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A critical examination of the intersection of patriarchy and religion in the oppression of Black South African women

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School of Human and Community Development

Master's Research Report

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Title: A critical examination of the intersection of patriarchy and religion in the oppression of Black South African women.

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Degree of Master of Social and Psychological Research by Coursework and Research Report

DECLARATION

I, Mathipa Pebetsi Pleasure declare that this research report, titled *" A critical examination of the intersection of patriarchy and religion in the oppression of Black South African women",* is my own original work. It has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for any degree or examination at any other university. It is being submitted at the University of the Witwatersrand for Master of Arts in Social and Psychological Research by Research Report and Coursework.

Signed:



Date: 20/05/2025

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This research is not just an academic exercise but a contribution to conversations on faith, justice, and gender. It critically examines the intersection of religion and patriarchy, not to reject faith but to explore its role in shaping lived experiences. My hope is that it fosters reflection, dialogue, and a deeper understanding of how faith and justice can coexist.

THANK YOU!!!

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CHAPTER 1

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.1. INTRODUCTION

The following chapter introduces the study, which examines the intersectionality of religion and patriarchy in the oppression of women. Using a Christian lens, this research explores how religious and patriarchal systems intersect to sustain systemic limitations, such as restrictions on women's leadership and autonomy. The study aims to unpack women's experiences of Christianity and patriarchy as mechanisms of oppression and to analyse the discursive practices that perpetuate these dynamics. Guided by the primary research question, what is the intersectionality of patriarchy and religion in the oppression of women? This chapter also outlines the research objectives, which include exploring women's narratives and critically examining how these structures contribute to their oppression.

Religion and matters of faith are amongst factors that play a huge role in the lives of many people across multiple cultures (Beyers, 2021), faith-leaders are relied upon to lead and support communities (Calabria et al., 2022). Religion influences people's perceptions and their interactions with others. For example, gender roles and understanding of how males and females should behave. Religious and/or faith leaders have a significant influence on people's thoughts, behaviours, attitudes, and the manner they conduct themselves (Atuhaire et al., 2018). Thus, people's attitudes and behaviours tend to reflect their religion and/or beliefs. This means that religious leaders have the potential to change and/or promote behaviours. The impact religion plays in structuring norms, morals and principles in our societies cannot be denied (Beyers, 2017; Inglehart & Norris ,2003, as cited in Lovinsky & Seguino, 2009; Maponya 2021).

Similar to religion, patriarchy has always been important in structuring norms in societies. Patriarchy has deep roots and influence in the interactions and/or relationships between men and women across multiple societies if not on a global scale (Lovinsky & Seguino, 2009). George (2008) highlights that patriarchy is not some sort of heavenly intervention, it is a unanimous agreement constructed through human history. Rakoczy (2004) proposes that the patriarchal system reflect on male superiority and female inferiority.

Although patriarchy is embedded in societal structures created by humans, it has always been seen as a righteous, godly, and a consecrated thing. This research aims to study women's experiences and perceptions of oppression due to the intersection of religion and patriarchy in South Africa (SA). Wood (2019) argues that some of the harmful patriarchal practices in churches that women experience includes restrictive dress codes that not only restrict their movements in private and public places but limit the leadership roles they can attain. French (1985) as cited in Wood (2019) states that women's experiences of oppression include lack of control over their own bodies. This is further supported by Mudau and Obadire (2017) that women have no control over their reproductive rights. Lekgau (2021) highlights that in South Africa the inferiority of women has been normalised, and the mentioned experiences can be used to attest to that.

1.2. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Religion plays a pivotal role in shaping societies, influencing individuals and institutions to maintain order and structure (Maponya, 2021). Religion is understood as humanity's way of representing reality (Van den Heever, 2001). Religious texts and teachings have historically influenced societal norms, ascribing distinct characteristics and roles to men and women (Bouma & Perales, 2019). These differences often create and reinforce power imbalances, perpetuated by patriarchal systems embedded within social structures (Walby, 1990). Bouma and Perales (2019) argue that religion is closely linked to patriarchal attitudes, frequently contributing to the systemic oppression of women.

Despite widespread acknowledgment of the oppressive potential of religion and patriarchy, the intersection of these forces in the lives of Black South African women remains underexplored. Patriarchy often operates invisibly, manifesting in values, attitudes, and institutional practices through socialization (Maponya, 2021). Furthermore, there is limited research examining how religious and patriarchal discourses are maintained, negotiated, and experienced by women themselves. This study aims to address this gap by critically examining the experiences and discourses shaping women's oppression, with the goal of fostering a more inclusive and equitable societal structure.

1.3. STUDY RATIONALE

Rakoczy (2004) has highlighted the patriarchal nature of religion. Maponya (2021) states that although other scholars have tried to separate religion from patriarchy by quoting scriptures that stand in favour of women's rights, it does not change the fact that the majority of religious interpretations are rooted in patriarchy. Rakoczy (2004) argues that patriarchy is intertwined with religion especially in the Christian tradition where the image and reference of God is profusely male. The oppression of women became extremely easy with the use of religion. Patriarchal social structures were/are easily maintained with religious doctrines, especially the fear of God.

Beyers (2017) mentions that it is hard to talk about religion without including culture, and this is because through culture morals, norms, beliefs, principles, and values governing individuals are established, and through religion these beliefs are maintained and devoted to. Through culture and religion, beliefs and ideas concerning gender and gender roles are taught and internalised (Winkel, 2019). In religious communities, upholders of traditional gender roles consistently use biblical texts to emphasise different roles that must be attained by men and women. A reference can be made from Genesis 2:18 where Eve was made for Adam as a helper. The perspective of Eve as a helper has established a traditional conviction that men are bequeathed the birthright legacy of headship from Adam (Bartkowski & Ellison, 2002). This research will contribute to unpack and understand the relationship between religion and patriarchy and their role if any in the oppression of women.

This research uses the Christian lens of religion to study and understand oppression. The study does not focus on any specific Christian denomination, rather it gives a general oppressive nature of religion and patriarchy as this connection is plausibly present in many Christian denominations, other religions, and cultures. The study aligns with the Sustainable Development Goal 5 of eradicating gender inequality and reducing inequality. The principle of this goal is to eliminate discrimination against women and ensure equal leadership at all levels. The study will contribute through women's perspective of gender in religious, social, and industrial settings, reconstruction of power structures and empowering women to voice and exercise their freedom of speech and choice. The research aims to fill the gap in literature on women's experiences of oppression due to intersectionality of religion and patriarchy in South Africa. It is important to note that the study does not position Christianity or religion as

inherently patriarchal, rather it critically explores how religious practices and interpretations of scriptures have been used as a tool to reinforce and justify patriarchal structures.

1.4. RESEARCH AIM:

This study aims to critically examine the lived experiences of Black South African women within Christian contexts, with particular attention to how patriarchy and religion intersect to shape their perceptions, roles, and identities. The research explores how these systems are experienced, negotiated, and internalised in women's everyday religious and cultural lives. In doing so, the study seeks to uncover the discursive strategies that normalise gendered subordination within religious spaces, while also recognising the agency and faith commitments of the women involved.

1.4.1. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- To explore women's experiences of Christianity as an oppressive tool.
- To explore women's experiences of patriarchy as an oppressive tool.
- To analyse the discourse of religion and patriarchy in perpetuation of oppression.

1.4.2. THE PRIMARY RESEARCH QUESTION OF THE STUDY:

What is the intersectionality of patriarchy and religion in the oppression of women?

1.4.3. THE SECONDARY RESEARCH QUESTIONS ARE:

- How do Black South African women experience Christianity in ways that reflect gendered oppression?
- How do participants describe and make sense of patriarchal expectations in religious and cultural life?
- What discourses are evident in Black South African women's narratives about submission, leadership, and womanhood in religious spaces?
- How do intersecting identities such as race, gender, and religious orientation shape women's experiences of power and subordination?

1.5. CONCLUSION

This chapter has introduced the study, which examines the intersectionality of religion and patriarchy in shaping and perpetuating the oppression of women, focusing on their lived experiences. It has highlighted the significant role religion and religious leaders play in influencing societal norms, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours, often reinforcing patriarchal structures. The chapter also discussed how religion and patriarchy intersect to shape gender roles and societal expectations, with a specific focus on exploring these dynamics through a Christian lens. By framing the study within this context, the chapter establishes the foundation for understanding the complexities of the intersection between religion and patriarchy and their broader implications for women's experiences. Building on this foundation, the next chapter delves into the existing literature to provide a deeper understanding of the key themes and theoretical frameworks that inform this study.

CHAPTER 2

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides a review of the literature relevant to understanding the intersection of religion and patriarchy in the oppression of women. It begins with an overview of monotheistic religions in South Africa, focusing on the historical development and influence of Christianity within the region. The discussion then explores patriarchy, both as a general construct and in the specific contexts of South African and African cultural practices. The chapter also examines the relationship between Christianity and patriarchy, including the portrayal of God and Jesus through a male lens. Finally, the chapter considers the impacts of sexism and misogyny on women's identity, providing a critical foundation for understanding the broader socio-cultural and religious factors that contribute to women's experiences of oppression.

2.2. RELIGION

2.2.1. MONOTHEIST RELIGIONS

Monotheism simply refers to the belief in one God (Assman, 2004; Namukoa et al., 2000). Believing in one and only God generally means one has to abandon old or contradicting beliefs (Royce, 2005). In monotheistic religions, God is associated with the sky and ultimately recognised as the controller of man's destiny and a God that is superior (Adamo, 2022). Globally, Christianity, Islam, and Judaism are the most common monotheistic religions, or sometimes called Abrahamic religions. Abrahamic religions carry the belief that Adam received an order to have authority over Eve, establishing hierarchy in gender (Allsop et al., 2021). These religions reflect on somewhat similar religious principles with some contradictory views. The difference between these religions lies in their point of orientation; Christians use Jesus, Muslims point to Muhamed as a messenger while Jews point to Moses (van der Kooi, 2012).

In African belief, man's experiences are associated with God Mbiti (1996) as cited in Namukoa et al. (2000). It is believed that occurrences of natural phenomena bear witness to

the presence of God. God is understood as the controller of everything in the universe and this belief shapes the reality of African people's experiences of God (Namukoa et al., 2000). African traditional religion is described as monolithic as it carries the belief that God is the supreme ruler of the universe, and all other spiritual entities are under the authority of the one supreme God who holds all power.

Allsop et al. (2021) explains that there are two narratives to Abrahamic religions 1) these religions are rigorously patriarchal and traditional which can be harmful to women, 2) they are supportive, valuable and useful to individuals, communities, marital affairs. Abrahamic religions separate gender roles based on teachings, and religious practices (Goldscheider et al., 2014). Allsop et al. (2021) outlines that within the Abrahamic religions gender roles are highlighted in the book of Genesis, the beginning of creations where hierarchy was established when it was stated that Adam was made to rule. In these Abrahamic religions, women are often not seen beyond the role of spiritual leader or teacher because they are often limited to their roles as mothers, caregivers, or nurturers (Haggard et al., 2019). In these circumstances gender roles and responsibilities are established.

In South Africa about 87% of the population follows the Christian religion (Schoeman, 2017), thus for the purpose of this study the Christian lens will be used. Although South Africa has never designated an official state religion, the government actively endorsed Christianity for much of the 20th century. As a result, Christianity continues to be the most widely practiced religion in the country today (Scroope, 2019). Langa and Rule (2010) as cited in Schoeman (2017) noticed that the church has a lot of influence in South African communities as individuals expressed trust in the church more than other institutions. During the apartheid era, the Dutch Reformed Church became closely aligned with the National Party and served as the de facto state religion, presenting an obstacle to political reform, however, numerous Christian churches also played a pivotal role in the dismantling of apartheid and the subsequent transition to democracy (Scroope, 2019). During the apartheid era president Nelson Mandela also called upon Christian institutions to help resist the apartheid mission and build a 'new' South Africa (Scroope, 2019).

2.2.2. HISTORY OF CHRISTIANITY IN SOUTH AFRICA

The patriarchal nature of religion in South Africa can be understood through the country's colonialist history of hierarchical and exploitative systems that remains problematic

in SA and colonial history which date back in 1652 (South African History Online, 2023). Missionaries introduced religion in SA, and they claimed to be anti-colonial, however, this was not true as religion was used to enhance and maintain political power and oppression (Nkomazana & Setume, 2016). According to Saayman (1993) the imposition of Christian religion on South Africans was governed by the notion that Africans had no religion or knowledge of God. The imposition of Christian religion made African traditions to be perceived as inferior (Saayman, 1993). The western missionaries perceived Southern African religious practices and customs as inferior and worked on eradicating them so that African people can accept Christianity (Nkomazana & Setume, 2016). Africans were actually forced to accept Christianity Chingota (1998) as cited in Mokhoathi (2020).

Nkomazana and Setume (2016) explains that initially Christianity was initiated to evangelize the people and was later used as a political weapon to suppress black people. Religious texts such as Gen 11:1-8 were used to segregate and control other races (Farisani, 2014; Theron, 2021). Farisani (2014) adds that religious ideologies were used to justify oppressive, and sexist beliefs towards black people and women. Genesis 11: 1-8 was used to introduce segregation. Theron (2021) contends that there are other scriptures that preached unity and equality. Farisani (2004) argues that the book of Romans 13:1-7 which states that whoever rebels authority is rebelling God was used to keep apartheid going and maintain order. Theron (2021) explains that the book of Acts 17:26 is used to explain race boundaries and why they should be in place. The conversion of African people into Christians was perceived as a linear process where new identities were assumed as introduction into new faith was established. Mokhoathi (2020) explains this as simply undermining other cultures as the missionaries were belittling perceptions of the world that is unique to theirs.

Mtombeni (2021) explains that the gender oppressive school of analysis describes African women as needing to be rescued presumably by colonialism. This statement gives the notion that African women were liberated by colonialism, however, the question remains ‘how?’ because this perspective oversimplifies and does not account for the complex and multiple experiences and challenges faced by African women. Walker (1991) states that women have been subjected to male domination and were helpless and powerless because of the patriarchal system. Women played a critical role in colonial history as equal as men did, but their contributions are often overlooked and not praised enough (Mtombeni, 2021).

2.3. PATRIARCHY

2.3.1. PATRIARCHY

Patriarchy has long been examined in feminist and social theory as a structural system in which men hold disproportionate power over women in both public and private spheres. Feminists like Gerda Lener have historically traced the institutionalisation of patriarchy and defines patriarchy as institutionalisation of male power over women in both the household and social structures (Hunter, 1988). Similarly, Walby (1990) adds that the concept of patriarchy adds the perception that every male is dominant while their female counterparts are subordinate. In his book on Masculine domination Pierre Bourdieu (2001) highlights on the concept of symbolic violence which offers a powerful way of understanding the subtle yet deeply established nature of masculine dominance. Bourdieu's (2001) work shows the shift from perception of patriarchy as an external social structure to an internalised structure that affects how people understand gender relations, feel and see the world.

Patriarchy refers to a hierarchical social system where one group is dominant over others (Van Huffel, 2011). In the South African context, patriarchy intersects with masculinity ideologies influenced by multiple cultural beliefs (Mshweshwe, 2020, as cited in Mpunzana & Mofokeng, 2023). While the legacy of colonialism entrenched rigid gender binaries and dominance, it is important not to conflate all forms of traditional practice with subjugation. Moagi and Mtombeni (2020) caution against relying solely on missionary-era writings, as they often misrepresented precolonial gender relations by framing African customs through patriarchal colonial lenses. Prior to colonisation, many African societies allowed women to accumulate status and authority, participate in decision-making, and hold significant roles in their communities. However, colonial structures, reinforced by Western religious ideals, formalised and deepened patriarchal norms.

Today, patriarchal structures remain deeply rooted in South African communities, where men often retain social authority while women are relegated to subordinate positions (Gennrich, 2013). Although post-apartheid reforms have opened space for women's participation in politics, churches, and the economy, transformation within cultural and religious patriarchy has lagged behind (SAHO, 2011). Mudau and Obadire (2017) argue that contemporary patriarchy maintains male privilege and uses cultural justifications to suppress opposition. Practices such as polygamy, the expectation of male heirs, and 'ukuhlolwa kwobuntombi' (virginity testing) exemplify how cultural traditions are mobilised to regulate

and objectify women (Mkhize & Vilakazi, 2021). These practices contribute to systemic disadvantage, reinforcing a framework in which women are made dependent on men for social and economic survival.

In South African communities' patriarchy is perceived as normal (Mkhize, 2017). Patriarchy, violation and discrimination against women is a persistent problem. Masango and Sekano (2012) have noticed that in SA most men are raised in households where patriarchy is normalised and thus, they grow up internalising patriarchal practices. Women continue to be ill-treated and discriminated against and marginalised in the hands of men (Bereng & Mutekwe, 2021). Although the world seems to be moving towards non-racial and non-sexist approaches to society, there are still male-oriented societies that fail to acknowledge and accept women's abilities and potential as good leaders (Masango & Sekano, 2012). This shows resistance towards gender equal society. Masango and Sekano (2012) express that the problem is that resistance and perception is held by church leaders making change impossible.

The relationship between men and women is often treated as unquestionable as per church derived biblical interpretations, however, the interpretation of the word as guided by God is conducted by a group of church leaders who are susceptible to human error in interpretation (Casimir et al., 2014). Both the church and African traditions have been proven to use misinterpretation of scriptures to promote detestable acts of oppression against women (Casimir et al., 2014). What seems to be forgotten as stated in the bible is that the kingdom of God is welcoming to everyone, regardless of gender, social class, age nor ethnicity (Musvota, 2021). The longstanding inequalities and injustices against women in Africa have been and are encouraged by the cultural practices and misinterpretation of scriptures (Casimir et al., 2014)

The domination of girls and women by SA men can be accounted for by the intertwines of social structures and the apartheid system which made men believe that they are superior (Hay-Yahia & Zaatut, 2016). Women have high influence in fighting the apartheid patriarchal system in SA; however, they are still looked down on by men (Modiba & Mutekwe, 2012). Despite SA history proving that women are capable and are good leaders, men remain resistant to acknowledge women's leadership. Lener (1986) and Wood (2019) support that men carry the mentality that not only are they superior but are far capable of leadership as compared to their female counterparts.

