

Change and Continuity in Black Pentecostal Dress Codes: The Case of the Apostolic Faith Mission in QwaQwa, 1975–2020

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Abstract

This article explores historical change and continuity in the dress code of black Pentecostal congregants within the Apostolic Faith Mission (AFM) in QwaQwa, South Africa, from 1975 to 2020. Pentecostalism often expresses itself through local cultural idioms, including dress. Drawing on oral history interviews with 37 long-term AFM members, the study examines shifts and consistencies in dress norms amid Pentecostal evangelical revival influences that became pervasive from the 1970s. Findings show a conservative dress culture shaped by older generations with traditional African values, into which formal Western dress styles were acculturated and a limited education. Over time, a gradual relaxation of dress codes emerged, resulting in a “new conservative” dress norm upheld by younger, better-educated congregants until more significant changes arose in the late 2010s. These changes reflect stronger advocacy for personal style expression, challenging the conservative hegemony emanating from the teachings of the founding ministers. Informed by Cultural Evolutionary Theory, this research contributes to understanding the socio-cultural evolution of Pentecostal dress codes in African contexts and highlights the complex interaction between tradition, education, and religious identity in shaping Pentecostal dress practices.

Keywords: Apostolic Faith Mission; Black Pentecostalism; dress; liberalisation; oral history

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Introduction

Pentecostalism is renowned for its appeal to ordinary people, particularly youth, often expressed in their cultural idiom (Diboro and Ehiem 2020, 83). Van Dijk (2000, 11–12) draws attention to the attraction of youth into Pentecostalism with the advent of prosperity-driven Pentecostal-Charismatic movement of the late 1970s to the 1990s. This was true across Sub-Saharan Africa, including South Africa, where Evangelist Reinhard Bonnke's Christ For All Nations (CFAN) parachurch ministry originated (Gifford 1994, 13). Through CFAN, Bonnke actively contributed to the spread of the Pentecostal-charismatic revival that swept across cities and towns of Sub-Saharan Africa from the late 1970s and the evangelicalisation of the Apostolic Faith Mission (AFM) of South Africa (Lebusa 2009, 141; Mofokeng and Madise 2019, 9–10). The propensity of Pentecostalism to attract the youth and have them become its ardent proponents (Diboro and Ehiem 2020, 80; Muyuni 2016, 17–18; Offiong 2010, 131, 134), and the inevitability of changes in the manner the youth express themselves overtime, especially regarding dress, necessitate asking: what changes, if any, occurred in black Pentecostal dress code between 1975 and 2020 and which aspects have remained unchanged?

To respond to this question, it is important to delimit it somewhat. The first delimiter is denominational. In this case, the focus is on the AFM of South Africa. However, because of the national spread of this denomination, QwaQwa serves as a geographic delimiter. QwaQwa is one of the earliest population centres in the then Orange Free State colony to welcome classical Pentecostalism in 1910. The third delimiter is a timeframe, 1975 to 2020. While the choice for 2020 is arbitrary, 1975 is significant in that Reinhard Bonnke, whom Van Dijk (2000, 8) counts among Western personalities actively involved in the spread of the Pentecostal-charismatic revival across Africa from the 1970s, launched CFAN. Additionally, one of Reinhard Bonnke's associates, Rev. Masusu Mofokeng, laid the foundation for an evangelical revival in QwaQwa, which resulted in the AFM having six congregations in 10 years (1975–1985) and a vibrant Christian ministry to educational institutions in the area (Du Plessis 1992; Tromp 2021, 17). The study contributes to understanding the historical evolution of dress code within African Pentecostalism.

This historical question arises in the context of concern with developments involving dress and Pentecostalism. For example, in the Kenyan context, Parsitau and Van Klinken (2018) note Prophet Owuor's fast-growing ministry's attraction to women through an emphasis on a strict dress code, while Mapuranga (2020, 36) blames the same emphasis for encouraging gender-based violence (GBV), especially against women within the Zimbabwean context. Writing in the South African context, Dlamini (2022, 55–56) problematises the literal reading of “biblical passages [which] are somehow equated to African value systems ... as tools” of women's oppression. Onah and Agbo (2021, 6), Nnadi (2010, 116), Ottuh (2020, 1–2) and several other scholars reflecting on the Nigerian context note with alarm the increasing loss of modest dress

among Christians and the general youth population. Omonijo and others (2016, 641), as well as Onah and Agbo (2021, 6), blame the seeming loss of dress modesty on some Pentecostal ministers.

