cisgender men and cisgender women; there was no in-between. Participants further indicated that even though 'everyone' might be allowed a chance to wear the church uniform, some people still need to go through certain procedures or rituals first. Nwoye (2017) attests to this by highlight

ting in the 'Africentric theory of personhood' that rituals in Africa are there to reverse the state of impureness, and they are conducted with the aim to protect against shame of the face or soul. Furthermore, participants were asked how their church uniform informs their gender and gender roles in the church and society. They were also asked whether they would like it if their churches would change the uniform to a new type. If the answer to the second question was yes, they were asked which form they would like the church uniform to take.

Participant10: *It reminds me that as a woman, I should wear appropriate clothes so that I will be respected. I shouldn't wear clothes that reveal my thighs or breasts so that people can respect me. Clothes such as long dresses, skirts, long sleeved t-shirts or shirts but mostly inside church it is important to cover ourselves so that men in the congregation don't see our bodies so that they will marry us. So, we wear staff dresses long ones, with doeks and those who have children but no married like me they put isiphika to show that. For men, young and old, they wear long blazers or jackets (ijazi) and white pants and they carry staves I am really comfortable in my current uniform so I wouldn't want it to change.*16 May 2022

Participant 8: *In my congregation, if you are a woman and you have a church uniform you are not allowed or shouldn't been seen wearing trousers or pants regardless of where you are. But we do it because ey ...we are rebellious. Yes, I would like for our church uniform to change to the one used in the olden days by our grandparents, where everyone wore umnarazetha, which was affordable and was the same for everyone. I think it can allow also the people you are talking about...yes gender non-conforming to have a safe space.*16 May 2022

Participant 11: *My uniform shows that I am honourable as a man which is the desired characteristic of being a man. My uniform shows that I am a straight man because we don't have a uniform for people who are bisexual or what. It confirms that I am a male who is a man, and it shows I am respectable. I have never thought of having a different church uniform, I like the one I have. Yes, we do have homosexual people in our churches but we grew up only having male and female uniform which can't change now.*21 August 2022

What Participant 11 comments speaks to the restrictive patterns and prescriptive nature of a church uniform that are directly linked to gender roles that constitute the accepted heteronormative patterns of sexuality in those who wear them. Thereby establishing not only a visual identity for religion, but also gender identity to exert control over the individual's body. Sithole (2019) argues that gender identities are informed by social and cultural beliefs.

Therefore, gender identities become a social phenomenon that informs how we engage in our society in general

Radcliffe-Brown(1980) describes the phenomenon that Sithole (2019) is referring to as a technique of maintaining groups in solidarity in order to produce a harmonious society because *dysnomia* leads to functional discontinuity or inconsistency, which leads to social health struggles and may therefore lead to structural change. However, Epprecht writes that “society also had ways and means to explain why some people did not always easily fit the heterosexual marital ideals and norms. Whether that was because they refused to marry or they were caught in same-sexual practices, such people existed and were known to exist.” (2008:9). This clearly identifies the need for troubling social structures that continue to convey communication that LGBTQIA+ bodies do not exist in our societies, as church uniform speaks to performance of social roles in constructing identities. Proposing a shift for church uniform to be asexual is therefore seen as a good start to the troubling process.

Religion such as Christianity and AICs movement have, to a certain extent, made a considerable effort to influence how certain bodies should be perceived in the contemporary societies, including the churches (Kisitu & Siwila, 2006:186). Another important factor to consider is the influence of the dualistic nature of AICs as a religion rebelling against the dominant Western culture, and as a religion within which Africans perceive their full humanness. Through their meaningful symbols such as church uniform, AICs show a clearly visible interplay of the African religion, colonialism and patriarchy. Furthermore, women and other bodies have become second to last citizenships in faith spaces through these symbols that maintain patriarchy.

One may argue that another possible cause of such difficulty in discussing sex and sexual identities within the AICs, is their stance on gender roles, which is binary and informs their hold on heteronormativity (Sithole, 2019:95). I concur with Sithole (2019) and other studies that were done in Africa, that heteronormativity of binaries is strongly embedded in the colonised African culture. I further concur with Settler (2018), who advocates for a postcolonial theology when writing about borderlands and religion. Positing a compelling point, Settler (2018)states that ‘post-colonialism is concerned with unmasking the guises of colonialism and in particular the ways in which colonialism institutionalised differentiation between native and settler.’ Furthermore, he asserts that ‘post-colonialism necessitates revision and restructuring of established relations between power and knowledge’ (Settler, 2018:103).

The aim of this study, by using borderlands, is to contribute positively in the further development of African theology, mostly in AICS, so that faith spaces can be a safe space for the marginalised. Doing this will require careful re-reading and revision of history, whilst interrogating, deconstructing and decolonising the knowledge that has been imposed by colonisers on Africans. One of the ways to do this is through restructuring of symbols that are so important to AIC members. This does not only open a chance to decolonise what constitutes Zion churches or AIC, but also how religious knowledge and work is produced in the context of sex, gender and sexual orientation.

Borderland is born out of the experience of alienation from and discomfort with the dominant culture that denies others as equals and rejects them for all that they represent (Anzaldúa, 1987). By understanding what Anzaldúa (1987) means with this explanation of borderland, moments of rebellion as coping mechanism for people living in borders in Zion churches are also understandable. In her book, Anzaldúa (1987) highlights her moments of rebellion in the form of running away from homeland to find herself; her own intrinsic nature buried under the personality that has been imposed on her (Anzaldúa, 1987:16). What Anzaldúa (1987) is not emphasising as much is that even though she fought a geographical border, she took her Catholic religion with her. Settler (2018) _ also reminds us that when people move, they take their religion with them (Settler, 2018:100). This brings me to my point, which is showing the importance of making affirmative and inclusive changes in faith spaces, as it will open spaces for people with different societal identities to embody their experiences. Moreover, since South Africa is a diverse country, religion, culture, ethnicity and languages are the main components that a person will take with them everywhere they go, whether through migration or emigration. Furthermore, through structural functionalism, we understand that social institutions are interdependent, which means we cannot have one without the other. Therefore, multiple identities will intersect. Henceforth, as one of its objectives, this study proposes a shift in uniform phenomena as an attempt to shift societal needs which must be constantly satisfied by societal institutions such as the church.

6.1.3 Proposing a shift in the uniform phenomenon.

The last objective of this study was to propose a shift in the uniform phenomenon toward the formulation of a non-gender binary church uniform. The following responses were given by participants:

Participant 12: *'...well it not easy to change church uniform even though we know about homosexuals but that cannot be the reason to change our church uniform because even in society people do not agree to the way the live.'* 21 August 2022

Participant 13: *'It will take time for us to get used to this new way of living (that there are other bodies which do not conform to the binary of genders). Yes, there may be people who are gender-nonconforming in our congregation, but it is still hard to talk about how to accommodate them because they do not come out and complain about uniforms. Even though changing a church uniform is a step, but today you never know this could be your child and I wouldn't want my own child to feel excluded in the church where I am leading.'* 21 August 2022

Participant 14: *'Maybe if we could do like other churches where everyone wears their ordinary clothes could be much better because I can't see a uniform where these groups (Homosexual and Heterosexual) of people can agree on. But then that means there will be rituals like Ukuhlonywa kwezikhali and Ukukhulekelwa kwabangulayo (praying for and with those who are sick) that won't be performed in a church anymore because those rituals are performed by people wearing a specific uniform.'* 16 May 2022

In connection with the above objective, it is clear that in Zion churches, there is a normative of the binary through the use of church uniform, and this uniform clearly informs gender roles. In the following section I will analyse the above data and I incorporate it with the main theory of this study.

