

The Impact of the Coalition of Pentecostalism and African Traditional Religion (ATR) Religious Artifacts in Zimbabwe: The Case of United Family International (UFI)

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Abstract

The rise of the mega- Pentecostal churches in Zimbabwe has brought an overarching coalition of religious artifacts in its quest to engage with the private and public lives of many Zimbabweans. Adaptation to the unstable political and economic decline in Zimbabwe has led to some proliferation of complex, interwoven practices between Pentecostalism and African Traditional Religion. Intrinsic violence, manipulation, extortions, cunning miracles, misrepresentation of the Bible and an elusive rhetoric of prosperity are used to gain obedience of the suffering populace. Somewhat, an alliance of religious artifacts, expressions, identity, and meaning forms a new hybrid of African Pentecostalism in Zimbabwe. This article explores the social, economic, psychological and political meaning of these religious artifacts coalition. The article uses United Family International (UFI) as a case study. This study collected data through interviews and sermons analysis.

KEY WORDS: ATR, Pentecostalism, Coalition, Artifacts

Introduction

The socio-economic decline, poverty and laxity of the rule of law in Zimbabwe today have involuntarily led the desperate populace to have an insatiable yearning for, and seek solace from, a new spirituality. In the Zimbabwean economy, Pentecostalism has become a central issue in offering some solutions to these and other challenges bedeviling the nation. Pentecostalism is a brand of Christianity which places emphasis on miracles,

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works of the Holy Spirit and evokes Acts 2:8ff as the source of power.² Pentecostal churches have attracted masses of people resulting in mega-congregations in Zimbabwe. However, zeal for power, riches and flamboyance have caused tension within these mega churches leading to their continuous mushrooming and schisms. On the other hand, the desperation of the population, poverty and suffering have led to rampant deception, exploitation, and extortion, especially within the Pentecostal churches. Common in these churches are teachings on prosperity, blessing, and curses as well as the possibility of acquiring riches using divine and supernatural methods.

Such claims are both interesting and worrying as they are causes for a coalition religious artifacts. Pentecostalism enjoys a substantial glamor and celebration in Zimbabwe. However, a closer analysis of its liturgy, rituals, myths, and beliefs shows subtle inherent violence camouflaged in a coalition of artifacts with African Traditional Religion (ATR). For instance, the new wave of mega-Pentecostal churches has begun to integrate, evoke and prescribe enchantments, ornaments, oils and bangles just as the ATR practitioners do. Such overarching practices promote inter-religious artifacts coalition. For example, the Pentecostal clergy has been condemned for receiving supernatural powers from the underworld, foreign nations and traditional healers, a dimension under discussion in this article. This interplay increase by the crafty coercions exercised on, and hefty payments made to the Pentecostal clergy in the guise of receiving a blessing. It is against this backdrop this article explores the social, economic and political meaning of this religious artifacts coalition between Pentecostalism and ATR.

Methodology

This article uses key arguments and data collection from United Families International (UFI). The UFI is founded by Prophet Emmanuel and Ruth Makandiwa in May 2010, after breaking from the Apostolic Faith Mission in Zimbabwe (AFM). The UFI attracts large numbers of people to their services. Claims of the prophetic voice, healing and miracles have continued to heighten the public curiosity and attention of the media. This article refers Makandiwa as the Prophet, as ascribed by his followers.

The first data collection tool was through interviews. The total numbers of interviews were twenty-five UFI members using purposive sampling. Purposive sampling is a technique in which the researcher uses own judgment to choose the population.³ Six ordained pastors were interviewed to discuss the challenges their theological interpretations of some religious artifacts and the main issues addressed by the UFI. Eight lay-leaders functioning as (Cell Group leaders, Sunday school teacher and hospitality and decorations) were interviewed to understand how they perceive, appropriate and cascade the teaching from the Prophet. Eleven members without positions in the UFI were interviewed, to understand how the artifacts have worked for them.

The second data collection was through analyzing sermons preached by the prophet. Pieterse argues that sermons provide a platform for the initiation of disciplinary practices and technologies of the self that, to varying degrees of success, enable spiritual self-

² Philip Musoni, "African Pentecostalism and Sustainable Development: A Study On the Zimbabwe Assemblies of God Africa, Forward in Faith Church," *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention* 2,10 (2013), 75.

