



How theological perspectives shape attitudes towards gender roles and sexual orientation

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation focuses how theology can be contrary and complex in the way people in South Africa think when looking at gender roles and sexual orientation. It tries to answer these questions in terms of African, feminist, strange and decolonial theology, paying attention to how sacred texts, church traditions, liturgical practices, as well as socio-cultural histories help produce, encourage and even object to our present topic about gender and sexuality.

Religion has in South Africa remained a very influential moral force and it has a very serious impact on the day to day conversations, how we develop our identities, how we establish our social norms and even how it influences politics in the country. It is because of that point that theological perspectives tend to feel like the motive force that is either strengthening the concept of patriarchy or heteronormativity, or causing significant changes towards inclusion and justice.

Conventional scriptural interpretations have traditionally given men power, relegated women to subservient positions, and discriminated against sexual diversity. These perceptions enhance gender-based violence, restrict the LGBTQ + membership, as well as defend the exclusionary policies regarding inequalities such as marriage, asylum, and health services, and holistic sex education.

On the other hand, the dissertation underscores that more liberating readings, sharing pastoral practice, and decolonizing critiques are being brought about to bring down those ancient colonial and patriarchal ideas making Christianity a source of righteousness, relational morals, and human dignity.

I have also thoroughly researched the academic literature, theological commentaries, and the policy documents and the study indicates that there is an ongoing tug-of-war concerning three fundamental actors, namely the moral weight of religious traditions, the constitutional powers of the democratic state, and the everyday practices of South Africans who do not sit well with the traditional image. This is some tension that forms a constantly shifting terrain where the church dogma makes the policy arguments and social orders, but it is slowly being remade by the grassroots movements, more open movements within churches, and shifts in the social and cultural responsibility.

In general, the research posits that the theological traditions may be disputed, reorganized, reformulated. The liberatory, hybrid, and contextualized discursive New African Christian theologies is one approach in generating gender just and strange affirming theologies, which would enhance social cohesion, strengthen democracy, and human flourishing.

Lastly, this piece predetermines further interdisciplinary examination of religion, gender, sexuality, and the public life in the South African context outlining the existing tensions and the current possibilities.

Keywords: Theological perspectives, Gender Roles, Sexual Orientation, Hermeneutics, Inclusivity

DEFINITIONS OF KEY CONCEPTS

Gender

Gender refers to the social, cultural, and psychological attributes and roles associated with being male or female. It encompasses a complex interplay of societal expectations, identity, and expression beyond biological sex.

Gender roles

Gender roles are societal expectations, norms, and behaviors assigned to individuals based on their perceived gender. These roles dictate how individuals should act, think, and interact within a given society.

Sexual orientation

Sexual orientation refers to an individual's enduring pattern of romantic, emotional, or sexual attraction towards others. It encompasses categories such as heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, and asexual, reflecting the diversity of human sexual identities.

Religion

Religion refers to the institutionalized, ceremonial, community-based and organizationally structured practices of a belief system within a given social context. This includes churches; denominations; liturgy; religious leaders; and religiously related activities in the public domain.

Theology

Theology is an interpretative and analytical conversation intended to express, clarify and formulate beliefs based upon sacred scriptures and doctrines.

Theological perspectives

Theological perspectives are interpretations and beliefs derived from religious doctrines and texts. They shape individuals' understanding of religious teachings and influence their attitudes and behaviors towards various social issues, including gender roles and sexual orientation.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

1.1 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO STUDY

The relations those attitudes have with theology stand as some of the most complex and contentious terrains of scholarly research. This study focuses on these relations, and especially the recent unrest in most societies around the world. The multiplicity of positions, especially conflicting ones emerging from religion on the issues of gender, and sexual orientation, provide signs of important shifts in social relations. This study seeks to address the various and sometimes paradoxical relations theology has with social attitudes relating to gender roles and sexual orientation, both constructing and deconstructing those attitudes.

For many centuries, and across many cultures, religious doctrines have had a significant influence in shaping social attitudes and the general social order surrounding the orientations and roles that are deemed acceptable in a society. The influence can be seen in many social structures where religion either promotes a conservative order on the roles and norms of gender or seeks to challenge and provoke a reform of the established conservative social structures. The intricate relations of religion and the social attitudes of a society regarding gender and sexuality continues to evolve and impact the societies of today.

Among other things, Burchardt (2020) studies the role of religion on the construction of masculinity (and possessions of citizenship) on the sexuality dimension, in post apartheid South Africa. He uses the field-theoretical perspective to see the influence and the interactions of the systems of religion and social constructions of masculinity and sexuality, and sexual rights. It allows the construction of the systems of religion and community to reflect on basic concepts of gender and sexuality to reinterpret them to help understand other concepts.

Likewise, Van Klinken and Chitande (2021) studies Christianity on the one hand and sexual diversity on the other in Africa, suggesting that there can be apprehended the focus of positive change and the acceptance of sexual diversity within some of the

religious constraints. This implies that having the faith traditionally restricts sexual orientation relationships, the churches can also be circuits of surplus sexuality diversity. This is of utmost importance to rethink the contribution of religion to societies where religion is expected in social predictability highly, within the frameworks of social constructions of the entities.

Discourse on sexual orientation and gender in the context of religion has culminated in the last couple of years, and one of the most profound scholars to analyze such phenomena is Cook (2021), who attempts to uncover the religious arguments of the causes of human sexual orientation. Cook's disconcerted and unbalanced approach to the interrelationship between religious reason and the scientific reason of sexuality proves to be valuable in filling the void of integrating religious reason and scientific reason in the modern world, in which the role of religion is directly proportional to the role of influence in the public discourse and social conduct of the people. Camminga (2020) attempts to analyze and outline the social and legal issues concerning the transgender population, especially concerning religious beliefs and Refugee Asylum Laws (RAL) within the context of South Africa, which complements the above. Her work provides legal and religious prejudices of a social order vis-a-vis the transgender persons, which legal order is opposed to inclusive and compassionate principles vis-a-vis the transgender persons.

In addition, the collaborative research of Van Klinken and Obadare (2020) provides a synthesis and general review of the fundamental connections between Christianity, sexuality, and citizenship in the African continent. Their work is paramount in decoding the complex and at times paradoxical ways in which religious tenets and teachings shape the attitudes of a given society regarding gender and sexuality. This is important in the African setting, which is characterized by a strong intersection of religious and cultural beliefs.

South African religion is diverse but this research project was concerned with Christian Theology. Historically Christianity has been the largest demographic of religions in South Africa, as well as an institutionally powerful force in South Africa's public discussions regarding gender roles and sexual orientation; therefore unless otherwise indicated "religion" refers to Christian Theological Traditions in this study.

1.2 THE MULTI-DIMENSIONAL AND CONTRADICTIONARY NATURE OF RELIGIOUS INFLUENCE

The intersection of religion, gender, and sexual orientation can be challenging, and at times even contradictory. There are numerous ways to interpret religious texts such as the Bible, and each interpretation is subject to its own intricacies, historical, cultural, and theological. In the Bible, the Book of Genesis chapters 2 and 3, the Quran Surah An-Nisa (4:34), and the Hindu religion Manusmriti all advocate for the reinforcement and maintenance of social stratification and traditional gender roles.

The complexity of the interpretation of religious texts is the same across the board. There is vagueness in some Bible passages. The story of Adam and Eve advocates for and supports gender responses to hierarchy, as it presents men as the head of the household (Banda 2020). There are contemporary theologians and religious scholars who have challenged the inequities espoused by such texts in their advocacy for gender justice by examining scriptures that declare the equality of all Christians, such as Galatians 3:28.

The interpretation and contextualization of religious scriptures are influenced by historical and cultural backgrounds. In many African societies religion is foundational. This may be one of the reasons for the predominant patriarchal structure within Christianity and Islam (Labuschagne 2021). There is a growing trend among many religious communities to reinterpret their scriptures in order to promote gender equality and inclusivity for all members of society (Van Klinken & Obadare 2020).

The complexity of religious philosophical thinking and reasoning increases. Religious communities have to incorporate their ideologies with the new social movements and scientific advancements because it is a religious community. Cook (2021) elaborates on the positive correlation between new scientific discoveries pertaining to human sexuality and the altered theological view on sexual orientation. This new reasoning may result in a conservative religious backlash and progressive change.

The nature of the impact of religiosity is heterogeneous. Intra-religious bodies may hold conservative views while others take a more open and amicable stance. Within African Christianity, Van Klinken and Chitando (2021) note a divergence in the support of and opposition to LGBTQ+ policies. The support and opposition of the religious leaders and institutions to the gender and sexuality equality paradoxes illustrate religion's

contradictory nature. Some religious authorities advocate for the inclusion of women leaders, others advocate for adherence to the status quo (Labuschagne, 2021). The former presiding bishop of the Episcopal Church, Katherine Jefferts Schori, was in favor of women's leadership. The Catholic Church has received heavy criticism for the treatment of its women clergy. While Pope Francis has expressed support for the role of women in the Church, he has not ordained women as priests, thus maintaining the longstanding exclusion of women from the highest positions in the Catholic Church (Labuschagne, 2021). There is a divergence of positions regarding the acceptance of LGBTQ+ persons in various religions (Camminga, 2020). Pastor Robert Jeffress of the First Baptist Church in Dallas has opposed LGBTQ+ rights, using scripture to rationalize exclusion and stigma (Camminga, 2020). The research problem necessitates appreciating the complexity and paradoxes that intersect herein. This prompted investigation of the spectrum and the dynamics of African theology, in particular its effects on gender and sexuality.

1.3 THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES ON GENDER ROLES

Many sacred texts have gender reflections. Adam and Eve suggest to many Christian customs that men are the heads of the families (Banda, 2020). Other faiths have rules encapsulating a patriarchal order where gender roles are inequitable. However, many faiths have an unorthodox approach. 1 Timothy 2:12 states, "I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent." In Surah An-Nisa (4:34), it states "Men are the protectors and maintainers of women." Borchardt (2020) investigates the interplay of Christian communities, particularly in the post-apartheid period of South Africa, the integration of masculinity, and the gender norms of balance with the norms of gender equality and sexual citizenship.

Sexual citizenship, in this case, refers to fundamental rights, dignity, and social equity (Van Klinken & Chitando, 2021). The theory scrutinizes norms heteronormativity, patriarchal order in social structure, along with gender and sexuality (Burchardt, 2020; Van Klinken & Chitando, 2021). This illustrates that religious communities are reformulating the meaning of sacred texts to accommodate gender equity.

Paul's teachings on marriage and gender relations are foundational to Christian attitude toward these matters. Submission, love, and respect as encouraged by Paul's letters in the New Testament. In Ephesians 5: 22-33 Paul explains that, "Wives, submit yourselves to your husband as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, His body, of which he is the Savior" (NIV). The respondent to the husband's leadership is also addressed, "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her" (Ephesians 5:25).

While some scholars argue that these teachings serve to reinforce and entrench the gender hierarchy Christian traditions, other scholars argue that the teachings promote gender reciprocity and respect that ought to exist as a result of Christ's love. In Ephesians, which amplifies the theme of mutual submission in marriage (Ephesians 5:21), promotes love and respect which, in the view of Pierce and Groothuis (2005) from 'Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity Without Hierarchy,' is a veritan effort to undermine the central idea of a patriarchal hierarchy.' Craig Keener's New Testament commentaries suggest that in order to read these passages in the context of current marriage and gender relations, knowledge of the culture of Ephesus and Corinth during Paul's time is crucial (1999).

Different perspectives spring from these texts during the complementarian-egalitarian Christian debate. According to Piper and Grudem (1991), Paul's teaching leads complementarians to conclude that when it comes to marriage, church, and societal roles, men and women have complementarian roles. However, the egalitarian side views Paul's teaching as advocating biblical equality, and, therefore, reciprocal submission in marriage (Bilezikian, 2006). These speeches have shaped and expanded Paul's influence on gender roles in marriage and testify to ancient writings which shape Christian philosophy and practice on gender and sexuality.

Women's rights advocacy can be faith-based. Historically, most religions have sanctioned and perpetuated gender inequity. However, recent religious traditions promote advocacy of equal representation. Some African Christian traditions of movement Van Klinken and Obadare (2020) describes promote advocacy of equal representation and are contrary to gender stereotypes. This demonstrates a shift from inclusive to patriarchal. The Modern Bhagavad Gita 9:22 encourages equal respect and equal opportunity, promoting gender equality. Advocating or condemning the practice of ascribed gender roles entails religious

leadership, as in the case of Bishop Gene Robinson, the first openly gay Episcopalian Bishop, who advocates for LGBTQ+ inclusion. Yet, many faith traditions forbid women to take the lead, a trend in which Christian and Jewish faiths are an exception (Labuschagne, 2021). The trend facilitates a shift in attitudes towards ascribed gender roles and equality.

Religion, gender, and sexuality, at least relatively, have been studied together. Labuschagne (2021) focuses on how gender and sexuality research affects (or more probably, has been and is being) integrated into theology. Today, the science-theology complex has integrated the research and reshaped the religious approaches to the social roles of different genders. Certain theological discourses, as it were, collapse the gender binary. Houffman et al. (2020) study the intersection of sexual minorities and religion/spirituality. Some, perhaps more than others, religious civilisations appear to permit self-identification as a non-binary gender. Religion impacts social and personal gender roles. Mayeza (2021) states religious impacts family dynamics, particularly for the youth in the LGBTQ community in South Africa. The study found that religion influences the father's and mother's views on gender and sexuality.

