



University of Venda

**Deviant Healing Practices within Contemporary Religious Movements in
Ṭhohoyandou, Limpopo: Towards a Post-Colonial African Practical
Theology Perspective**

by

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DECLARATION

I, Rev. Mashudu Edward Muthivhi, hereby declare that the thesis for the Doctor of Philosophy degree hereby submitted by me, at the University of Venda, has not been submitted previously for examination for a degree at this or any other university, that it is my own work in design and execution, and that all reference materials contained herein have been duly acknowledged.

Signature: _____



Date: 28 August 2024

DEDICATION

To the roots upon which I can stand, nurtured by the wisdom of generations that grounded me in heritage and history. I dedicate my aspirations and endeavours. May this work contribute, however modestly, to the growth and flourishing of future generations, sowing seeds of knowledge and understanding that will continue to bear fruits long after my time.

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Finally, with a tender heart; for the enduring support from the love of my life and the mother of our wonderful children, for the assistance, patience, and belief in me, I will always be grateful.

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ABSTRACT

The legacy of imperialism on Indigenous belief systems has imprinted an arguable influence on the identity and traditions of religiosity in the histories of Africa. The phenomenon of religion entails socio-political and cultural realities, some of which may overlap, correspond, or compete with different fields of study, which ultimately bears an impact on the conventional understanding of religious meaning, practice, and function. The introduction of Eurocentric orientations into African spirituality did not only encounter Indigenous religious systems but resulted in the development of religious pluralism. As such the researcher felt obliged to explore the Christian religious setting from an African perspective. The study unpacked the universality of the religion and focused on the underlying philosophy of African religious experiences and expression. The latter was engaged from two complimentary investigative angles: i) the researcher defined and explained deviant healing practices within contemporary religious movements in Tshohoyandou from a Practical Theology perspective and thereby probed consequent incidents of spiritual abuse; ii), in addition the researcher also appraised the implications and challenges of melding Indigenous religious beliefs and practices, and those of Western origination. This sought to unearth the depth of missionary influence or lack thereof; that contributed to deviant healing practices amongst identities within the Vhavenda spiritual landscape and heritage. The study is qualitative in nature and encompasses an ethnographic research methodology. This comprised of literature review, an empirical survey of deviant practices and an assessment of Western and African religious inclinations in modern day society. Hopefully, the research poses a benefit to faith communities, religious and government leaders and consequently, equips individuals who can provide positive influence. Ultimately, the study served to present religious insights from a Practical Theology perspective and equally expound on the interpretations of pastoral care within contemporary religious belief systems.

Key words: African Theism, Deviant, Healing Practices, Pastoral Care, Practical Theology, Missionary Activism, Syncretism, Vhavenda Worldview

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The foundation of the study is laid forth in Chapter 1, which in addition underscores the relevance of examining deviant healing practices within contemporary religious movements in Ṭhohoyandou and frames the research setting. This chapter explains how the study was motivated by contentious religious practices, examines the dynamics through the prism of practical theology, and investigates the interactions between religious practices in Africa and Europe as well as the spiritual abuse that arises from them. First and foremost, it looks to recognise and reveal diverse forms of alternative healing, exploring their wide adoption and manifestations, which are covered in detail in Chapters 3 and 4. Second, as discussed in-depth in Chapters 4 and 5, the study examines these behaviours with regard to their causes, the people or entities that uphold them, and their impacts on the community. Thirdly, Chapters 2 and 5 provide a critical evaluation of the inherent difficulties in the syncretism of African and European spiritual traditions. As mentioned in Chapter 6, the study's final goal is to provide corrective pastoral care and counselling models to assist and heal those who have been harmed by these kinds of activities. Four related questions serve as the basis for the research: it looks into the characteristics of the deviant healing practices unique to Ṭhohoyandou, addresses the parties involved and explores the reasons and effects of these practices, considers the viability and ramifications of fusing European and African spiritualities, and looks for practical solutions for the impacted parties. This methodical technique guarantees a comprehensive comprehension and tackles the intricate interaction of cultural, spiritual, and societal aspects in modern religious customs within the area.

This chapter tendered a layout of the context and background of the study, and thereby included the complexities located within Vhavenda cultural and religious setting. Analysis highlighted the notions of African theism considering missionary activism, secularism, syncretism, and the challenges of deviant religiosity. A statement of the problem, the purpose and objectives of study

was presented along with the research methodology that was employed to address key questions of the study. Particularly notable is not only the way the study unfolded, but the evaluation of archived and present-day studies that are influential and relevant to the understanding of; not only religion, but the concept of deviant spirituality amongst Vhavenda currently. The notion of deviance has not been entirely unfamiliar, even to Biblical spiritual expression and may be traced back to the Old Testament era (Rubiés, 2006). Upon scrutiny of the Old Testament context, various portions of scripture point to Israel deviating from the fundamentals of the established customs of worship and introduce spiritual traditions of surrounding nations. Such was deemed as idolatry and served as a constant complexity that proffered competing ideologies and contradictory morality from neighbouring cultural influences (Whitlark, 2012).

Post-colonial Indigenous religious expression within the African reality may be deemed a concomitant of religious pluralism (Mashau, 2009). The South African religious setting is underpinned by diverse faith communities and an assortment of spiritual traditions (Coertzen, 2014). Traditional African thought posits profound religiosity which is deeply embedded within complex cultural dimensions that have at times suffered distortions in function and meaning (Kgatla, 1994). It must be considered that Africa has a rich spiritual heritage, that has paved the way for the introduction of Christianity into the continent and modern ventures of missionary activism that have contributed considerably to the face of religion in South Africa as we know it today.

The notion of religiosity in Africa assumes an exclusive reality to that of other spiritual activities elsewhere (Ibenwa, 2014). Religion in Africa may be deemed to adopt a holistic worldview (Henry, 2016). Whereas European missionary activism reflected Western ideals and values that were instituted on racial superiority and motives that were contrary to African progress (Khapoya, 2012). Even currently, there persists a chasm between an African traditional existence and colonial realities that inclined if not imposed approaches to spirituality (Nel, 2008). It is here where the traditional values compete with modern Western principles. In other words, the new-found European conceptions of religious endeavour were deposited or attuned to accommodate

traditional religious belief systems and activities, according to the perceived needs of the Indigenous population. Through such pursuits it may be understood that the seeds of deviance were being sown without fully fathoming the future outcomes.

Deviant practices entail the introduction and synthesis of not only external but unfamiliar belief systems to a setting that subscribes to a local religious persuasion (Müller, 2008). This may culminate in an assortment of spiritual constructs that diverge from the Aboriginal norms and values. The influence of colonialism and Christianity has left a mark on Indigenous African theism and laid a footing not only towards morality but socio-political, economic and African Christianity that cannot and should not be underestimated. However, the evolution of religion must be distinguished from deviance, in that deviance conforms to a syncretic paradigm which at first may be subtle, but sooner or later engenders a divergent or new-fangled sense of religiosity that is analogous, i.e. comparable or equivalent in some respects though otherwise dissimilar and thereby rival to that which may be presented as an authoritative religious system (Engler, 2009). Arguably, the underlying conceptions of African theism tend to be slighted and sometimes even distorted by Western oriented belief systems (Kgatla, 1994). Africa has remained resilient in defending its traditional religions throughout different political and religious dispensations within the continent. It may be understood that African Indigenous religion is a spiritual institution, whose core tenets have been ignored and at times altered to fit values and standards recognised by those who merely dismissed Indigenous religions in Africa as sheer superstition (Nthamburi, 1989).

In democratic South Africa, despite never adopting a particular official state religion, Christianity has had a profound religious effect that has permeated the annals of a colonial and apartheid past. According to the general household survey published by Statistics South Africa in 2015, an estimated 86% of South Africans were affiliated to the Christian religion, while 5,4% professed to following ancestral, tribal, animist, or other traditional religions. An estimated 1,9% of the population considered themselves Muslim while 5,2% did not follow any religion. The latter figure was particularly high in Limpopo (14,4%). Only 0,2% of individuals were estimated to be Jewish (StatsSA, 2015).

Christian spiritual expression has over time had an influence on the Indigenous religious sphere and the opposite is equally true (Agbiji & Swart, 2015). Most of the Indigenous population who subscribe to Christianity, belong to African Indigenous, initiated, or independent churches which tend to entail an intermingling of traditional African and Protestant Christian beliefs.

This study focused on Vhavanḁa, the inhabitants of the now Vhembe district in the Limpopo province. Vhavanḁa have a deep religious heritage that spans through pre-colonial, colonial, and modern times. Missionaries and colonial administrators proved disinclined to recognising Vhavanḁa nationhood, just as they had failed with most other African norms and values. The European visitants assumed a particular religious outlook that implied that Vhavanḁa are not only backward, but lesser and their religiosity was impractical within the confines of Western religious expression. Hence, varied strategies were instituted to veer matters in favour of the imperialists through the establishment of religious systems aimed at compromising, quashing and at best assimilating African traditional religions to new modes of worship (Kaplan, 1986). Some scrutiny of Western and colonial religious impositions, irrespective of their perceived good intent, yields a need to sift and weigh the effects and outcomes on Indigenous religiosities today. It thus becomes vital to point attention to Vhavanḁa not as mere objects of colonial religious culture and morality, but a spiritual people left with a colonial legacy which may have, to some degree contributed to deviant inclinations of socially engineered missions of modernising postcolonial societies.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Communities' (CRL) report revealed that certain spiritual abuses were being perpetrated within religious movements in South Africa. These involved amongst others the instigation/invitation/inspiration of deification and hero-worship, the subjection of members to practices and rituals that infringe on human rights and ethics, the subjection of members to extremist or fundamentalist inclinations and the recommendation or prescription of untested diagnosis or prognosis in health issues (CRL Commission, 2017). The CRL indicated that these

undesirable behaviours are on the rise. This has become a key issue that necessitates an understanding of deviant practices and the many forms they may take.

This study is inspired by recent controversial religious practices in South Africa and examines the healing practices in relation to spiritual abuse within contemporary/new religious movements. The dynamics of spiritual abuse in the study are consequentially argued through the lens of deviance and this is done to show a relationship between religious deviance and abusive practice. The research observes that behaviours, concepts, and traits are not inherently deviant. Deviance may be explicated not only as relative but as a beneficial method to comprehend what individuals are doing with and to one another (Higgins & Butler, 1982). Perrin (2001) in explaining that fringe religion and deviant behaviour can be conceptualised and explained in the same way, further reveals that:

The absolutist perspective suggests that the evil quality of the cults is self-evident. The normative perspective focus on non-normative religious behaviour, attempting to explain why NRMs [New Religious Movements] form and why people join NRMs. Finally, the reactivist perspective focuses on the "cult" label and attempts to explain the competing interests involved in its construction (2001, pp. 136-137).

The subject matter of this study - deviant healing practices within contemporary religious movements in Thohoyandou - is problematic in that it relates to a kind of religiosity which neither fully subscribes to a Christian or African ethos, and which may be coupled with the neglect of identifying Indigenous modes of conceptualisation. In essence this problem constructs various states of contradiction, where syncretistic Christians profess Christianity but ultimately resort to African traditional religiosity which at times becomes abusive to vulnerable adherents, who in turn find themselves hapless and without ready structures for assistance and penalisation for the perpetrators. In certain instances, such culminates in the blending of separate and even possibly deviant belief systems and practices which are not authentic to the religions that existed before and thus create a preferred religion.

The study does not end with the abuse of vulnerable adherents only, but further discerns a second form of abuse that ongoing spiritual mishandlings have implications on African traditional religion, which stands to become a casualty of abusive practices, though it is acknowledged that African religions vary in practice and method. Missionary activism has contributed immensely to the Indigenous cultural and religious landscape. At another more theoretical level this study also seeks to explain the challenges and consequences of the interaction of Eurocentric and African religion, from an African perspective.

The encounter of missionary activism within the African context instituted changes that were not fully anticipated, hence, the reality of Eurocentric and Afrocentric religious systems inclined spiritual expressions that cultivated dynamics of their own. Western notions of religiosity, it must be noted, endeavoured to furnish inferences and standards for the interpretation of African religious expression based on European impressions of religion, culture, and ritual. Thus, African theism was modelled to reflect the preferred and expedient point between the secular and profane.

1.3 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The dual purpose of the study is to: i) construct a Practical Theological theoretical framework with specific reference to Pastoral care to explore deviant healing practices within contemporary religious movements in Ṭhohoyandou; ii) identify, describe, and analyse deviant healing practices in contemporary religious movements in Ṭhohoyandou in terms of African religiosity and European religious practices.

1.4 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Specific objectives of the study include:

- To identify deviant healing practices in contemporary religious movements in Ṭhohoyandou
- To analyse these deviant healing practices in terms of cause, perpetrator, and effect

- To identify the challenges of merging European and African spiritual practices
- To suggest forms of remedial Pastoral care and counselling for the victims of deviant healing practices

1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What kind of deviant healing practices occur amongst contemporary religious movements in Ṭhohoyandou?
- Who is involved in these practices and what are their causes and effects?
- How can European and African spiritual expressions be merged meaningfully?
- Which forms of remedial action may be undertaken for the benefit of the victims of deviant healing practices?

1.6 RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

The significance of the study hinges on the survey of deviant healing practices which may render African religiosity ineffectual. African theism comprises of an integrated matrix of cultural patterns that reveal the traditional African experience and reality, and ignorance of such has and continues to make a way for syncretism. Despite missionary activism in South Africa, the current religious setting has to some extent managed to offer converts who ignore distinctions between traditional and contemporary religions, which leads to a spirituality of merged identities; whilst attempting to treat them as one. At times, this is confusing and presents a condition wherein converts do not owe allegiance to a particular belief system but merely go along with whatever seems to be working for them at a particular time.

This interdisciplinary study sought to survey the sources of difficulty in African religio-cultural expressions that contended with missionary theology, colonialism and apartheid, and the repercussions thereof on the African church; with reference to deviant healing practices that duly compel a Practical Theology perspective for relevant praxis in the South African context.

Interdisciplinary, from this angle denotes and involves the use of various findings from diverse disciplines (e.g., anthropology, psychology, sociology, etc.) that are not exclusively theological.

This study also critiqued to reflect; on the interactions between African traditional belief systems and contemporary African Christian movements which may pose ritual healing practice complexities, which in turn present a need for pastoral care to address religious issues in the Church and society more effectively. A hermeneutical approach looked to find meaning not only in controversial but anomalous religious practices and spiritually abusive tendencies that have recently risen to the fore within the South African religious landscape. The role of the Practical Theology perspective becomes more significant, as it must look to address religious deviance in modern cultural, spiritual, and socioeconomic contexts that induce even the secular to compete with traditional religious norms and values. The study actualises a creative platform that may assist in finding African solutions to African spiritual challenges and uncover the depth of African concepts of religious expression amongst Vhavenda and help open dialogue between relevant institutions.

1.7 DEFINITION OF KEY CONCEPTS

1.7.1 African Theism

A theistic approach to African religiosity reveals imprints of a deity or deities, a god (monotheism) or gods (polytheism), and objects of worship or reverence in African traditional religion. According to Mbiti, for an African, “to live is to be caught up in a religious drama” (Mbiti, 1999:1). Such a religious worldview informs the philosophical understanding of African myths, customs, traditions, beliefs, morals, actions, and social relationships (Mbiti 1999:15). Mbiti opines that the African perception of a deity regards God as assuming the highest possible position. Mbiti (1990) stipulates that: “For most part of their life, African people place God in the transcendental plane, making him seem remote from their daily affairs. But they know that he is immanent... Thus for them, God is in theory transcendent, but in practice immanent” (1990:18). According to (Kruger,

Lubbe, & Steyn, 2009) there are three categories in the theistic reality of African Traditional Religion, namely the spirits of ancestors, nature spirits and deities. Religion is indeed fundamental for Africans since human beings live in a religious universe.

African theism refers to a coherent system of faith underlying a traditional Afrocentric worldview towards understanding the meaning of human existence considering the function and structure of the divine. This concept is relevant in terms of the second purpose of the study.

1.7.2 African Traditional Religion

Ekwunife (1990) defines African traditional religion as:

Those institutionalized beliefs and practices of Indigenous religion of Africa which are rooted in the past African religious culture, transmitted to the present votaries by successive African forebears mainly through oral traditions (myths and folktales, songs and dances, liturgies, rituals, proverbs, pithy sayings and names), sacred specialists and persons, sacred space and objects and religious work of art, a religion which is slowly but constantly updated by each generation in the light of new experiences through the dialectal process of continuities and discontinuities (Ekwunife, 1990).

J. Omosade Awolalu (1976) offers an explanation of African Traditional Religion which relays that:

It is the religion that has been handed down from generation to generation by the forbears of the present generation of Africans. It is not a fossil religion (a thing of the past) but a religion that Africans today have made theirs by living it and practicing it. This is a religion that has no written literature, yet it is 'written' everywhere for those who care to see and read. It is largely written in the peoples' myths and folktales, in their songs and dances, in their liturgies and Shrines and in their proverbs and pithy sayings. It is a religion whose historical founder is neither known nor worshipped; it is a religion that has no zeal for membership drive, yet it offers persistent fascination for Africans, young and old (1976: 275).

African Traditional Religion is an Indigenous system of spiritual expression that is distinguished from other religions that were imported into the continent. It is not a product of conversion or preaching but an approach to life itself.

1.7.3 Deviance

Arguably, deviance may be surveyed from two diverging viewpoints, that of a positivist premise, which comprises of three assumptions namely absolutism, objectivism, and determinism; and the second viewpoint being that of a constructionist postulation, which encompasses relativism, subjectivism, and volunteerism (Heckert & Heckert, 2002). According to Tittle (1995) deviance is “any behaviour that the majority of a given group regards as unacceptable or that typically evokes a collective response of a negative type” (2018, p. 124). Tittle also went further and specified that deviance can be separated into six divisions: predation, exploitation, defiance, plunder, decadence, and submission. Douglas (1977) defines deviance as: “the mutation that is generally destructive of society, but it is the only major source of creative adaptations of rules to new life situations” (1977, p. 60). Ben-Yehuda (1990) argues that: “Deviance is not an objective, eternally true, essence. Deviance is the product of complex and dynamic processes of interaction, power, and legitimacy” (1990, p. 221).

The interface between deviance and crime exposes a complex, yet; thin line between the two. However, deviance may not merely assume a negative or a positive identity, but entails more than behaviour, attitude, and beliefs. Crime is always about violating the law, whereas deviance though at times it may involve criminality, relates more to trespasses against informal norms that are derived from popular beliefs.

Deviance entails an abstraction formed by intricate and related power dynamics, of which do not only relate to violation of conservative behaviours but may involve physical psychological, even spiritual conditions, characteristics, traits, or practices that transgress societal customs and ethics.

1.7.4 Religion

Koenig (2009) argues that the definition of religion is generally agreed upon by scholars of religion: it includes convictions, customs, and ceremonies pertaining to the divine, God, the spirit world, or the paranormal. (Koenig, *Research on Religion, Spirituality, and Mental Health: A Review.*, 2009). Vennon (1962) described religion as that part of culture composed of shared beliefs and practices which not only identify or define the supernatural, the sacred and man's relationship thereto, but which also relate them to the unknown world in such a way that the group is provided with moral definitions as what is good (harmony or not in harmony) with the supernatural. Idinopulos (2002) opines that the word, religion, acquired its own distinct meaning when the forces of secularization became so dominant in Western culture that religious belief and practice became distinctly human acts. For once secularity became fully evident in society it was possible to speak by contrast of the religious way of life (Idinopulos, 2002).

Religion is a modern and traditional phenomenon that consists of a set of propositions within a cohesive system of beliefs and practices directed toward the divine, which individuals offer assent to as a course for meaning in life and nature of mankind.

1.7.5 Secularism

Defined in elementary terms, secularism may be deemed as mere irreligiosity. However, Bell (1980) enlightens us that secularism entails some form of detachment of religion from the public sphere, political life and aesthetic life and thereby retract to an isolated world where it retains authority only over its followers. In other words, religion is overarched by the profane in contrast to the spiritual.

According to Demerath (2007):

Secularisation is a process of change by which the sacred gives way to the secular, whether in matters of personal faith, institutional practice, or social

power. It involves a transition in which things once revered become ordinary, the sanctified becomes mundane, and things other-worldly may lose their prefix. Whereas ‘secularity’ refers to a condition of sacredlessness, and ‘secularism’ is the ideology devoted to such a state, secularisation is a historical dynamic that may occur gradually or suddenly and is sometimes temporary and occasionally (2007:65–66).

Norris and Inglehart (2004) allude to a tri-dimensional approach to the conception of secularism, firstly, as religious involvement that implicates shared religiosity and the attrition of individual religious practices. Thirdly, as the religious standards that affect the aspirations that people prefer to accentuate in their society and community and finally, as religiosity that concerns the fundamental faith indorsed by diverse world theologies.

Secularism refers to an ideology and principles that effect the disparity of religious influence over modern cultural and socioeconomic structures, including the state and thereby foster a proclivity that institutes the secular above traditional religious norms and values.

1.7.6 Syncretism

According to Droogers and Greenfield (2001) the notion of syncretism was first used by Plutarch to portray the momentary accord of quarrelling inhabitants of Crete in the face of a common enemy. The English “syncretism” is derived from the Greek which means union in battle. According to Eller (2007) religious syncretism relates to efforts aimed at mixing or blending elements of two or more cultures or belief systems to produce a new, third, better culture or system. The Dictionary of Asian Christianity points to a variance of application of the term “syncretism” in the social sciences and missiology. Mullins (2001) states that:

Syncretism is usually understood as a combination of elements from two or more religious tradition, ideologies, or value systems. In the social sciences, this is a neutral and objective term that is used to describe the mixing of religions as a result of culture contact. In theology and missiological circles, however, it is generally used as a pejorative term to designate movements that are regarded as heretical or sub-Christian (2001, pp. 809-810).

Syncretism essentially entails the appendage of central tenets of a religion to a dominant religion, which leads to the creation of a different belief system. Syncretism is not contextualisation. A change in description or practice for the sake of outreach to other cultures does not culminate in syncretism because the original belief has not changed.

1.8 LITERATURE REVIEW

The review of literature was undertaken in this section of the research with the intention to help address the research questions. The literature endeavoured to offer a succinct depiction of the key arguments of the study and strive to unfurl critical spiritual concerns that still maintain profound cultural, religious, and even political implications on African spiritual practices and values. To be more particular the research focused on developments in Practical Theology and deviant healing practices amongst Vhavenda. In addition, the process of melding Eurocentric and Afrocentric spiritual expressions was investigated.

Practical theology is a discipline underpinned by a reciprocal relationship between theory and practice and undertakes to analyse and reflect on religious practices to establish the theological constructs signified by those practices (Poppleton, 2017). The purpose is to consider how theory and practice can be brought into line, adjusted, or developed theologically. According to Heitink (1999) practical theology is defined as: “the empirically oriented theological theory of the mediation of the Christian faith in the praxis of modern society” (1999, p. 6). It may be deduced from the above mentioned; that practical theology is an involved subject; it is one that puts focus on practical occurrences from a cultural and theological perspective with an intent to engage a particular praxis for transformation.

Woodbridge (2014) in giving a biblical approach to practical theology, explains that it has a twofold purpose, firstly it relies on and responds to people's readings of normative sources from scripture and tradition, and assists in continuing changes and transformations of their practices to be more suitably responsive to their interpretations of the shape of God's call to partnership

(Fowler, 1999). It is secondly indicated that the goal of theological contemplation is not only to ponder or grasp the world as it is, but to help the world become what God intended it to be, as understood by the great theistic traditions. (Cowan, 2006.).

Cahalan accentuates this in highlighting that Practical Theology emerges from the examination and evaluation of both secular and religious behaviour, as well as their underlying significance (Cahalan, 2005). Practical theology has many models at its disposal, of which all have their origins from sociology and Osmer's model is the most applied, presently, for doing research in practical theology (Woodbridge, 2014). According to Pieterse (2017):

Osmer's hermeneutical approach has a great influence on the work of contemporary practical theologians in South Africa. The important contribution of his approach is that he includes in his hermeneutical approach an empirical component. Osmer works with four core tasks in practical theological research, formulated in four questions: What is going on? Why is it going on? What ought to be going on? How might we respond? (Osmer 2008:4–12). The first task is the descriptive-empirical task; the second task is the interpretive task; the third task is the normative task, and the fourth task is the pragmatic task.

The post-colonial condition of South Africa infers that dilemma located in African settings, including Christian practices within those settings, should be approached according to an interdisciplinary and multicultural basis.

According to Bate (2001), churches in South Africa that focus on coping and healing can be divided into two types. The first type of church is an African Independent church, which combines African heritage, urban Black working culture, and conventional Christian traditions. The second type of church is Charismatic/Pentecostal, which follows the Pentecostal heritage while incorporating features of postmodern Western society, notably those relating to media and entertainment. These churches primarily serve the urban clergy and business classes of all races (Bate, 2001). It is also integral to note that the disarrangement initiated by colonialism not only paved the way for new and Indigenous churches to appear but contributed to atypical pastoral care

praxis. When religion mutates or evolves, so do the rituals and practices; and it is through ritual that faith healing is practiced.

Kertzer (1998) states that:

The power of ritual stems not just from its social matrix, but also its psychological underpinnings. Indeed, these two dimensions are inextricably linked. Participation in ritual involves physiological stimuli, the arousal of emotions; ritual works through the senses to structure our sense of reality and our understanding of the world around us (1988, p. 10).

From Kertzers' view one is pointed to the power of ritual, it is from here that we may observe the power that a spiritual healing practitioner possesses. The practitioner has the power to deploy a ritual process which wields religious, psychological, and cultural impacts which may prove detrimental to the participants. Yusoff, Kasim and Baharuddin (2018) state that:

The process of spiritual abuse is subtle, thus explaining why many respectable, well thinking people are ensnared in this religious deviance. As leaders within religious deviance group actually believe they are representing God, they consider themselves to be beyond support or assessment of any kind. Consequently, the religious systems they uphold become abusive and therefore create an environment for the perpetration of spiritual abuse. Abusive leaders dominate those under their leadership, and then influence people through negative discourse, which inflicts wounds upon the person's psyche, causing the shaming of the person who can then be easily manipulated (2018, p. 85).

Spiritual healing practitioners without the necessary expertise pose a danger to society, due to the deliberate, ignorant, or unconscious inclinations towards deviant healing practices. Healing rituals or practices in "Coping-healing" churches tend to deviate towards exorcism, anointing and counselling, which; when abused or practiced erroneously, may lead to worsening hysteric, neurotics, and varying psychotics (Bate, 1999). Most specifically, and closer related to the study there have been two major events that relate to deviant practices in religious practices, namely the Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Cultural, Religious and Linguistic

Communities (CRL) which undertook to probe the commercialisation of religion and abuse of people's belief systems in South Africa. Recent unusual practices which have demonstrated mistreatment of people within a spiritual context by churches, religious organisations and traditional healing practices led to government intervention in the form of the CRL Rights Commission.

The ACRP is a professional body for Christian religious professionals that was registered in 2015, the ACRP (2019) stipulates that it was established:

“In response to challenges related to ministry standards and ministry training, as experienced by many Christian churches and ministries in South and sub-Saharan Africa. The needs experienced by churches and ministries in the “independent” or “informal” church environment received special attention. The reality is that a very low percentage, even less than 10%, of Christian ministry leaders in South and sub-Saharan Africa have access to formal ministry training. There are currently more than an estimated 200,000 pastors in South Africa, and more than a million in sub-Saharan Africa, who did not have access to formal training for the work they do. Many informal (nonaccredited) training institutions and programmes exist, but the work of these training centres is not strategically aligned, not comprehensive in nature and in some cases not of appropriate standard” (Association of Christian Religious Practitioners, 2019).

The era of imperialism and European missionary activism served concurrently to culturally subjugate African worldview and religiosity with the purpose to ‘civilise’. The initiatives by European missionaries were intended for good but proved to be a negative factor for the continent to receive the Gospel (Punt, 1999). History has exposed that European missionary praxis also consisted of social, political, and economic repercussions.

African theism still shapes the principles, identity, and outlook of the Indigenous populace to some degree. It has entrenched a profound religious consciousness, even at a subconscious level they easily resort to for spiritual expression, ideology, symbols, rituals, and philosophies (Chitando, 2013). It must be noted that Indigenous traditional religious approaches have and in certain instances continue to be communal and overlap onto the socio-political and economic spheres.

Arguably, the encounter between Christianity and African traditional religiosity has established a weighty mutual influence that has served as a stimulus for an Indigenous African Christianity.

Nunn (2010) states that:

The empirical results show that descendants of ethnic groups that experienced greater missionary contact are today more likely to self-identify as Christian. This correlation provides evidence that foreign missionaries altered the religious beliefs of Africans, and that these beliefs persist as they are passed on from parents to children” (Nunn, 2010, p. 147).

Though numerous research studies have laboured to explore the enduring imprints of missionary activism, a compelling measure of the lasting effects on the spiritual belief systems and ideals of African theism have proved elusive (Woodberry, 2004). It may be inferred that the introduction and emulation of African traditional practices and Christian doctrine, culminated in African initiated churches.

The likes of Masondo (2005) espoused and stated that AICs ought to be perceived as African and Christian, since they draw from Christianity, African theism, Western and African culture, and tradition.

Maimela (1985) revealed that:

The reluctance of Africans to break ties with the African Traditional Religions lies in the fact that they are wedded to an African worldview in which salvation is understood in terms of relief or help in times of trouble in this life. Salvation is thus expressed in such acts as healing, driving away evil spirits, empowerment of individual self, the promotion of fertility, and success in life’s ventures (Maimela, 1985, p. 72).

Although AICs are affixed to Biblical doctrine yet some of their worship is derived from Indigenous traditional religious practices. Bate (2001) indicates that the church's praxis includes a variety of activities known as mission, ministry, practical theology, and pastoral theology (2001, p. 7). From Bate's view, it may be deduced that praxis is not only a multifaceted subject but entails impressions such as systems, means and strategies.

Van Engen (2004) stipulates that the notion of praxis helps us grasp that not just thought, but also meaningful action, are part of a "theology-on-the-move" that attempts to find how the church might engage in God's mission in God's world (2004, p. 48). Henry (2016) interestingly mentions that a weakness that could be located within the missionary-initiated churches (MICs) is the inclination to utilise 'ministry frameworks' that were irrelevant to the context they found themselves. Henry proceeds further to state that their models of mission and churches proved ineffective, "primarily because it is ontologically defective and epistemologically remiss. MIC can learn from AIC and the wider neo-Pentecostal movement in their 'missional hermeneutic' towards a relevant African missional ecclesiology" (2016, p. 6).

The phenomenon of pluralism may be detected in African Indigenous churches founded by African converts; therefore, this concept seems relevant to the study and need to be briefly defined here. Bender & Klassen (2010) define religious pluralism as "a commitment to recognise and understand others across perceived or claimed lines of religious differences" (2010:2). According to Roumeas (2015) religious pluralism may be understood in four different ways, those being, theological, sociological, philosophical, and political. Roumeas explains that pluralism contrasts with exclusivism and inclusivism.

Mashau (2009) proffers a three-dimensional approach to pluralisms, namely, *cultural*, *structural*, and *confessional* or *religious* plurality. Imparting a view on cultural plurality in Africa, Mashau further reveals that there are two significant forms of culture namely traditional African and modern Western. *Confessional* plurality takes into account that there exist different religious convictions in the world. Pluralism may be regarded as an evident reality in Africa. South Africa

is a secular state that adheres to cultural plurality, embracing structural pluralism through distinct societal structures and in the meanwhile acknowledging the freedom of religion, of which may be understood to be religious pluralism. The phenomenon of religious pluralism does not only encompass various religious traditions but includes various religious activities that may be located internally or externally to those traditions and the various forms of unbelief (Taylor, 2007, p. 437).

Aside from Eurocentric Christian missionary efforts and Muslim proselytising, African theism in the form of worship to African deities, the homage to ancestors and the recourse to divination, magic, and other rituals; has sustained its influence (Bascom & Herskovits, 1959, p. 3). In line with the aforementioned discussion, I did an interdisciplinary study within a Practical Theology framework in order to offer a critical correlational critique of the praxis of religion in Africa, Western missionary practices and the implications of contemporary spiritual experience and expression within a plural setting. The recent religious deviant discourse and activities in South Africa further necessitate an appraisal of African theistic meaning in the context of charismatic Christianity, in light of radical religious conceptualisations that challenge commonly held belief systems. It is within such spaces and systems that religious dilemmas will be confronted in order to depict abusive practices and structures established in the name of healing.

1.9 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Practical theology engenders interactions between “Christian traditions, doctrine and praxis” with a particular focus on the challenges presented within a contemporary social context (Gallet, 2017). In further highlighting the nature of practical theology, Dames (2013) postulates that: “Practical theology is a critical hermeneutical, participatory action and reflection study within the praxis of God, for the missional praxis of the church within the praxis of society” (2013, p. 8). It is from this vantage point that the study endeavoured to explore the link between the secular and the religious in respect to charismatic praxis; whilst focusing on deviant healing practices in Tlohoenyandou. In so doing the study strived to unfold three levels of Practical Theology: “the experiential, the reflective and the orientational” which will help uncover gaps in pastoral care in an African context

(Dakin, 1996). Magezi (2019b) confirms that there are gaps in pastoral care within Africa and stipulates that:

There is a gap regarding substantial systematic consideration of pastoral care. It is important for pastoral care to respond to contextual challenges and critically reflect on its theory well as its contribution to global care rather than be narrowly focused (2019b, p. 10).

With the interdisciplinary nature of Practical Theology, the researcher was further enabled to use ideas, approaches, and techniques from varying disciplines to enable more scrutiny and depth (Müller, 2013). Through this framework the researcher also reflected on the postcolonial influences of Western missionary activism on expressions of African Christianity and its close relationship with African traditional religion. The researcher adhered to practical theology postulations made by Osmer (2008) which were partly inspired by the hermeneutical approach presented by Browning (1991) and entail four tasks; the descriptive-empirical, interpretive, normative and pragmatic. His methodology offers the study the benefit of combining sub-disciplines, academy and ministry, and the interpretation of the interconnectedness of ministry (Schoeman, Laubsher, Pali, & Berg, 2012). According to Osmer (2008):

“New understanding emerges when scholars are open to hermeneutical experiences in which they become aware of the preunderstandings with which they begin their interpretative activity and are willing to put them at risk in a dialogical encounter with the objects, people, or texts they are interpreting” (Osmer 2008:23).

In an endeavour to obtain a systematic consideration of the African experience, the African church struggles with the consequences of colonialism and apartheid. Through Osmer’s tasks, the researcher sought to achieve not only a new but constructive interpretation of deviant healing practices in post-colonial Africa, but was willing to challenge his own preconceptions, as well as confront the challenges of the contemporary *modus operandi*. The first task that Osmer supplies pertains to answering the question: ‘What is going on?’ regarding deviant healing practices; by gathering information which looks at patterns, particular incidences, settings, and contexts,

through qualitative research methods (Osmer R. , 2008, p. 4). The second task pertains to answering the question: “Why is going on?” by engaging the social sciences to discern why certain things are happening and thereby be able to interpret research data (Osmer, 2008, p. 4). Thirdly, the researcher looked to answer: ‘What ought to be going on?’ by contrasting what is and what should be (Osmer, 2008, p. 4). Lastly, the question: ‘How might we respond?’ was addressed by offering strategic reflections and actions that inspire a desirable direction, where interpretation of research data will position contemporary religious movements in a way that transmutes their ritual healing practices (Osmer, 2008, p. 4).