³Michael Quinn Patton, *Qualitative Research* (Wiley Online Library, 2005).

fashioning.⁴ Ten video sermons preached by the Prophet were analyzed. The sermons he preached at youth services, Judgement Night Conference, normal services at Chitungwiza sanctuary, business conference and deliverance. The sermons gleaned information which helped to understand teachings about blessings and curses.

Discourses on Pentecostalism and Public Space

Recently, there has been an increase of works about the of Pentecostalism in public space including the political voice and the socio-economic debates. Related context like Nigeria, Ghana, South Africa, Tanzania and Kenya brings critical ideas to this article. Marx Weber work, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, frames answers for the relationship between religion and economics. The 'Protestant Ethic' are habits, ethics, and beliefs that sustained European Industrial Revolution economic growth. Afe Adogame focused his work, *Dealing with Local Satanic Technology: Deliverance Rhetoric in the Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries*⁵ shows that in Nigerian during 1980-1990, the collapse of socio-economic and political paved a new Christian Pentecostal persuasions providing channels for venting frustrations and sources for solutions. Adogame questions the interconnectedness of religion to the declining economic and concludes that there exists a dialectical and interactive relationship between various ingredients of the social structure. He argues that church literature and 'sermon genres' are replete information about how beliefs structure shape and impact the society.

Paul Gifford article, *The Protestant Ethic and African Pentecostalism: A case study*⁶; reviews the 'Pentecostal Ethic' presents the case of an African Pentecostal Church, 'Winners Chapel.' It emphasizes 'victorious living' by using writing by David Oyedepo *Signs and Wonders Today: A Catalog of Amazing Acts of God among Men*, in 2006 and the testimonies contained in this book. He points out many pastors in African Pentecostalism uses 'victorious living' motif which they emphasize financial gain. In this article, the use of oil, the blood of Jesus, washing of feet and mantle forms power instruments to protect them. Birgit Meyer⁷ using Ghanaian context argue that Pentecostals reject government heritage politics. In Zimbabwe, David Maxwell⁸ explains that Pentecostals makes a total break with the past by exorcisms. However, Ruth Marshall works argue that "Pentecostalism is a paradox of difference and uniformity, of flow and closure that seem to be at the heart of processes of transnationalism and globalization."⁹ Kudzai Biri's work, *the silent echoing voice: aspects of Zimbabwean Pentecostalism and the quest for power, healing and miracles*¹⁰ contests the notion of 'total break from the past' through studying Zimbabwe Assemblies of God Africa and United Families International (UFI). She confirms that they both tape into the

⁴Jim Pieterse, "Managing belief in a hostile world: experiencing Gifts of the Spirit at a small Pentecostal Charismatic Church in Pretoria," *Anthropology Southern Africa*, 2016,5.

⁵ Afe Adogame, "Dealing with Local Satanic Technology: Deliverance Rhetoric in the Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries," *Journal of World Christianity* 5, no. 1 (2012).

⁶ Paul Gifford and Trad Nogueira-Godsey, "The Protestant Ethic and African Pentecostalism: A Case Study," *Journal for the Study of Religion* 24, no. 1 (2011).

⁷ Birgit Meyer, "'Make a Complete Break with the Past.'Memory and Post-Colonial Modernity in Ghanaian Pentecostalist Discourse," *Journal of religion in Africa* 28, no. Fasc. 3 (1998).

⁸ David Maxwell, "'Delivered from the Spirit of Poverty?': Pentecostalism, Prosperity and Modernity in Zimbabwe," *ibid.*

⁹ André Corten and Ruth Marshall-Fratani, *Between Babel and Pentecost: Transnational Pentecostalism in Africa and Latin America* (Indiana University Press, 2001).

¹⁰ Kudzai Biri, "The Silent Echoing Voice: Aspects of Zimbabwean Pentecostalism and the Quest for Power, Healing and Miracles," (2012).

Shona traditional culture to find the meaning of life. The literature review, taken together does not interrogate the social, economic, psychological and political meanings of the coalition of religious artifacts in Pentecostalism, a gap this article intends to fill.

Understanding Pentecostalism and schisms in Zimbabwe

This article does not go into the complex, historical and emergence of Pentecostalism debate, but uses a working definition by Musoni above. Musoni defines Pentecostalism as ‘a brand within Christianity which emphasizes charisma and works of the Holy Spirit. In the same vein, there is a contestation of the term ATR has for a long time. In this article, ATR is narrowed to mean the popular indigenous religions and cultures of the Shona people Zimbabwe. The large ethnic group in Zimbabwe is the Shona people. Over the past century, there has been a dramatic increase in appreciating that Pentecostalism has managed to satisfy its adherents in both spiritual and material needs putting them in the spotlight. As such, this is contrary to her counterparts like Catholicism and Mainline churches. Adherence of Pentecostalism views them as powerless and traditional.