Masango and Sekano (2012) explains that some men feel undermined or belittled by leadership of women. Men argue that culturally it does not make sense for women to take

leadership roles because that is not their duty as women (Masango & Sekano, 2012). Matlala (2008) as cited in Masango and Sekano (2012) explains that men feel humiliated by equality of gender or being under the leadership of a woman. This is also influenced by upbringing and socialisation of gender. There are expectations that male children are groomed into the men they are socially expected to be. Part of those expectations include males being better than women in every regard, this is seen in Masango and Sekano (2012) with remarks that are given to male learners when they are struggling or performing poorly academically that they will be controlled by their wives because they are stupid. With remarks like this, male children become slaves of their own upbring and internalise the notion that they are and should always be better than their female counterparts. Unskilled male leaders would defy women's leadership. Masango and Sekano (2012) explains that this kind of leadership can be observed even in churches where preference is given to male pastors as compared to female pastors because people have been socialised to believe that that's what God prefers.

Kobo (2018) argues that black South African women find themselves fighting triple oppression of race, class and gender, within their struggle of fighting the patriarchal system, furthermore it does not help that the system they are fighting against is silencing their voices. Young (1990) as cited in Kobo (2018) states that women suffer from five types of oppressions: violence, powerlessness, exploitation, marginalisation and cultural imperialism. Kobo (2018) explains that to this day women are still exploited in churches, at the same time they are being denied leadership roles. The patriarchal system has been strengthened and justified using Christianity to explain male dominance and subordination of women (Williams, 1993). The strengthening of patriarchy has also strengthened the perception that leadership is predominantly a male trait or characteristic. Oduyoye (1995) also supports that indeed Christian theology and biblical interpretations in Africa have been used as a tool to marginalise women.

Despite the presence of legislation aimed at eradicating gender discrimination and stereotypes in post-colonial South Africa, meaningful transformation remains limited. Coetzee (2001) contends that prevailing gender discourse and reform efforts have largely resulted in the symbolic inclusion of women, without challenging or redistributing the underlying structures of patriarchal power. Similarly, Ratele (2014) observes that while many men in post-apartheid South Africa profess support for gender equality, such support often proves superficial when tested against policies that seek to disrupt entrenched gender hierarchies. As a result, commitments to equality tend to remain rhetorical, failing to address the substantive grievances

women continue to face, particularly their ongoing marginalisation from political leadership and other decision-making spaces. Thus, Van Huffel (2013) argues that the presence of women in social spaces is not an indicator of transformation.

2.3.2. PATRIARCHY AND CHRISTIAN RELIGION

It is important to note that Christianity was not created to demote and oppress women, rather it was designed to bring hope, liberation and preach faith, and this can be referenced based on how Jesus undermined the oppressive ruling of the Roman Empire in the bible (Nelson, 2018). Christianity was supposed to save slaves/ black people in a sense that they endured due to Christian beliefs that morally rejected slavery as wrong and promised deliverance (Smith, 1972). Christianity is perceived to preach redemption (Abraham, 2019). Krull (2021) argues that for centuries Christianity has been used to condemn, confine, judge, and strip off liberty of already marginalised people. The history of Christianity notes that women used to occupy valuable positions and were perceived as valuable members of the society rather than being reduced to just servants or somebody's wife (Krull, 2021). For example, before colonisation the Yoruba tribe did not consider gender roles and women were not relegated to men's submission as they were seen as complementary and not subordinates (Ajímátanraeję & Muraina, 2022).

Christianity still preaches male supremacy and dominance and silences women's voices Krull (2021). Wood (2019) contests that patriarchy is repressive, oppressive, and rooted in supremacist ideologies where men are put on a high pedestal. Furthermore, these problematic ideologies are passed from father to son, maintaining gender inequality. Wani and Wani (2023) notes that while not all religions sustain the exploitation of women, there are multiple societies and/or communities that have been influenced by the patriarchal system to use religious beliefs to prolong, enforce and justify gender inequalities. Religions such as monotheistic have been used to enforce gender inequality, have denied females opportunities to attain good education, gain independence and participate in political matters. Mwaura (2013) as cited in Mudimeli (2021) states that to date, South African women are dominant members in Pentecostal, Charismatic, and other Christian churches, however, they are hardly included in power structures of the church. In terms of leadership roles Mudimeli (2021) states that in most churches the leadership role women play is leading each other during gatherings, laying hands

on congregation members (although they do not get a title for this) but mostly are leaders or teachers to ‘Sunday school children’ and to other women to teach them how to live well with their in-laws, how to respect their husbands, etc, but not teachings motivating enough for women to want to attain proper leadership roles in the church. Women in multiple societies are treated as and given second-class status (Ortner, 1974).

Patriarchy continues to dictate how women should live, carry themselves and what they can do in the church (Mudimeli, 2021). Mudimeli (2011) as cited in Mudimeli (2021) argues that the perception given by patriarchy that men are dominant over women has had impact on Christian women and for instance has led Pentecostal women to have challenges regarding how they and other women are perceived and the biblical interpretations that subjugate women and paint them as of low standards as compared to their male counterparts. Chisale (2020) argues that churches play a significant role in maintaining and nurturing male dominance and women remain marginalised and excluded in decision making. Chisale (2020) makes an example of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa that comprises about 80% of women in population, however, all important portfolios and councils in the central Dioceses consist of 90% males. Leadership roles are for men; the church has the potential and ability to repress women. Both Chisale (2020) and Mudimeli (2021) emphasise on the denial of women to take leadership roles in churches.

Mudimeli (2021) further say that men tend to argue that women have been granted freedom referring to few moments where they are allowed to participate in some kind of service and this does not mean much, showing that they are not willing to share power or leadership with women and this is the reason why women tend to not/or have given up on pursuing ministry in the church because it is not a space they are allowed in. As already established religion and culture emerged as a result of socialisation or civilisation and both are linked to power and have hierarchies led by men (Ali, n.d.). Ali (n.d.) argues that patriarchy is reflected in religious texts and thus religion is used to maintain patriarchal structures in societies and adds that patriarchy is practiced in multiple religions where the reference of God or gods is more often given in a male perspective. The use of scripture to deny women leadership was also observed by Mudimeli (2021) when she discovered that there are women in the church who do not believe in women leadership because in the scriptures Jesus never had female disciples, to which Mudimeli asks a very interesting question that since there is no mention of a black male disciple should black men then not take leadership roles?

Abraham (2019) argues that patriarchal religions reinforce gender hierarchies, and this can be observed through modelling parents (expectations placed on gender), additionally scriptures that emphasise or place husbands as heads of their wives have the potential to perpetuate gender hierarchies. Wani and Wani (2023) add that some religious teachings are used to enforce strict gender roles within households or what is known as 'household codes' which are used to strengthen patriarchal norms and suppress females. Diko (2023) portrayed how the Old Testament was/is used to subordinate women. Wani and Wani (2023) highlights that the male narrative or interpretation of biblical texts is not used by all religious institutions and the patriarchal narrative is changing in other institutions to value and appreciate the important role played by women. It is important that a more inclusive language of embracing and understanding the divine being be considered and put in place to eradicate the patriarchal practices of prioritising men and praising them while women are being subordinated. Wani and Wani (2023) acknowledge that sometimes religion is not a problem per se, however the patriarchal interpretations attached to religious texts and male narrative in biblical teachings is the root problem in the subjugation of women and makes religion to be problematic.

2.3.3. THE MALENESS OF GOD AND JESUS

The Christian community often portrays God using male attributes and this can be due to historical patriarchal systems (Feinberg, 2019). Klinken (2017) and Feinberg (2019) explains that the metaphoric connotation of the maleness of God seems to have lost its figurative expression as people are taking the 'maleness' literally. Feinberg (2019) argues that the 'male' exclusive approach of speaking about God does not encompass all biblical metaphors and limits full understanding of God that is beyond human gender categories. The problem is not only the gendered categories, but the patriarchal interpretations attached. In the Catholic church the priest is seen as a representative of Christ especially during Eucharist (the ceremony to celebrate Jesus Christ's last meal), this is because males are seen as adequately representing Christ more than females (Maseno, 2020). Christ's 'maleness' is only used to restrict females from attaining leadership roles and participating in meaningful positions (Maseno, 2020). Ruether (1998) argues that the focus should be on the message Christ was preaching rather than biology. The analogies which are used to create a comprehensive

understanding of the divine is not the literal truth, rather they are used with the intention of eliciting the inherent nature of God.

The gendered understanding of God often goes unexamined in many religions, especially in Abrahamic religions and this affects how one relates to the divine (Klinken, 2017). Studies have been conducted to explore the discourse on the interpretation of scriptures using the male narrative in Christian religion to understand how the masculine traits attached to God can be dangerous to women especially in a patriarchal country such as South Africa (Baloyi, 2019; Wood, 2019; Wani & Wani, 2023). The role of God especially in religious context assumes the male gender, so does the gender of Jesus the son (Havlicek & Klingorava, 2015). Women can assume different roles as depicted by female leaders in biblical texts, (e.g., in the book of Judges, Deborah was a judge and prophet), however, Havlicek and Klingorava (2015) argue that their voices are hardly heard. The perception of God's image as male might be a misinterpretation as there are several scriptures that highlight the femininity of God. For instance, Deuteronomy 32:11 compares God to mother eagle and Isiah 49:15 compares God to a mother who will never forget her children. Furthermore, the description of God is not necessarily attached to gender as mostly assume and this is made evident in 2 Corinthians 3:17-18:

> Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with unveiled faces, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as the Lord, the spirit.

It is important to note that the referral of God as the 'spirit' is used throughout the bible and there is no gender attached to it, for instance John 4:24, "God is spirit, and his worshippers must worship in the Spirit and truth". Furthermore, the scriptures highlight that all human kind is made in God's image, so if the literal maleness of God and Jesus is to be assumed, it means all human kind is male and should therefore attain equality and superiority. The representation of God as masculine is the reason men use their maleness to claim proximity to God and thus their self-acclaimed superiority.

Castelli (2001) explains that the perception or imagination of the divine as having human attributes lead to the emergence of gendered perceptions and power struggle. The representation of the divine as male reinforces gender hierarchy, attributing qualities or characteristics of maleness as closer to the divine which influences gender roles and normative gender interactions in social, economic and political spheres (Plaskow, 1991). Feinberg (2019)

highlights that it is important to note that God as father and Jesus as son does not explain an essence of God's nature rather the relational dynamics within the Trinity. The essence of God exceeds sexual bodiliness, thus it is essential to acknowledge the limitation with the analogy used to understand the divine. Furthermore, the book of Numbers 23:19 explains God's characteristics as the ones above humans as it says, 'God is not a man that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should repent', so if the literal maleness of God is the way to go when giving biblical interpretations, then this scripture contradicts the whole narrative of literalness. In fact, if the literal male narrative is to be continued with, there are scriptures that will leave lots of questions answered because God is compared to a lot of things in the bible, living and non-living included.

Trible (1973) states that God is not man nor women, neither he nor she and that being so these modern contentions of God's masculinity even though they may seem befitting are misleading and should not be adhered to because not only are they inaccurate but limit the understanding of God who transcends sexism. Although not mentioned by names, Wani and Wani (2023) states that there are religions and communities that are exploring alternative ways of referring to God that are inclusive of female imagery or female characteristics of the divine to deal away with stereotypical teachings that are subordinating to women, to bring about humility and equality. In her *Vhusadzi* theology that aims to preach gender equality and liberate women from patriarchal religious traditions, teachings and practices, Mudimeli (2021) encourage that scriptures like Galatians 3:28 be read and taught – *'There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus'* (NIV). This scripture is in support of Trible (1973) argument that God is not a man nor a woman and also supports Wani and Wani's (2023) initiative to come up with a more inclusive way of understanding the divine that is not stereotypical.

2.4. IDENTITY

2.4.1. AFRICAN FEMALENESS

Contemporary gender theory views and explains gender as a social and cultural construct rather than an innate trait (West & Zimmerman, 1987). West and Zimmerman (1987) further add that 'doing gender' involves subtle socially guided actions such as the way of speaking, dressing or interacting with others, and these performances are reinforced by social interactions. Butler (1990) explains that because gender is performative, not fixed or biologically grounded in identity, individuals are recognised based on their performance as

male or female in accordance with their culture's expectations. Building on this idea, Oyěwùmí (2004) challenges the Western assumption that gender is universally organised around biological sex. Drawing from Yorùbá society, she argues that social categories were often structured by seniority and lineage rather than rigid gender binaries. This highlights that gendered expectations, particularly for African women, have historically been context-dependent and fluid, shaped by local cultural logics rather than solely by anatomy. Such insights are crucial for understanding African femaleness, which cannot be fully explained using Western gender frameworks alone, as it is also constructed through indigenous norms, spiritual roles, and socio-political hierarchies. These culturally specific constructions of gender are further reflected in how African communities have historically socialised girls into womanhood through rituals, language, and religious instruction.

Neculaesei (2015) mentions that through language, beliefs, and attitudes, mentalities are passed amongst generations and gender is constructed. De Beauvoir (1949) as cited in Neculaesei (2015) says through culture one becomes a woman but one is not born a woman. This is further supported by Oduycye (2001), and Phiri (1997) as cited in Moyo (2004) that in other African cultures, sexual development is celebrated through rites of passage where the older you get, you become introduced to culturally structured sexual education. Moyo (2004) states that through religion and culture girls and young women are initiated into acceptable behaviours. From as early as eight or nine, girls are taught that at some point they will have to leave their homes and live with their husband who may have been chosen for them from birth Ndongko (1976). In many African cultures, parents actively look forward to negotiating lobola arrangements with their daughter's prospective in-laws (Posel & Rudwick, 2014). Ebila (2015) argues that there are expectations attached to what it means to be a good African woman, like conforming to social sanctions and norms, being quiet when men speak, and not challenging authority. A good woman accepts marriage, bears children and prioritises family (Maathai, 2007). For example, women are groomed to take care of their siblings earlier in preparation for motherhood.

Mudau and Obadire (2017) adds that women are expected to conceive children and the number of children to be conceived are determined by the husband and sometimes his family, failure to do that someone else will be married to do the job for her. This is similar to Sarah's situation in the bible where she ended up offering her servant to her husband so she can bear children for her husband, showing prioritisation of fertility and motherhood to get accepted and seen as a woman in the society (Diko, 2023). In childless African marriages the woman is

always blamed for being infertile and the husband often takes a second wife without seeking medical counsel first to see if indeed the first wife is barren (Baloyi, 2017). Kimathi (1994) as cited in Baloyi (2017) explains that the statement *'woman's glory is crowned in childbirth'* is the reason why women feel pressured to conceive and will go to greater lengths to give their husbands children even if it means bringing another woman into their marriage. Essentially a good woman is expected to abide by the rules of the society and listen to their male authoritative figures. Moyo (2004) argues that the religio-cultural teachings that groom women to be socially acceptable in communities leave them powerless to their male counterparts. Kgatle (2019) and Moyo (2004) adds that unfortunately this means that women find themselves in positions where they have less power in decision making. Women are not afforded decision-making power both in communities and in the church because they are seen as ordinary human beings (Kgatle, 2019).

Ebila (2015) argues that the notion that a 'good African woman' does not speak up is a complex issue shaped by colonialism and African patriarchal traditions. Additionally, studies have demonstrated that women seem pressured to be polite (Swim & Hyers, 1999) as cited in (Constantinescu, 2021). Colonialism enforced patriarchal values into laws and educational systems amongst other things, making it difficult for women to speak up. In traditional African Independent Churches women's leadership and decision making is permitted in small matters, however, when it comes to important things a males' leadership is required (Kgatle, 2019).

2.4.2. IMPACTS OF SEXISM AND MISOGYNY ON WOMEN'S IDENTITY

Identity formation is a process that allows one to understand themselves. King (2003) states that religion and spirituality have the potential to influence the development of identity, especially during the adolescent stage. Erikson (1964, 1965) as cited in King (2003) emphasises the important aspects played by religion in identity formation. Erikson (1964, 1965) as cited in King (2003) explains the integrative nature of religion to say that, 1) it helps one make sense of their existence and purpose in relation to a higher being, 2) it passes moral principles and behavioural norms that helps one to navigate and find their place in the world, 3) and it gives a sense of collectivism among believers. Ruether (2014) argues that although there can be two approaches to Christian teachings (prophetic and liberating perspective and dominating perspective) most of the interpretations take the dominant patriarchal lens. Prophetic and

liberating perspectives emphasise that God sides with victims and releases them from oppression (Fortein, 2019) while dominant perspectives use God to support patriarchal teachings.

Affiliating with a religious group is often a feature of personal and collective self and can affect self-conception (Anisman et al., 2010; Mavor and Ysseldyk 2020). Identity helps one know who they are and how they relate to others (Davidman & Greil, 2007). In the symbolic interactionist tradition, it is emphasised that identity can be shaped by expectations of others and the roles one is expected to attain (Davidman & Greil, 2007). As mentioned above, there are expectations placed on men and women in religious and patriarchal institutions. Although this can have a positive impact in a sense that individuals will have shared beliefs within their community (Durkheim, 1965, as cited in Dias et al., 2013), it can have a negative impact in a situation as the one mentioned by Ebila (2015) where women are expected to be good role models to other women. Jansen (2020) adds that the expectations placed on women as per Proverb 31 (noble women) are not ideal. Allsop et al. (2021) argues that Jesus represents love, hope and peace, and teaches his disciples to love one another and husbands to love their husbands yet Apostle Pauls' teachings preach subordination of women.