The post-colonial locus of South Africa warranted inquiry into the “body-politics of knowledge and the epistemological location of its readers” (Ramantswana, 2016). There is need to decolonise African biblical hermeneutics to overcome coloniality (the continuation of colonial domination, exploitation, and racialisation in the postcolonial era). Decolonisation in this instance would entail delving deeper into and tackling postmodernity, post-foundationalism, poststructuralism and/or deconstruction within the Western canon. Zooming in on poststructuralism and post-foundationalism one discerns the following: that poststructuralism may be understood as a “theory (such as deconstruction) that views the descriptive premise of structuralism as contradicted by reliance on borrowed concepts or differential terms and categories and sees inquiry as inevitably shaped by discursive and interpretive practices” (Merriam-Webster, 2021). We further understand that post-foundationalism in conjunction with the critical correlational hermeneutic are important to Practical Theology. According to Van Huyssteen (1997):

In theological reflection then, a postmodern critique of foundationalist assumptions will therefore be an inextricable part of a postfoundationalist model of rationality and will definitely shape the way in which theology is located within the context of interdisciplinary reflection (1997, p. 13).

A post-structuralist and post-foundational outlook were assumed, in a way that practical and liberation theology was merged, to give the excluded, marginalised or abused; a voice (Aguilar

Ramírez & De Beer, 2020). It is from here that Osmer's (2008) tasks meet with socio-analytical, hermeneutical, and practical meditations of liberation theology (Boff & Boff, 1987).

There are limited models applicable and relevant to Christian pastoral care and the healing ministry within a (South) African context (Magezi & Magezi, 2016). A vacuum is then left, which calls for theory formation that answers to African comprehension and still maintain a sturdy Christian healing perspective relevant to African pastoral care needs. Arguably, when this vacuum is not attended to, it opens a door for religious deviance through healing practice. The bringing together, theoretically; of 'religious resources' to address practical African realities, spiritual experiences, and ritual operations, is far from simple (Louw, 1998). This needs attention and demands new models that can deliver practically effectual approaches in an African context, especially regarding healing and pastoral care.

This study used the ritual healing theory to present the disarticulation of ill health onto culturally recognised narratives of power (Kaptchuk, 2011). The ontological credibility attached with descriptions of extraordinary experiences and phenomena, such as healing rituals, has been received with scepticism from Western quarters because they are not testable within the ambits of a "universal categorical system" and therefore cannot be adequately explained (Gilbert, 2014). In terms of the deviant science of parapsychology, extraordinary experiences and phenomena are referred to as psi, which may be defined as paranormal or anomalous extrasensory and psychokinesis activity that may not be explained through any physical and biological mechanisms (Irwin & Watt, 2007). The ritual healing theory allowed for the study of meaning and function in the healing practices of contemporary religious movements (Dube, 2019). McClenon (2004) states that:

The ritual healing theory allows researchers to transcend conflicts between sceptics and believers regarding the authenticity of psi and facilitates the investigation of anomalous claims within mainstream scientific paradigms. This orientation can contribute to the scientific study of religion and lead to more effective treatments of psychologically influenced disorders [and physiological health problems] (2004, p. 130).

Concepts such as traditional and or faith healing refer to *psi* or paranormal means of knowledge or energy transfer that may not be clearly explained scientifically. In essence the ritual healing theory allows for the scientific study of paranormal phenomenon which may include spiritual, magical, and religious operations. Thus, it becomes critical to be aware that a healing ritual is symbolic and has substance, and as such through the ritual healing theory, may be decoded or interpreted (Dube, 2019). Interestingly, it should be further noted that rituals may be explained according to a hermeneutical schema based on three levels of analysis: contextual analysis that enables the construction of a code, the formal symbolic structure of an action and the profound contradictions and problems that the action seeks to address (Dube, 2019). Such an approach helps in confronting deviant healing practices in contemporary religious movements, which may prove challenging to decode, contrary to the intended effect or spiritually abusive due to a lack of usefulness and productivity.

The study had an intent to unearth a hermeneutical lens that would re/interpret pastoral care in an African context. An African paradigm was explored in order to survey African theism in light of Eurocentric religiosity, as to depict the religious autonomy of traditional faith systems that not only reinforce but reflect principles and ideals that are intrinsic to a Tshivenda experience. This reflected “*a distinct conceptual-operational orientation to reality (or the Universe or Cosmos) ...represent[ing] the distinct unifying cosmological, ontological, epistemological and axiological principles,*” (Kambon, 1998). Afrocentricity situates an African at the epicentre of any analysis of African phenomena in terms of action and behaviour (Chawane, 2016). The researcher hoped to produce a form of scholarship that is not restricted to subliminal missionary racist undertones that have conventionally sought to undermine and demonise African frames of religious reference.

This research leverages an African vantage point to evaluate Practical Theology within a Christian religious context. The imperative for addressing the distinctive spiritual encounters and manifestations prevalent within African contexts—particularly those impacted by both Indigenous and Western traditions—led to the choice to investigate this viewpoint. Through this, the study hoped to advance a deeper appreciation of Practical Theology that takes African religious practices

and ideas into account. This is consistent with the idea put forth by Ganzevoort (2009) of practical theology as a "hermeneutics of lived religion," which highlights the significance of comprehending religion as it is lived out in daily life. The researcher aspired to unravel the complexity of religious identity created by both by looking at the particular cultural and historical settings of Vhavenḁa. The researcher delved into an array of pertinent challenges, paying attention to unconventional means of healing. The research examined the difficulties associated with religious plurality, syncretism and spiritual abuse, weighing the consequences of missionary activism and the ramifications of blending African beliefs with European religious practices. Specifically, the research centres on developing the insight and practice of pastoral care in culturally diverse contexts within the subdiscipline of Pastoral Care and Counselling. Aside from this, it helps equip religious leaders, along with faith communities, with discernment into mitigating the effects of deviant practices.

1.10 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

1.10.1 Research Design

This research explored the dynamics of healing practices in respect to spiritual abuse within contemporary religious movements in Ṫhohoyandou and addressed this through the lens of religious deviance. This includes scrutiny of Western, colonial and applications or misapplications of African Traditional Religion by incorporating it into European induced forms of spiritual expression. The research seeks to find Practical Theology solutions within an African setting, by opening constructive dialogue that may enable mechanisms that will address anomalous healing practices, assist victims of these practices and deal with perpetrators. The study falls within the interdisciplinary discipline of Practical Theology that focuses on both faith praxes within the church as well as pastoral healing practices beyond the church (outside of the church). For this reason, it was necessary to do a qualitative empirical study in order to explore the experiences, perceptions and living realities of the research participants in search of answers.

This chapter investigates the phenomenon under inquiry using an empirical approach and qualitative methodologies. With its foundation in postcolonial theory, this approach enables a sophisticated comprehension of how power interactions and socio-cultural settings are linked to the topic. The chapter attempts to convey the real-life situations and viewpoints of the participants using participant observations, in-depth interviews, and textual analysis, providing diverse contextual viewpoints. This method not only highlights the participant's contributions and agency but also reviews colonialism's lasting effects on modern customs and ideologies. Readers are referred to Chapter 4, where empirical evidence is displayed and clarified carefully within the theoretical framework, for an in-depth analysis and specific findings.

The research design of this study hinged on two investigative angles, on the one hand the researcher intended to explore the challenges of deviant healing practices. This is vital to do so, to appraise any contribution or lack thereof; by these practices to some members of contemporary churches being victimised by spiritual authorities and members alike. The study identified some forms of victimisation and addressed them by suggesting remedial action. On the other hand, the researcher attempted to analyse **victimisation** in terms of **syncretism** and the upshots of contradictory belief systems; in the instance of Christianity and African Traditional Religion, where practices do not adhere to practical reason and are mishandled to the detriment of the unsuspecting.

This further made it essential to look at how colonialism and Western hegemony has influenced the vilification of African theism and practices. Thus, leading to African religiosity being confined to European preferred interpretations of expression that complicate pastoral care efforts. The selection of research participants will therefore aim to provide quality data for the abovementioned purposes of the research design.

The researcher adhered to the principles of qualitative research, as this allowed for the provision of data in terms of how people understand, perceive, and experience a particular or complex setting. According to Sutton and Austin: “Qualitative research can help researchers to access the

thoughts and feelings of research participants, which can enable development of an understanding of the meaning that people ascribe to their experiences” (2015, p. 226). Ethnographic research offered the best option to the research. An ethnographic methodology not only provides a study of diverse human cultures within their cultural setting, but further brings to light “social interactions, behaviours, and perceptions that occur within groups, teams, organisations, and communities” (Reeves, Kuper, & Hodges, 2008, p. 337). Ethnography surveys behaviour as it occurs within a particular context, how it is formed and its implication, and more importantly how people interpret the experience. Reeves, Kuper and Hodges (2008) indicate that the main intent of ethnography is to present in-depth, holistic and substantial comprehension of peoples’ perspectives and activities within their domain, through exhaustive observations and interviews (2008, p. 337). According to Ploder and Hamann (2021):

Ethnographic research is the product of multiple practices. It is an assemblage of seeing and looking, hearing, and listening, handling objects, describing, interviewing, recording, reading, documenting, and working with data—transcribing, storing, transforming, sharing, labelling, coding, sequencing, comparing, interpreting, visualizing, and quoting—as well as many other practices. They occur in all stages of the ethnographic research process and in a broad variety of social settings including fieldwork sites, data sessions, seminars, conferences, and the writing desk (2021, p. 3).

It must, however, be noted that the ethnographic method is more than a “toolbox of techniques, but a way of looking at a problem” (Blomberg, Burrell, & Guest, 2003).

In this design, ethnographic data collection techniques such as participant observation, interviews and the studying of documents were applied. In other words, this entailed planning (formulating research objectives, devising a sampling strategy, and selecting appropriate methodologies), gaining access, sampling, observation, interviewing and self-reporting (Blomberg, Burrell, & Guest, 2003). The role of the researcher was that of a critical ethnographer, especially in terms of our task to unearth deviant healing practices; and incompatible Western missionary paradigms in lieu of African religious experiences/spirituality/ies. A critical ethnographer studies the issues of

power, empowerment, inequality, inequity, dominance, repression, hegemony, and victimization (Madison, 2005).

1.10.2 Research Participants

The researcher interviewed thirty research participants, with ten of them being victims of spiritual abuse and extracted four categories of research participants within contemporary and traditional African religious belief systems, to establish a population for the study. The four categories included participants from traditional Protestant Missionary Initiated Church (MIC), African Initiated Churches (AIC's), New Religious Movements (NRM's) and African Traditional Medical Practitioners (diviners/mediums/herbalists/general practitioners). The number of research participants were limited to a minimum of at least four members (where possible) for each of the four types of religious movements identified earlier on. The interviewees consisted of practitioners within the identified categories, such as church leaders, traditional religious practitioners, and victims and or dissatisfied congregants.

1.10.3 Sampling

In selecting a sample of participants for the study, the study employed two non-probability sampling approaches. The sampling method comprised of judgment and snowball techniques. A comprehensive and varied sample of participants was selected, and participants represented their field area. Gentles, Charles, Ploeg, & McKibbin (2015) defined sampling in qualitative research as: "the selection of specific data sources from which data are collected to address the research objectives" (2015, p. 1775).

The researcher approached participants relevant for the study, specifically Vhavenda men and women in contemporary religious movements. These participants were requested to refer, where possible, other individuals they may know and are willing to furnish relevant information to the

study. The age range of identified participants was between 21 to 80 and they were approached according to their willingness and consent to participate.

1.11 RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS FOR DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

1.11.1 Data collection

The researcher, in collecting data for the study; applied participant observation, interviews and document studies, which obliged written documents, records, the internet and semi-structured, one-on-one interviews. Telephonic interviews were preferred because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Data that was available from other available sources such as archives, was collected and integrated with the data collected from the interviews and participant observation.

Participant observation is key to ethnographic research and the researcher approached it as a complete participant (Jones & Smith, 2017). In ethnography, a complete participant pertains to a covert approach; the researcher was submerged and assimilated into the situation but did not disclose themselves as researcher. The researcher attended religious services in charismatic churches, which included: Sunday, miracle healing, and deliverance services; during times which they were conducted and observed how healing practices are conducted.

Participants were interviewed at venues convenient and suitable to them and in a language that would enable full expression, be it English or Tshivenda. Field research was conducted in accord with the ethnographic stages classified by Singleton and Straits (2005) which encompass: problem formulation, selection of a research setting, gaining access, presenting oneself and gathering and recording information (forgotten episodes, personal impressions, feelings, and methodological notes). The participant-as-observer approach to data collection catered for constructive engagement between researcher and the participants' condition and in consideration of the COVID-19 regulations.

1.11.2 Data analysis

Flick (2013) defines qualitative data analysis as: “the classification and interpretation of linguistic (or visual) material to make statements about implicit and explicit dimensions and structures of meaning-making in the material and what is represented in it (2013, p. 5)”. The process of data analysis included preparing and organising the data, reducing, visualising, representing, and displaying the data (De Vos, Strydom, Fouche, & Delpont, 2011).

A framework approach in an organised and methodical way, to analyse data from various sources, was vital for the rigour of data analysis. Data was analysed according to ethnographic strategies as offered by Roper and Shapira (2000) which involve:

- Coding for descriptive labels
- Sorting for patterns
- Identifying outliers
- Generalising constructs and theories
- Memoing with reflective remarks

1.12 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The researcher deemed permission from church or religious organisations, consent, and confidentiality as essential ethical concerns for the study, hence consent was sought through consent forms before interviews are conducted. In the final report, the identities of the participants were not used. Participants were informed of research objectives, processes, potential consequences of their participation and results (Morris, Social Work Research Methods: Four Alternative Paradigms, 2006). Research participants were not deceived about facets that pertained to their willingness to participate (Neuman, 2000). Permission to record interviews was obtained. Vigilance was adopted to realise ethics as outlined by Miles and Huberman (1994), which encompassed the following: informed consent, harm and risk, honesty and trust, privacy,

confidentiality and anonymity, intervention, and advocacy. The research entailed explaining to respondents about the study and potential challenges involved.

The researcher indicated that the study is voluntary to participants and supplied an informed consent letter which was clear and easy to understand, so that a participant was able to render a reasonable judgement before any participation and signature of the informed consent letter. Hence, the researcher evaluated all conceivable harm and risk to the reputation, dignity or privacy of participants. Regarding sensitive, yet relevant data, such data was be presented in a way that ensured confidentiality and anonymity by using pseudonyms and not the actual names of participants (Walliman, 2021). To ensure confidentiality, data in soft and hard copy form was stored safely in electronic devices and files, in a locked place and was only be accessed by the researcher, who safeguarded any transfer of data (Walliman, 2021). For participants who were traumatized by deviant practices, the researcher referred them for counselling.

1.13 DELIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This research study was actuated within the Thohoyandou locality amongst Vhavenda. Interviews were conducted in Luvenda and English, with the awareness that there would have been probable language restraints whereby meaning was compromised through translation. Religion as a sensitive subject may cause some of the participants to respond negatively and the variances in cultural approaches may also complicate generalisations in applying findings of one culture to another. Bias was also a significant issue for consideration as the researcher is a reverend. To steer away from bias, the researcher had not only planned for the research but strived to write objectively and inclusively (Šimundić, 2013). To avoid data collection bias, the research sample was representative of the population, and the analysis of data did not seek to favour preferred conclusions. Data was not interpreted in favour of the researcher's beliefs; overgeneralisations nor were the original findings ignored. Findings were published whether they are positive or negative (Šimundić, 2013).

1.14 CHAPTERS ORGANISATION

- CHAPTER 1: **Introduction:** Introduction is given to the study and thereby contextualised and developed to present the reason, rationale and relevance of the research.
- CHAPTER 2: **Theoretical framework:** The theoretical framework is exposed together with the key concepts, through the review of relevant literature.
- CHAPTER 3: **African religious hermeneutics of Christian practice:** A case is built through the description, discussion and synthesis of the phenomena investigated in the research study.
- CHAPTER 4: **Qualitative empirical study:** The research design and methodology are expounded, thereby defining the hypotheses through data collection techniques and data analysis.
- CHAPTER 5: **Research findings and discussions:** Focus is placed on the description and summary of the findings and discussions of the study.
- CHAPTER 6: **Conclusions and recommendations:** Interpretation of the findings is presented through a review of the key points and discussion of the relevance of the study. Recommendations of the study will also be made in this chapter.

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL AFRICAN PRACTICAL THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 INTRODUCTION

With the objective to probe deviant healing practices within contemporary religious movements, Chapter 2 adopts a theoretical lens which incorporates pertinent theories with traditional African perspectives. Osmer's model, ritual healing theory, and deviance theory have all been integrated to meet the intent of creating a thorough theoretical framework to examine deviant healing practices among contemporary religious movements in Ṭhohoyanḍou. Examining how these theories intersect with the historical and cultural background of postcolonial Africa has allowed researchers to address the secondary research question: "How can practical theology, incorporating African perspectives, provide a framework for understanding and addressing deviant healing practices in contemporary religious movements in Ṭhohoyanḍou?" The need of a situated standpoint on practical theology that considers the African worldview and the difficulties of blending Indigenous and Western religious practices is further highlighted in this chapter. To address the issues raised by nontraditional healing tactics, it underlines the necessity of pastoral care and counselling that is responsive to cultural disparities. In the chapters that follow, this theoretical framework's findings will be employed to examine empirical evidence and create useful suggestions for religious leaders and faith groups.

Theories function to substantiate, predict, and offer comprehension of phenomena; whilst at the same time presenting postulations that pose strong questions to existing knowledge. A theoretical framework details and sets forth expositions as to why the research problem exists. Unlike literature reviews, as posited by Grossman (2010), which:

neither lambaste nor offer saccharine praise; they critique vs. criticize, i.e., they carefully engage in a meta-analysis of the existent research. Finally, what is not found in the process of creating a literature review is as important as what is found (2010:6).

A theoretical framework represents the researchers' epistemological dispositions, a perspective and a 'methodically analytic approach' (Collins & Stockton, 2018). It fortifies key dimensions of theory presentation in qualitative research and thereby makes research meaningful. Hence, the researcher ventured not to portray this chapter as a mere précis of other's published work. However, the theoretical framework divulges analytical awareness and synthesis of the subject matter. Distinctly exhibiting the relevance of varying arguments, theories, and methodologies, whilst steadily preserving a tie with the objectives and rationale of the study.

Research should embody and be grounded in a thorough theoretical framework. The theoretical framework expresses the researcher's ontological and epistemological perspectives (Jackson, 2013). It enriches the study, not only with focus but a structure to unearth meaning, whilst connecting the study to existing scholarship. The theoretical framework focuses on examining the research question, the problem, and possible solutions to the problem, including how to interpret the findings (Adom, Hussein, & Agyem, 2018). A theoretical approach to Practical Theology offers a focus on meaningful constructions, concepts, and theoretical principles that facilitate an interchange of perspectives between human experience and the Christian story, as a way of fostering critical analysis of diverse viewpoints (Klaasen, 2017). It examines the relationship between critical thinking, knowledge, and the impact of cultural and social contexts.

Viewed through a theoretical framework, Practical Theology seeks to bridge the gap between theoretical modalities and their practical implications. As a cross-disciplinary field it not only explores religious discourse but engages real-world challenges faced by individuals, faith communities and leaders in those communities. By integrating concepts from sociology, psychology, and philosophy, it advances a comprehensive look at religious beliefs and practices in order to help confront intricate moral and ethical dilemmas. It also strives to integrate scriptural teachings with contemporary issues to deepen our understanding of our faith practices by fostering a dialogue between theology, society, and culture, as well as the development of methods and strategies to effectively address a wide range of social and spiritual concerns.

Practical theology is based on hermeneutics, correlations, critical thinking, and theological ideas (Smith, 2010a). It is important to note that in order to achieve deeper insight and understanding of

the discipline, the Bible is a key source and at least these three different perspectives should be critically correlated - the situation, the Christian tradition, and other sources of knowledge (art, mass media, etc.) (Linton & Mowat, 2006). The critical correlational theory proposes that critical thinking can be used to evaluate and assess existing knowledge, as well as to generate new knowledge. This theory has been instrumental in understanding the complexities of Christian traditions and praxis and provides a valuable framework for understanding the impact of theory and practice (Linton & Mowat, 2006).

Tracy in modifying Tillich's, method calls for a mutual critical correlation, where questions and answers are correlated in a manner that is mutually beneficial: theology and the social sciences conversing at the same time (Lee, 2017). In this manner, Christian traditions and praxis are brought together in mutually constructive critical dialogue as are other forms of social sciences and praxis (Klaasen, 2014). By using the insights from both the social sciences and theological practice, a holistic understanding of the human experience can be achieved. Browning's (1991) development of the correlation theory suggests that practical theology can be used as an effective tool for analysis, assessment, and evaluation of current social and cultural issues.

This study espouses a thought-out openness to the dynamics of theory and practice, in light of pastoral care and healing practices (Hestenes, 2012). The theoretical framework seeks to remain theologically sound, whilst contextually pertinent, comprehensive, and pluralistic; it factors the African worldview, cultures, and practices. The theoretical framework not only builds on current and emerging theories but is engaged from a scientific and structured approach which obliged a "comprehensive accumulation, transparent analysis, and reflective interpretation of all empirical studies pertinent to a specific question" (Rousseau, Manning, & Denyer, 2008, p. 9). This was done to analyse the theoretical foundations and practices that underpin practical theology as an approach to confront the research question of: What kind of deviant healing practices occur amongst contemporary religious movements in Tshohoyandou?

The nexus of theory and practice, in this study, constitutes constructive research into and assessment of religious healing in South Africa. This merits an interdisciplinary approach which

incorporates the use of constructs and standpoints from several disciplines. This study draws from discourses available in disciplines such as anthropology, parapsychology, sociology, psychology, theology to mention a few. Practical theology involves engaging “practical concerns” which in turn impels practice (Hermans & Schoeman, 2015). This research looks to construct a framework that challenges African practical concerns in faith healing, more so, within contemporary religious movements. Magezi (2019a) purports that practical theology is in danger and under threat due to a lack of a foundation in experience, proceeding to theoretical contemplation, and then going back to practice.

It is through theory that the researcher sought to explore healing practices from an African outlook and appraised the fundamental constructs of meaning in Indigenous Christian phenomenon. It is with the above mentioned in mind that this study explored the associated challenges and further considered whether these practices were deviant or not. The ideation of the science of religion is experienced in varied modes of expression within distinct contexts and an African understanding of religion invokes transcendental encounters which are buttressed by profound insights of an African worldview (Beyers, 2010).

Locating a scientific-theoretical stratagem to study practical theology is vital and a theoretical framework allows for pertinent research through the employment of tested research tools (Pieterse, 2017). According to De la Porte (2016): “practical theology is a theological theory of action that includes hermeneutical, strategic and empirical reflection” (2016, p. 1). It is with this in mind that hermeneutics in the context of practical theology as a hermeneutic discipline is elucidated through Richard R. Osmer's integrated approach.

The study's theoretical framework places concentration on three main theories, a practical theological theoretical framework is constructed using insights from Osmer's practical theological framework and ritual healing theory to address pastoral care of deviant healing practices within contemporary religious movements (Scott & Wepener, 2017). Theoretically, the meaning and

purpose of healing practices/rituals performed by practitioners of faith is explored through the ritual healing theory.

2.2 PRACTICAL THEOLOGICAL THEORY OVERVIEW

Practical theology arises from an overlap between context, praxis, and theory, and entails the application of both the hermeneutical and empirical approaches of scientific methodology. In practical theology, praxis is of primary concern; therefore, the theological method is inductive, beginning with experience and leading to theorisation (Lazar, 2017). Within the contemporary phase of its development, practical theology is confronted with a discourse that seeks to establish whether it should focus on the praxis of the church or look more to emphasise social and cultural engagement with lived religion.

The study draws attention to how practical theology is relevant to the practice of the church and how this in turn is relevant to society. Several theories have been generated within the broad field of Practical Theology to explore how the Christian religion functions as a mediator in modern society. Heitink's integrated method, which blends empirical, strategic, and hermeneutical viewpoints, is notable among them for its all-encompassing framework (Smith, 2013b). This method offers a solid basis for comprehending the intricate interactions that exist between practice and religion in contemporary settings. Comparable to this, Ganzevoort provides an integrative strategy by illustrating the interpretation of religious experiences and activities within their sociocultural circumstances in his theory of Practical Theology as the hermeneutics of lived religion. Zerfass's paradigm, which underscores the relationship between theology and empirical reality, highlights how theological reflection is flexible and dependent upon the setting, adding to the breadth of this discourse (Smith, 2013b). Through the integration of empirical and hermeneutical techniques, Browning's model offers a flexible framework that facilitates understanding and resolution of complicated religious plurality challenges. While Michael Cowan's LIM model provides a clear method of addressing real-world issues, but cultural intricacies may require more in-depth analysis.

Osmer's paradigm is particularly useful for investigating the intersections between African and Western religious practices since it enables a methodical and thorough interaction with practical theological challenges (Schweitzer, 2019). To objectively evaluate deviant healing practices used by contemporary religious movements in Tshohoyandou, this study employs Osmer's model. The justification Richard Osmer's theory of practical theology standing out as especially persuasive is that it takes a disciplined but adaptable approach that skilfully strikes a balance between normative, pragmatic, interpretive, and descriptive tasks. This attraction for Osmer's theory stems from its capacity to negotiate the challenges of fusing Indigenous and Western spiritual expressions—an undertaking that necessitates both methodical study and real-world implementation. Osmer's paradigm provides an effective means of tackling the problems associated with spiritual abuse and syncretism in the context of post-colonial African practical theology (Khoaseb, 2014). Employing Osmer's paradigm, this research delves into the extent of missionary impact on the spiritual landscape of Vhavanḁa and suggests significant and culturally appropriate remedial measures. This research attempts to further broaden our comprehension of African religious experiences and to promote exchanges between diverse theological and cultural perspectives by incorporating ideas from multiple practical theology theories.

2.2.1 The Osmer's Model of Contemporary Practical Theology

Practical Theology posits a focus on the appraisal of faith-experiences and contemporary religious praxis. Rather than furnish directives for practice, Practical Theology infers critical theological reflection in the examination of orthodoxy and orthopraxis (Bennett, Graham, Pattison, & Walton, 2018).

Practical theology traditionally had the task of bringing into normative or transformative conversation, Christian tradition and cultural-religious experiences and practices, or Text and context, and over the years of practical theological theory and/or methodology various models for this conversation have been developed. At first it was a rather linear conversation where historic theology discovered the truths and systematic theology captured that truth into coherent dogmatic statements which could then be applied to the context of practice (Meylahn, 2014, p. 1).

In view of the above, Practical Theology elucidates on a facet that offers orientation for and transforms theological practice. Practical theology not only lays focus on theory and practice but attempts to correlate theological reflection to the world in distinct paradigms. In other words, it explicates the transformation of reflection into embodied faith (Tucker, 2014). Moreover, it encompasses investigating cultural and ecclesial implications of various belief systems within communities and their varying contexts. It is underpinned by its critical engagement of how faith leaders and adherents alike interpret, practice and experience religion and spirituality.

Practical theology is faced with a pluralistic world wherein contextual challenges and Christian practices call for a closer look at the praxis of lived religion. Consequently, it is essential that the empirical realities of lived religion have a theoretical framework to outline the dynamics of culture, Indigenous knowledge systems, religious doctrines, and more importantly healing rituals (Gräb, 2014). Practical Theology in the domain of lived religion involves paying heed to the religiosity of existential practices or experiences of sacredness of devotees, in the context of their worldview as they navigate between meaning and action (Ganzevoort & Roeland, 2014).

The idea of lived religion transcends traditional conceptualisations of the Church to embrace everyday social dynamics and how they may influence theology and how people interpret the divine. Practical Theology undertakes to unravel how and where lived religion, as the quest for meaning, is lived today both inside and outside religious communities (Gräb, 2014). There is a need for Practical Theology to scrutinise with particular attention the contemporary systems of perceiving the spiritual aspects of life expressed through cultural forms of religious expression. Grab argues for a practical theology of lived religion that is not only concerned with 'church theory, pastoral theology, or even methodologically grounded empirical science (theologia applicata)', but additionally seeks to discern sociocultural 'phenomena as spiritual through the use of cultural-hermeneutic approaches (Apostolides & Meylahn, 2014). To acquire a grasp of the complexities of African contemporary religious movements, Practical Theology is compelled to adhere to interdisciplinarity and empirical research to examine the expansive terrain of hybridized religions, changes in Christian organisations, and the diffusion of other traditional faiths. Van der Ven, who has significantly advanced the empirical-theological methodology approach, underpins his

approach with a hermeneutical purpose that entails a discourse with other disciplines and presupposes a pragmatic theological outlook (Ganzevoort, 2004). His approach subscribes to an interdisciplinary perspective which provides theology greater prominence than social science. It therefore focuses primarily on the theological praxis of faith communities. Moreover, it should be noted that empirical theology may be conducted in different forms and has been found to be effective in the analysis of contemporary issues.

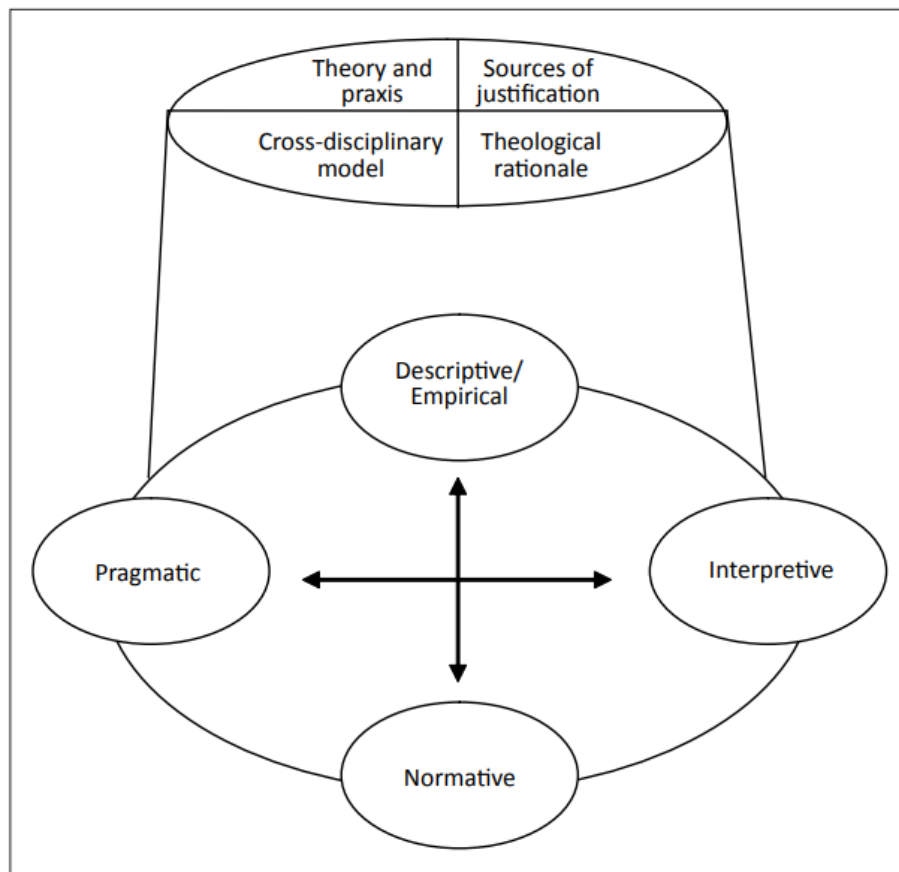
Practical Theology quintessentially weighs both empirical cultural hermeneutical reflection and conceptual/theoretical explanation. It ventures to apprehend the archetypes of religious actors and the methods and systems at play when religious and cultural traditions are assigned to praxes (Sremac & Ganzevoort, 2017). Practical Theology basically asks the substantive questions about spirituality and the associated hybrid forms of religion, including their implications. In addition to this, it confronts unanswered complexities located in religious activity, together with communal and institutional identities (Schoeman & Van den Berg, 2016).

Arguably, in Africa, Practical Theology does not only find itself with in a post-colonial locus but is enclosed between a traditional/animist worldview and a postmodern worldview. On one hand the traditional worldview is not as structure; in Western terms. Whereas, on the other hand the postmodern worldview ‘challenges the biblical worldview in the areas of epistemology, metaphysics, and ethics’ (Ndereba, 2021). According to Ndereba (2021) the postmodern worldview has assumed two faces, that of the “psychologised self” and the development of “critical theory”, to encounter reality. Critical theory is particularly interesting because it ideologically it is reinforced by the following constructs: social binary (oppressor vs oppressed), hegemonic power, lived experiences and social justice (Shenvi & Sawyer, 2020). These concepts are noteworthy because they give insight into the South Africa religious landscape and the distinct predicaments they share with the rest of Africa. In highlighting this phenomenon, the dichotomy of Western and African spiritual expression, allows for the discourse which warrants a need to attend to religious trespasses against traditional religiosity.

Richard Osmer's model of contemporary Practical Theology is a scientific theoretical approach that explores firstly, reflective practice and secondly, metatheoretical perspective (Osmer, 2011). In contemporary practical theology, empirical-hermeneutical reflection on the dialectical relationship between theory and practice has assumed a central position centred on interdisciplinary theological reflection. The hermeneutical approach to practical theology used by Richard Osmer was stimulated by Don S. Browning as well as Johannes A. Van der Ven empirical contributions. Osmer's model also factors in an empirical component to his hermeneutical framework. Basically, practical theology has as a fixed reference point; the "how to" within Christianity, but it is guided by a theory "why to" — "why we ought to practice the Christian way of life in certain ways as a result of an interpretation of a particular social context and the normative claims of the Christian community (Carter, 2018).

Contemporary practical theologians in South Africa have and continue to be heavily inspired by Osmer's hermeneutical approach. In his approach he purports that contemporary Practical Theology has four tasks that attend to four questions which are substantial to addressing real-life problems. The four tasks are the descriptive-empirical (priestly listening), interpretive (sagely wisdom), normative (prophetic discernment) and pragmatic (servant leadership). These four tasks provide a practical framework that enables engagement with contextuality (see Figure 1 below). According to Osmer's 'consensus equilibrium model', the four tasks/movements inform each other within a hermeneutical circle or spiral (Carter, 2018, p. 251).

Figure 1: Metatheoretical issues in Practical Theology



Source: Osmer, R., 2005, *The teaching ministry of congregations*, Westminster/John Knox, Louisville, KY

The hermeneutical spiral is Osmer's way of clarifying the relationships between the four tasks although they are distinct as well as interconnected. Beside answering the question: what is going on, the descriptive-empirical task is concerned with gathering information about episodes, contexts or religious realities and discovering trends behind them. In focusing on the question of why things are going on the interpretive task interprets and explains certain actions/practices and patterns through an interdisciplinary approach that is hinged on the social sciences. The normative task addresses what ought to be going on, theology, ethics and other perspectives are used to raise normative questions. The pragmatic task asks how one should respond, which involves implementing specific actions as a means to form a plan that stands to reshape an episode, situation,

or context for a constructive outcome. Osmer asserts that the essential and central question of practical theology is what, why, how and what ought to be answered. In this study, the researcher considered these four questions, which relate to the healing practices in contemporary religious movements, as this was consistent with the research objectives.