However, recently, the church in Zimbabwe is blamed for political and economic instability, and there is an argument that leaders have lost God in pursuit of their glory and materialism.¹¹ The desire for glory and empire building attributes to the burgeoning of Pentecostal schisms. What is interesting and worrisome is that the productive young man aged between 22 and 40 purported to be causing these breakaways. During the escalating economic decline in Zimbabwe from 2009, young Pentecostal preachers surfaced on the scene with a ‘prophetic craze’ having miracles of varying levels of sophistication attributed to them.¹² This prophetic voice has made these churches to attract myriads of followers. Traditionally, the clergy was manned by the older adults, and this brings a question of why the sudden interest by the young productive generation. The church has become a lucrative business and a greener pasture in Zimbabwe, Southern Africa and beyond. Most of these ‘fly by night’ young preachers have no theological training, resulting in an inaccurate interpretation of the Bible. Literal translation and superficial selective reading of scriptures are used to justify their needs.

Although scholarship denies the existence of a religion which can be termed ‘new’ in religious circles; in the Zimbabwean context, the ‘new’ is about the divergent practices as compared to Classic Pentecostalism, which traces from America around 1900. The pioneers of Pentecostalism in Zimbabwe such as the Apostolic Faith Mission (AFM) and the Zimbabwe Assemblies of God Africa (ZAOGA), Hear the Word Ministries, Family of God Ministries can be a benchmark for this comparison. In other words, this article distinguishes between the Zimbabwe New Pentecostal Movement (ZNPM) as ‘first generation Pentecostal breakaway churches’ from the existing charismatic or Pentecostal churches in Zimbabwe. Examples fitting this category are the United Families International (UFI), Heartfelt International Ministries (HIM), Prophetic Healing and Deliverance Ministries (PHD) and Spirit Embassy Ministries. This article utilizes the UFI as a case study representing the ZNPM.

¹¹Andrew Nyamayaro, “False Prophets Misleading Nation,” *H-Metro*, April 20, 2016, 8.

¹²Ezra Chitando et al., 2013. “Back to the Future! A Reader on the Bible, Prophets and Profits in Zimbabwe.” In *Prophets, Profits and the Bible in Zimbabwe*, ed. Ezra Chitando et al. (Bamberg: University of Bamberg Press, 2013), 9.

Potential Coalition: The Nexus of Pentecostalism and ATR

There is a dialectical and ambiguous relationship between ATR and Pentecostalism. In Zimbabwe, ATR has been castigated, resisted and labeled sinful. Despite this concerted effort, ATR has remained resilient and interwoven in the fabric of Pentecostalism. The striking observation to emerge is the emphasis of Pentecostalism to break away from the 'past life' of its adherents. They base on the understanding that when one is in Christ, they are a new creation (2 Corinthians 5¹⁷). Anything that is traditional and indigenous is viewed negatively as causing, or being a source of demonic activity. In fact, Pentecostalism perceives Indigenous religions to be a demonic and cultural belief as the basis of evil. It is possible that discursive power and domination underlies the hegemonic tendencies utilized by Christianity in demonizing and relegating indigenous religion as evil. Since individuals coming from existing religions like ATR are converting to Christianity, it is likely that the believers use indigenous frames of analysis to interpret and map the physical and metaphysical world. It is at this point that Pentecostalism begins to borrow from the indigenous culture. Therefore, for ZNRM clergy to be abreast with miracles and demand for solutions to poverty and economic challenges in Zimbabwe, there is compromising of the inter-religious boundaries. The inter-religious conflict is toned down by forming a new coalition between Pentecostalism and ATR.