DeConick (2013) emphasises that misogynistic interpretation of (selected) scriptures display the female body as defective. Additionally, Mikolajczak and Pietrzak (2014) explains that sexism doesn't occur unconsciously, rather it is embedded in societal structures, belief systems that hold hierarchical values. Sexism has been normalised and rewarded/ seen as a positive thing in societies because it is still persistent. Mikolajczak and Pietrzak (2014) argues that sometimes the link between religion and sexism might be direct as religious leaders pass the teachings that promote stereotypical gender roles and views. However, there is also a possibility that the link is indirect. Klopper (2002) argues that there should be an understanding that there is a strong connection between women's perception of God and the way they perceive their identities, their experience of faith, and the relationship they have with themselves. Dreyer (1998) as cited in Klopper (2002) argues that the problem of God and the hierarchy of male over females is that it is easy to feel constantly accused, looked down upon, inadequate and guilty if one constantly experiences God as someone who lays rules that must be obeyed, which is the image being preached towards women in patriarchal religions. The male narrative of God paints a picture of God that is not kind or loving towards women. The male language used to make reference to God promotes the notion that men are closer or more like God and further

gives the impression that since women are less like God, you will find more men in the church which is not the case (Klopper, 2002).

In his article on depatriarchalizing in biblical interpretations Trible (1973) argues that so long as there are sexist interpretations of religious texts and oppression of women because of their gender it means men too are oppressed and quotes the book of Jeremiah (8:12): 'for the hurt of the daughter of my people am I hurt'. The depatriarchalizing interpretation that Trible (1973) attaches to this text is that if one is oppressed or hurting, so is everyone and that sexism will be the end of both the oppressed and the oppressor unless equality is obtained to liberate everyone. Raday (2012) points that gender discrimination in the name of religion is a violation of religious freedom and must come to an end. Trible (1973) argues that men cannot claim superiority over women because they did not participate in the creation of women; rather both owe their existence to the mystery of the Divine being.

2.5. CONCLUSION

This chapter explored the influence of monolithic religions, particularly Christianity, in South Africa, emphasizing their deep-rooted role in shaping societal norms, gender roles, and cultural practices. The historical context of Christianity's introduction was examined, highlighting its use as a tool of colonization and oppression, which, alongside apartheid, entrenched patriarchal structures that persist today. The chapter discussed how patriarchy intertwines with religion to justify gender inequality and suppress women, often through the misuse of theological constructs such as the maleness of God and Jesus. This suppression is further exacerbated by cultural expectations of women's behaviour, particularly in defining what it means to be an African woman, perpetuating sexism and impacting women's self-perception and identity. Building on these discussions, the next chapter introduces the framework of intersectionality, which provides a lens to unpack the complexities of how religion and patriarchy intersect in the oppression of women.

CHAPTER 3

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter introduces intersectionality as the theoretical framework for this study, providing a lens to examine how religion and patriarchy intersect to shape the lived experiences of black South African women. Intersectionality is particularly useful in understanding the interplay between gender, religion, and culture, revealing how these systems of power work together to perpetuate oppression. By focusing on these intersections, the framework enables a nuanced exploration of how religious and patriarchal practices influence women's roles, identities, and opportunities both within households and society. This aligns with the study's aim to critically examine how these systems operate as tools of oppression and offers a foundation for analysing participants' experiences within these overlapping structures of power.

3.2. INTERSECTIONALITY

Intersectionality, first introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), emerged to articulate the ways in which Black women's experiences were systematically excluded from both feminist and antiracist discourses. Crenshaw (1991) argued that gender (being a woman) and race (being Black) are not isolated categories but interlocking systems of power that shape lived experiences in specific ways. This theoretical lens was initially centred on the marginalisation of women of colour to capture their unique experiences and liberate them from overlapping forms of oppression. Building on Crenshaw's foundational work, scholars such as Bowleg (2012), Robinson (2018), and Al-Faham et al. (2019) emphasise intersectionality as a tool to understand the complex interplay between multiple systems of oppression such as patriarchy, racism, capitalism, and religion and how they exacerbate social inequalities for marginalised individuals.

While intersectionality has expanded to encompass a broader range of intersecting identities, this study maintains a focus on Black Christian women in South Africa. It acknowledges that the intersection of race, gender, and religious orientation produces distinct experiences of subjugation not adequately reflected in analyses that isolate any one category.

Although this study does not seek to compare the experiences of Black and white women or across different faith groups, it remains grounded in the recognition that patriarchal oppression is shaped by one's specific social location. In this context, intersectionality is not only a descriptive tool but also a critical framework that affirms the importance of centring Black women's voices in interrogating symbolic and structural domination in religious and cultural life (Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1991).

This theory is used to understand experiences of marginalised people and how they are disadvantaged by the multiple systems that are put in place to discriminate against them. Intersectionality is used to explain how identity was used to enhance marginalisation and explain the exclusion of black women from white feminist movements (Al-Faham et al., 2019). Thus Davis (2008) as cited in Carastathis (2014) claims that the theory comes as a political remedy for the exclusion they suffered in white feminist movements. Although this theory was established to liberate black women, it was not only limited to experiences of women of colour, but the point was also to confront gender and racial hierarchies to challenge how experiences of women of colour are seen as minority problems while they are the same people that are being consistently marginalised by the system (Al-Fatham et al., 2019). This theory initially focused on the double disadvantage of gender and race on marginalised women, how race and gender make them vulnerable to violence and exploitation (Robinson, 2018).

The theory was then extended beyond just race and gender as it was then realised the oppressive experiences suffered by women cannot be explained by just these two, but that class, sexuality and other things were convergingly shaping women's experiences (Singh, 2015). Intersectionality notes that human experiences are influenced by multiple factors such as gender, race, class, and socio-economic status (Bauer et al., 2021; McCormick et al., 2019, Nishimoto & Philpott, n.d.). Thus, integration of these social issues is essential in understanding how people's experiences are shaped because they do not simply go away. In essence intersectionality shows how social issues are mutually inclusive. Similarly, in this research intersectionality is used to understand how gender, religion, patriarchy, power dynamics intersect to construct women's experiences of oppression. Due to this integration of multiple factors and social categories, intersectionality theory is seen as determined to bring an ending to different forms of oppressions all at once (Singh, 2015). Intersectionality theory plays an important role as no other social theory took the voices and experiences of black women seriously until the development of intersectionality, giving women of colour a voice (Carastathis, 2014).

Intersectionality has a deep history in black feminism simultaneously confronting the 'woman question' and the 'race problem'. The woman question and race problem go back to the issue of narrating the history of black women's experiences in terms of race and gender only whereas they face multiple systems of oppression (Rodríguez and Vickery, 2021). As already highlighted by Al-Fatham et al. (2019), Carastathis (2014), Rodríguez and Vickery (2021) also emphasise that one of the aims of intersectionality is to expose the limitation of black women's experiences to just gender and race. Research shows that it is indeed true that black women have been experiencing the 'double jeopardy' throughout history (Al-Fatham et al., 2019; Robinson, 2018), however, the experience of systemic oppression is not only due to race and gender but multiple intersecting identities that come because of gender, race and class (Rodríguez & Vickery, 2021).

The theory of intersectionality emphasises that there are multiple dimensions to gender, that shapes beliefs and experiences, and religion is one of those dimensions (Shields, 2008). Religion is acknowledged as one of the important factors contributing to identity formation and gender identity across the globe (Abraham, 2019). The interplay between gender and religion cannot be denied as it does not only shape and/or affect women's awareness and perceptions but also limit their opportunities in religious institutions and work industries (Abraham, 2019). Given that there is a lot of oppression towards women in religious institutions, it is interesting that they make up a larger membership (Chisale, 2019) and they maintain loyalty to their beliefs (Abraham, 2019).

Singh (2015) argues that the question of why religion has gone for a long time without being included in the theory of intersectionality remains important because it is possible that religion is an oppressed form of difference or itself is an oppressive force. Religion can be used to explain the performance of gender roles and expectations along with acceptable behaviours attached to gender, femininity, and masculinity (Abraham, 2019). Mudau and Obadire (2017) argues that in the patriarchal system expectations are placed on women's fertility and the number of children they are supposed to conceive. Women who defy gender expectations within the patriarchal system often face discrimination, isolation, harassment, etc (Kaur & Sabo, 2014). Hierarchies of gender are built and fortified within religious ideologies through socialisation, shaping and modelling of behaviour that children learn through parents, and they also learn what it means to be male or female and traits attributed to each gender (Abraham, 2019).

Shields (2008) found some consistent underlying principles on intersectionality that are not limited to the two; (1) reinforcement which states that individuals consistently and actively engage in formation of their identity showing that identity is not a fixed thing, showing that one can identify within the gender roles they perform such as being a mother, a wife, and likewise religious roles required by the religion one follows and these roles can be modified to accommodate changes in norms and principles within religious institutions, (2) naturalisation which is the process by which aspects of one's identity becomes firmly established within social norms to such extended that they are perceived as natural. For instance, expectations and roles attached to gender in religious context, women internalising the perceptions that they are not to be leaders because they are not born for it, remaining silent in uncomfortable situations because women are not to question any law established by a man, internalising and normalising rules made over their bodies and choices. Shield (2008) further argues that intersection can put one at an opportunistic or oppressive state in relation to other groups, in this context it can be understood how the intersection of gender and power put women at a disadvantage.

The exclusion of women from religious leadership does not only exclude them from theological culture but sidelines them, steals their voices (Krull, 2021; Ruether, 1981), and steals their contributions and reduces their presence using male narrative. Bouma and Perales (2019) and Ruether (1981) call out the problematic perception that women's physical and moral weakling nature does not permit them leadership roles. The ground for this argument is layered on Eve being easily deceived (Akaranga & Ongong'a, 2014). Being easily deceived shows poor self and moral control (Ruether, 1981), thus lack of suitability for leadership. Women are not perceived as nothing beyond biological nature, thus Apostle Paul states that through childbearing women shall be saved from their sins (1 Timothy 2:15). One can make an extensively reaching argument that this perception fuels cultural views of women as responsible for conception of children, placing pressure on them to conceive (Mudau & Obadire, 2017).

3.3. INTERSECTIONALITY AND ADDRESSING OPPRESSION IN RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS

In his study on intersectionality and religion, Diko (2023) found that the oppression of women and girls portrayed in biblical scriptures, particularly in the Old Testament, resemble

the experiences of oppression of women in the South African context. Diko (2023) argues that women's experiences of oppression can be seen in multiple instances such as normalisation of men as superior beings, normalisation of polygamous relationships/marriages, silencing of their voices within religious and legal context, practice of leverage marriage and other oppressive things that women continuously battle. Trible (1973) also argues that religion should be depatriarchalized as he argues that through the patriarchal nature of religion women's sense of agency is restricted through the concept of 'female purity' where they are considered to be impure while on their menstruation period and have restrictions placed upon them during this period. Although in the Old Testament there are rituals that men had to perform to retain purity, today they are not as popular compared to rituals expected from their female counterparts.

Research shows that there are extraordinary women in biblical text, however, because of male narrative their leadership and victory is not praised enough (Abraham, 2019; Chisale, 2020; Havlicek & Klingorava, 2015) and it can be argued that this is because acknowledgement of their experiences as leaders will bring them out of the box they have been confined in as primarily mothers, caretakers, and wives. As highlighted by Chisale (2020), Diko (2023) also attest that the problem with gender roles start when societal expectations are confined within these roles. Diko (2023) explains that confinement of women to these constructed gender roles limit them from exploring and discovering their talents and as a result are forced to rely upon men, downgrading them to subordinate positions in societies.

Hutson (2007) states that during apartheid in South Africa sexism and racism were striving and women were subordinated and further discriminated against by the multi-cultural systems in the country. Black women were battling cultural traditions that belittled them and were also challenged by the apartheid system that emphasised the superiority of white men. Before colonialism things seemed to be better for women as they had status in the society as farmers, being able to provide for themselves and their families, however, post-colonialism things became different as they were no longer allowed to participate in activities that would advance them economically and forcing them to rely on their husbands who were also not paid enough for their hard labour (Baden et al., 1993).

Diko (2023) makes a comparison between experiences of women in the Old Testament to experiences of South African women in apartheid system and argues that just like the way women in the Old Testament are portrayed as subordinate to men, South African women are

experiencing intersecting forms of oppressions as a result of gender, race, and class that marginalised them. They were disadvantaged by the apartheid system that used religious texts to keep them in place. Thus, South African women suffer the complexities of the intersectionality of patriarchy, historical injustices and oppression similar to the one on women in the Old Testament (Diko, 2023). Despite this Casaburri (1986) argues that it cannot always be assumed that African women are oppressed, others find passion and purpose in their roles as nurturers, mothers, and takes these tasks to heart, however, it remains that they are excluded from taking part in important political decisions.

3.4. UNDERSTANDING THE OPPRESSION OF WOMEN IN SA.

The oppression of women in South Africa is influenced by multiple factors such as, but not limited to economic, political, ideological and cultural factors (Casaburri, 1986). Hutson (2007) argues that because of these factors and different values that can be perceived in South African cultures gender inequality is going to be a continuous thing for a long time. Hutson (2007) explains that South African women experienced oppression in so many ways, since colonialism era where rules were changed and women could no longer continue with agricultural activities because agriculture became less important, furthermore, young girls and women grew up expected to depend on a man, getting involved in polygamous marriages. Because women had limited opportunities, they tried to make ends meet by becoming domestic workers and casual workers on white owned farms (Baden et al., 1999, as cited in Hutson, 2007). The impacts of colonisation and apartheid are still prevalent today. Thus, true democracy and emancipation of women cannot be totally achieved in a society where gender inequality and discrimination still go unnoticed (Segalo, 2015). Matabane and Ntshangase (2022) argues that colonisation caused imbalances, gender inequality, and female disempowerment in Africa.

In terms of understanding oppression of women in the context of this study, it is a very important task for missionaries to take seriously the issue of gender and oppression, especially Christians and ask important questions to find out whether women find religious institutions appealing or revolting (Kretzschmar, 1995). The same way Christianity and missionaries were taking seriously the issue of gender, race and culture should be the same way the issue of gender inequality should be taken seriously (Kretzschmar, 1995). It is yet to be navigated how

maleness and masculinity and femaleness and femininity can be spoken about without raising stereotypical assumptions attached to each gender especially in a country like SA. Kretzschmar (1995) notes that the issue of gender inequality in South Africa goes way back to the mid-19th century when golds and diamonds were discovered and there was introduction of urbanisation. This is when social forces started to have more profound impact on family structure and gender relations, when women started to struggle even more as they were faced with the challenge of providing for their families, working long hours in industries for little pay and expected to come home and take care of the daily household running and the children, showing the triple struggle of race, gender and class experienced by black women.

The concept of oppression can be understood differently based on internalised and externalised types of oppression. Internalised oppression is a form of oppression where the oppressed group accept and adopt the negative stereotypes and prejudice imposed on them by dominant groups and often this leads to self-hatred, feeling powerless and inferior, unworthy and grateful for survival amongst other things (Peterson, 1986; Uchem, 2012). Due to long experience of being subjected to ill-treatment, internalised oppression is being accepted as a normal behaviour (Uchem, 2012). South African women experienced discrimination and oppression from the apartheid system because they were black. Black women were living under repressive laws that denied them the opportunity to exercise their political, social and economic rights (South African History Archive, n.d.). Furthermore, they were faced with the patriarchal system that discriminated against them based on their gender and were also treated as second citizens in their own homes (SAHA, n.d.). Thus, Uchem (2012) urges that the social construction of women's internalised oppression should be questioned to ask who defines women? Who set the conditions for women to be oppressed and oppress each other? Who benefits from women's internalised oppression? These questions are important to ask as Uchem (2012) emphasises that there is no way women are consciously oppressed, they have been conditioned to accept and participate in their own oppression. This explains Mudimeli's (2021) findings in Pentecostal churches in Thohoyandou that other women believe leadership is not for women. Segar and White (1986) stresses that it is worth noting that gender roles are not an in-born traits, one can choose to change or reject them, however, they have been imposed for a long time that reinforcing them has become a norm, thus some women have internalised the believe that they are inferior to men and are not well equipped to perform tasks that are deemed to be masculine.

3.5 CONCLUSION

This chapter examined intersectionality as the theoretical framework guiding this research, focusing on how multiple social systems: patriarchy, race, class, and religion intersect to shape women's oppression. Intersectionality highlights the complexities of human experiences, emphasizing how gender, religion, and power dynamics interact to construct women's marginalization. Black women, in particular, face compounded struggles, including normalized practices of male superiority, silencing of their voices, and systemic injustices such as polygamy and leverage marriages. Despite historical examples of strong female leadership, women's contributions remain largely unacknowledged. In South Africa, intersecting factors such as economic, political, cultural, and ideological factors deepen women's oppression, reinforced by apartheid and colonial histories. The framework reveals how societal hierarchies perpetuate inequality, often conditioning women to internalize their subjugation. Intersectionality thus provides a critical lens to unpack these complexities and informs the methodology outlined in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter outlines the research methodology employed to explore the phenomenon of religion and patriarchy. The study adopts a qualitative approach and an exploratory research design to gather in-depth insights into participants' lived experiences. Non-probability sampling methods, specifically convenience and snowball sampling, were used to identify participants with relevant experiences. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews, providing flexibility and depth to the responses. Thematic analysis and critical discourse analysis (CDA) were used to analyse the data, uncovering patterns and examining power dynamics. The chapter also discusses measures taken to ensure rigour and reflexivity, as well as the ethical considerations upheld in engaging with participants.

4.2. QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Cropley (2023) suggests that qualitative research delves into how individuals narrate their stories and make sense of their lived experiences. This approach prioritizes the exploration of human experiences as a means to understand social phenomena and uncover insights that might otherwise remain overlooked (Lim, 2024). To illuminate social and cultural dynamics, qualitative research employs diverse data collection methods, including observations, interviews, and photovoice (Relacion, n.d.).

For this study, qualitative methods were utilized to explore participants' perceptions of oppression stemming from the intersection of religion and patriarchy. These methods captured an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences, opinions, and interpretations of religious texts and teachings. This approach was particularly significant, as Lim (2024) highlights the value of qualitative research in providing contextual depth and offering holistic perspectives. By giving each participant, a platform to share their voice, qualitative research ensured that their unique experiences are recognized and understood. This study adopted a qualitative research methodology underpinned by the constructivist paradigm. This paradigm aligned with the study's aim to construct meaning from participants' subjective realities, emphasizing the co-creation of knowledge through their shared narratives and interpretations.