Osmer (2011) distinguishes for metatheoretical issues as shown in the figure above, namely the theory-praxis relationship, models of cross disciplinary work, sources of justification and the theological rationale. Sources of justification pertain to the dynamics that a researcher encounters when they weigh Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience. Models of cross-disciplinary work refer to combining varying disciplines and bringing them into dialogue with one another, this includes the choices involved. Theological rationale concerns the researcher's convictions, their guiding principles and approach to working on particular issues. This also involves methodological commitments.

2.2.2 Ritual Healing Theory

Conversely, a ritual is a framework designed to dictate human dealings, it is primarily symbolic, with no empirical foundation, and generally sanctioned by society (Wu, 2018). Rituals and more importantly healing rituals exist in the real world and can be studied in the real world. Ritual healing usually has a rather different aim from psychiatry and medicine and requires different evaluation standards (Sax, 2014). Other than illness, healing rituals are used to deal with other forms of distress. It assumes a holistic approach, which in practice, is characterised by scores of methods. In the neo-Durkheimian framework, rituals become authoritative because they bring about social interaction based on physical co-presence and shared emotional attunement. The people involved in the ritual experience the essence of solidarity with one another as they actively take part in a common undertaking (Vecaldo & Manera, 2017).

Ritual healing theory is an interdisciplinary approach to understanding the power of ritual in healing the individual and connecting with the divine. It holds that rituals of all kinds, from

religious to non-religious, have the potential to affect an individual's physical and mental health (Perriam, 2015). Rituals can be used to encourage physical, emotional, and spiritual healing, as well as to foster connection with the divine. Ritual healing theory posits that rituals can be used to transform and transcend the suffering of individuals, providing a means of connecting with the divine and accessing the power of healing.

A ritual varies from other human activities in that its mechanism is both nontechnical and supernatural, it is based on deep spiritual principles (Legare & Nielsen, 2020). A ritual performance solidifies the psychological and cognitive underpinnings of individual commitment to group archetypes and standards. Throughout history, rituals have been used by African cultures to deal with life's vicissitudes and ritual healing has equally played an important role in traditional African culture (Mokgobi, 2014). The term "ritual healing" may refer to several other forms of healing which involve the exorcism of spirits which possess the host and produce adverse social effects manifest in mental or physiological problems. Ritual healing practices use a variety of culturally integrated, idiosyncratic, and ceremonial methods to heal individuals who have been affected by various health conditions (Okwaro, 2010). Customarily, rituals are an important part of healing in African cultures.

However, it should be considered that traditions of healing vary according to culture and region as they are not homogeneous. In surveying contemporary practices in ritual healing within an African context, Okwaro (2010) suggests that as a point of departure, diseases and or illnesses should be referred to as afflictions because such a discourse places a focus on the self, as well as the social, spiritual, and material condition of an individual. As societies develop their own cultures, they develop their own ways of dealing with illnesses. Arguably, it may be construed that individuals also learn culture through ritual orientation. In other words, rituals construct a premise for actions grounded on social conventions. A culture or society's Indigenous healing practices are designed to treat its people within that culture or society (White, 2015).

A ritual used for problem-solving purposes reflects intuitive beliefs about causal reasoning and the effectiveness of goal-directed action. Accordingly, ritual efficacy is interpreted based on intuitive causal beliefs about action potency (Legare & Souza, 2012). In many faith-based ritual healing practices, rooted in faith utilise religious objects in unconventional ways that do not adhere to established doctrines (Peprah, et al., 2018). A faith community's sacred meaning is defined and actualised by its religious rituals, although specific beliefs and rites vary immensely across cultures.

McClenon's theory of ritual healing identifies important elements of faith and proposes a connection between the immediate neurological effects of religious ritual and its evolutionary roots (McClenon, 2004). The ritual healing theory contends that physiologically based experiences produce atypical or deviant belief in spirits, souls, afterlife, and magical abilities and such perceptions contribute to hypnotic and placebo healing by instilling belief in the healing process (Winkelman, 2003). However, the ritual healing theory does not make any assertions about the plausibility of magical or paranormal phenomena. Even though there may be numerous physical and mental health pros related with certain ritual practices, the significant investment of time, energy, and resources required to replicate such behaviour may be prohibitive for those who do not subscribe to the teachings of a particular religion.

Religious groups have a vested interest in maintaining a sense of intragroup solidarity and cohesion (Zhanghttps, et al., 2019). To ensure this, they often require members to adhere to certain behavioural patterns, some of which may be demanding. This can include things like abstaining from certain activities, performing certain rituals, and adhering to moral codes. These behaviours are important in creating a sense of community and shared identity within the religious group and are thus necessary for its survival. This reinforces the sense of togetherness, trust, and solidarity between members of the group and helps to ensure the continued success of their collective endeavours. By publicly demonstrating their commitment to the group, individuals are also able to gain the respect and admiration of their peers. As such, these taxing behaviours are an important part of any successful group dynamic.

2.2.3 Deviance Theory

The notion of deviance is often understood in religious terms as a deviation from divinely revealed truths that represent what is considered orthodox (Rives, 2012). Despite the complexity of deviance, one finds that there is a tendency to opt for simplistic explanations, which are usually negative in nature. When religious non-conformity is observed from the typical/universal or even Western, the inconsistencies or defects can be identified as deviant. Religions that are normative have deviant behaviours, while non-traditional religions interact with societally normative bodies, social debates over religious tolerance versus unacceptability, and nontraditional religions attempt to control their members by engaging in deviant behaviour (Perrin, 2015).

The analysis of religious deviant practices in South Africa is particularly complex due to religiously pluralistic African societies (Henrico, 2019). Although mainstream groups produce or respond to deviance in a variety of ways, it remains of considerable interest to research the manner in which they do so. Throughout most of the world, numerous denominations, ethnic religions, and sects flourish in pluralistic societies, which transcend definitions of religious deviance based on practices which differ from the majority (Hunt, 2017). As a result of previous dominant groups feeling threatened by alternatives' religious requirements, charges of unacceptable religious deviance continue to be levelled against others. Religions needing to justify their practices as acceptable behaviour become even more difficult when at least one of the disputants is not representative of a major world faith (Fox, 2020). Consequently, group identification becomes a political issue since the religious identity of a particular movement potentially has significant societal implications regarding perceptions of acceptability.

In this study, religion and deviance are not perceived as a clear-cut state of play. The researcher probed religious healing practices that divagate from traditional religious beliefs and practices. Contemporary religious beliefs denoted by sects and cults, radical charismatic religious leaders and fundamentalist ideologies have inferred influence by such practices (DeCamp & Smith, 2019).

Specifically, a form of harmful deviance is interrogated, which involves the infraction of religious norms that culminate in adverse response.

The concept of deviance is a complex phenomenon with multiple theories attempting to explain its causes. Functionalist theories posit that deviance is an inherent part of social structure and can serve a beneficial purpose by providing clarity to the rules of society (Fried & Singhal, 2020). Conflict theory emphasises that deviance is caused by economic and social inequalities and the struggle between social classes (Hossain, 2014). Symbolic Interactionism suggests that deviance is caused by individuals' interpretations of symbols and norms (Carter & Fuller, 2015). Labelling theory proposes that deviance is caused by the process of Labelling individuals as deviant and the consequent effects of being Labelled (Onyekonwu, 2022). Each of these theoretical perspectives offers insight into the causes of deviance, providing an important foundation for understanding this phenomenon.

The primary explanations for deviance can be categorized as either structural or processual theories. Structural theories focus on the link between deviant conduct and particular structural conditions within society and strive to explain why deviance is more prevalent in certain areas, for instance those of lower socio-economic standing (Nalah & Ishaya, 2013). Alternatively, processual theories focus on explaining the processes and conditions that lead to deviant behaviour, rather than simply describing it. Certain religious experiences are considered more unconventional, such as speaking in tongues, religious visions, hearing the voice of God, and miraculous healing (Cook, 2019). These experiences are deemed deviant as they challenge the "laws" of the material world and distance themselves from mainstream culture, which primarily relies on scientific explanations.

This study will delve into how non-normative religious groups are considered deviant in our society. Before delving into this topic, it is important to note that non-normative refers to practices that differ from the normative values of society. Anything that is not considered common in society may fall under the category of non-normative values. In the context of this paper, non-normative

religious groups refer to religious groups that do not align with the common practices and values of society.

Deviant religion is a term used to describe religious practices that deviate from mainstream religious beliefs and practices. To gain a better understanding of deviant religious practices, it is necessary to consider how deviant behaviour is being conceptualised. Depending on the context and the cultural norms in play, an action could be considered deviant by one person, but completely normal to another. Deviant religions are often characterised by unorthodox beliefs, rituals, and organisation (Coates, 2015). Examples of deviant religions include cults, sects, and new religious movements. For some, deviance is behaviour that violates a norm, and these norms can be identified and measured. From this objectivist or normativist viewpoint, deviant religious groups, or "cults," are non-normative, "new" religious groups. Objectivist theories focus on how and why cults form and who joins them (Dellwing, Kotarba, & Pino, 2014). Deviant religions often challenge traditional religious structures, beliefs, and practices and can create controversy or even be seen as dangerous. Deviant religions can also provide a sense of community and purpose for their adherents, allowing them to find their own spiritual path outside of the mainstream.

On the other hand, for others, deviance is behaviour that is labelled as such. From this subjectivist or interactionist, constructionist, or reactivist perspective, deviance is said to be "subjectively problematic" because norms are abstract and situational and only matter in relation to the reactions they provoke (Perrin, 2014). In this case, it is reactions, rather than norms, that determine deviance categories. Deviant religions are fringe religions defined as "cults" by others. Subjectivist theories focus on understanding and explaining these reactions rather than the etiology of the religious group.

Deviant religious practices can lead to leaders becoming overly powerful while diminishing members' dignity, willpower, and critical thinking abilities. These religions often involve leaders treating adult members as children, resulting in forms of abuse like those experienced by people in dysfunctional families or abusive relationships. The high demands for commitment in these groups increase the likelihood of members facing group sanctions. Some groups have formal

systems of sanctions for members who deviate from doctrines or prescribed behaviours and may use verbal aggression or special penal systems to punish deviance and enforce conformity. This can lead to conformity among members but may also create a negative public image for the religion as deviant.

Sociologists focus on the social context of deviance, looking at how groups define, judge, and respond to deviant behaviour, rather than just individual actions. They also recognise that established rules and norms are socially created, not just morally determined, or individually imposed. In contrast, psychological perspectives on deviance emphasise criminal tendencies or deviance as natural human drives and urges that are repressed through the process of socialisation (Clinard & Meier, 2015). This can lead to personality disorders that implicate both personal and social structures and processes.

The study of deviance can be divided into understanding why people violate laws or norms and how society reacts to this behaviour. This reaction includes the Labelling process by which deviance is recognised. Religious groups often strive to be seen as morally normative or at least acceptably deviant, while critics may label them as unacceptably deviant cults (Goode, 2022). This can lead to debates among societal contenders, with accusations that many "new religions/cults" impose unacceptable constraints and demands on members, violating their "core selves" and causing harm to their personal well-being, financial security, and decision-making abilities.

A notable part of African cultural resistance is defiance of Western theological structures. Several African societies have developed a resistance to Western religious norms and ideals, seeking to affirm their cultural identity and autonomy via the resurrection of old traditions and the formation of new religious movements (Sanni, 2016). African religiosity, for example, features therapeutic methods such as possession, ritual, and the use of herbal treatments, which may be considered deviant by Western biological standards (Adu-Gyamfi & Anderson, Indigenous medicine and traditional healing in Africa: a systematic synthesis of the literature, 2019). These behaviours, however, are strongly ingrained in cultural traditions and may be seen as a means of resisting the

imposition of Western Christian beliefs and standards. It is critical to recognise that not all healing practices considered deviant are motivated by a desire to defy Western paradigms, and that their practice may have both beneficial and bad repercussions for people and communities.

However, research has also shown that participation in some non-traditional or deviant faiths can have functional benefits for both individuals and society (Encyclopedia of Religion, 2023). These groups can provide freedom from substance abuse, promote a work ethic, and create a sense of community. They also allow for social experimentation that may not be possible within traditional settings and can be vehicles for social change by introducing new ideas and projects into society. The conditions under which deviant behaviour exists continue to be an enduring question for researchers, with a variety of theories and approaches developed in the fields of sociology, social psychology, and social work practice.

2.3 TOWARDS AN AFRICANISED PRACTICAL THEOLOGY

Africanised practical theology is an approach to Christian ministry that seeks to engage African theological principles into the practice of pastoral care (Naidoo, 2015). It posits that Africanisation and decolonisation represent two complementary methodologies, with Africanisation implying transformation by cultural, social, and spiritual insights derived from Africa. It will appraise the concept of Africanised practical theology current trends in the application of African theological principles, and the potential of Africanised practical theology to inform the contemporary practice of Christian ministry. This research will examine the implications of Africanised practical theology for both African and international Christian communities, demonstrating the potential of Africanised practical theology to contribute to a more holistic and culturally relevant approach to Christian ministry.

Practical Theology in Africa places a strong emphasis on lived religion, or living a life of faith, rather than on intellectual or disciplinary reflection (Ward, 2017). The shifting nature and inclusivity of the contemporary African identity, which transcends race and incorporates an

increasingly comprehensive, contextual, and narratively driven understanding, should also be noted (Schoeman, Laubsher, Pali, & Berg, 2012). The focus is on practice rather than reflection and identity. It is important to hear the voices of theologies that originate from Africa or find fertile ground there, as they are often the voices of marginalised and underrepresented stories. Practical Theology in Africa should focus on listening to these voices from the fringes to gain a more comprehensive understanding of African religious thought, identity, and reality. To undertake to gain such understanding reveals the cultural, social, and spiritual insights of African people and can be used to inform the practice of Christian ministry. Western and Eurocentric religious frames of reference deserve to be revisited to expose and impart relevant and authentic reflections of Afrocentric religiosity (Yountae, 2020). Hence, a review of Indigenous faith systems and values necessitate an exploration of endemic African spiritual proclivities, linguistic conceptions, and societal preferences.

Noting that Practical Theology in Africa has tended to leave a conceptualisation vacuum: the basic question that emerges is: what is Practical Theology in Africa? African-centred religiosity is reflective of a discernible orientation and ethos premised on a holistic epistemology that does not separate the sacred and the profane (Nwoye, 2022). The pretermission of the Indigenous religious terrain occasioned in the infiltration of Western theology that sought to subvert and validate itself without recognising African culture, whose identity was deemed as deficient. Muzorewa (1985) indicates that: ‘Theology must, to establish and preserve the identity of the African people, resist any tendencies toward domination and dehumanisation’ (Muzorewa, 1985, p. 99).

Religiosity may be understood as a cultural undertaking that seeks to recognise the spiritual. This not only presupposes religious inclinations as a way of life for a people; at least in some form or another, but that no people could have survived or continue to do so without any social organisation, belief system, philosophy or even history. Arguably, to consider a society without a culture or assign lowliness to that culture; offers a posture that deprives different worldviews of their contextual expression. Beidelman (1982) states that: “The most poignant and destructive aspect of evangelism in Africa was the missionaries’ failure to appreciate fully the integrated

quality of traditional African life” (1982, p. 25). The preferred European modes of religiosity in engaging African spiritual value systems inferred the alteration or rejection of predefined Indigenous practices which were reckoned essential for existence. One may construe those European efforts were not utterly accepted and their alternatives signified complexities within Indigenous culture.

Interestingly, Ikenye's work highlights the necessity of embracing indigenous viewpoints in frameworks for leadership, particularly in light of Africanised practical theology, that accords priority to lived religion and voices from underrepresented groups (Ikenye, 2010). His focus on servant leadership, which underlines the value of humility, service, and community involvement, is in line with the Africanised approach. Raising leaders who are capable of putting servant leadership concepts into practice in a useful and efficient way requires the synthesis of academic and biblical training. In addition to addressing local challenges and fostering cultural growth, this training ought to be critical, practical, pastoral, and specifically designed for the African setting. Through the integration of Africanised practical theology into Christian ministry, this approach not only strengthens individual leadership capacities but also ensures that leadership practices are grounded in biblical teachings and the cultural realities of African contexts.

2.3.1 The Postcolonial Context of Practical Theology in (South) Africa

The mid-1950s saw the emergence of postcolonial African theology, a pivotal intellectual and spiritual response to colonialism. It was stimulated by prior movements such as Négritude, which elevated black identity and endeavoured to reclaim African tradition and culture. Postcolonial African theology, which aims to demolish colonial conceptions and redefine Christianity to address freedom and social justice, is distinguished by its momentary and conceptual attributes. It integrates precolonial, postcolonial, and futuristic components (Maluleke & de Jong-Kumru, 2020). The focus is on critical hermeneutics, which guarantees the relevance of theological interpretations. This theology advocates for a thorough knowledge of Christianity in Africa that

goes beyond traditional theological texts by highlighting the significance of African literary and artistic mediums in offering insightful theological critiques and insights.

In South Africa, the postcolonial context of practical theology is complex and multifaceted, reflecting the country's diverse history of colonialism and apartheid (Dames & Dames, 2014). This context has shaped the emergence of deviant healing practices, which are often seen as challenging established religious and cultural norms. These practices have arisen in response to the social and political conditions of South African society and are deeply rooted in the lived experiences of those affected by colonialism and apartheid. Through the study of deviant healing practices in the postcolonial context, we can gain a better understanding of the role that practical theology plays in contemporary South African society.

Postcolonialism can also be defined as the way in which race, ethnicity, culture, and human identity itself are represented in the modern era. Hermeneutically, postcolonial approaches to religiosity stand to offer a bridge between varying African theological perspectives, as well as the resultant theological strategies. Notably, coloniality did not take kindly to the role of 'Indigenous forms' in theology and Christian spiritual practice, it was either avoided or prohibited (Elsdörfer, 2019). Postcolonialism emphasises culture, which is an important aspect of religion, it further portrays how identity and representation are integral. Lartey (2003) asserts that theological inclinations inherent to Christian faith and Christianity are founded in Indigenous cultures idiosyncratic to Africa; they do not adhere to colonial traditions. Hence, a question about praxis and hermeneutics is raised and the issue of hermeneutical privilege. As such, postcolonialism denotes a kind of transformative confrontation to one-sided and discriminatory forms of colonial practices (Travis, 2014). It is concerned with issues of how the knowledge and or practices of the colonised were destabilised and subsequently constructed in a way that served to disadvantage the colonised.

Postcolonialism may be construed as a methodological paradigm for exploring, interpreting, and scrutinising colonial cultural and even religious practices (Fitzgerald, 2016). Postcolonial criticism has not gained prominence as a method for approaching and critiquing the Bible, although its application has advantages also within South Africa's post-apartheid society. Postcolonial

criticism elucidates on the sometimes deliberate, prejudiced, and sinister reasoning and its subtleties, behind which colonial conceptions of the Indigenous populace were constructed (Alfaisal, 2011). It illustrates the coloniser's epistemic distortion of the African people and culture; further implying a ramification on how Africans should interpret religious expression.

Postcolonial criticism seeks to challenge the notion of the colonised as constructed by colonialism. It reveals the inaccurate and incomplete nature of the colonial representation of the people and cultures encountered and offers a more nuanced understanding of their experience. By exposing the false assumptions and preconceptions of colonialism, postcolonial criticism provides an alternative perspective to re-examine and re-evaluate the history of colonisation (Parashar & Schulz, 2021). This discourse also provides a critique of the hegemony and power dynamic that is implicit in many of the conversations between nations and cultures. It highlights the way in which dominant nations and cultures often impose their will on the less powerful, thus creating an unequal relationship. It also draws attention to the ways in which global relations are often shaped by a narrow and outdated worldview, one that does not consider the diverse perspectives and realities of other cultures. By bringing to light these issues, this discourse works to challenge the status quo and open a space for more equitable and inclusive dialogue. Postcolonial criticism is an important field of study that focuses on the effects of colonisation on the personhood of the colonised (Lartey, 2022). Its objective is to create a space for decolonising the thought, theory, and practice of colonised experience. This process is necessary to counteract the pervasive and often pernicious power of colonialism that has been embedded in the cultural landscape. Through postcolonial criticism, the voices of the colonised can be heard and the unique perspectives of the colonised can be acknowledged and respected. Analyses of the experiences of those who were colonised by other nations recognise and give worth to their humanity, while at the same time reinforcing the ability of these people to create their own identities. To generate a new consciousness and new orientation to life for the future, it is necessary to re-appropriate, validate, and apply subjugated knowledge (Ramsay, 2018, p. 82).

Postcolonialism looks at narrative and literary representations that are focused on the effects and influence of European cultural impositions. Literally, it refers to the period after colonialism or after independence. According to Duncan (2014) postcolonialism refers to the ‘writing and reading practices grounded in some form of colonial experience occurring outside Europe but because of European expansion and exploitation of the other worlds’ (2014, p. 2). The word ‘postcolonial’ has come to describe modern history of imperialism, colonialism, the struggle for independence, the attainment of independence from the colonial domination and the present neo-colonialist realities (Abraham, 2020).

The notion of religion as a manoeuvre is in essence a device formulated by imperialism. Hence, postcolonial religion necessitates a delicate and profound look at the phenomena that follows and is developed from the previous phenomena, which in the South African case may be connected to domination, abuse, prejudice, and hegemonic agenda. The development of African Theology may be construed as a response to the early Western missionaries and some Western Theologians who pressed for the eradication of any pre-Christian African customs (Sakupapa, 2018). The trajectory of religious praxis in postcolonial contexts has been unpredictably complex. In turn, this has activated the emergence of diverse religious challenges, which have culminated in the perception of religion as a problematic phenomenon or an institution whose social agenda is found wanting.

The following is what Bigger (2009) says in connection with this:

Ethno-spirituality starts with the assumption that Indigenous peoples were not ignorant savages but potentially wise within their level of knowledge. Missionary accounts obfuscate the picture as they were out of their intellectual and cultural depth and were indoctrinated into a hegemonic view of the value of Western Christianity. Over two centuries they subtly interfered with Indigenous beliefs so we cannot posit a historic pure African pre-Christian faith. Lack of scientific education and knowledge encouraged elemental speculations about ourselves, the environment, weather, and heavens which over time would have adapted to new knowledge. Our task is to re-evaluate this traditional wisdom without Christian or colonial assumptions. (2009, p. 2)

The muddying of Indigenous religious conceptualisations is an imperative reflection that exposes the conscious spiritual clampdown by European hegemony. The concept of postcolonialism highlights cultural concerns of fundamental importance in African Theology/Christianity, which pertain to identity, representation, and ideological agendas as they engage colonialism and its repercussions. South African postcolonial history is one interwoven with the past of imperialism, struggles for liberation, and present-day neocolonial realities.

According to Magezi (2019a) Practical Theology in Africa presents an approach to theology that seeks to understand and live out a life of faith within a black and geographically African context. It is about grasping, articulating, and expressing an Indigenous worldview. By engaging holistic African situations, the theology transcends Western reaction and reference. Practical theology is characterised by the reflection on how to live, contemplate, and to communicate God within a postcolonial African context that is constantly changing (Magezi, 2019).

Other than being socially located, a postcolonial outlook signifies that variance between races, genders, religions, nations of the world, and their values does not necessarily mean inferiority (Rai, 2013). This theory fosters its substance on past prejudices, cultural disparities, and political inequalities that were implemented through colonial and imperial apparatuses. It develops a phenomenon of hybridisation which entails a dialectal relationship between the blending of Western cultural systems and Indigenous ontologies, which bring about new socio-economic and religious identities (Drabinski, 2019).

African religious orientations still bear the imprints of colonial ideologies. In this context, studying religion and religious practices under postcolonialism is an attempt to clarify the possibilities and constraints associated with religion and religious dialogue. Even in contemporary religious spaces, imperial principles, patterns, and philosophies subtly and even possibly inadvertently shape contemporary religiosity, positively or negatively, to the extent of influencing postcolonial identities (Mongia, 2021). Hence, a biblical hermeneutic that captures the Indigenous African

imagination, or at least produce an alternative trajectory for reading the biblical text, must unmask the structures of coloniality that destabilise the African imagination (Adamo, 2015).

In defining a postcolonial world, one stands to be deceived into thinking the systems of imperialism have been totally dismantled. The structures of the colonial agenda still have their foothold and decoloniality is a necessary factor (Mashau, 2018). However, the process of decoloniality, particularly in the aspect of religiosity, runs the risk of repurposing Euro-Western ideals within an Indigenous identity and thereby destroy their own mission and identity. There is a possibility of changing the name to African without changing the substance. Without rethinking biblical hermeneutics from the vantage point of colonial hegemony, or from the perspective of the underside of modernity, the content will remain the same.

The development of Euro-Western hermeneutical practices in Africa was heavily influenced by colonial-apartheid era White African biblical scholars (Arowolo, 2010). Africans' minds were not colonised through voluntary means; but it was done through brutality during the period of colonial dominance. Africans were put through the experience of having their cultures and knowledge systems subverted and coerced into espousing the coloniser's philosophical distinction between the primitive Western mind, and the civilised Western mind (Kaya & Seleti, 2013).

2.3.2 Religious Care Dimensions in an African Context

Religious communities are a major point of access for people seeking redemption from human suffering, including diverse illnesses which may not be limited to the physical or emotional. Religion and healthcare have collaborated for ages, but the advent of science seems to have developed a chasm between the two (Koenig, 2012). Spirituality continues to assume the role of a bridge which helps people maintain health and cope with illnesses, traumas, losses, and life transitions. Rumun (2014) proffers that there are four perceptible ways in which religion influences health, and these include: health behaviours, social support, psychological states, and 'psi'

influences. Rumun explains “psi” as natural laws governing 'energies' not currently understandable by science, however one day may become comprehensible.

In the African context, a person is understood to be in perpetual interchange with their community and the supernatural world, each of which exerts a distinct influence on the individual (Kpanake, 2018). In other words, throughout their existence, their experiences are interwoven into the network of relationships, where harmony is expected to be maintained between them and their environment. Disturbances to this balance are deemed to cause ill health. Spiritual or religious care is deemed an imperative; hence, it takes on new phases and meaning in this spectrum.

This study contends that the cultural ontology of the African worldview poses a challenge in the development of a hermeneutical framework through which to examine the intricate network of relationships (Speckman, 2016). European missionary activism in Africa should have offered more appropriate responses to the religious concerns and healthcare need of the African populace. This would have allowed for religious expressions that imparted religious care suited for the cultural beliefs and hopes of Africans. There are several supernatural perceptions and experiences associated with sickness and suffering in Africa, and a religious practitioner may be required to interpret God through these supernatural perceptions (Kahissay, Fenta, & Boon, 2017). Therefore, one must be able to understand the nuances of this worldview to make effective religious diagnoses and do effective religious care.

African practices of coping are embedded in the realm of community practices. The family or the community walks the journey with the person in distress through rituals and sacrifices. A number of discernible ways are used in the practice of religious care in many parts of Africa. The ways emerge organically in response to the spiritual needs of people. These approaches are applicable according to a variety of factors which may include one's religious background, their problems, their position in their families, their distance from their extended family, and their age.

The process of providing spiritual and religious support to individuals is called religious care, which is typically provided by religious or spiritual leaders. From a Christian perspective, religious care and counselling embraces the provision of pastoral care, which involves offering spiritual, psychological, and emotional support to individuals through active listening, compassionate care, and prayer. It is focused on helping individuals to find peace and joy in their lives by addressing their spiritual needs and helping them to develop a deeper relationship with God. It is also concerned with helping individuals to make decisions based on their faith and to live a life in accordance with their values.

Throughout the years, pastoral care (*cura animarum*) has been shaped by the necessity to formulate inventive solutions to address people's situational issues (Magezi, 2019). This study looks at the idea of pastoral care (*cura animarum*) as a Christian spiritual concept that looks at the entire individual rather than just one part, as the basis for its framework. It suggests that pastoral care practices and approaches in Africa have been developed in reaction to the cultural dynamics of Christianity's interaction with the African population. The present-day challenge of connecting, enacting, and leading a genuine African Christian lifestyle has emerged and continues to be a source of difficulty in finding meaning in life.

Religious care encountered through the lens of a Christian outlook embraces the form of pastoral care and counselling (Doehring, 2014). Despite its short and illustrative history, pastoral care and counselling in Africa continues to be an integral part of congregational life and community growth. It is an inclusive, broad-based ministry of mutual healing and growth. A pastoral care setting, then, is a means of developing people's skills to cope with their problems and crises by using a combination of healing methods.

A significant part of pastoral care in Africa is devoted to the relationship between illness, misfortune, and sins; the role of spirits in community life; and the philosophy of life as an overall experience (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2015). A substantial amount of attention seems to be paid to healing, spirituality, spirits, ancestors, and community matters. Pastoral care in this context has come to rely on these aspects, since African people's lives are rooted in them, however, they lack the capacity to deal with modern challenges in a technologically advanced and modern Africa.

A very real challenge Africa faces is being positioned between modernity and traditional patterns of life, a problem that is not adequately addressed. It carries with it the problems of pastoral care components embedded in Western theological discourse which carries several deficiencies and thus creating a pastoral care vacuum. There is a need to forge appropriate practical theology methodologies that offer pastoral cares for the sick and counselling that communicates meaning through culturally derived symbols which Africans perceive as reality (Motsi & Masango, 2012).

Magezi (2016) purports that most of Africa's churches practice pastoral ministry in at least seven distinct ways and this is due to contextualised pastoral needs. It should also be noted that they are diverse, yet interconnected and related. Magezi further indicates that these entail the following: mixing African traditional practices and Christian pastoral care practices, an approach that draws a dichotomy between Christian values and practical life, agonising and alienating Christianity, focus on formation of family and community coping with support structures, family group enrichment, exorcism and healing, and finally position reversal or abandoning the Christian faith and its approaches to care and adopt a traditional African approach.

2.4 PRACTICAL THEOLOGICAL APPRAISAL OF FAITH/RELIGIOUS/DIVINE HEALING AND CARE PRACTICES

Practical theological appraisal of faith, religious, and divine healing and care practices is a complex endeavour that requires a comprehensive understanding of diverse religious and faith-based perspectives (Hamlyn, 2015). It involves analysing and evaluating the efficacy of different forms of spiritual healing and care, such as prayer, meditation, and ritual, to better understand how these practices may be used to enhance physical and emotional wellbeing. In addition, it involves critically examining the various ethical, social, and cultural implications of such practices, and how they intersect with contemporary healthcare and social service provision. Ultimately, practical theological appraisal of faith, religious, and divine healing and care practices provides a much-

needed bridge between traditional faith-based approaches and modern scientific and medical models of health and healing (Sharpley & Kaunda, 2020).

Healing is a central aspect of many individuals' relationship with God in the modern Church, both physical and emotional. African communities place a strong emphasis on religious healing, with faith communities playing a significant role in the search for wellness (Bosire, Cele, Potelwa, Cho, & Mendenhall, 2022). This practice is not unique to Africa but is commonly found in African Independent Churches (AICs). As a result, pastoral care is a crucial aspect of a minister's role within the congregation. Several congregants in Africa attend worship services primarily for healing.

Cultural and social illness have often been attributed to supernatural causes throughout history. Commonly believed causes include angered spirits, witchcraft, and alien/evil spirits (Ozioma & Chinwe, 2019). Even today, when medical science has a thorough understanding of conditions like diabetes, these conditions may be attributed to supernatural causes in some communities. In the Western world, the concept of curing and healing is often based on the idea that physical dysfunction is the source of an individual's illness. This idea is deeply embedded in our culture, where health is viewed as the absence of physical or mental illness, and the goal of treatment is to return a person to a state of wellbeing (Gurung, 2019). Healthcare practitioners strive to use a variety of treatments to restore balance and harmony to the body, mind, and spirit, allowing individuals to recover and heal from illness. It is likely that a different explanation for illness may be in place in contexts where this distinction between curing and healing is unknown or not understood well.

In African society, illness is viewed differently from the allopathic Western medicine perspective. A person's illness can be attributed to a natural, cultural, or social cause (Ozioma & Chinwe, 2019). The traditional African view of human nature emphasises the physical, spiritual, moral, and social components. If any of these three aspects fail to work in harmony, it signifies sickness, while if any of these aspects work in harmony, it means good health. As such, treating someone with a

disease may include aiding his or her physical well-being as well as addressing spiritual, moral, and social issues.

In African traditional beliefs, the human being is composed of physical, spiritual, moral, and social aspects, and good health is achieved when these aspects are in balance. Illness, on the other hand, is seen because of imbalances in one or more of these aspects. Traditional medical practitioners take a holistic approach to treating illness, addressing not only the physical aspect but also the spiritual, moral, and social components (Adom, Hussein, & Agyem, 2018). This may include faith healing, therapeutic occultism, and other practices. They may also be skilled in various medical procedures such as circumcision, tribal marks, and surgery. Additionally, traditional beliefs recognise that illness can also be emotional, and healing is often seen as an integral part of one's relationship with God in the modern Church. Although African traditional religion is not against Western medicine, some followers believe that there are some diseases that Western medicine cannot treat and that require spiritual attention.

2.4.1 Defining religious healing practices

Healing is a process towards health; mentally, physically, and spiritually that results in meaningful changes and a sense of wholeness. Religious healing practices involve the use of spiritual methods to restore physical, mental, and emotional health. These practices often draw upon the belief that an individual's spiritual or religious beliefs can be used to improve their overall health (Dein, 2020). The connection between religion and healing, while emphasising an anthropological concept of healing, is also seen in the early church. The early church later sanctioned faith healing through such practices as anointing and the laying of hands. Religious healing practices have been associated with other religious traditions, including shamanism and spiritism. Common methods of religious healing include prayer, faith healing, meditation, and rituals such as anointing (South & McDowell, 2018). Additionally, religious healing can involve the use of various physical techniques and rituals.

Practical theology as an interdisciplinary field of scholarly inquiry examines the relationship between religious practices, beliefs, and the contexts in which they are situated. Practical Theology explores how religious practices, such as liturgy, inform and shape the lived experiences of individuals and communities (Graham, 2013). Within this context, liturgy is an important form of ritual practice that helps to shape and define a group's collective identity. Additionally, deviance theory provides a useful framework for examining the relationship between liturgical practices and their potential implications. Deviance theory helps to explain the ways in which liturgical practices can become a source of resistance and innovation within a community, as well as the consequences of such practices. Rituals play a significant role in the healing process in traditional African setting. Rituals are ideal formats for transmitting religious ideas through religion and religious practices (Beyers, 2017). It is consistent with findings that collective rituals are ubiquitous and ancient; no culture is devoid of them. There has, in fact, been little research that describes how, at the level of cognitive processing, specific aspects of ritual affect participants' ability to establish collective beliefs.

Healing is a holistic, personal process that involves the repair and recovery of the mind, body, and spirit. It is multidimensional and goes beyond just addressing a physical problem. It involves understanding the patient as a whole person and achieving balance in various dimensions such as physical, emotional, mental, social, or spiritual. Healing is different from curing, which only addresses the physical or mental aspect of a disease (Szawarska, 2015). In some cultural contexts, the concept of disease as a cause of illness is different from Western perspectives and the distinction between curing and healing may not be applicable. The study of healing rituals, such as those performed by African Neo/Pentecostal churches, aims to understand their intention and meaning, rather than comparing them. The purpose and function of rituals can be evaluated based on their intention and implication.