1.4 RELIGION AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS SEXUAL ORIENTATION

Conservative and progressive perspectives on sexual orientation congregate and diverge due to religion. Specific religious views are informed by the ways in which their adherents interpret religious texts, especially concerning the religions' views on homosexuality, bisexuality, and transgender identity and expression. This has a bearing on the social and religious views on the LGBTQ+ community.

Conservative perspectives in religion and sexual orientation are often backed by references to the Bible. Non-heterosexual orientations and behavior are seen as incompatible within Christianity and some Islamic Quranic interpretations. Because of this stance, LGBTQ+ persons, as many have come to refer to them, are stigmatized and their social representation risked in several cultures and religions. Research on African Christianity and sexual variation by Van Klinken and Chitando (2021) illustrates a paradox of modernity and these traditional views.

Progressively, some religious traditions are seen to be incorporating a wider interpretive scope especially on sexual orientation. For instance, some modern theologians and religious traditions interpret 1 John 4: 8 which reads “Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love” as God’s invitation to love without prejudice and hence inclusive of same-sex marriages and heterosexuality. Human rights and egalitarianism have prompted a wider re-reading of scriptures. Cook (2021) looks at the interface of religion and science to understand the various traditions in a pluralistic worldview and the theological orientation on sexual orientation. These perspectives positively influence the LGBTQ+ community’s religious orientation.

The impact of religion on LGBTQ+ attitudes is unquestionable. Religion influences the sexual orientation policies of many countries. Conservative religious factions lobbied for the passage of laws that discriminate against LGBTQ+. Countries across Africa with religion-informed legal systems criminalise same-sex relationships and alienate the LGBTQ+ community (Van Klinken & Obadare, 2020). Traditionalists defending heterosexuality and gender dualism often reference religious texts. In South Africa, Religious Incorporation oppose same-sex marriage and the right to gender change (Camminga, 2020). Without question, Religious Discrimination foster the denial of Comprehensive Sexuality Education that includes LGBTQ+ issues (Cook, 2021). Public and politicians’ perception of religious conservatism fuels the maintenance of such policies. On the Other Hand, Inclusively and Acceptance-promoting religious factions have contributed to the advancement of LGBTQ+ rights in many countries.

Challenges are on the table for LGBTQ+ individuals in religious contexts. In her study of South African asylum law’s address transgender identity and sexual orientation, Camminga (2020) found that, in conservative religion, LGBTQ+ individuals suffer significant stigma, and marginalisation and face open hostility. All this is exacerbated for the LGBTQ+ individuals who are equally devoutly religious. Van Klinken and Obadare (2020) study the complex relationship of Christianity, sexuality, and citizenship in Africa. Their research highlights how religious ideologies shape, and are shaped by, complex societal attitudes toward sexual orientation.

1.5 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Considering and analyzing the impact religious thought has on Africa's gender norms and sexual orientation is critical but often overlooked. A tendency to adopt sole Western viewpoints or draft general frameworks to interpret African societies and cultures is prevalent in the literature. Research on how religious South African communities have engaged with the theologies of gender and sexuality remains almost nonexistent (Van Klinken & Chitando, 2021). The absence of these studies on African Traditional Religion, Christianity, and Islam (Burchardt, 2020) illustrates the gap. Studies on the religious context and the South African LGBTQ+ community are lacking (Camminga, 2020; Mayeza, 2021).

Mayeza (2021) deals with the experiences of South African LGBTQ adolescents, focusing on coming out and the response of parents. This is a continuation of former studies, with an aim to shed light on how theology informs these attitudes. This research examines the multifaceted and, at times, paradoxical impact of religion on gender and sexual orientation attitudes. The study gets a better understanding of these attitudes' current state and probable future outlooks on the attitudes theologies by breaking down these elements.

1.6 RESEARCH QUESTION

How do theological perspectives influence and shape societal attitudes toward gender roles and sexual orientation within South African contexts, considering the multi-dimensional and often contradictory nature of religious influence?

1.7 RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND OBJECTIVES

This study poses the following research questions and objectives:

1.7.1 Research questions

1. How do Christian theological perspectives shape societal norms and attitudes towards gender roles?

2. In what ways do religious beliefs influence attitudes towards sexual orientation?
3. How are religious beliefs reflected in South African public policies concerning gender and sexual orientation?
4. What potential exists within Christian traditions for reinterpreting doctrines to be more inclusive of diverse gender identities and sexual orientations?

1.7.2 Research objectives

1. Examine the influence of theological perspectives on attitudes towards gender roles.
2. Analyze the impact of religion on perceptions of sexual orientation.
3. Investigate the role of religion in shaping public policy on gender and sexuality.
4. Assess the potential for reinterpretation and reform within religious traditions.

1.8 CENTRAL THEORETICAL ARGUMENT

This dissertation will contend that theological perspectives serve as a strong form of moral discourse in South African Christianity, influencing how people think about and treat sex and gender in society. Rather than being simply neutral or just an expression of faith, theological perspectives are socially located meanings that help shape who we are, what our churches do and how they interact with society, and the way society thinks about issues of public policy.

This dissertation will also argue that theological perspectives perform two functions at once. First, traditional ways of interpreting Christian scripture have helped reinforce hetero-patriarchal views of gender, legitimize male dominance, and exclude those who identify as LGBTQ+, through specific types of interpretations (such as literalistic and androcentric readings) of the Bible. Second, however, this dissertation will contend that theology is not monolithic. Even in the very same scriptural and doctrinal traditions that have been used to justify exclusions, there exists within them resources for critique, resistance, and reform. Specifically, feminist, African, liberationist, decolonial, and queer

theologians show that there exist within theology itself resources for reinterpretation, including alternative readings of scripture that challenge the patriarchy and heteronormativity of traditional understandings of justice, human dignity, relationality, and the imago Dei.

Therefore, this dissertation will contend that theology serves as a place of conflict, rather than a static doctrine. Theology is a dynamic arena where different interpreters compete for authority, morality and social order. And in the case of South Africa, where the constitution provides a relatively progressive legal environment that protects individuals from discrimination based on their gender and sexual orientation, this conflict between constitutional commitment to equality and religious claims to autonomous interpretation is evident. Thus, this dissertation will argue that theological perspectives should be seen as socially influential discourses that both support the maintenance of current social hierarchies around gender and sexuality and provide resources for transforming them.

1.9 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research uses a qualitative, interpretative and critical research model based on a large body of literature. It does not generate new empirical evidence through survey or interview methods. Instead, it critiques the existing scholarly literature, theological commentary, ecclesiastical documents and policy documents/authorities so as to consider how theological perspectives affect societal views of gender roles and sexual orientation in South Africa.

Literature studies have been used to explore a variety of complex questions in the area of doctrine and ethics in theologies and humanities (Meyer, 2020: 45–47). They enable a systematic conceptual examination of belief systems and their socio-cultural consequences.

The methodology has four interconnected approaches.

Firstly, the study conducts thematic analysis to identify common theoretical and socio-cultural themes in literature. Particular emphasis is placed on themes which include patriarchy, heteronormativity, complementarity, inclusion, liberation, and sexual citizenship. For example, Chisale (2020: 112–115) demonstrates how Pentecostal and

Evangelical traditions strengthen Christian patriarchy; whereas Davids (2020: 89–92) shows how some of the mainstream church traditions provide inclusive and queer affirming interpretations. Through the documentation of these arguments across different traditions, the study outlines the ways in which positions on doctrine are developed, supported and contested. Therefore, thematic analysis is not simply descriptive, but also analytical because it permits the study of the larger social impacts of theological discourse.

Secondly, the study utilizes a critical hermeneutical approach. This means investigating how the Bible is interpreted in terms of the historical/cultural/ecclesiastical contexts in which they were written. The study recognizes that scripture is never self-interpreting, but rather interprets scripture considering the socio-historical conditions and power structures of the institutions in which it was written. As Meyer (2020: 52–54) states, all theological discourse is in a specific interpretive community. The use of critical hermeneutics allows the study to distinguish between the biblical text and the historically conditioned interpretation of it.

Thirdly, the study is guided by an intersectional framework to understand that theology exists within multiple intersecting structures of race, class, ethnicity and economic power. An intersectional framework serves as an analytical lens to evaluate how the various systems of oppression operate concurrently (van Dijk & Mangai, 2025: 203–206). In South Africa where the legacy of apartheid continues to impact socio-economic realities, an intersectional framework is required to evaluate how patriarchal theology intersects with raced and classed inequalities. For example, Camminga (2020: 118–121) illustrates in queer theological analysis that gender and sexuality cannot be isolated from the broader political and identity formations.

Lastly, the study draws upon insights from queer studies and sociological analyses of religion, particularly in evaluating the hetero-patriarchal dimensions of Christian communities. Camminga (2020: 122–125) notes that queer theological scholarship is an interdisciplinary field of study and can be relevant in understanding lived religious identities. The interdisciplinary nature of queer theological scholarship provides both analytical depth and representation in evaluating how theology relates to identity formation, public dialogue and legal frameworks.

In selecting the sources of the study, priority is given to peer-reviewed scholarship and recognized theological authorities to ensure academic credibility. The quality and validity of these sources permit the study to engage critically with prevailing theological constructs. Academic conventions are followed, including proper citation practices, fair representation of alternative scholarly viewpoints, and careful consideration of contentious issues. Ethical responsibility is central to the research process due to the fact that many of the topics of religion, gender, and sexuality relate to marginalized communities, especially LGBTQ+ individuals (van Dijk & Mangai, 2025: 210–212).

Using this qualitative thematic and hermeneutical framework, the study demonstrates that theological perspectives serve as not just abstract doctrines, but as socially embedded discourses that form identity, govern gender norms, and guide public opinions and socio-legal developments in South Africa.

1.10 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The significance of this study lies in its multifaceted contributions to various fields including theology, sociology, gender studies, and public policy. Its impact can be assessed in several key areas:

1. Societal Understanding and Dialogue: The research illustrates the impact of the influence of theologically based beliefs on gender roles and sexual orientations. By examining these characteristics, individuals are better positioned to understand social patterns, thereby promoting intergroup dialogue. This is especially advantageous in highly religious, theologically conservative and divided communities.

2. Contribution to Theological Scholarship: Analyze the complex interaction of religious doctrines and societal norms. This interaction will display the various ways society shifts the focus of theological doctrines. Numerous religious institutions are having difficulty updating their doctrines and integrating their ideals, making this essential.

3. Impact on Policy and Legal Frameworks: This study could help policymakers understand how religious beliefs influence public policy, particularly on gender and sexual

orientation. It can assess how religious beliefs affect legislation and public policy to ensure inclusivity and respect for varied religious views.

4. Advancing Gender and Sexuality Rights: No other academic pursuits emphasize constitutional law as fundamentally as interdisciplinary research. This research highlights the often-neglected intersection between religion and gender/sexuality rights, promoting inclusivity in both religious communities and broader society.

5. Educational and Awareness Raising: Both secular organizations and religious institutions may benefit from the results of this study as an educational resource. Raising awareness of the multifaceted intersections of religion, gender, and sexual orientation will help to dispel existing stereotypes.

6. Supporting Inclusive Religious Practices: This study may help religious communities and leaders accept diversity. It could help religious communities accept diverse gender identities and sexual orientations by suggesting ways to reinterpret and reform religious traditions.

7. Enriching Sociocultural Discourse: To conclude this work broadens the conversation surrounding text{gender, sexuality, religion}. Having a slight better elucidation of the synthesis from the triangulation of these variables can equip society with the necessary tools that promote the appreciation of a robust advocacy on public discourse.

1.11 OUTLINE OF CHAPTERS

The specific aims of the study enable the structured and targeted research to consist of six chapters. This format permits the concentration of each chapter on one individual topic of research and the attainment of the objectives of the study. The outlined chapters are:

Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter introduces the study's topic, background, and context. It outlines the research issue, aims, and significance. The introduction also covers the subsequent chapters, providing readers a clear picture of what to expect.

Chapter 2: The Influence of Theological Perspectives on Attitudes towards Gender Roles

Examines how religion affects gender roles in society and individuals. This chapter discusses pertinent literature, the study's theoretical framework, and data findings.

Chapter 3: The Impact of Religion on Perceptions of Sexual Orientation

Concerned with understanding how religious teachings and traditions impact societal attitudes toward different sexual orientations. As with the previous chapter, it's a synthesis of existing research and the analytical perspective of data newly collected pertaining to this facet of the research.

Chapter 4: The Role of Religion in Shaping Public Policy on Gender and Sexuality

Religion influences gender and sexual orientation legislation in public policy. This chapter discusses how religious leaders and groups influence policy and society.

Chapter 5: The Potential for Reinterpretation and Reform within Religious Traditions

Looks into religious gender and sexual orientation change. Reviews historical strategies of ideological reinterpretation and inclusiveness along with inclusiveness reform. Outlining and exploring these changes reveals the challenges and opportunities of this chapter.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

The last chapter provides thematic conclusions of the study. It looks back on the research objectives and questions, and considers how the conclusions of the study illuminate the most important themes. This chapter also discusses the implications of the study for theory, practice and prospective related research, and provides recommendations. This chapter also recognizes limitations of the study and suggests other work to be undertaken.

This structure of the chapter provides for a comprehensive consideration of the research questions to enable the audience to grasp the interconnections between the religion, gender norms, sexual orientation and public policy. There is a clear sense of progression

and interconnection of all the chapters of the work which provides for a great and informative conclusion and captures the essence of the contribution of the study.