6.2 Data analyses

Mercy Makuwatsine writes, 'when one talks about the church they associate the church with a type of a uniform' (Makuwatsine, 2012;). However, the deeply embedded culture of patriarchy that comes with that uniform remains overlooked and is normalised. In 1995, Oduyoye claimed that AICs, as patriarchal as they are, accept the material services of women, but do not listen to their voices, seek their leadership, or welcome their initiatives (Oduyoye, 1995:172). Anzaldúa further argues that 'through our mothers, culture gave us mixed signals' (1987:18). Confirming Anzaldúa's (1987) argument, Moyo(2004) posits that African mothers are the transmitters and custodians of culture – the acceptable beliefs and behaviours that cisgender men make or create (Moyo, 2004:1). The following themes emerged from my analysis of the interview data.

6.2.1 Uniform as the source of identity

According to Colin Skelton ‘even before the church services have begun, the Zionist are already performing their culture, their religious identities, through what they wear and through objects they carry’ (2009:56). This is very evident when one considers the response of Participant 2, who spoke about how people from their community desire the Zionist identity because they saw how he (Participant 2) embraced and wore their church uniform. Many participants of this study indicated that the church uniform makes them feel that they belong to the congregation, and have the recognised identity of a Zionist. They also indicated that the adorning of the church uniform does have a huge effect on how they feel during the services. Participant 3’s answer is evidence to that too. Furthermore, there is a sacramental element to wearing the church uniform. By sacramental element, this study means that church uniform is a sign of one being born again and is key to spiritual essence which is vital for someone who is in a committed relationship with the supernatural power – in this case, God. Participant 14 said, ‘*I feel like an angel when I am wearing my church uniform, especially when I have ironed and starched my uniform,.....*’. Participant 14’s comment suggests that there is a feeling of pureness that comes with the church uniform. In Chapter 2 of her book *movimientos de rebeldia y las culturas que traicionan (Movements of rebellion and cultures that betray)*, Anzaldúa (1987) attests that humans fear the supernatural: the undivine, especially the ‘animal impulses’ such as sexuality, the unconscious, and the unknown; and the divine, the superhuman, the god in us.

For this reason, people would understandably have the urge to feel innocent or pure, because according to Jerry Gill (2019) it seems schizophrenic for one to even start thinking of the enfleshment³ of Divine Reality in a human form and as something that is achievable in this reality. This is because God the Father is believed to be a spiritual being, which is why there are no physical manifestations of God to people (Islam & Islam, 2015:5). However, Gill brings us the revelation that it is indeed possible to imagine enfleshment of divine reality in human form (Gill, 2019:9). He continues to use examples from the Holy Bible, quoting the biblical accounts of Jesus’ activities where there was no reference to any division between his divinity and his human form. He does this with the intention to give evidence that enfleshment of Divine Reality in a human form is very much possible for people of faith, and especially Christians.

³ Jerry H. Gill defines enfleshment as a holistic perspective that integrates Christ’s divinity and humanity (2019:10). In other words, enfleshment is a holistic perspective that integrates fully Divine and fully Human form.

Therefore, there is no need to have profane and sacred activities that will lead to a conclusion of overriding the integrity of a person, because even Christ our Saviour had many identities that he embraced, most of which were of marginalised bodies. Indeed, Jesus also embodied the identities of both an active human being and an active divine power in one body. There is intersectionality of identities, the entry to both worlds.

However, not all Zionists know what the church uniform means to them individually. Thus, the adorning of a church uniform was imposed on them through the socialisation and the pressure of wanting a Zionist membership. This speaks to what Sithole highlighted in the interview: through the church, the society at large decides who wears what, and how. This clearly shows that the social relations of gender are strongly at play and problematic in understanding identity, and understanding the power dynamics of social differentiation. This explains why the participants of this study showed that they see the church uniform as a group identity, which is that of a Zionist, and a gender identity in relation to the biological sex and roles that are linked with gender roles. Seemingly, they take pride in their uniform because it makes them a part of an accepted group in religious society. Participants' comments suggest that church uniform, as much as it gives identity, also comes with commitment and responsibility for members of a group. For almost all Zionist church members, baptism is essential and is seen as the only route one can take in order to become a full member and to identify with the church and its teachings, and therefore one must be 'saved'. That is why baptism is seen to offer a fundamental spiritual experience for many followers or members (Brown, 1996; Haddad, 2016). However, on the other side of baptism, congregants attain their positionality in relation to the power structure of the church by using the church uniform that has been issued to them.

According to Masenya (1997), it is important for Africans to redefine themselves using their voices, because given the history of the marginalisation of Africans and of women in South Africa, everything was defined for us by Westerners, including the rich heritage of our African culture. Khuzwayo-Magwaza (2021) helps us to understand the reason for what Masenya (1997) said by stating that Africans are at a disadvantage, because previously we only believed in oral traditions. She continues to assert that many African epistemologies are seen as something that never existed, because they were undocumented, and this served as a loophole and privilege for the colonisers. As a result, that has led to an identity crisis (Masenya, 1997:439). I concur with both Masenya and Khuzwayo-Magwaza(2021) that because we have no official documentation of African epistemologies and philosophies, the colonisers found a

way in and now Africans are in the midst of an identity crisis. Even Kwame Gyekye (1988), who is Ghanaian philosopher, attests to this. Gyekye (1988) argues that a well-cultured African individual, although originating from and inextricably bound to his family and community, possesses a clear concept of himself or herself as a distinct person of volition to self-identify.

Rebelling from the dominant Western culture is necessary; Anzaldúa(1987) encourages marginalised bodies to find strength to rebel in oppressive situations. The dominant culture has created its version of reality (Orozco-Mendoza, 2008:42) and through the Borderlands theory, this research confirms multiple ways of knowing, which involve both the dominant culture's and African ways of knowing. Furthermore, through borderlands lenses, this study gains the ability to legitimately bring African ethno-socio-cultural historical accounts into light for fellow Africans in faith spaces as a starting point in deconstructing-reconstructing our identities. Through the state of in-betweenness, *Nepantla*, we confront and reaffirm our own identities as Africans in faith spaces under AICs, which include, but are not limited to, doctrine, philosophies, and epistemologies. Through borderlands, we realise and understand that there are other ways of looking and understanding reality. This makes awareness of borders that have been and still are problematic point through our use of the physical eye. For example, there are other sexualities, philosophies, referencing styles, and ways of thinking– the list is long – to show that there are other ways of knowing (Anzaldúa & Keating, 2000: 229). If one takes a closer look, one cannot shy away from the fact that AICs, even in research, were seen as 'uneducated' by white male scholars such as Oosthuizen, Anderson and Sundkler, and AICs therefore pose dangerous challenges to historic missionary churches. Against this backdrop, it is safe to conclude that previous studies on AICs were not about AICs at all, but about the researchers and their churches, whose culture aligns with the dominant ways of thinking. For this very reason, the role of religion in the life of Africans gives rise to many questions. When Gloria Anzaldúa(1987) wrote a book on borderlands, *La Frontera, The New Mestiza*, she wrote about challenges of gender, identity, race and colonialism as experienced by her – a lesbian Catholic woman of colour, who grew up in a very patriarchal home in her own marginalised culture. She continues to emphasise that 'culture expects women to show greater acceptance and commitment to the value system than men. The culture and the church insist that women are subservient to males' (Anzaldúa, 1987:16).