Religious healing practices are generally rooted in the belief that physical and mental health are closely linked to spiritual wellbeing, and that healing must be sought on both spiritual and physical levels (Božek, Nowak, & Blukacz, 2020). They involve the use of prayer and gestures that are

believed by some to elicit divine intervention in spiritual and physical healing. Religious communities have reported positive experiences based on religious healing practices, however, there have also been instances where such practices have been characterised by morally objectionable behaviour (Punt, 2017). A concerning issue about these practices is that it can delay or prevent people from seeking medical treatment. This can be particularly risky for serious illnesses such as cancer, where early treatment can greatly increase the chances of survival. In some cases, people who rely solely on faith healing may not seek medical attention until it is too late, and their condition has become irreversible. Another concern is that some religious practitioners may not have the necessary training or qualifications to diagnose and treat illnesses. They may also use unscientific or harmful methods, such as exorcisms or fasting, which can have dangerous consequences (Forsyth, 2022).

Additionally, faith healers may take advantage of vulnerable people by charging exorbitant fees for their services or convincing them to give away their possessions. In some cases, religious practitioners may also be involved in fraud or other illegal activities. Religious healing practices may lead to a lack of accountability (Oakley, 2013). In some jurisdictions, faith healers may not be held responsible for the harm caused to their patients. People harmed by religious healing practices may not know their legal rights or may be afraid to speak out because of social stigmatisation. Religious healing practices can be beneficial for some individuals, it can also be harmful if not used appropriately (Peprah, et al., 2018). It is important for people to be aware of the risks of faith healing and to seek medical attention when necessary. Faith healers should also be held accountable for any harm caused to their patients.

2.4.2 Neo-Pentecostal/Charismatic Healing Ritual Practices

Pentecostal/Charismatic healing ritual practices are deeply rooted in both natural and supernatural explanations and are premised on the belief that divine intervention is necessary to cure physical, spiritual, and psychological ailments (Mercer, 2013). Pentecostal/Charismatic healing ritual practices often involve the laying on of hands, prayer, and the speaking of tongues. These rituals

are often accompanied by intense feelings of emotion and spiritual ecstasy and by engaging in these rituals, adherents seek to bring about a restoration of harmony and balance in their lives and to experience a deeper connection to the divine. The concept of spiritual healing has always been part of the heritage of Christianity, and various Christian traditions and renewal movements have differed by their belief in and approval of biomedicine, herbal treatments, and other forms of spiritual healing (Kpobi & Swartz, 2018).

Charismatic ministries have emerged as a new manifestation of prophetism in contemporary African Christianity. These ministries are largely Neo/Pentecostal in their theological orientation and are characterised by a literalist interpretation of the Bible, over-spiritualisation of issues, and a strong focus on success and fulfilment in life (Adedibu & Igboin, 2019). They are also heavily reliant on symbols such as anointing oil for healing and deliverance. Neo-prophetic ministries are considered pro-existential, meaning they are focused on helping people deal with the challenges of living and are often presented as a survival strategy to people facing life's crises (Ramantswana, 2019).

Africa has witnessed rapid growth in Christianity, driven primarily by Indigenous Pentecostal churches, which continue to emphasise healing and exorcism in their teachings (Kgatlé, 2018). A noteworthy phenomenon of Christianity in modern Africa is the growth of independent churches which are broken off from mission Churches. However, there are some churches and movements which have been established by Africans without any trace of breakaway from a mission Church. In Africa, most theological meditations on healing are centred around the Church's mission and its role as a healing place, or Christ's identity as the ultimate healer (Akanbi & Beyers, 2017).

Southern Africa is home to a range of health discourses which have a significant influence on people's ideas and beliefs about health and healing (Sodi, et al., 2011). These discourses, which include traditional healing practices, religious beliefs, and various forms of alternative and complementary medicine, are deeply entrenched in the culture and history of the region. While there is a strong emphasis on the importance of physical health, mental and emotional wellbeing

are also considered essential components of overall health and wellness. These health discourses provide a framework for understanding how to maintain health and healing and are thus highly influential in the region. A multi-disciplinary approach is essential when considering healing and religion in Africa because of the various health traditions and practices present in different socio-cultural contexts (Nkomo, 2017). African traditional communities have long used communal healing rituals to bring comfort, support, and acceptance to those experiencing difficult times. These rituals often involve specific preparations and activities that encourage group participation and mutual care. Pastoral healing, meanwhile, is a spiritual and faith-based approach to healing, which can offer an alternative perspective on how to cope with and resolve difficult situations (Louw, 2017). This approach can involve counselling, prayer, and meditation, and often encourages individuals to look inward to find their own inner strength and healing. Pastoral and African healing can be integrated to create a holistic approach to healing that meets the needs of individuals and communities (Rensburg, 2010). This approach can include counselling and prayer, as well as communal activities that encourage support and acceptance of one another, such as music, singing, and dancing.

The recent emergence of African Pentecostal churches has been accompanied by a significant increase in the prevalence of controversial healing practices (Pondani, 2019). These practices contrast with the primary focus of these churches on ministry of healing. This discrepancy between the two forms of healing has been a cause for concern in recent years, as such practices could have potentially hazardous consequences for those involved. African Pentecostal healing rituals seek to symbolically create a connection between the divine and the physical world to heal physical and spiritual ailments (Lartey, 2013a). Furthermore, the rituals involve the use of prayer and other corporeal devices. These rituals are believed to draw on traditional African healing practices, and the symbolic structure is used to bridge the gap between the divine and the physical world, as well as to bring the spiritual and physical realms into harmony (Mayfield, 2018). The deeper contradictions that are addressed through African Pentecostal healing rituals include the tensions between traditional and modern healing practices, and between the spiritual and physical realms.

African Independent churches have a variety of ways to organise healing services, but they all aim to evoke emotions before healing (Ngoya, 2021). This is achieved through music, dance, and prayer, with more participation from all present than in charismatic-Pentecostal churches. This reflects the communal and participatory nature of African traditional culture and its ritual forms. Arguably, healing may be offered in two main ways: through interpersonal encounters between patient and healer, and through group encounters where belonging, affirmation, and worldview are the main dimensions of healing (Modiko, 2011). Psychological understandings of religious healing suggest that emotion transaction is a central feature of the process, with healing being concerned with replacing negative feelings with positive ones. Religious healing often creates emotion-charged environments through music, dance, preaching, and other cultural mechanisms, or through meditation, counselling, and prayer.

The religious practitioner or healer is experienced in leading the patient through the process of emotion transaction and uses whatever emotional atmosphere they think will be most effective. African Pentecostal preachers practice a mix of communicative and uncommunicative healing rituals, such as the use of oil (Dube, 2019). The effectiveness of these rituals can be determined by their symbolic structure and how they address incongruities in the human state.

2.4.3 African Traditional Healing Approaches

It is essential to examine African beliefs, culture, and religion on topics of health, disease, and illness causation if one seeks to understand healing in African cultures, particularly in South Africa. As such, healing within African culture cannot be understood without also taking into consideration the worldview of the African people. Unlike many Western health systems, African health systems are multifaceted, focusing both on biological approaches to disease arising from the body as well as culture-bound illnesses that are learned from understanding specific cultural histories (Chukwuneke, Ezeonu, Onyire, & Ezeonu, 2012). It is important to note that diseases and treatments are identified, assessed, and classified differently in African health systems. The

physical environment and access to Western medicine, as well as level of literacy and access to Western medicine are all variables that have a profound impact on African health systems.

African traditional healing approaches are rooted in the diverse set of spiritual practices that are rooted in the cultural and spiritual beliefs of various Indigenous groups on the continent. These approaches often involve the use of plant-based remedies, spiritual rituals, and divination practices to diagnose and treat illnesses (Sobiecki, 2014). They continue to be a prevalent aspect of many parts of Africa, particularly in rural areas, where they are deeply ingrained in the culture, identity, and heritage of the people and often coexist with Christianity.

In African traditional healing and religious approaches, animism is a key element in the diagnosis and treatment of illnesses. African Christianity and animism, the belief in the presence of spirits in the natural world, have a complex relationship (Bowie, 2021). In many parts of Africa, Christianity was introduced by European colonisers and missionaries, and it has since been adopted and adapted by many African communities. However, many African Christians continue to practice traditional animistic beliefs and rituals, blending them with elements of Christianity to create a unique syncretic faith (Peoples, Duda, & Marlowe, 2016). One example of this is the way in which many African Christians continue to propitiate or appease spirits through offerings, sacrifices, and other forms of worship, even though Christianity teaches that there is only one God. Similarly, many African Christians continue to use divination practices to diagnose and treat illnesses, even though Christianity teaches that faith in God is enough to bring about healing.

While Christianity traditionally emphasises the power of God to heal, many African Christians still believe in traditional healers, or *nanga*¹, to diagnose and treat illnesses (Mabuza, 2018). By providing a different perspective on the spiritual realm and the power of spirits, the spread of Christianity has helped to a certain degree, reduce their fear of spirit possession (Nel, 2019). The traditional belief in spirits is still strong, however, with many Africans continuing to rely on

¹ A term that refers to a spiritual healer or traditional health practitioner in Tshivenda (Sigida S. T., 2022).

traditional religious practitioners to diagnose and treat physical and spiritual ailments. Christianity has provided a conduit between the modern and the traditional, allowing people to benefit from both a traditional and a modern approach to healthcare. Many African Christians blend elements of both belief systems to create a unique syncretic faith (Mokhoathi, 2017). Christianity has been able to provide a different perspective on the spiritual realm, while animism continues to play a central role in understanding the natural world and the power of spirits.

2.5 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter addressed the particular challenges presented by deviant healing methods in Ṭhohoyandou and guarantees that the research is rigorous and pertinent to the setting by building a solid theoretical framework. The chapter's theoretical frameworks—Ritual Healing Theory, Deviance Theory, and Osmer's Model—provide insightful understandings of the characteristics of deviant healing practices. Osmer's model offers a systematic method to practical theology, facilitating the interpretation and practical application of findings. While deviance theory explains why some activities are considered deviant and their effects on individuals and societies, ritual healing theory clarifies the role that rituals play in the practice of healing.

By fusing theoretical insights with real-world issues, the chapter provides an adequate foundation for the scrutiny that will follow, ensuring that the study's methodology will continue to be both contextually relevant and scientifically sound.

CHAPTER 3

AFRICAN RELIGIOUS HERMENEUTICS OF CHRISTIAN PRACTICE

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 3 expands on the previous chapter's theoretical framework by examining how African Christians perceive and practice their faith. The chapter assesses the cultural ontology of the African worldview and endeavours to explore the various challenges and opportunities presented by the application of African religious hermeneutics in Christian praxis. It then delves into the distinctive qualities of contemporary religious movements before surveying healing practices in Thohoyandou's contemporary religious movements. In essence, it analyses how African religious hermeneutics impact and mould Christian practice in Africa, with a focus on healing. African religious hermeneutics of Christian practice poses a distinct method of interpreting scripture and theology that draws on the diverse cultural heritage of the African continent and its people (Nel M. , 2018; Lartey E. , 2013a). This approach recognises the unique perspectives and experiences of African communities and seeks to integrate them into Christian teachings and practices. It continues to develop and seeks to bring the African cultural perspective to Christian practice and emphasises the importance of communal interpretation, allowing multiple voices to contribute to the understanding of scripture and theology. African religious hermeneutics of Christian practice also emphasises the value of contextualisation, enabling believers to apply ancient scripture to modern life (Mburu, 2019). Moreover, to interpret biblical texts considering African traditions and values. By considering the cultural values, beliefs, and practices of African people, a hermeneutical approach allows for a deeper and more meaningful interpretation of scripture and theology.

According to Mburu, beneath the cover of African elements, African hermeneutics is really a colonial epistemology. Even with its fragile appropriation of African aesthetics, the method is viewed as inherently colonial since it upholds a framework that rejects alternative viewpoints and asserts itself as the exclusive source of truth (Mburu, 2019). Despite its goal of addressing the

problem of divided lives in Africa, this kind of dichotomy is not exclusive to African contexts but rather a global problem.

3.2 THE CULTURAL ONTOLOGY OF THE AFRICAN WORLDVIEW

The patterns of any culture infer the sum of norms and practices of a people. It must be noted, more purposely, that the non-material aspects of culture have bearing on the portrayal of approaches to change and the challenges of adjustment which diverge towards certain religious inclinations. Culture signifies values that constitute an identity and according to Idang (2015) culture can be considered and appraised under the “ethical aspect of value theory” (2015 , p. 102). Ellwood argues that the explicit aspects of culture may be understood from actual behaviour in the conventions and institutions of that culture (Afolabi, 2010).

Haviland (1990) explains that:

Recent definitions [of culture] tend to distinguish more clearly between actual behaviour, on the one hand, and the abstract values, beliefs, and perceptions of the world that lie behind that behaviour on the other (1990, p. 30).

In other words, culture refers to common ideas, values, and conventions that influence behaviour within a group or community. These profoundly established features of culture shape behaviour and serve as the lens through which individuals interpret their experiences and make sense of the world. Interestingly, a broad look at the notion of culture offers latent understanding of distinct characteristics of a particular society and poses a basis for interpreting transmitted thinking, feeling, and reacting precepts that shape their religiosity (Samovar, Porter, McDaniel, & Roy, 2016).

The transmission and formation of cultural content and patterns of values, ideas, and other symbolic-meaningful systems have an impact on human behaviour (Creanza, Kolodny, & Feldman, 2017). The line between culture and religion is a thin one. Various variables contribute

to the thin line, and these may include the interconnected nature of culture and religion, the effect of culture on religious practices and beliefs, and the diversity of faiths and civilisations across the world (Hunt, 2003). For instance, Christianity has been adapted to local cultural customs and beliefs, resulting in distinctive varieties of Christianity that differ from Christianity practiced elsewhere. Since culture and religion tend to foster one another, it thus becomes essential to also consider the subject of subjective and objective culture. Subjective culture pertains to that which is in the human mind and objective culture applies to an external outcome of human activity (Vásquez, 2020).

Concentrating on the covert elements of objective culture exposes institutions such as marriage systems, laws, including inheritance systems, taboos, etc., and political or religious bodies (Minkov, 2013). An interplay of culture and socialisation perpetuates the internalisation of responses and reactions of the immediate cultural setting, which in turn impels the religious socialisation that stimulates individual religiosity. Religious socialisation is instrumental in transmitting and reinforcing certain spiritual explanations and preferences (Sherkat, 2003). This appraisal is endorsed by Klingenberg and Sjö when they highlight their findings by defining religious socialisation as: ‘the process in which an individual comes to hold preferences in relation to dimensions understood as religious in the surrounding context’ (2019, p. 174). In other words, the adoption of customs and abstract systems of the surrounding culture has psychological implications that not only influence religiosity but provide a means to co-opt and intuitively interpret normative structures.

3.2.1 African Traditional World

To comprehend cultural frameworks, one needs to recognise the meanings associated with a particular culture. Hence, context is not only integral but serves to represent a reality and ideas that are not directly accessible. However, this reality and ideas may be inferred from language or practices and thereby be observed and analysed. A look at religious socialisation requires a more culture-informed approach that reflects on culture-related differences between religious beliefs and

practices, in addition to this, one must further delve into how cultural constructs impress on religiosity in different ways (Klingenberg & Sjö, 2019). It is important to note that culture and religious socialisation are processes with varying elements that raise diverse difficulties in the survey of contemporary perceptions of religiosity.

Through epistemological conditioning, the Indigenous populace was made to reject their own institutions, knowledge systems, and thereby view them as primitive. Through systematic suppression, African means for generating knowledge and meaning, culture and beliefs were suppressed. In addition to imposing their own forms of knowledge and knowledge production, colonialists oppressed indigenes (Steinmetz, 2014). The colonials further incorporated some of the colonised into the colonial system through the seduction of selective teaching.

African thought is importantly different in essence and origin from Western ontology (Ekanem, 2012). The traditional standards that have historically reinforced the distinctive behavioural traits of the African psyche continue to shape the frames of reference around it, supplying the reasoning behind its culture, worldview, and religion. An Africentric framework is based on the idea that Africans have a distinct cultural legacy and viewpoint that should be recognised and appreciated (Grills, 2007). This paradigm strives to recover and honour African cultural traditions, values, and beliefs while challenging Eurocentric patterns of thought that have dominated many elements of Western civilisation (Monteiro-Ferreira, 2014). It is worthwhile to acknowledge that an Africentric worldview is one that is informed by Indigenous African culture (Graham & Al-Krenawi, 2003). Despite external intrusions which included European and Arab penetration into the historical landscape of the continent, African culture, worldview, and religiosity have found ways to not only continue in existence but preserve a level of consistency. Thabede suggests that because African worldviews have traditionally been neglected and underrepresented, it is possible that many Africans employ both traditional or African and Western psychological therapy approaches to address mental health difficulties (Thabede, 2008). In essence, the concepts of culture, worldview and religion are interrelated. A worldview reflects the ideas that are used by a particular society to survive within that particular social order. A religion on the other hand, is at the core of an

individual's worldview, it contributes to the interpretation of the nature of reality. The traditional African worldview is pervasive and deeply embedded in the life of an average African, this makes it necessary to explore the concept of worldview.

Koltko-Rivera (2004) offers a rather comprehensive definition of the concept of worldview in indicating that a worldview is a certain way of understanding the cosmos and one's role in it. It includes both factual and normative elements, defining what exists, what is good or evil, and what should be sought. A worldview is a collection of ideas that determine what is possible and desirable in the universe, as well as how information may be obtained. It also influences one's values, aspirations, habits, and interpersonal connections. Worldviews may include assumptions that are not always established or demonstrable, but they serve as the foundation for other ideas within the same belief system (Koltko-Rivera, 2000, p. 2).

Such a definition helps in confronting an understanding of African traditional worldview because it reveals how philosophical and metaphysical foundations can underpin certain beliefs that may be located within a belief system. African traditional worldview is premised on a corpus of interlinked or common values and presuppositions, which may be noticed consciously and unconsciously in beliefs, practices, economic and socio-political institutions of African Indigenous societies. Key ideas of the African-centred worldview encompass the interconnectedness of all things; the spiritual nature of human beings; collective individual identity; the collective/inclusive nature of family structure, the oneness of mind, body, and spirit; and the value of interpersonal relationships (Graham, 1999).

3.2.2 African Cultural Systems

Traditionally, African culture is typified by distinct faith systems and cosmology, which may be manifested in various traditions. African faith systems and cosmologies in most cases are connected to nature, the spirit world, and the ancestors (Olupona, 2014). They are conveyed via numerous traditions such as religious rituals, festivals, music, dance, and art. This has implications

on matters such as morality, forms of marriage or death rites, even music and dance. Unlike Western thought, Afrocentric traditional paradigms are not linear but uphold a circular process (Mungai, 2015). In other words, it may be understood that African history, culture, traditions, and worldview are relevant and interrelated in a way that reveals what is valued and why. All this converges to compose distinct categories of understanding and modes of cognition that are divergent from Eurocentric psycho behavioural modalities. Eurocentric thought is inclined to be more intellectual and less animated. Afrocentric constructs, on the contrary, assume a rather involved, peculiar, emotional, and embodied disposition (Gwaravanda & Ndofirepi, 2020).

This entails a deep and personal involvement that goes beyond just intellectual understanding, and emphasises an emotional, sensory, and spiritual connection between African cultures and their environment, as well as their embodied practices. Traditional African cosmology is constituted by a setting of symbiotic relationships within a religious universe, which has its foundations in a spiritual sovereignty set into conformity with the principles of a Supreme creator (Viri, 2010). Philosophically, this mode of being patterns a hierarchical existence which organises the roles of self, community, progeny, ancestors, divinities, and the primordial Supreme being.

Within such an actuality resides an array of spiritual parameters where good behaviour and obedience to communal customs and practices are well-regarded (Nyang, 1980). In general, there are two major types of worldviews, the material and religious worldviews. We have the materialist's perspective, whereby the universe is understood as a random accident without any meaning. According to this perspective, any occurrence, such as sickness or natural disaster, results from chance. Alternatively, a religious worldview perceives creation as having a profound meaning, therefore every occurrence is interpreted according to the purpose it is construed to signify, it is with such an understanding that reliance and practice in magic and or preternatural healing is reinforced (Ekeke & Ekeopara, 2010). Hence, faith in influences outside probabilities typified by natural or scientific laws offers an expedience for humanity to dominate their environment. It is this belief in the transcendental which empowers an African to pursue that which cannot be realised by ordinary means.

3.2.3 African Christian Thought

Christianity in Africa appropriated Western means of interpreting human experiences, and these did not necessarily interlace with the endemic but expressly overlapped. A Western outlook is premised on individualism, personalism and privatisation and this presents a predicament within an Afrocentric setting (Soares, 2018). When European Christian religiosity was instituted, it did not fully factor in how Africans relate to the dynamism of their environment and experience being, and how their worldview is culturally based. Thus, missionaries imparted a dilemma of double alienation where Africans were subjected to Western subversion on a religious level, and most importantly on the other hand, they endured a state in which they had to suppress their spiritual norms, forms, and expression (Mokhoathi, 2021). Thus, their new identity no longer aligns with their traditional beliefs and this separation from their old identity culminates in alienation from their former communities. Africans, because of a non-biologically transmitted heritage, find themselves challenged by its unconscious nature.

Mokhoathi asserts that hybridity may be understood as an identity formation process through which individuals integrate external cultural components into their own identity in order to enrich or challenge their current cultural traditions. As a result, they may develop a rich and diverse identity that reflects the breadth of their experiences and influences (Mokhoathi J. , 2021).

Indigenous people had a very specific cultural and religious context, and early missionaries should have understood that context. It is important to note that the early missionary approaches were simplistic and undermined the essential elements intrinsic to the conversion of Indigenous people who held a distinctive worldview rooted in the rationality of their African traditional religious heritage (Masondo, 2015). It was vital for the missionaries to critically engage the African context, worldview, and culture with respect to healing. Several of the above points are important to healing, especially in relation to the body, the supernatural and the Bible. Worldviews permeate people's sub-conscious, so they affect their families, languages, and social surroundings. Various

aspects of African spirit life thus influence the practices of worship in Africa (Knoetze, 2019). It is for this reason that spiritual services, faith healing, and expectations of the miraculous typically feature prominently in religious services. African worship systems are based on African Indigenous way of knowing and perceiving of the spirit world, which was a fertile ground for the Christian religion.

When an African becomes a Christian, the Christian worldview doesn't replace the African worldview, resulting in a paradox of schizoid Christianity (Carroll, 2020). In the end, this leads to a dilemma whereby the modern Christian cannot reconcile the two traditions. Christians then hide in the shadows to use divination, witchcraft, magic, fetishes, charms, spirits, and ancestors to solve their problems. In addition, the inculturation of worship creates a void where Africans are seeking worship that suits their needs and communicates their healing language (Duncan, 2014). Interestingly, Africa has historically translated the Gospel of Jesus Christ by means of worship based on the literal and spiritual language of life and healing.

3.3 CONTEMPORARY RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS

Contemporary religious movements refer to a wide range of movements that have emerged in the modern era and have developed as a response to changes in the wider society (Adogame, 2014). These movements generally emphasise personal spiritual growth and a return to traditional values and beliefs. In many cases, they are characterised by an emphasis on individual spiritual experience, alternative worship practices, and social engagement. Moreover, many of these movements are often inter-denominational and ecumenical, meaning that they seek to unify different religious traditions and create a sense of unity among their adherents (Solomon Makanjuola, 2018). Such religious movements are often seen as a response to the rapid changes in the modern world, as they offer an alternative to the traditional forms of organised religion and seek to bring together people from diverse spiritual backgrounds.

The concepts used to describe these movements can vary, and it is important to consider the perspectives and motivations behind each concept. These movements may reject the authority of organised religion and emphasise personal religious experience as a source of authority, rather than relying on traditional religious texts or leaders (Partridge, 2016). Furthermore, they may emphasise a personal relationship with God, rather than relying on a structured hierarchy of authority. Ultimately, these religious movements and or groups provide an alternative to traditional religion and are sometimes referred to as new religious movements, new religions, sects, or cults. The notion of a new religion will always depend on its context, regardless of whether it reflects movements, groups, or more personalised forms, regardless of the era in question. A survey of history reveals numerous instances of religions that fit comfortably within our conception of the 'new' (Kirby & Cusack, 2014).

This study conceptualises contemporary religious movements as non-institutionalised religious groups. Institutionalised religion typically relates to formal organisations or groups, while non-institutionalised religious movements are found outside of formal organisations (Kujawa, 2017). Institutionalised characterised by a highly organised structure that establishes rules and regulations, which are often enforced by the authority of the church or organisation. On the other hand, it is critical to note that the form and practices of non-institutionalised faiths may vary. While some may not assume a conventional approach, others do subscribe to a rigorous set of beliefs and traditions. The deficiency of an established authority or regulations does not necessarily imply a precarious structure. Various non-institutionalised movements do adhere to their own internal governance systems, hierarchical structures, or charismatic leaders with a lot of authority and influence.

The emergence of new religions in the modern world has been seen as a challenge to traditional beliefs and practices, particularly in Africa. This has not only sparked debates about their impact but broadly speaking, there are two forms of Christian new religious movements in contemporary Africa (Nmah, 2017). People flock to new religious movements in search of spiritual power for personal reasons such as healing or security. The first form pertains to movements that have broken away from the historic missionary-founded churches, and which often continue to reflect many of

the ideologies of their mother churches, despite undergoing significant internal transformations and adaptations. The second form relates to those new religious movements which have been founded, enforced, or fed by the USA charismatic leaders. These are often referred to as "spiritual" or "spiritualist" movements because of their emphasis on pneumatology and the practice of glossolalia and spiritual healing (Kärkkäinen, 2018). Arguably, in some contexts, these new movements have sought to preserve some cultural capital of the local population, while older churches have sought to transform the religious landscape through missionary activity and evangelisation (Christerson & Flory, 2017).

A shift in African religious beliefs and practices occurred because of the arrival of Western ideas and values, along with colonialism (Adekunle, 2013). This subsequently resulted in a dynamic and adaptive form of religiosity that has been able to evolve and adapt to changing cultural and social circumstances. Taking into account such a religious heritage, it is important to note that the resultant personalisation of spiritual quests and a sense of rupture with the recent past have made these religious movements appealing to a wide range of people, which has contributed to their growth and spread in Africa (Hanretta, 2013). Consequently, Neo/Pentecostalism has become an integral part of many people's lives, helping to shape their individual and collective identities. The movement has also provided a platform for people to express their faith, share their experiences and develop deeper connections with their beliefs and the Divine. The rise of neo-traditional and Neo-Pentecostal subcultures has been fuelled by a reaction to secularisation and a search for distinctive religious identities (Firestone, 2012). As movements that seek to restore what they believe is a true Christian faith, these churches adopt a fundamentalist approach to morality, especially in sexuality and gender roles.

Religious fundamentalism is often presented as a response to the perceived lack of spiritual fulfilment and moral decay in modernity, as well as the perceived ineffectiveness of mainstream or traditional churches in addressing these issues (Abi-Hashem, 2014). Fundamentalists often seek to return to a strict interpretation of religious doctrine and tradition and place a strong emphasis on maintaining religious authority and strict adherence to moral codes. Thus, fundamentalist ideas

may be observed in the way that many US churches in Africa preach a rigorous interpretation of Christian doctrine and tradition. This might take the shape of a prosperity gospel, which prioritises financial riches and individuality over communal ideals and social justice (Bowler, 2018). In certain circumstances, the healing strategy offered by certain US churches in Africa, which stresses individual faith and prayer above traditional healing procedures, can also be considered as a sort of cultural imperialism that devalues African healing cultural practices and knowledge. A key focus of these movements is the maintenance of sacred authority and fundamental truths of evangelicalism, and the reinforcement of traditional biblical morals and ethics (Kaunda, 2020). For example, strong commitment to biblical principles and values may result in the rejection of some healing procedures deemed incompatible with Christian beliefs. This might lead to a reluctance to seek medical attention or to engage in traditional healing procedures that are seen as incompatible with Christian principles.

3.3.1 Contemporary religious movements prioritising healing [practices]

Contemporary religious movements give prominence to the direct experience of God's power via healing, and they lay a heavy focus on believers' capacity to receive divine healing through faith (Pretorius, 2009). As these groups have risen in popularity across the continent, so has the emphasis on healing techniques within African religious traditions. Healing practices in contemporary African religious movements are a complicated issue driven by a variety of circumstances such as poverty, social inequality, political instability, Westernization, and the emergence of Pentecostalism and charismatic Christianity (Afolayan, Yacob-Haliso, & Falola, 2018). Copious contemporary religious movements within an African setting, such as African Indigenous or Independent or Initiated Churches, Zionism, Prophetism, Pentecostal or Neo-Pentecostal and Charismatic movements, lay emphasis on healing as part of their mission (Adedibu B. , 2018). The focus of these movements is often on the power of spiritual or divine energy to heal an individual physically, emotionally, and spiritually (Dein, 2020). Healing is a spiritual practice that has been an integral part of African traditional religion for centuries. In many African cultures, healing is seen as a language of worship, where the act of healing is a form of

communication with the divine (Scott & Wepener, 2017). Healing as a language of worship in Africa highlights the spiritual and cultural significance of this practice in African traditional religion. It emphasises the importance of holistic healing that addresses not only physical but also spiritual and emotional aspects of a person's wellbeing (Singh & Bhagwan, 2020). The healing practitioner is seen as a conduit of divine power, and the act of healing is seen as a form of worship or praise to the divine (Blanton, 2015). This idea is based on the belief that everything in the world is connected, and that sickness and disease are often the result of a disturbance in the spiritual balance of an individual or community. In many African cultures, healing is not just about curing physical ailments, but also about restoring spiritual harmony and balance (Che, George, Ijinu, Pushpangadan, & Andrae-Marobela, 2017).

In African cultures, the question of "why" someone is suffering from illness or misfortune is preceded by the question of "who" caused it (Landman, 2020). Africans want to know the identity of the entity or cause responsible for their suffering, which may be attributed in some instances, to a witch or an ancestor, and the reason why it was done. This understanding is reflected in the practice of 'u tungula', which refers to divination that provides an explanation of the cause of illness within Vhavenda traditional religiosity and 'u femba', which concerns the diagnosis of illness and appropriate treatment (Malindi, 2021).

Over the years, Vhavenda traditional spiritual *mediumism*, which involves a 'maine' as practitioner, has moved beyond its traditional contexts in African Traditional Religion and rural culture, and has been adopted and transformed by (South) African Christianity, particularly in the African Instituted/Independent/Indigenous Churches (AICs) or more specifically in contemporary religious movements (Munyai, The tenacity of African Traditional Religion in Venda Christianity: a missional investigation, 2016). These practices have also spread to urban and white communities in South Africa and Europe, where it is seen as a form of alternative healing with aspects that express a universal spirituality (Kleinhempel U. , 2017).

Healing is a significant aspect of many contemporary religious movements (Hovi, 2018). These movements often promote the idea that healing is a spiritual practice that can be used to cure physical and emotional ailments. In some cases, healing is believed to be a miraculous act of divine intervention, while in others, it is seen as a natural consequence of following a particular religious path (Pawlikowski, Wiechetek, Sak, & Jarosz, 2015). The Charismatic movement, as an example, emphasises the experience of the Holy Spirit, including gifts such as healing, prophecy, and speaking in tongues. This movement has led to the development of faith healing practices, which involve the laying on of hands, prayer, and the use of anointing oil to heal physical and emotional ailments (Bartoş, 2015). Other contemporary religious movements, such as New Age spirituality, also emphasise healing as a central aspect of their teachings (Levin, 2022).

By and large, healing has become a leading facet of many contemporary religious movements, reflecting the value of holistic health and wellbeing within an African society (Mumo, 2012). These movements offer individuals a range of spiritual practices and alternative healing modalities that they can use to promote physical, emotional, and spiritual healing.

3.3.2 Ethical Dilemmas in Healing Practices by Contemporary Religious Movements

The advent of Pentecostalism in some mainline churches has sometimes led to the establishment of independent congregations, often led by pastors who have not received formal theological training (Masenya & Masenya, 2018). A significant concern is the use of questionable healing practices that lack scientific evidence of their effectiveness. While healing practices offered by contemporary religious movements can be beneficial for many individuals, there are also ethical dilemmas that can arise, which have the potential to lead to harm, as individuals may forego conventional medical treatment or delay seeking medical attention in favour of alternative healing practices (Saguyan, 2019). The possibility for exploitation and abuse by spiritual leaders or religious authority who assert to have exceptional healing capabilities presents an ethical conundrum (Plantak, 2017). Such individuals may take advantage of vulnerable individuals seeking healing by demanding exorbitant fees for their services or exerting undue influence over

their followers (Banda, 2019). Although such practices are considered acceptable within belief systems, they highlight the potential for believers to be used for selfish ends as well as their vulnerability to self-sacrifice (Benyah, 2018). In some cases, people have been physically or sexually assaulted under the guise of healing (Landa, Zhou, & Tshotsho, 2019).

When people are encouraged to accept healing ministry practices without questioning or examining them critically, they may be more likely to adhere to dogmatic interpretations of their religion rather than engaging in a more nuanced and reflective practice (Lewin, 2017). This rigid approach can be seen in the justification of some ethically challenging healing practices. For instance, the practice of "deliverance ministries," in which people are exposed to intense and sometimes aggressive exorcisms to be free of claimed spiritual illnesses. Some of these behaviours have been linked to bodily injury and even death (Howard, 2013; Leburu, 2021). It is important to recognise that this type of religious radicalism is not inherent to any religion or belief system. Rather, it arises from a combination of factors, including socio-political and economic conditions, cultural and historical contexts, and individual psychological and emotional factors (Ramakrishna, 2022).

Religious radicalism takes on diverse forms and expressions in various religions and cultures, making it a complex phenomenon (De Graaf & Van den Bos, 2021). At its core, it involves a rigid and dogmatic adherence to a particular interpretation of religious texts or beliefs, often accompanied by a rejection of alternative views or practices. One of the key features of religious radicalism is the belief in the superiority and infallibility of one's own religious beliefs and practices over those of others (Tirosh-Samuelson, 2012). This often leads to a dehumanisation of non-believers or those who hold different beliefs, which can justify even violence and other forms of oppression. Practitioners have positioned themselves as spiritual merchants who selectively interpret specific elements of religion that are deemed desirable and likely to attract followers, which culminates in a situation where individuals are free to pick and choose their beliefs and practices (Oake, 2021). Unlike in more traditional religious movements, where there may be a more centralised authority or established set of beliefs and practices, contemporary religious

movements often emphasise individualism. This can lead to a wide range of beliefs and practices among different congregations, as religious practitioners are given the authority to interpret scripture and determine the specific practices and beliefs of their congregation.

The use of unethical healing practices in contemporary religious movements is of grave concern, as they can result in physical, emotional, and psychological harm to individuals who seek spiritual guidance and support. Such practices can take many forms, such as exorcisms, faith healing, and deliverance sessions, and they often involve coercive or manipulative tactics that can lead to the victimisation of vulnerable individuals (Pondani, 2019). Fear and intimidation are common elements of abusive healing practices that control and impose beliefs or practices on individuals. For noncompliance, there may be threats of denunciation, as well as isolation from those who do not share the same faith. In addition to the subsequent trauma, individuals are exploited for profit or power, through spiritual abuse, manipulation, sexual exploitation, and other forms of abuse (Vernon J. T., 2019). Victims of such abuse can suffer long-lasting harm to their physical, emotional, and psychological wellbeing, particularly if they are seeking spiritual guidance or support.