1.12 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

This study examines the influence of theology on attitudes towards insert what attitudes are towards should be gender roles and/or sexual orientation\]. For this research, there is an examination of attitudes toward gender roles and sexual orientation within the context of theology, so the research must be under the influence of and study the ethics of these subjects. The research must be done on a literature basis, meaning that the researcher must recognize their ethical obligation and academic integrity must be prioritized. This is an ethical obligation that must focus on the intellectual honesty of theology, not distorting, misappropriating, or misrepresenting the arguments of authors through their work. Meyer (2020) and Shingange (2023) encourage caution when examining this topic, and this study intends to uphold this caution. Misrepresentation of these subjects can perpetuate harm and constitute a negative representation of the arguments. The ethical integrity of and the adherence to scholarly principles through these subjects must be protected. The researcher must give arguments the academic recognition they need and must give authors—especially those authors with opposing moral or political viewpoints—an academic respect that is critical, and to give their arguments the moral recognition, or academic integrity that their subjects, their debates, and their arguments deserve.

Another set of ethical considerations involves how socially vulnerable, marginalized, and contested identities, such as members of the LGBTQ+ community, experience stigma and exclusion within religious contexts. Camminga's (2020) work and Robertson's (2020) work have demonstrated how, within the academic community, the experiences of some queer individuals are reduced to heteronormative templates, and as such, marginalization within the queer community is further perpetuated. Though the study does not have human subjects, the study does indulge in scholarship and testimony that seek to illuminate the social realities of the community in question. Consequently, ethical obligations necessitate mitigating such testimony with accuracy, care, and respect. As such, the researcher actively avoids language that is, directly or indirectly, of the disease-

focused or medical modelling variety, essentialist explanations of sexualities, and the selective use of scholarship which, though unintentional, may oversimplify or misunderstand the complexities of gender and sexual identities. This stance has been echoed by Judge (2020), as those researching within the fields of religious studies and sexuality must seek to eschew problematic ways of interpreting and, instead, prioritize inclusivity and reflexivity.

Sensitivity regarding varied religious traditions in South Africa, where Christianity, alongside other Faiths and indigenous religious worldviews, resides, enriches the engagement with theologies and scriptural interpretations. Khosa-Nkatini and Buqa (2022) warn against the practice of religious text readings, as they tend to elide the socio-cultural configuration in which such texts were authored, as this may reproduce colonial modernity and other patriarchal orders. To respond to these ethical considerations, the study engages with theologies of different traditions and explains the submissions contextually. Plural interpretations and submissions of scholars are documented, so readers can appreciate the diversity of theological perspectives in contrast to a single theological position, especially in regard to gender and sexuality, themes where the religious conversation has often been uncooperative, polemic and passionate. As such, the study values proper and responsible academic engagement.

Moreover, ethically utilizing secondary data necessitates openness about the consequences of engaging with the findings of other researchers without direct contact with the research subjects. For example, Grobbelaar and Jones (2021) point out that secondary research runs the risk of overgeneralization or inaccurately portraying a situation when the researcher has little or no involvement in the creation of the data. To address these concerns, the research in question assembles data from several peer-reviewed works and cross-verified these findings to guarantee that the conclusions drawn are not the result of solitary scholarly work. Furthermore, reflexivity is a critical ethical principle: the researcher significantly considers and distances themselves from any personal biases, ideological tendencies, or religious biases that might influence the analysis or assessment of the situation. Such a stance confirms that ethical scholarship is not merely a function of the researcher's compliance with procedural dictums, but rather that it is forged within the researcher's scholarly imagination. Lastly, ethically sanctioned research entails avoiding plagiarism, referencing all consulted works, and observing

intellectual property rights. This research acknowledges the failure of all researched works, demonstrating the most basic level of adherence to established standards of scholarly ethical conduct. Given that the research is theoretical and does not collect empirical data, no informed consent, guarantees of anonymity, guarantees of confidentiality, or other protections relating to research subjects of human beings are warranted, in accordance with the supervisor's advice. Even though the research does not attempt to collect empirical data, it is ethically committed to scholarly integrity in that it studied the most sensitive issues of gender diversity, sexual orientation, and theological critique with the requisite analytical and scholarly modesty. The research undertook a more than basic level of ethical scholarship, and as a result of this scholarly integrity, also contributed to the scholarly discourse on religion, gender justice and sexual diversity.

1.13 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study focuses on the complex interrelation among theology, South African gender roles, and the attitudes surrounding sexual orientation, as noted in the research proposal. Religion recognizes the complexity of oppression of gender and sexualities of people in various cultures.

The effect of religion on the change of gender roles and sexual orientation, as society and religion changes, is complex but very vast. Mayeza (2021) is one of the research works that illustrates the complexity of LGBTQ+ South African Youth's religious practices. This research proposal takes primary research as a point of departure in investigating religion and the attitudes of people in society, especially in Africa.

To what extent theology, the positive and negative attitudes towards sexual orientation, and the inclusivity of religion shape the attitudes of society, is of concern here. A reexamination of religion, governance, and dogma.

This study is expected to demonstrate the complex relationship among religion, gender, and sexual orientation. Integrating theological research, social discourse, policy formulation, and practices of religion and secular inclusivity, this study seeks to demonstrate the complexity of the interrelation of the subjects. This study, in South African religious communities, will foster the understanding of, and engagement in

discourse, on the subject of gender and sexuality, which are among the gaps in knowledge.

CHAPTER 2

The influence of theological perspectives on attitudes towards gender roles

2.1 INTRODUCTION

African and South African Christian theologies influence gender and sexuality with respect to architecture. Khosa-Nkatini and Buqa (2023), Shingange (2023), and Chisale (2020) assert that Christian teachings shape home, church, and community authority relations and structures that prescribe and define gender, sexuality, and masculinities the main focus of this chapter is to discuss the various ways that Christians have interpreted theology, but it has done so in a way that takes into consideration the broad social and cultural context of religion in South Africa.

This chapter critiques conservative and feminist literature that defends patriarchal civic institutions. The complementarian–egalitarian debate is then considered concerning authority, hermeneutics, texts, social order, and the gender order. In the chapter on religion, masculinities and sexual citizenship, Bulchardt, Meyer and Camminga (2020) study the influence of religious identity on the social and political discourse around rights, sexuality, and inclusion/exclusion. This chapter, using intersectionality, shows how theology impacts race, class, and sexuality in South Africa (van Dijk & Mangai, 2025). The chapter provides evidence how social practices, gendered discourse, and women and sexual minorities in different fields are impacted by patriarchy and theology. This paves the way for the subsequent chapter which focuses on modern-day Christians' interpretations of these theologies, their dissemination, and contestation.

2.2 SCRIPTURAL FOUNDATIONS AND PATRIARCHAL INTERPRETATIONS

Analyses of Christian scriptures have shaped biblical views of standards and Christian views of gender that nurture the stand of dominant systems of oppression and control of the leadership of women. Banda (2020) submits that, "Christian patriarchy is entrenched through literalist, androcentric hermeneutics". The scriptures, particularly the Bible, delineate gender roles within the family and the church (Pierce & Groothuis, 2005). South African gender dominance is shaped by socio-cultural beliefs (Labuschagne, 2021).

These scholars show that macho ideology, the exploitation of scripture, and gender inequality coalesce. In order to justify other forms of hermeneutics, the potential interaction of liberating theological constructs and oppressive social systems is examined and explained.

These patriarchal readings were produced within a larger context. They are an expression of the Christian theological tradition. This is to say they grew out of (and have been informed by) earlier expressions of Christian theology such as the views of Augustine of Hippo with respect to the nature of original sin and disordered desires, and the views of Thomas Aquinas with respect to sexual ethics considering natural law. The views expressed by both of these thinkers were influential in the development of future Christian interpretations of gender hierarchy and moral regulation.

There exists, however, a wide rift among feminist theologians on the Genesis accounts of creation and the ultimate genesis of patriarchy. Traditions, however, have rationalized and justified women's servitude by propounding that Eve, a ribbed creation of Adam, was the cause of the fall (Banda, 2020; Piper & Grudem, 1991). Feminists Tribble (1970) and Ruether (1983) have articulated responses. Tribble argues that Genesis 1–3 encourages sexual equality and the integrity of the human body, but the fall is what sows the seeds of patriarchy. Ruether (1983), however, contends that these scriptures have been abused by a dominant patriarchal culture which leads to the denial of God's equality.

That is what Keener (1999) points out; traditional explanations have marginalized women to 'sleeping on the side of the church, out of the reach of safely pointed domination and sidelining of the church'. Ephesians 5:22-33 has been translated with a stronger emphasis on male supremacy by Paul. Bilezikian (2006) and Pierce and Groothuis (2005) observed that these interpretations emphasized masculine domination while overlooking verse 21's injunction to surrender. Keener (1999) observes that Paul's pastoral guidance to the poor had a socio-historical boundary, as the early Christian society had little to no freedom, and so the restrictions were not the result of divine command.

Feminist theologians have been critical of the patriarchal interpretations of the texts. Feminists take Paul as an ally for advocating women's leadership with the Christian community because of Tribble (1970)'s argument that patriarchal exegesis heavily weighted the concept of submission, and because of Ruether (1983)'s argument that the

New Testament's ethics of love and justice, if set in relation, would contradict the hierarchical ordering of marriage and ministry. Paul's interpretations of the New Testament neglects theology for the sake of culture.

The interpretation of scripture is shaped by historical hermeneutic traditions, which have been patriarchal; therefore, it has not always been a product of the Bible itself. The contributions of Tribble (1978: 72–85) and Ruether (1983: 18–23) demonstrate this clearly through their feminist biblical scholarship. Tribble's emphasis on mutuality in creation through a rhetorical analysis of Genesis is evidence that this understanding is present in the biblical text. Ruether (1983)'s theological critique also demonstrates how patriarchal ecclesiastical structures have selectively used portions of scripture to support male dominance. Therefore, Tribble and Ruether (1983) demonstrate that the interpretation of scripture not the scripture itself is what provides the foundation for the theological constructs of gender.

Labuschagne (2021) & Banda (2020) both argue that how many South African scholars interpret the bible through the lens of patriarchy contributes to the normalization of GBV (gender-based violence) among specific religious groups. Labuschagne (2021) states that patriarchal religions justify the oppression of women by normalizing violence in relation to the dominance of men. Van Klinken & Obadare (2020) show the ways in which religion endorses and supports hatred of women. Selina Palm has shown that religious beliefs and doctrines make women targets of violence during the COVID-19 lockdown which saw an alarming rise in GBV, and that some church organizations promote and justify the abuse of women by subordination of women and the use of the doctrines to support violence. The findings suggest that conservative and patriarchal interpretations of the Bible externalize injustices against women. The reinterpretation of some scriptures could mitigate violence and some inequities in the system.

The subjugation of women in the Bible and in South Africa illustrates the impact of patriarchal divinity. Burchardt (2020) draws a parallel between the biblical accounts of excluding women; the violence associated with such accounts and the current socio-economic conditions of the oppressed and marginalized. Banda (2020) suggests that such biblical accounts legitimize the pedagogical subordination of women and the subordination of men. Van Klinken & Chitando (2021) assert that readings of the Bible in a patriarchal manner further worsens the socio-religious conditions of women. Cook

(2021) identifies such theological tendencies to be the cause of socio-political inequities and proposes an examination of patriarchal biblical texts as a solution to the problem of gender-inequities in South Africa. This illustrates that theological language might shape behavior while advocating for a theology of scripture that is centered on justice and the dignity of all.

2.3 THE COMPLEMENTARIAN VS. EGALITARIAN DEBATE

Christian theology contests patriarchal interpretations of scripture. Over the last few decades, a theological argument has arisen surrounding the complementarian vs egalitarian positions regarding the role of the genders in the family, church, and society (Pierce & Groothuis, 2005). This theological argument involves hierarchical interpretations of the bible and centers on power, authority, and the subordination of women in Christianity (Piper & Grudem, 1991). Historically, this kind of hierarchical reading has been connected to theological anthropology models that have historically identified social structures as divine and unchangeable. On the other hand, liberationist, contextual, and many other contemporary theological approaches challenge this understanding. For example, theologian Cone (1970) stated that theology is best understood by how it affects oppressed peoples; therefore, any interpretation that supports oppression violates the liberating nature of the Gospel. This is where this abstract of Hermeneutics starts (Bilezikian, 2006).

Complementarianism is the view held by both John Piper & Wayne Grudem (1991). They state that men and women are equal before God but have distinct, complementary roles in both life and the church. In this view, men are given the positions of leadership in both the home and the church because, although women and men are equal in all ways, they differ in role and function (Banda, 2020). The submissive and silent roles of women in the church, as per the Pauline writings and in Genesis, has always served to strengthen patriarchal views (Keener, 1999). They argue that women, who they view as the primary caregivers of the home, are not to stray from these activities as that would be opposing the good and perfect will of God for humanity (Piper & Grudem, 1991).

Rather, egalitarianism advocates the marriage and societal and ecclesiastical (church) spheres (Pierce & Groothuis, 2005). For egalitarian scholars such as those contributing

to the volume, *Discovering Biblical Equality*, biblical stories promote and advocate for the end of all forms of bondage and the cessation of all forms of inequity, and especially the ones which include the hierarchy of genders (Bilezikian, 2006). They argue that passages which proclaim male supremacy ought to be analyzed by their milieu (Keener, 1999). They argue that the exhortations which Paul gives in Ephesians 5 should be understood for their historical background, verses 5:21 which requires all Christians to be submissive, and therefore the rest should be understood as mutual love and respect in a particular culture.