What Anzaldúa (1987) speaks to is what Avtar Brah(1996) describes as difference as social relation, which she further explains as the ways in which the difference is constituted and organised into systematic relations through cultural, economic, and political discourses and

institutional practices (Brah, 1996). This is important, as it has a link with the historical and contemporary trajectory of material circumstances and cultural practices, which produce the conditions for construction of group identities. Anzaldúa(1987) uses her writing skills to create the borderlands in order to re-appropriate her mind, body, soul, and voice, and more importantly, her own epistemologies. In this sense, we can infer that part of what is at stake in Borderlands is the *Nepantla* state, which is central to Anzaldúa's(1987) writing, as it is the process of killing the colonised self by challenging, confronting, or reaffirming our own identity in order for any person to have self-representation, or *autohistoria*, in Anzaldúa's language. This speaks to the deconstruction of existing gender relations and overarching power structures.

6.2.2. Uniform has a spiritual element.

Control of the how and the what of adorning the church uniform and the powers they give out is vested in the inspiration of the congregation's prophet (umhprofethi) whose directives are issued only in the context of public healing (Kiernan, 1979:14). According to Kiernan in *Prophet and Preacher: An Essential Partnership in the Work of Zion* (1976) describes that a role of a prophet in a church is to heal through prayer and divine powers. Through these powers they are able to communicate with the sick and they are able to divine the cause of affliction and prescribe a remedy (Kiernan 1976:358). In Zionist churches, prophets can be male or female. Prophets while consulting with an individual over an illness that is afflicting him, the prophet may then recommend the church uniform that they must wear permanently which will act as protection against bouts of illness. The existence of the Holy Spirit is very real for Zionists. The centrality of the belief in the Holy Spirit as both an entity and an experience are a central reference point in verbal religious expression amongst the Zionists. Participants of this study showed that there is a sacred spiritual value that is attached to church uniform. Participant 10 said, '*When I have a headache, I always put my green doek and I do not drink headache pills and it works.*'

In 'Dress as a Mark of Differentiation: The Religious Symbolism of Dress in African Initiated Churches', Vengayi and Mwandayi (2014) deal with detailed colours for AICs vestments. They attest that the colour green represents life (Vengayi & Mwandayi, 2014:207). This is the same colour that Participant 10 referred to when she described the colour of her doek that helps to cure her headaches. Other participants commented that even when they are walking alone, be it during the day or night, they do not feel scared because they know that when they are wearing their church uniform, the Holy Spirit is with them, and they are protected. Participant 9

commented that when they wear a church uniform they feel powerful, and whenever they are sick they will put on their church uniform, feel power coming, and then they will pray. After that, they will feel much better. However, when the participants talked about feeling better, it pointed to more than physical healing. It also suggests that the uniform covers their physical struggles, and provides mental and spiritual healing. Furthermore, Participant 3 commented that she does not enjoy the service when she is not wearing church uniform,

‘My church uniform is important to me because I feel like I belong when I am wearing it and when I am not wearing it for some reasons.... I do not feel or enjoy the service. Amandla asengubeni (the power is in the church uniform).’

This suggests that she does not feel the presence of the Holy Spirit when she is wearing normal clothes without uniform which speaks to the amount of power that the church uniform gives to its adherents. Participant 3 comments also speaks to church uniform as a constant force that keeps bodies in their place, which is also in relation to gender roles that maintain the difference as *us* against *them*.

6.2.3. Uniform as meant to conceal individual \financial status.

Most Zionist congregants have made it clear that their church uniform makes them feel equal. Participant 14 commented on this by saying,

‘Church uniform makes us to feel the same and equal because it is the same colour and sometimes same design, usually there is one person from the congregation who makes or sew uniform for us and at times a person who can’t afford uniform the congregation members or church leaders combine money to buy uniform for that individual.’

According to most participants, this ensures no-one can really see the financial background of a person when they are wearing church uniform. However, this is not completely true, because Participant 14 further commented that maybe this would have been the case a long time ago when our grandparents used to wear *Umnazaretha*, which are the white robes that Brown (1996) speaks about. However, this is not the case anymore. Brown (1996) continues to insist that even though these robes look similar, they somehow convey social status and differentiate gender. This shows that even the robes are gendered, and they are in relation to existing power structures. Participant 14 speaks of church uniform fabrics,

‘The types of fabrics that are used today when making a staff dress or Ijazi are not similar. From looking at the fabrics you can tell who has more money than who. So, we can clearly see

your financial status through the fabric of your church uniform, yes the colour can be the same but fabrics talks a lot.'

Church uniform, apart from being a symbol of AICs for supposedly expressing anticolonial sentiments during the nineteenth and twentieth century, did not reject completely the European style of fabrics; they just incorporated indigenous elements into the church uniform as their expression of their discontentment.

In speaking about the difference in fabrics, Participant 14 shows that the different fabrics speak to the immediate or visual inequality that church uniform presents in terms of economic power. This results in hierarchical power dynamics amongst members of the congregation without looking at the number of garments to see a person's status. Research by Dawid Venter in 1998 points out that even though the number of AICs are growing exponentially, they draw recruits from the poorest sectors of society which has the lowest income and education levels (Venter, 1998:415). I only concur with the first part of Venter's (1998) assertion, but I disagree with the second part, because no matter how high a woman might climb on the education or professional ladder, through church symbols, she is constantly reminded of her assigned gender and sexuality roles and their meaning by traditional beliefs, and religious and cultural practices. In addition to this, research has only focused on showing that in African societies, women's places are always domesticated, and men or boys are always given opportunities to go study or work (Rwafa, 2012). However, what is interesting is that most AICs are made up of more women than men.

Economic power dynamics are established amongst members through the use of different fabrics of a church uniform, which is a meaningful symbol in both faith spaces and in society. These patterns of an unequal society are co-opting church garments to convey these power and economic differences in an unequal society such as South Africa. This is still legacy of colonialism, and it still contradicts the initial aim of the creation of AICs – to rebel against and deconstruct any colonial legacy of inequality, especially amongst genders, and to create inclusivity.

6.2.4 Reinforce ritual performance

In Africa, rituals are important and are performed for different reasons. One of the reasons is to reverse the state of impureness of the body as discussed earlier. However, the factor that is often ignored with regards to this, is that reinforcement of gender and sexuality is visible in the performing of rituals. In African culture, when a person dies, certain rites are performed to

deliver the spirit of the dead person into the world beyond the grave (Chinyowa, 2005). This world is known as *kwelamathonga*, 'the world of the ancestors' (Chinyowa, 2005). Chinyowa (2005) further maintains that this ritual is done by a male elder in the family, and usually women are not allowed to talk during this ritual. This is a practical example of what I have previously put forward as a concern of all African womanist theologians – that women's voices are silenced, and women are spoken to and spoken of through certain African practices. Chinyowa (2005) further explains that during this ritual, an older male call and evokes the names of the departed ancestors in their hierarchical orders, informing them about the death of one in their lineage. Yet, women are only responsible for the reinforcing of young women to be 'good women' through virginal testing, and this ritual is only done by women (Tsara, 2020:120).