There is a need to understand further the various perceptions of Pentecostalism that exist in alignment and continued operation with ATR. To this, Mbiti explains that an African is notoriously religious, taking religion to the field, work and every aspect of their life¹³. The parasitic nature of Christianity is large since for it to appeal to many people in each society, it must situate itself in the belief system of the people and address problems in a manner acceptable to the people in question. Thus, this gives Christianity relevance in the Zimbabwean society. Consequently, the ZNPM has begun to integrate, evoke and prescribe enchantments, ornaments, oils and bangles just as the indigenous practitioners do best. These artifacts do not only bring similarities but a competition between religions to preserve ownership. Concomitantly, there is a condemnation of the Pentecostal clergy has for receiving supernatural powers from the underworld, foreign nations' traditional healers: a new coalition saga which deserves further investigation. There are still many unanswered questions about whether an African can convert to Christianity or not. There is a new scenario whereby practitioners of the indigenous religions are blending and operating like the Pentecostal churches and vice-versa. Interviews established that one known *n'anga* (witchdoctor) suddenly turns into a prophet when they come to Christianity. These ornaments are there to prevent the adherents from evil attacks. Such claims are not peculiar to ZNPM, but the traditional healers give their patients charms, oils and herbs for protection as well. These artifacts sell at a price in both cases.

Discussions

The purpose of this article was to explore the social, economic and political meaning of the coalition of the religious artifacts between Pentecostal and ATR in Zimbabwe. This section discusses the findings of the socio-economic and political meaning of the coalition of religious artifacts from UFI. It uses the emerging themes; *demonology, prosperity gospel, the idea of a man of God, total health, blessings and curses rhetoric and spiritual declarations*.

¹³John.S Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (London: Heinemann, 1969),1.

Demonology

Deliverance from all forms of evil spirits is a central theme in the clergy of the UFI. A notable incident is a yearly service done called 'Judgement Night.' (*Anonymous UFI Cell Group Leader*) says, "Judgement Night is for sentencing poverty, sickness and every evil from people's lives." Kakore argued that 175 000 members attended 2016 Judgement Night 4.¹⁴ The Prophet teaches that evil spirits cause poverty. Such belief makes people shift their focus on the economic decline but thinks they have demons/evil spirits. Thus, one reason why Zimbabweans are flocking to such gatherings is to answer the question concerning their sufferings and understand the source of the poverty and break it.

One of the tools used to destroy the evil spirit is the prophet picture/portrait. (*Testimony from UFI member*), explains that the portrait of Prophet delivered his son who had evil spirits. The meaning of the portrait paints an authoritarian and autocratic muscle on the Prophet. Nevertheless, the Prophet has been branded as a trickster using occult powers and charms to draw a crowd to UFI and performs dubious miracles.¹⁵ Occultic powers and charms are common among the Shona traditional religion. Chavhunduka argued that exorcisms are rampant among the Shona people especially those of the antisocial acts like *kuroya* (bewitching).¹⁶ It is difficult, therefore, to differentiate the source of the powers of the Prophet.

The impact of some exorcisms turns to be abusive in form. It is possible to call it 'soft violence' which is very traumatic. For instance, a bishop told a woman that her husband transmitted evil spirits to her through sex, he then performed rituals that allowed him to hypnotize, rape, and telling her to celebrate thanking God for using the bishop as an instrument for the ritual.¹⁷ The social meaning of such acts is not only criminal and offenses but results in HIV and AIDS and causing psycho-somatic depression.

Anointing oil is used to protect believers from demons/evil spirits. At the launch of anointing oil in Chitungwiza UFI church, Prophet explains that "The anointing oil unlocks all the doors of impossibilities in one's life, it lubricates a person's life, and things start to move smoothly."¹⁸ The use of oil icon brings an economic hope to the people, as they lubricate their economic vices. Nonetheless, on a broader perspective the use of oil suggests a people who are lazy and want handouts. Often they fall into the trap of losing property to the clergy only thinking that poverty is a curse, neglecting the lack of accountable leadership and good governance in Zimbabwe.

¹⁴ Nyemudzai Kakore, "Record Numbers at Judgement Night 4," <http://www.herald.co.zw/record-numbers-at-judgment-night-4/>.

¹⁵ The Telescope News, "Ghananian Pastors Planning to Visit President Mugabe to Expose and Get Makandiwa Church Banned," <http://iharare.co.zw/ghanaian-pastors-planning-to-visit-president-mugabe-to-expose-and-get-makandiwas-church-banned/>.

¹⁶ Gordon L Chavhunduka, "Traditional Medicine in Modern Zimbabwe," *Zimbabwe: University of Zimbabwe Publications 115p. ISBN 908307403* (1994).

¹⁷ Justin Sullivan, "An African Bishop Allegedly Hypnotizes Then Rapes Woman as Part of Exorcism Ritual," Inquisitr," <http://www.inquisitr.com/1912557/church-bishop-hypnotizes-rapes-woman-as-part-of-exorcism-ritual/>.