3.3.3 Analysis of deviant conceptualisations of healing in contemporary religious movements

In recent years, the emergence of various new religious movements has led to a reconsideration of the traditional concepts of healing. Contemporary religious movements frequently include unconventional or deviant approaches to healing that can manifest in various forms (Urban, 2015). These may include spiritual practices that are not officially recognised by traditional religious institutions or prefer more traditional or "natural" healing methods over modern scientific approaches. These unconventional views of healing can have significant implications for individuals, their families, and the wider community. Consequently, it is crucial to investigate and evaluate these non-traditional views of healing and their effects on religious movements to gain a better understanding of their consequences.

Contemporary religious movements have received both acclaim and censure from the public and have been the subject of inquiry. While some view these unconventional or deviant approaches to healing as a source of hope and empowerment, others perceive them as potentially harmful to public health and safety (Sarnkhaowkhom, Phonsuk, Santre, & Suksatan, 2022; Ross, 2020). While some of these unconventional methods of healing have received acclaim, others have been subject to criticism due to the potential risks associated with their use.

Syncretism has played a role in shaping health and healing practices in Africa (Nel, 2017). Many people combine elements of different religious and cultural traditions in their approach to health care, creating unique and diverse approaches to healing. The infusion of African traditional healing practices into Christianity has been viewed by some as deviant or inauthentic, especially by those who hold to a more traditional or orthodox view of Christianity (Mokhoathi, 2017). This is because the incorporation of traditional healing practices into Christian worship may be seen as syncretistic, or as diluting the purity of the Christian faith. Neo/Pentecostal and charismatic movements have become increasingly widespread in Africa. These movements lay emphasis on the importance of healing and place great weight on prayer for healing. Some Neo/Pentecostal and charismatic churches even reject medical treatment in favour of relying solely on prayer for healing (Glassman, 2018).

Christian missionaries in the past have actively discouraged or even suppressed traditional African practices in favour of their own beliefs (Ntombana, 2015). Christianity and African traditional healing have since had a complex relationship in Africa. Christianity has been seen as a threat to traditional African beliefs and practices, including traditional healing methods. There has been a growing recognition among Christian leaders of the importance of traditional healing practices in African cultures. Some Christian churches have even begun to incorporate traditional healing practices into their own services and ministries (Bosire, Cele, Potelwa, Cho, & Mendenhall, 2022).

Christianity has been the dominant religion in many parts of the world for centuries, and its beliefs and practices have become the norm against which other religions are judged. Religious

movements that do not adhere to traditional norms, regardless of whether they are newly created religions or self-focused spiritual practices, are frequently disregarded as inauthentic. However, this assessment is problematic because it fails to recognise the diversity and complexity of religious practices and beliefs around the world. It also ignores the fact that Christianity itself has evolved and changed over time, with different denominations and interpretations of its teachings. The question of authenticity in religion is also a complex one, and it is not always clear what constitutes a "real" religion (Meintel, 2021). This is especially true in the context of contemporary religious movements, which often challenge traditional religious norms and offer new ways of understanding spirituality and the divine.

In recent decades, there has been a growing trend in Africa of incorporating traditional healing practices into Christianity. This has been driven in part by the recognition of the importance of traditional healing practices in African cultures, as well as a desire to integrate these practices into the Christian faith (Chiroma, 2020). One way that traditional healing practices have been incorporated into Christianity is using prayer and spiritual healing. Many churches in Africa now offer prayer sessions for physical and mental illnesses, and some have even established healing centres where traditional healing practices are used alongside Western medical treatments (King, 2012). Another way that traditional healing practices have been infused into Christianity is through the incorporation of traditional symbols and rituals into Christian worship. For example, some churches in Africa have incorporated the use of traditional African musical instruments and dance into their worship services, while others have adopted traditional dress and other cultural practices.

However, the infusion of traditional healing practices into Christianity has not been without controversy (Masondo, 2017). Some Christian leaders have opposed the incorporation of traditional healing practices, viewing them as incompatible with Christian doctrine. Others have argued that the use of traditional healing practices in Christian worship can lead to syncretism and dilute the purity of the Christian faith. Despite these debates, the incorporation of traditional healing practices into Christianity continues to be an important trend in many African societies, as

it reflects the ongoing importance of traditional healing practices in African cultures and the desire to integrate these practices into modern religious traditions.

3.4 HEALING PRACTICES IN CONTEMPORARY RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS IN ṬHOHOYANDOU

In healing practices in contemporary religious movements in Ṭhohoyandou, draw on the Vhavenda worldview, which comprises of their basic and intricate ideas of existence transmitted via narratives, symbols, and rituals that support all areas of life. The culture and traditions of African societies have an extensive history of healing practices, which many communities still view as an important part of their cultural inheritance. It is important to note that culture is a concept that encapsulates the attitudes, knowledge, values, and manners of a particular society at a particular time and place (DeCapua & Wintergerst, 2016). It comprises of lifestyle traits that contribute to how individuals see the world around them, including how they approach religion or form and learn their belief system.

Vhavenda communities in Ṭhohoyandou still regard their healing practices highly as part of a broader healthcare system that is profoundly based in their cultural, spiritual, and religious concepts, due to their capacity to foster wellness. As a result, most healing practices aim to address the cause of a problem rather than treat the symptoms. African Indigenous/traditional healing practices subscribe to a comprehensive healthcare system that is deeply rooted in the cultural, spiritual, and religious beliefs expressed throughout the continent (Chaitanya, Baye, Ali, & Usamo, 2021). Several healing practices may form part of the spiritual beliefs and rituals of contemporary religious movements in South Africa.

The practice of praying, using holy water, laying on of hands, and chanting are some of the most common. Individuals and communities are believed to benefit from these practices on a physical, emotional, and spiritual level. Depending on the religious movement, specific practices may vary, but fundamentally, all believe in the power of spirituality to heal (Oliver, 2012). Healing practices

are an integral part of contemporary religious movements in Ṭhohoyandou. These movements combine Indigenous beliefs and practices with Christianity, resulting in a unique spiritual practice that is distinct from traditional Christianity.

One of the key beliefs of these movements is that physical and spiritual health are interconnected. As such, healing practices not only address physical symptoms but also aim to restore spiritual balance and harmony. Prayer and faith play a significant role in this process, with practitioners believing that divine intervention can facilitate healing.

3.4.1 Vhavenda Religious Beliefs, Customs, and Healing Practices

The Vhavenda, an ethnic group native to South Africa, are mainly located in Ṭhohoyandou within the Thulamela municipality, in the northern province of Limpopo, and have a long-standing cultural legacy that dates back millennia (Ramarumo, Maroyi, & Tshisikhawe, 2019). Despite the lack of clarity and fragmentation of oral histories, it is understood that Vhavenda originated in the Great Lakes region of East Africa. With a complex social structure that encompasses various clans united by a common history, language, and cultural traditions (Pikirayi & Magoma, 2021). Their traditional religious beliefs focus heavily on the veneration of ancestral spirits and nature gods, and they have a diverse range of rituals and practices that are deeply entrenched in their culture and identity. From harvesting crops to healing rituals, Vhavenda are passionate about their traditions and take great pride in them. Many of these customs and beliefs have been passed down through generations, and still live on to this day. While the Vhavenda clans differ in their histories, languages, and cultural traditions, they work together to preserve and pass on their cultural inheritance.

Vhavenda have historically subscribed to a complex and multifaceted belief system that incorporates both monotheistic and animistic elements (Phaswana, Communal Pastoral Counselling: Culturally Gifted Care- giving in Times of Family Pain - A Vhavenda Perspective, 2008). Vhavenda belief in Nwali /Raluvhimba/Khuzwane as the creator of mankind and the earth

underscores the importance of spirituality and the divine in their culture and provides a lens through which to understand their worldview and values (Davhula, 2016).

Interestingly, the Hellenization of *Nwali* in Tshivenda highlights the complex and sometimes problematic interactions between colonialism, Christianity, and Indigenous religions (Sebola, 2022). It highlights the multifaceted impact of colonialism and missionaries on Indigenous cultures and beliefs. Hellenization as a term encourages a constrained, linear understanding of African traditions within the larger missionary narrative as opposed to taking a holistic approach (Kanu, 2021). Consequently, persons who hold such an opinion could overlook or misinterpret the intricate cultural and religious aspects that are unique to many African communities.

Nwali is deemed the universal and supreme creator, and *midzimu* (tutelary spirits, more commonly perceived as ancestral spirits) as representatives of *Nwali* who act as mediators between *Nwali* and their living relatives. It's interesting to note that the name Raluvhimba is composed of the honorific prefix 'Ra' and the word 'Luvhimba', which means eagle (Munyai, 2016). This could suggest that the name Raluvhimba is associated with the idea of a father figure who soars above all else, perhaps indicating a divine or elevated status. In Vhavenda culture, the concept of God is often described as "makhulu," which translates to "grandparent" or "elder" (Munyai, 2016). This term is used to reflect the belief that God is a personal being who cares for and looks after his children or grandchildren, which refers to all of humanity. This belief is closely tied to the Vhavenda worldview of communal care, which emphasises the importance of caring for one another and working together as a community. The Vhavenda have always had their own distinct name for a priest, rather than adopting one from elsewhere. The name is *Tshifhe*, which refers to a person who officiates in sacrificial rites for either *Nwali* or ancestors according to traditional Vhavenda standards (Ndou, 2007). Interestingly, the Vhavenda consider their ancestors to be "alive" rather than "dead" and therefore venerate them.

It is important to note that Vhavenda belief, only *Nwali* is considered to reside in the sky, not the ancestors. Vhavenda people hold the belief that misfortunes never occur without cause, and certain

misfortunes are attributed to witchcraft (Petrus, 2016). Their culture is deeply rooted in the past, connecting them to their ancestors and the origin of their traditions. In the event of serious illness or misfortune, they turn to a traditional doctor or *maine* for guidance. The '*maine*' uses divination to pinpoint the problematic spirit and choose the right ritual to extinguish it (Mabogo, 2012). The major role of traditional healers or medicine men, in the eyes of the Vhavanḁa, is to ascertain the needs of their spiritual ancestors and the duties of the living in attending to those ancestors. They think that those who practice traditional healing are close to God and have learned from Him. By rituals of restitution and reconciliation, illnesses brought on by ancestral neglect can be cured, whereas diseases brought on by evil powers can be cured (Verginer & Juen, 2019).

Vhavanḁa culture integrates social wellbeing, religion, and health in a way that is inseparable, unlike in Western civilisation. In Vhavanḁa tradition, traditional healers, referred to as *nanga* or *maine*, hold a high social status, whereas seers, known as *mungome*, are not regarded as having any social standing (Muthivhi, 2018). Seers are more commonly found among the Tsonga people and are known for their ability to identify evil or guilt within a group. It was customary among the Vhavanḁa to consult seers after a burial to determine the cause of death and identify those responsible. It is critical to note that practitioners may employ a variety of therapeutic modalities, and that the distinctions between them are frequently negligible. For instance, both herbalists and diviners hold dreams and visions in high regard (Masoga, 2018). The power of '*vho-maine*' (plural of *maine*) and *mingome* (plural of *mungome*), for example, were seen by missionaries to be manifestations of the demonic or superstition. They attributed the persistence of these beliefs and practices to the *mahosi* (Tshivavanḁa traditional royal leadership), or local chiefs.

In Tḥohoyanḁou, African traditional religion is practiced alongside Christianity and other religions, with its unique set of beliefs, values, and practices that are deeply rooted in the culture. While it may be possible to adopt some aspects of Christianity into African traditional religions, completely replacing them would be challenging (Okeke, Ibenwa, & Okeke, 2017). In the past, faith healing has played a crucial role in the spread of the Gospel when the founders of African Pentecostal or Neo-Pentecostal independent churches went their separate ways. The autonomy of

the independent churches occasioned a focus on a type of Christianity that directly confronted people's issues and needs, mainly spiritual healing. On the other hand, African traditional culture locates its meaning and lays emphasis on spiritual rituals and beliefs. Traditionally, African people see the spirit realm as a natural part of their life, they are more receptive to the idea of spirits affecting their lives (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2013). As a result, encounters that might be considered paranormal or supernatural in Western civilisations are more commonly accepted in African society. African culture interprets such concepts differently and conveys them as authentic. Traditionally, encounters with spirits are widely recounted and openly shared among community members. Conversely, in Western cultures, interactions with spirits are often considered irrational, in turn, this may prove difficult for individuals to tackle such issues.

African and Western civilisations see paranormal occurrences from diverse angles. In African culture, spirits are generally seen as powerful and potentially dangerous, and as a result, people may approach them with caution and respect (Idang, 2015). However, interactions with spirits are often discounted as meaningless or a sign of insanity in Western cultures. Spirits are seen as essential elements of the natural world in African culture, making them great sources of knowledge and insight. In contrast, the natural world is usually seen as different from the supernatural in Western cultures, and spiritual encounters are occasionally dismissed as unreasonable or unimportant.

3.4.2 Healing Practices in Contemporary Religious Movements Amongst Vhavenda

Healing practices are an important aspect of Vhavenda religious life and reflect the ongoing interplay between traditional beliefs and practices, and the influence of Christianity in Ṭhohoyandou. In contemporary times, there has been a rise in the number of religious movements amongst Vhavenda people. *Mutakalo* (health) and *malwadze* (sickness) amongst Vhavenda people, are not viewed solely as individual states but are seen as dynamic processes that involve the whole person and their relationship with their social and natural environment (Netshitahame, 2012). According to Van den Bosch (2009) the rationale for treating healing as an African hermeneutical

category, rests on the premise that predicates that the idea of "health" (and so "healing") is not universal. Rather, it is influenced by distinct socio-cultural traditions that vary from location to place. For health concepts to make sense and health practices to be relevant, the patient, their family, and the healthcare professional must all share the same culturally particular health tradition. Each socio-cultural environment, particularly the African one, has a variety of health traditions, rules, and practices (2009, p. 521).

Traditional healing practices have long been an important part of Vhavenda culture, and many contemporary religious movements among the Vhavenda incorporate traditional healing practices into their teachings and rituals. These practices serve as a bridge between the spiritual and physical realms, providing an essential component to their belief system. The healing practices of traditional medicine differ across cultures and regions, making it a diverse system (Lakshmi, et al., 2015). The level of prevalence and organisation of traditional healing varies among different countries and regions.

In Christianity, many Vhavenda have adopted Neo/Pentecostalism, which places a strong emphasis on divine healing. Pentecostal churches in Tshohoyandou often hold healing services, where people can come forward to receive prayer and anointing with oil for physical, emotional, and spiritual healing. Some Neo/Pentecostal churches also teach that illness is caused by demons or sin, and therefore healing involves spiritual warfare and repentance (Asamoah, 2016). The type of healing that is used in Vhavenda religious movements will vary depending on the specific movement. However, all these healing practices are based on the belief that the spirits can help to heal the body and the soul. Tshivenda concepts do not always correspond to biomedical categories of body, person, and disease. They challenge the Western biomedical model of health, which tends to focus on the individual body and the physical causes of illness (Cantor, 2020). It purports that health is not simply the absence of disease or illness but is a state of physical, mental, social, and spiritual well-being and recognises that individuals are not isolated beings but are instead part of a larger system that includes their social, natural, and spiritual environment.

South African Christianity has absorbed components of Tshivenda traditional healing from rural culture, particularly in the African Instituted Churches (AIC), which have adapted and modified Tshivenda ritual and practice (Adedibu, 2018). In recent years, it has migrated to urban cultures and white communities in South Africa and Europe, where it is accepted as an alternative healing method in esoteric settings. The spirits serve as the intermediaries between the absolute divine and the world of corporeal humans, according to Tshivenda spirituality. Through paranormal perception, the spirits are communicated with, steering the descendants' lives by offering guidance and healing (Dionne, 2020). In addition to being used for healing, divination, and other social duties like protecting the vulnerable, the relationship with the spirits has a religious importance.

The event of changing from a situation of death into a condition of life is referred to theologically as healing. The focus of most theological thoughts on healing in Africa is either Christological, with Christ as the great physician, or missio-ecclesiological, with the church as the place of healing (Van den Bosch, 2009). This serves as a metaphor for the unconditional acceptance we get from God's grace as well as the possibility of our being returned to a state of harmony, rapprochement, and forgiveness. The idea of *nanga* or *maine* is therefore essential to the religious life of the community; they are both priest and healer (Sigida & Masola, 2020).

In Tshivenda culture, the idea of *vhulwadze* (sickness), is frequently connected to the direct involvement of a force, whether divine or human. The illness may be attributed to witches, sorcerers, spirits, or gods, making the afflicted believe that they are the victims of attack (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2015). Thus, the use of traditional therapeutic practices and rituals is incorporated as crucial elements of the treatment plan to placate and combat the presumptive agents. The blending of traditional beliefs with contemporary medicine enhances the healing process for the ill, giving them both physical and emotional relief, underscoring the significance of this cultural knowledge.

3.4.3 The Blending of African and European Religious Expression

In general, numerous religions were greatly influenced and restyled by the impact of missionary Christianity (Manala, 2013). Accordingly, this entailed converts; at times having to forsake their traditional heritage and religious cultures, and as such don other identities together with the ensuing cultural dynamics. It may be deduced that converts did not simply reject their own heritage and that there was a synthesis that evolved over time to cater for their needs. This, one may imagine, contributed to various forms of dissension in contemporary religious practices as people began to interpret concepts from their own cultural context and meanings change.

The question of blending African and European religious expression is a matter that relates to a cultural encounter between the two worlds that emanated from the colonial era, where European missionaries sought to spread their religion and African people had to adapt to a new faith while trying to maintain their own cultural heritage (Mokhoathi, 2021). This has evolved into a complex interaction between two religious' traditions, which has culminated in the emergence of new forms of expression and practices. One of the most significant areas of blending has been in spiritual healing. Traditional African religions have long used a variety of techniques to heal individuals, including the use of herbal medicines, divination, and the intervention of ancestors and spirits (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2014). European Christian missionaries, on the other hand, have emphasised prayer, faith, and sacraments as the means to heal the sick. The blending of these two traditions has led to the emergence of new forms of spiritual healing, such as the practice of mediumism, combines traditional African practices with Christian beliefs. In this practice, mediums communicate with the spirits of ancestors and divine beings to receive guidance and healing for individuals (Kleinhempel, 2017).

The blending of African and European religious expression also raises questions about the nature of cultural identity and the preservation of cultural heritage. Some argue that the integration of African and European religious practices has led to a dilution of African cultural identity, while others see it to preserve and adapt traditional practices to changing circumstances (Sibani, 2018).

It may be now construed that missionaries were erroneous in thinking that the Indigenous populace had and would easily abandon their traditional heritage and religious culture to be converted to Christianity. African people could not simply discard everything that had shaped their identity and culture. Instead, the African communities synthesized their own unique form of Christianity that met their needs and was born out of their lived experiences (Van der Merwe, 2016).

The blending of African and European religious expression, specifically the concept of “double faith”, is particularly relevant in the context of *sangoma* practice in South Africa (Kleinhempel, 2017). According to Kleinhempel *sangomas* are Bantu shamans and have a well-defined cultural complex with recognised patterns of experience, training, and social roles (Kleinhempel, 2018). They are involved in contact with spirits in their calling and formation, as well as in their practice of healing and divination. The belief in a spirit realm is central to traditional religion in Bantu African culture, which has remained so through Christianisation and modernisation. The concept of *mediumism* is at times used to relate ‘*maine*’ practice to a cultural practice rooted in Western culture, specifically in spiritism (Kalvig, 2016). However, this does not fully apply to African culture, and to the wide spectrum of African cultures, for whom the belief in a spirit realm is central to their traditional religion. The first major step of African mediumism in Southern Africa from its original religious context has been its reception by churches of the “African Instituted” type, who have incorporated both the “prophet” type of mediumism, as well as the “shamanic” type of the *maine/mungome* (Waweru, 2020).

Christianity has attained a certain blending of the elements of African Traditional Religion with Christianity, which led to a re-evaluation and re-definition of some spirit concepts of ATR and modifications in the associated mediumistic practices (Nel, 2017). This has incorporated the challenges of spirit possession, which has led to an unresolved conflict inside the church that may be viewed as a sort of double faith within the Christian community. This development may be viewed as a transition of Bantu mediumism from the context of African Traditional Religion into an Africanised form of Christianity (Craffert, 2015). The phenomenon of “double faith” is not only present in the practice of those who consult *maine/mungome*, but also among the *maine/mungome*

themselves. Overall, the blending of African and European religious expression, specifically the concept of “double faith”, highlights the complexities of cultural interaction and adaptation in the modern world (Cason & Kent, 2021).

Despite the widespread conversion of many black South Africans to Christianity, the concept of the African traditional medium practitioner in South African society been deeply entrenched. This is due to their spiritual connection to other realms beyond purely religious ones, which encompass matters of health, wellbeing, and divination (Wallace, 2015). Many black Christians continue to visit Indigenous traditional healing practitioners despite criticism from some churches, and this is because African religiosity is not purely religious, but also has practical applications (Mangany & Buitendag, 2013). Moreover, the majority of black South Africans who belong to African Independent/Instituted/Indigenous Churches (AICs) have developed a role and office like that of the African traditional medium practitioner called the "prophet." This position includes that of a prayer healer and places a strong emphasis on the Holy Spirit as a source of spiritual power and motivation. Whereas a priest or pastor works in the realm of religion, an African traditional medium's role is focused on communication with the dead (Deke, 2015). By using the Holy Spirit's power for healing and other reasons, the prophet's position in AICs somewhat fills this void, though the two roles are not necessarily compatible.

Therefore, the roles of African traditional medium practitioners and prophets continue to exist side by side, even where most people have converted to Christianity (Magezi & Banda, 2017). The adoption of the African traditional medium practitioner's role by AICs has contributed to its continued and renewed acceptance in the context of modern southern African societies. However, other churches dispute AICs' claims and accuse them of syncretism. Given that it is inextricably linked to the theological and spiritual worldview of African Traditional Religion, the reception of the function of the traditional healer and its metamorphosis in AICs may be seen from the viewpoint of "double faith" (Mosicke, 2017).

A '*maine*' is one of three types of mediumism recognised in South African Bantu culture, along with herbalists and seers/prophets (Sobiecki, 2014). The '*maine*' uses a combination of oracles and intuition to provide guidance on issues of health and crises, while herbalists are believed to be shown the herbs they need through dreams, and seers/prophets have a natural gift of clairvoyance and do not use oracles. In African philosophy, there is a close association between the realm of spirits and physical, psychic, and social health and well-being (Marumo & Chakale, 2018). In modern South Africa, traditional healers may be consulted alongside medical doctors, priests, prophets, psychotherapists, and social counsellors. Traditional healers, including herbalists, are also consulted, but usually as auxiliary practitioners to cover aspects of healing not covered by conventional medicine. *Mingome* and other traditional healers deal with afflictions involving "spiritual" aspects, which distinguishes them from medical professionals (Shange & Ross, 2022).

When different spiritual traditions and practices coexist, they may combine in a syncretic process that fosters harmonious relationships (Ferretti, Klass, & Ferretti, 2001). This view acknowledges that individuals may engage in seemingly contradictory or exclusive practices as part of their spiritual paths. By understanding this, we can appreciate the value of each tradition and enrich the overall spiritual landscape. With blurry distinctions between the two, those who obtain Bantu mediumship may identify as Christians but may also be esotericists or positivists (or "secular") (Podolecka & Nthoi, 2021). The limits of this process are a total conversion to the new system or a wholesale rejection of its elements and convictions. In general, the traditional healer's function in South African culture has endured and evolved in a variety of ways, adding to the varied religious, spiritual, and medical landscape of contemporary South Africa. (Mothibe & Sibanda, 2019).

3.5 CHAPTER SUMMARY

In seeking a relevant, contextual approach to healing, this chapter highlighted the importance of critically engaging with the African context, worldview, and culture. As this remains central to pursuing a legitimate and relevant approach to examining deviant healing practices in

contemporary healing practices in contemporary religious movements. This chapter sought to provide a deeper understanding of the complex relationship between healing, religion, and culture amongst Vhavanḁa. The chapter revealed the range of religious practices in Africa today, as well as the need for a deeper comprehension of religion's role in African culture. Finally, an investigation of healing practices in Ṭhohoyanḁou has highlighted the significance of taking a sensitive and contextually appropriate approach to the study of religious healing practices in Africa. Nevertheless, it can be concluded that even though there is tension between African traditional and European influenced Christian practices, the issue is not the use of healing practices, but rather the source that supplies healing in the aftermath of those practices.

The chapter fulfilled its purpose by offering an in-depth look into the ways in which Christian practice is influenced by African religious hermeneutics, specifically with regard to healing. It discussed the blending of Christian teachings with traditional African beliefs and explored how this blending might be implemented within contemporary religious contexts. Research has demonstrated that interpreting and making sense of African religious hermeneutics have a profound impact on healing practices, resulting in creative fusions of traditional and modern methods. Overall, Chapter 3 addressed how crucial it is for religious activities to acknowledge and take into account cultural factors. The chapter presented significant insights into the changing religious practices in Ṭhohoyanḁou by connecting traditional African beliefs with contemporary Christian teachings. This helped to clarify the intricate connections between healing, religion, and culture.

CHAPTER 4

QUALITATIVE EMPIRICAL STUDY

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 4 provides a comprehensive and structured overview of the qualitative inquiry that was done, along with insights into the study's background and methods of data gathering. Building on this framework, Chapter 5 will provide a detailed presentation of the data, a thorough analysis, and a discussion of the results. From the collection of empirical data to its interpretation and theoretical discussion, this framework assures an organised and transparent investigation of the information. Using this sequential structure, the empirical study is clearly distinguished from the analysis and discussion later on, allowing the raw data as well as its broader significance to be examined thoroughly. The groundwork for the qualitative empirical investigation was established by a survey of practical theology theory in Chapter 2 and the literature review on African religious hermeneutics of Christian practice in Chapter 3. The aim of the qualitative empirical research undertaken in Ṭhohoyanḍou was to advance the theoretical and applied comprehension of non-traditional healing methods within modern religious groups.

Research methodology concerns a process that accords systematic means for the solving of a research problem (Patel & Patel, 2019). The purpose of this chapter is to explain in detail the research design and methodology chosen for this study, as well as to justify the approach used. A qualitative empirical research design was used in this study. The practical theological theory overview in Chapter 2 and literature reviewed on African religious hermeneutics of Christian practice in Chapter 3 laid the foundation for the qualitative empirical study. The objective of the qualitative empirical study conducted was to further the theoretical and applied understanding of deviant healing practices within contemporary religious movements in Ṭhohoyanḍou. The problem of the study pertains to the phenomenon of contemporary religious movements and their healing modalities, with a focus on potential spiritual abuse. It critically analyses the relationship between religious deviance and abusive conduct in these religious environments via incidents of

claimed spiritual abuse. Spiritual abuse is investigated using the sociological viewpoint of deviance to reveal underlying patterns and mechanisms causing harmful activities within these groups (Henry S. , 2018). This inquiry thus offers a comprehensive knowledge of the elements that permit the continuation of spiritual abuse in modern religious settings. The researcher opted for this type of research to collect data valid enough to answer the research questions and to achieve the objectives of the study.

The underlying qualitative empirical schema of the study is discussed, and this entailed an appraisal of research strategies, instruments, the theoretical framework, sampling, population, and setting (Chu & Ke, 2017). A review of philosophical assumptions is undertaken to identify an interpretive paradigm for the theoretical framework of the study. Moreover, the chapter outlines the research methodology and design of the study. It is here where a variety of selected steps and approaches that are contained in the study are described. To examine the study's findings, the researcher adopted a post-colonial African Practical Theology viewpoint, highlighting the significance of comprehending the historical and cultural contexts that impact theological discourse in the area.

4.1.1 Qualitative Empirical Research

Qualitative empirical research fosters critical reflection on theological concepts within real-life contexts and encourages dialogue between theory and praxis (Ehmann, 2021). Empirical research explores subjects, describes situations, and events, or explains causal relationships between variables and outcomes. It aims to generate objective, reliable, and valid knowledge about a specific phenomenon or problem (Hermans & Schoeman, 2015). Through rigorous and systematic methods to collect and analyse data, empirical research aims to minimise bias and error in the research process, and to produce findings that are generalisable to a larger population. By engaging with diverse perspectives and narratives, qualitative empirical research grants theologians the opportunity to explore the complexities of human experiences in relation to faith and spirituality.

By employing qualitative research methods, practical theologians are better equipped to address pressing societal issues and develop a more informed and inclusive theology (De Roest, 2018).

Research methods were not merely contrived to collect and analyse data but were developed to do so reliably and validly. The researcher was methodical and consistent to produce data on the research problem (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Through a qualitative approach, this study underscored the importance of observation as part of a meaningful description, as well as strategically promoting the topic of the study. It is noteworthy that qualitative research relies on the observation of events in their natural context, which allowed for a holistic assessment of the problem at hand (Mohajan, 2018). Thus, an experience is neither limited nor influenced by anyone, nor is it hindered by external factors. As a result, the researcher was able to observe data with a broad-minded perspective and appreciate the way in which individuals interpret and perceive their own experiences. By examining the research problem in this way, new perspectives were opened, ultimately producing a deeper understanding and study.

The study explored the universality of religion and focused specifically on African religious experiences and expression. The researcher employed two complementary investigative approaches to examine the underlying philosophy of African religious practices. Firstly, the study examined deviant healing practices within contemporary religious movements in Tlohoenyandou, through a Practical Theology perspective. This allowed the researcher to explore incidents of spiritual abuse that may arise from such practices. Secondly, the study also looked at the implications and challenges of blending Indigenous religious beliefs and practices with those of Western origin. This allowed the researcher to assess the extent of missionary influence, or lack thereof, that contributed to deviant healing practices within the Vhavenda spiritual landscape and heritage. Hence, the researcher opted to advance *Vhuthu* (in Tshivenda) or Ubuntu (in isiZulu), a notion that accentuates personhood towards another's, as a research methodology. *Vhuthu* is a social ethic of human interdependence encompassed within the Vhavenda proverb '*muthu ndi muthu nga vhathu*', often translated as 'a person is a person through other persons' (Chigangaidze & Chinyenze, 2022). *Vhuthu* is a moral philosophy and worldview that holds that society grants humans their humanity (Mugumbate & Naami, 2023). Even though cultural values and practices

vary by ethnicity, they always highlight that an individual human being is part of a wider system of connections, communality, society, environment, and spirituality. Arguably, Indigenous knowledge systems in Africa have predominantly developed through an Ubuntu or *Vhuthu* (human interdependence) epistemology, ontology, and axiology (Seehawer, 2018). This incorporates a schema that acknowledges and values African Indigenous traditions, culture, languages.

A distinguishing characteristic of qualitative research is that behaviour is studied as it occurs naturally. There is no manipulation or control of behaviour, nor are there any externally imposed constraints (Tracy, 2013). As qualitative researchers are interested in how people interpret their experiences, construct their worlds, and attribute meaning to their experiences; an understanding of the situational context is very important. Qualitative researchers, therefore, need to have context sensitivity, as any explanation of behaviour that does not take into consideration the context is assumed to be incomplete (Hatch, 2023). At the same time the researcher must maintain some distance, Ganzevoort and Roeland (2014) explain that:

The methodological distantiation creates relatively autonomic knowledge that allows us to critique the ideology of the praxis we study, even if it is our own praxis. These distantiation and critique are at the same time an instance of our appropriation of praxis. The research outcomes lead to a new relation of researcher and praxis, often in the form of new knowledge, new possible modes of action, or new inspiration (2014, p. 7).

In qualitative research, the researchers, and co-researchers (participants) themselves are the primary instruments of data collection and analysis. The qualitative research process is inductive. Researchers gather data to build concepts, hypotheses, or theories, rather than deductively testing hypotheses as in positivist research. Theory is developed from the bottom up, from detailed particulars, rather than in a top-down manner. This approach is important, because qualitative researchers want to be open to new ways of understanding (McMillan & Schumacher, 2011).

Qualitative research was used because it emphasises the subjective views and experiences of the participants recruited and involved in the study (Newington, Alexander, Kirby, Saggu, & Wells,

2022). As a part of its analysis and scientific methodology, practical theology draws on the social sciences. In using scientific methods, it evaluates, reflects, and theorises about people's practices, experience, and reactions. Hence, in this instance, practical theology is empirical, which means that it goes beyond purely statistical information. As a result of the empirical-hermeneutical analysis of religion, practical theology must also assume the role of a cultural theology (Gräb, 2012). Therefore, its ability to identify and understand religious practices and communications is directly related to its ability to integrate religion and culture through fluid, hermeneutical communication. By conducting empirical research into the hermeneutics of religious experience in culture, practical theology can offer insight into the absolute qualities involved in meaning-making because of its application to everyday life (Klaasen, 2017). A qualitative approach allows researchers to examine the experiences and perspectives of individuals from diverse religious traditions as well as the social and cultural contexts of their practices. It fosters better empathy and awareness of diversity by encouraging open communication and mutual understanding amongst individuals with various religious backgrounds. Through respectful dialogue, we may learn from one another and develop a deeper appreciation for the diversity and depth of religious practices and beliefs, dispelling myths and fostering better understanding amongst religions.

4.1.2 Ethnography

Ethnography is a highly suitable research method for practical theology, it involves a qualitative research approach in which researchers conduct direct observation and interaction with a study's participants in their natural environment. Müller (2013) indicates that there is an emergence of a new approach to ethnography that sheds light on a corresponding shift in practical theology, particularly in the narrative and postfoundational approach. This innovative form of ethnography moves closer to social science, employing qualitative research methods. It is conducive for examining religious and spiritual practices, beliefs, and experiences (Norton, 2020). The researcher is enabled to glean experiences and narratives of people and groups within religious contexts by combining. To procure insights into how religious beliefs and practices impact people's lives by using participant observation, interviews, and other qualitative methodologies. Such an

approach offers the study an avenue to recognise the profound complexities of religious occurrences and how they interact with social, economic, political, and cultural aspects. The narrative and postfoundational approaches emphasise the relevance of individual and community stories within religious contexts, equally noting the diverse and subjective viewpoints and interpretations (Müller, 2013).

The application of theory and empirical data obtained through ethnographic research methods allows for a practical theologian to develop understanding of religion's practices and experiences in various contexts (Swinton & Mowat, 2016). This grants pastoral care and community engagement that is more effective. Furthermore, the study's ethnographic approach makes way for a better comprehension of how to support communities with various life experiences and backgrounds, resulting in more culturally competent religious practices. In the study, ethnography locates a useful method for researching Vhavenḁa customs and their unique viewpoints and experiences. Through ethnography, the researcher determined the community to be examined, considering their variety and origins (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019). Following that, needed to develop a sense of trust with people of the community and important stakeholders to participate actively in the community's religious rituals, events, and gatherings. From such a vantage point one can then conduct individual interviews or group talks to get more detailed information about their experiences. This involves the use of open-ended questions to encourage expression of thoughts, and even difficulties. Ultimately field notes are to be recorded, interviews transcribed and findings evaluated. Culminating in the acquired data being thoroughly unpacked for common themes, patterns, and insights.