This was also evident in this study when Participant 10 spoke about how the church uniform reminds them to wear 'appropriate clothes', which do not reveal their bodies, so that they will increase their opportunities of being chosen as someone's wife. This means that the more you prove to be a good woman, the higher your chances are of being chosen, and this comes with the prestigious status of being married and being a woman who can keep a man. This notion also speaks to what it really means to be a woman in African contemporary society, which leads to my next point. In African societies, loss of virginity before marriage usually results in stigmatisation and punishment, even in faith spaces. Tsara (2020) maintains that the punishment that girls go through when they lose their virginity before marriage, reinforces other girls to get married at a young age. What Tsara (2020) is attesting to is one of the struggles that women face, which results in the high prevalence of HIV and AIDS, domestic abuse and sexually transmitted diseases amongst young South African women, as found by other scholars. Bhana and Pattman (2011) attests that in South Africa, it has been recognised that the operation of gender power within heterosexual relationships heightens young women's vulnerability to the diseases mentioned above. The social construction of heterosexuality operates in ways that are based on men's power over women (Bhana & Pattman, 2011:962-963).

All cultures and religions regulate sex, yet permit sexual freedom that could even be counter normative; some more than others. This means that perceptions around bodies that are marginalised and always controlled, such as women's bodies, are directly linked to sexuality. I concur with Rwafa when he maintains that in Africa, men exercise power over women by marrying not one, but many women, which means being given a freedom by both culture and society to have a lot of sex, but only with women as the heteronormative reinforcement. This

also demonstrates how African culture and religion play a substantial role in constructions of masculinity versus femininity, which automatically allows patriarchy and hierarchies as operating principles in African societies. As previously discussed, African societies are greatly influenced by religion, which means that sexuality is about power for those who determine the ‘what, when, where and the how’ of sex, be it socio-economic or religio-cultural (Moyo, 2004:73).

The indigenous African religions practised the worshipping of gods and goddesses in the form of idols and ancient spirits, but the colonisation of Africa by Europeans caused a huge collapse of indigenous religions. For this reason, whenever African religion is discussed, it is presented primarily as a phallicist religion. The ‘tribal mind’ has, from the European standpoint, created religious rituals and gods in its own fear-ridden image. Therefore, Borderlands is a good theory for this study, because again Anzaldúa (1987) seems to take pride in her *Chicanos* history through referring to her indigenous gods and goddess as sources of some of the Aztec epistemologies to show that everybody has different identities and sides. Musa Dube (2014) also attests that reading texts and important books, like the Bible, in indigenous languages is very important. It assists us to discover and recognise how much the colonial ideology informed biblical translations (Dube, 2014:151).

6.2.5. Cultural performances

As few African theologians talk about women outside of marriage or family life, there is little awareness or interest in on-going theological reconstructions of the ‘feminine nature’ of God. Many researchers have conducted studies on culture, but there is little research on how culture interfere with socialisation and the reinforcement of gender roles in society through different cultural performances, starting at a very young age. Below, this study shows how culture is reinforced through cultural performances such as games that children play and through storytelling.

6.2.5.1. Children’s play (*umazindlu/ umasigcozi*)

African children’s play is different from Western children’s play. In KwaZulu-Natal there is a game called *umasigcozi*, (playing houses), where children from five years old to ten years old would impersonate and enact family roles such as father, mother, sons and daughters. Boys would mould clay or mud to make cattle and build houses or cut tree branches to make different weapons, whereas girls would be the ones preparing food for the boys using mud. According to Bandura (1977), children learn human behaviour through observation, modelling, and

imitation. In addition to that, Skinner (1963) claims that through reinforcement such as rewards and punishments, there is a good chance of getting desired behaviour in humans, especially children. The pattern of cultural socialisation in *umasigcozi* may be seen as that of complementary gender roles in relationships. This game reinforces or instils gender categories in boys and girls; it clearly shows power relations, a sense of individual and collective identity, roles and responsibilities. Chinyowa (2005) claims that through this type of play, children are learning and practising a way of life, because it manifests into adulthood.

6.2.5.2. Storytelling (*Izinganekwane*)

In Africa, storytelling is one of the most creative ways or arts to socialise young people. In the Zulu speaking community, these folktales are referred to as *Izinganekwane*. *Izinganekwane* is a native way to teach or equip people with required knowledge to survive in society. *Izinganekwane* usually takes place after people have finished doing their daily duties and it is mostly narrated by older women. It is never done during the day because it is believed you will grow horns or have misfortunes when you tell stories during the day. The above beliefs are motivations or discouragement so that people can focus on doing their work during the day and not focus on telling stories (Chinyowa, 2005). *Izinganekwane* allows people to have an imaginative journey of what would happen in the story, or whether if they ended up like the characters; it makes them feel, think and act. Sometimes storytelling is used to instil fears in people – this is also the case in churches when they interpret the scriptures.

Culture forms our beliefs and we perceive the version of reality that it communicates. Dominant paradigms – predefined concepts that exist as unquestionable and unchallengeable – are transmitted to us through culture (Anzaldúa, 1987). Culture is made by those in power, which is cisgender men. They make the rules and the law; women must obey and communicate them. The psychological borderlands, the sexual borderlands, and the spiritual borderlands are not particular to the southwest. In fact, the borderlands are physically present wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where the lower, middle and upper classes touch (Anzaldúa, 1987).

In the above paragraph, we are confronted with a notion of borderlands that does not exist physically, but which is, nonetheless, influential and powerful. These borderlands have been created with the intention of establishing differentiation. That is, they are socially produced to create hierarchies seeking to seize control over the fate of certain groups or try to keep others at distance. As previously explained, the very notion of a border implies people construct

binary categories such as *us* and *them*, which, most of the time, are incompatible, since the *us* gets preference over *them*. *Coatlicue*'s role in the borderlands is to 'balance dualities and fuse opposites' (Anzaldúa, quoted in Reuman, 2000:10). The first step is to take inventory. *Despojando, desgranando, quitando paja* (stripping, shelling, removing the straw). This step is a conscious rupture from all oppressive traditions of all cultures and religions. Anzaldúa (1987) communicates that rupture and she documents the struggle. She reinterprets history, and by using the new symbols, she shapes new myths. She adopts new perspectives toward the dark-skinned, women and queers (Anazaldua 1987). She strengthens her tolerance for ambiguity, and is willing to share, to make herself vulnerable to foreign ways of seeing and thinking. She surrenders all notions of safety of the familiar; she is able to transform herself (Anzaldúa, 1987:82-83).