In their treatment of the subject of dress, the above-mentioned scholars approach it from several theoretical lenses, such as moral theology and cultural normativity (Nnadi 2010; Omonijo et al. 2016; Onah and Agbo 2021; Ottuh 2020), symbolic meaning (Dube 2024), decolonial and feminist critique (Bvuma 2025; Dlamini 2022; Mapuranga 2020; Parsitau and Van Klinken 2018). However, these approaches tend to describe the significance of dress (codes) rather than trace the changes in dress codes within specific church histories.

Method

In light of the identified lacuna in the previous section, the article is a historical descriptive research on the subject of change and continuity in black Pentecostal dress, drawing from oral history interviews with 37 adult members from various congregations of the AFM in QwaQwa. Their selection was through a combination of snowball and volunteer sampling methods (Berg and Lune 2017, 39). Their recruitment and participation were guided by principles of full disclosure of the purpose of the study; consent to participate, to be recorded, and to educational dissemination of the contents of the interview; right to withdraw without reprisals; and avoidance of financial inducements (Creswell 2013, 153). Additionally, participants had to be members of any participating AFM congregations, be above 18 years of age and witnesses to changing dress codes. Most of these participants have been members of their congregations for more than 30 years. They included 15 males and 22 females, with ages ranging from 22 to 79 years old. These participants were interviewed mostly at church sites of participating congregations, with the average interview lasting an hour. The goal was to elicit credible data about the congregations, including participants' views and experiences regarding dress code in each congregation. Data credibility was established through cross-referencing individual interviews with each other, firstly within a congregation, then across congregations where relevant (Shopes 2002, 6). The interviews were recorded using a digital recorder, transcribed, and uploaded to Atlas. ti 24 for analysis. The researchers proceeded to create initial codes inductively, followed by a deductive categorisation of the codes informed by the research question. However, the write-up adopts a thematic structure deriving from the question instead of emergent analytical categories. Participants granted written permission to associate their contributions with their names.

Hereafter, we discuss the background to the AFM in QwaQwa, followed by a consideration of the initial dress code associated with the congregations established from 1975, the changes to the dress code, and what it all means. The discussion is informed by Cultural Evolutionary Theory and a change and continuity conceptual framework. According to Cultural Evolutionary Theory, change results from

preferential interactions of individuals with a change agent, thereby diversifying a once homogenous base (Creanza et al. 2017). Accordingly, the homogenous dress code of the establishment era (1975–1985) of evangelical Pentecostalism in QwaQwa, described hereafter as conservative, diversified into new conservative and post-conservative dress subcultures over time in addition to the continuing conservatism. On the other hand, change and continuity draw attention to the differing pace of change affecting a phenomenon of interest within a specified timeframe (Seixas 2017, 8). A slower pace of change constitutes a continuity between the past and the present, while a faster pace of change raptures the past and present.

The AFM in QwaQwa: A Background

American Pentecostal missionaries, John Graham Lake and Thomas Hezmalhalch, founded the AFM of South Africa in 1908 in Johannesburg, from where it soon spread across South Africa and into the neighbouring countries (Burger and Nel 2008, 73, 78–80, 204–206). By 1909, the AFM had entered the Orange River Colony (today's Free State Province) and by 1910, assumed the leadership of William Leshega's QwaQwa branch (Morton 2014, 75, 77–78). When it registered with the government in 1913, it was as a company in which white Pentecostals were members and black Pentecostals mere adherents organised within a mission department (Burger and Nel 2008, 82, 198). Black Pentecostals gained legal membership in 1990 amidst negotiations to unite the race-based divisions into one church, a goal realised in 1996 (Nel 2012, 126).

By the 1970s, the AFM had a congregation in Naledi Village, with branches in Makgalaneng and Mabolela villages (Interview, Nkomo 2009). This congregation was phenomenologically like Spirit-type African Independent Churches, as was the situation with other AFM congregations across South Africa (Interviews: Mbele 2022; M.L. Mofokeng 2022; Mofokeng 2021a, 6). The outstanding mark of these AFM congregations was the wearing of special garments or a church uniform. According to Mofokeng (2021a, 6), women wore white hats, white collars on the shoulders, blue blouses, black skirts and black shoes. The young woman's uniform was different only in two respects. Instead of a white collar, theirs was blue, and their blouses were white instead of blue. Men wore white "laboratory" coats and blue sashes with gold trimmings (Interview, M.I. Mosia 2022), while beneath the coat, or sometimes a jacket, was a blue waistcoat (Interview, Malete 2009).¹ Pastors and evangelists wore clergy shirts and