Egalitarian exegesis showcases the New Testament's first-century Greco-Roman context (Keener, 1999). For scholars like Craig Keener (Bilezikian, 2006), many of Apostle Paul's directives concerning women were meant to tackle issues such as disorganized worship of pagan practices, as opposed to being intended to be universal commands applied to all Christians of all nations. In Galatians 3:28, Paul underscores 'For you are all one in Christ Jesus,' 'there is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female' as the gospel's radical and everlasting equality. This is the core of the gospel, and as described by Piece and Groothuis (2005), this is where most other cultural texts that egalitarians handle derive from.

Theologically speaking, according to Labuschagne (2021) and Banda (2020), religion is used as a means of controlling people socially particularly when it comes to women's rights over their bodies. Certain classical complementarian interpretations of scripture, refuse to acknowledge the structures of patriarchy (Piper & Grudem, 1991). Such strategies engender and sustain widespread gender-based violence from the perception of male supremacy (Burchardt, 2020). Egalitarian interpretations of scripture undermine the patriarchal structures' theological authority (Pierce & Groothuis, 2005). Conservative Christians' venomous hostility toward the principle of equality is, of course, and their defense of social order where male dominance is theologically introduced, culturally established, and institutionally defended, is not surprising (Bilezikian, 2006). The discord is obviously of political nature, and will affect women within and outside the church (Labuschagne, 2021).

2.4 MASCULINITY, RELIGION, AND SEXUAL CITIZENSHIP

There are many problems in terms of how people view and how people react to men and women taking into consideration post-apartheid South Africa and religious ideas pertaining to gender and role. Burchardt, (2020) states. In urban township areas, there are men who need to come to terms and make sense of opposing, and, in many cases, conflicting views of what it means to be a man (Vank Klinken & Obadare, 2020). Agile modernity Burchardt, 2020 states, assists men in a certain context (mostly in relation to a singular type of modernity) in structuring their identity around a specific form of Christianity (Pentecostal). Men, along with the religion, exercise their agency pertaining to sexual citizenship and politics regarding gender (Van Klinken & Chitando, 2021).

Often, these expressions of masculinity have been legitimized through religious appeals to divine order or headship; however, this is a theme which has historically existed in Christian theological discourse. Contemporary African feminist theologians, for example, Oduyoye(2020), also suggest that the religious appeals used by many people to justify these expressions of masculinity are nothing but culture based patriarchy disguised as divine will. Oduyoye(2020) suggests that African Christian Theology should critically examine the patriarchal assumptions that have been passed down from generation to generation rather than sanctifying them as sacred traditions.

In relation to the township of Cape Town, gives the description of the -fourfold matrix of masculinities of which there are: 1 - liberal - sexual - 2- cultural traditional is patriarchal AND respectful; 3 - religious - Pentecostal; 4 - hyper-masculine youth gang (Banda 2020). Compared to other masculinities and their sexuality, Pentecostal men identify their masculinity with their sins. - The - born again - identity (Labuschagne, 2021) allows men to address violence, substance abuse and promiscuity is a means of becoming a good, godly, husband and father.

This study is about the concept of “sexual citizenship,” which identifies, recognizes, and protects the relational rights of members of a society and its engrained social and legal frameworks of equity, resources, and acknowledgment of the particular social communities irrespective of sexual orientation and gender identity (Van Klinken & Chitando, 2021). The notion of religiously defined masculinities has a divergence with this post apartheid liberal and rights discourse (Burchardt, 2020). The Liberated state is

in favor of sexual liberalism and equity, while the Pentecostal teachings endorse male dominance in familial matters and heterosexuality (Piper and Grudem, 1991). There is an inner conflict among religious men and men of state-recognized rights of their aspirations and beliefs (Van Klinken & Obadare, 2020).

For Burchardt (2020), Pentecostal masculinity is in a radical transition, in which men use a religious identity in a creative way to address certain social and moral dilemmas. "This is masculinity is a set of cultural distinctions that vary in accordance with the issues that these distinctions seek to address" which implies that men might under certain circumstances adopt or conceal a 'religious masculinity' to enhance their social standing and acceptance within a particular social context, to set themselves apart from 'traditional' or 'gang' masculinities, or to justify social living, including its ethical aspects and sexual citizenship (Van Klinken & Chitando, 2021).

There are scholars, including Burchardt (2020: 45-51), who have shown that religion is an important part of the process of how people form their identities and where they place themselves socially, in the South African community. A male religious feminist is morally integrating, can access congregation's supportive social networks, and can establish a family within their unstable community (Burchardt, 2020). Exhibiting some forms of masculinities can result in social isolation. Dismissing secular liberal tenets may exacerbate an existing antagonism toward gender equality and the rights of people in the LGBTQ+ community and may undermined the South African constitution's sexual citizenship goal (Camminga, 2020). Hence, the study of religiously-inflected masculinities is crucial in understanding how lived, negotiated and contested theological gender views, and how personal doctrines may intersect with the public politics of identity and rights (Cook, 2021).

2.5 INTERSECTIONAL OPPRESSION

Even though the method is narrower, no other method analyzes the intersection of theology and gender the way this intersectional framework does (Huffman et al., 2020). The intersection of gender and other theological concepts include the race, class and ethnicity structures of the society, and this contributes to multi-layered deprivation and the other structures of dominance (Banda, 2020). In the context of apartheid and

economic deprivation, the intersectional approach is necessary to understand the lives of women, particularly those black women who experience multiple forms of oppression and who mainly carry the discriminatory practices of society (Van Klinken & Obadare, 2020).

The combination of patriarchal theology that fosters and legitimizes male superiority and the oppression of women, combined with the structural racism and poverty that most black South Africans experience, creates a very dangerous and highly detrimental situation (Burchardt, 2020). This example illustrates how, from a religious perspective, Doctrine functions not simply as beliefs; however, as an instrument of social power. Liberation Theology as defined by (Cone:1970) demands that theology be interpreted from the context of those experiencing systemic injustice. Therefore, when viewed through an intersectional lens, Theological Claims regarding Order, Submission, and Authority cannot exist independently of the racialized and economic conditions in which they operate.

The loyalty that black women owe to their husbands, who are the economic neck of the family, compounds racial oppression and economic vulnerability (Labuschagne, 2021). This situation defends the black women and the men to advocate for their communities to demand and fight for gender and economic equality (Banda, 2020). Intersectionality suggests that though gender is a basis of their oppression, race and class are the primary determinants of their lack of resources to respond to the oppression, and in the fight against oppression (Cook 2021).

Hybrid governance systems entail understanding how modern governance systems of state are integrated with non-state, community authoritative structures in the majority of post-colonial societies. This explains the overlapping discriminations (Van Klinken & Chitando, 2021). In many South African communities, modern, rights-based legal systems operate alongside traditional authorities, and strong religious systems with patriarchal traditional integrations (Burchardt, 2020). The integration creates complexities of conflicts in a woman's social life. Where legal frameworks exist, such communal patriarchy restricts/facilitates access (Banda, 2020).

Bible interpretation, South African society, and all other disciplines, exhibit intersectional oppression. The intersectional understanding of the Old Testament suggests a specific focus on the gender, social class and culture which resulted in the oppression of women

(Keener, 1999). The overlapping identity of being women, widows, foreigners and slaves also explains the great persecution in comparison to other groups, similar to the situation of marginalised women in South Africa today (Pierce & Groothuis, 2005). This lens reveals the dominant theological position which in most cases homogenises women, deliberately subjugates the recognition of women's strength and the feebleness they endure in complex social situations (Huffman et al., 2020). Any theological project envisaged to assist radical equality from a gender perspective must contend with sexism, and how it operates in consort with racism, classism and other forms of oppression in the maintenance of inequitable socio-economic order (Labuschagne, 2021).

2.6 CONCLUSION

Interpretations of theology affect the roles of gender, and sexual orientation in the African Christian civilisations discussed in this chapter. The works of Khosa-Nkatini and Buqa (2023) and Chisale (2020) illustrate how patriarchal interpretation of scripture provide legitimisation to the unequal distribution of power within the home and the church, while Shingange and Judge (2020) illustrate how theodicies promoting heterosexuality marginalise those with non-conforming sexual orientations. Theological reflections and the *raison d'être* of political and cultural sexual citizenship as framed by Burchardt and Meyer (2020) contend with conservative theology as well as the equalities espoused by the South African constitution. Diko (2023) and Van Dijk and Mangai (2025) evidenced how theology, race, class and sexuality convergence oppress black women and members of the gender-diverse. Banda (2020: 78-80), Van Klinken & Chitando (2021) and Burchardt (2020:47-64) demonstrate that theological discourse does not merely establish normative discourses, it also legitimates hierarchical social systems which have real life implications for lived experiences. The historical time span in which Christian doctrine was developed from the early church fathers through the medieval period's formulation of natural law and continuing today with various ecumenical discussions among the churches suggests that theologies regarding gender and sexuality have never been stable or unchanging; rather, theologies of gender and sexuality have always represented a set of competing traditions of interpretation that continually influence South African society and religion. This chapter precedes the subsequent chapter, which focuses on how theology informs and shapes gender and sexuality discourses, the instruments and

practices of legislation, and what other hermeneutical approaches may constructively subvert the established discord in the church and the society.

CHAPTER 3

The impact of religion on perceptions of sexual orientation

3.1 INTRODUCTION

While this chapter mentions religion in a more general sense, it primarily focuses on the ways in which Christian theologians have articulated their perspectives about gender and sexual orientation in South Africa because Christianity is the dominant religion in South Africa that influences the public debate around gender and sexuality issues. It considers the impact of religious traditionalism, theological doctrines and ecclesiastical practices surrounding South African sexual orientation attitudes. As per Van Klinken and Chitando (2021), Burchardt (2020) and Shingange (2023), religion continues to influence the public sphere and the regulation of conduct from the moral, gender and sexual ethics standpoint; hence the need for theological discussions when it comes to the topic of the identity of the LGBTQ+. The chapter starts with the explanation of the impact of conservative interpretations of the bible that has legitimised and promoted heteronormativity and the marginalisation of sexually diverse Christians of all denominations. It also touches on the ways religious authorities and the community of faith police sexuality, enforce gender nonconformity and devalue (or morally demonise) homosexuality as untruth, inflicting moral harm, and as false. As noted by Robertson (2020), Camminga (2020), and Judge (2020), the chapter also touches on the tensions between faith and sexuality that LGBTQ+ believers must navigate, chronicling their psychological, socio-spiritual wear and tear. Also, it brings postcolonial corrective frameworks urging for the deconstruction of the so-called “Western import” of sexual diversity by jurisprudential and religious frameworks around political discourses of cultural sovereignty and identity. Finally, the chapter addresses new strands of theology focusing on inclusive exegesis, and justice based pastoral practices. It provides a thorough analysis of the ways theology has been and continues to influence the orientation of sexual ethics and opens the scope for new inclusive approaches meant to challenge the conservative religious frameworks.

3.2 CONSERVATIVE THEOLOGY AND THE PATHOLOGIZATION OF HOMOSEXUALITY

Conservative theologies across multiple Christian denominations have influenced social attitudes towards homosexuality as deviant, sinful, and even diseased. Meyer (2020), Chisale (2020), and Van Klinken and Chitando (2021) have pointed out that religious teachings have labeled LGBTQ+ people as outcasts by viewing same-sex relationships as being in conflict with Christian principles. The exclusion from acceptance within the Christian faith is derived from the belief that only heterosexual relationships are lawful and approved by the Lord, and that all other relationships are viewed as immoral and unnatural (Chapman, 2020). Conservative churches have legitimized social exclusion, regulated aspects of sexual conduct, and fostering social hatred (Huffman et al., 2020). Religious doctrine plays, and will continue to play, a big role in shaping social perceptions and the stigma justified by religion surrounding the exclusion of homosexuality within the heterosexual social order. Theological doctrine plays an enormous role as a social power in defining the morality of the society as a whole, and particularly, that segment of the society of which a sizable portion is composed of individuals that will bend social mores.

In particular, conservative theologies have festered heteronormativity within all of Africa and within South Africa in particular. Van Klinken and Obadare (2020), Kaunda (2020), and Burchardt (2020) explain the opposition to sexual diversity by the Anglican, Methodist, independent evangelical and some of the mainline Reformed denominations. This opposition is what Shingange (2023) refers to as ‘heteronormative God-talk’ – the discourse on sexuality and sexual diversity that is theologically located and frames heterosexuality as the only way in which the moral order of the divine can be structured. Additionally, religious leaders preach, pray and caution that sexual diversity threatens spiritual wholeness as well as the cultural identity of the people. Shingange (2023) and Labuschagne (2021) provide agreement on the fact that this discourse also concerns morality and law as well as nationhood which advocates for the discourse to be restricted to the private sphere of religious that some Christians have. This discourse is also socio-political in that it situates the church as the moral guardian of society. Conservative theology then is dual as a religion and a political entity that attempts to influence the sexual orientation of the entire nation, using conservative biblical arguments.