6.2.6 Social status

Participant 5 commented that when you are in a leadership position, you ought to wear an extra garment over the general church uniform:

'when you are a youth leader you wear a blue robe with isiphika (cape) over the long white staff dress. The arch bishops wear different colour-vestments, it could be white, red, green or even black. We wear these colours depending on type of church services or rituals for example if kunkonzo yokukhulekela abagulayo (service to pray for the ill) we wear green and its big services like good Friday we wear white garments.' 21 August 2022

White church uniform is regarded as the basic church uniform, and has been the uniform that has been used over the years in Zion churches, but the group leaders and other authority individuals wear extra garments to indicate that they are in authority. For instance, a yoke, known as *isiphika*, for married female leaders. Men who are pastors, deacons, or an archbishop, wear vestments which have buttons from the collar downwards. These garments show inequality amongst congregants. They create the idea of *us* versus *them*. The *us* have the privilege of making the rules, laws and constitution of the congregation while *them* is left only with an option to conform. Ideological borderlands may be present when the social hierarchies presuppose that the world is composed by rigid and definite categories of superiority and inferiority. Superiority is commonly associated with male church leaders and other authoritative individuals, while inferiority is related to those who fall outside of the previous category and are considered different or defective. Borderlands also look at fixed structures of power, i.e. state officials, dominant culture, and economic and political elites.

It is evident that Zion churches have a strong hold on binary of genders, strongly embedded in both their African culture and the dominant Western culture, which inform their religious beliefs, values, constitutions and doctrines. In this chapter, through responses and analysis from the interviews it is clear that uniform plays an important role in the church. However, the responses from participants and my analysis further show not everything about church uniform is good, especially for women who encounter double oppression, and for other bodies that exist in Zion churches. This is where this study enters – to advocate for a new type of church uniform that will create safe and inclusive spaces for everyone. This could be a great initiative towards breaking the silence of gender nonconforming, or for every injustice that exists in AICs such as Zion churches, through the symbols that speak to the culture, constitutions and doctrines of the congregation.

This study does not seek to advocate for the total removal and ending the use of church uniforms. Instead, through the use of Borderlands Theory, it seeks to advocate for and propose a shift towards inclusive symbols, such as church uniform, as a form of confrontation, challenge, reaffirmation and auto-reconciliation. This will ensure that we, as Zionists, will be able to create consciousness around ancient myths and fiction stories, and how they constitute reality of different bodies that exist in society. In other words, through Borderlands theory we are now able to reaffirm our intersecting identities, we can reject colonial legacies in different spheres, and we can all occupy the same spaces without any hindrances or alienating other bodies. There are still myths and fiction stories about women and women's bodies in African societies and some are interlinked with biblical texts. One example of these is a Bible story about how Delilah became the reason for Samson's death, (see Judges 16) another story is about how Sodom became a sinful city because gays were having sexual intercourse (see Genesis 19). Therefore, deconstructing the myths, fiction stories and these biblical narratives about women's bodies in African societies calls for re-reading in our indigenous languages and reinterpretation of texts. This is an important process because myths and fiction stories speak to different key identity constructions. Therefore, for African societies to allow spaces for self-identity and embracing and the embodiment of one's experiences in the faith space, it is important to re-read and reinterpret biblical texts.

With regards to challenges encountered by this study during the recruitment and interviewing process, I realised that the silence and the responses to questions of this study was a clear

indication that I am only dealing with the tip of the iceberg, which is the church uniform, whereas the roots of the problem are factors such as doctrines. Hence, I cogitate the work of Chidester (1996, 2014) and Masuzawa (2005) when they argue that religion as we have come to know and understand it, is largely the product of imperial science and its inclination to classify and deny religious ways of being and knowing that do not fit into the Christian normative and theistic notion of religion. In the interview responses, some participants were not pleased with the fact that this study is trying to advocate for a different type of a church uniform, even though it is an asexual uniform. This might have been because the new suggestion threatens the roots of why and how the uniform is made, and all of these elements form a part of who they are. The questions from the participants seemed to show that they were concerned about having to change different doctrines and constitutions of the congregations in the name of being inclusive and accommodating.

Scholars such as Settler (2022) and Anzaldúa (1987) strongly advocate the necessity to allow marginalised bodies to embody their silence as human beings and to embody the silence of the physical body. Through data analysis of this study, it is evident that Zion churches in Pietermaritzburg, through current restrictive church uniform, clearly portray the interplay of power relations embedded in discourses, institution, and practices. Therefore, in an attempt to decolonise and restructure the power distribution among all bodies in the church, the current church uniform denies the first step of liberation theology, which is to confront, challenge and reaffirm identities, as it does not allow its members to fully embody the history of each and every member equally. The only image it portrays is colonised and diluted African culture. Hence, a shift in the Zion Church uniform to an asexual type of uniform, which will be the legitimate presentation of the body, is very important. This uniform will legitimise and restore marginalised bodies' humanity and integrity – in this case women and gender-nonconforming people in the church – as it allows everyone to be.

Questions or concerns may arise with regards to whether gender-nonconforming persons do or do not exist in Zion faith spaces, since they did not participate in this study. While I was doing snowball sampling, which is sampling that allows participants to refer each other to the researcher, it became evident that they gender-nonconforming persons do exist, as they referred me from one person to another in their comments, and some commented that they are not comfortable to be interviewed for this study. This suggests that for gender-nonconforming people, conforming has been their new home at the cost of living a double life: one inside

church and the other outside the church. This is because some people do not have the strength of rebellion that the *Borderlands* author, Gloria Anzaldúa (1987), had, because they have been silently groomed into the gender binary structures that are operating in the church. Furthermore, should a person identify across or out of the binaries, they are ‘signing a warrant to be left out’. As a result, it is not easy for them because every year in South Africa, millions of people across the country suffer physical, sexual, and psychological abuse and violence on account of their real or perceived sexual orientation (Mazibuko, 2021:10). The world is not a safe place (Anzaldúa, 1987:20), and the fear of being abandoned by the culture and religion in such societies is taking away the strength of rebellion.

As Anzaldúa(1987) introduced ‘Shadow Beast’ when she was referring to her sexuality, the very same term will be applied in this section when speaking about sexuality. Moving forward with the assertion made above, gender-nonconforming people of this study understand and acknowledge that the Shadow Beast will always be part of them, but theirs is different from Gloria’s because theirs can take orders from outside authorities. With this, I mean that they have decided to conform and take social orders that produced heteronormativity as their way of living, compared to be at the stage where they are rejected by their families, communities, and society. The reason why I appealed to structural functionalism by Radcliffe-Brown (1980) was to gain a deeper understanding and analyses of why these identities are maintained and reproduced in religious societies, including AICs like the Zion churches. I did this by looking at how society functions and communicates ‘correct’ messages in creating identities and their meaning to maintain social orders like patriarchy in faith spaces. What I have attested above is the practical example of how this theory works in Zion faith spaces.

I still strongly believe that churches or faith spaces must be a place where everyone feels safe and welcomed, regardless of their gender and sexuality. My viewpoint is that it is possible to propose a shift in church symbols such as church uniform, staves (*Izikhali*), doeks, and even the colours of the uniform, because the colours also limit the people who can perform certain rituals at that particular service. However, the colours’ issues and their limitations are not to be dealt with in this study. I suggest that we, as scholars and individuals who are already researching AICs, especially Zion churches, and who have already established an entry point to key challenges that affect and impact AICs in African contemporary societies. Shhould take a step forward by asking ourselves how we can create truly inclusive, safe and affirming faith spaces. Taking embodied experiences into consideration without making anyone feel alienated.

We would have to consider how we would advocate and negotiate for important inclusive symbols without stepping on each other's toes. I am also not ignorant to the fact that as researchers we should start somewhere to deal with injustices that constantly hinder the church from being a place of refuge for everyone.