1 The colours of various items in the AFM uniform are not exclusive to this church. For instance, the AFM's uniforms worn by young and married women, as well as men, closely resemble those of their Methodist counterparts, differing primarily in the substitution of blue for the Methodists' red. This same uniform style appears in the Reformed Apostolic Faith Mission and Old Apostolic Faith Mission (Interview, Tshabalala 2008a; 2008b). In contrast, denominations that seceded from the AFM before 1946 typically avoid black, opting instead for blue or white. While the symbology of the colours of the AFM uniform has received little prior attention, it may be surmised that the colours signify similarly to Methodist colours, where black stands for sin and white for purity or sanctification (Mujinga 2023, 9). The assumed similarity derives from the African section of the AFM's strong Methodist influence from inception (Interview, M.J. Mofokeng 2009). This influence

collars, often with a suit (De Wet 1989, 107; Mofokeng 2021a, 6), contrary to Mzondi's (2024, 3) assertion that this was never the case.²

In 1975, Rev. Masusu Mofokeng laid the groundwork for the establishment of an evangelical Pentecostal congregation in Phuthaditjhaba, the capital of QwaQwa (Interview, R. Mosia 2022). The latter had received a self-governing homeland status in the previous year. Rev. Reinhard Bonnke joined Rev. Mofokeng for a gospel campaign in 1978 in Phuthaditjhaba, resulting in the birth of the AFM Phuthaditjhaba congregation (Interview, R. Mosia 2022). This congregation planted branch congregations in Makwane, Tseki, Tsheseng, and Naledi villages, with the Paballong branch developing out of Tseki in 1985 (Interviews: Dlamini 2022; M.I. Mosia 2022; Sekgato 2022). The main congregation in Phuthaditjhaba was led by Rev. Michael Thito from 1978 until 1985, the same year the rest of the congregations assumed full congregation status (Interviews: Mashinini 2022; M.I. Mosia 2022). This was consequent to each congregation having an ordained minister, all of whom had apprenticed under Rev. Thito after their ministerial training. These congregations remained six in number for 17 years, when three more were added. These three new congregations resulted from splits due to conflict, which centred on disagreements regarding dress code, at least in one congregation (Interviews: Mashinini 2022; J.J. Mofokeng 2022; Q.J. Nkejane 2022).

included the 45 African Methodist Episcopal congregations who joined the AFM in 1909 in Bloemfontein, who, like the Methodist Church of Southern Africa's manyanos, black signifies sin and white signifies light, glory or holiness (Cooke 2014, 433; Maxwell 1999, 250–251); and the superintendency of WF Dugmore (1916–1919), who was a former Methodist (Burger and Nel 2008, 221). Dugmore organised the African section along Methodist orders in 1910, a structure that remained intact until constitutional changes of 1961 (Burger and Nel 2008, 221). The blue colour was specifically important as a colour associated with the high priestly garments (ephod) in Scripture (see Exodus 28). It was otherwise symbolic of the sky or heaven; therefore, the Holy Spirit. Among the AICs, blue symbolises healing, which is considered the work of the Holy Spirit (Bvuma 2025, 5).

- 2 Mzondi (2024, 2) asserts the absence of “clergy vestments” in the AFM. He supports his assertion with another that the founding missionaries of the AFM, John G. Lake and Tom Hezmalhalch did not wear clergy vestments (p.5). He further cites the existence of “photos of Elias Letwaba, Richard Ngidi and graduates of Union Bible School dressed in jackets or lambs jackets and wearing ties” (p.6). While Mzondi (2024) is correct in his argument about John G. Lake and Tom Hezmalhalch and the existence of the photos, evidence for the existence of vestments in the AFM is the photo of the AFM's first Afrikaner president, who served from 1913 until 1943, Pieter Louis (PL) le Roux and his bust at the AFM's archives in Auckland Park. PL le Roux is often shown with a clergy collar (see Burger and Nel 2008, 244iii). Another piece of evidence is the 1920 AFM's Native Conference resolution that forbade collars to ministers who had not been consecrated by laying hands, a decision which the 1926 conference reemphasised (AFM Native Conference 1920; 1927). Rev. Elias Nkitsing, one of the key leaders in the early AFM within the Orange Free State Province, who had known John G. Lake (AFM Native Conference 1920), wore a collar (the author possesses a photo to this effect). Oral testimony in possession of the author is that a lot of ministers of the AFM who retired in the 1970s wore clergy shirts and collars (Interviews: Maletle 2008; M.J. Mofokeng 2009; Tshabalala 2008b).