Constructivism is described as a philosophical approach that states that individuals construct their own understanding through experiences and their understanding of those experiences (Honebein, 1996). Individuals make meaning and create their own reality out of their experiences (Adom et al., 2016). Johnson et al. (2021) explains that researchers who employ this paradigm emphasise participants' own construction, and narration of their lived experiences. Guba (1994) explains that the construction of reality is not absolute truth, rather the truth is relative to context, perceptions and experiences of those constructing it. Thus, realities of individuals are influenced by interpretations and understandings of constructions. According to Bally et al. (2022) constructivist approach has proven to be very useful in comprehending and attaching meaning to experience. This paradigm is suitable for the study as the researcher is interested in the construction of meaning that participants attach to their experiences in relation to the research topic.

4.3. STUDY SETTINGS

I (the researcher) explored diverse perspectives from participants residing in Westdene, a suburb within the Johannesburg Metropolitan Municipality in Gauteng Province, South Africa. Westdene is situated near the suburbs of Sophiatown and Melville. Participants were recruited from this area for convenience, as I resided in Westdene, and recruitment was also extended to members of a sisterhood WhatsApp group to which the I belonged.

Westdene has faced several social challenges over the past decade, including illegal communes, sewage spills into the Westdene Dam, power outages, and water pipe bursts, which have significantly affected the community's quality of life (Fourie, 2025). Gauteng Province, home to South Africa's largest population, has approximately 15 million residents (Stats SA, 2023). In 2011, Westdene itself had a population of 7,815, with a population density of 3,892.91 people per km² and 3,806 households. The gender distribution was 52% female and 48% male (Frith, n.d.). Permission to conduct the study within the area was obtained through an acknowledgment letter from Goshen City Church. This recruitment approach ensured accessibility and relevance, aligning with the study's focus on gathering localized insights.

4.4. EXPLORATORY RESEARCH DESIGN

Lawal and Thomas (2020) states that exploratory research design is usually carried when there is not enough information on a phenomenon. The main aim of exploratory research design (ERD) is to explore and make new discoveries, and it lays a ground for future research. Adi (2020) states that exploratory research is practical in terms of providing possible underlying factors of a phenomenon enabling the research to develop an in-depth understanding of the problem. Pawar (2020) argues that ERD plays an important role in clarifying and defining problems. Thus, exploratory research design was employed to gather information in this study.

4.5. SAMPLING AND SELECTION CRITERIA

Participants were selected using a non-probability convenience and snowball sampling method. Golzar et al. (2022) suggest that in convenience sampling, participants are selected based on their availability and accessibility to the researcher. Participants were given a Participant Information Sheet to read and were encouraged to ask questions before agreeing to participate. Those who agreed to be part of the study signed two consent forms, with one copy provided for them to keep. I acknowledge that convenience sampling is often not representative of the majority of the population; however, it is valuable for acquiring rich qualitative data (Alvi, 2016, as cited in Golzar et al., 2022).

In this study, participants were Christian women aged 18–35. Approximately 10 Christian women voluntarily took part in the study. The age range of 18 to 35 was chosen because I observed that youth within this range were more willing to discuss the topic. The South African Youth Forum recognizes this age range as youth. Goshen City Church was approached as an entry point into the Westdene community. An acknowledgment letter granting permission to conduct the study in the community was requested and obtained from the church. However, participants included women residing within the community regardless of their church affiliation to ensure inclusivity. Additional participants were recruited through a sisterhood WhatsApp group that I am was part of (not linked to the church).

4.6. DATA COLLECTION METHODS AND PROCEDURE

Data collection is one of the important stages in research that help to generate the answers the researcher is looking for and gives insights into the research topic being explored (Taherdoost, 2021). Taherdoost (2021) states that there are different methods of data collection. It is important that the researcher identifies the data collection method suitable for their research to appropriately address their research questions and gain valuable insights. In this research, interviews were used. Bussetto et al. (2020) proposes that interviews give a useful insight into a person's opinions, and subjective experience as opposed to giving facts. I was interested in participants' opinions and experiences; thus, interviews were a suitable method of data collection. I prepared an interview guide to have an organised discussion with participants.

The interview guide was developed based on the research topic, primary and secondary research questions, as well as the aim and objectives of the study. The purpose of the guide was to facilitate an organized and structured discussion with participants. To ensure its efficiency, pilot interviews were conducted with the assistance of my supervisor to assess the guide's clarity, relevance, and alignment with the research objectives.

According to Allif et al. (2017), piloting interviews strengthens the research instruments by allowing researchers to refine their questions, acquire new interviewing skills, and enhance their approach to data collection. Feedback from the pilot phase was used to adjust and improve the interview guide for the main interviews. The main interviews were conducted in person, with each session lasting approximately an hour. During the process, ethical considerations such as obtaining informed consent, ensuring participant confidentiality, and creating a comfortable environment were strictly observed and adhered to.

4.7. DATA INSTRUMENT AND MANAGEMENT

In this research semi-structured interview questions were used to acquire in-depth information. The open-ended nature of interview allowed me the privilege of understanding the experience from the participant's perspective (Albaret & Deas, 2023). List of interview

questions were constructed from research objectives/ research subtopics **see Appendix 4**. The interview guide questions are there just to remind the researcher on how to probe. An audio recorder was used during the 10 interviews. English was used during the interviews.

Data management refers to the process of organising, storing, and controlling the data accumulated during a research project (Bouchrika, 2024). Data management is useful in addressing errors, verifying and increasing the validity and quality of the research (Bouchrika, 2024). For this research, recordings were stored safely on a password encrypted file. I am the only person with access to the audio. Transcriptions were conducted after the interviews and stored in a password encrypted folder. The recorded data will be kept for a period of five years following any publication or for six years if no publications emanate from the study.

4.8. THEMATIC ANALYSIS AND CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

Braun and Clarke (2012) states that thematic analysis is one of the flexible methods of analysing data in qualitative research as it makes easy the organisation of data into common themes. In thematic analysis common relations and experiences between participants can be identified. The six phases approach to thematic analysis were employed, namely: familiarising yourself with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing potential themes, defining, and naming themes, producing reports (Braun & Clarke, 2012). Thematic analysis was used as the initial process to keep the data together.

Discourse is explained as the use / study and analysis of language (Hodges et al., 2008; Kamalu & Osisanwo, 2015). This analysis is not only concerned with studying formalities and principles of language but also explain how language is used to form social norms, and understand social phenomena amongst other things, (Hodges et al., 2008). In this research critical discourse analysis (CDA) was used to understand social and religious norms in relation to gender roles and expectations, how the construction of gender is situated within social structures. CDA explores the underlying structures of language and how it is used to perpetuate power dynamics and social hierarchies within texts (Leotti et al., 2021). Leotti et al. (2021) further points that CDA is not only concerned with what is explicitly stated in a text but explores what the text implies and what it does.

Critical discourse analysis will assist to understand the interplay between culture, religion, and patriarchy and how gender is performed and how this can be oppressive towards

women. The data collected was analysed for themes, patterns, and lastly meaning was made in relation to study findings. Alejandro and Zhao (2023) highlight that discourse analysis use analytical strategies to understand written and spoken communications. Alejandro and Zhao (2023) state that DA is not too strict thus it employs analytical frameworks to make sense of discourse as used in society and politics.

In this research Van Dijk's (1993) framework of Critical Discourse Analysis was used to analyse and make sense of the data. CDA analysis is suitable as it evaluates how language and discourse are used to promote and maintain social power and dominance. Van Dijk (1993) emphasise that discourse is not merely an individual idea hence rather than focusing on individual power it examines the relationships between broader groups/power. This is because discourse serves the interests of dominant social groups that influence shared beliefs and as a result reinforce societal hierarchies. CDA analysis considers the power of discourse to shape and control social cognition and to understand how collective beliefs, ideologies, and norms are formed and maintained (Van Dijk, 2013). Wodak (2001) as cited Allagbe and Amoussou (2018) perceives CDA as analysing both hidden and visible power structures of dominance, discrimination, power, and control as they are expressed through language. Excerpts from participants' interviews and biblical scriptures quoted were used to highlight how discourse can be used to support patriarchal values and gendered power dynamics within religious institutions and the communities.

Van Dijk's CDA principles namely, ideological framings, social cognition, control over discourse and dominance were employed. With social power and dominance, CDA is interested in the exercise of power by the elites and analyse the abuse of power and inequality placed on the marginalised (Udasmoro et al., 2013). Social cognition refers to mind management, interpretation, understanding and conceptualisation of information (Van Dijk, 1993). With social cognition, dominance and discourse is understood. Ideological framing includes social practices, beliefs and attitudes shared by set of people or members of a group (Van Dijk, 2013).

CDA is largely driven by a commitment to pressing social issues, aiming to deepen understanding of these concerns through discourse analysis (Van Dijk, 1993). Van Dijk (1993) explains that unlike other discourse analysts, CDAs adopt a clear sociopolitical stance, making their perspectives, principles, and objectives known both in academic contexts and in society more broadly. CDA aims to foster social change through a deeper, critical understanding of language and power dynamics, especially by representing the perspectives of those most

affected by inequality and dominance and this is done by challenging the power structures such as influential elites who perpetuate, legitimize, or overlook social inequities and injustices (Nnamdi-Eruchalu, n.d.).

A key foundation of effective CDA lies in understanding the concepts of social power and dominance Fairclough (1995) as cited in Al-Mas'udi (2021). With this understanding, it can be explored how language and discourse help reinforce these structures of power. In short, CDA examines the relationships between social groups, rather than focusing on individual power unless it serves as an example of broader group power (Van Dijk, 1993). Social power, in this context, is rooted in access to valued societal resources like wealth, status, education, authority, or influence. CDA is interested in power abuse to assess how those in power break rules and principle and perpetuate inequality and injustices (Van Dijk, 1993). Dominance is challenged because often it come in subtle forms that it is accepted as a norm (Nnamdi-Eruchalu, n.d.; Van Dijk, 1993).

4.9. ENSURING STUDY RIGOUR

Birt et al. (2016) explains member checking as a technique that validates the credibility of participants' responses. Member checking is essential in verifying and assessing the validity of the obtained qualitative data (Doyle, 2007, as cited in Birt et al., 2016). According to Candela (2019) member checking gives the researcher an opportunity to ensure that they have portrayed the voices of individuals accurately. Member checking also gives participants a chance to confirm whether their voices have been captured well or not (Candela 2019).

Peer debriefing is explained as a technique to establish credibility of qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, as cited in Brandon et al., 1997). Baxter and Eyles (1997) states that peer briefing includes sharing data with trusted colleagues to get new perspective on data interpretations and avoiding biasness. By exposing data and seeking assistance from external reviewers the researcher obtains new ideas on their research enhancing credibility of the study (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Peer debriefing helps the researcher to perceive biasness and to seek more information and enhance the quality of research (Barber & Walczak, 2009).

Gender matching interviews are used to establish rapport within a study mostly by feminist researchers where gender is prioritised (Thwaites, 2017). This comes from the notion that gender matching has the potential to establish trust and open communication between the interviewer and the interviewee. For example, in this research this is applicable as the

researcher is studying a topic that might be sensitive to women. Thus, being of the same gender might help in getting participants comfortable.

4.10. REFLEXIVITY

The researcher acknowledges that she is a black woman who identifies as a Christian which might be an advantage as she is part of the community she intends to study. The researcher also acknowledges that she speaks a different home language from some of the participants which might bring about language barrier. While some participants spoke a different home language from mine, I was able to navigate this challenge effectively due to my intermediate understanding of their language. Furthermore, participants primarily communicated in English, occasionally incorporating their home language, which I was able to comprehend without compromising the meaning of their narratives. There were possibilities of encountering various biasness such as cultural and personal biases, etc.

I recognised that, and the biases were acknowledged and addressed appropriately. In terms of personal biases, as a black Christian woman myself, I recognized the importance of approaching the study with an open mind and acknowledging my positionality. I was mindful of the diversity in how different churches interpret and practice religious doctrine, which helped me remain objective and respectful of participants' unique experiences. This awareness allowed me to engage with their narratives critically, without imposing my own beliefs or assumptions, ensuring that their voices were authentically represented in the findings.

4.11. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

It is essential that the rights and health of participants are always protected when conducting research, and this is done by getting ethical approval before carrying out a study, to avoid exposing both the researcher and the participants to negative experience. Bouma and Ling (2004) states that careful planning and ethical standards should be strictly followed. To ensure good code of conduct the following themes will be considered: informed consent (giving participants enough information about the research so they can make an informed decision before participating), confidentiality (privacy of participants), privacy, and deception (giving false or withholding information).

Potential participants were explained to about the study during the initial contact and informed that their participation is totally voluntary and can be withdrawn at any time should

they feel uncomfortable continuing as participants. Becker et al. (2012) proposes that the identity of participants should always be protected (this was done by using pseudonyms), should they want to maintain anonymity from those other than the researcher. Anonymity cannot be guaranteed as the researcher knows the participants, but confidentiality can be guaranteed. Deception includes instances where the researcher misinforms, omit, or lie about the aim of the research. To ensure good ethical conduct in this research, participants were given consent forms and their rights as participants to read for themselves, as well as understand the overall process of this research. Should participants need counselling during or after the study they will be referred to Emthonjeni Centre on 0117174513/0117178324. The researcher will obtain the ethical clearance from the University of the Witwatersrand, Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical).

The perspectives, experiences, and opinions expressed by the participants in this study are solely their own and do not represent the views or positions of Goshen City Church and Sisterhood WhatsApp group. While approval was obtained to conduct research within this area and recruit participants, the organizations and institutions involved bear no responsibility for the study's findings, interpretations, or conclusions.

4.12. CONCLUSION.

This chapter outlined the qualitative methodology underpinning the study, grounded in a constructivist paradigm to explore participants' experiences and the meanings they attribute to them. An exploratory design was employed to gain new insights into the research topic. Convenience and snowball sampling were used to recruit 10 women participants, who were respectfully approached, informed about the study, and provided with consent forms. Semi-structured interviews, guided by a piloted interview guide, served as the primary data collection method.

Thematic analysis was used to identify patterns and generate themes, while critical discourse analysis (CDA) offered deeper insights into participants' language and experiences. Steps to ensure rigor, including reflexivity, were implemented to enhance the study's quality. Ethical considerations were carefully adhered to throughout the research process, ensuring the integrity of the study and respect for participants.

CHAPTER 5

5. ANALYSIS

5.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides an analysis of the findings from the study on the lived experiences of black South African women, focusing on the intersection of religion and patriarchy. The analysis is guided by the research aims and objectives, which seek to critically examine the intersecting factors that serve as tools for women oppression. Five key themes emerged from the analysis, offering valuable insight into how oppression is maintained and internalized:

1). Gender inequality and patriarchal structures: This theme explored how patriarchy systematically sustains inequality in both societal and religious contexts.

2). Oppression and silencing of women: This theme examined the ways in which women's voices and agency were suppressed through patriarchal and religious practices.

3). Gendered perception of God: This theme investigated the portrayal of God as a patriarchal lens which influences gender dynamics and power relations.

4). Women in Leadership: Navigating Religious Patriarchy and Cultural Undermining

5). Misinterpretation of scriptures: This theme highlighted use of religious text to reinforce oppressive gender norms, the intersection of faith, guidance, and gender roles.

5.2. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

5.2.1. THE GENDER BINARY AND FOUNDATIONS OF PATRIARCHAL INEQUALITY

Ridgeway and Correll (2004) defines gender inequalities as culturally and socially created differences between men and women that lead to unequal influence in societal decision making and accessing resources. Religious doctrines, and culture defines characteristics that society uses to distinguish males from females and sets expectations for behaviours and values appropriate for each gender (Ridgeway & Correll, 2004). For example, men are usually thought to be assertive, independent, competent while women are seen as caring, friendly, interdependent, warm (Eagly & Mladinic, 1989). The expectations placed on gender often

reinforce patriarchal hierarchies and place men in position of dominance which relegate women to position of submission. Pierik (2022) explains patriarchal power as control men have over the physical and biological aspects of life, as well as the knowledge presentation of these aspects, furthermore, this power presents itself as 'natural' and opposes any attempt by women that make it unnatural. Wood (2019) argues that in patriarchal context, religious belief often justifies traditional and cultural practices that lead to unfair treatment of women. Often this includes restrictions of what women can and cannot do, favouring one gender over the other. **Kim,** shares that:

> "…But obviously sometimes the Bible favours men than women, and although we are treated equal, there are some instances where there are differences. Like men are better..."

This excerpt shows the perception that men are perceived as inherently favoured by God. The participants acknowledges that while there is promotion of equality, men are often more valued than women and this is seen in the use of language that *men are better* showing distinction between men and women. The suggestion that men are better highlights that men are more preferred, granting them authority and power. Additionally, this framing position men as superior which aligns with patriarchal values and doctrines embedded in religious and cultural teachings. The idea that men are *better* and favoured potentially shapes the beliefs around gender, which can lead to internalisation of male authority and acceptance of authority and gender roles as godly ordained. The following excerpt shows how men are better favoured over women. **Blessing** narrates that:

> "…Because I think it's just promoting like it's just promoting women to stay in the house, men work and then like it just shutting out opportunities for women. And then if you're a woman, you come to like a male-dominated place and then it's like, what are you doing? Yeah. You should be at home breastfeeding..."

The excerpt shows how religious discourse promotes a binary between men's and women's roles. The participant interprets religious expectations as dictating that women should remain in domestic spaces, which restricts their access to work and social positions traditionally occupied by men. This view aligns with Ridgeway and Correll's (2004) assertion that widely

held gender beliefs act as cultural guidelines, reinforcing established roles that support inequality. The restriction establishes a boundary in terms of what women can do, and the limitation on opportunities limit women's independence in private and public sectors. This discourse control reinforces and legitimates patriarchal expectations by prescribing specific roles.