¹⁸ Tendai Rupapa and David Tshuma, "Thousands Queue for Makandiwa's Anointing Oil," <http://www.herald.co.zw/thousands-queue-for-makandiwas-anointing-oil/>.

Prosperity

Although there is the concept of prosperity within the Christian faith, the ‘prosperity gospel has become a trap to religious blackmail. The prosperity gospel is key in the UFI church. Some people accuse and challenge this gospel not to be correct. What is at stake is not the gospel per se, but how the clergy center everything on themselves other than God. There are different innovations to attract wealthy to the clergy, for example, UFI has rebranded Old Testament altars. Rose, female, teacher by profession and teaches Sunday School at UFI says:

I constructed a home altar and placed a small brown box at the corner of the room. I pray at that altar every day and makes a sacrifice. The sacrifice is the money or anything that they will give to church on Sunday which they put on the altar until Sunday. I either kneel or lie on the altar. And when I pay my tithe and get a receipt I can remind God at the altar that I pay tithes.

In an interview with an UFI member it was explained that “I seed to Prophet so that I become rich. The Prophet told us that he was sent by God to preach prosperity and I know *zvangu zvaita* (my things will work).” The impact of the ‘seed/seeding’ has made Prophet extremely rich. Prophets in Zimbabwe live lavish, materialistic extravagant lifestyles, and drive expensive cars such as Mercedes Benz S600, Bentley, and Lamborghinis.¹⁹ Such a celebrity life when the country is in poverty is questionable, after all not the whole UFI members are experiencing this life except the Prophet. The ‘giving’ in UFI is associated with sowing seed or seeding on fertile ground. The ‘fertile ground’ refers to church activities and mostly the man of God who is the Prophet. Biri and Togarasei argued that the prophets in Zimbabwe promise people that suffering would end if people would contribute to tithes and offerings.²⁰ In theological circles, there is a potential discrepancy when comparing this with the Jesus of the Bible. In significant instances, Jesus, did not hoard or amass material possessions but gave to the marginalized or found means of meeting their needs. Brinton argued that the religious persuaders use deception for people to believe, they compromise the truth telling lies to the persons they wish to persuade.²¹ On average, an African is not a reader of the bible or research on theological issues; most people in Zimbabwe rely on the preacher for their religious claims.

“I use anointed towels for many reasons to achieve something, for example; Prophet said you could wipe a car that you believe in buying and the anointing in the towel work wonders for you to get the car,” explains (*UFI Hospitality and Decorations Leader*). Such a statement suggests the impossibility of challenging the misconceptions, incorrectness, and untrustworthiness of how the UFI present the biblical discourses such as prosperity, blessings, and curses. It is in such a context that truth is blended and skewed, the clergy set aside selected texts making them preach what they want to achieve.

¹⁹ Obvious Vengei, "Zimbabwean Pentecostal Prophets," in *Prophets, Profits and the Bible in Zimbabwe Festschrifts for Aynos Masotcha Moyo*, ed. Ezra Chitando, Masiwa Ragies Gunda, and Joachim Kugler (Bamberg: University of Bamberg Press, 2013).

²⁰ Kudzai Biri and Lovemore Togarasei, "Back to the Future! A Reader on the Bible, Prophets and Profits in Zimbabwe," *ibid.*, ed. Masiwa Ragies Gunda and Joachim Kugler Ezra Chitando.

²¹ Alan Brinton, "St Augustine and the Problem of Deception in Religious Persuasion," *Religious Studies* 19, no. 04 (1983).

Idea of Man of God

In the guise of the prophetic mandate, trans-migrations to heaven, and manifestations of supra miracles, the abusive leaders attack their prey. Extreme religious loyalty has psychological meaning and implications and meaning. There are violence and abuses of some believers in the name of being loyal to the man of God. The UFI members use titles like Prophet and *papa* (father), and these seem to make the Prophet, a god. Nsubuga argued that pastor Paseka Motsoeneng claimed to have visited heaven during Easter, took a photo and is selling it for \$240.00 USD.²² Such transcendental entitlements sustain these abuses and violence.

There is the special branding of UFI followers whereby they are expected to wear bangles, and badges with inscriptions saying *ndiri mwana wemuporofita* (I am a son of a prophet). An Interview with UFI pastor's aged 62:

All I can say is people do not know much about the Prophet, he has his money and does not depend on people's money. People say he has a snake and other things because they do not know him at all, he is a father to us and is a man of God. Everything done in the UFI is prophetic, and if you listen, you will prosper. I am not a person who just goes anywhere, but in UFI I have found a home, father Prophet is very spiritual. UFI has its unique principles and characteristics in doing things. In a Christian walk, you need a spiritual father a mentor someone higher in the spiritual realm. Prophet Makandiwa is an all-rounder and touches marriage, business and old people.”