The Initial Dress Code of the Evangelical Dispensation in AFM Congregations

Mofokeng and Madise (2019) differentiate between the Zionist Pentecostal and evangelical Pentecostal phases in the history of black Pentecostalism within the AFM denomination. Before the evangelical phase dominated black Pentecostalism within the AFM, black Pentecostalism was phenomenologically similar to the independent Zionist church movement (Anderson 2000, 49; De Wet 1989; Hwata 2005). Mofokeng (2021b, 84) demonstrates these phenomenological similarities between independent Zionists and black Pentecostals of the AFM within this period, with Mofokeng (2018, 112) providing a contrast between the Zionist and evangelical Pentecostal phenomenologies.

In QwaQwa, the Zionist Pentecostal phase found expression in the Naledi congregation and its branches, while the Phuthaditjhaba congregation represented the beginnings of the evangelical Pentecostal phase in the area (Interview, Mbele 2022). The conspicuous difference between AFM members belonging to the congregation in Phuthaditjhaba and its branches, and those in the Mabilela, Makgalaneng, and Naledi villages, was the former's intentional rejection of special garments (Mofokeng 2021a, 7). Their rejection represented the triumph of the longstanding missionary campaign to rid black Pentecostals of special garments (Mofokeng and Madise 2019, 11). However, this new dress regime retained the expectations governing both men's and women's dress regarding the lengths of women's skirts, which were beneath the knee for adults, especially married women, and a knee-level skirt for young women (Interview, M. Mosia 2022). The shoulders, arms, and head remained covered, while jewellery and makeup were eschewed (Interviews: Qhaba 2022; M.L. Mofokeng 2022; M. Mosia 2022; Mbele 2022). Men's attire included wearing formal trousers, long-sleeved shirts, neckties and jackets (Interviews: N. Mooko 2022; S. Mooko 2022; M.I. Mosia 2022; R. Mosia 2022).

The portraiture of the dress code within the AFM in QwaQwa agrees with Anderson and Otwang's (1993, 38) representations of black Pentecostals in South Africa, whom they refer to as "mission Pentecostals," when they write:

Some of the Pentecostal churches have strict rules concerning attire. In most Pentecostal mission churches, for example, women are expected to wear a head covering in church services; make-up and jewellery are often frowned upon; and men are to wear a jacket and tie.

The above quote describes the dress situation of Black Pentecostalism in the early 1990s, based on a study conducted in Soshanguve, a black township to the north of Pretoria, in Gauteng. The strictness alluded to in the above quote took the form of refusing anyone who was improperly dressed; for example, a young man without a necktie, or a young woman with exposed knees, would not be allowed to stand in front of the congregation (Interview, Mlangeni 2022). In one congregation, wearing neckties was so mandatory, especially at the church site, that it did not matter whether it was Saturday or Sunday. The seriousness of this requirement becomes apparent in the

statement of one participant who mentioned a brother who would purchase ties using his own money and give them to those who had none (Interview, M.M. Motaung 2022).

Changes in the Dress Code of AFM QwaQwa Congregations

With the departure of Rev. Michael Thito and the arrival of Rev. George Mahlobo in 1985, the Phuthaditjhaba congregation became the first one to change the dress code (Interview: S. Mooko 2022; Q.J. Nkejane 2022). It was followed by the Naledi congregation in the early 1990s, following the departure of Rev. Masusu Mofokeng, who had assumed leadership in 1984 (Interviews: Qhaba 2022; M.L. Mofokeng 2022). The Makwane congregation was the third one to change its dress code with the arrival of Rev. William Nthotso in 2000 (Interview: Mlangeni 2022; Q.J. Nkejane 2022). These older congregations were joined by three other congregations that arose in the early 2000s, namely the Lusaka, Mphatlalatsane, and Tswelopele congregations in the Lusaka section of greater Makwane, Tseki, and Riverside section of Phuthaditjhaba, respectively. The Tswelopele congregation inherited the liberal stance of the Phuthaditjhaba congregation (Interview, M. Mofokeng 2022), with Mphatlalatsane continuing the stance of the Tseki congregation from which they respectively split (Interview, Mashinini 2022). The Lusaka congregation began as a protest against the liberalisation of the dress code at the Makwane congregation, but it eventually adopted a liberal posture towards dress (Interview, Q.J. Nkejane 2022).