The idea that *you should be at home breastfeeding* frames women's roles as centred around caregiving. Ortner (1974) explains that woman's body appear to limit her to reproduction abilities while men are expected to show creativity through technology. From the perspective of Van Dijk (1993) the use of language in **Blessing's** excerpt shows the naturalisation of patriarchal expectations by normalising gender roles and restrictions. World Bank Group (2019) explain that persistent discriminatory social norms and practices are the reason why women are denied their right to own land and properties. Through the lens of intersectionality, it can be seen that the restrictions go beyond gender but intersect with broader systems that normalise this exclusion such as culture, patriarchy, and socio-economic systems. The perception of women as nurturers might be perceived as a rule than opinion to show that culture dictates appropriate roles (Cerdán-Torregrosa, 2023). The statement explicitly revealed the expected norm. This ideological framing suggests that deviation from these roles is inappropriate, contrasting women's access to male-dominated spaces as an anomaly.

The language used reflects an ingrained societal belief that women belong in domestic roles (Fisher, 2021), emphasising the cultural belief about gender perspective for men and women. For instance, if it is taken as a rule that women are only seen as nurturers and nothing beyond, this will unconsciously reinforce societal structures (Aceves-Gómez et al., 2024) such as patriarchal family systems and gendered division of labour. These religious and cultural beliefs about gender guides societal belief and understanding about women's position in the community. For example, religious institution beliefs the role of God or creator is portrayed as a man while women are portrayed as nurturers, limiting them in religious and leadership roles (Havlíček & Klingorová, 2015). By holding this belief, together with the limitation of opportunities for women, social mobility for women is created and gender inequalities are maintained. The systemic nature of gender inequality and patriarchal structures serves as a foundation for various and intersecting forms of oppression that silence women and suppress their agency, often in overt or subtle ways, maintaining their subordinate positions, marginalizing their perspectives, and limiting their autonomy. Consequently, the theme of

oppression and silencing of women emerges as a direct extension of the pervasive patriarchal framework, warranting further exploration.

5.2.2. OPPRESSION AND SILENCING OF WOMEN

Yih (2023) explains that silence is not always the lack of expression but could be an effect of repeated suppression by dominant voice. Individuals, groups, or institutions with authority can silence those less powerful through various silencing treatment, such as suppression of voice in politics, science, the economy and other things (Yih, 2023). The silencing of women does not simply refer to lack of voice in religious matters or patriarchal spaces but the firmly fixed religious beliefs and structures that restrict women from expressing themselves. Silencing also refers to women's inability to voice their concern due to gender oppressive systems (Yih, 2023), it refers to the notion of obedience without question that is expected from women. Oppression and silencing of women can be understood through **Sihle** who expressed the following:

> "…I think it promotes gender inequality because uhm when men lead me as a woman I don't have a say. I can't even say this is wrong this is right, even if I do, they'll just say I am a woman, you have to follow, that is inequality. Usually when women say something they will say 'uwumfazi' you will do and listen to what I say…"

In the above excerpt there is presence of discourse control as the participants' words shows how language shapes power dynamics. The phrase *men lead*, and *I don't have a say* shows the authority that men have, authority to speak and make decisions whereas women are expected to silently follow, aligning with Van Dijk's (1993) argument that those in power often maintain their dominance by silencing the powerless. Women are described as *natural* followers, which can lead to the acceptance of not questioning males' authority. The gendered language further shows the defined roles and expectations in societies (Jahan, 2021). For instance, *you will do and listen to what I say* and *uwumfazi (you are a woman)*- highlights women's position and the submission they must give. The term *uwumfazi* as used in the excerpt shows that women are not permitted to give opinions, or they must be aware of their surroundings before doing so. Additionally, it comes across as dismissive, to say what women have to say is not valued limiting their participation in religious and cultural matters to listening and obeying. This systematic exclusion highlights Crenshaw's (1991) argument that gender works as a negative

framework while structural powers work to exclude and marginalise the disadvantaged, which can be observed from **Sihle's** excerpt. The use of discourse on the following quote emphasise how gendered language portrays women as passive participants in social, cultural and religious matters, highlighting structures of inequality. **Sihle** narrate that:

> "…worse, uhm if a woman is treated like this at home maybe at home my father doesn't listen to anything I say and at church is the same, as a woman you may reach a conclusion that that's how men are, they are above us and obviously in my mind I will think men should lead no matter what, men should do it, everything. Especially if you grew up knowing that at home dad's words are final and with our mothers telling us that we should listen to men when they speak and even at church the same thing is happening. Even if I grow up still that thing is already in my mind, I know that I listen to my husband, I should keep quiet even if there's something wrong, I keep quiet, so I don't get insulted…"

Sihle's excerpt aligns closely to Crenshaw's (1991) argument that women's oppression is collectively reinforced by multiple domains, in this instance culture, patriarchy and religion. The above narrative reflects on religious settings of male dominance which shows discourse control where men are authoritative while women's voices are dismissed. The specific words used such as *my father doesn't listen to anything I say, that's how men are, they are above us and dad's words are final'* tie together to emphasise that men are indeed seen as authoritative figures that not only rules but are not to be questioned and as a result suppress any other alternative perspectives. The use of language indicates normalised behaviour of women's silence in certain spaces. The silencing was further supported by quoting the scripture of 1Timothy 2:12 which in summary says women are not permitted to have authority over men but must remain silent.

The statement *that's how men are* can be tied into Van Dijk's (1993) social cognition principles that reflects participant's acceptance of male's *natural* assumption of dominance. Dominance perspective impact on the social norms which shapes cognitive frameworks and perception of men's superiority. Furthermore, it can be seen how women's status in society is as unchangeable by the phrase *they are above us,* ultimately influencing how women view themselves relative to men. The perspective pressures women to abide by the expectations set

upon them which includes suppressing their voices, embracing their subordinate role which fits into societal expectations. The statement *dad's words are final* portrays the patriarchal structure of an undisputable male authority (Ferry, 2024). This authority shapes the understanding of family dynamics, the cultural and social understanding of a male's role of decision-making power, and this role should be feared, respected and unchallenged by others. Unchallenged dynamic may impact on individual autonomy, specifically women might feel that their voices are not valued and undermined. Additionally, it affects perception of relationship dynamics for young females as they grow up embodying their subordinate, submissive and passive roles while young males learn to embody dominance. **Tshepo**, highlighted how embracing these expectations lead one to live untruthful life that is about pleasing others but yourself.

> "…Yeah, it's like they're living for people. They're not living. They're not being true to themselves. Like, now you're forced to submit and do every single thing to please the other person. But then what about you? What about God himself? Because that's the person who created you, not the other person. So, I think, yeah, it's just it's just robbing them a lot out of life…"

The excerpt above highlights continuous silence without permission to question which can deny women autonomy and authenticity. By *stating you're forced to submit and do every single thing to please the other person* implies that what you are doing is no longer about you but what others prefers. This statement indicates how women within religions and culture are conditioned to prioritise needs and beliefs of others. The idea of being forced into submission and pleasing others can be understood as socially reinforced expectation of women (not an individual experience), highlighting how patriarchy and religion intersect to define gender expectations. Internal conflict may arise as per the statement *but then what about you?* **Tshepo** realises the battle of satisfying social and religious expectations at the expense of compromising self-authenticity, highlighting the struggle between personal agency and patriarchal structures and social expectations. The question of *what about God himself?* introduces a contrasting perception as related to expectations of society, challenging the perception of divinely ordained male dominance as framed to justify women's oppression. The participant phrased the question in such a way that it opposes patriarchal norms instead of supporting them. Additionally, *just robbing them* highlights that expectation of women's silence all the time deprives them a chance to live their authentic lives. The use of the two

assertions together, *what about God himself* and *just robbing them* potentially shows denial of women's autonomy and voice which potentially be at odds with divinely intended self.

One of the interesting things about the use of discourse is how (1) **Kim** and (2) **Aisha** uses the same words but highlight different perspectives, this can be seen with the use of 'submission'.

> (1). The definition of submission is, like, I don't know, people, like, define submission in different ways. So, I feel like that also can promote patriarchy because I feel like when I define submission and then me defining submission means that, like, a woman must cook, a woman has to wash dishes, a woman has to do this, a woman has to do that. I am saying that, like, as a man, don't do this.

> (2). Submission is not as bad as people make it sound, that's if you have a good husband. When your husband is leading you well, it is a natural thing to do. It is not even a matter of you being denied a say but because you have no reason, or they don't give you a reason to question their leadership so submission will come naturally to you.

The use of submission in excerpt one is tied to specific behaviour that is expected from women such as cooking and doing dishes. Submission here comes as a traditional role that dictates women, giving them restrictive and unequal roles to men (Cerdán-Torregrosa et al., 2023). Submission is defined as supporting patriarchal standards that set limitations on women. However, in the 2nd excerpt it can be observed that submission has a condition attached to it. It is described as *naturally* emerging when led by a *good* husband. This does not take away the idea that submission is seen as a role women should *naturally embody*, however, it gives a notion that a husband should earn their wives' submission. It is not totally tied to inequality rather it is situational and/or voluntary as influenced by the husbands' character or actions.

In excerpt 1 the phrase *a woman has to,* shows the ideology that submission is rooted to specific gender tasks. Women expectation has been traditionally and culturally defined, and the speaker feels like that satisfies patriarchal structures. The choice of words, *as a man, don't do this* further defines gendered roles that a man takes the lead, and a woman listens and abides. The principle of mind management (van Dijk, 1993) can be seen from the word *must* which highlights internalisation of gendered roles which suggest men and women must come into acceptance of what is defined as appropriate gender roles for each.

On the contrary, excerpt 2 highlights submission as not bad, portraying it in a positive light. The use of *good husband* gives justification for why women must submit, revealing internalised social cognition. Power dynamics are evident in the linking of submission to men's leadership, by default, men are leaders; they are naturally positioned as authoritative figures. However, how *good* they are, determines the level of submission they receive. This reflects a conditional acceptance of male dominance, which reinforces the norm rather than challenges it. Situational submission, however, does not restore women's independent decision-making power, as there is still limitation. Additionally, the idea that submission comes *naturally* and *without question* signals how structural ideologies become internalised to the point of feeling expected or even desirable. This mirrors Van Dijk's (1993) notion of everyday discourse shaping social cognition, as well as Althusser's (1971) concept of interpellation, whereby individuals are "hailed" into ideological structures and unconsciously reproduce them. Aisha's framing does not just reflect her personal experience but also points to how gendered religious norms operate through symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 2001), gently maintaining domination without overt coercion. This understanding of power dynamics leads into the next theme, which explores the gendered perception of God and its implications for women's roles in religious contexts.

5.2.3. GENDERED PERCEPTION OF GOD

Gender role perceptions have evolved from stricter acceptance of roles to challenging gender roles; however, this has proven to be hard as societies are governed by historical gender expectations (Whitehead, 2012). It is important that the ideologies that influence gender roles be explored. In the first excerpt **Sihle** and in the second and third excerpts **Tshepo** highlighted that the masculine pronoun attached to divinity perpetuates patriarchal views or is rather used out of context to promote male dominance.

> (1) "…I feel like throughout the bible God is portrayed as a man. In terms of women, we relate to people like Hanna. Most of the time we see the work of God through men like David and Abraham and for women its household things like Hanna who couldn't get pregnant, Sarah same thing because it was pregnancy, so you see and Dorcus. So, as women that's what we can relate to, then for men its conquering wars, you see, while women are busy called Jezebels, like that's how

> women are portrayed, as temptations, so obviously even when you marry the perception remains. So yah, it remains the same because Jesus was always with men (his disciples), everything good has to do with men…"
>
> (2) "…I think there is a problem with everything. 1st Jesus could have been a woman and the disciples' men, but it keeps on reinforcing that women cannot do things. And women cannot create anything. I think the only thing men are grateful for is that women can fall pregnant, so I think it creates the perception that men are top dogs. I mean just look at it, God is a man, Jesus is a man, the disciples were men, and you would go to other churches, and they say women don't preach no matter how much after preaching people could feel healed, they say don't come to church when you're on your period you are dirty…"
>
> (3) "…Preachers always take all those downfalls of women without even acknowledging what they are. Hypnotizing people there to think… Then they'll tell you, as a woman, you must be strong. Sarah didn't have a child and remained strong until she had a child. Why as a woman, if you also look at the Bible, almost the whole book of Proverbs tells you how to be a woman? Can you tell me at least a book that tells you how to be a man..."

Throughout history God has been portrayed as male, and engaging with multiple religious texts the same observation can be made. God is identified and respected as a divine authoritative figure. The use of masculine pronouns and characteristics in describing God has been used to promote the idea of male authority as natural, thus making male dominance desirable and acceptable. Van Dijk (1993) explains how ideologies can be used to reinforce power inequalities. In this context the maleness of God is associated with masculinity, authority, power, all of which are used to explain the superiority of men and ultimately making them closer to the divine. Gallagher (2003) found in her study of Evangelicals that when God is perceived as male and men are seen as direct representations of God, women who challenge male authority are viewed as challenging God and disrupting the gendered order of society. Attributing masculine traits with divinity can be seen as grouping God together with men, giving femininity the concept of the *other* and *less authoritative*. Taking into consideration the

socio-historical context of discourse, the shared masculine traits between God and men have been standing for the longest time and thus this history still shapes modern religious practices and patriarchal structures (Whitehead, 2012). The use of language in the bible influences people's understanding of reality as a result influencing the justification for the roles given to men and women in the church and society.

In excerpt 1 the participant provides a detailed insight into the differences between men and women in relation to the gender attached to God. The participants show that men and women are understood both biblically and, in the society, men are defined as conquerors, associating them with strength and leadership (biblical stories about David, Moses, etc.) and women are associated with the household duties and family matters such as childbearing (biblical stories about Sarah and Hanna). The phrases *we see the work of God through men* and *women are busy being called jezebels* highlights internalised perception of gender in society. Men are associated with greatness, whereas women are associated with deception. The perception of women as jezebels denies them association with greatness and leadership as deception is ungodly. Furthermore, men and women have different impact in the household and society, and this can be seen with the phrases: *men conquer wars* and *women relate to Hanna*, showing difference in terms of possession of power. Additionally, *Jesus was always with men* indicates that divinity is mostly associated with men.

In excerpt two, the participant shows concern that everyone centred around divinity is men, omitting women from such roles. Jaramillo (2023) argues that such perceptions contradict the true nature of God, whose qualities such as compassion, kindness, and love are reflected equally in both men and women, as bearers of God's image. The assertion *God is man, Jesus is a man, the disciples are men* can be used to reinforce that leadership is seen as being for men. It makes it easier not to question male dominance and leadership because it can historically be seen how men have always been in the front. The assertion of God as male demonstrates that when the divine is linked to human experience, gender becomes a source of tension, marked by differences and power dynamics (Castelli, 2001). Social hierarchies and norms can be understood by the discourse *men are top dogs* and *women cannot create anything* showing men's ability to get things done and their superiority. The statement *women cannot create anything* starkly illustrates the symbolic devaluation of women's agency. While biologically, women are often associated with *creation* through reproduction, the contrast drawn here suggests that such capacity is not recognised as legitimate creative power within patriarchal frameworks. Instead, the notion of *creation* is implicitly reserved for men, linked

to leadership, innovation, authorship, and spiritual authority. This also has the potential of leading women to accept that they cannot do anything, accepting limitations. The statement the *only thing men are grateful for is that women can fall pregnant* reduces women's societal value to reproductive function. This reduction reflects broader patriarchal logic where women are valued not as autonomous agents, but in terms of what they can offer men. It reproduces the trope of women as vessels, able to *procreate* but not *create* a dichotomy that erases intellectual, spiritual, and political contributions by women. The phrase *men are top dogs* sustains male dominance and female restrictions even in situations where women can do exceptional work in preaching and delivering the message positively.

5.2.4. WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP: NAVIGATING RELIGIOUS PATRIARCHY AND CULTURAL UNDERMINING

CDA highlights how historic events can be used to place limitations on what women can do and how the use of language can lead to the acceptance of these limitations. Dominant and cultural norms can restrict women from expressing their beliefs and marginalise their spiritual identities. These themes tie to the impact of social expectations and religious norms on individual lives. The themes are interconnected as the limitations of opportunities restrict women from expressing their spiritual beliefs. Furthermore, hinders them from being recognised for leadership abilities they may possess. For instance, **Aisha** shared:

> "…If a woman cannot preach in church, she surely will not be president. Surely, they cannot be this…"

This statement shows that restriction goes beyond religious institutions, if women are directly restricted from preaching or taking leadership in religious institutions, they are directly hindered from taking leadership roles in the society. By linking religion with politics, the participant shows that religious beliefs shape the traits, and capabilities associated with women. The participant's statement further underscores the assumptions tied to femininity, suggesting that the patriarchal system continues to deny women recognition as equal religious subjects (Hoel & Naidu, 2013). The emphasis on the word *surely* suggests a definitive stance that women cannot attain certain positions. Additionally, the use of *will not* and *cannot* implies that society has been conditioned to uphold rigid gender roles, where simply being a woman is seen as sufficient justification for denying access to these positions (Cerdán-Torregrosa et al., 2023).

This pattern of exclusion reflects what Crenshaw (1989) describes, where certain identities are unjustly marginalized based on social constructs. Just as Crenshaw (1989) highlights how being excluded as a woman was as painful and unjust as racial exclusion, the denial of women's leadership in religious spaces illustrates how intersecting biases surrounding gender and religious tradition continue to limit women's roles. The chain of the statements also shows the reasoning or the logic behind the restriction, taking in mind that if women cannot preach (in religious settings with small population) they have no business being (political) leaders (who address large populations). The statement can also be argued to be against change because historically women has been denied presence in gatherings and, if allowed, had to be passively present. So, the use of *surely* again gives the notion that naturally women are not meant to be leaders, hence the denial of their leadership then and the denial now. The statements further show limitation to the agency of women, showing that societal norms have declared them unfit for certain roles and they are not given a chance to show their capabilities or make personal choices on what they want to do or participate in. With CDA these statements can be questioned, and challenged, to show that it is not *natural* for women not to be leaders, rather it is what society has been socialised to believe. For instance, Deborah in the book of Judges (4:4-16 KJV) was both a judge and a leader, showing authority and her leadership was trusted.