How widespread the use of heteronormative theology is across religions has turned sexuality into a political issue (2020). Burchardt, Camminga, and Van Klinken and Obadare mention that actors, such as self-proclaimed prophets and institutional leaders, address the LGBTQ+ identity as a morally declining and 'Western contaminated' issue (2020). These morals are amplified through the media and create values void panic of cultural disintegration and societal instability, often referred to as the makeshift of society panics. The opposition to sexual diversity is often claimed to be a resistance to external ideology by African leaders (Cook, 2021). The politicization of theology here is a means to provide the churches the authority to control the legislation and public. The use of gender and sexuality as proxies for cultural sovereignty, identity and political power is evident.

LGBTQ people are excluded and viewed unfavorably. For example, conservative ideology views same-sex relations as sinful, disordered, and/or antithetical to one's Christian identity, which leads to internalized stigma and psychological deterioration (Mayeza, 2021; Shingange, 2023; Van der Toorn et al., 2020). The belief that one cannot be Christian and gay, which affects one's identity deeply, has become prevalent due to the conservative moral framing (Huffman et al., 2020). Within faith communities Van Klinken and Chitando (2021) describe the public shaming, disciplinary action, and removal of leadership roles that religious communities impose on LGBTQ people. The discriminatory behaviors of religious faith communities have resulted in numerous people living double lives in order to preserve family and community relationships (Burchardt, 2020). The impact of inflexible doctrine on mental well-being, sense of belonging, and human dignity is sharply illustrated by these experiences.

Having doctrinal beliefs about same-sex partnerships has caused significant emotional and psychological distress among many LGBTQ+ Christians. Internal faith- sexual conflicts have been elaborated by Huffman et al. (2020); Mayeza (2021); and Camminga (2020). The self-blame and guilt cause "healing" efforts through prayer, conversion therapy, and counselling, all of which pose severe psychological risk (Cook, 2021). The association of sexual diversity with moral or spiritual weakness perpetuates religious communities' shame and alienation. The consequences are profound, as many people forgo their religious practices, endure years of emotional distress, or isolate themselves.

These patterns show that conservative theologies impute moral value and also extend their distressing consequences on people's lives.

Even in moderate and dialogical denominations, gay people have to grapple with the 'politics of belonging' (Robertson, 2020; Labuschagne, 2021; Van Klinken and Obadare, 2020). While some queer clergy and congregants may be permitted to participate in the social and ministerial life of the community, they still contend with the possibility of dismal surveillance, restrictions, and the unspoken obligation to conceal their true selves. People experience profound tensions trying to survive in zones where they are simultaneously included and excluded. Consequently, while offering spiritual sustenance, religious institutions also provide deep social exclusion, underscoring the need for frameworks that are theologically and sociologically sensitive to the social exclusion of sexually diverse people. These testimonies illustrate the resilience of LGBTQ+ Christians, as well as the urgent need for churches to go beyond mere tolerance and provide true inclusion that honors the full dignity and humanity of each member of the community.

Postcolonial viewpoints confuse conservative theology and conceptions of African sexual orientation. Cameron (2020), Van Klinken and Chitando (2021), and Mnyadi (2020) argue that the rejection of the LGBTQ+ identity is not simply a theological matter but also a question of risk and cultural sovereignty. The "stigma of Western words" reflects how the identity categories of "gay," "lesbian," and "transgender" carry Western ideologies and politics that do not fit well into African discourse. Tiwonge Chimbalanga highlights the tension of Western identity categories and local gendered experience (Camminga, 2020). Most opponents of LGBTQ+ rights claim to be defending African values and fighting cultural imperialism (Mayeza, 2021). These discourses justify homophobia as an anti-colonial struggle, rather than acknowledging sexual diversity as part of African life.

These arguments showcase the importance of developing theologically and socially informed frameworks grounded in specific African contexts and supporting sexual and gender pluralism in African Christian communities. Obadare and Van Klinken (2020), Burchardt (2020), and Cook (2021) contend that in order to rethink the theological discourse, one must take into consideration the precolonial and ancient histories of the African diverse and plural sexual practices and gender identities, as well as affirm that the core of the Christian gospel speaks justice and dignity, and compassion, and advocates for LGBTQ+ persons. It also counters the position that sexual diversity is "un-

African” and contextualizes it to the continent’s spiritual and cultural history. Such frameworks would promote more empathetic and genuine pastoral responses, assisting church groups in abandoning practices of exclusion and doing African-rooted ‘affirmation’ work. The Contemporary re-visioning of theology also puts gendered and sexual marginalization within ethical Christian Relationality as disengaged from human dignity and the realities of all Christian believers.

3.3 EMERGING PROGRESSIVE THEOLOGIES OF INCLUSION

The line remains open and is a considerable and rising movement within Christians, regardless of the opposition from conservatives (Van Klinken & Chitando, 2021). This shift assists with the adjusting of the scripture, theology, and the church within a colourful glowing modernity. This movement is fuelled by Method influenced biblical readings, an alignment with modern accepted knowledge, a rejuvenation of empathy and justice, and the empowered witness of Christians with LGBTQ+ (Cook, 2021). This is not purely a scholarly resource, and is in fact a life giving, theologically transforming movement that impacts LGBTQ+ members of religious communities (Huffman et al (2020).

New approaches to the interpretations of scriptures remains at the heart of this development. While some deny same sex relations, along with some of the other 'clobber passages, some interpreters shift their focus to the biblical themes of love, inclusion, justice and radical grace (Pierce & Groothuis, 2005). An argument against the interpretation of these few prohibitive verses concerns the historical and literary contexts within which the verses, along with their criticisms of same sex relationships, were constructed. It is asserted that the verses target specific ancient cultural practices as pederasty and cultic prostitution, and not all same sex relationships that are loving and consensual (Keener, 1999). This purpose of this approach to scripture is to allow LGBTQ+ numerals to exist as a part of a Good Christian life that is definable by the presence of a good Christian faith (Bilezikian, 2006).

Interdisciplinary perspectives have allowed for further integration and rethinking of one’s theology (Labuschagne, 2021). Certainly, science has brought about a consensus that compels certain orthodox theology positions, which opposed and discriminated sexual orientations that were acceptable as simply a natural, inborn characteristic, to be re-

evaluated, if not accepted altogether. Consequently, many theologians critique orthodox positions on natural law and creation, stating that a God who fabricated an extraordinarily intricate universe would also be responsible for human sexual variation (Huffman et al., 2020). The integration of science in the theology of sexuality demonstrates a significant shift from the orthodoxy paradigm of faith and reason to one of greater moral complexity and intellectual rigour (Labuschagne, 2021).

Southern scholars, as among African Christian men and women, espouse that the church ought to take on an entirely new prophetic ministry of combating all forms of oppression, esp. heteronormativity and cisnormativity, and working towards a fully inclusive realm where all of God's offspring are acknowledged and supported. This radically shifts the church's mission from exclusion and judgement, to one that embodies the radical, unconditional love espoused within the Christian faith (Cook, 2021).

Humanity and dignity are fundamental rights which all individuals deserve, regardless of their sexual orientation and gender identity. Affirmations and injustices of this sort are what a liberating and inclusive Christian sexual theology will have to acknowledge (Van Klinken & Chitando, 2021). Within the global South and African Christian studies, this perspective contests the church's role of moral gatekeeping, who gets to exercise their sexuality (Burchardt, 2020).

3.4 RELIGION AS A DETERMINANT OF ATTITUDES TOWARD SEXUAL ORIENTATION IN SOUTH AFRICA

On South African attitudes towards sexual orientations, the purpose and morality that the South African culture and religion provide must be considered. Burchardt (2020) states that conservative and Christian teachings are still advocating for heterosexuality and the love for and within the LGBTQ+ community to be a moral or spiritual evil. Sexuality, a controversial moral topic, shapes and is shaped by the family, society, and community at large. As Khosa-Nkatini and Buqa (2023) point out, there is an integration of patriarchy and biased theological teachings on the gender binary system. As Meyer (2020) explains, in post-apartheid South Africa, sexual difference is a consequence of religiosity and the South African culture of hegemony. The above suggests that, in South Africa, sexuality or its orientation is an aspect of a religious system and social ideology.

Churches have long condemned homosexuality due to the Christian doctrine that stems from a view of homosexuality and non-heterosexual orientations as sinful or unnatural. In his work, Huffman et al. (2020) explains the other sexual orientations as an immoral pulling away from the righteous purpose God has for humanity. Religion draws heterosexuality as moral and demonic. Religious teachings that target heterosexuals as the only moral orientation of the faith have severely harmed and traumatized LGBTQ+ individuals of faith leading to feelings of turmoil and fears of out casting by family and the community of the faith (Judge 2020). In Gaitho (2021) explains why there is justification, by the theology of a religion, of violence including, but not limited to, the euphemism of “corrective rape.” The theology of a religion creates and justifies the exclusion of the LGBTQ+ community from religious belonging. The research shows that the exclusion created from religious teachings is a form of policing the intersection of religious identity with anti-LGBTQ+ bias.

Evangelical and Pentecostal leaders in Africa exercise authoritarian religious control in dismissing sexual diversity. As Shingange (2023) explains, “heteronormative God-talk” refers to the promotion of heterosexuality as sacred and the relegation of LGBTQ+ identities as threats to the divine and to the social order. For Kaunda (2020), African Pentecostal theology and its charisma are rooted in a particular gendered morality and, as such, advocates a form of charismatic nationalism that instrumentalizes sexuality as a tool for cultural control. This, as Van van Toorn, Pliskin, and Morgenroth (2020) describe, is the “insidious nature of heteronormative ideology”, which, while initially the province of Pentecostalism, has extended to mainlining Protestantism and Catholicism. Sexuality Policing is religiously regional. Thus, religious institutions exercise spiritual authoritarianism to shape debates on LGBTQ+ rights and policies.

How does religion influence the belief systems and the identities of the LGBTQ community? In an examination of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa, Robertson (2020) shows the struggle of spiritually called ministers who, due to ecclesiastical rules, are shut out of communities of belonging. These ministers, who are celebrated for their pastoral work, are surveilled for their sexual orientation. Gender non-conforming South African university students describe former religious spaces as sites where their identities were over-policed, leading to significant challenges of self-acceptance and the development of the self (Mampane and Brown, 2021). Although Davids (2020) argues

that church policies of the Uniting Reformed Church create a metaphorically invisible space for LGBTQ+ Christians, there is an emphasis on inclusivity. These studies suggest that on a micro level, social exclusion is the result of informal rules and leadership arrangements which guide the participation, or lack thereof, of religious systems. Unconditional affirmation within the governance of both theology and institutions is necessary.

Post-colonial thought has addressed the lack of rationale for the resistance for the inclusion of African LGBTQ+ on the basis of religion. Camminga (2020) explains that most African Christians identify the words “gay”, “lesbian” and “transgender” as Western and thus are stuck with the “stigma of Western words” as they are unable to claim foreign labels. This conflict also addresses cultural sovereignty, the memory of colonization, the Western gaze, and not only sexuality. Mnayadi, (2020) explains the African heteronormativity paradigm as the untrue assertion that the Ancestors, and Indigenous Cosmos, structure gender and sexual identity as does the Western tradition. Diko (2023) argues that southern Africa biblical interpretation is shaped by the colonial Christian mission which incorporates Victorian gender ideologies that are of African Christianity. This sees the lack of opposition to LGBTQ+ inclusion as simply a cultural conflict, which is also not the case with religion. This scholarship has shown that without decolonial reflection on the various ways African theologies are engaged, sexual diversity will remain an unexamined realm.

Religion's impact on politics, law, and socio-cultural aspects also shapes views on sexual orientation. Luiz and Terziev (2024) elucidate the way religious dodge heteronormativity and interweave the sexual discrimination with the socio-racial and gender inequities in order to legitimize and deepen systemic oppression within the South African socio-economic tapestry. Henry, Steiger, and Bellovary (2022) highlighted the correlation between the robust commitment towards geopolitical gender equality and the willingness to embrace and promulgate laws accommodating sexual orientation on the spectrum. Indicators, thus, reflect the religious gender norms as the pivotal force. Jacobs, George, and De Jong (2021) argue that the systemic assumption of heterosexuality within the socio-political frameworks dominates the norm, and thus, the adolescent health policy, influencing the entire system. Religious moral dictates institutional ethos that perpetuates the intersectional discrimination towards women and the LGBT persons, as posited by

Van Dijk and Mangai (2025). There is much to learn from these studies in terms of the religious constructs around sexual orientation and their impact on policy, health, and rights. These studies show that the societal impact of religion can either be used to define the scope of inclusivity or to establish the boundaries of marginalization.

Progressive theologies invite alternative interpretations of scriptures and Christian community (Van Klinken & Chitando, 2021). African Christian theologians interpret texts from the lenses of justice, compassion and history. Activists of religion-sexuality argue that faith is instrumental in advocating for human rights (Judge, 2020). Brown (2020) demonstrates the use of narratives in transforming religion/spirituality in Christian families with LGBTQ+ children. These children have Empathy and Understanding (E&U) through narratives. Certain cross-cultural frameworks in psychology argue for sensitive contextualization, which many progressive theologians employ. These factors represent intellectual and institutional agency African Christianity has to respond to inclusion. This demonstrates an inclination towards a holistic, justice-oriented understanding of sexual diversity.

