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Publisher: Routledge  
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## Democratization

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/fdem20>

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Published online: 06 Nov 2009.

To cite this article: Gladys Ganiel (2009) Spiritual capital and democratization in Zimbabwe: a case study of a progressive charismatic congregation, *Democratization*, 16:6, 1172-1193, DOI: [10.1080/13510340903271795](https://doi.org/10.1080/13510340903271795)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13510340903271795>

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## Spiritual capital and democratization in Zimbabwe: a case study of a progressive charismatic congregation

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*(Received April 2009; final version received August 2009)*

Throughout Africa, charismatic Christianity has been caricatured as an inhibitor of democratization. Its adherents are said either to withdraw from the rough and tumble of politics ('pietism') or to preach a prosperity gospel that encourages believers to pour their resources into their churches in the hope that God will 'bless' them. Both courses of action are said to encourage such people to be politically quietist, with no interest in democratization or other forms of political activity. This is said to thwart democratization. This article utilizes an ethnographic case study of a 'progressive' charismatic congregation in Harare, Zimbabwe, in 2007, to provide evidence that 'pietism' and 'prosperity' are not the only options for charismatic Christianity. Drawing on the concept of 'spiritual capital', it argues that some varieties of charismatic Christianity have the resources to contribute to democratization. For example, this congregation's self-styled 'de-institutionalization' process is opening up new avenues for people to learn democratic skills and develop a worldview that is relationship-centred, participatory, and anti-authoritarian. The article concludes that spiritual capital can be a useful tool for analysing the role of religions in democratizations. It notes, however, that analysts should take care to identify and understand what variety of spiritual capital is generated in particular situations, focusing on the worldviews it produces and the consequences of those worldviews for democratization.

**Keywords:** spiritual capital; democratization; religion; charismatic Christianity; Zimbabwe

### Introduction: democratization in Zimbabwe

There has been considerable debate about how democratization in Africa should be evaluated.<sup>1</sup> There is an emerging realization that African democracies cannot be judged against Western standards and conceptions, which are contextually rooted in the West's own historical development. So Salih, drawing on Merkel

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and Dahl, develops a 'polyarchical' evaluation which assesses democracy according to these criteria<sup>2</sup>:

- (1) freedom to form and join organizations;
- (2) freedom of expression and alternative sources of information; and
- (3) eligibility for public office and the right of political leaders to compete for support and votes in free and fair elections.

Koelble and Lipuma push the debate further, claiming that most standards used to evaluate democratization are 'EuroAmerican' and therefore inappropriate for assessing post-colonial political developments in Africa.<sup>3</sup> They argue that 'the real measure of democracy is the extent to which governance conforms to the visions of democracy worked out by the governed'.<sup>4</sup> The task of the political analyst, then, becomes one of determining the values and standards of the host population. Consequently, analysts should seek to evaluate political institutions and practices according to the extent to which they meet the population's expectations – not the extent to which they conform to EuroAmerican ideal types.

Disagreements about how analysts should evaluate democracy are a key aspect of a debate between various scholars – including, Bratton, Chikwana and Sithole<sup>5</sup> and Moore<sup>6</sup> – about how Zimbabweans *really* think about democratization in their country. Bratton, Chikwana and Sithole draw on recent Afrobarometer survey results to argue that Zimbabweans' enthusiasm for democracy is waning. On the other hand, Moore interprets these results to mean that Zimbabweans simply realize that what passes for democracy in their country does not meet their own standards for good governance.

However, these debates are interesting but inconclusive. One thing that does seem beyond dispute is that democratization in Zimbabwe – whether evaluated by external EuroAmerican or by contextual Zimbabwean standards – has been thwarted.<sup>7</sup> This is surprising. After Zimbabwe won its independence from white-run Rhodesia in 1980, there were signs that it would become a democratic success story. The new prime minister, Robert Mugabe, promised 'reconciliation' with the whites. The agricultural sector, dominated by whites, was initially left largely untouched and food production soared. Mugabe's Zimbabwe African National Union-Popular Front (ZANU-PF) government initially undertook much needed reforms in health and education, and a substantial, well-educated black middle class developed. But these successes masked other tensions and political intrigues.<sup>8</sup> Ndebele people in the Matabeleland region of Zimbabwe faced violence and killings on a massive scale during the Gukuruhundi massacres following independence.<sup>9</sup> Raftopoulos has interpreted this as an attempt by Mugabe to subordinate his rivals in the name of national 'unity'.<sup>10</sup> ZANU-PF inherited economic problems from the Rhodesian regime, including a large foreign debt. ZANU-PF's land reform and redistribution policies progressed at a slow but steady pace in the first decade after independence, but stalled dramatically during the