Change was more conspicuous among women. It involved relaxing the taboos against makeup, jewellery (earrings), and uncovered hair, shoulders and arms (Interviews: Mokgotla 2022; M. Mosia 2022; Zondo 2022). For younger women, the changes included raising the hemline of their skirts or dresses to just below the knee level, which differentiated them from older and married women (Interview, M.L. Mofokeng 2022). Older women began wearing tracksuit trousers to night prayer meetings, especially in winter, albeit hidden behind a blanket wrap (Interviews: Radebe 2022; Zondo 2022). Thereafter, female trousers and jeans began to appear at youth activities or events, mostly on Saturdays (Interviews: Nyembe 2022; Zondo 2022). These were followed by skirts with a hemline above the knees, “hot pants,”³ exposed back, large earrings, long nails, and use of coloured lipstick, much to the consternation of conservatives within the congregations (Interviews: M.L. Mofokeng 2022; M.I. Mosia 2022; M. Mosia 2022; Mzizi 2022; Tsotetsi 2022).

Men’s dress code remained conservative with one slight innovation: On a hot day, a preacher might rhetorically ask for permission to put away his jacket in the course of ministering (Interviews: S. Mooko 2022; M.J. Motaung 2022). However, some changes have been noted. These changes, characteristic of small sections of the male members of the AFM in QwaQwa, included not putting on a necktie and/or sometimes a jacket

3 Johnson (2010, 221) describes hot pants as “exceedingly short pants which fitted snugly around one’s body, hovering tantalizingly around the limits of modesty.”

when attending church services and other important events (Interviews: J.J. Mofokeng 2022; Mbele 2022). The changes were visible in younger and middle-aged men. In one specific congregation, in recent years, some young men have begun to include skinny jeans, sneakers, t-shirts and spiky hair in their dress repertoire (Interviews: Mokgotla 2022; Mlangeni 2022; Nyembe 2022). In another congregation, a few men have begun wearing shorts at home and sometimes to church meetings except on Sunday (Interviews: M. Mosia 2022; Zondo 2022).

What Do These Changes Mean?

The question of change and discontinuity implies an initial state of affairs from which change occurs. In this investigation, the initial dress culture was conservative, which, as Kwon (2017, 33) notes, refers to “preservation of past forms,” and therefore “not trendy.” This initial dress culture was biased in favour of the older generation in all congregations. Many from this older generation were former farm dwellers who became residents in villages when they migrated to QwaQwa (Bank 1984, 2). Additionally, their background as former farm dwellers implied a lower standard of education due to the former Apartheid government’s policies, which Pillay (2022, 18) opines to have been meant to trap farm workers through “education [that] was effectively only primary level.” The relevance of both educational background and residence lies in the attitude and relations with customary values and practices they engender in a person, which Petzer (2009, 9–10) still describes as traditional even at the beginning of the 21st century. Such customary values and practices could be argued to represent African conservatism against Western influence among the better-educated Africans (Van Dijk 2000, 12, 14). However, this African conservatism co-opted formal Western dress through acculturation (Maholela, Twala, and Kompi 2022, 171; Zulu 2012, 247).

The younger and often better-educated generation, on the other hand, brought slightly different perspectives to the dress question, which the older generation considered liberal and problematic. However, at first and for a long while, the change championed by this younger and often better-educated generation constituted a relaxation of certain taboos, while retaining some. The retention of some taboos meant that the initial change remained recognisably conservative, therefore, justifying the application of the label “new conservative” to the dress code. A more thoroughgoing change, critical of both conservative and new conservative dress ideologies and practices, emerged in the last half of the second decade of the 21st century. The change that black Pentecostal dress code has undergone since the late 1970s, when evangelical Pentecostal congregations were established in QwaQwa, involves the shattering of the conservative hegemony. The consequence has been the emergence of strong advocacy for the expression of personal style through exercising the right to wear or not to wear jewellery, cosmetics, head coverings, short-sleeved shirts, jackets, ties, t-shirts, female trousers, sneakers, skinny jeans, etc.