3.5 Christian Interpretations of Gender and Sexual Order

Early and Medieval Christian theology provided the groundwork for subsequent Christian understanding of gender hierarchy and sexuality ethics. Even though contemporary debates typically focus on modern ecclesiastical disputes, many of the assumptions underlying present-day theological perspectives are deeply embedded in Patristic and Scholastic traditions. One of the most influential early theologians in shaping Western Christian thought on sexuality was Augustine of Hippo. His reflections on creation, sin, and desire led him to argue that human sexual desire became disordered as a result of the Fall. He affirmed marriage as a legitimate institution ordained by God; however, he also believed that sexual passion was marked by concupiscence, a distortion of human will, due to original sin. Therefore, proper sexual expression was limited to heterosexual marriage and was oriented toward procreation. He did not develop a systematic theory of gender hierarchy in the modern sense, but his anthropology contributed to later theological constructions that associated rational control with male authority and bodily desire with disorder. These interpretations laid the groundwork for later associations between masculinity and reason and spiritual leadership.

Thomas Aquinas, a Scholastic theologian, further systematized Christian sexual Ethics in a Natural Law framework. Aquinas used Aristotle's philosophy to show how moral norms could be discerned through reason by observing the natural purposes embedded in human faculties. According to Aquinas, the primary purpose of sexuality was procreation within heterosexual marriage. Sexual acts that were non-procreative were contrary to Natural Law. Additionally, Aquinas articulated a hierarchical view of social order in which differentiation between male and female was seen as part of divine design. While such arguments were situated within Medieval cosmology, they significantly shaped Catholic moral theology and influenced broader Christian moral discourse regarding gender complementarity and sexual normativity.

As demonstrated by classical theological constructions, contemporary Christian positions on gender and sexual orientation are not simply modern reactions, but rather embedded within long-standing doctrinal traditions. However, it is important to emphasize that these interpretations emerged within particular historical and philosophical contexts. Augustine's reflections were shaped by late antique concerns about bodily discipline and spiritual purity, while Aquinas' synthesis reflected Medieval metaphysical assumptions about teleology and hierarchical order. Recognizing this contextual embeddedness is essential for critical hermeneutics, as it provides an opportunity to examine how theological claims have been historically constructed rather than divinely fixed in timeless form.

The influence of these classical thinkers continues to echo in contemporary debates within South African Christianity, particularly in appeals to "Natural Order," "Biblical Marriage," and "Divinely Instituted Gender Roles." However, the historical distance between these foundational formulations and contemporary social realities raises important hermeneutical questions: To what extent should Medieval metaphysical assumptions govern modern ethical deliberation? And how might Christian theology distinguish between core doctrinal affirmations and historically conditioned moral frameworks?

By locating contemporary theological perspectives within their historical lineage, this study demonstrates that Christian teachings on gender and sexuality have always involved interpretation. They are neither static nor immune to contextual transformation.

This recognition provides a foundation for critically engaging both conservative and progressive theological claims within the South African context.

3.6 CONCLUSION

This chapter demonstrates that society's perceptions of polarized sexual orientations are shaped by conservative religious ideologies promoting heteronormativity and exclusionary ideologies. Shingange (2023), Meyer (2020), and Chisale (2020) note that many non-Pentecostal religions use their doctrinal authority to depict homosexuality as evil; a morally repugnant act; and culturally alien to sustain targeting of a given society and its people. Burchardt (2020) and Van Klinken and Chitando (2021) note that religious leaders impact politics and morals through the use of heteronormative rhetoric in the public space. The chapter describes the emotional and psychological impacts of the extreme internal crises and exclusion from the community facing LGBTQ+ believers in reconciling their faith and identity, as described by Robertson (2020) and Camminga (2020). Postcolonial studies illustrate how the religious rhetoric and debates around cultural sovereignty bordering on sexual diversity as “un-African” escalate the hostilities towards inclusion. Progressive theologies which realize scriptural reinterpretation seek to acknowledge the full range of humanity of LGBTQ+ people. These conclusions illustrate that theology reimagines social possibilities, shifts moral compasses, and transforms everyday life. This leads the quest to determine how progressive theologies enhance social cohesion and social justice in communities of faith.

CHAPTER 4

The role of religion in shaping public policy on gender and sexuality

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Contrary to the political context, religion shapes South African gender and sexuality policy, implementation, and debates. Van Klinken and Chitando (2021), Burchardt (2020), and Camminga (2020) indicate that religious advocacy has shaped conversations concerning sexual rights, gender equality, and the cultural politics of the nation as a 'moral guardian'. Within and outside church doctrines, there is influence over law, education, public health, and asylum seeking. To this end, this chapter seeks to determine the impact of religious lobbying on legal doctrines, the ways in which conservative theology affects the legislation of LGBTQ+ rights, and the impact of conservative, particularly Christian, theology on comprehensive sexuality education, gender-affirming health care, and constitutional protection on autonomy. According to Judge (2020) and Robertson (2020), public institutions must find a compromise between legal obligations to equality under the constitution and claims of religious freedom. Illumination of these intersections demonstrates the influence of theology over policy and the lives of sexual and gender minorities. This section details the ways in which religious ideology translates to state policy, national discourse, and institutional responses to gender and sexuality.

4.2 RELIGIOUS LOBBYING AND THE INFLUENCE ON LEGAL FRAMEWORKS

How theological views on gender and sexuality have, in one sense or another, entered not only into church walls but also into corridors of power, as religious bodies most often play the role of commanding and effective political lobbyists (Van Klinken & Obadare, 2020). In South Africa and on the African continent, however, organized religious groups are accused of actively intervening in the spheres of legislation and public policy so as to best fit their interpretation of doctrine, particularly on controversial social issues (Burchardt, 2020). Such political activism has established a direct, oftentimes powerful, line from theological interpretation onto government policy, and here constitutes a critical

battleground where religious values clash with those of an essentially secular democratic state (Camminga, 2020).

In South Africa, groups with a religious bend have been forefronts in campaigns opposing the expansion of rights for LGBTQ+ people. After the 2005 landmark ruling of the Constitutional Court legalizing same-sex marriage, a coalition of conservative Christian and other religious bodies set off a steady opposition campaign, lobbying Parliament to enact laws that would establish marriage as a union solely between a man and a woman (Van Klinken & Chitando, 2021). Despite their full-throated opposition, which cemented their political relevance and the ability to rally a vast constituency around a conservative social agenda, they failed to prevent the passing of the Civil Union Act (Cook, 2021). Such opposition has been witnessed once again in the recent legislative discussions around transgender rights, where religious groups have often been vocal in opposing measures aimed at assisting transgender persons to change their legal gender markers or to access gender-affirming healthcare (Camminga, 2020).

Another area of interest in religious lobbying is education concerning content on comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) in public schools (Cook, 2021). Conservative religious organizations have often opposed CSE curricula they considered "value-neutral" or those that teach contraception, safe-sex methods, and LGBTQ+ identities (Mayeza, 2021). They assert that such education undermines the parental role and promotes morality contrary to their religious beliefs, and thus advocate for abstinence-only programs that reflect such religious values (Labuschagne, 2021). This opposition could have serious public health ramifications, standing in the way of young people receiving crucial information that could protect them from unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections, including HIV (Banda, 2020).

While South Africa has decriminalized homosexuality, elsewhere in Africa colonial laws that make same-sex intimacy illegal are either still on the statute books or have been replaced by worse laws (Van Klinken & Obadare, 2020). Thus, in many of these societies, religious leaders and institutions have been, themselves, the very promoters and defenders of the antagonistic laws. On the basis of scripture and theological considerations, they have sought to legitimize criminalization and persecution of LGBTQ+ individuals (Van Klinken & Chitando, 2021). They use their considerable moral and social capital to paint homosexuality as a danger to the religious and cultural identity of the

nation, which has cultivated, over the years, a toxic political environment in which it is extremely hard for politicians to speak in favor of decriminalization or protection of LGBTQ+ rights (Burchardt, 2020). This is a stark example of how religious institutions, on the basis of their theological understandings of gender and sexuality, have a chillingly direct impact on the state-being, legal and carceral powers-with grave consequences for the lives and safety of sexual minorities (Cook, 2021).

4.3 ASYLUM LAW: A CONSIDERATION OF THE INTERSECTION BETWEEN LAW, RELIGION, AND IDENTITY

The South African asylum system for SOGI victims centers, disproportionately, on laws, religion, and identity (Camminga, 2020). The asylum practice exemplifies how progressive legal frameworks often are unable to tackle the complexities of conservative religious beliefs (Van Klinken & Chitando, 2021). South Africa is the only country in Africa that has constitutional protection for LGBTQ+ persons, thus allowing the country to serve as an asylum safe haven. SOGI asylum applicants demonstrate how legal and bureaucratic systems attempt to examine and assess identities that do not conform to Western frameworks, albeit with subtle exclusions and epistemic violence (Cook, 2021). A country like South Africa, presumed to be legally progressive, can also reproduce colonial systems of power as long as it can categorize the disadvantaged bodies it deems necessary to recognition and protection, in this case, Camminga (2020) notes, is the transgender asylum seeker. In colonial regimes (Burchardt, 2020), knowledge and identity systems were wholly imposed on the dominated. A central component of any asylum claim is the claimant's capacity to articulate not just any identity, but a "legible" one, to the seams of the state's legal and bureaucratic structures (Van Klinken & Obadare, 2020).

Camminga (2020) explains this. The South African court placed her under a specific classification for her safety. She described "transgender" as "a Western term" an identity presumed of her. To obtain protection, she would have to comply with Western and identity politics conceptualizations and legal frameworks (Cook, 2021). Hence, the state's administrative need to classify her legally outweighs her self-identification and her ethnically heterogeneous gender experience (Labuschagne, 2021). The perverse

outcome of a state presumed to be compassionate and progressive is the identification and categorization of asylum seekers, which requires them to inhabit a foreign subjectivity for protection and acceptance. This continues to reproduce colonial dominion through the control of categories, attesting to the paradox of emancipatory institutions (Camminga, 2020).

The societal perception of asylum claims consists of conservative values, which, as stated in Huffman et al. (2020), “may inform asylum officers and judges’ credibility assessments.” These assumptions are particularly relevant as “clients” are expected to perform their gender identity through stereotypes and, as Mayeza (2021) articulately puts it, any “noncompliance” in this “performance” may be deemed as suspicious. Therefore, to achieve credibility, the individual must perform in such a manner as to not be themselves, sacrificing their very being for the sake of trust, while their safety and future depend on a redundant asylum system (Camminga, 2020). It is this interplay of civil death, which brings together state law, societal expectations, religious beliefs, and the individual that leads to a deeply unjust and violent predicament for the most marginalized (Van Klinken & Chitando, 2021).

4.4 PUBLIC HEALTH POLICY

There are specific public health conceptualizations and actions having to do with gender and sexuality which are influenced by conservative theology and social conventions (Labuschagne, 2021). A systematic examination of policy documents from South Africa indicates an adolescent health focus, as well as an inclination to identify proximal “symptoms” of gender inequity, including GBV and HIV, and attempts to ignore these structural factors (Banda, 2020). Patriarchal norms and rigid gender roles can be supported by conservative religions (Burchardt, 2020).

Numerous health initiatives conceptualize gender in binary terms—girls/women versus boys/men—as opposed to a mutable social process with disparate relational hierarchies (Cook, 2021). This gender strategy defies many of these adolescent girls’ contextual realities and power inequities (Labuschagne, 2021). This implies little policy attention to the health requirements of boys and the masculinisation processes and the negative consequences on themselves and their partners due to harmful masculinities (Burchardt,

2020). The health of young LGBTIQ+ specifically is frequently overlooked with the exception of HIV prevention (Huffman et al., 2020).

Focusing on symptoms rather than causality reinforces the notion that the health of adolescents is a health service which is resolvable by post-violence care or treatment with antivirals (Banda, 2020). While these auxiliary services have a crucial role, the ineffectiveness of these services is because they place unequal power relations and the need for gender transformative prevention on the periphery (Labuschagne, 2021). With the considerable influence of conservative religious factions, neglecting the socio-economic determinants of ill health is because patriarchy and hetero-normativity is politically the more convenient option (Van Klinken & Obadare 2020). The ground is unlevelled. While the public health framework is politically charged, the Southern African HIV Clinicians Society's Standards of Gender Affirming Healthcare are progressive and rights-based (Cook 2021). The guidelines are crafted with transparency and most certainly with the engagement of medical and psychosocial experts, and are human rights centred, based on evidence, and are unapologetically anti- the pathologisation of transgender and gender diverse people (Labuschagne, 2021). The care is validated. Rather than the pathologisation and conservative gatekeeping, the principles adopted empower users to agency, self-determination, and autonomy (Huffman et al 2020).

These opposing strategies demonstrate the same policymaking process. Knowledge of science and human rights informs one route aimed at producing highly sophisticated documents that mirror the best technical practices globally (Cook, 2021). The other route emphasises political strategy and the attempts to satisfy influential conservative constituents and this resulted in a disarticulated gender-neutral public health policy and a domestic policy (Burchardt, 2020). A hostile policy environment that refuses to confront social structures that, reinforced by religion and culture, create a myriad of public health challenges, is likely to stifle progressive standards of care in the public health system which is already fractured and severely weakened (Van Klinken & Chitando, 2021).

4.5 THE CONSTITUTIONAL CONFLICT: RELIGIOUS FREEDOM VS. THE RIGHT TO EQUALITY

The 'freedom of religion' and the 'freedom of equality' clash inherently and constitute the scope of the analysis of the intersection of religion and public policy in South Africa with respect to Camminga (2020) and South African public policies on gender and sexuality. Camminga indicates that, in South Africa, the legislation passed in the post-apartheid regime provides for enshrined fundamental legislation. The broader socio-legal environment would continue to 'evolutionarily' transform as the socio-legal environment permits due to the fact that the legislation on human rights does not provide a codified hierarchy on the rights in question (Burchardt, 2020). The primary sphere of the contestation is now on the policies relating to gender and sexualities, with human rights advocates on one side defending and religious institutions on the other side contesting the socio-constitutional vision of the South African Constitution as per Van Klinken and Obadare (2020).