While different examples can be given to show women's capabilities in leadership, or their contributions in history, they hardly get the same recognition as their male counterparts. For instance, **Blessing** said:

> "…Winnie Mandela like Mandela is not forever in our heads. Like we never forget about Mandela. But Winnie can slip out of our minds like they do it. Like, okay, she did this. They recognized her for that. But then it's like they don't sustain that recognition. It's like, yeah, she did it. Cool stuff. But then they go for man…"

This statement brings into light that women's contributions are under-recognised despite the importance or value of what they do (Rajeshwari, 2023). It can be seen from the statement that women like Winnie Mandela, despite their contributions societal values still prioritise male achievements, despite equal contributions. It can be seen how achievements of men and women are perceived differently; men's achievements are highly valued and treasured and seen as heroic (Rajeshwari, 2023). Although both Winnie and Nelson Mandela contributed to the anti-apartheid regime, Winnie's contributions are recognised for a short period of time, giving the

idea that while her contributions are of great importance, they are not of commensurable level of honour. It can be argued that the value of achievements and recognition is influenced by gender. For example, Deborah's leadership is hardly spoken about when talking about leadership while Winnie's leadership and achievements are remembered momentarily, treating women's contributions in historic movements passively (Rajeshwari, 2023). The phrase *they go for a man* indicates that although recognition is given, contributions that are worth more recognition belong to men. Additionally casual use of language like *she did this* and *cool stuff* highlights how the contributions are temporarily recognised. Bringing both Deborah and Winnie's contribution into context, it can be seen how historic contributions of men are commemorated while women's contributions are visited. Rajeshwari (2023) argues that the agency and contributions of women in different movements should be recognised for they address the pressing social and economic issues women face as well as highlight the intersecting factors disadvantaging women. The idea of leadership being *natural* for men can be perceived as the reason why the society is comfortable with temporary or selective recognition of women's achievements.

While the example of Deborah demonstrates that leadership is not restricted by gender, some women still agree with Apostle Paul's teachings, believing that leadership and teaching roles should be reserved for men. They argue that this does not impose limitations, as there are other tasks women can undertake. This aligns with Akpa's (2011) argument about the importance of contextualizing Paul's teachings. **Rose** mentioned, *"It is said in the Bible that only men are supposed to preach…, then, young women, you know, in terms of when they grow up, how they should take care of their husbands".* This statement displays complex mix of societal, spiritual and personal dynamics. From the statement, there is denial of lack of opportunities and marginalisation of women and genuine acceptance and understanding of these structures. The belief that only men are supposed to give instructions both morally and spiritually ultimately portrays them as all-knowing and always right. It does not leave a room for women to participate in important moral or spiritual matters and this has the potential of marginalising their spirituality especially if they believe they have been called to teach, mentor or lead the congregation or community in one way or another. Rajeshwari (2023) argues that the deliberate exclusion of women and their confinement to traditional roles as mothers and wives erases their narratives and undermines their capabilities. This exclusion implies that women are not good enough or that their contributions lack significance. However, Kendall and Kolde (2024) counter this notion, highlighting that Jesus intentionally revealed himself to

women first after his resurrection and entrusted them with the task of preaching the good news to their brothers, demonstrating their full capability and worth. **Sihle** further complained that men do not know what women need, so they cannot speak on their behalf. This is highlighted in the following quote:

> "…at my church, only the male pastors lay hands on the congregants, a woman cannot do that because we don't have a female pastor and sometimes, we feel uncomfortable telling the pastor our prayer points because they cannot relate. Even during important things like emsamo (a hut that is a sacred place or altar for prayer and sacrifices) they say a man should be the one communicating with the ancestors on our behalf like they know what we really want. I could be needing help with the same man that is praying on my behalf, how do I tell him that..."

This quote highlights the complex challenges women encounter by being denied a position of power. The use of language in this excerpt shows tension and frustration because of these restrictions. The phrase *women cannot* show that they are not permitted, it is not their duty but that of men. *They say a man should be the one communicating*, highlights exclusion and opens a door for conversation around who is *they*. The use of *they* show ambiguity and power and does not provide clarity on who is responsible for the decision of men communicating on women's behalf. The vagueness of *they* makes it hard to challenge these long-standing cultural beliefs as *they* represent unspecified authority that have been passing these religious and/or cultural practices from generation to generation, showing some sort of imposition. By using *they* the participant distances herself from the decision, highlighting that she is not comfortable with and questions the normalised gender roles. Additionally, *they* reveal how these collective gender norms and beliefs are emphasised and maintained as community standards without being reinforced by any specific individual.

Sihle expresses discomfort in telling the pastor prayer points because they cannot relate, showing that the male pastor may not fully understand the things women are praying about. Similar to Crenshaw's (1991) argument on political intersectionality where feminist and anti-racist movements have historically prioritised either gender or race, patriarchy and religious institutions often prioritise male leadership, failing to fully represent women, further silencing them .This potential gap may hinder women's spirituality as they cannot be direct about their needs, which has the potential of affecting their faith especially if they feel misunderstood.

Additionally, it shows the need for females in the religious roles. The use of *like they know what we really want* emphasises that men do not thoroughly know nor understand some of the challenges women encounter, so by speaking on their behalf they limit their agency. The limitation can also be seen in the phrase, *how do I tell him* highlighting the difficulty that comes with having someone else intercede on your behalf. Furthermore, men speaking for women in *emsamo* passes the ideology that men can represent women. One of the challenges highlighted in this excerpt is evident when Sihle states, *"I could be needing help with the same man that is speaking on my behalf."* This reflects the intersecting structural barriers and discriminatory practices against women that Rajeshwari (2023) identifies as limiting their agency and participation in political movements, decision-making, and positions of power. Similarly, Crenshaw (1989, 1991) argues that overlapping systems of oppression create unique challenges for women, particularly when gender intersects with other social factors. As a result, women may feel frustrated and hesitant to express their concerns, especially when doing so involves acknowledging the role of someone who is perceived as an advocate but also contributes to their struggles. This fear often stems from concerns about being misunderstood, judged, or causing offense. This dynamic can result in a dilemma or isolation as women cannot fully express both their personal and spiritual needs. Because they cannot fully express their needs and must rely on men to intercede on their behalf, women may find themselves in a position of dissatisfaction and helplessness, feeling there is little they can do to change the situation.

Sana expressed that women do not lack leadership abilities, nor are they afraid to speak up; rather, they are denied opportunities and a receptive audience, often being undermined. This aligns with Phakeng's (2015) assertion that black women remain invisible in leadership spaces and are marginalized by masculine power. She said:

> "…In my church women are not in leadership, its only men and I've always thought it is normal because I didn't think much about it, but growing up I started to wonder and realised that in general women are not seen just that things are slowly changing now in the society but not in my church. I feel like the problem is the sentiments given when women speak, most of the times men speak badly of women, you will hear things like 'you're saying nothing' or ya eta ke e tshadi pele e wela ka leopeng, Sepedi idiom for (if led by a woman, we are likely to encounter challenges or pitfalls). Even on the road, if a woman makes mistake while driving you will hear 'nxa I knew that it's a woman'

> because men don't make mistakes. To say the least, women are undermined…"

The excerpt highlights how exclusion of women has been normalised in society, and this is seen by the phrase *I've always thought it is normal*. The term *normal* perpetuates a lack of opportunity and how women not being in leadership is never questioned. The use of language in this excerpt excludes women from leadership by normalising the stereotype that women cannot be capable and effective leaders, and this is illustrated by the idiom, *ya eta ke e tshadi pele e wela ka leopeng*. Additionally, phrases like *you are saying nothing* and *nxa I knew that it's a woman* shows that women are seen as incompetent. The statements are also devaluing and disrespectful and have potential of discouraging women from believing in what they do. Contrary to the believe that women are incapable of leadership, Kendall and Kolde (2024) highlights that the bible speaks of remarkable women who God entrusted with his people such as Miriam the prophet (Exodus 15:20), Deborah, a judge and prophet (Judges 4:4-5) and Huldah, a prophet (2Kings 22:14-16). The use of stereotypical language in this excerpt reinforces the bias perspective that women are incompetent and diminishes their credibility and further create barriers for them.

On the other hand, other women are fully in acceptance and support of the doctrine and norms and roles prescribed. In affirming to traditional and religious structures, these women do not see women as inadequate but believe in male leadership and follow that as a respectful order as prescribed by their tradition and doctrine. They see value in the division of tasks and the way they are divided as this aligns with their faith. These teachings resonate with their beliefs and their household structures and understanding of femininity and masculinity. For these women, the restriction of women from partaking in certain tasks does not equal inequality but creates a way of living harmoniously. For instance, **Aisha** said:

> "…I totally agree with male leadership and the man leading does not mean I as a woman does not have a say, I simply believe in my husband to lead us as a family, and I give my opinion where it is required. Men leading does not mean women are silenced, well at least where I am from because I understand that my reality is no other women's reality…"

From this statement, it can be seen how the participants explain a positive frame of male leadership. There is a sense of voluntary and supportive relationship where one is not made to

feel dominated or oppressed and this can be seen in the phrase, *I give my opinion where required* showing that as much as she is reliant on the male's leadership, she still has a voice, and her opinions are valued. While the participant's view of male leadership challenged the broad assumption of patriarchy being oppressive, she also acknowledges that perspectives differ. *My reality is no other women's reality* highlights that while she has a personal choice on what to believe in, other women are denied that, hence their experiences of male leadership may differ. The use of *where I am from* brings in the difference in cultural context, personal experience and understanding that their interpretation of male leadership differs. The participant's experiences shows that religion is not uniformly oppressive.

Another participant, **Kim**, expressed that while she believes in gender equality and that anyone can be called into ministry regardless of gender, she sees a problem when personal challenges are included in sermons, which she feels women tend to do. **Kim** noted:

> "…I genuinely believe in any gender being called into ministry and even at my church women participate in different departments, however, the problem I have is when people start centring the word around their personal experiences, and women tend to do this a lot as compared to men, hence I understand why men should do the teaching. The frustrating thing again is that I can understand why they do this because they hardly get a change to share their concerns so when they get a chance they cry for help, so I am grateful for the women conferences we have at my church because we get to talk women to women…"

Kim's language suggests natural framing of gender roles, showing support for equality. However, she states that she has a problem with too much inclusion of personal experiences in sermons, which women tend to do. This does not mean taking sides rather an observation that **Kim** made. Similar sentiments were shared by Sihle that women tend to preach about themselves most of the times. This contextual truth is the reason why **Kim** believes that men should do the preaching, however this is not stated as a rigid rule. From this excerpt **Kim** has the freedom to interpret gender roles in a way that aligns with her beliefs, rather than having these roles imposed on her. While she maintains a natural stance, she empathises with women and understand the reasons or motivation behind their sermons, acknowledging the limited space for women to express their experiences. Furthermore, the phrase *I am grateful for women*

conferences shows that she appreciates a space where women can freely talk and feel understood. This is similar to Khuzwayo's (2014) findings that it is easier for women to express themselves in women space without being intimidated by men. **Kim** further shared the conflict she has between Paul's teachings on not permitting women to teach and fulfilment of divine purpose. **Kim** shared, *"I respect what Apostle Paul said neh, but what conflicts me is that God can use anything and anyone to fulfil his purpose, hence earlier I said I don't mind women preaching because of that".* The participant referencing Paul's teachings highlights the traditional power dynamics in most institutions, however, believes in God's ability to use anyone. The participant's conflict highlights Akpa's (2011) argument that while Apostle Paul remains one of the influential leaders who have written about thirteen books in the New Testament, most of his teachings are misapplied as the contextual teaching of that time is often ignored. While the participant understands Paul's teachings, her perspective and believe in anyone being used to fulfil divine purpose brings in questions into the gender restriction. Contrary to **Kim, Momo** expressed her believe in Paul's teachings. **Momo** stated:

> "…I do not believe in women taking leadership roles, becoming a pastor and standing in front of the congregation, especially when there are men present. Paul explained this in the book of Timothy that women are not permitted to have authority over men, it is a disgrace…"

The participant's statement legitimises the leadership as divinely ordained and exclusion of women as an appropriate thing to do. By referencing Paul, the participant displays her believe in traditional power dynamic, and gender roles. Akpa (2011) emphasizes the importance of understanding the gap between Paul's audience and the present-day audience in order to properly interpret and apply the scriptures to a generation that differs from Paul's time. The use of language also suggest that the participant does not see exclusion as perpetuating institutional power, rather embracing the order of creation (Hasel, 1984), men leading because they were created first. Additionally, the participants shares that she does not see how women are denied opportunities nor limited as there are other things that they can do. **Momo** said:

> "…As a female, indeed, you can talk, you can tell the pastor and say that, okay, you have something to prophesy about, and then you can stand in the church and tell us about what the Holy Spirit told you. So,

> that's why I'm saying that there's no limitation. The only limitation is that you can't preach to the whole congregation…"

The quote highlights that there are boundaries in terms of what women are permitted to do, this is because the male-dominated leadership should be maintained. The presence of women in church leadership remains a contested issue, as structural and cultural barriers within the male-dominated hierarchy continue to limit their influence (Bagilhole, 2003, and Percy, 2017, as cited in Nyhagen, 2021). Despite progress, such as the ordination of women as bishops since 2014, there are still boundaries regarding the roles women are permitted to occupy, as maintaining male-dominated leadership appears to persist as a priority (Nyhagen, 2021). The use of words like *you can tell; you can stand* emphasise that a permission must be granted for women to perform these tasks which resonate with **Sihle's** statement that at her church women must ask permission from their husbands before preaching or standing in front of the congregation to deliver a message. **Momo's** quotes emphasise that there are opportunities available to women and equate those activities they can participate in with those performed by men only. In reference to the excerpts used in this theme, Akpa (2011) argues that it is important to acknowledge that Paul's original audience had their own personal and Christian community struggles that were addressed in the epistles. While these writings remain applicable to today's audience, it is essential that they are approached with diligence.

5.2.5. MISINTERPRETATION OF SCRIPTURES

Religious scriptures play an important role in guiding moral principles and socially acceptable practices and behaviours. However, it is important to note that the interpretation of these scriptures is influenced by different things such as history, personal experience and cultural beliefs amongst others, making scriptures prone to misinterpretation (Luna, 2010). Misinterpretations occurs when there is biasness or taking readings out of context either mistakenly or to fit a certain agenda. Based on how they are read and understood, religious scriptures can be used to empower or limit individuals. For instance, **Kim** shared:

> "…So, I feel like they also play a part in, like, promoting the oppression that comes with, like, the scriptures, if ever there is. Because if they tell you that, like, okay, 1 Corinthians says a woman should submit and then they leave it like that. Then a man will feel that if the pastor said it, they are the leader, they

> have a relationship with God. God called them to do this, to preach and all those kinds of things. So, if they say this and it's from the Bible, then it means that, like, it's true. But, like, I feel like it's not taught well. People don't understand the depth of the verses. So that can lead to oppression. But if ever it was taught, like, in a good way, I feel like it comes with liberation…"

This excerpt shows the amount of power leaders have when it comes to passing messages to the congregation as congregants trust in their authority and their explanation of religious truths. The pastor or spiritual leader as an authoritative figure reinforces beliefs, acceptable practices through given interpretations, thus Akpa (2011) emphasise the importance of reading the whole book in the bible to gain understanding and context before giving interpretations. **Kim** acknowledges that the way pastors teach has the potential to promote oppression, particularly when they present scriptures without providing a thorough explanation or context. For instance, if a pastor shares a passage with a surface-level interpretation, congregants may adopt that superficial understanding as absolute truth. Thus, Kendall and Kolde (2024) caution readers to remember that books like those written by Apostle Paul were responses to letters addressing specific issues brought to his attention, as such, understanding the historical context is essential. Kendall and Kolde (2024) emphasize the importance of considering context when interpreting scripture, noting that the same Apostle Paul who instructed that women should not teach or lead men also wrote Galatians 3:28, which states, *"there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."* This contrast underscores the need to understand the historical and social context of Paul's writings, particularly in communities like Corinth and Ephesus, where women were perceived as disruptive (Kendall & Kolde, 2024). It suggests that these instructions were specific to those settings rather than a universal mandate for women's exclusion from leadership. Furthermore, Paul uses the phrase *"I say this (not the Lord)"* in 1 Corinthians 7:12 (NIV), where he distinguishes his personal advice from direct teachings of Jesus, showing that his own perspective is included in teachings. This lack of critical engagement or detailed breakdown can inadvertently reinforce oppressive practices or beliefs, as congregants may not fully grasp the intended meaning of the scripture. The phrases *leave it like that,* and *it is not taught well* shows that stating scriptures without providing context and depth is not enough as that creates misunderstanding. The pastor saying, *women should submit* and not elaborating can lead to oppression as this is a statement that is likely to be taken as a

principle and prescribed way of living for women, thus, the participant feels that if the scripture is taught well with depth, in a holistic manner it can lead to liberation. What the participant is saying points to scriptures not being inherently oppressive, rather what makes them oppressive is the lack of accuracy in teachings. This gives the notion that the scriptures on their own are not naturally oppressive, the oppression is rather the by-product of interpretations.

Kim further explained that these misinterpretations end up being taken and internalised by congregants. For example, she said:

> "…sometimes we can't question things, so we end up internalising. Not that we are not given biblical scriptures, but we understand them different, and you can't tell the pastor that they are wrong. The problem with religious settings is that they don't provide a space where you can raise your hand and ask what the pastor is saying or do like a follow up. And it is not helpful that sometimes when you don't understand what they are saying they tell you to pray about it…"

The quote reveals power imbalance, and practices in religious settings that may contribute to misinterpretation of scriptures. The possibility of misinterpretation can be seen in the phrase *we understand them differently*, meaning that although the pastor reads the same scripture as the congregants, how the message is conveyed to each congregant according to their understanding differs. This also introduces the idea that scriptures are interpreted subjectively, highlighting the tension created by Apostle Paul's teachings (Akpa, 2011; Kendall & Kolde, 2024). Additionally saying *pray about it* conveys that the congregants should take it upon themselves to pray until they understand the scripture or what the pastor was preaching. The phrase *you can't tell the pastor that they are wrong* indicates that what the pastor say is taken as the truth and is hard to be questioned. Thus, congregants end up internalising what they are told, without understanding. The participants may also internalise the teachings with the understanding that the pastor knows better and cannot mislead them, however this approach does not support their personal and spiritual growth and may feel disempowered. The participant highlighting the disengagement with pastors to discuss the teachings further as a problem and this could be because it limits opportunities to critically engage with scriptures and teachings to understand further and feel included in the institution. The disengagement could also be a way of preventing challenges from church members or a way of maintaining institutional control as one of the participants **Kate** said, *"sometimes these people in higher*

positions have agendas, they pass you a message in a way that is hard to question and in a way that is suitable for them". Kate's statement highlights the intentional misinterpretation of scriptures as a way of gaining or remaining in power. Controlling the narrative in a way that it makes sense to follow by giving vague teachings in less noticeable ways, supporting van Dijk (1993) that control and oppression is often subtle.