However, as we continue to encounter more challenges than solutions in doing AICs studies, it becomes harder each time, even for AICs researchers, to gain access to congregants and convince them to engage in certain topics that raise many questions and concerns. This forces us back to the drawing board to point out possible gaps, or even to ask ourselves what we could improve on, and importantly, interrogate ourselves to ascertain whether we as researchers are dealing only with symptoms and not the causes. If this is not the case, we need to understand why it is becoming harder to get members of AICs to engage, and why other bodies that embody different experiences continue to be alienated.

The process of decolonising biblical translations could be a sensible starting point for AICs. Dube (2014) suggests that it is important to re-read the colonised Bible together with our indigenous Bibles, so that we can read through our own languages. This will assist us to discover how coloniality has impacted translation (Dube, 2014). This also speaks to Anzaldúa's (1987) assertion that the aim of the colonist was to control our tongue and the language that we speak through certain reinforcement (Anzaldúa 1987:53). This is why Dube (2014) encourages Africans to read the Bible in indigenous languages because colonists' translations were not only colonising, but also had a patriarchal influence.

Furthermore, I concur with Dube that we must continue to re-read our colonised Bibles to expose how modern colonialism informed indigenous translation, to rethink translation and to consider our gender-inclusive languages. This will encourage and give us the privilege to document our appropriate epistemologies of storytelling and playing house, because what initially placed us at a disadvantage, according to Khuzwayo-Magwaza (2021), was not having the privilege to document. Moreover, it is to conserve our epistemologies, which will no longer be seen as inferior traditions.

6.3 Recommendations and way forward

Without having to claim or to generalise borderlands, many people in the world understand what this metaphor means in different contexts, despite their location. This necessitates the adaption of Borderlands Theology in African churches. Jesus crossed many borders in the Bible

in order to help the marginalised (see book of Luke; John 4:24; Mark 7:26-30). Thus, it is important for theological reflections in Zion churches to be centred on interactions between scriptures and one's experience, because studies have shown that borders play an important role in one's life (Anzaldúa, 1987; Settler, 2019:2021; Brah, 1996).

Identity is very important in shaping one's life, but identity is also a very complex concept (Evangelista, Dumaop & Nelson, 2016:100). Through the application of Borderlands Theory, one can understand that identity is pluralistic, and it intersects across several domains such as gender, sexuality, sexual orientation, and religious identity – in this case, that of a Zionist. Also, through the very same theory, we come to understand that sometimes some identity domains have been constructed to oppose each other, such as being homosexual and religious identity of being a Zionist. Others are successful, such as being heterosexual and being a Zionist. Gender-nonconforming people and the LGBTQIA+ community as a whole are unable to live in heterosexual expectations and they face challenges in reconciling themselves to their sexuality (MacDonald, 2008). Through structural functionalism, we were able to understand that the reason for MacDonald's (2008) argument is that society as a larger organism feed on social institutions like the church in order to maintain the status quo. Those who do not perform their required function are eliminated and replaced. The persons who do perform their role are rewarded by remaining in the system, but they live their lives in conformity. Furthermore, we understand that one of the colonial legacies is the use of language in categorising people. When we initiate the process of deconstruction-reconstruction in *Nepantla* state, we begin by integrating the experiences of oppression by the church and through the church, followed by personal quests towards deep faith and knowledge of oneself, and finally one can make meaning of their faith and personalise it through use of their indigenous languages. In AICs, the inability to fully embrace and embody both Deity and Flesh is the most ignored but troublesome border, which makes it even harder for Africans to combine and equally acknowledge both profane and sacred clothing in contributing to one's identity. I would like to borrow the term 'Incarnation' that Jerry Gill uses to explain what I have mentioned above. He describes incarnation as a person who embodies both flesh and divine as he speaks about how faith spaces are familiar enough with the idea of incarnation but fail to deal honestly with its implications. This is the reality of Zionist churches – they have a 'welcoming' but not affirming attitude towards homosexual gender and sexuality domains. Furthermore, they are intentionally not paying attention to the fact that even Christ was a border deity who embodied both divine and human. Jesus performed both divine and human activities as part of construction of

identity, therefore, it helps us to understand that Jesus is an integrated person: neither strictly divine nor merely human (Matthew 26:39).

With that being said, scholars have shown and emphasised that in moving towards liberal theology there is an urgent need to create safe and inclusive spaces for the marginalised minorities (Settler, 2019; MacDonald, 2008; Nell & Aldous, 2019; Chin, 2023; Sande, 2018; Evangelista, Dumaop & Nelson, 2016). All these scholars have shown in their studies that marginalised minorities are constantly leaving the existing Christian faith spaces because of the oppression they are continuously experiencing; this oppression keeps adding up until it drives them away, and eventually they leave to search for a faith space or community that would embrace them as they are. Anzaldúa (1987) also refers to this when she talks about immigration; she calls it an illegal crossing, and she encourages it, as it is in pursuit of liberation of oneself and the body. Chin (2023) highlights one of the reasons for the pursuit that Anzaldúa's (1987) is attesting to: for a considerably long time, religion has been seen as primary reason for the rejection of the LGBTQIA+ identities and socialisation within institutions (Chin 2023:9). As a result, LGBTQIA+ people turned to public spaces such as bars and clubs to form physical queer communities as key institutions for their identity constructions. This shows that the biggest challenge is that identities outside the heteronormality are hindered through the relationship of religion and culture. Exclusions are based on the relationship between culture, customs, and Christian beliefs. Therefore, I see a need to recommend the tools such as Contextual Bible Study (CBS) and support programs that are outlined below to understand gender and sexuality in faith spaces.

6.4 Contextual Bible study and its application to the understanding of gender, sexuality and church uniform in faith spaces

In line with the data analysis and findings of this study, it is evident that Zionist individuals' church uniforms function to maintain social orders and ensure that reinforcing constant construction of specific social identity through performances is guaranteed. However, what may have been an oversight by AICs is that this church uniform is a form of colonial legacy as shown by this study – it was formally introduced in the 19th century, which was the colonial era. Therefore, some of the attributes and functions presented by church uniform resemble colonisation and oppress certain bodies. Therefore, introducing Contextual Bible Study (CBS) as a recommendation seems viable.

Nadar, Ueti and Jodamus (2023) define CBS as an interactive study of particular texts in the Bible, which brings the perspectives of the contexts of both the reader and the Bible into critical dialogue, for the purpose of raising awareness and promoting transformation. This tool was introduced in South Africa in 1989 by Ujaama Centre for Community Development and Research in Pietermaritzburg (Nadar, Ueti & Jodamus, 2023). CBS as a tool can be utilised in AICs to create spaces for open discussions and understanding gender and sexuality issues in faith spaces, and how they produce gender inequality or injustices through use of important symbols such as church uniform. CBS is a flexible and fluid method for such studies, because it is a method that can be used to revisit, re-read and reinterpret biblical scriptures in faith as part of troubling the gender binary process.

The CBS can assist with understanding underlying issues of gender inequalities created by important symbols like church uniform, because religion as a social structure exists to fulfil the solidarity in society, and for people to be connected rather than disconnected by certain church doctrines. Thus, connecting societies can be achieved through using the ‘6Cs’ components of the CBS which are community, context, criticality, collaboration, change and conscientisation (Nadar, Ueti & Jodamus, 2023). Below I use these 6Cs components to discuss in detail how this method will be of use to AICs in understanding issues of gender inequality and church uniform in faith spaces.