These groups who advocate for religion and religious institutions support a broad interpretation of this conflict for religious freedom advocacy. They support the right of the religious to conduct their public activities in a discriminatory manner while protecting the right to privately believe and practice their religion (Piper & Grudem, 1991). If a religious institution of sincere belief is required to act in a manner inconsistent with its belief for the sake of equality, that, according to this view, would be a violation of freedom of conscience and association (Labuschagne, 2021). This is the position that is often cited in religious marriages, where religious officials oppose their doctrine and in employment in the case of faith-based restrictive dismissal of an employee, arguing that their right to practice religion is violated if they dismiss an employee simply for being transgender, or in a same-sex relationship (Cook, 2021).

The other side of the argument mentions that advocates of LGBTQ+, gender equality, and human rights are 'the champions of equality and the right to no discrimination' (Camminga, 2020). They argue that while religious freedom is important, it cannot be used to harm others, or infringe the overarching legal principle that all individuals are equal before the law and entitled to equal access to the law and legal rights and protections (Mayeza, 2021). They argue that permitting such religious discrimination will create a tiered citizenship scheme where women and LGBTQ+ rights are more

permissibly and arguably unequally available (Huffman et al., 2020). In her view, the exercise of one's freedom of religion in public and in matters concerning the rights of others, particularly discrimination, must be curtailed in the interests of equality (Van Klinken & Chitando, 2021). Because of its influence on how public policy is created, this dispute in the constitution goes well beyond the legal domain (Burchardt, 2020). The attempt to balance contradictory rights in every case is a profoundly intractable challenge for the legislator. An example of this is in the healthcare regulations where rights can be conscience based, and a medical entity may refuse to provide a certain service, such as gender affirming care or abortion.

For patients, to achieve equal access to these services, their rights must be weighed against their needs (Cook, 2021). Nevertheless, concerning the religious organisations' requests concerning the inclusion of faith-based curricula within the scope of educational policy, the state does have a responsibility to provide inclusive, and, to the best of its ability, educationally inclusive policies and practices (Labuschagne, 2021). The political weight and relative influence of the opposing actors define the scope of these policy debates. Hence, religious lobbying and secular advocacy are pivotal in shaping the direction of the South African polity (Van Klinken & Obadare, 2020). Ultimately, the resolution of this controversy will indicate the state of democracy in South Africa and the opportunity to honour its promise concerning the coexistence of its plurality of faith traditions and the unwavering commitment to the principles of equality (Camminga, 2020).

4.6 CONCLUSION

As shown in this chapter, religion guides the tone and content of South African gender and sexuality policy. According to Burchardt (2020), Van Klinken and Chitando (2021), and Shingange (2023), religious organizations use doctrinal debates to shape legislative and public health policy, as well as educational interventions, especially including and excluding LGBTQ+ rights and gender equity. Conservative Christian coalitions AGAINST same-sex marriage, gender-affirming health care, and comprehensive sexuality education, have strengthened heteronormative policy frameworks. Camminga (2020) and Robertson (2020) note the chapter concerned the tension of progressive commitments of the constitution and conservative theological cultural frameworks. Public health discourse

elucidated the ways in which religiously charged moral prescriptions stalled gender-transformative and rights-based treatments. Culturally embedded religious prejudices administered the asylum processes to highlight the ways in which poor religious beliefs constrict public policy. The studies cite theological worldviews as the constraining factor in public policies and individuals. The extent to which South African Gender and Sexuality policies will depend on the extent to which the State can balance constitutional equality with religiously motivated activism. The need for policy frameworks that engage with religious philosophies, while preserving human dignity and rights, is made clear.

CHAPTER 5

The potential for reinterpretation and reform within religious traditions

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The chapter discusses the impact of new methods of interpreting doctrines on the reform of the gender and sexual orientation's facets of the Christian religion. Van Klinken and Chitando (2021), Shingange (2023), and Burchardt (2020) argue that African Christianity is going through a revision of the doctrines and beliefs through the liberatory, decolonial and queer perspectives. Such new readings are proposing that ecclesiastical and social teachings may be radically altered and, therefore, challenge the teachings/interpretations of a patriarchal and heteronormative system that social and ecclesial teachings are based on. South African scholars Chisale (2020) and Robertson (2020) believe that the inclusion of the insights of women and the queer community might help the faith traditions devise a more inclusive ethical system. Thus, the chapter illustrates that the hermeneutics of liberation, decolonial theology and the African hybrid model of theorizing do not merely collapse traditional rigid binaries but also enable and create space for theologies that are gender-just and queer-affirming. It is these transformation currents, constituting the reinterpretation of doctrines as a socially relevant frame that modifies practice and belief, that the chapter is focusing on. Such transformations enable faith communities to re-image themselves around principles of dignity, equality and contextual ethics.

5.2 HERMENEUTICS OF LIBERATION: RE-READING SACRED TEXTS

While scholars have dissected the patriarchal and heteronormative components of the sciences and humanities, there has been an equally important Christian scholarly response of reinterpretation and reform (Van Klinken & Chitando, 2021). In this regard, the focus of her thematic essay on religion and the philosophy of hermeneutics, particularly the theory and methodology of interpretation, seeks to explore the sacred writings not as static and monolithic structures of oppression, but as meaningful texts open to reinterpretation and as sites of oppression to be liberated and made inclusive

(Pierce & Groothuis, 2005). The axis of “Hermeneutics of Liberation” runs contrary to the principles of establishment interpretation, asserting that the scriptures are meant for positive change and that, when interpreted through the lenses of justice, compassion, and equitable principles, should never be at the service of oppression (Bilezikian 2006).

Therefore, Banda (2020) maintains that the male-dominated patriarchy structures and the female-dominated oppression structures should be paused and analyzed in light of the scriptures (Banda, 2020). Egalitarian has offered strong counter critiques of the patriarchal readings of some letters of Paul (Keener, 1999). For instance, Pierce and Groothuis (2005) argue that Paul’s command in Ephesians 5 that “wives be subject to your husbands” is an incomplete statement and must be read with the immediately preceding command that “all of you be subject to one another” (mutual submission). Consequently, the passage does not function as an instruction for a one-sided command and obedience in a marriage, but rather as a radical instruction for mutual love and service (Bilezikian, 2006). This, in the context of the patriarchal first century Roman Empire, would be liberating and revolutionary (Bilezikian, 2006).

The distinguishing factor of liberative hermeneutics is its attention to underlying history and cultural context. Craig Keener (1999) has considered the necessity of understanding the specific social and cultural conditions to which the authors of the biblical text responded. This argument posits that a number of the more problematic texts addressing women’s roles in the church are primarily pastoral concerning specific local issues your inappropriate conduct, the presence of a pagan cult with female sacerdotal priesthood, or the need to retain a proper public visibility in a hostile environment and that such texts are not to be considered and transcribed as universal wholistic statutes for every church of the world (Pierce & Gro). This line of thought enables a contemporary church to value other biblical mandates centered on the principles of equity and justice, as in Galatians 3:28 (Bilezikian, 2006).

Progressive biblical theologians ponder the same methods of interpretation pertaining to the very few biblical texts that carries condemnation of homosexuality (Cook, 2021). This school of thought articulates that the cited verses reference not to loving, committed, equitable same-sex relations as Found in contemporary times but to exploitative pederasty, ceremonial prostitution, or sexual violence and domination, all of which were commonplace in antiquity (Van Klinken & Chitando, 2021). The differentiation of what

historically particularized phenomena were being condemned in the text, on the one hand, and the present-day reality of an LGBTQ+ identity and relationality, on the other hand, is a profound stride that enables these theologians to present a discourse to the effect that the bible does not directly condemn homosexuality as an orientation (Labuschagne, 2021). The opening of this hermeneutic door provides self-affirmation of an inclusive Christian sexual ethic based fundamentally on love, faithfulness, and justice (biblical), as opposed to the 'literalist' interpretation of a few rogue scriptures that bend to the will of, and serve as context for, the ideology of fundamentalist estrangement (Huffman et al., 2020). The movement to reread these texts is anchored on a very particular reflexive spiritual axis of fundamental meaning which demonstrates that religious traditions are living and moving systems of meaning with the ability for formidable self-criticism, and that, as a result, these traditions are literate in the practices of self-criticism and transformation (Van Klinken & Obadare, 2020).

5.3 A DECOLONIAL THEOLOGY: CHALLENGING THE COLONIALITY OF "GOD-TALK"

African Christian traditions are presented via a decolonial theological lens, with the primary purpose of recognising and undoing the ways in which colonial ideas of power and knowledge have become institutionalised in contemporary religious discourse (Van Klinken & Obadare, 2020). According to the argument, some forms of God-talk, such as those based on absolute patriarchy and heteronormativity, are not valid expressions of either the Christian gospel or African culture, but rather the result of a colonial imposition that attempted to force a Western understanding of gender, sexuality, and family into African realities. Decolonial theology is striving to free Christian faith in Africa from colonial remnants, allowing a more genuine, contextual, and thereby justice-based form of belief to emerge (Van Klinken & Chitando, 2021).

The critiques of "heteronormative God-talk" in the African Pentecostal context are a prime example of such a decolonial narrative. According to Cook (2021), Pentecostal leadership's frequently intense hostility to sexual diversity is the result of a specific historical encounter, rather than an eternal theological attitude. The suppression of libido and rigid binary gender ideals seen in the interiors of these Pentecostal leaders can be traced back to the white Victorian missionaries who established Christianity on the region.

A decolonial reading uncovers the "coloniality of power" included in religious discourse, which includes remnants of colonial control and normalisation tactics such as body policing and rejecting anything that inhibits colonialism based on sexuality (Burchardt, 2020).

Decolonial techniques are significant tools for critique and rebuilding. The strategy reveals the repressive characteristics of so-called "God-talk," demonstrating how religious language is used to reinforce social hierarchies and discriminate against persons who do not meet mainstream standards (Van Klinken & Chitando, 2021). It can also help identify the church's liberating potential outside of colonial confines (Van Klinken & Obadare, 2020). Theologically, in a decolonising manner, the incarnation of the gospel liberates from all forms of oppression, a liberation that must also include the inalienable release from the rigid Victorian-type genders and sexual norms imposed on Christian faith in exchange for false claims to be its very core.

"God-talk," when approached constructively and decolonially, has the capacity to bring about significant development in both the church and society. After overcoming its colonial and heteronormative origins, the church can now try to explain a theology that liberates all members, regardless of gender or sexual orientation (Labuschagne, 2021). Because this would entail a conscious retrieval of select precolonial African conceptions of gender and sexuality that could be more fluid and diverse, as well as the integration of these ideas with those liberating elements in the Christian message (Burchardt, 2020), it is not a project to abandon Christian faith; rather, it seeks to deeply root Christian faith in the African experience in order to articulate a theology that speaks to the lived realities of all Africans.

5.4 AFRICAN CHRISTIANITY AND THE SEARCH FOR AN AUTHENTIC HYBRIDITY

The dynamic and ever-changing nature of African Christianity provides a fertile ground for intrinsic theological advancement through authentic, contextualised religion that combines Christianity, ATR, and culture (Van Klinken & Obadare, 2020). Many call this creative process "hybridity." This is a deliberate and unashamed search for the authentic African Christian identity, rejecting early missionaries' erroneous contradiction of Christianity and culture (Burchardt, 2020). Creative synthesis can transform gender and

sexuality by establishing an indigenous theological framework that rejects binaries and promotes diversity and inclusivity (Van Klinken & Chitando, 2021).

Theological "hybridity" is a more positive and accurate term than "syncretism," which Western theologians use to critique the mixing of Christian and non-Christian concepts as a degradation of "pure" faith (Cook, 2021). Hybridity is a dynamic and creative process that mixes two traditions to create a new cultural and religious product (Labuschagne, 2021). This does not diminish Christianity but rather reinterprets it so that an African way of life is relevant to the experiences, worldviews, and spiritual sensibilities of Africans who identify with the gospel (Van Klinken & Chitando, 2021).

Gender and sexuality in contextualised Christianity are influenced by numerous factors. Through this lens, orthodox African Christianity, particularly rigid, patriarchal, and heteronormative forms, can be seen as imbrolios brought from outside-the-colonial missionary packages that needed a profound break with African cultural identity (Burchardt, 2020). As a result of its hybrid African Christian identity, these norms required reevaluation (Van Klinken & Obadare, 2020). African Christians may reject missionary-imposed sexual (male/female) and identity (heterosexual/homosexual) dichotomies if they reject missionary-imposed identity dichotomies ("Christian" vs. "heathen"). (Cook, 2021).

Hybridity can evolve into an indigenous religious paradigm for LGBT inclusion, avoiding the "Western import" conundrum. In some parts of Africa, LGBTQ+ acceptance is hampered by the belief that gay identities represent Western cultural colonisation. The hybrid process is inherent in African Christians' quest for a distinctive faith (Van Klinken & Chitando, 2021). The entire discussion would be turned on its head if theologians and church leaders presented LGBTQ+ inclusion as an act in the exciting project of creative hybridity, which fuses the Christian message of radical love and inclusion with the lived realities of all African peoples, rather than a "Western" idea imposed on Africa (Labuschagne). This would be an African theological construction claim, not cultural capitulation, a step towards authentically sustaining Christ.