4.1.3 Pastoral Ethnography

Pastoral ethnography was particularly useful in exploring how contemporary religious movements interpret and respond to contemporary issues and challenges, particularly healing practices. By incorporating the researcher's own theological questions and values into the research process, pastoral ethnography can also contribute to theological reflection and dialogue within religious

communities (Moschella, 2023). In addition to contributing to theological reflection and dialogue within religious communities, pastoral ethnography integrates the researcher's theological questions and values. Pastoral ethnography raises questions about the possibility of subjectivity or bias in study findings, especially if the researcher is too affected by their own personal beliefs. It calls into question the researcher's position in the community being studied as both an insider and an outsider (Toscano, 2019). The researcher had to negotiate their twin identities as social scientists and religious practitioner, and equally balance their own theological beliefs with their research objectives. To honour the voices of the participants and embody ethical regard in research relationships.

Both analytical reasoning, that is rigorous and receptive contemplation are components of an ethnographic approach. While being open and attentive to the experiences and opinions of the participants, the researcher must be able to collect and interpret data objectively (Hammarberg, Kirkman, & Lacey, 2016). Empathy and critical thinking must coexist in this, as well as a readiness to question one's own presumptions and biases. The result is a comprehensive and nuanced analysis of the social structures, cultural practices, and religious beliefs of a specific community that can improve understanding and respect of religious diversity.

4.2 RESEARCH INSTRUMENT

A research instrument is a tool for data collection and analysis (Sathiyaseelan, 2015). The research study applied participant observation, interviews and document studies which further necessitated an integration of different data located online. In this study, semi-structured interviews were used, and this resulted in independent responses from participants (Jamshed, 2014). The researcher did not allow outside interference. Consequently, the researcher was able to produce a document that was both authentic and original.

To solicit as much information from the participants as possible, the interview questions were open-ended. However, for the purpose of obtaining the responses of religious practitioners, such

as ministers, different questions were used. Moreover, a modified version of the structured interview was also conducted, as participants were asked to provide their opinions on the research question in relation to the church. It was also made clear that open-ended questions were the most appropriate technique for obtaining information from subjects of research. A wide variety of responses were gathered through open-ended questions, allowing the researchers to locate respondents' true beliefs. In a broader sense, they allow respondents to express any thoughts or opinions independently.

Face-to-face interviews were conducted at the convenience of the participants using a semi-structured interview guide. The guide was developed based on a group discussion and a pilot study, with the primary question being, what kind of deviant healing practices occur amongst contemporary religious movements in Ṭhohoyandou? The semi-structured format was chosen for its flexibility in allowing for deep exploration of the participants' experiences and for building a rapport with them. This approach allows for the modification of initial questions and for further probes of important issues that may arise during the interview. The semi-structured format also allows for a co-creation of meaning between the interviewer and the participant.

4.3 POPULATION AND SETTING

This study was conducted in the Ṭhohoyandou within the Thulamela Local Municipality in Vhembe district of Limpopo. The participants of the study were located from contemporary Christian movements, these involved Pentecostal/Charismatic African Independent/ Initiated/ Churches. To enhance understanding of the phenomenon being studied and inform the research questions, participants were selected who could best provide relevant insights into deviant healing practices. There were enough participants to inform fully all the significant elements of the phenomenon being studied. In other words, additional interviews did not result in new concepts being identified, the sample size was sufficient.

4.4 SAMPLING

Sampling essentially pertains to the selection of a representative group of individuals, objects, and items to epitomise the larger target group of the population (Mujere, 2016). The aim of sampling is to establish parameters or characteristics of the entire population, so that the research findings may be considered universal to the population at large. To help the research keep to pertinent constituents needed for the sample, the research was premised on the non-probability sampling approach. Due to the hidden and sensitive nature of victims of deviant healing practices, the non-probability sampling technique proved more suited to deal with the population (Bacher, Lemcke, Schmich, & Quatember, 2019). Two non-probability sampling approaches were used, and these were purposive and snowballing techniques.

The researcher recruited an array of individuals with various experiences and viewpoints on deviant healing practices in practical theology within Vhavenḁa community by combining purposive sample and snowball sampling. This method served to contribute to the research findings and give a full grasp of the subject from inside the community. Purposive sampling also known as judgement sampling proved constructive because the research sample shared related deviant healing practices experiences, membership in Pentecostalism and were able to assist in developing a theory (Casteel & Bridier, 2021). Snowballing sampling also known as ‘chain sampling, chain-referral sampling, or network sampling’ was specifically helpful because it best caters for ‘hard-to-reach or hard-to-ask, allowing members of the hidden population to conduct the recruiting on the researcher’s behalf (Casteel & Bridier, 2021). Purposive sampling, a non-random selection strategy, was utilised in this practical theology research to choose participants based on certain qualities or features judged pertinent to the study. This strategy enabled the researcher to focus on the specific demographic they wanted to analyse and collect data relevant to the research subject. Purposive sampling may also give extensive and in-depth insights into participants’ experiences and viewpoints, making it a desirable tool for practical theology research (Swinton & Mowat, 2016). However, the subjective character of this sample approach may raise concerns regarding the validity and representativeness of the results at times. The researcher was able to

broaden the sample and get insights on deviant healing practices in Ţhohoyanḑou, by using snowball sampling. Snowball sampling demonstrated a viable strategy for identifying and accessing persons engaging in deviant healing practices in the context of practical theology study on such practices (Anderson, 2015). Based on the developing theory, the sampling strategy evolved from largely judgmental to largely theoretical as the data were collected and analysed.

Overall, a sample size of 25 (twenty-five) out of the originally predicted 30 (thirty) adult participants (males and females) from Ţhohoyanḑou furnished an adequate foundation for conducting comprehensive scrutiny of deviant healing practices in practical theology. In this study, identifying a variety of denominations was critical, illustrating the broad spectrum of the religious environment under investigation. It is critical to stress that the researcher sought consent from each denomination, ensuring that ethical guidelines were followed. Methodologically, two essential factors were critical: the analysis technique and the concept of saturation (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The former defined the methodical process by which data was analysed, assuring rigor and coverage. The latter, saturation, was critical in evaluating when new data ceased to bring novel insights into the issue. The study attempted to conduct interviews with a varied spectrum of individuals, including seventeen pastors (13 male and 4 female), three victims/congregants (1 male and 2 female), and five African Traditional Medical practitioners (3 male and 2 female).

4.5 DATA COLLECTION

Data collection is crucial to the credibility and quality of any research. Any research project is incomplete without data collection, an in-depth data collection strategy is paramount to the success of any research study (Lareau, 2021). In this study, face-to-face, online, and telephonic interviews were used to gather data. Following relevant and essential ethical considerations, data was gathered through interviews. The interviews were designed to elicit participants' perspectives on deviant healing in contemporary religious movements. The interviews were held in private. Participants were the ones who determined when they would be available for interviews (Jamshed, 2014). Most interviews were done in Tshivenda; however, participants were permitted to move between

Tshivenda and English to explain their ideas. The researcher also moved between these two languages to explain queries and explore for more conversation. Every interview response was recorded and transcribed and presented as narratives. Raw transcripts of interviews cannot provide a clear and coherent picture of interviews. Narratives can provide a clearer and more coherent picture of interviewees' responses (Kim, 2015).

By employing *vhuthu* methodology and adapting the traditional *khoro* concept as a model, this study elucidates on the complex aspects of Thohoyandou 's spiritual landscape. The *Vhuthu* approach embraces the notion of interconnectivity and collaboration amongst persons, which is strongly entrenched in African philosophy (Nkosi, 2022). It served as an outline for a comprehensive and interactive strategy for data collecting in the setting of the study. *Vhuthu* fosters the value of community and supports communal accountability. The researcher used this approach because there was a need for a communal perspective in understanding the intricacies of deviant healing practices (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021). This novel technique to data gathering combines with a longstanding custom by exploring and addressing modern difficulties in religious groups using *khoro*, a traditional seating arranged for various reasons and or settling contentious situations. “*Khoro*” refers to family or communal forum which may be understood to a council in English; *lekgotla* in Sesotho and Setswana, on the other hand it correlates with “*tshivhidzo*” which relates to *imbizo* in isZulu and isXhosa languages, whereas it also relates to “*dzulo*” which connotes a seating (Phaswana, 2008). This type of duty tends to be delegated to the mature and knowledgeable. They are obligated to provide a report after their assignment has been accomplished. These traditional assemblies allow family and community members to serve one another. This correlates with the goal of the Christian community, which is made up of individuals who look out for one another. It is both Christian and strongly African in its conception of family and society.

In this study, the notion *khoro* provided a safe platform for discussion and exploration of sensitive issues, as well as for seeking resolutions, all in line with Ubuntu principles. This notion was applied as a model in establishing a safe and open forum for participants to express their insights and

perspectives about deviant approaches to healing (Mouton, 2022). Participants were given the opportunity to voice their opinions in an atmosphere of mutual respect and trust, in accordance with Ubuntu principles and the *khoro* philosophical thought.

The overarching motivation of this study was to reinforce the prominence of African Indigenous ideas and values as appropriate frames of reference for gathering and analysing data (Kovach, 2021). The researcher sought to involve participants in the study, collaboratively validating and directing the findings toward advancing cultural engagement. The adoption of *vhuthu* indicates that extensive Indigenous engagement in the study process was crucial. The researcher hoped that an African-based methodology would unpack an Indigenous African practical theology that acknowledges the African voice and recounts the narrative as it should be conveyed (Chilisa, 2019). Reaffirming the meaning of lived culture as a starting point for developing a dynamic approach to theological study. A Tshivenda orientation to centralised values, notably through a shared sense of moral obligation, was employed as a study paradigm (Joshua & Tshamano, 2023). It necessitated cultivating a sense of connection while undertaking the research. Hence, implying that research must remain cohesive in nature, with the goal of comprehending the study participants and their collectively chosen goals. Through empathy and collaboration, there should be a common understanding and a common ground for such an understanding, where the problems, preferences, and agendas of the researched are taken into consideration, as well as vice versa (Kaushik & Walsh, 2019).

4.6 CHAPTER SUMMARY

In order to comprehend the intersection of African religious practices with practices of Western origin and their ramifications in modern religious movements in Ṭhohoyandou, Chapter 4's goal was to discuss the empirical approach and design used in this study. Through the implementation of a qualitative, ethnographic, and narrative inquiry methodology, the research was able to extensively investigate the participants' lived experiences and viewpoints. The demographic and

sampling, data analysis methodologies, research design, and data gathering methods are addressed in this chapter. In order to safeguard the validity of the research were carefully addressed.

To address the secondary study question, which asks how members of these modern religious movements perceive and understand the merging of Western-origin religious rituals with traditional African religious practices the narratives of the participants were examined according to the qualitative empirical research approach. The results show a complex interaction between spiritual, historical, and cultural elements, illustrating both the positive and negative aspects of this blending process. The participants' varied points of view revealed a spectrum of experiences, from intense spiritual enrichment to incidents of spiritual abuse and conflict. This refined comprehension offers significant perspectives on the theological and sociological ramifications of these hybrid practices, enhancing our grasp of the current religious environment in Ṭhohoyanḍou.

Finally, the research process undergone in this study was thoughtfully constructed to evaluate the complicated phenomena of deviant healing practices among contemporary religious movements in Ṭhohoyanḍou. To investigate this topic, a qualitative empirical study design driven by practical theology and ethnographic methodologies was adopted. This technique allowed for a thorough evaluation of the study topic, considering the sociological perspective of deviance to uncover underlying patterns and mechanisms producing destructive actions inside these religious communities. Moreover, the study's incorporation of traditional African values, such as *vhuthu* and *khoro*, within the data gathering process depicts a dedication to connecting with the community and respecting their cultural environment. This approach highlighted the significance of comprehending and honouring the cultural and historical factors that influence theological discourse in the area. It used a variety of methods to ensure a comprehensive grasp of the issue and encouraged cooperation with study participants. This thorough and culturally sensitive approach advances the study of practical theology by deepening awareness of the intricacies and problems involved with deviant healing methods in this unique setting.

CHAPTER 5

DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 5 has examined the complex relationship between deviant healing practices and contemporary religious movements in Thohoyandou, Limpopo. The overarching purpose was to fully grasp the extent, character, and consequences of these practices, especially when integrating Indigenous African spiritual beliefs with practices of Western origin. The chapter also attempted to address the following secondary research question: How can European and African spiritual expressions be meaningfully combined to reduce deviant behaviours and promote a comprehensive pastoral care approach? In this chapter the process of data presentation, analysis, and discussion will be outlined. The data collected from the qualitative study is presented in a structured format as the following step in the research process. The compilation and analysis method attempted to offer data in a clear and discernible structure to find trends and relationships consistent with the research objectives (Walliman, 2021). Data gathered from interviews and data analysis is applied to support the various responses. This chapter additionally offers an explication of supplementary details supplied by the participants. This was conducted systematically with the intention to detect paradigms or correlations which are congruent with the research objectives and the specific objectives of the study:

- To identify and describe deviant healing practices in contemporary religious movements in Thohoyandou.
- To analyse these deviant healing practices in terms of cause, perpetrator, and effect.
- To identify the challenges of merging European and African spiritual practices.
- To suggest forms of remedial Pastoral care and counselling for the victims of deviant healing practices.

5.2 DATA PRESENTATION

Data presentation shows textually how data is related to each other (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). This section includes a detailed data presentation targeted at answering research questions about the topic under examination. It focuses specifically on the biographical information of the study's participants. The data contains information about the participants, such as gender, and any other pertinent variables that could aid in understanding their viewpoints or experiences.

The present section details the demographics of the twenty-five (25) participants in this study, as seen in Table 1 below. Included, is a diverse group of men and women, traditional mainline church ministers, Pentecostal ministers, and African traditional heal practitioners who had served in their respective fields for five to over twenty years and ranged in age from 20 to over 60. Among other variables, such as gender, race, and age distributions, this sample shows the different positions and titles within the religious sector.

Table 1: Participants information

Participants	Gender	Title	Category	Age	Race
1.	Male	Prophet	Minister	20 - 30	African
2.	Male	Reverend	Minister	35 - 45	African
3.	Male	Pastor	Minister	55 - 65	African
4.	Male	Reverend	Minister	35 - 45	African
5.	Male	Reverend	Minister	35 - 45	African
6.	Female	Miss	Victim	20 - 30	African
7.	Female	Miss	Victim	20 - 30	African
8.	Male	Apostle/Dr	Minister	55 - 65	African
9.	Male	Dr	Minister	55 - 65	African
10.	Male	Maine	Traditional	65 - 75	African
11.	Male	Maine	Traditional	35 - 45	African
12.	Female	Pastor	Minister	45 - 55	African
13.	Female	Pastor	Minister	55 - 65	African
14.	Female	Pastor	Minister	55 - 65	African
15.	Female	Maine	Traditional	65 - 75	African
16.	Female	Pastor	Minister	45 - 55	African
17.	Female	Prophet/Maine	Minister	45 - 55	African

18.	Male	Pastor	Minister	45 - 55	African
19.	Male	Mr	Victim	25 - 35	African
20.	Male	Maine	Traditional	65 - 75	African
21.	Male	Bishop	Minister	55 - 65	African
22.	Male	Pastor	Minister	55 - 65	African
23.	Male	Dr	Minister	55 - 65	African
24.	Male	Pastor	Minister	55 - 65	African
25.	Male	Pastor	Traditional	55 - 65	African

The table depicts a complex and diverse African Thohoyandou community, with representation spanning several religious, cultural, and societal roles. It sheds light on the diverse views and insights within Vhavenda community, displaying both its range of perspectives and potential themes for additional investigation or research.

Figure 2: Study Participants

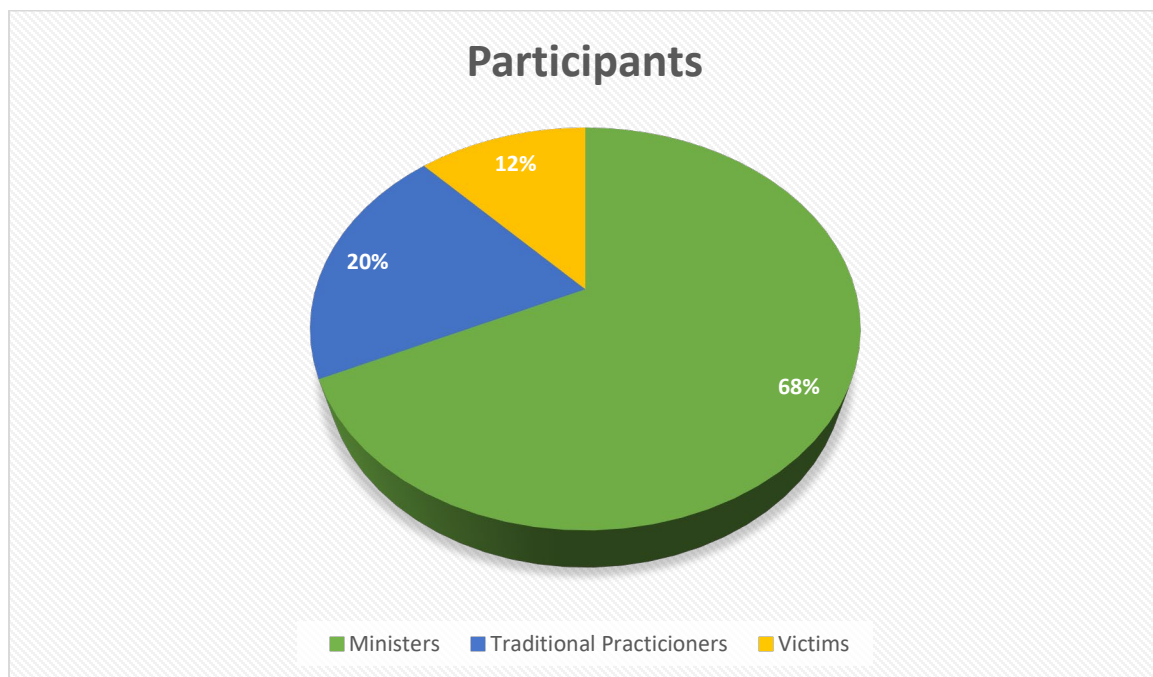


Figure 2 depicts the type of the participants involved in the study. Seventeen of the 25 participants (68%) were Christian ministers. Five were African traditional medical practitioners and three were

victims, which amounted to (12%). The individuals listed hold various roles such as Minister, Victim, and Traditional. This reflects the multifaceted nature of the community, encompassing religious leaders, victims of certain circumstances, and those who adhere to traditional roles within society. All individuals identify as African, reflecting Vhavenda cultural and ethnic homogeneity. This implies that to a certain degree individuals identified share a common identity, as well as values, traditions, and experiences. Certain individuals have double titles, such as Apostle/Dr. or Prophet/Maine, indicating a mixing or overlap of religious and societal positions within the local population. This reflects the complexities of African communities' identities and functions, where individuals may play multiple roles at the same time. This hints at an environment in which people might have many identities or responsibilities, combining spirituality with other domains of influence. The existence of individuals identified as victims signifies an acknowledgement of societal problems or abuses.

Figure 3: Age of Participants

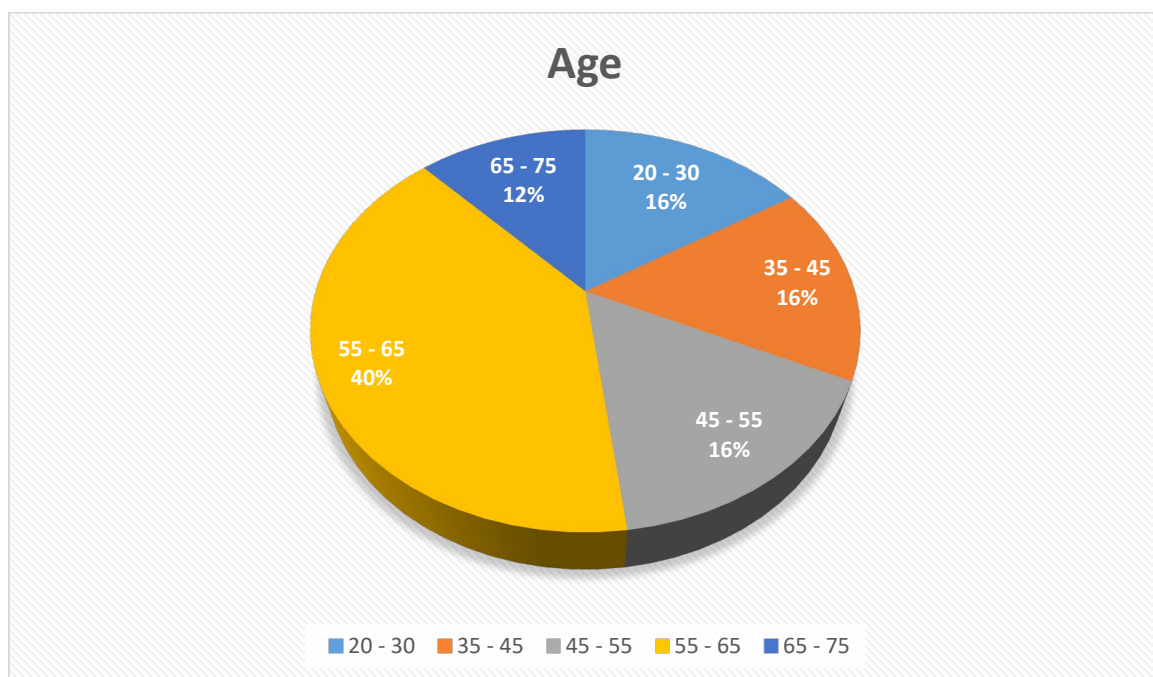


Figure 3 depicts the age distribution of the study participants. Four of the 25 participants (16%) were between the ages of 20 and 30, and four were between the ages of 35 and 45. Four were between the ages of 45 and 55 (16%), ten between the ages of 55 and 65 (40%), and three between the ages of 65 and 75 (12%). Participants' ages range from 20 to 75 years. This indicates that the population includes individuals from a variety of ages, which could provide a wide perspective and range of experiences.

The age distribution indicates a diversified society with people at various life stages. However, there is a concentration of older people, particularly in leadership roles, indicating a potential generational divide in the transfer of leadership or opportunities for younger members. In certain positions, such as Pastor, there appears to be a correlation between age and gender, with females represented across a wide age range and males largely clustered between the ages of 55 and 65. Most males in older age groups holding leadership positions such as Bishop, Apostle, and Pastor may correspond to conventional gender standards or precedents regarding authority within the society.

Figure 4: Gender of Participants

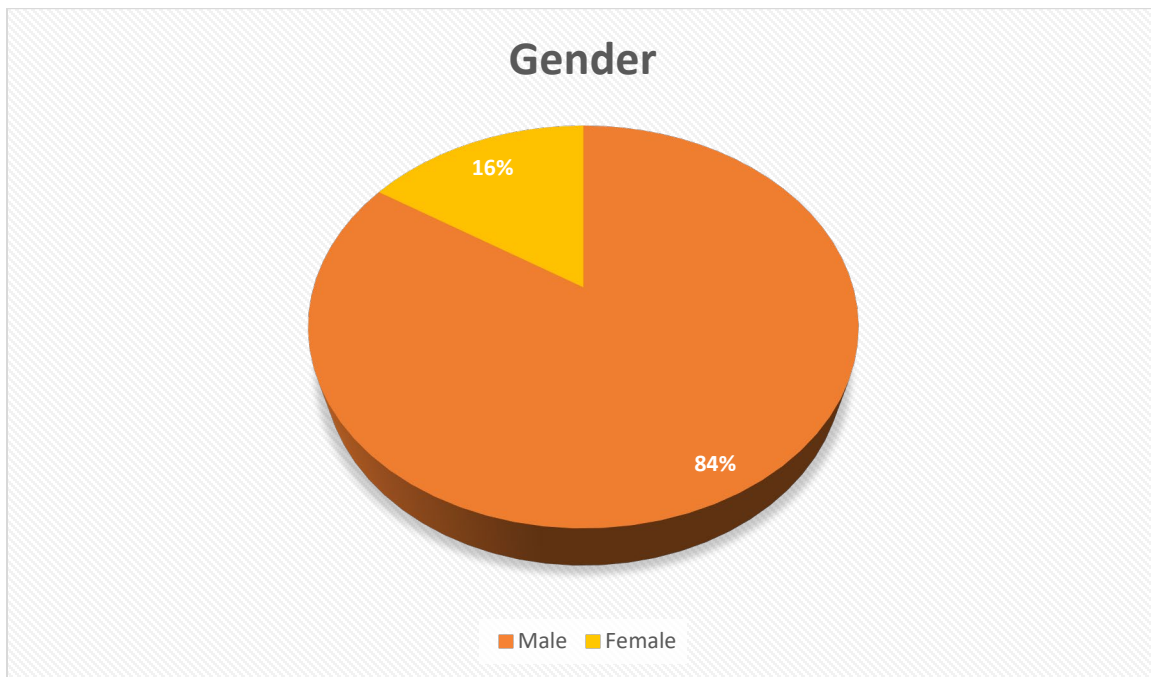


Figure 4 illustrates the participants who took part in the interview process. 25 of the previously suggested 30 people were interviewed, with 17 males which translated to (84%), and 29 females which translated to (16%). This data suggests that many male participants in the study responded more to the interviews than female ones. Gender representation varies significantly, with men outnumbering women, particularly in leadership or conventional roles. This gender gap may be a consequence of underpinning societal norms or cultural practices which promote men in positions of leadership within religious or traditional systems. The underrepresentation of women in contrast to men could signify difficulties or limits that women encounter in obtaining specific positions or occupations within the community. It is worth mentioning that, despite the gender difference, women continue to hold numerous roles and positions, albeit in fewer numbers. This implies some amount of inclusivity while simultaneously underscoring the need for increased gender diversity and representation.

5.3 INTERVIEWS AND OBSERVATIONS

Interviews were conducted based on a combination of guided, standardised and focus group interviews, which included an open-ended interview approach (Guest, Namey, Taylor, Eley, & McKenna, 2017). Considering the above, the confidentiality of participants and affected groups was always maintained. Due to the sensitive nature of the study, the vulnerability of the participants, and the concern of any potential harm to interviewees, if they were to reveal sensitive information, complicated attempts to recruit more participants (Ellard-Gray, Jeffrey, Choubak, & Crann, 2015). Interviews proved a crucial data gathering tool, as they provided a more in-depth insight of the experiences and beliefs of those participating or affected by deviant healing practices. Interviews allowed for better understanding of the role of Charismatic or Pentecostal leaders or healers within these groups, as well as how they develop and impact their practices. The researcher investigated the opinions of participants via personal narratives and acquired valuable insights into their worldviews (Karagiozis, 2018). Observation, both participant and non-participant, is an essential component of data collecting in practical theology, therefore immersion in the religious community, was a critical factor, watching healing rites, and engaging with practitioners helped the researcher to get a full understanding of deviant healing methods. Observation aided in determining the emotional, social, and cultural components of these acts, offering a comprehensive picture.

5.4 DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis is the act of reviewing, cleansing, transforming, and modelling data with the goal of uncovering usable information, drawing educated conclusions, and supporting empirical decision-making (Alem, 2020). These processes involve a series of closely connected actions that are done with the goal of summarising, organising, and manipulating gathered data to produce information that provides answers to research questions (Tracy, 2013). For this study, two data sources were found to be appropriate: interviews and a literature review as secondary data. Secondary data

was obtained with the primary goal of re-examining the data and had an added benefit of obliging the researcher to be open about the fundamental presumptions and ideas relevant to the dataset.

In qualitative data analysis the aim is to expound and establish a profound grasp of a phenomenon by interpreting the data and assembling themes (Sargeant, 2012). Data analysis is the process of organising raw data so that meaningful information may be derived from it. In other words, it is a process that involves systematic perusal and arrangement of transcripts, notes and other data may be amassed in examining a phenomenon at hand. Data analysis mainly functions to convert data into research findings (Sutton & Austin, 2015). The process of evaluating interview transcripts and observational notes to discover recurrent themes, patterns, and meanings is known as qualitative analysis (Belotto, 2018). Notably, there are several techniques to data analysis, and it is notoriously simple to change data during the study process to promote certain results or agendas. The researcher presented a comprehensive knowledge of the lived experiences of persons engaging in deviant healing practices by diving into the narratives. Proper analysis of data was adhered to, in order to interpret research data. The researcher structured and interpreted data in a way that what it represented was understandable.

Practical Theology Viewpoint

Examining the topic from the standpoint of practical theology helps to grasp the cultural, historical, and theological factors that relate to deviant healing practices. Individuals seek peace and respite from suffering through different routes, including those outside of standard medical institutions, according to practical theology (Gibson & Louw, 2018). Practical theology, by utilising a multi-disciplinary approach, provides for a complete and nuanced study. A researcher can find patterns, trends, and correlations that provide light on the inner workings of these religious groups by gathering, organising, and analysing data in a methodical manner. This type of analysis assists in answering key issues such as: What are the underlying assumptions that motivate deviant behaviour? What distinguishes these views from conventional interpretations? What drives people

to seek out unorthodox healing methods? What are the possible hazards and advantages of these practices?

Practical theology, through empirical analysis, provides useful insights into deviant healing methods within modern religious communities (Walton, 2020). It aids in the identification of variables that lead to the popularity and expansion of these practices, such as a desire for alternative healing approaches or cynicism against mainstream medicine. It also provides data on the influence of deviant healing practices on the physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being of individuals. A solid foundation for examining data on deviant healing methods among contemporary religious movements is provided by practical theology. It blends theological and sociological approaches to better comprehend the motives behind these activities, their influence on people and communities, and their consequences for the religious landscape as a whole (Pieterse, 2017).

To understand the crucial role of data analysis in practical theology, we must first recognise the complexity underlying deviant healing practices. These activities are not restricted to a single religious tradition, but rather encompass a variety of faiths, including charismatic Christianity, African spirituality, and others (Walton, 2020). The multiplicity and fluidity of these movements make understanding the motivations, tactics, and effects of deviant healing difficult. Data analysis enables practical theologians to discover potential hazards and ethical dilemmas related to deviant healing practices (Grossoehme, 2014). They can determine the extent to which vulnerable people are abused or misled by unethical practitioners. This study adds to efforts to keep people safe and encourages responsible and ethical behaviour within religious groups. It is critical to create a balance between objectivity and sensitivity while analysing evidence in practical theology (Anderson, 2015). The researcher had to approach the topic with compassion and respect for the religious beliefs and practices under consideration. The researcher gave a thorough understanding that acknowledged both the spiritual traditions involved and the scientific rigor necessary by using an interdisciplinary method that incorporates theology, sociology, anthropology, and psychology.

An inductive method of thematic analysis was applied to the research study's transcribed data (Chapman, Hadfield, & Chapman, 2015). Thematic analysis is a flexible method for studying qualitative data since it includes finding patterns and themes in the data without the use of a pre-existing framework (Kiger & Varpio, 2020). Thematic analysis is a crucial method for making sense of voluminous qualitative data and can provide researchers with new views on the feelings and viewpoints of their study subjects. The research questions mentioned above, as well as pertinent data from other interview guide questions and context-specific language probes, were the focus of the investigation. To make sense of the data, each interview transcript was carefully examined before the thematic data analysis began. Thematic analysis involves reviewing data gathered during the process of qualitative inquiry for the purposes to identify relevant observations and patterns from the collected data (Alhojailan, 2012). Thematic analysis emerges as the perfect tool for undertaking analysis on such types of data, which entail disagreement and a wide range of replies.

Further reading revealed recurring themes from each interview and their connections to others. To allow voices to spontaneously emerge from the worldview of respondents, typical narratives that supported a certain emerging topic were selected and tied to the theme, and the depth of such tales was examined through interpretation by the researcher (Falzon, 2016). Once themes were found, they were eventually connected logically in a more theoretical and systematic ordering, leading to the creation of generic categorisations.

5.4.1 Thematic Analysis Process

This study offers a detailed thematic analysis using Braun and Clarke's six-step process, which provided a solid foundation for understanding the convoluted aspects of Ṭhohoyandou's deviant healing practices. Braun and Clarke's method consists of six steps: getting familiar with the data, creating codes, identifying themes, reviewing themes, defining, and Labelling themes, and producing the report (Kiger & Varpio, 2020). The process was instrumental in assisting the researcher in addressing underpinning premises of theory. It proved helpful in the investigation of

diverse points of view and experiences, expanding awareness of the cultural and spiritual dynamics at play. Moreover, it provided vital insights to the larger conversation by offering a platform to interrogate a post-colonial African Practical Theology perspective, opening the way for future research and informed pastoral practices (Komboh, 2017). It demonstrated the strength and adaptability of Braun and Clarke's six-step theme analysis in peeling back aspects of deviant healing practices within a specific cultural and religious context. The process was recursive and allowed for the researcher to revisit prior stages as they advanced through the investigation.

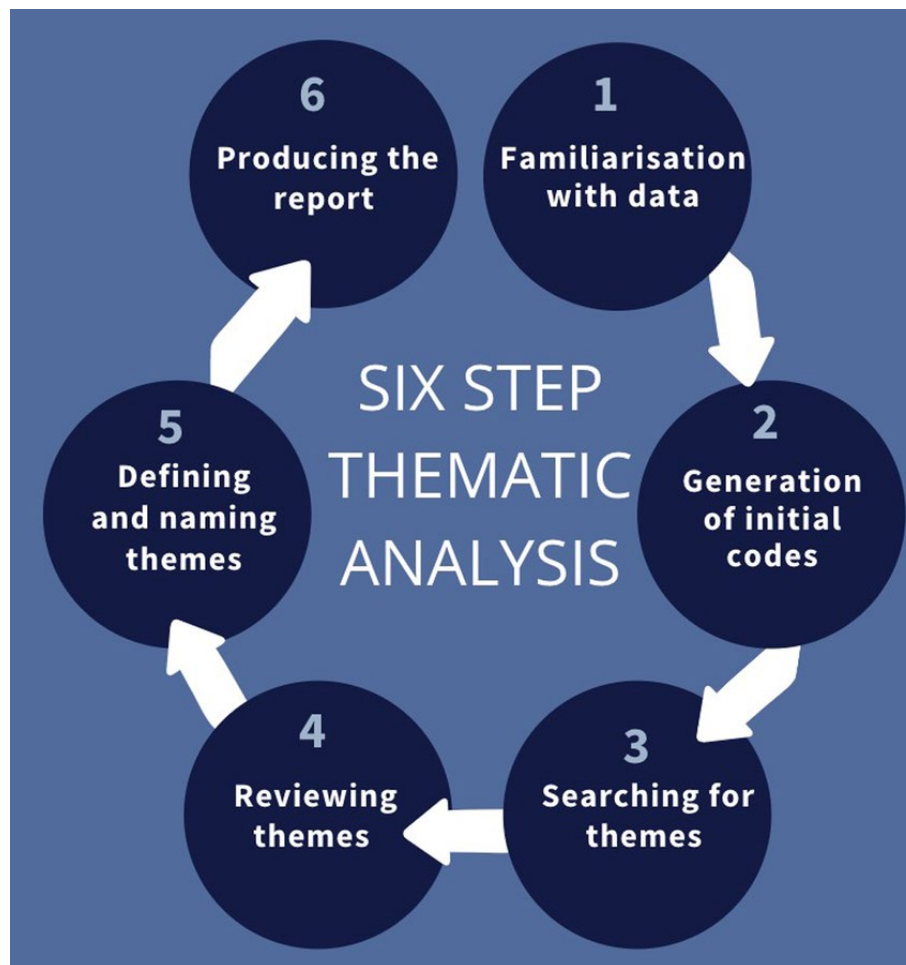
Thematic insights gained through the process lead to a more profound comprehension of these practices, with substantial potential for future pastoral interventions in comparable settings. In presenting a fluid and dynamic approach to analysis, it allowed for unexpected themes to emerge. Furthermore, it highlighted the need of reflexivity and transparency in the research process, ensuring that the researcher's interpretations are presented explicitly. The reflexive character of Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis involved an interplay between researcher and the subject, with the subject's own perspective informing the researcher's understanding of the data. This approach allows for a more holistic understanding of the subject, which can lead to more meaningful results (Terry, Hayfield, Clarke, & Braun, 2017).