Findings from (UFI *youth meeting at Sports Center*), Prophet explains that the purpose we give you wristbands is for identity if you want to marry, do not look at everyone but find someone with a wristband. Psychologically these utterances and identification brainwash the youth, limits freedom of association, marital choice and create religious boundaries. Jane, 58, self-employed and UFI intercessor, declares that, “Prophet is my spiritual father, and we are sons and daughters, and we kneel to respect the anointing upon him.” Such dignity and reverence ascribed to the Prophet make one think twice when abused. The impact of the idea of a man of God opens the possibility of ‘ecstatic violence’ where the clergy abuse and rape the congregates using spiritual ecstasy. The clergy in Pentecostal churches claims to access, manipulate and interact with the supernatural. As such, believers are made to eat snake²³, drink petrol²⁴, and rape women.²⁵ Thus, the idea of the man of God exerts political power upon the believers as the man of God has outright control over them. A befitting example is what happened in Tanzania, where the pastor claimed that his feet should not touch the ground while

²² Jimmy Nsubuga, "Pastor Mocked for Trying to Sell Photos of 'Heaven' He Took on Smartphone," <http://metro.co.uk/2016/04/03/pastor-mocked-for-trying-to-sell-photos-of-heaven-he-took-on-smartphone-5792485/>.

²³ Jane Flanagan, "Pictured: The Shocking Moment a 'Miracle- Working Prophet' Fed Worshippers Live Snakes to Test Their Faith," <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3168202/Pictured-shocking-moment-miracle-working-prophet-fed-worshippers-LIVE-SNAKES-test-faith.htm>.

²⁴ Adenike Orenuga, "Controversial South African Pastor Give Church Members Petrol to Drink, Calls It 'Juice'," <http://dailypost.ng/2014/09/25/controversial-south-african-pastor-gives-church-members-petrol-drink-calls-juice/>.

²⁵ Sullivan.

preaching, so brothers in the church carried the pastor on their backs until the end of the service.²⁶

Prophet in (*sermon teaching*) says “Anyone who fights me will die because he is fighting God.” Such statements bring fear and make no room for believers to summon the Prophet to the courts of justice if anything wrong happens. For believers to drag such Prophet to the courts of law is viewed as attracting a curse on oneself. The clergy quickly evokes defensive biblical texts that silence any attempt to challenge them. They use appropriate scripture which pacifies and counsel those cheated or disgruntled by the clergy. Prominent texts such as the clergy are the apple of God’s eye are evoked, and anyone touching them are touching God are evoked (Zechariah 2⁸) The Bible itself discourages such acts of using circular courts to settle conflicts from the house of faith (1 Corinthians 6:5-6). If members question anything they do, they are labeled traitors. They quote the example of Tobias and Sanballat who opposed the rebuilding of Jerusalem (Nehemiah 4:1ff). Sometimes they are referred as satanic agents. They hide in what they term, an encounter with God. It is the stance of many church leaders to hide from being questioned by saying 'you were not there when I had an encounter or experience with God.'

Total Health

Ayegboyin argued that healing is central to Pentecostalism.²⁷ (*Interview with UFI member*), “After being admitted to the hospital, I realized I had my wristband in my pocket, and I received healing the moment I wore it.” Another similar testimony from a mother confirms that “When I was desperate and did not have money to go to the hospital with my child, I wrapped a calendar with the picture of the Prophet I bought for \$2USD, and immediately my child recovered.” Shoko explained that the Shona people focus on health issues.²⁸ Charms, amulets and *madumwa* (talismans) are artifacts used by the Shona traditional healers for healing. Laying of hands, anointing oil and faith healings in the name of Jesus are a tool for healing in the Bible.²⁹

Chitando warned that it is important nowadays to think of whether miracles from prophets in Zimbabwe are real or not.³⁰ Some findings to emerge from this study is that pastors and lay-leaders of UFI have teachings spiced with supernatural notions and miracles of which some are known to be fake, and stage-managed. In Harare, Zimbabwe, UFI Prophet Emmanuel Makandiwa, and Walter Magaya charge as much as \$1500.00USD for contact meeting for those seeking spiritual solutions to their problems.³¹ Desperation opens a doorway for the deception of believers. The idea of a man of God in Zimbabwe questions whether they are shepherds, charlatans or business

²⁶ Pastor Must Not Touch the Ground Until End of Service See a new church in Tanzania, <http://www.nairaland.com/2916593/see-new-church-tzpastor-must>.