6.4.1. Community

CBS is conventionally facilitated with small, intimate groups, usually within a shared faith community context of about 10 to 30 people (Nadar, Ueti & Jodamus, 2023). CBS works within the pedagogical model of facilitation rather than teaching, which allows the process to be interactive to allow for engaged communal learning and sharing. Sunday school could be one way to establish a community, because primary socialisation (socialisation from childhood) plays a huge role in imposing, reinforcing, and constituting gender and sexuality, as discussed earlier in my findings and analysis with regards to cultural performances that groom children. These Sunday schools would provide first-hand knowledge and support for providing ongoing theological education for children, where the facilitator and the children could read biblical texts in their indigenous languages. This will allow them to interpret the text with their own understanding of how their world functions., This will allow them to embody their experience and create a vocabulary for themselves. This could also involve a range of activities, such as

drawing, writing and song composition. Furthermore, through borderlands, we have learned that using indigenous languages is a good start, because colonisation relied heavily on the use of the coloniser's language. Using indigenous languages shows constant border crossing.

Another way in which one can establish community is through hosting workshops or Bible studies in the church where church members can read biblical texts out loud together in indigenous languages. The act of reading a text together is different from listening to the traditional church service sermons. 'The aim is to read the text with fresh eyes and together' (Nadar, Ueti & Jodamus, 2023). This assists in being able to draw the congregants' or participants' attention to linguistic privileges, and to show how such privileges are so entrenched that people hardly notice them. Moreover, this is important to evoke the unfamiliar tongue in the space to remind ourselves of the dominance of colonial languages.

6.4.2. Context

The aim of this research was to problematise the use of church uniform in Zion churches as a method that functions to reinforce the gender binary and prescribed gender roles which informs and maintains the patriarchy in the church. The research findings and data analysis of this study clearly shows there is still a need to trouble Zion faith spaces. A useful way to establish contexts of the CBS, is to ask participants to identify the themes of the narrative during these workshops or Sundays' schools. This will result in congregants or participants revealing their own context through their answers without them even realising (Nadar, Ueti & Jodamus, 2023). For example, in this case, facilitators can use the Genesis. 1-2 narratives and other narratives as well in order to establish gender and sexuality perceptions of the group they are facilitating.

6.4.3 Criticality

AICs need to come to terms with the fact that people cross borders for better life. If the church is going to be a meaningful institution in the world today, it must come to terms with how it is going to understand and respond theologically and practically to all quotations of borders. This study has shown that Zion churches take a proscriptive stance against homosexuality, and they view it as unnatural, perverted, and sinful, which makes it difficult, if not impossible, to be homosexual and a Zionist, because these identities seem incompatible. As a result, gender-nonconforming and homosexual persons could not participate or voice their opinions in this study because they had come to terms with how the society views them, and they fear losing

what is at stake for them. Evangelista, Dumaop and Nelson (2016) support this by adding that this community of people tend to have high levels of internalised homophobia, depression, guilt, suicidal idealisation, and isolation, as they receive none or minimal support – neither from the church itself nor from outside the church. Thus, by using biblical narratives of gender and sexuality, we not only find contested historical accounts of the past, but also an invitation to reflect on the present in light of the past. This will assist AICs' members to take note of colonialism accounts on imposing essentialism of gender and sexuality categories as the basis of maintaining societal structures.

6.4.4. Conscientisation

Conscientisation of faith communities about injustices must happen in Contextual Bible Study. This can happen when communities are asked to reflect on their context in light of the biblical text. This will then assist participants to reflect on their own perceptions about gender and sexuality issues in a more open-minded manner and approach. Furthermore, participants can question how important rituals like baptism manage to exclude bodies whilst there are biblical texts such as Galatians 3:27, 1 Corinthians 12:13, and Mark 1:4-5 which show that through baptism, people form a body of Christ. This component can help participants see how culture has influenced theology through the use of church uniform.

6.4.5 Change

All the above components, reflections and exercises are expected to result in change. This could open a platform where pastors or ministers welcome the chance to invite people or speakers that are more knowledgeable in the field of gender, sexuality, and diversity into church spaces to educate the church about such issues. Furthermore, this could lead to initiating programs that educate about issues of gender and sexuality to families whenever they get invites from families in the surrounding communities. Furthermore, the AICs might then be willing to renegotiate constructions of social roles that maintain oppressive societies. Henceforth, as part of my recommendations, I would suggest that women in faith spaces have their own programs or forums that will offer support. It could be physical, emotional, moral, or even spiritual support to families who have queer children. I am choosing women groups intentionally because the studies done in African societies have shown that women are the guardians and custodians of culture and customs (see Moyo,2004; Tsara,2019; Seeley,1984). If women can be the first ones to destabilise the heteronormative culture that excludes and rejects queer individuals, it could

be a positive start towards not only the church liberations, but also societies. These recommendations could be utilised by AICs faith spaces, as this will be a good start to create affirming and inclusive spaces in church. These recommendations are not just a strategy to disrupt the existing norms in Zion faith spaces, but it is also an attempt to disrupt the conformity culture that gender-nonconforming people and the queer community have adapted to for years.

Through the above recommendations, we would not have created safe spaces for gender-nonconforming and queer communities to co-exist in societies only. We would also have given them the strength and courage that they would require when times such as this, when they are invited to participate in research interviews, come by. They will not be afraid of feeling displaced or isolated, nor will they feel judged, because this would have created secure and affirming enough spaces for them to be in.

When Anzaldúa (1987) speaks about the strength of rebellion, what she highlights the most is the readiness to run away from home. She knew she had to be isolated, or in her words, ‘to be away from the source in order to find my true self’. This process of equipping her Shadow Beast to be ready to be isolated, needed enough tools and resources to create her foundational resilience and courage. Hence, as part of her work on inner self and body liberation Anzaldúa (1987) established herself in education. Thus, resulting in her creating an identity formation theory. Through this work, she has established herself in a community where she can exist as a Catholic queer.

In the above chapters, I speak about how the ‘Shadow Beasts’ of gender-nonconforming persons who were recruited for this study were not strong enough to allow isolation, but Anzaldúa’s (1987) was. What I explained earlier is the very same reason why Anzaldúa’s (1987) Beast is strong and courageous. Thus, the adoption of these recommendations in faith spaces moving forward will serve as educational tools in equipping the ‘Shadow Beasts’, to be ready to establish themselves in terms of identity formulation, and within a community where they can exist as they are, inside and outside the church.

I concur with what Settler (2018) puts into light: that ambiguous zones of borderlands also emerge as productive zones, where conventional binaries related to secular and sacred religious beliefs and practices are increasingly contested and reformed. This is why this study saw it as very important to start troubling important and significant symbols in the church that perpetuate

the patriarchal hierarchies' binaries. This study of troubling the binaries through use of church uniform further gives research a starting point on how to have discussions around border spaces. Investigating symbols that have traces of harmful effects of dualism that have persistently downgraded bodies, such as church uniform, has allowed this study to understand that maybe, we need to investigate further, and offer an in-depth critical analysis on related issues such as gender and sexuality perceptions.