On the other hand, the pastor saying 'pray about' it could be them influencing congregants' engagement with scriptures instead of the congregation always relying on him for interpretations. This can be seen to foster both personal and spiritual growth. The congregants are not dismissed rather motivated to learn spiritual independence or spiritual autonomy and build their own relationship with God. This approach shows that the pastor acknowledges that faith and understanding comes from personal engagement and rather than the institution having certain control over congregants, they get to experience God for themselves. This perspective highlights that individual and spiritual autonomy can exist in hierarchical structures.

Amongst other scriptures that participants highlighted as being misinterpreted is the book of Genesis 1:26-28 and Genesis 2:20-22. **Thabiso** argued that often Genesis 2: 20-22 which in summary state that Eve was made from Adam's rib is often used to supress women and for 'women to live for men' as quoted by the participant. The complementary scripture Genesi 1: 26-28 is often forgotten, which emphasise an equal creation of man and woman and the responsibilities given to both. Both man and woman were given the joint purpose of multiplying and ruling over the earth, highlighting partnership. Mati (2022) argues that the equality of man and woman as image-carriers of God precedes over their sexual roles. Mathew (1996, as cited in Mati, 2022) states that both man and woman share the same nature and equality of personhood and God's image bearers but differ in sexual roles as the woman describes as a helper. Mathew (1996, as cited in Mati, 2022) further explains that although being a helper means man and woman expresses their personhood differently, a woman as a helper means she holds an important position as the term conveys the idea of divine assistance, however, this does not mean equality with God. Furthermore, Mati (2022) explains that Luke 8:1–3 illustrates how women played a significant role in supporting Jesus's ministry and were the first to witness his resurrection, demonstrating that Jesus did not conform to the prescribed societal norms regarding gender roles. Applying Crenshaw's (1989) concept of intersectionality, it becomes evident that social identities such as gender and religion are often constructed to marginalize women, despite biblical evidence of their active participation and importance in religious life. Both **Kate** and **Thabiso** argued that Genesis 1 reflect

companionship and unity rather than one being over the other. It is argued that Eve was created as a helper because Adam could not do everything on his own, not for Eve to be dominated or supressed. For instance, **Aisha** said:

> "…Man and woman are not the same. And it is not even a matter of competition; men can do somethings that I as a woman cannot do just as they cannot do somethings that women can do. Masculinity and femininity are to balance each other…"

Kim says:

> "…When you look at Genesis, in the beginning when God created heaven and earth, and created man before woman. So, I feel like most of the time that is taken out of context. Okay, the Bible does say that a man should lead, a man should provide, a man should work hard, and all those kinds of things. But then, you get to see how that is taken out of context, whereby the men feel like they must be in control of almost all the things…"

Both participants are resisting the dominance narrative and misinterpretation by framing that although men and women are different, *it is not a competition* but for *balance*, so that they can complement each other, have interdependence instead of being in conflict. **Kim** states, *sometimes that is taken out of context* to show that the scripture is often used to practice dominance and control over women and that is not what it was implied for. The participants show that there is no need to use the difference between men and women to justify inequality. Aisha highlights that there is indeed a difference between men and women, meaning that both have traits that sets them apart and should be used together for survival. However, the differences between men and women which on surface are often described as equally important are used to warrant traditional gender roles. Both **Kim's** and **Aisha's** statements can be used to bring further understanding to what **Thabiso** meant by *living for men*, as there is lack of understanding of this complementarity when interpreting the scriptures. When taken out of context it comes across as if the scripture is meant for men to take excessive control of women living out the harmony in unity, showing how gender roles are exercised without acknowledging the unequal distribute of power and agency they cause. Additionally, **Momo** noted, *"I do believe in men leadership but men who use this scripture to oppress women are not men of God, and I am not fazed by them"*. Although the participant affirms acceptance of

male authority as leaders, she rejects the use of this authority to abuse women. The participant follows biblical principles yet aware of and resist acceptance of oppressive patriarchal interpretations. The phrasing of male leadership as biblical can, however, lead to benevolent patriarchy where patriarchy is seen as protective and beneficial.

While participants expressed concern with the way religious texts are often interpreted in a way that reinforce patriarchal norms, they also viewed scriptures as a saving and guiding force, providing moral direction and spiritual support in their lives. This duality underscores the complex role of religious teachings: they are not only subject to misinterpretation in ways that perpetuate oppression but also serve as sources of strength and guidance for individuals. This complexity reflects the broader intersection of religion and patriarchy, illustrating how these systems can simultaneously constrain and empower.

For example, **Kate** (1) and **Kim** (2) said:

> "…okay in a way the teachings and rules they can assist in terms of they can prevent a lot of things (4:35) um especially for young people, like diseases and then you have one partner that you trust, preserving purity …"

> "…I think when you look at it, well, since I am a born-again Christian, I feel like the way it's written, like the Bible teaching us women how to behave, like, saves us from, like, a bunch of things in the world…"

The language used, phrases like *prevent lot of things* and *preserving purity* portray scriptures as foundation for moral compass. It reflects the trust placed in religious teachings to help navigate life and protect from unforeseen or unfortunate circumstances. *Prevent lot of things* and *saves from bunch of things* could imply stopping one from engaging in things that are not good for them, things that might lend them in trouble or lead to regret. The participant highlights on the importance of teachings in preserving purity, as it saves.

Kim explains that the bible teaches women to behave, and this too is appreciated as good behaviour grounds them and save them from harm. Additionally, Kim identifying as born-again Christian accept authority of scriptures in her life, accepting conviction and blending faith works in daily life choices. Both excerpts reflect acceptance of authority of scriptures as bringing salvation and as a tool to navigate challenges. The participants' use of *lot and bunch*

of things suggests that there is no limitation to what you are faced with, the scriptures will guide you. Looking at the excerpt from the lens of CDA however, it can be argued that the world is viewed as a sinful place that needs regulation, and women should be rescued from.

Transformation within the spiritual context refers to an encounter that one has with the Divine that leads to a profound change in their relationship with the Divine, in such a way that their broader social and other relations are influenced (Waaijman, 2002, as cited in Lombaard, 2015). For instance, **Momo** shared, *"I am grateful for being introduced to the Christian world, I am born-again, I was taught how to pray, and it has changed my life".* In this statement the participants highlight how being introduced to Christianity and learning prayer transformed her life, showing a shift from her before to current life. This indicates that there is change in the way she carried herself, behaviour or relations or interactions with others or situations. The phrase *it has changed my life* in this context could indicate gaining new hope, living a better life or seeing a good difference as compared to before being born-again, gaining new sense of purpose.

Aisha explained that as a Christian you should be willing to let go of some things, it could be manners or a way of dressing as this has the potential of saving you from misfortunes and that does not equate to oppression. She shared:

> "… although sometimes we might not want to admit, Christianity teaches you how to handle yourself, it could be you being slow to anger or learning conflict management or dressing appropriately. And by this I am not saying wearing something short is wrong but look where you are and who you are with, I don't mean to be controversial or promote wicked things but following teachings and being spiritually firm often gives you logic to calculate situations and make better decisions for yourself in positions where you can…"

The participant's statements show the practical personal conduct guidance that Christianity offers. Biblical teachings emphasise on emotional regulation and the participant states that, that can be helpful in different situations guarding moral and behavioural response. This can be seen in the phrase: *it gives you logic to calculate situations and make better decision*, highlighting the ability to navigate both social and personal contexts and make thoughtful decisions. The participant's use of language reflects scriptures as guiding or giving discernment

as she says *look where you are and who you are with* to highlight that, that will guide your decisions and choices. This also highlights that the participant takes context into matters while showing their value towards appropriateness. The participant, based on their choice of words highlights that scriptural teachings can foster self-awareness, thoughtfulness and practical application of the teachings in response to different situations. The participant saying *I don't mean to be controversial or promote wicket things* reflects a respectful approach to individual perspective, with an awareness that their interpretation of things or the guidance they receive is not uniform for everyone else.

While the teachings are appreciated for the strength and direction they provide, some women are concerned that the emphasise placed on women's character development and having good behaviour potentially excuses male's behaviours as the emphasises is hardly placed on them. For instance, **Kate** shared:

> "…although I value these teachings the problem, I have with the people teaching us is that they emphasise these teaching more on girls than boys. I remember back in our youth services they taught both boys and girls about purity but when the girls fell pregnant, they blamed them and not the boys. The way boys are quickly dismissed and that does not teach them accountability…"

The participant reveals an imbalance in how the teachings are applied, showing that girls are held more accountable for their morals and actions than boys, giving the notion that purity is for girls and not boys. **Sihle** also shared similar sentiments that as a Zulu female, growing up purity was always emphasised on them, but boys were applauded as men for impregnating someone's daughter which shows no balance at all. **Sihle's** sentiments resonates with **Kate's** phrase, *boys are quickly dismissed and that does not teach them accountability*. The teachings uphold power imbalance where boys are excused for equal responsibilities, and the blame is disproportionately placed on girls. Teaching both girls and boys but placing blame on girls and not both parties show a disconnect between the teachings, intention, and expectations. Quickly excluding boys from accountability shows the societal preference to prioritise boys over females, undermining the scriptures intention to hold both genders accountable for their actions. Constantinescu (2021) add that these double standards on gender exists throughout the world. The problem with these double standards is that it does not only hold women

accountable for moral conduct but ties their worth to purity. Both Kate and Tshepo stated that both boys and girls should be restricted from exploring their sexuality as it doesn't make sense to allow boys to explore their sexuality while restricting girls, especially considering that these boys are likely to explore with the very same girls who are being shamed for doing so. **Kate** added, *"after all, who are they expected to explore with? While I encourage the value of purity, it should not be a standard applied to only one gender"*.

5.2.6. CONCLUSION

The analysis of South African women's lived experiences at the intersection of religion and patriarchy reveals how these forces intricately sustain gender inequality and suppress women's autonomy. Key themes: Gender Inequality and Patriarchal Structures, Oppression and Silencing of Women, Gendered Perception of God, Women in Leadership, and Misinterpretation of Scriptures, highlight the pervasive influence of patriarchal ideologies, often reinforced by religious teachings. Patriarchal norms position women as subordinates, marginalizing their voices and leadership potential while framing male dominance as divinely sanctioned. The findings also underscore the role of scripture interpretation, which can either entrench inequality or serve as a pathway to empowerment, though the absence of critical engagement within religious spaces limits progress toward equality.

These findings set the stage for the next chapter, which delves into a discussion of the research findings, exploring their broader implications and aligning them with existing literature. The upcoming chapter will critically examine how these insights contribute to the understanding of the intersectionality of religion and patriarchy, as well as their impact on women's lived experiences and societal roles.

CHAPTER 6

6. DISCUSSION

6.1. INTRODUCTION

This section discusses the findings on the lived experiences of Black South African women at the intersection of religion and patriarchy, tying participants' narratives to broader societal patterns. It explores how religious teachings and patriarchal practices, often delivered with good intentions, can unintentionally reinforce harmful gender norms, shaping women's roles not only within households but also in wider society. By engaging with existing literature, the discussion highlights how these intersecting forces affect women's identities, agency, and social perceptions, offering critical insights into the broader implications of such oppression.

One of the central themes that emerged from the findings is the persistence of gender inequality and patriarchal structures deeply entrenched in the socio-cultural systems of society and reinforced by religious teachings. Participants highlighted how these frameworks enhance and keep gender inequality rooted in different spheres and putting women in subordinate positions. The theme revealed broader societal norms that disadvantages women while promoting male privilege. These norms perpetuate social expectations that men and women cannot occupy equal roles and lead to gender inequality in terms of access to opportunities and resources (Boudet et al., 2023). The exclusion of women from leadership roles and the lack of recognition for their contributions have been shown to underestimate and undermine their value in society, as highlighted by both participants and literature (Modiba & Mutekwe, 2012; Mtombeni, 2021).

The findings reveal similarities between the Christian religion and cultural/traditional beliefs that women should not partake in leadership roles as that is not their duty (Masango & Sekano, 2012). Reflecting on the diverse interpretations of scriptures and implications on gender roles, participants shared divided opinions regarding inclusion of women in leadership. While others support Apostle Paul's teachings that women should refrain from leadership roles, others highlighted the importance of identifying leaders based on their ability, potential and capabilities regardless of gender (McChesney, 2009). Chauke (2015) asserts that the role of leadership was not given only to men. The order of creation emerged as a major factor in the attainment of leadership role (Matthews, 2021) as participants highlighted that a man was

created first and referred to the book of Genesis to show how Eve was easily deceived, making women unfit for leadership. Conversely, those in support of women leadership referred to 1 Corinthians 11:11-12, which emphasise the interdependence of man and woman, even in leadership context. The lack of belief in women's leadership among themselves contributes to the ongoing resistance to female leadership (Khuzwayo, 2014). This tension was further underscored by participants who shared their decision to leave their church after it permitted a woman to teach the congregation in the presence of men, which they perceived as a violation of scriptural teachings and a disgrace. This example illustrates how deeply held beliefs about gender roles in leadership can influence personal and communal religious practices, further reflecting the complex interplay between traditional interpretations of scripture and modern perspectives on inclusivity. It can be argued that women are associated with lower value or existence and are seen as being closer to nature (Ortner, 1974).

The tension between women's role in leadership indicates the strong influence of traditional interpretations of scriptures. The tension, however, indicates active engagement with scriptures, active faith and deliberate ability to adhere to or challenge some of these interpretations. The expression of discomfort with female leadership does not come as passive following of patriarchal leadership, rather, it is seen as authentic religious practices. Adherence of religious and traditional teachings in this instance reflect active and conscious act of faith rather than naïvely accepting inequality. Despite the adherence, (Maloba & Nyakora, 2018) explain the importance of including women in ministry to mature their faith as they have important roles to play and stop marginalising them. On the other hand, acceptance without questioning can highlight how patriarchal narratives are engrained in religious teachings to enhance self-regulating beliefs. Further highlighting how internalised patriarchal beliefs reinforce power dynamics by aligning one with what is deemed acceptable rather than challenging these structures. Through the internalisation, it can be understood what Van Dijk (1993) meant by power dynamic systems being accepted as they are presented in a subtle manner to the marginalised.

Engaging with the language used by participants, it can be observed that the denial of women's leadership goes beyond religious and/or cultural norms but is embedded in the everyday language. The use of idioms like '*ya eta ke e tshadi pele e wela ka leopeng*' and condescension like '*ah I knew it is a woman*' reveal the societal attitude of incompetence directed towards women. These expressions not only carry the connotation that fortify the belief that women are incompetent for leadership but also perpetuates stereotypes and

normalise disrespect towards women and their contributions. Additionally, linking shortcomings to gender validates the exclusion of women from leadership and further shape and carry generational understanding and perceptions of gender and leadership, this is made worse by portrayal of women as being far from God and deceptive (Hadebe, 2007).

The use of language and the gender biasness embedded in it has the potential to promote gender inequality (Biencowe et al., 2017) and perception of self-identity, and image. Such language can foster self-doubt, especially when encountered repeatedly, shaping their understanding of their potential and instilling fear and limitations. The less acceptance of women leadership can contribute to internalisation of stereotypes of women being seen as less than or incompetent and lead them to unconsciously question their leadership abilities (Ahiante & Hanyane, 2022). Notably, a rather negative pattern use of language when giving responses has been noticed, showing that these patterns are used to reinforcer societal attitudes towards gender perceptions. The linguistic patterns as noted from multiple participants reflect that they see themselves through lenses of incompetence. The perceived incompetence and stereotypes attached to women can manifest into their silencing, as societal attitudes and language gradually condition women to accept the limitations imposed on them. The limitation placed on women acts as a barrier to advance into leadership roles (Ngulube & Thelma, 2024). This internalized narrative not only restricts women's opportunities but also normalizes their exclusion from leadership and decision-making roles, making the systemic oppression appear natural or divinely ordained.

The oppression and silencing of women is further exacerbated by the misuse of cultural and religious norms (Musalo, 2015). Gennrich (2013) reveals that gender inequality, restriction of women from partaking in leadership, obedience to men's authority and silencing of women is a problem that is not confined to South Africa, even countries considered to be liberal face similar problems. Ortner (1974) adds that it is likely that women are subordinated in very society. While religious and cultural teachings expect and position men to attain leadership roles, most participants expressed that their behaviour does not align with the authority placed on them. One participant noted, *"men who abuse authority are not men of God"*, highlighting the disconnect between expected moral leadership and the actual behaviour.

Participants highlighted that what makes these injustices worse is that it is often hard to question pastoral teachings. What was further highlighted to be problematic by few participants is how society is turning a blind eye to the harmful cycle of practices perpetuated

by these injustices (van Veen, 2018), thus the silence and resignation from women. Fear to challenge the abuse of authority was also expressed as participants did not want to be labelled as a rebels or heretics and end up being isolated from the church or community. Additionally, it was expressed that culture teaches that a man's authority is not to be questioned and individuals who does that, especially women, are considered to be unruly. Due to their perceived dominance, men think they are superior, thus it is mostly men in high positions such as presidency, CEO and the likes, however, just because these positions are mostly given to men it does not mean all men are powerful (Johnson, 2005). By framing the abuse of authority within the lens of intersectionality, it becomes clear how authority, when abused, manipulates the power within cultural and religious systems. While progress has been made, recognizing and addressing inequality within these systems remains crucial to challenging oppressive structures and eradicating their perpetuation. While participants shared their understanding of God as the father, they also highlighted multifaceted nature of God and described him as a helper, a friend, or whatever one wants him to be. These nuanced understanding and acknowledgement of God goes beyond the traditional perceptions indicating God's adaptability to different roles to meet the specific needs of individuals. God's adaptability in this case contrasts male's use of their proximity to God to justify their abuse and unjust domination to women.