²⁷D Ayegboyin, "Dressed in Borrowed Robes: The Experience of New Pentecostal Churches in Nigeria," *Tradition and Compromises: Essays on the challenge of Pentecostalism*. Ibadan: Michael J Dempsey Centre (2004).

²⁸ Tabona Shoko and Dee Burck, "The Etiology of Evil in the Shona Traditional Religion," *Studies on Ethno-Medicine* 4, no. 2 (2010).

²⁹Fidelis Nkomazana and Abel Tabalaka, "Aspects of Healing Practices and Methods among Pentecostals in Botswana-Part 1," *BOLESWA: Journal of Theology, Religion and Philosophy* 2, no. 3 (2009).

³⁰ Ezra Chitando, Masiiwa Ragies Gunda, and Joachim Kügler, *Prophets, Profits and the Bible in Zimbabwe: Festschrift for Aynos Masotcha Moyo*, vol. 12 (University of Bamberg Press, 2014).

³¹ Brian Chitemba and Desire Ncube, "Makandiwa and Magaya Charges Us\$1500 Per Person for 'Solutions'," <http://nehandaradio.com/2016/05/22/makandiwa-magaya-charge-us1500-per-person/>.

tycoons dressed in white collars? Despite these negative results, a significant number of believers continue to lose their hard-earned money, cars, houses, and businesses. What is rather disappointing is that the believers seem to be pacified, hypnotized and clueless of what is happening. It is difficult to explain this result, but it might be related to how the leaders brainwash their followers to the extent that they become very defensive and willing to protect the perpetrators. Gifford observed that in Pentecostalism physical healing is a critical component which also shows that health a sign of prosperity.³²

Blessing and Curses Rhetoric

In Zimbabwe, a popularized and oppressive teaching on blessing and curses has emerged in the economic meltdown context. An elusive and declaratory divine rhetoric is peddled within Pentecostal churches promising supernatural ways of achieving prosperity. To this, countless believers continue to lose their treasure to the clergy and leaders of these churches. Musoni echoed that Pentecostal in Zimbabwe attract believers like a 'hot potato' promising solutions to mitigate the here and now problems.³³

It shows that the discourse of 'blessing and curse' is a trump card for gullible behavior in Zimbabwe. The starting point is the attractiveness of both the concept of blessings; everyone wants them. On the other hand, a curse is a push factor causing fear; people want to escape them. What is fast becoming a key instrument for this gullibility in UFI today is a belief that the Prophet has both the power to 'bless' and 'curse.' The most important question to ask perhaps is how does one attract a curse or blessing? What is confusing is that the Prophet does not speak about the context of economic meltdown and political instability but rather of a cursed world we live, and God anointed him to solve this condition. It is this understanding that believers want to find favor and pay the clergy so that they can remove curses. For instance, during *Judgement Night 3* Prophet was anointed to bless believers though their tithes and seed for blessings, however, he also cursed three individuals during miracle service.³⁴

At the (*Judgement Night 4 Sermon*) the Prophet prescribes a solution for moving out the bondage to possess Canaan by willing to go through, spiritual warfare, "If you don't fight, stay as broke and as poor as you are." Other quoted Scripture (3 John1:2), Beloved; I wish above all things that you may prosper and be in health, even as your soul prospers are used without proper exegesis and hermeneutical principles. Several elements are required and attached for one to receive a 'blessing.' Three or more words are normally used to describe one's failure to receive blessings such as faith, time, and doubt. Firstly, for one to receive a blessing they emphasize the need for one to give for the granting of the blessing. If one does not receive a blessing, they blame the believer for not raising their level of faith. When one does raise this faith level according to them they will find another excuse such as; it's not yet your season to receive a blessing, your time will come. Logically, the clergy never admits that it is their problem that people are not getting a blessing. Nevertheless, most of the followers after having given resources and sacrificed what they have, there is no assurance whether their lives will change. The Bible portrays the devil as an evil monster waiting to destroy the lives of believers as written in John

³² Gifford and Nogueira-Godsey.