By critically examining the data from different angles, this thematic analysis was conducive for the identification of patterns and themes that may not be readily apparent in other approaches (Proudfoot, 2023). It helped to identify some interesting underlying patterns and dynamics that may be influencing the deviant healing practices, as well as potential interventions that may be more effective. The researcher navigated and accomplished the study process thoroughly, encompassing procedures such as familiarisation with data, creating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining naming themes, and writing the report (Naeem, Ozuem, Howell, & Ranfagni, 2023). This methodical approach did not only prove useful but uncovered pertinent information. The motive of using Braun and Clarke's theme analysis in the context of a Practical Theology study was to integrate theoretical notions with practical applications. The objective entailed providing perspectives that not only adhere to analytical rigor but also resonate

with individuals' and communities' lived realities (Walther, et al., 2017). It was critical to incorporate theological thoughts and ethical issues throughout the analysis to ensure that the findings make a significant contribution to the area of Practical Theology by bridging the gap between theory and practice.

Figure 4 presented below demonstrates the steps or phases that the researcher underwent to apply a practical theology prism into each phase of Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis, to not only study deviant healing techniques but also aimed to address the theological aspects and consequences for pastoral practice and spiritual well-being.

Figure 4: Braun and Clarke six-step thematic analysis (McInerney, et al., 2022)



Step 1: Getting familiar with the data

The researcher began by reading and re-reading interviews, field notes, and pertinent documentation connected to deviant healing practices in Thohoyandou. This involved being submerged in raw data to obtain an in-depth awareness of the background and intricacies around the phenomena (Jackson, Vaughan, & Brown, 2018). This was required to find relevant material that may be related to the research questions. In this sense, manual transcription of data was an immensely productive undertaking for the researcher, substantially facilitating an in-depth immersion into the data. Data was transcribed orthographically, taking note of inflections, breaks, pauses, tones, and so on from both the interviewer and the participant (Byrne, 2022). To become acquainted with the data, the researcher commenced by listening to every interview recording prior to transcribing that specific recording. The researcher did not take notes on the initial replay of each interview since it needed active listening. Prior to transcribing, the researcher used active listening to gain a grasp of the main topics covered in each interview (Lareau, 2021). This also allowed for the recalling of gestures and behaviours which could have or might not have been noted in interview notes because of the distraction of activities such as note taking. Every conversation was meticulously transcribed by the researcher following the active-listen replay. After all interviews had been transcribed, each transcript was read several times.

Step 2: Creating codes

Coding serves as an underlying basis for what will eventually become themes (Vaismoradi, Jones, Turunen, & Snelgrove, 2016). The encoding process is used to provide brief, abbreviated descriptive or interpretative labels for individual components of data indicating what might be relevant to the research question(s). It assists researchers in systematically handling and interpreting copious quantities of qualitative data. Researchers are then able to find trends, correlations, and themes that culminate in a profound recognition of the study topics by fragmenting the material into minute, practical pieces (codes) (Walliman, 2021). Based on the strategy and study aims, the coding process can be undertaken in a variety of ways, including open

coding, axial coding, and selective coding. The researcher in open coding begins with a comprehensive analysis of the data without preconceived classifications. Inductively produced codes from data support the creation of novel concepts and notions. In respect to axial Coding is the process of grouping open codes into more precise and related groups (Williams & Moser, 2019). Connections between codes are investigated to comprehend the data's interplay and exchanges. In selective coding, the researcher concentrates on the fundamental categories most relevant to the study issue. The objective is to provide a consistent and complete framework.

Coding involves grouping data into small categories that are meaningful to the researcher, allowing them to identify patterns and trends within the data (Deterding & Waters, 2021). This process requires creativity and intuition, as well as analytical and problem-solving skills, as it requires the ability to recognise patterns and interpret data in a meaningful way. The setting in which the study is conducted, the nature of the research, and the researcher's mindset and interests will all impact which codes the researcher assigns to the data. Some codes may emerge repeatedly during the coding process, which might be an indicator of forming patterns. These emergent patterns or similarities between codes may give rise to groupings (Wegrzyn, Vogt, Kireclioglu, Schneider, & Kissler, 2017). Coding entails not just Labelling but also linking or connecting facts to a concept. It's a cyclical process. Richer interpretations, classifications, themes, and conceptions may be formed from the data by including additional cycles into the coding process.

The researcher examined the full dataset, giving equal treatment to each data item and finding elements of data items that are engaging and relevant in establishing themes (Kiger & Varpio, 2020). Given that coding is an interpretative process, it is probable that two researchers will assign two distinct codes to the same data. The researcher employed analytic memos to chronicle how the coding process evolved and to highlight the codes that prompted more substantial contemplation on the researcher's part, in relation to the essential nature of the data (Birks & Mills, 2022). Making use of axial coding as a method for reviewing qualitative data and uncovering themes and implicit implications. The researcher sought to determine when, why, who, how, and with what ramifications specific activities and practices occur. The researcher continued to code

until data saturation was reached. In practice, data saturation is achieved by continuing the coding process until no new themes or insights arise from the data. This guarantees that the analysis captures the complexity and diversity of the participants' experiences, adding to the credibility and rigor of the study findings (Amin, et al., 2020). This method guaranteed that the analysis was extensive and that the conclusions were founded on a thorough study of individuals' and communities' lived experiences, which aligned with the purpose of Practical Theology.

Step 3: Identifying themes

Once every one of the pertinent data components has been coded, the identifying themes step commences. The coded data is evaluated and compared to determine how various codes could potentially be merged based on associated significance to produce themes or sub-themes (Adu, 2019). This sometimes entailed combining many codes that share a common underlying notion or aspect of the data into a single code. This phase yielded initial codes that captured crucial traits, practices, and drivers related with deviant healing practices. Each code functioned to provide an outline, encompassing the core concepts of the data, and opening potential wider themes to become apparent (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

The researcher diligently interpreted the links between various codes and analysed how the connection impacted the researcher's interpretation of an identified theme (Ozuem, Willis, & Howell, 2022). It was critical that the arrangement of codes and data items convey a crucial idea that contributes to the answer(s) of the research question(s). The researcher compiled codes into preliminary candidate themes.

Step 4: Reviewing themes

It is critical to verify that every theme is theologically cohesive and adheres to consistency throughout the thematic analysis process. This entailed the researcher critically assessing how the

highlighted themes correspond with theological concepts and questions of ethics, as well as how they represent individuals' and communities' lived experiences in the framework of Practical Theology (Bennett, Graham, Pattison, & Walton, 2018). The researcher considered each theme carefully regarding theological reflection, safeguarding that they are consistent with the theological fundamentals that are essential to Practical Theology.

Furthermore, the fundamental premises of theme was determined and arranged into a coherent explanation that reflects the study results' theological and ethical elements. The researcher ensured that the themes were approached through an appreciation of ethics, with participants' narratives respected and appropriate handling of their experiences reflected (Burles & Bally, 2018). This stage guaranteed that each theme appropriately reflected the data correlations identified, and that thematic structure was consistent with the research objectives. The researcher's ongoing contemplation and debate were critical in developing the themes.

The strategy of implementing an in-depth two-fold analysis was critical to ensuring the reliability and validity of the encountered themes (Myneni, Cobb, & Cohen, 2016). At this point the researcher conducted a review of potential themes from two independent levels. The first level involved an examination of the links between the data items and codes that comprise each theme and sub-theme. If the codes generated an underlying trend, it was deemed that the prospective theme/sub-theme constitutes an argument that is plausible and could be added to the overarching account of the data (Byrne, 2022). The identified themes have been examined in connection to the data set at level two. At stage two, the candidate themes are evaluated in respect to the data set. Themes were evaluated based on the extent to which they can give a sufficiently accurate analysis of the data in connection to the research question(s).

Step 5: Defining and Labelling themes

The definition of themes necessitates a thorough examination of the constituent data elements. Each theme was supported by many data points. When writing up the analysis results, the

researcher chose which data items to include as extracts (Kiger & Varpio, 2020). The selected samples served to offer an engaging and argumentative summary of the contentions advanced by each theme. Multiple extracts from the overall array of data items that constitute a theme were employed to illustrate the wide range of meaningful representations across these data items and to highlight the cohesiveness of the theme's data items. Furthermore, each of the given data extracts was subjected to a thorough examination, going beyond just reporting what a participant may have stated.

Adequate data was obtained to corroborate the participants' perspectives and opinions. A more in-depth examination of what was said and how it was said was undertaken. The empirical examination of data extracts suggested intriguing implications for how participants developed their schema of deviant healing practices (Benoot, Hannes, & Bilsen, 2016). The headings of the themes were exposed to a thorough evaluation. Theme names provide the reader with the first indication of what has been extracted from the data. The researcher ensured that the names were simple, educative, and distinctive. The overarching trend was to come up with names that are descriptions of the themes.

Step 6: Producing the report

The final stage included creating an exhaustive account that conveyed the thematic analysis findings (Peel, 2020). This part of the process, like the preceding ones, necessitated an iterative approach towards authoring. As the codes and themes changed during the analysis, so did the write-up. Developments were meticulously documented throughout this phase and represented in unstructured notes and memos. Phase six may thus be viewed as the completion and final assessment of the report that the researcher had started working on before tackling their thematic analysis. Every theme was extensively examined, and pertinent statements or data samples used to demonstrate and justify the established patterns (Vasileiou, Barnett, Thorpe, & Young, 2018). The research provided a complete assessment of deviant healing practices in Tshohoyandou, as well as significant findings based on data and thematic analysis.

5.5 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

For the study, a formal application for ethical clearance to the University Ethics Committee was registered and approved. As part of the ethical responsibility to protect the participants' rights and welfare, the researcher adhered sincerely to the study's ethics (Sabar & Sabar Ben-Yehoshua, 2017). The researcher informed the participants in the study of the purpose of the study and were invited to take part. All participants were assured of confidentiality and anonymity throughout the research process, as well as the ability to withdraw at any time (Bos, 2020). Interview dates and times were agreed upon and arranged with the participants. As part of the trust-building process, the first step was to establish a relationship with the participant. Participants were provided with consent forms upon agreeing to take part in the study, thereby giving their informed consent (Manti & Licari, 2018). Moreover, the participants were asked to grant permission for their interviews to be recorded and their responses to be used in the study's presentation.

Participants were constantly conscientized about the compliance of confidentiality and anonymity (Saunders, Kitzinger, & Kitzinger, 2015). It was made clear to them that the church, ministry, or organisations name would not be written in the study. The true identities of the participants were not used in the transcription of the data from the recordings. Each participant and church, ministry or organisations were given pseudonyms as a security measure to ensure anonymity (Petrova, Dewing, & Camilleri, 2016). The transcriber had no vested interests in any of the churches, ministries, or organisations; they were not threat participants.

5.6 VALIDATION STAGE

Validity is a critical aspect of qualitative research as it pertains to the credibility or the reliability of scientific findings (Cypress, 2017). A researcher may be deflected by subjectivity in their interpretation of data and should strive to preclude factors that may pose risks to consistency in respect to the scientific merit of the study. It may be argued that qualitative research depends on the conscience of the researcher. Aubin-Auger (2008) emphasises this by saying that: "The value

of scientific research largely depends on the researcher's ability to demonstrate the credibility of his findings" (2008, p. 145). The researcher's ability to collect and record data correctly is imperative. However, it must be noted that validity in qualitative research differs from quantitative research (Hammarberg, Kirkman, & Lacey, 2016). In qualitative research a naturalistic slant is adopted to depict phenomena within a distinct setting, in a way that enables interviews and observations to dominate in the "naturalistic (interpretive) paradigm and supplementary in the positive paradigm" (Golafshani, 2003). This exposes the philosophical nature of each paradigm.

In essence, reliability pertains to the consistency of a research instrument to not only measure but analyse variables (Yilmaz, 2013). In addition to being essential, reliability is also necessary, it dictates that for a study to be regarded as reliable, any significant results must be more than a once-off event. To be reproducible, it is anticipated that other researchers will be able to perform the exact same research under the same conditions and generate the same results (Sandve, Nekrutenko, Taylor, & Hovig, 2013). By doing so, a solid understanding of the hypothesis is presented. Reliability is necessary, but it is not sufficient, a reliable set of data will also need to be valid. Human behaviour is never static, which presents a reliability problem in the social sciences. Generally, research is designed to be reliable on the basis that a single reality exists, and the same results will be obtained by studying it repeatedly. In qualitative research, reliability and validity are defined by trustworthiness, rigor, and quality (Anney, 2014). The researcher understood that by using triangulation to achieve validity and reliability of this study, they would eliminate bias and increase the researcher's truthfulness in proposing some social phenomena. The focus of the study entailed the appraisal of deviant healing practices in contemporary religious movements in their relation to African traditional religious expression. Vital to the validity of the interviews was asking relevant questions that were not vague and abstruse. The researcher considered that validity in qualitative research does not provide a unitary concept. Due to this, the researcher adhered to the processual approach. According to Vandenbussche, Edelenbos and Eshuis (2020) the epistemological consequence of the processual perspective on reality is:

that knowledge too is considered as fundamentally processual. Rather than seeing knowledge as universal and objective and as a valid and reliable representation of a static, external reality (cf. Cartesian epistemology), processists see knowledge as continuously evolving: knowing is an ongoing process. Furthermore, knowing is embedded both in experience and context: ‘what we can know [. . .] are products of ongoing concrete interaction between “myself” (or “ourselves”) and the specifics of the social and physical “context” or “circumstances” we are in at any given time’ (2020, p. 3).

The processual approach presented more room for the study to ‘adapt to different situations, contexts, epistemological paradigms, and personal styles in conducting research’ (Hayashi Jr, Abib, Hoppen, & Wolff, 2021, p. 2).

5.7 FINDINGS

This research's objective was to collect substantial data on the incidence and consequence of deviant healing practices in Ṭhohoyandou. To guarantee representativeness, a sample size of 25 people from diverse age groups and backgrounds was chosen at random. In-depth interviews with chosen individuals who had encountered deviant healing practices were conducted as part of the qualitative study. These interviews revealed many essential topics. The data analysis outlined numerous noteworthy findings about Ṭhohoyandou's deviant healing practices. It emerged that these practices are frequently used as an alternative form of healing for people who divert from established healthcare systems.

The research questions that guide this study are as follows:

- What kind of deviant healing practices occur amongst contemporary religious movements in Ṭhohoyandou?
- Who is involved in these practices and what are their causes and effects?
- How can European and African spiritual expressions be merged meaningfully?

- Which forms of remedial action may be undertaken for the benefit of the victims of deviant healing practices?

This section will present major findings that illustrate the frequency and significance of deviant healing practices among contemporary religious movements, based on a careful examination of data acquired through interviews, observations, and literature. These findings will be arranged into themes or topical areas to provide a thorough overview of the various practices identified (Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017). Furthermore, this section will investigate the underpinning principles that influence these atypical methods of treatment. Investigating different themes and codes allows for the understanding of the cultural and social relevance in Ṭhohoyanḍou's religious landscape. Thematic analysis helps one to better understand how historical legacies, local traditions, and global influences shape these activities (Getz & Page, 2019). The researcher used a post-colonial African practical theology viewpoint to develop discourse and stimulate critical thinking on the complexities of these events that occur at the junction of tradition and modernity in the context in question (Heaney, 2016). It helped the researcher to question dominant narratives and better understand how power dynamics influence the appearance and acceptability of such behaviours within certain religious groups.

Thematic analysis helped reveal an elaborate mosaic of motives that propel deviant healing practices in modern religious movements in Ṭhohoyanḍou (Pratezina, 2021). Using thematic analysis of interview transcripts, eight overarching themes emerged, each revealing different aspects of contemporary religious movements' deviant healing practices. Each theme offers distinctive perspectives into the socio-cultural, ethical, and spiritual forces at play within modern religious movements in Ṭhohoyanḍou. These themes include the significance of spiritual healing, healers, rituals, emotional healing, traditional healing, Christian faith healing, and the integration of traditional and modern healing practices (Kahissay, Fenta, & Boon, 2020). By exploring these themes, one may acquire a stronger grasp of the intricacies and concerns related to healing practices and spiritual expressions, which can then be used to inform community-wide efforts that encourage healing, dialogue, and epistemic justice (Moschella, *Ethnography as a pastoral practice: An introduction*, 2023). While certain themes overlapped, they all contributed to an extensive

awareness of the topic under examination. These results have significant implications for the development of evidence-based therapies.

Emerging Themes

The accounts reflected on the peculiar practices adopted by contemporary religious movements, demonstrate an intricate interweaving of cultural syncretism, unconventional modalities, dependence on the paranormal, and alternative systems of belief. By delving into these themes, one gains insight into the complex and dynamic character of contemporary healing techniques, as well as the diverse viewpoints and experiences of people involved in them. The terrain of contemporary healing movements has a complex array of practices which transcend standard medical approaches.

1. What kind of deviant healing practices occur amongst contemporary religious movements in Thohoyandou?

Theme 1: Authenticity of healing modalities

Theme 1 divulges the perspectives and claims on the legitimacy and practicality of healing methods within contemporary religious movements. Participants shared their ideas and personal encounters with what makes authentic healing, particularly the necessity of a sense of faith, spirituality, and supernatural involvement. The analysis of views and exchanges about the veracity of healing methods within contemporary religious movements follows profound assumptions, individual experiences, and conceptions of what constitutes true healing.

Some participants expressed that for healing practices to produce genuine restoration results was a crucial factor in assessing its validity. A female participant who has been involved in ministry for 18 years indicated that:

“Vha khou ya vha vhuya vhari vho fhola (mmh) Vhafunzhi zwa vhukhumakhuma havhala vhathu vha vha songo fhola Tshothe (okay) asi zwone (mmh) phodzo yo fhelelaho ikha murena Yeso khirisito ayethe (mmh) vha vha songo fhola Tshothe... ndo no zwi vhona Vhafunzhi havhala vhathu vhono tuwa vhaya hangei vha tshi vhuya vha thoma ubva mamuya (okay) vha kho dzi vhona (mmh) a... ri tshi vho vha rabelela in the name of Jesus Christ havhala vhathu vha bva heila mimuya”

Translated into English as:

They will come back and say they are healed (mmh) Pastor, in reality those people are not healed completely (okay) it not true (mmh) complete healing is in the Lord Jesus Christ alone (mmh) they are not healed completely...I have seen, pastor, that once those people have gone to those places, when they come, they begin to manifest spirits (okay) you see (mmh)...when we pray for them in the name of Jesus Christ, those people have spirits come out of them.

At the centre of this theme is the question of what constitutes true healing. For some, legitimacy is inextricably linked to following established religious rituals and beliefs, in which healing is considered as an expression of miraculous intervention or spiritual force. In these situations, faith and prayer are frequently viewed as essential elements of the healing process, with believers putting their trust in higher powers to bring about physical, emotional, or spiritual recovery. Whereas, others consider healing in a more integrative manner, combining alternative treatments or mind-body activities into their faith-based or spiritual paradigm.

In such circumstances, authenticity may be determined by the perceived success of the healing modality in elevating one's general health while tackling the underlying causes of illness or suffering. It is vital to also note that practices that deviate substantially from accepted conventions might not possess scientific validation or rigorous testing to back up their claims of efficacy. This raises questions regarding the trustworthiness and legitimacy of such activities.

“Muthu arali ana suger diabetes kana musu muthu ana cancer a rabeleliwa hapfi o fhola kha tuwe na mufunzi vha ye ha dokotela u wana confirmation yori na ngoho o fhola kana mini ngori huna vhanwe vho no litshisaho vhanwe na mishonga kana uri vha songo tsha di thavha dzi injections hoyu muthu avhuya a thothela a vhuya a lovha zwino huna vhafunzi vhane vha vha vha vhukuma na vho no khou fake dzi phodzo vha tshi khou itela uri vha kunge vhathu vha de kerekeni ”

Translated into English as:

If someone who has sugar diabetes or when someone with cancer is prayed for and it is said that they are let them go with the priest to the doctor and get confirmation, that indeed they are well because there are some who were instructed to stop medical treatment or to stop taking injections and such a person health would deteriorate until they die. The are real pastors and those who fake healing in order to attract people to church.

While proponents of atypical ways of healing may provide informal confirmation and testimonials to support their effectiveness, those who are sceptical tend to draw attention to a lack of serious scientific research and empirical evidence that validates these practices. Some may challenge the validity of the healing methods and express questions about the risk of harm to people who choose such treatment over standard medical treatment.

Theme 2: The significance of Indigenous knowledge systems

The findings offer an in-depth overview of the interconnected epistemological and ontological contention for acknowledgment of Western and Indigenous approaches to healing. Christianity, being a worldwide religion with ties to colonialism, has traditionally influenced Indigenous societies and practices, either replacing or suppressing traditional healing approaches (Adu-Gyamfi & Anderson, Indigenous Medicine and Traditional Healing in Africa: A Systematic Synthesis of the Literature, 2019). African ways of healing are look down upon, as alluded to by a participant:

“just unfortunate vha tshi swika khou fhodza ha mushonga wa tshithu vha mbo di u associate na na ushavha na lutendo kha zwo na madimoni”.

Translated into English as:

Just unfortunate that when it gets to healing according to Indigenous medicine, it is associated with moving away from the faith and demons.

This power dynamic, which privileges Westernised methods to health and well-being over Indigenous methods of knowing and healing, poses a situation that may reinforce oppressive systems and destroy Indigenous sovereignty. This theme delves into the cultural and historical foundations of healing practices, such as the usage of medicinal plants, ceremonies, and traditional understanding transmitted through subsequent generations.

“tshirema ndi vhona unga ri kho sedza fhungo la dzilafho ndi ndila ine vhathu vhahashu vha lafhisa zwone ngauri vha do wana uri hafha Vhembe mashango haya o fhambana hunwe huna miri mipfufhi minwe ndi miri mihulwane hunwe huna zwisima hunwe huna mini mini zwino zwi to bva na khou ri muthu o dzula shangoni lifhio line havha na miri yo to itisa hani na milambo yo to itisa haniho, lune musi vha tshi lafha vha vha vho lafha vha tshi khou sedza miri ino wanala hanefho fhethu uri uyu muri hupfi u lafha mini”.

Translated into English as:

The Indigenous, I look and see it as a means of treatment and a way through which our people conduct healing, because you will find that in Vhembe the various places are different. Some places have small trees, and some are taller, there are wells and several other things depending where one is located. Where there are trees, including rivers of different variations, to the extent that when they heal, when they heal, they look to availability of various medicinal plants.

The repercussions of imperialism and commercialisation of healing seem to have displaced traditional healing systems to a certain degree, with profound repercussions for the efficacy, ethics, and politics of medical treatment. The findings draw attention to the need for a healthy healing space based on appreciation and regard for all knowledge holders, including Indigenous healers.

Theme 3: Deviance through occult practices

Occultism is often characterised as a quest of esoteric knowledge, which is frequently linked to unexplained or supernatural phenomena (Azize, 2021). Occult activities include a broad spectrum of practices and ideologies that are frequently seen as beyond accepted norms or conventional religious traditions. These may involve divination, spellcasting, spirit summoning, and rituals designed to access illicit ways or esoteric knowledge (Lycourinos, 2017). While some occult

rituals may be considered untoward or aberrant in some spiritual or cultural contexts, they frequently have deep meaning and value for people who engage in them.

“U ya nga ku pfesesele na kuvhonele kwanga ro sedza fhungo la phodzo kha vhupo ha Thohoyandou ri kho ita ri tshi vhona huna maitele ane avhonala atshi nga ha tshimbilelani na zwi gereke ehh (clearing of throat) zwine zwa vhonele hu tshi nga kerekeni hu kho dzeha na vhungome kana zwa vhungome zwo duma zwi tshi kho tshimbilelana fhuthi ba vhu Maine”.

Translated into English as:

According to my understanding and my point of view in looking at healing within the Thohoyandou area, we are witnessing practices that seem to be of the church, ehh (clearing of throat) where the church is infiltrated by divination, and this popularly associated with ‘vho-maine.

“Nga uri mafhungo mahulwane asi uri zwi kho shuma kana azwi shuma (okay) mafhungo ndi vhungome ho da ita zwithu na vhuloi na vhungome nga ngomu Mara zwi tshiya phanda ha mudzimu osumbedza maanda awe zwa fhela zwa vha zwi tshi vho bva kha zwa mudzimu”.

Translated into English as:

The main issue is not that its working or whether it does not (okay), the issue is that divination is responsible, witchcraft and divination are at play. But as things go on, God will show His power and it will succumb to God.”

Participants explored the incorporation of occult practices that are prevalent in contemporary religious movements, such as rituals, rites, and spiritual notions related to occult knowledge. In this theme the lines of separation between appropriate spiritual acts and those regarded as controversial or aberrant within the cultural and theological setting of Thohoyandou are examined.

“Arali zwino vha pondiwa vha vhulayiwa vha lovha malofha avho atshi fhala rine sa vho maine ria ra dzhia hafhali fhethu he vha vhulayeliwa hone ro hu wana ra shuma zwine ra khou shuma vha sala vha tshi shengela nga maanda.”

Translated into English as:

If you were to be attacked, killed and blood flowed, we vho-‘maine’ go and take it from the scene. We then do what we do and make sure that the responsible part suffers.

In the setting of Thohoyandou, where traditional African spirituality melds with Christianity and other faiths, the borders between permissible and inappropriate spiritual practices may become permeable and subjective. It was suggested that some practitioners may include occult aspects into their religious rituals to communicate with spirits or seek paranormal insight. Others may regard such behaviours with mistrust or even censure, considering them as inconsistent with their religious or cultural values. The topic of occult practices among contemporary religious movements typically plunges into the opaque limits between appropriate spiritual practices and those deemed unethical or unacceptable within cultural and theological contexts, such as Thohoyandou.

2. Who is involved in these practices and what are their causes and effects?

Theme 4: Educational deficits and training gaps

This theme highlights the difficulties and restrictions that arise from a scarcity of formal instruction and professional training among practitioners of deviant healing techniques. Participants spoke of the consequences of insufficient training for its safety and effectiveness of healing services, as well as the continuing existence of inappropriate conduct owing to ignorance or misunderstanding. A key issue relates to the well-being and performance of healing activities delivered by inexperienced practitioners. Without sufficient training, practitioners may not possess the expertise and capacity required to competently evaluate and address an individual's needs. This may heighten the likelihood of injury because improper or ineffective healing practices can aggravate current health concerns or introduce additional issues. Furthermore, a lack of training may impair practitioners'

ability to identify when a referral to a skilled healthcare expert is required, endangering the health of persons looking for aid. A participants expressed with some consternation that:

“Hoyo muthu na tshikoloni ha ngo ya tshinwe tshifhinga vhaa wana ndi muthu o phasaho khamusi standard 5 ha ngo ya na secondary mara u khou sumbedza ndila ya uri ene anga zwikona uvha murangaphanda mathina murangaphanda u funa uri avhe o pfumbudzwaho o dzhenaho tshikolo zwino arali wa wana huna vhathu vho to raloho ra soko fhumula ra ri hai vho vhidzwa nga mudzimu tshinwe tshifhinga ri do vha ri khou khakha zwino na haneŋho hunwe ri a di ita ri tshi kaidza uri hai arali no vhidziwa nga Mudzimu iyani tshikoloni ni thome ni funziwe ani soko vuwa namusi na ri ni mufunzi ni songo thoma na trainiwa khamusi uto fana na nga hangei Rwanda , Rwanda zwazwino avha tendi muthu a soko vula kereke yawe vhari kha thome aye tshikoloni a vhuye na certificate tsho sumbedza uri ene o funziwa o dzhen tshikolo”.

Translated into English as:

This person will not have gone to school, they never attended, sometimes only to find that they might have only passed standard 5 but you find that they present themselves as capable of leadership, whereas you need to be trained and have gone to school. If we find such people and we merely say that they are called of God, we are at fault, in some instances we do explain that even if are called by God, we do tell them go and receive training. You do not just wake today and say you are a pastor without training, maybe like in Rwanda, in Rwanda currently they do not just accept one just starting a church, you are expected to go to school and come back with a certificate to show that you have been taught or have attend school.

A lack of formal teaching can lead to the persistence of erroneous actions among practitioners. Lack of awareness or misapplication of ethical codes, professional boundaries, and best practices can lead to hurtful, abusive, or unethical actions.

Theme 5: Socioeconomic dynamics and commercialisation of healing

Charismatic leadership assumes a pivotal part in the propagation of unorthodox healing approaches, because charismatic leaders frequently exert enormous influence over their followers

(Thwala, 2020). The commercialisation of spirituality exacerbates the commodification of healing practices within contemporary religious movements. In capitalist nations, spirituality has become a marketed product, with people searching for deeper meanings along with answers to their issues through consumerist means (Gauthier, 2016). Spiritual methods of treatment are becoming advertised and traded as products or services, meeting the needs of a consumer-driven culture while also encouraging the revenue-generating potential of spiritual experiences. The disintegration of social conventions upsets entrenched belief and practice systems, leaving people looking for contemporary methods to heal and find spiritual fulfilment (Roussou, 2021).

Contentious healing methods were revealed to be perpetrated by charismatic religious leaders, traditional healers, and those claiming supernatural powers. These perpetrators frequently misled susceptible people for selfish benefit. Deviant healing practices have proven to have far-reaching consequences for individuals and communities, ranging from psychological trauma and reliance on untested cures to humiliation and exclusion from the wider community. Poverty, poor accessibility to advanced medical services, and deeply held traditional beliefs have all been referred to as major causes to the increased incidence of deviant healing methods. Participants discussed how these rituals provided spiritual consolation while also exercising control over people who are susceptible. Deviant healing methods are frequently perpetrated by charismatic leaders, self-proclaimed prophets, and traditional healers who operate outside of acknowledged regulatory systems. These individuals have great influence over their followers and may take advantage of their trust for selfish benefit. Participants discussed the societal and economic variables and commodification of healing methods in contemporary religious movements. A participant hinted at those who may be actively involved as perpetrators of the healing practices in question:

“Yeah amongst the elderly full engaged in the ministry of healing those who were found to have deviated who are the minority there is now the majority is amongst the young ministers some of whom are not trained in any seminary some did get trained when the healing ministry in their way soon-to-be, bringing this one I know I said it I never said it's it I started answering your questions to some it becomes a business the ministry is the Business of God

but to them it become a lucrative business where even those who are getting healed they pay and because there is money there this young ministers in the country which in terms of matters of economy the economy is still with a certain class of the people and the people of another ethnic group, to them it is another way of getting money and getting rich and some do get it they become rich listen to no counsel anymore and that is the challenge we are having where the young ministers are males and few females”.

Participants highlighted the economic variables that contribute to their spread, highlighting the ways in which vulnerable individuals are exploited for financial gain or personal gratification. This exploitation enables the cycles of dependency, manipulation, and harm, particularly when individuals place blind trust in charismatic leaders without adequate critical scrutiny or accountability. A participant who is an African traditional medical practitioner indicated that:

“Hu khou shuma tshelede fhedzi vhafunzhi vha di ita sa maine oralo ni tshi da aty tshena tshifhinga ndi usoko ni rema nga tshelede nkene na badela, nda ni todela ndi sindela matari makene na makene ndari tshimbilani niyo nwa nda vhona ni tshiri lucky dzila dze vha mpha adzi shumi ndaya nda toda na vhulada ni dori hezwila vhu tshi kho thothona ndari ndi hone lucky itshi kho jena muvhilini wanu. Ndi ndi hu kho shuma vhugevhenga fhedzi hafho fhethu”.

Translated into English as:

It is all about money only, pastors make themselves to be ‘maine’, when you come they just hit you with an amount you have to pay, and they certain leaves are sought for you and you are told to go and drink and I see you saying that the luck you sought for me is not working so I even go get ‘vhulada’ (a very itchy plant) and once you start to feel itchy, that’s when luck is entering your body. This is when criminality is at work.

The findings provide examples of such exploitation, including the challenges faced by traditional healers when treating people, and how the commercialisation of healing puts profit ahead of efficacy. To attract clients, healers may alter or embellish healing practices to make them more commercial. This jeopardises the integrity of the entire endeavour.

3. Which forms of remedial action may be undertaken for the benefit of the victims of deviant healing practices?

Theme 6: Ethical dilemmas in contemporary practice

Unlike conventional medical practices, spiritual methods of healing frequently lack institutional accreditation, oversight, and codified training programmes. This lack of accountability generates issues about practitioner proficiency, safety, and responsibility, especially when working with vulnerable groups or people who have complex health requirements. Problems of ethics in are critical to discourses regarding deviant healing practices, underlining the challenges of balancing sensitivity and ethical awareness among practitioners working in diverse and pluralistic communities.

Faith healing methods embrace a variety of techniques, certain of which may be lacking in empirical evidence of efficacy or safety. Practitioners could be subject to dilemmas regarding ethics when weighing the cultural relevance of healing operations against any prospective harms to individuals' well-being. Practitioners who lack sufficient training or monitoring may unwittingly cause injury or worsen pre-existing health conditions, raising concerns about their moral obligation to put emphasis on client safety.

Theme 7: Spiritual abuse and its psychological consequences

Spiritual abuse transpires whenever an individual in an elevated position of dominance or influence within a religious or spiritual framework abuses their position of spiritual leadership to manipulate, dominate, or adversely affect people behaviourally, psychologically, or religiously (Knapp, 2021). The study pointed to a range of underlying reasons for the emergence of challenging healing

practices, which include but not limited to cultural syncretism, as well as economic exploitation by charismatic leadership looking to benefit from people's need for healing.

Moreover, participants expressed a variety of detrimental effects from engaging in deviant healing practices. These included psychological distress, financial exploitation, and bodily injury. Furthermore, the proliferation of disinformation and distrust in traditional healthcare institutions increased the effects on individuals and communities. A participant, a victim, relayed how she had negative experiences in multiple churches, and she highlighted a sense of discomfort and disbelief in the authenticity of the practices within the churches she attended. She shared that she developed a close relationship with a pastor who later took advantage of her and expressed feelings of being manipulated and brainwashed, especially since the practitioner, a pastor, used his position to gain her trust and loyalty.

The victim recalled instances where the pastor and his friend engaged in questionable practices, such as using a mysterious liquid that raised suspicions about potential ritualistic activities. In a very sensitive description of events, she mentioned a specific incident where she felt uncomfortable and suspected ritualistic intentions when the pastor insisted an intimate act during her menstrual period.

Interviewee: *"I don't know if maybe what I think was correct or not but there was a point where he came and picked me up I was actually in my periods then I was like I'm on my periods".*

Interviewer: *"Okay."*

Interviewee: *"We can't do this; he insisted that we do it like he forced me."*

Interviewer: *"Okay."*

Interviewee: *"And there was no protection used that time, so it was just a bit suspicious because after that he took me back home, i just felt a little bit odd it was unlike me because usually it spent a night and [inaudible] immediately*

when he was done, he took up his pants and he told me to take my things we leaving

Interviewer: *“And he forced you? Didn’t you at that point wanted to report or to tell anyone.”*

Interviewee: *“I wanted to I was dying inside I wanted to but I didn’t, the only person I communicated with was my friend.”*

Interviewer: *“So, didn’t you tell your friend uri hey things are being otherwise”.*

Interviewer: *“Because I heard you talk about the other people who went through this, none of them ever tried to speak out or you know find some form of justice in any way.*

Interviewee: *“I don’t think so because no don’t think so I’ve never heard anything about him being exposed or yeah things like that”.*

While she has not sought formal counselling, she believes she has healed over time. The victim expressed a willingness to share her experiences with others who might be going through similar situations.