5.5 THE CALL FOR AN AFFIRMING AND INCLUSIVE THEOLOGY

Recent movements within African Christianity the past two decades liberative hermeneutics, decolonial theology, and real hybridity have sought an affirmative and inclusive theology (Van Klinken & Chitando, 2021). Considering everyone as God's image bearer, theological exclusion is unethical and irreverent (Cook 2021). Theologians IAM (Inclusive Affirming Ministries) van der Walt and Mokoena argue Christian communities need to deconstruct spiritual hierarchies that diminish queer bodies and experiences. They argue that the church's role as the "moral gatekeeper" is more akin to social policing than a Christ-like compassion, and so a prophetic vocation of radical hospitality and justice is required (Burchardt 2020). These reforming Christian traditions want the doctrine of the church to unequivocally affirm and defend everyone.

The exclusion of particular beliefs that are affirming theologies results in psychological distress, spiritual alienation, and increased aggression (Mayeza 2021) IAM's Sacred Queer Stories campaign highlights the spiritual tenacity of LGBTQ+ Christians despite the theological persecution they encounter. Excluding people based on their identity weakens the gospel's claim of unconditional love (Van Klinken & Obadare 2020). Jesus' ministry showed elevation of social and religious outcasts (Huffman et al. 2020). There is a growing consensus that the church ought to dismantle theological barriers and embrace the impoverished. The consensus shifts the interpretation of Christianity from moral surveillance to relational justice in a life-giving way.

Transformative theology explains how the church has a new civic and social function. With Burchardt (2020), we note that the church has a history of moral defense, not liberation, of conservative political aims. Affirming Ministries theologians Kheswa and Louw propose that real Christianity lies in communities opposing injustice, not in support of patriarchal and heteronormative frameworks. Van Klinken and Chitando (2021) argue that as part of social justice, churches should resist gender-based violence, interrogate hegemonic masculinities, and advocate for gender and sexual equity. Banda (2020) claims that a justice-oriented hermeneutic helps religious groups evaluate and change exclusionary cultural practices. Human dignity and accountability may be a source of compassion for the church and for society.

Directions for institutions. Dealing with institutions demands change. Camminga (2020) highlights the church's historical frameworks and apartheid South Africa's equalities clash with the new transgender and LGBTQ+ rights. In the Pathetic Theology of South Africa, Mayeza (2021) clarifies, many hold the view that patriarchal expressions within religions are damaging and relics of the past. Manuals and guides of informal community presbyterian pastoral training material of IAM illustrates the moral and social decline of non-religious communities. Huffman et al (2020) indicate communities that lack social and political inclusivity might be LGBTQ+ bigoted. Disengagement social movements are ethically based reform and practical reconfigurations for preserving christian institutions reputation within multicultural rights claiming societies. Affirming theologies are within the reasonable ambit of Christianity and contribute positively to moral voice of Christianity. More positively, Edifying theologies are of immense relevance to social justice and equity initiatives within South Africa.

5.6 CONCLUSION

African Christian communities rethinking gender and sexual orientation theologically, as demonstrated in this chapter. Van Klinken and Chitando (2021), Cook (2021), and Shingange (2023) explain through liberative hermeneutics the unmasking of patriarchal and heteronormative reading misinterpretations, and through decolonial theology, the way colonial frameworks continue to constrain God-talk. Burchardt (2020) and Camminga (2020) demonstrate the potential of hybridity and the reclamation of culture to produce ethically inclusive and embedded frameworks in expressions of African Christianity. The chapter has also shown how some queer theologians and pastoral practitioners in Inclusive Affirming Ministries use lived experience in advocacy for the transformation of theology. The evidence indicates that pastoral, intellectual, and community grassroots change is already underway, and in response to socio-economic conditions, inclusive of Christian communities in South Africa that seek justice and the affirmation of diversity. Following these conclusions, the next chapter examines the impact of these changes on ecclesial identity, pastoral practice, and public theology.

CHAPTER 6

Conclusion

6.1 OVERVIEW OF FINDINGS

This dissertation set out to answer the central research question: How do religious perspectives influence and shape societal attitudes toward gender roles and sexual orientation in South African contexts, given the multidimensional and often contradictory character of religious influence? This seems to get a clear and nuanced answer from the examination that is so far in the preceding chapters. This influence is not a monolith, undetermining, and predictable; it is rather an ever-evolving, fiercely contested, and deeply paradoxical power that takes shape at the crossroads of the sacred texts, cultural contexts, political power, and lived human experience (Burchardt, 2020). Christian theological perspectives in South Africa act as a strong social agent, suppressing debilitating patriarchal and heteronormative structures and simultaneously galvanizing genius movements for egalitarianism and inclusivity (Van Klinken & Chitando, 2021).

Investigation in Chapter 2 informs about gender roles, showing how certain traditional, patriarchal interpretations of sacred texts have been used to justify the divine sanction of male headship and female subordination into a social order in which gender inequalities and violations on the basis of gender are considered normal (Banda, 2020). However, this theological framework is not fixed; in fact, it is whole-heartedly contested by another, egalitarian view that utilizes a liberative hermeneutic to re-interpret the same sacred texts as a call for mutual submission and radical equality (Pierce & Groothuis, 2005). This theological debate is not just academic; instead, it is a front for a more profound contest for social power, which has implications for the construction of masculinity and the full realization of womanhood as citizens (Burchardt, 2020).

Chapter 3 investigated the effects which theology has had on the perception of sexual orientation, giving an account of how conservative doctrines have emerged to position non-heteronormative identities in the domain of pathology and consequently stigmatize and marginalize these persons (Cook, 2021). This religion, which discriminates and demeans, brings with it a human cost in that it intensifies inner conflict for LGBTQ individuals of faith while also perpetuating toxic environments within the faith communities

and broader society (Mayeza, 2021). The chapter further expounded on the emergence of very powerful counter-narratives, including progressive theologies of inclusion and postcolonial critiques refuting the uncritical imposition of "Western" categories of identity and calling for a more culturally genuine and affirming version of sexual diversity (Camminga, 2020).

After concluding with the legal issues of public accommodation and equal access, Chapter 4 thus considers the public sphere in relation to the process by which these theological perspectives translate into political influence and public policy. It further illustrates how religious institutions act as strong lobbyists for legal frameworks that restrict marriage equality, sexuality education, and public health (Van Klinken & Obadare, 2020). This presents an enduring tension between the constitutional promise of equal protection under the law and the justifiable demands of religious constituencies, becoming unmistakably evident in the denial of shelter that LGBTQ+ asylum seekers confront before Irish law and public health policy that remains fragmented (Camminga, 2020).

Chapter 5, finally, charts the possibility of change from within by exposing the hermeneutical, decolonial, and contextual resources that are being mobilized toward an inclusive and just interpretation of Christian faith (Van Klinken & Chitando, 2021). It argues that religious traditions are not far gone and are in fact capable of a self-extensive critique and reform from within (Labuschagne, 2021).

6.2 ENDURING CONFLICT: THEOLOGY, CONSTITUTION, AND LIVED REALITIES

Findings of this dissertation could be synthesized into one major, overarching argument: To create a workable system, the relationship between theology and society in contemporary South Africa is best understood as the ongoing negotiation, which remains unresolved, of three mighty forces: the moral authority of God, the legal authority of the state, and the lived realities of its diverse citizenry (Burchardt, 2020). The meta-narrative of an "authority struggle" stated in the introduction has been proved through the analysis. Such a conflict is not a peripheral issue but is at the core that defines and directs South African democracy into the future (Van Klinken & Obadare, 2020).

The moral authority with which religion-whether theism or Christianity-is charge of history and society follows the allegiance of the major part of people (Banda, 2020). This authority defines codes of behavior and thus shapes community values and provides meaning and identity to millions-the study having shown-a conservative use of that authority is more common when gender and sexuality issues are involved, trying to conserve an old structure of family and a heteronormative social order (Piper & Grudem, 1991).

This religious authority is in direct and often openly adversarial conflict with the post-apartheid legal authority, whose foundation lies on a secular constitution that places human dignity, equality, and non-discrimination at the rock-bottom. (Camminga, 2020) Legal order espouses an image of society that appreciates gender diversity and protects the rights of sexual minorities, with such an image from the perspective of the conservatives of religious bodies being generally antithetical (Cook, 2021). This is a material tension playing out in the courts, in parliament, as well as in public policy formulation, each area laying claim to be paramount as defining society's normative order (Van Klinken & Chitando, 2021).

Between and along these two powerful institutional forces are the lived realities of commoners in South Africa. The experiences of women facing gender-based violence, LGBTQ+ youth coming out to their religious families, and queer clergy seeking a place of belonging within their denominations represent the human dimension of this conflict (Mayeza, 2021). These lived realities, in turn, have two agencies that do not neatly advance the state's and the religious doctrines' categories, instead presenting a landscape of negotiation, defiance, and resilience (Huffman et al., 2020). Theologies for the reforms accounted for in Chapter 5 may be thought of as a potent expression of this third force: people of faith attempting to reconcile their lived realities and ethical commitments with their religious traditions such that they thereby resolve the conflict from within the religious domain (Van Klinken & Chitando, 2021).

6.3 IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

The findings of this research carry significant implications for theological scholars, religious communities, and policymakers. In terms of theological scholarship, this study

offers a nuanced, particularistic analysis of the role of religion in a post-colonial, democratic society bearing the scars of apartheid and missionary Christianity (Van Klinken & Obadare, 2020). It makes the case for the complementary development of theological approaches that pay attention to intersections, to power relations, and to decolonial perspectives, thus advancing beyond conceptual abstraction to understand and critique how theology acts in praxis, mainly to oppress or liberate (Burchardt, 2020).

For religious communities and their leadership, this dissertation represents a paradigm of genuine self-reflection. By calling upon these agents to picture the actual hurt inflicted by exclusive and patriarchal laws, the work exhorts them, "From a stance of barricaded self-absorption and cowardice, move into listening and repentance" (Mayeza, 2021). At the same time, it furnishes hope and resources for those working towards becoming inclusive; this is in part because the rich theological traditions of reinterpretation and contextualization may be used to create a friendly and just faith (Van Klinken & Chitando, 2021). It suggests that the path to renewed relevance and moral credibility in a plural society is not by much looking back, rather walking the present path bravely and faithfully (Cook, 2021).

In the view of policymakers and public actors, the research underscores the inescapable importance of learning about the religious underpinnings of social problems. It shows clearly that, in gender, sexuality, and health-related policies, if the religious beliefs of the populace have a strong bearing on public attitudes and behavior, then such policies will not work (Labuschagne, 2021). This does not mean, of course, that policies should be made purely according to religious principle-but perhaps policymakers must find ways to take on board religious belief whilst staying firmly anchored in constitutional values of equality and human rights (Camminga, 2020). This could include dialogue with religious leaders, supporting progressive faith-based organizations, and making sure public schooling on fundamental values is firm in teaching tolerance, diversity, and free thinking (Van Klinken & Obadare, 2020).

6.4 LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Whilst this study strives towards comprehensiveness, its limitations have to be recognized as they provide for very interesting areas of research recommendations. The principal

shortcoming consists in its exclusive focus on Christian theological perspectives. Since Christianity is the major religion in South Africa, a fuller picture needs comparative studies that contemplate other important religious traditions in the country on gender and sexuality—such as Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, and African Traditional Religions (Burchardt, 2020). Such research may bring useful points of agreement and disagreement and thus feed into a multi-faith concept of the South African socio-religious landscape (Van Klinken & Chitando, 2021).

Moreover, even though the qualitative method provides depth and nuance, it does not allow for generalizations relating to how widespread certain attitudes are within the population. Future studies could undertake large-scale surveys studying how conservative and progressive attitudes exist within different religious denominations and demographic groups (Cook, 2021). These statistics would be helpful in having policymakers and actors in civil society better target where to intervene (Mayeza, 2021).

Most importantly, while this study has identified the inroads for change in the religious traditions, ethnographic research is foreseeable to investigate how exactly this change process plays out at the level of specific local communities (Burchardt, 2020). Specimens of selected congregations or denominations that are on the cutting edge of gender equality and LGBTQ+ inclusion could allow the researcher, through firsthand experience, to appreciate the challenges, strategies, and achievements of grassroots theological transformation (Van Klinken & Chitando, 2021). Such on-the-ground research would greatly benefit as complementary insights to the more text-based and theoretical treatment of this matter that this dissertation contains (Labuschagne, 2021).

6.5 CONCLUSION

The theological view presents a complex, controversial, and profoundly consequential phenomenon about attitudes towards gender roles and sexuality in South Africa. It is a story of powerlessness and power, of exclusion versus inclusion, of doctrines that hurt and of theologies that heal (Van Klinken & Obadare, 2020). In this regard, religion can no longer be cast as a monolithic force either for oppression or for liberation. Rather it is a social arena within which competing visions of the divine, of humanity, and of society strive for dominance (Burchardt, 2020). The future of gender and sexual equality in South

Africa will hence simultaneously be beaten out on the benches of Parliament and in the halls of the Supreme Court, as well as in pulpits and seminaries and in the hearts and minds of the people of faith. This study was an attempt to shed light on those critical contours within that struggle so as to contribute towards a better understanding of the challenges that remain and the possibilities that exist for transformative change (Van Klinken & Chittando, 2021).

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