1990s.<sup>11</sup> While these policies were initially supported financially by the British government, it eventually withdrew its support.<sup>12</sup> Over time, Zimbabwe's foreign debt became 'unpayable', and far-reaching Structural Adjustment Programmes were imposed by the International Monetary Fund, as a condition of further financial assistance.<sup>13</sup> Over time, economic concerns were reflected in political developments. Significant rumblings of discontent among citizens were heard in 2000, when Zimbabweans rejected a referendum to amend the constitution, which would have given Mugabe more powers as president. Mugabe claimed he would accept this result.<sup>14</sup> But within days, violent and haphazard 'invasions' of white-run farms began.<sup>15</sup>

At the same time, censorship of the media and the oppression of a newly established political party the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC, formed in 1999) and civil society groups increased.<sup>16</sup> The MDC's efforts to secure political change were repeatedly foiled by rigged elections, violent intimidation, and internal divisions. Similarly, the National Constitutional Assembly (NCA) was established to pressurize the government to reform the constitution. In addition, Women of Zimbabwe Arise (WOZA) was formed to publicize state repression through demonstrations. Both NCA and WOZA were violently suppressed by security forces. It was difficult to access independent media and education, especially in rural areas. ZANU-PF instituted a thorough propaganda campaign via both the media and the teaching of 'patriotic history'.<sup>17</sup>

Following elections in 2008, ZANU-PF eventually agreed to a power sharing government with the MDC. However, ZANU-PF retained control of the police and security forces, which involved a difficult compromise for the MDC. Questions remain about Mugabe and ZANU-PF's sincerity in accepting the coalition. While this power-sharing experiment might be considered a step towards democratization, the workability of the coalition is uncertain. Some schools have re-opened, there is more food in shops, and prices of some basic goods have decreased.<sup>18</sup> But the political climate remains strained and there appears to have been few other improvements in the everyday lives of citizens.<sup>19</sup> For Inglehart and Welzel, socio-economic development is the crucial variable that leads to conditions that allow people to develop 'self-expression values', which in turn forms the basis of 'effective democracy'.<sup>20</sup> These conditions are clearly absent in Zimbabwe today, where the main concern of most citizens is no doubt everyday survival. At the time of my fieldwork in February–April 2007, 80% of Zimbabweans lived below the poverty line and the annual inflation rate was 2,200%.<sup>21</sup> By July 2008 annual inflation was calculated at 231,000,000% – the last figure that was released. In an attempt to curb inflation, in January 2009 the government allowed trading in foreign currencies.<sup>22</sup>

Despite the challenges such difficult economic circumstances pose to everyday activities, Raftopoulos and Alexander provide evidence of increased activism amongst groups in Zimbabwe's public sphere.<sup>23</sup> Although groups such as the NCA, the trade unions and some of the churches initially focused on regime change, Raftopoulos and Alexander identify a recent shift towards human rights

discourses, constitutional reform, and publicizing injustices. For example, such groups (especially networks of churches) played a role in publicizing Operation Murumbatsvina in 2005. This was a large-scale demolition of houses in high density suburbs of Harare, areas that mainly supported the MDC.<sup>24</sup> In 2006, WOZA conducted nationwide consultations and produced a 'People's Charter' that outlined an alternative vision of Zimbabwean society and politics. In Koelble and Lipuma's terms, these groups mobilized largely because the Zimbabwean state was failing 'miserably to meet the standards of the Zimbabwean citizenry'.<sup>25</sup> Koelble and Lipuma claim:

There is a growing chasm between the visions of democracy circulating in the Zimbabwean public sphere and the political practices of the Mugabe government. In the eyes of Zimbabwe's democrats, Mugabe's razing of the shanty settlements surrounding Harare in mid-2005 is anti-democratic less because it violates their [Zimbabweans] version of individual rights than because it violates their [Zimbabweans] sense of community and the right to have a place of belonging.<sup>26</sup>

The Christian churches were prominent in publicizing the injustice of Operation Murumbatsvina. Three-quarters of Zimbabweans are practising Christianity and, as a result, churches and related organizations play a significant role in the social lives of many citizens.<sup>27</sup> Given that in many rural areas the church and the school are the only public institutions, Christian organizations are probably the most high-profile throughout Zimbabwean civil society as a whole.<sup>28</sup> This made such organizations well-placed to respond to the poor economic and political conditions in the country. But the roles of these different churches and organizations are diverse, with some choosing to address the difficult circumstances directly, and others judging that it is not their place to do so. Thinking of churches and organizations in terms of the variety of 'spiritual capital' which they produce may be helpful in analyzing their role in responding to Zimbabwe's poor political and economic context, including their ability to contribute to democratization.