³³ Phillip Musoni, "African Pentecostalism and Sustainable Development: A Study on the Zimbabwe Assemblies of God Africa, Forward in Faith Church," *International journal of Humanities and social science invention* 2, no. 10 (2013).

³⁴ Moses Matenga, "Makandiwa Curses three people amidst miracle," <https://www.newsday.co.zw/2015/08/makandiwa-curses-three-people-amid-miracles/>.

10:10. Thus most of the clergy spend a considerable time creating, blaming and showing that the devil is withholding their blessings or that he cursed them. While on the other hand, this may be true, but the hands of the clergy are not clean as they capitalize on this for their gain. Today much of the devilish traits are visible in the behavior and actions of the clergy.

Spiritual Declarations

An analysis of the (*Prophet Sermon of Judgement Night 4*) shows the atmosphere where the Prophet makes declarations. As I observed, I noticed the expectation, zeal and the excitement of the people. As the prophets ascend to the podium, there are wild celebrations as if God Himself has manifested on earth. You hear jeering, whistling and shouting ‘papa’ becoming the audible sound in the context of wild and illogical celebrations. You cannot miss the prophet’s presence as he declares his word. With a short laugh and inviting more ‘Amen, say Amen repeatedly’ without even much having spoken, the crowd goes wild. The prophet is believed to be a custodian of divine oracles. Therefore, there is a portrayal of the whole service is as divine. As he utters the word, there is a passionate celebration, and at times you do not even hear what he would have said. His voice would vibrate due to the not up to the standard audio system and brings a sense of fear to the audience.

The declarations: the Prophet declared an anointing of ownership in people's lives and some would build seven houses. The prophet declares that: “My mission is to take people from one place to another. My mission is characterized by honey. Your marriage has to be sweet, your life, your health has to be sweet, *unobuda chete!! Ndati unobudachete!*(I said you are coming out).”

The art of sermon delivery had ululations and loud music that you even wonder what is the purpose of preaching. The stimuli are not exactly the message but the noise and excitement that exudes through the prophet voice and actions. In such an atmosphere, I realized that most believers would not be worried whether they are duped, or robbed all they want is to listen and do what the Prophet is saying because he stands in the position of God. (*An interview UFI member*), declares that Prophet is not mortal *munhu wemweya* (is a spiritual person) an embodiment of the divine.

As such, this shows how some members of UFI become oblivious to some negative issues with the Prophet. Makandiwa, the leader of UFI, has admitted to some clandestine land deals.³⁵ What happened to the story remains neither here nor there but he was acquitted. One would think that gullibility which results in citizens losing valuable property is criminals offense. Contrary to expectations, the government of Zimbabwe, police force, and state intelligence machinery seem to be dumbfounded as they stand aloof from these happenings. In Zimbabwe, religious beliefs coated with appealing artifacts are framing, deception, exploitation, and extortion. With much corruption, poverty, and economic decline in Zimbabwe even the clergy are finding their way out of litigation. Probably, it is difficult to employ the rule of law in this bizarre, twisted politico-economic context. It then follows necessarily that the spirituality is the entry point of gullible behavior. The multilayered, multidimensional complex socio-economic context has become the hatching ground for gullibility. Human beings are pattern-

³⁵ Moses Matenga, "Makandiwa Admits Land Impropriety," <http://www.newzimbabwe.com/news-7869-Makandiwa+admits+land+impropriety/news.aspx>.

seeking animals, and brains are set to seek and find patterns whether they are real or not.³⁶ Thus, a reiteration of a certain pattern such as ‘need of being wealthy’ or a ‘blessing’ in this context conditions the human mind on that pattern.

Conclusion

The objective of this article was to explore the social, economic and political meaning of the religious artifacts in mega-Pentecostalism churches. Findings indicate that there is a coalition of religious artifacts between Pentecostalism and ATR forming a new hybrid of African Pentecostalism in Zimbabwe. The religious artifacts coalition manifest in demonology, healthy, and prosperity. Such complex and interwoven practices are attracting the suffering populace for alternative solutions. These artifacts have the social, economic, psychological and political impact. To maintain, appeal and be abreast of the needs of swelling adherence mega-pentecostal actors employ and display unpredictability, megalomania, and penchant for the delusional and ludicrous to lure their believers. The current findings add to a growing body of literature on the understanding of religion, peace, and conflict in contemporary.

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³⁶ Michael Shermer, "Smart People Believe Weird Things," *Skeptic* 10, no. 2 (2003).

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