The pace of change differed according to gender, as it was slower for men and faster and more pronounced for women. This signals men's inclination towards conservatism against women's inclination towards increased liberalism in the area of dress—an observation which may suggest the existence of a quest for female bodily autonomy. This quest finds expression in a female participant's remark about women's oppression in congregations under the conservative dress regime (Interview, R. Mosia 2022). The concept of oppression was also invoked in the context of the youth's experiences with the conservative dress regime (Interview, Qhaba 2022). However, considering the long-standing inclination towards conservatism in men's dress, it may be that it was the female sector of the youth that mostly felt oppressed. This argument finds basis in the many instances, across the congregations, where young women led the struggle for relaxation of conservative dress codes and have been at the receiving end of reprimands from conservatives (Interviews: Mashinini 2022; Mbele 2022; Q.J. Nkejane 2022).

Removing the taboos on head covering, shoulder and arms covering, jewellery and makeup represented women's earliest victory, which was new dress conservatism. Like conservatism, which prioritises the group over individuals, new conservatism retained measured sensitivity towards the group through the principle of concern for another person (Interview, R. Mosia 2022). Adherence to this principle had a self-limiting effect towards dress-based self-expression. While conservatives would insist that women should refrain from drawing attention to themselves or being sexually provocative to men in their dress (Interview: Komako 2022; J.J. Mofokeng 2022), one who subscribes to new conservatism would attempt to balance feeling good and avoiding provocation. From a conservative perspective, women owe men a duty to assist them in their sanctification by the way they dress, while new conservative women consider it merely a favour (Interviews: Dlamini 2022; M. Mosia 2022; R. Mosia 2022). The recent developments, suggesting the abandonment of self-limitation, therefore constituting a post-conservative dress phase, are demonstrable in an anecdote of a female university student who unashamedly attended a church service in one of the congregations wearing "hot pants." Her response to those who had misgivings about her dress preferences was to "fix themselves" (Interview, Mokgotla 2022). Her sentiment rebelled against the expectation of others and refused to accept responsibility for their reactions.

However, now that a change has occurred in the dress code of black Pentecostals, the co-existence of various dress subcultures becomes an important issue. This calls for leadership and the teaching ministry to assist peaceful and meaningful co-existence wherein every member, regardless of dress ideology and practice, is disciplined for a greater role in the broader community's dress subcultures as the church seems to be a microcosm of the community it operates in. The congregation in Phuthaditjhaba, especially the youth, raise this very argument that dress conservatism renders young Pentecostals uncomfortable to the point of leaving in some instances, and dissuades young people against converting to Christ (Interviews: N. Mooko 2022; Nyembe 2022; Zondo 2022). Adhering to strict dress codes and an uncaring attitude towards the youth

who subscribe to casual dress has led to some leaving, with one congregation's loss threatening its existence (Interviews: Komako 2022; Skosana 2022; Zondo 2022).

Members' experience of dress code changes is likely to be echoed in other geographies beyond the AFM's congregations in QwaQwa. Although this church has reappraised and reissued some of its ethical pronouncements in recent years, the subject of dress code was not included (see Pronouncements page at <https://afm-ags.org/pronouncements/>). The last pronouncement regarding dress code was made in 1990, before the unity of the disparate racialised sections of this church (AFM of Africa 1989; 1990). This pronouncement relied on the one made in the former White Section in 1985, which was informed by the desire to maintain unity among disagreeing members. Therefore, the wearing of hats by women members of this church, which was considered a matter of obedience to God in 1975, was relegated to a dispensable social custom by 1985 (Burger and Nel 2008, 373, 375). In light of the threat of dissolution of some congregations whose intolerance to youthful dress aesthetics has led to young people discontinuing membership, as suggested by the developments in QwaQwa, it may be necessary for denominational leaders to consider providing guidance on the matter of dress code again.

Conclusion

The article traced dress portrayals of members of the AFM in QwaQwa from the 1970s until the end of the second decade of the 21st century. Noteworthy was the homogenous dress appearance foundational to the congregations established between 1975 and 1985. It was characterised by strict rules. Over time, this homogenous character diversified due to differing rates of change in dress styles, resulting in continuities and discontinuities of black Pentecostal dress among men and women. Consequently, in 2022, when the study was conducted, members of the AFM in QwaQwa were easily classified into two broad dress subcultures, which are: conservative and neo-conservative. These two subcultures have a longer history of co-existence in some congregations and across congregations. Recently, a more youth-driven trend is emerging, one showing signs of not wanting to associate with any form of conservatism. Should this trend succeed in establishing itself, it would be taking its place among the already existing subcultures as a post-conservative dress subculture.

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