The findings outlined the substantial demand for trauma-aware pastoral care and counselling to assist victims of deviant healing practices. Participants reiterated the crucial role of providing safe spaces that enable individuals to process their own traumas and pursue recovery in a supportive communal setting. Divergent means of healing have far-reaching consequences for both individuals and societies. Victims may suffer bodily pain, psychological distress, and social isolation because of their participation in these practices. They may experience feelings of humiliation, guilt, and isolation, necessitating sensitive and culturally appropriate support. A participant revealed her powerlessness due to spiritual abuse, in saying:

“I just feel like we don’t believe that there is something that is going to be done, I feel like there are a lot of people that get away with it with things like this, so I just decided that I’m just going to let go because at the end of the day it will be like I’m the one who is just causing trouble”.

Participants stressed the need for trauma-informed practices and access to mental health care in religious communities.

4. How can European and African spiritual expressions be merged meaningfully?

Theme 8: Confluence of European and African spiritual traditions

The fusion of European and African spiritual practices is laden with complications due to competing belief systems and worldviews. Western concepts of logic and reservations about spirituality might be at odds with Indigenous beliefs in ancestor spirits, divine intervention, and the efficacy of traditional healing procedures. Participants presented how diametrically opposed European and African belief systems are, further elaborating power dynamics, and resistance to change, noting the barriers of integrating various cultural backgrounds and worldviews in the context of spiritual practice and belief. In addition, they addressed how to locate a delicate equilibrium between appreciating diverse cultures and worldviews.

The findings revealed that conversation between different groups is critical for identifying points of convergence and creating an environment in which everyone can practice their spiritual beliefs. Power relations and appropriation of culture serve a substantial part in navigating the challenges of incorporating spiritual traditions (Brondizio, et al., 2021). European influences frequently predominate speech and practice, restricting Indigenous knowledge while preserving colonial legacies of exploitation and cultural erasure (Samson & Gigoux, 2016). Resistance to change and traditionalism impede attempts to reconcile European and African spiritual practices. Traditional healers may see attempts at integration as challenges to their cultural identity and livelihoods, causing opposition and distrust within communities.

*Tshikheresite na tshirema a thi vhoni unga zwi a lwa ngauri tshirema ndi ndila
ine vhathu vha khou ri Mudzimu ri ne ori dzumbululela ngei murahurahu uri ri*

*lafhisa hani vhulwadze ho imaho nga uri ndi tshi tenda na zwaure ndi vhadzimu
vhane vha vha vho sumbedza muthu kha muthu ane a shumise dzi thangu ndi
vhona unga ndi Mudzimu nga uri Mudzimu udi dzumbulula kwa tshaka dzotho
dzo fhambananaho zwino ari koni u classify tshirema na vuvhi kana u classify
tshirema ra tshi ra tshi badekanya na vho maine vhane vha shumisa dzi thangu,
tshirema ndi tshirema zwa vho maine ndi zwa vho maine ndaa.*

Translated into English as:

"Christianity and tradition, I do not see them as conflicting, it is a way people believe that God has historically revealed how to heal illnesses that have arisen, because I believe that the ancestors are the ones who guide someone to one who uses divination bones. I see this as God's doing because God manifests Himself to different nations in different ways. Now, I cannot classify traditional healing with evil or associated it with diviners who use divination bones. Traditional healing is traditional healing, and divination is divination. Thank you."

Remarkably the study findings suggest that the prevalence of deviant healing methods do not inevitably erode the authority of official religious institutions. Instead, it depicts a complex interplay between traditional African beliefs and Christianity, emphasising the dynamic character of Tshohoyandou's religious practices. The role of ancestral devotion and communication was underlined as a major part of Tshohoyandou deviant healing methods. Furthermore, the study identified the importance of spirituality in the lives of Tshohoyandou citizens. Deviant healing practices, with their strong spiritual roots, generate a sense of belonging and connection within various faith communities, thereby building a communal identity. The practices concerned do not just present solutions to physical problems but also emotional and spiritual requirements, providing a comprehensive approach to healing.

*Tshikherisithe kha tshi imele thungo tshi thothe hune ha khou pfi ri khou tea u
tanganela hone ri kho amba fhethu huno nga zwibadela na musi vhulwadze vhu
tshi ri balela kha ri vha rumele zwibadela. Sibadela vho rali vhulwadze vhu tshi
khou vha balela kha vha rumele vhalwadze kha rine. Ri bivhilini ri vho zwifha
hafho zwino azwi tshimbilelani havhala khavha shume zwavho zwa muya nga uri
zwi vhezwa upfi ndi dzi Faith Healer, vha tshi vha tshidza nga muya (eh). Zwino
faith healer na rine vhane ra shumisa mishonga zwiya kona utala?*

Translated into English as:

"Christianity should stand aside separately, where we integrate, we should be talking about places like hospitals, and when illnesses overwhelm us we should send people to hospitals. With hospitals, when illnesses overwhelm them, they should send patients to us. Biblically, we would be false, these things do not align let those do their spiritual things because they are called Faith Healers, and they heal spiritually (eh). Now, can faith healers and those of us who use traditional medicine complement each other?"

5.8 DISCUSSIONS

By paying attention to the words and experiences of local practitioners, this study illuminates the difficulties of religious identity, tradition, and resistance in a constantly changing society. It accentuates the relevance of contextualised approaches to learning and decoding matters of faith, especially in postcolonial contexts where various influences intersect. Deviant healing practices of contemporary faith groups are infused within complex power relations (Bocock, 2020). They pose an expression that implies a rejection of hegemonic structures that strive to govern and supervise spiritual discourse. The study endeavoured to locate the societal, cultural, and religious elements which translate to the spread of deviant healing practices in contemporary religious movements in Ṭhohoyanḍou. It also reviewed the resulting consequences for individuals, communities, and the broader socio-religious landscape. Although these healing practices could pose challenges to traditional standards of ethics, they also show the constraints of universalistic moral norms across various contexts of culture (Busia, 2023).

A post-colonial African perspective is brought to bear on understanding and engaging with deviant healing practices in the discussion section. This perspective looks at the colonial history and legacy of these practices and considers how colonialism has shaped the economic and social factors that have led to the emergence of these practices (De Juan & Pierskalla, 2017). It also suggests that colonial power dynamics have perpetuated existing power structures, which have shaped the meaning and significance of these practices. Furthermore, this perspective argues that postcolonial African healing practices should be understood in terms of how they serve to challenge and resist

colonialism. It also looks at how these healing practices are being used to address the challenges of the post-colonial era.

The following discussion is divided into four subsections based on the findings in Chapter 5:

1. Towards a Post-Colonial African Practical Theology Perspective

Traversing deviant healing practices from a postcolonial African Practical Theology viewpoint entails an in-depth scrutiny of the legacy of colonial rule, institutionalised power, and epistemological underpinnings that continue to impact theological discourse in Africa (Devisch, 2017). Post-colonial African practical theology provides a more egalitarian and decolonised approach to religious knowledge and practice by focusing on underappreciated perspectives and respecting the diversity of culture (Mthembu, 2021). It advocates for a reworking of theological paradigms that respond to African communities' daily realities and ambitions, generating a renewed sense of spiritual liberty and empowerment. Notwithstanding having distinct precursors and focuses, postcolonial and decolonial theories have at times been conflated. The two perspectives confront colonialism and its reverberations, but postcolonial theory often explores the complexity of identity and representation by delving into literary and cultural components. Decolonial theory, in contrast, adopts a more radical approach and aims to completely destroy colonial power structures. It opposes the dominance of Western knowledge systems and promotes a pluriverse world that accepts a variety of epistemologies.

A post-colonial stance argues for ethical engagement and community empowerment to inform faith identities and practices. However, an apparent constraint of a postcolonial African practical theology approach is the risk of simplifying culture or standardising different Indigenous traditions in Africa. It is critical to understand the diversity and fluidity of African cultures while avoiding reproducing stagnant conceptions of tradition (Sarr, 2020). The dichotomy between conventional methods of healing and modernity, especially Western biological concepts, poses a challenge to a postcolonial African practical theology viewpoint. To negotiate this conflict, one must carefully

navigate opposing epistemologies and ontologies, while also respecting the value of Indigenous knowledge and the significance of critical engagement with harmful behaviours.

Deviant religious activities can be seen through the lens of postcolonial theory as intricate, hybrid phenomena that represent the battle for spiritual and cultural autonomy rather than just as superstitious or archaic behaviours. For example, taking advantage of Indigenous healing methods within contemporary Neo-Prophetic movements might be seen as a way to regain agency and challenge the dominance of Western medical paradigms. By contesting the dominant accounts that frequently downplay these operations, postcolonial theory may prove useful in exposing the benefits of deviant post-colonial religious practices. When interpreting scripture passages, Matthew 28:18–20 and Mark 16:15–18 illustrate the role of the church to proclaim the good news and interact with people from different cultural backgrounds. A postcolonial perspective may be used to understand these writings, highlighting the value of ideologies that are relevant to Indigenous peoples while also being contextually situated. This method encourages an inclusive interpretation of Christianity that is in line with the lived realities of African communities while also honouring their distinct cultures. Churches need to have a biblical and culturally aware stance while negotiating the intricacies of spiritual occurrences and healing strategies, especially when it comes to the demonic. Churches may approach healing as a holistic practice that honours Indigenous knowledge systems while staying rooted in scriptural teachings by learning from postcolonial African practical theology. For the church to cultivate a comprehensive awareness of the interactions among Indigenous traditions, colonial legacies, and modern faith manifestations, a strong theological education is essential. This entails incorporating cultural values and convictions into the worship process in addition to theological instruction. By developing a church which is simultaneously contemporary and sensitive to the spiritual requirements of its members, this kind of approach eventually fosters an increasingly empowered and accessible faith practice.

2. Dynamics of Deviant Healing Practices

Identifying and classifying deviant means of healing within contemporary religious movements in Ṭhohoyanḍou raises difficulties regarding subjective deviance and the role of power in producing normative religious discourse. What is considered inappropriate in one religious tradition or cultural setting may be deemed valid or sacrosanct in another (Magezi & Igba, 2018). Furthermore, efforts to regulate or restrict inappropriate healing practices may unintentionally strengthen power structures and dominance, thus inhibiting individual liberties and freedom of thought. A thorough look on the underpinning presumptions and prejudices that shape definitions of deviance is required to avoid propagating prejudice and bias against minority religious communities and practices.

The findings call into question religious societies' dichotomous understandings of transgression and tradition. Deviant modalities of healing are frequently regarded as unorthodox or heretical, resulting in stigmatisation and social isolation (Riley-Seymour, 2023). However, such designations fail to account for the assortment of faith experiences and manifestations within Ṭhohoyanḍou. The application of deviance theory poses philosophical questions pertaining to who decides the definition of deviant behaviour in religious settings. Labelling certain acts as deviant could represent favoured standards and ideologies rather than a sincere concern for the well-being of individuals and groups (Henry, 2018). As a result, there is a necessity for academics and practitioners to reflect critically on the cultural biases and structures of power that guide their decisions and interpretations.

Participant observation and in-depth interviews revealed that syncretic healing rituals are employed to negotiate cultural identities and overcome socioeconomic constraints. A significant component of the deviant healing practices studied was charismatic performances. These performances feature spectacular exhibitions of spiritual force, such as prophetic pronouncements, intense dancing, and faith healing (Engelbert, van Elk, Kandrik, Theeuwes, & van Vugt, 2023). Document analysis and participant observation demonstrated that charismatic leaders used

charisma as a form of authority in order to draw adherents and validate their healing techniques. However, the study also identified contradictions between charismatic leadership and established religious norms, which reflect broader issues within African Christianity.

3. Unravelling Spiritual Abuse in Healing Practices

Contemporary religious movements in Ṭhohoyandou tend to function without adequate oversight or monitoring, leading to the unrestrained growth of aberrant healing methods. The lack of regulating procedures provides fertile ground for spiritual abuse, as leaders can misuse their authority without consequence (Swindle, 2017). Spiritual abuse triggered by questionable ways of healing has far-reaching implications, including psychological and emotional trauma. Persons who have been subjected to abusive spiritual behaviour are prone to trauma, apprehension, depression, and other psychological disorders because of continuous manipulation, oppression, and exploitative practices (Riley-Seymour, 2023). Furthermore, the shame connected with voicing spiritual abuse may heighten a sufferers' sense of isolation and powerlessness.

The hierarchical framework that characterises various faith movements seems to widen power disparities and allow leaders to wield excessive authority over their adherents. Cultural conventions and ideas affect beliefs regarding spirituality and healing in Ṭhohoyandou. While traditional healing techniques are strongly ingrained in the region's culture, current religious groups might present unfamiliar, often syncretic, forms of spirituality that stray from established norms (Macaranas, 2021). This cultural conflict can create tension and vulnerability among adherents, raising the possibility of spiritual abuse. In the backdrop of atypical modalities of healing, ethical considerations assume an integral part in providing pastoral care and counselling.

Divergent healing methods typically target people who are susceptible owing to their economic situation, medical issues, or emotional calamity. Practitioners can leverage these vulnerabilities for personal advantage, employing deceptive strategies to acquire control of followers and extort financial or other forms of support. This exploitation reinforces cycles of reliance and servitude,

strengthening the power dynamics inside the religious movement. Interviews with practitioners revealed that these forms of care frequently work outside the purview of traditional religious institutions, questioning mainstream notions of healing and redemption. Furthermore, the study also showed the vital role of nontraditional spiritual interventions in promoting psychological health and fortitude in dealing with of trauma.

4. Negotiating the dichotomy of African and European Spirituality

Hegemony of cultures has had an immense effect on faith traditions and healing practices in Ṭhohoyandou. European influences frequently dominate expression and practice, discriminating against Indigenous knowledge while preserving the traces of colonial exploitation tendencies and erosion of culture (Samson & Gigoux, 2016). It is vital to investigate how prevailing ideologies impact belief systems and expression respectively, in addition to their consequences for genuine cultural value and individuality in African religious communities. By rejecting cultural hegemony and rediscovering Indigenous traditions, communities can demonstrate their freedom and tenacity in the face of outside pressures, fostering a more pluralistic and inclusive religious setting.

The prospects of melding European and African spiritual practices posed hurdles due to competing belief systems and worldviews. Placing a premium on Western biomedical conceptions over Indigenous methods of knowing fosters Eurocentric concepts of a superiority complex while discriminating against Indigenous epistemologies and ontologies. Participants reported problems between traditional African spiritual beliefs and the encroachment of Eurocentric Christian beliefs, which created a sense of cultural dissonance among the participants. The imbalances of epistemic authority and cultural appropriation posed substantial problems in the integration of spiritual traditions.

Participants expressed concern that European missionaries and charismatic leaders were appropriating local knowledge and exploiting African spiritual traditions. African traditional medical practitioners were sceptical of Western solutions and underlined the necessity of retaining

Indigenous therapeutic methods and cultural customs. This epistemic injustice hinders Indigenous self-determination and reinforces colonial narratives that value Western knowledge systems above Indigenous knowledge systems. The exploitation of Indigenous knowledge systems for economic or individual gain ignores the religiosity and cultural worth of traditional healing methods, converting them to commercial commodities cut off from their cultural and spiritual context. The practice further discredits Indigenous cultures while reinforcing colonial ideas of cultural inferiority.

5.9 CHAPTER SUMMARY

In conclusion, this chapter offers insightful information about the research findings. Data has been laid out in an understandable and systematic way. The results have been evaluated considering the study questions. The results have been thoroughly analysed in the discussion section, which also highlights the findings' importance and ramifications. Despite the challenging study topic, the chapter has been able to effectively present and interpret the data. These findings reveal the intricacies of deviant healing practices prevalent in contemporary religious movements in Ṭhohoyandou, underlining the necessity for contextualised ways to comprehend and confront these phenomena. Furthermore, discussions focused on the role of colonial legacies, power relations, and cultural tensions in forming faith identities and practices in the region. Finally, the study underlines the significance of encouraging ethical involvement, cultural inclusivity, and trauma-informed treatment in religious groups in order to offset the detrimental impacts of deviant healing practices.

This chapter set out to both explain the implications of deviant healing practices on the local population and to offer the analysis of actual data on the subject. These goals were carried out by carefully reviewing fieldwork data, which involved speaking with practitioners, those who were impacted, and survivors. The chapter has depicted various forms of deviant activities, their motivations, and their effects on both the individual and collective by examining these data sources.

The chapter has also demonstrated how these activities go against conventional notions of spirituality and healing, underlining the necessity of a multifaceted pastoral care strategy that honours regional customs while addressing harmful behaviours. Additionally, the approach has cleared the way for future research by shedding light on the wider implications for religious practice and communal well-being. Additionally, the analysis has shed light on what this means for faith expression and communal well-being, opening the door to more thoughtful and compassionate solutions to pastoral and spiritual challenges in Tshohoyandou.

In conclusion, Chapter 5 has achieved its goals by offering a thorough and situated examination of the empirical data, so making great progress in pointing out the complex terrain of deviant healing practices and their ramifications.

CHAPTER 6

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

6.1 INTRODUCTION

In this final chapter, the researcher takes a moment to contemplate the research journey and position the discoveries within a larger theoretical context in relation to deviant healing practices found in contemporary religious movements in Ṭhohoyandou, Limpopo. This reflection allows for a deeper understanding of the unique nuances and implications of the findings. By acknowledging the complex interplay between deviant practices and religious beliefs, the researcher paves the way for future studies to delve into the underlying dynamics that drive these phenomena. Additionally, this concluding chapter serves as a steppingstone for further exploration and discussion, ultimately contributing to the academic discourse surrounding religious movements and healing practices. In the context of this study, the researcher aimed to provide insight and foster both practical and theoretical awareness. The chapter explores the study's outcomes through a post-colonial African Practical Theology perspective. By doing so, it highlights the importance of understanding the historical and cultural influences that shape theological discussions in the region. This approach allows for a more nuanced interpretation of the findings and contributes to the ongoing discourse in the field of Practical Theology.

In outlining the key conclusions, responding to the research questions, and underlining their importance for the area, the chapter reflects on the theoretical implications of the study's findings, particularly how they advance our understanding. The researcher proffers recommendations for interventions based on the study's results, which would be useful for academics and religious practitioners alike. Finally, the researcher provides closing comments about the study's overall relevance and possible effects on the area of deviant healing practices within contemporary religious movements in Ṭhohoyandou, Limpopo, with respect to a post-colonial African Practical Theology perspective.

6.2 OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

It is pertinent to consider the spectrum of healing practices in Ṭhohoyandou, where Indigenous African spiritualities interact with Christian denominations, neo-traditional groups, and syncretic belief systems. In this distinct situation, healing is more than just a medical or psychological process; it is a holistic undertaking that includes the spiritual, social, and cultural aspects of human existence.

While the term "deviant" may have negative connotations, it is critical to approach it with complexity and care, acknowledging the reality that what is deemed deviant in mainstream religious discourse might possess substantial implications in marginalised or subaltern cultures (Ferrell, 2017). Thus, the study endeavoured to move past the basic dichotomies of orthodox and deviance, instead engaging the heterogeneity and plurality of healing practices within their sociocultural context. The research approach draws on post-colonial African Practical Theology concepts to acknowledge the multiplicity of voices and lived experiences within Ṭhohoyandou (Magezi V. , 2019a). It critically examines the juxtapositions of authority, influence, and history in influencing spiritual convictions and practice. It demands consciousness of how colonial legacies persist in altering religious settings and influence perceptions concerning what defines valid modes of healing and spirituality. Furthermore, it calls for a decolonial strategy that elevates local populations' viewpoints and lived experiences, confronts dominant narratives, and encourages cultural regeneration and independent thought.

6.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

Contemporary healing practices in Ṭhohoyandou, Limpopo, combine traditional beliefs, modern faith communities, and post-colonial African perspectives on practical theology, creating an intriguing and diversified terrain. By researching such phenomena, it is appropriate to probe into the multifaceted nature in which healing is understood, practiced, and experienced within the framework of the different religious traditions that are prevalent in the area in question (Naor &

Mayseless, 2020). This recommendations section aspires to offer reflections and recommendations for further study, policy formulation, and community engagement on deviant healing practices from a postcolonial African Practical Theology viewpoint.

Through empirical research and scholarly analysis, the study attempted not only to shed light on the fundamental underlying reasons, cultural meaning, and societal implications associated with these practices, but also to present an argument for grappling with deviant healing practices that are grounded in the real-world circumstances and Indigenous knowledge systems of the social groups under study. The study strategy hinged on assessing the acceptance of agency and autonomy within spiritual groups. In lieu of imparting extrinsic opinions or labelling, the researcher aimed at drawing attention to the narratives and ideologies of practitioners and those affected, valuing their ability to translate, respond, and form new perspectives within the framework of their faith. By narrowing down the accounts of individuals who were directly involved in deviant healing practices, the researcher sought to promote a more progressive and reflective way of approaching the analysis of religion and healing in African contexts.

In this section, recommendations are provided based upon the principles of inclusivity, empowerment, and cultural sensitivity. Outlined below are recommendations that focus on how to address the challenges posed by challenging healing practices in contemporary religious movements:

1. Developing Community Understanding

Education and campaigns to raise awareness are crucial for preventing deviant healing practices while supporting well-informed choices in society. Delivering credible details about the hazards and implications of these practices enables people to make less harmful choices and look for help when necessary. Empowering spiritual figures and leaders in the community as facilitators of change may serve to enhance preventative and intervention efforts while also addressing detrimental habits while advocating social justice. Collaboration with the relevant governmental

entities, faith-based groups, and other civil society organisations to monitor and control inappropriate healing practices, would assist with the conformance to appropriate standards of care and conduct that is ethical.

2. Pastoral Care and Counselling

The recommendations for remedial intervention include providing resources and support to community-led efforts that enable individuals and groups to detect and oppose abusive or fraudulent activities in religious movements. Collaboration with Christian mental health professionals to provide relevant help geared to the needs of those dealing with the consequences of engaging in deviant healing methods is essential. Support networks and assistance programmes for survivors of deviant healing practices, including trauma-informed counselling and spiritual support should be established.

3. Engagement of Professional Bodies

Cultivate interaction and cooperation between professional bodies (e.g., Christian counselling associations, pastoral care networks) and religious communities in Thohoyandou. Arrange training sessions, conferences, and seminars offered by experts to provide religious leaders with the appropriate abilities and knowledge to effectively confront deviance in their communities.

4. Training and Capacity Building

Conduct training and initiatives to build capacity for religious leaders, healthcare professionals, and African traditional medical practitioners to help them become more acquainted with deviant healing practices and respond appropriately. Provide information and best practices for communicating with people who engage in deviant healing practices in a considerate, professional, and socially informed way.

5. FHOLA Deviance Analysis Model

Healing practices that deviate from conventional models have emerged in contemporary movements of religion and analysing them requires a deep comprehension and a methodology for investigation and intervention that is productive. A robust analytical framework is crucial for adequately recognising and responding to such variances. Building on this paradigm, researchers can help improve knowledge and develop successful strategies for supporting ethical and culturally sensitive healing practices in religious groups. This study recommendation calls for the exploration and endorsement of the FHOLA Framework as an instrument for assessing deviance in faith-based or religious healing practices.

The new model provides a complete approach that includes cultural, holistic, spiritual, experiential, and ethical elements, resulting in a more refined awareness of questionable conduct in healing practices. The FHOLA Framework is comprised of five relevant elements: foundational cultural analysis (F), holistic assessment of healing practices (H), observation of spiritual dimensions (O), lived experience analysis (L), and assessment of ethical implications. The incorporation of these elements allows researchers to acquire a better grasp of the cultural, spiritual, and ethical dimensions of deviance in healing practices.

F - Foundational Cultural Analysis:

The model involves a cultural analysis to comprehend the cultural backdrop in which healing practices are embedded. Detecting deviations from standard practices requires an awareness of cultural norms and values.

H – Holistic Assessment of Healing Practices:

Deviance in healing methods typically extends past the physical realm. The “Holistic Assessment of Healing Practices” component examines the synthesis of the physical, psychological, emotional, and religious aspects in healing, acknowledging that deviance can emerge across these domains.

O - Observation of Spiritual Dimensions:

Healing approaches often involve spiritual concepts and practices. This step assesses the spiritual aspects of healing rituals and determining how deviation may emerge within particular settings.

L - Lived Experience Analysis:

Individuals active in healing practices may generate useful information into deviant behaviour. This element concentrates on figuring out the viewpoints, motives, and outcomes associated with deviant practices for both practitioners and recipients.

A - Assessment of Ethical Implications:

Evaluating deviance in healing procedures requires addressing ethical considerations. This stage entails evaluating the ethical ramifications of inappropriate conduct or practices, considering their compatibility with moral standards and values.

6.4 CONCLUSION

Embracing the complexity of religious life in contemporary Africa requires rethinking our assumptions and challenging our preconceptions. Deviant healing practices, rather than being outliers or mere confusions, represent a continual interaction between tradition and ingenuity

and human development. They serve as a reminder of the constant flux of faith and spirituality, as well as the ongoing search for healing, completeness, and purpose in human existence. The study makes a substantial contribution to fostering social wellness and narrowing the disparities between differing spiritual orientations. This not only broadens our awareness of deviant healing methods, but also provides vital insights on fostering remedial pastoral care and counselling for those affected.

The study notes the shortcomings of Eurocentric conceptions and endorses a strategic survey into Indigenous epistemologies and knowledge systems, thereby offering novel perspectives into the lived realities of African communities. This includes a dedication to decolonising research methodologies and recognising the inherent predispositions and mechanisms of power that mould our perceptions. Ultimately, the research substantially answered the defined research questions and objectives by offering insights into the nature, origins, and implications of deviant healing practices in Ṭhohoyandou. It also suggested ways to support affected individuals. However, more research may be required to investigate the long-term impacts of these practices and establish comprehensive measures for their prevention and reduction.

The complicated terrain of deviant healing practices within contemporary religious movements in Ṭhohoyandou, Limpopo, has been examined in this study. The research offered extensive insight of the cultural, spiritual, and ethical aspects of these practices through the adoption of a post-colonial African Practical Theology approach. The persisting influence of imperialism on African spirituality has been brought to light by the fusion of post-colonial ideas. This further highlighted the necessity of a decolonial strategy that honours Indigenous knowledge systems and lived experiences. The findings of the study highlight how crucial it is to address deviant healing practices through capacity building, professional engagement, pastoral care, and civic education. With a focus on ethical and contextual awareness, the recommended FHOLA Deviance Analysis Model provides a thorough framework for evaluating and responding to these behaviours.

By offering a reflective account of the research process, the work advances the scholarly

conversation about religious movements and healing modalities and opens the door for further investigations into the fundamental dynamics of non-traditional healing practices. This research is aimed at strengthening religious figures, societies, and policymakers to tackle the issues raised by these practices by promoting theoretical and practical awareness. In the end, the ultimate objective is to promote an even more inclusive and moral strategy for healing within the framework of contemporary African spirituality.

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ANNEXURE A: ETHICAL CLEARANCE

ETHICS APPROVAL CERTIFICATE

RESEARCH AND INNOVATION
OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR

NAME OF RESEARCHER/INVESTIGATOR:

Rev ME Muthivhi

STUDENT NO:

16016123

PROJECT TITLE: Post-colonial deviant healing practices within contemporary religious movements in Thohoyandou: Towards a practical theology perspective.

ETHICAL CLEARANCE NO: SHSS/20/DS/07/2003

SUPERVISORS/ CO-RESEARCHERS/ CO-INVESTIGATORS

NAME	INSTITUTION & DEPARTMENT	ROLE
Dr LM Mudimeli	University of Venda	Promoter
Prof GE Dames	University of South Africa	Co - Promoter
Rev ME Muthivhi	University of Venda	Investigator – Student

Type: **Doctoral Research**

Risk: **Risk to humans, animals, environment, or a sensitive research area (Category 3)**

Approval Period: **April 2021 – April 2024**

The Research Ethics Social Sciences Committee (RESSC) hereby approves your project as indicated above.

General Conditions

While this ethics approval is subject to all declarations, undertakings and agreements incorporated and signed in the application form, please note the following.

- The project leader (principal investigator) must report in the prescribed format to the REC:
 - Annually (or as otherwise requested) on the progress of the project, and upon completion of the project
 - Within 48hrs in case of any adverse event (or any matter that interrupts sound ethical principles) during the course of the project.
 - Annually a number of projects may be randomly selected for an external audit.
- The approval applies strictly to the protocol as stipulated in the application form. Would any changes to the protocol be deemed necessary during the course of the project, the project leader must apply for approval of these changes at the REC. Would there be deviation from the project protocol without the necessary approval of such changes, the ethics approval is immediately and automatically forfeited.
- The date of approval indicates the first date that the project may be started. Would the project have to continue after the expiry date; a new application must be made to the REC and new approval received before or on the expiry date.
- In the interest of ethical responsibility, the REC retains the right to:
 - Request access to any information or data at any time during the course or after completion of the project.
 - To ask further questions; Seek additional information; Require further modification or monitor the conduct of your research or the informed consent process.
 - withdraw or postpone approval if:
 - Any unethical principles or practices of the project are revealed or suspected.
 - It becomes apparent that any relevant information was withheld from the REC or that information has been false or misrepresented.
 - The required annual report and reporting of adverse events was not done timely and accurately.
 - New institutional rules, national legislation or international conventions deem it necessary

ISSUED BY:

UNIVERSITY OF VENDA, RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

Date Considered: March 2021

Name of the RESSC Chairperson of the Committee: Prof Takalani Mashau

Takalani Mashau

Signature: _____



ANNEXURE B: INFORMATION LETTER

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RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

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Appendix B

LETTER OF INFORMATION

Title of the Research Study : Reflections on Post-Colonial Religiosity in Africa:
Deviant Healing Practices within Contemporary
Religious Movements

Principal Investigator/s/ researcher : Rev. ME Muthivhi

Promoters : Dr L.M. Mudimeli and Prof G.E. Dames

Brief Introduction and Purpose of the Study: The study looks to identify and describe deviant healing practices in contemporary religious movements in Thohoyandou and thereby analyse these deviant healing practices in terms of cause, perpetrator and effect. The study has a dual purpose to identify, describe and analyse deviant healing practices in contemporary religious movements in Thohoyandou and to investigate how these practices blend African religiosity with European religious expression and identity. It seeks to discern the abuse of vulnerable adherents and further detect a second form of abuse that ongoing spiritual mishandlings have implications on African traditional religion; which stands to become a casualty of abusive practices, though it is acknowledged that African religions vary in practice and method.

Outline of the Procedures : Participants in the study will be expected to answer questions as outlined in the research interview schedule and one-on-one interviews will be conducted at the participants preferred venue. Only participants above the age of eighteen will be interviewed, interviewees will encompass victims of spiritual abuse and authorities within contemporary movement. Interviews are anticipated to be approximately forty five minutes to an hour.

Risks or Discomforts to the Participant: Participation in the study may result in psychological detriment (episodes of depression, guilt, stress, confusion and loss of self-esteem).

Benefits : Publication will be the main benefit of the study.

Reason/s why the Participant May Be Withdrawn from the Study: Participants may be withdrawn from the study due to non-compliance or illness. Participation is deemed voluntary and there will be no adverse consequences for the participant should they choose to withdraw.

Remuneration : Participants will not receive any monetary or other types of remuneration.

Costs of the Study : Participants will not be expected to cover any costs towards the study.

Confidentiality : Participants will not be deceived about their participation in the study, the researcher will ask for consent and maintain trust, honesty, anonymity and privacy. The researcher will take heed of risk, harm and confidentiality at all times.

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ANNEXURE C: CONSENT FORM

Research and Innovation
Office of the Director

Research-related Injury : In the event of a research-related injury or adverse reaction, there will be no compensation.

Persons to Contact in the Event of Any Problems or Queries:

Please contact Dr L.M. Mudimeli my promoter on (cell no. 061 909 5509 / email. lufuluvhi.mudemili@univen.ac.za), Prof G.E. Dames (cell no. 082 787 1509 / email. damesge@unisa.ac.za) or the researcher (cell no. 072 508 8161 / tel no. 015 962 8231 / email. mashudu.muthivhi@univen.ac.za), or the University Research Ethics Committee Secretariat on 015 962 9058. Complaints can be reported to the Director: Research and Innovation, Prof GE Ekosse on 015 962 8313 or Georges.Ivo.Ekosse@univen.ac.za

CONSENT

Statement of Agreement to Participate in the Research Study:

- I hereby confirm that I have been informed by the researcher, Mashudu Edward Muthivhi, about the nature, conduct, benefits and risks of this study.
- I have also received, read and understood the above written information regarding the study.
- I am aware that the results of the study, including personal details regarding my sex, age, date of birth, initials and diagnosis will be anonymously processed into a study report.
- In view of the requirements of research, I agree that the data collected during this study can be processed in a computerized system by the researcher.
- I may, at any stage, without prejudice, withdraw my consent and participation in the study.
- I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and (of my own free will) declare myself prepared to participate in the study.
- I understand that significant new findings developed during the course of this research which may relate to my participation will be made available to me.

Full Name of Participant	Date	Time	Signature
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I, Date Time Signature

Mashudu Edward Muthivhi herewith confirms that the above participant has been fully

Informed about the nature, conduct and risks of the above study.

Full Name of Researcher

Mashudu Edward Muthivhi Date..... Signature.....

Full Name of Witness (If applicable)

..... Date Signature.....

Full Name of Legal Guardian (If applicable)

..... Date..... Signature.....

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ANNEXURE D: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

TITLE OF THE RESEARCH STUDY:

Reflections on Post-Colonial Religiosity in Africa:

Deviant Healing Practices within Contemporary Religious Movements

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR RESEARCHER : Rev. ME Muthivhi

PROMOTER : Dr L.M. Mudimeli

: Prof G.E. Dames

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Specific objectives of the study include:

To identify and describe deviant healing practices in contemporary religious movements in Thohoyandou.

To analyse these deviant healing practices in terms of cause, perpetrator and effect

To identify the challenges of merging European and African spiritual expression

To suggest forms of remedial counselling for the victims of deviant healing practices

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

What happened with you healing experience?

What kind of deviant healing practices occur amongst contemporary religious movements in Thohoyandou?

What are your views on the current healing practices in your church/religion?

Why do you think these healing practices are the way they are today?

Do you see these healing practices as being deviant, why?

What do you consider to be or not to be deviant about these healing practices?

Who is involved in these practices and what causes those involved to commit these practices and what are the effects of these practices?

Who do you feel are the relevant people to conduct healing practices?

Do you feel these healing practices are positive or negative?

Are these healing practices effective?

Should European and African spiritual expressions be merged?

Is there any relationship between European and African spiritual expression?

Can African spiritual expressions find a place in Christianity?

Do you think African/European spiritual expression is being abused, why?

Which forms of remedial action may be undertaken for the benefit of the victims of deviant healing practices?

Are healing practices by pastoral/religious abusive in your view?

What can be done to give a voice to victims of healing practices?