Participants flagged that men have tendencies of belittling and ridiculing women with remarks like *that's why God doesn't have a wife*, as they are compared to Eve (Wood, 2019). Remarks like this not only sustain patriarchal attitudes but undermine the value of women and lessen their dignity (Wood, 2019). It can be further stated that misinterpretation of divine authority like this gives a distorted image of God, has the potential to negatively affect the understanding and the relations individuals form with God and permits men to abuse the social power they have been entrusted with within communities and religious institutions. Although participants explained their understanding of God as the heavenly father, they highlighted that the misunderstanding of and perceived maleness tends to be taken out of proportion and is the reason why women are mostly disrespected. The maleness was further highlighted to be the reason behind exclusion of women in some activities. This excessive dominance based on gender is the cause of destruction in communities (Wood, 2019).

Despite the inequalities and forms of oppressions participants highlighted, they also acknowledged the moral guidance provided by scriptures. The constructivist paradigm underpinning this study can be observed through this duality, with participants actively

engaging and creating their own meaning of their experiences, analysing and negotiating the empowering and oppressive aspects of the cultural and religious systems. Literature indicates that religion has been misused to justify harm, including colonialism, apartheid, and patriarchy (O'Connor, 2018). At the same time, it has also served as a source of empowerment, as seen in South African history when figures like Nelson Mandela collaborated with churches to oppose the apartheid system (Scroope, 2019). This duality underscores the potential of religion to both oppress and liberate.

Similar patterns can be observed in participants' experiences that while others are experiencing the oppressive part that comes as the result of misuse of religion, others experience the liberating and empowering part or both, showing diverse experiences. The results also highlight how historical, cultural, and social contexts collectively shape the understanding of religious teachings, making interpretations susceptible to bias rather than reflecting the core principles of the texts. Khalaf-Elledge (2021) emphasizes that, to effectively address Sustainable Developmental Goal (SDG) 5 which aims to achieve gender equality organizational structures and development agencies must promote religious literacy and contextual understanding. Recognizing these complexities reveals how religious teachings can serve as a source of liberation, personal growth, and guidance for a principled life, while others may perceive them as tools for limitation and control over agency. This complexity can be used to reflect broader societal phenomenon where biblical texts have been used to oppress the minority, maintain hierarchies and promote patriarchy and domination and debates on race, classism and gender. Framing scriptures as guidance to moral and principled life and engaging with personal experiences, indicates that participants are not passive rather through active engagement recognise scriptures as source of transformation and guidance to a better life. Furthermore, teachers are challenged to promote equality both in broader context and in disciplining individuals regardless of gender, especially male teachers as they are the ones who mostly carry the interpretations (Wood, 2019). This is important because religious and/or faith leaders have a significant influence on people's thoughts, behaviours, attitudes, and the manner they conduct themselves (Atuhaire et al., 2018; Thomsen, 2022). Additionally, Khalaf-Elledge (2021) asserts that achieving SDG 5, requires that organizations whether religious or not, select partners based on their demonstrated commitment to combating gender inequality and advocating for women's rights.

The results call for change as it is clear that many doctrines and churches practices promote patriarchal traditions (Gennrich, 2013). Overall, literature states that sometimes

religion is not a problem per se, however the patriarchal interpretations attached to religious texts and male narrative in biblical teachings is the root problem in the subjugation of women and makes religion to be problematic (Wani & Wani, 2023). This was further attested by Casimir et al. (2014) that although biblical interpretations are carried by men inspired by God, they are still mortal beings who tends to make errors in faith and reasoning. While the elimination of harmful patriarchal practices may take time, it is crucial to implement more gender advocacy programs that engage both men and women in finding solutions. Research findings and existing literature indicate that women themselves can play a role in perpetuating patriarchal systems and the oppression of other women (Gennrich, 2013). In this regard, Khalaf-Elledge (2021) and Thomsen (2022) emphasize the significant influence of faith actors in shaping values, beliefs, and perceptions about gender relations. Their involvement can either support or hinder progress toward gender equality, making them key partners in policy development and societal transformation aligned with SDG 5. Understanding the intersecting factors that affect women within organizational structures, as well as the dynamics between men and women, is essential for developing effective interventions and ensuring the success of policies aimed at achieving SDG 5 (Thomsen, 2022).

6.2. CONCLUSION

This chapter explored the persistence of gender inequality as shaped by societal systems like culture and patriarchy, which reinforce norms that disadvantage women and uphold male privilege. It highlighted parallels between Christianity and cultural traditions that limit women's leadership roles, revealing tensions between traditional scriptural interpretations and more inclusive perspectives. The role of language in perpetuating stereotypes and normalizing the marginalization of women was underscored, alongside fears of challenging authority due to potential ostracism. Despite these challenges, participants recognized the positive influence of Christianity in their lives and emphasized the need for holistic scriptural interpretation to prevent the misuse of religious texts in perpetuating oppression.

CHAPTER 7: FINAL REMARKS OF THE STUDY

For the longest time it was believed that God and the bible supports the unequal treatment towards women (Ani, 2011), however, the findings in this study proves otherwise, rather it is those in power who are the sole perpetrators of unfairness. The results shows that there is a direct link between patriarchy and interpretation of scriptures, further highlighting the error in these interpretations. It can further be seen that culture, patriarchy and religion are intertwined systems that men take advantage of to exercise power over women. The intersection of these systems underscores the importance of challenging the male-oriented dominance of power to release women from subjugation and subordination. The findings indicate a significant gap in the historical and contextual understanding of scriptures, leading to misinterpretations. This highlights the need for religious and scripture literacy to ensure accurate teachings that align with the original intent of the scriptures. Furthermore, the findings highlight that research should be done to explore the liberating part of religion for women.

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APPENDICES



Appendix 1: Participant Information Sheet

Title of project: Patriarchy and religion: The use of religion to oppress women.

Dear Sir / Madam

My name is Mathipa Pebetsi. I am a master's student in Social and Psychological Research at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. The study title is Patriarchy and religion: The use of religion to oppress women. My supervisor is Matamela F.B Makongoza. I am conducting a research study about the intersection of religion and patriarchy in the oppression of women.

I am inviting you to take part in an interview. If you decide to take part, your participation in this research study will last approximately an hour. The interview will take place at a convenient place during the day in a private room. With your permission, I would like to audio record the interview. This data will be stored in an encrypted file for 5 years and/or deleted after 6 years. Only the researcher will have access to the data. The interview will be confidential and anonymous. When I share the results of the research study, I will not include your name or anything else that could identify you. With your permission, other researchers may use the data collected from this research study, but your name and any personal information will not be used or passed on.

If you decide to take part in the research study, it should be because you want to volunteer. You can stop being part of the study at any time without any consequences. You do not have to answer any questions if you do not want to. You will not get any direct benefits if you choose to join the research study. You will not lose any services, benefits, or rights you would normally have if you decided not to join. Taking part in the research study will not cost you anything. You will not be paid for being in this research study.

The risks for this research study are no more than what happens in everyday life OR some of the questions asked may make you feel sad or upset. If this happens, I will stop the interview and continue another time with your permission. If you need some support or counselling services following the interview, these are available free of charge at the Emthonjeni Centre at Wits University. The contact details for counselling are 011 717 1888.

This research study will be written up as a research report. The report will be available on the university library website. If you would like to receive a summary of this report, I will be happy to send it to you. If you have any questions during or afterwards about this research study, feel

free to contact me or my supervisor on the details listed below. If you have any concerns or complaints about the ethical procedures of this research study, you are welcome to contact the University Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical), telephone +27(0) 11 717 1408, email hrecnon-medical@wits.ac.za.

Yours sincerely,
Pebetsi

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Appendix 2: Participant Consent Sheet

Title of project: Patriarchy and religion: The use of religion to oppress women.

Name of researcher: Pebetsi Mathipa

I, ……..,agree to participate in this research project.

I agree to the following:

(Please circle the relevant options below)

The research study was explained to me. I understand what this study is about.	YES	NO
I understand that I can volunteer to take part in the study.	YES	NO
I agree that the interview may be audio recorded.	YES	NO
I agree that direct quotations from my interview may be used by the researcher in their research report.	YES	NO
I agree that my participation will remain anonymous (my name or other identifying data will not be used by the researcher in their research report.	YES	NO
I agree that other researchers may use the information I provide in my interview (depending on their own ethics clearance being obtained) but my name and any personal information will not be used or passed on.	YES	NO

…… (Participant's signature)
…… (name of participant)
…… (date)

…… (signature)
…… (name of researcher/person seeking consent)
…… (date)

Appendix 3: Digital Audio Recorder Agreement form

Title of the study: Patriarchy and religion: The use of religion to oppress women.

I, _____ give my consent for my interview with Mathipa Pebetsi Pleasure to be audio recorded for her study.

I understand the following:

• The tapes and transcripts will not be seen or heard by anyone other than the researcher.

• The recordings will be stored in a password protected file that only the researcher has access to.

• No identifying information will be used in the transcripts or the research report.

• Although direct quotes from my interview may be used in the research report, I will be referred to by a pseudonym (Participant 1, Thato* etc.)

• The recordings will be transcribed and any information that could identify me will be removed

• When the data analysis and write up of the research study is complete the audio recording of the interview and the transcriptions will be kept for five years following any publication or for six years if no publications emanate from the study.

• Direct quotes from my interview, can be used in the report write up so long as it is not information that could expose my identify.

Name of Participant: _____

Date: _____

Signature: _____

Name of Researcher: _____

Date: _____

Signature: _____

Appendix 4: Interview Guide

1. Kindly tell me about the church that you attend.
2. Do you think there are scriptures relating to (differences) men and women that are interpreted out of context? What kind of image do these interpretations paint?
3. Are there any biblical texts or/and interpretations that you think promote male dominance over women? Which ones?
4. In what ways do you think biblical interpretations can perpetuate gender inequality and reinforce patriarchy?
5. Do you think the patriarchal system is oppressive towards women? If yes, do you think the intersectionality of patriarchy and religion makes it worse or brings liberty?
6. In what ways do you think biblical interpretations affect the self-image of women?
7. In what ways do you think religious language and interpretations of scriptures regarding gender can lead to internalised oppression of women?
8. What personal beliefs, ideas, attributes do you hold in relation to the gender attached to God?
9. Does your perception of God in terms gender remain the same as you engage with scriptures? If yes, how so?
10. How does the perception of God and Jesus as males sideline women in leadership roles and how do you think this challenges women's experiences of spirituality and faith (especially the ones who are perceived to have a spiritual calling within ministries)
11. Can you share a personal experience on how Christian language and teachings are/have influenced the kind of women you are today or have shaped the women in your circle/community?

Appendix 5: Acknowledgement Letter

17 April 2024

To whom it may concern

Goshen City Church

Dear Sir/Madam

Re: Acknowledgement letter to conduct research in the community

My name is Mathipa Pleasure. I am studying for Master of Arts in Social and Psychological Research (MASPR) at the University of Witwatersrand. I am conducting a study on women's experiences and perspectives of intersectionality of religion and patriarchy. I am hereby requesting for an acknowledgement that I am conducting a study of this nature in the community.

I am hoping to recruit about ten young women aged 18 to 35 years who reside in Westdene and may or may not fellowship in the churches within the area. If the participants I recruit I agree to be part of the study, they will be asked to be interviewed. The interviews will be audio-recorded with participants' permission, and they will be asked to sign a consent form to be audio-recorded. Participants will be given consent forms before the research and only when they agree will the research take place. Their responses will be treated confidentially, and pseudonyms will be used to respect and protect their identities and be kept anonymous. Individual privacy will be maintained in all published and written data resulting from the study. Counselling will be arranged with Wits Emthonjeni counselling centre for participants who may experience feelings of distress as a result of the interview. Kindly address the letter to myself in your institution headed paper signed and dated.

Yours sincerely,

Mathipa Pebetsi Pleasure

Student number: 2136226 and phone number: 0631129667

Supervisor Dr Matamela F.B Makongoza

Matamela.Makongoza@wits.ac.za Tel: 011 717 4489

Appendix 6: Acknowledgement Response Letter



CITY OF GOSHEN
WWW.WEAREGOCITY.ORG

Dear Pebetsi Mathipa,

Thank you for reaching out regarding your study in our community. We appreciate your dedication to research and your efforts to engage with our community in this endeavor.

We acknowledge receipt of your request for acknowledgment, and we commend your commitment to conducting valuable research that contributes to the betterment of our community.

We understand the importance of research in addressing community needs and advancing knowledge in various fields. Please be assured that we support your efforts and wish you success in your study.

If there are any specific ways in which we can assist you or if you require further information or resources, please do not hesitate to let us know.

Thank you again for keeping us informed, and we look forward to hearing about the outcomes of your study.

Best regards,

Nkele Mabuza
General Manager
0104460118

Phone.
+27 67 048 1474

Email.
info@wearegocity.org

Address.
16 Tenby S Street,
Westdene, Johannesburg

Appendix 7: Request letter

13 June 2024

To Admin

Sisterhood WhatsApp Group

Dear madam

Re: Request for permission letter to recruit participants in the Sisterhood WhatsApp group

My name is Mathipa Pebetsi Pleasure. I am studying for Master of Arts in Social and Psychological Research (MASPR) at the University of Witwatersrand. I am conducting a study on women's experiences and perspectives of intersectionality of religion and patriarchy. I am hereby requesting for permission letter to recruit participants in the group for my research.

I am hoping to recruit about ten young women aged 18 to 35 years in the group. If the participants I recruit I agree to be part of the study, they will be asked to be interviewed. The interviews will be audio-recorded with participants' permission, and they will be asked to sign a consent form to be audio-recorded. Participants will be given consent forms before the research and only when they agree will the research take place. Their responses will be treated confidentially, and pseudonyms will be used to respect and protect their identities and be kept anonymous. Individual privacy will be maintained in all published and written data resulting from the study. Counselling will be arranged with Wits Emthonjeni counselling centre for participants who may experience feelings of distress as a result of the interview.

Yours sincerely,

Mathipa Pebetsi Pleasure

Student number: 2136226 and phone number: 0631129667

Supervisor Dr Matamela F.B Makongoza

Matamela.Makongoza@wits.ac.za Tel: 011 717 4489

Appendix 8: Request Response letter

Subject: Permission to recruit participants in the WhatsApp group

Dear Pebetsi Mathipa

Thank you for reaching out and showing interest in recruiting participants from our group for your study.

The importance of your study is well understood and thus I am pleased to inform you that you have permission to recruit participants in the WhatsApp group as requested. While we appreciate your interest in recruiting participants from the group, we will appreciate it if all interactions with participants are done with research ethical standards in mind.

All the best with your research endeavours. Should you need further assistance please contact us.

Thank you again for reaching out to us, we look forward to learning about your research findings upon the completion of your study.

Regards

Rainny Nkhatho 14/06/2024

Pronouns: She/Her (https://www.mypronouns.org/what-and-why)

Director & CEO: YouthMatterz NPC

Master of Nursing Science-Northwest University (S.A);

PhD Candidate-University of Bath (UK)

Email: rainny@youthmatterz.org.za

Tel: +27 (0) 72 126 3185

Appendix 9: Confirmation of Counselling Services

EMTHONJENI CENTRE
THE SCHOOL OF HUMAN AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT (SHCD)

Private Bag 3, Wits, 2050 • Tel: 011 717 4513 • Fax: 011 717 4559 • E-mail: emthonjenicentre.SHCD@wits.ac.za E-mail: Umthombo.SHCD@wits.ac.za

18/07/2024

Attention: Human Research Ethics Committee

Confirmation of psychotherapy/counselling services

This serves to confirm that, should the need arise, participants in Pebetsi Mathipa research study on "*Religion and Patriarchy: The use of religion to oppress women*" can access psychotherapy services free of charge at the Emthonjeni Community Psychology Clinic on East Campus.

The name of a specific counsellor cannot be specified at this time, as the counsellor allocated to the case, if the need arises, will depend on which counsellor has availability at that time.

This confirms that I am aware of Pebetsi Mathipa' s study and will prioritise any participants from the study making contact with the clinic. I can be contacted for bookings on 011 717 4513 or paballo.lepota@wits.ac.za.

Kind regards



Ms Paballo Lepota
Emthonjeni Centre Administration
University of the Witwatersrand
011 717 4513
Paballo.Lepota@wits.ac.za

Appendix 10: Ethics clearance

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

SCHOOL OF HUMAN AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT ETHICS COMMITTEE
CONSTITUTED UNDER THE UNIVERSITY HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (NON-MEDICAL)

CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE	**PROTOCOL NUMBER: MASPR-24-05**
PROJECT TITLE:	Patriarchy and religion: The use of religion to oppress women.
INVESTIGATOR	Mathipa Pleasure
SCHOOL/DEPARTMENT OF INVESTIGATOR	SHCD/Psychology
DATE CONSIDERED	07 June 2024
DECISION OF THE COMMITTEE	Approved unconditionally
RISK LEVEL	Minimal Risk
EXPIRY DATE	31 December 2026

ISSUE DATE OF CERTIFICATE 08 July 2024 **CHAIRPERSON** Aline Ferreira Correia
(Prof. Aline Ferreira Correia)

cc: Ms Matamela Makongoza (Supervisor)

DECLARATION OF INVESTIGATOR

To be completed in duplicate and **ONE COPY** returned to the Chairperson of the School/Department ethics committee.

I/we fully understand the conditions under which I am/we are authorized to carry out the abovementioned research and I/we guarantee to ensure compliance with these conditions. Should any departure be contemplated from the research procedure as approved, I/we undertake to submit an amendment of the protocol to the Committee.

_____ _____/_____/_____
Signature **Date**