Scholars Haddad (2016), Kiernan (1979), Brown (1996) , Cooke (2014), Sundkler (1976), Arthur (1999), Mukonyora (2007) that have done studies on church uniform have all outlined their thoughts on how the church uniform functions, similar to what the survey shows in Chapter 2. In summarising their thoughts, the impression is that a church uniform is a symbol that connects or disconnects groups through different doctrines, rituals, ceremonies or events. Thus, the recommendations that I offered above clearly show that Borderlands Theology is not just a discursive liberation strategy or theory. There are practical solutions that one can come up with in reconstructing what it means to be African and ethnic, what it means to be a collective, and how Borderlands Theology as a framework can assist us in reformulating church and community.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this study was to problematise the gender use of the church uniform as a method to reinforce the gender binary and prescribed gender roles, which then inform and maintain the patriarchy in the church. Through thematic analysis of the data, six main themes emerged: uniform as the source of identity; uniform as a spiritual element; uniform as a means to conceal individual financial status; uniform to reinforce ritual performance; and cultural performances and social status.

Through the incorporation of Borderlands theory and appealing to structural functionalism for anthropological analysis, an understanding is formed in terms of how the different social institutions are able to maintain social orders that lead to the inequality and injustices in a church through symbols such as church uniform. This study has generated enough data to prove that there is still a need to interrogate Zion spaces, and to deconstruct-reconstruct what it means to be an African in faith spaces as a collective. Furthermore, this study has suggested different interventions or starting points of how one can come to understand issues of gender and sexuality in Zion faith spaces, and possibly acquire answers to the questions one might have

regarding these issues. Time did not allow the putting together of a manual toolkit where I can suggest different strategies on how to start this conversation to those with no idea. The Recommendations that I have made, such as CBS, will lead to the creation of safe spaces where LGBTQIA+ persons can co-exist in societies without hiding. These safe spaces will serve as a pedagogical aid where church leaders, elders and congregants will be educated about issues of gender and sexuality. This creates space for brutal honesty about privileges and power dynamics in society as well as in the church. Moving towards liberation theology, Borderlands Theology should be one of the tools we continuously use to pursue liberation and betterment of the self. It requires us to normalise and acknowledge that it is acceptable to be different individuals that form part of a collective, because *Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* (a person is a person through other persons).

This research has critically evaluated the impact of the uniform in the Zion Church, looking at the advantages and disadvantages of the uniform, and has introduced border thinking in reimagining inclusivity of holy symbols, images, pictorials, statues, and by extension, church uniform, in Zion faith spaces. It has also successfully proposed a shift in the uniform phenomenon towards the formulation of a non-binary asexual church uniform.

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Information Sheet and Consent to Participate in Research

I greet everyone in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

Date: 10 June 2021

My name is Slindokuhle Ndlovu, 216059830. I am a student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal and I am currently doing my master in Theology in Gender and Religion this year. My study topic is “Troubling the Gender binary: Church uniform and Gender inequality in Zion churches in Pietermaritzburg (KZN)”.

This study aims to problematise the use of church uniforms in the Zion church as a method to reinforce the gender binary and prescribed gender roles which then informs and maintains the patriarchy in the church. This topic is of interest to me because I have been a member of Zion church since I was very young.

I will be the facilitator as well as the scribe of these interviews, there will be one-one sessions and also, I will then sometimes divide you into groups of four then give you 5-15 minutes to

discuss the question and have your opinions about it. There will be a mutual respect among the participants, everyone will be able to express ones' opinions freely. Please note that the information that you provide will be used for scholarly research only. Your participation is entirely voluntary. You have a choice to participate, not to participate and to withdraw from the study whenever you fell that it exposes to yourself, you will not be penalized for taking such an action. Your views in this interview will be presented anonymously and confidential. Anonymity and confidentiality will be maintained by using pseudonyms and/or disguise the participant's names.

The recording as well as other items associated with the interview will be held in a password protected file accessible only to myself and my supervisors. After a period of 5 years, in line with the rules of the university, it will be disposed by shredding and burning. The study will provide no direct benefits to participants. The approval to undertake the study will be obtained from the Ethics Research Committee of the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

If you agree to participate, please sign the declaration attached to this statement.

I can be contacted at: School of Social Sciences, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg Campus, Scottsville, Pietermaritzburg. Email: 216059830@stu.ukzn.ac.za and cell phone: XXXXXXXXXX

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

The Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee contact details are as follows: University of KwaZulu-Natal, Research Office, Email: hssrec@ukzn.ac.za, phone number +27312603587.

Thank you for your contribution to this research.

CONSENT

I _____ have been informed about the study entitled Troubling the Gender binary: Church uniform and Gender inequality in Zion churches in Pietermaritzburg (KZN). Which is aiming at troubling the use of church uniforms in the Zion church as a method to reinforce the gender binary and prescribed gender roles which then informs and maintains the patriarchy in the church conducted by Slindokuhle Ndlovu. I fully understand the purpose and procedures of the study and I also understand that I can ask for clarity and questions anytime.

I declare that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time without affecting any of the benefits that I usually am entitled to. I have been informed about any available compensation or mental help should there be trauma as a result of questions asked. If I have any further questions/concerns or queries related to the study I understand that I may contact the researcher at:

Email: 216059830@stu.ukzn.ac.za

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

Interview Questions in English and in IsiZulu.

- How old are you?

-Uneminyaka emingaki?

- Are you married? Yes or No

-Ingabe ushadile yini? Yebo noma Cha

- How long have you been a member in Zion church?

-Ingabe unesikhathi esingakanani uyilunga lebandla lase Zion?

- How do you identify yourself?

-Ibuphi ubulili bakho?

- Do you like your church uniform?

-Ingabe uyawuthanda yini umfaniswano webandla okhonza kulo?

- Why church uniform is important?

-Ingabe ubaluleke ngani umfaniswano webandla okhonza kulo?

- How do people view you when you are wearing your church uniform?

-Abantu bakubuka kanjani uma usufake umfaniswano webandla okhonza kulo?

- What does your church uniform mean to you as an individual?

-Ingabe usho ukuthini kuwe umfaniswano webandla okhonza kulo?

- How do you feel when you are wearing your church uniform?

-Ingabe uzizwa kanjani uma usuwufakile umfaniswano webandla okhonza kulo?

- Who is allowed to wear a uniform in your church?

-Kungabe abanjani abavumeleke ukufaka umfaniswano webandla?

- How does your church uniform inform your gender and gender roles in church and in society?

-Ingabe umfaniswano we bandla okhonza kulo uhambiselana kanjani nobulili bakho Kanye nezinto ezilindeleke kuwe ebandleni nasemphakathini?

- Does your behavior change when you are wearing your church uniform?

-Ingabe indlela oziphatha ngayo iyashintsha yini uma usufake umfaniswano webandla okhonza kulo?

- Is there additional uniform/s that your church has? If yes who wears it and why?

-Ingabe ikhona yini eminye imifaniswano ebandleni okhonza kulo? Uma impendulo kungu yebo obani abayifakayo futhi kungani?

- Would you like a new type of a church uniform?

-Ingabe ungathanda umfaniswano webandla ohlukile?

- How would you feel if your church uniform were to change?

-Ingabe ungazizwa kanjani uma ngahle kushintshwe umfaniswano webandla okhonzakulo?