### **Spiritual capital and democratization**

'Spiritual capital' has its roots in the development of the concept of 'social capital'. Putnam is the major figure in this field, defining social capital in terms of networks of relationships within (bonding social capital) and between (bridging social capital) groups and individuals.<sup>29</sup> These relationships are said to nurture trust, laying foundations not only for the flourishing of society and the economy but also a better quality of democracy. Writing from and within an American context, Putnam observes that nearly half of all volunteering and personal philanthropy in the USA is church-related. He argues that religious attachment enhances participation in secular civic activity. Norris and Inglehart note that participation in religious *worship services* does not correlate with greater civic activity, but that participation in religious *organizations* does correlate with greater civic activity.<sup>30</sup>

Scholars have also begun referring to 'religious capital' and 'spiritual capital'.<sup>31</sup> Yet, the ways these terms are used in the literature is often confusing. At times they are conflated and seem to mean the same thing, while at other times scholars draw distinctions between them. Carkoglu has distinguished between religious and spiritual capital, differentiating between them by drawing an analogous relationship with bonding and bridging social capital.<sup>32</sup> For him, religious capital produces exclusivist 'bonding' identities, while spiritual capital is a 'bridging' resource that inspires people to act to help others beyond their immediate comfort zone. While this is an interesting distinction, it is not widespread in the literature. Rather, the trend seems to be to abandon use of the term religious capital (which was common in the early 1990s)<sup>33</sup> in favour of spiritual capital. Conceptions of spiritual capital retain the emphasis on the individual that is present in earlier discussions of religious capital,<sup>34</sup> while at the same time exploring how religious ideas and activities can have wider social and political impacts. For example, Berger and Hefner argue that there are *varieties* of spiritual capital within the world religions. These varieties promote different values, producing different worldviews about a number of issues, including democratization and development.<sup>35</sup> For Haynes, spiritual capital introduces an extra dimension to development. Development then is not just about material progress but also about 'redemptive hopes and expectations'.<sup>36</sup> Following this convention, from here I will use the term spiritual capital in this article.

In order to develop the analytical worth of the term 'spiritual capital' in relation to democratization, it is necessary to focus on both empirical and comparative research, which note that there are *varieties* of spiritual capital. At the same time, we need to analyse both religious actors' *ideas* and *practices* and *networks*. Following the argument put forward by Weber in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, this article suggests that religious ideas can have a wide, diffuse cultural impact, including an impact on democratization.<sup>37</sup>

### **Spiritual capital, democratization and charismatic Christianity in Africa**

Considerable scholarly attention has been devoted to the role of religion in democratization in Africa.<sup>38</sup> For example, Haynes analyses the role of both elite level leaders and popular religious movements across the continent, concluding that while there have been important examples in which religion has played a democratizing role (such as South Africa), on the whole 'religious actors have not been able to help advance democracy beyond a stage often characterized by cosmetic rather than substantial changes'.<sup>39</sup> Ranger's recent edited volume updates and at times challenges this conclusion.<sup>40</sup> Ranger divides Africa's democratic history into three phases, and explores the role of the churches during each era or 'revolution'. He says that across the continent mainline churches, such as the Catholic and established Protestant mission churches, took centre stage during the 'first democratic revolution' anti-colonial struggles. Yet, their role was ambiguous, with some churches legitimating and supporting white-led minority regimes, and others

challenging them. Charismatic<sup>41</sup> churches were conspicuously absent from politics in the 1950s and 1960s. Charismatic churches include both mission churches and home-grown churches, and can be characterized by their belief in the bible as an infallible guide to faith, their imperative to evangelize, and their emphasis on deep-felt religious experiences such as conversion, speaking in tongues, and belief in miracles. Over time, these churches either withdrew altogether from politics or offered repressive regimes their tacit support. This was a dominant pattern in Kenya, South Africa and Zimbabwe.<sup>42</sup>

Ranger dates the next phase of African democratic history, the 'second democratic revolution', from the late 1980s. This was concerned with addressing the injustices perpetrated by the post-colonial governments. Ranger claims that the mainline churches retained enough independence and moral authority to speak out against violence, militarism and one-party rule. However, as Haynes has noted, their authority and influence were often limited.<sup>43</sup> As in the first anti-colonial democratic revolution, Ranger does not consider the role of charismatic churches during this era to be substantial. Ranger's depiction of the 'third democratic revolution', which he dates from the early 1990s to the present, ascribes a different role altogether to charismatic churches. No longer on the margins of mainline Christianity, they are growing rapidly in many African countries. Using South African charismatic churches as an example, Ranger claims that by virtue of their numbers and their promotion of a 'moral opposition to the new nationalist order',<sup>44</sup> they are now crucial to ensuring 'the sustainability of democracy' in Africa.<sup>45</sup>

This conclusion echoes an earlier, 'cultural potentiality argument' about charismatic Christianity.<sup>46</sup> Advocates of this view, including Maxwell, claim that people involved in highly participatory charismatic churches would learn skills necessary to become democratic citizens.<sup>47</sup> Freston noted, however, that such arguments were not rooted in much empirical evidence.<sup>48</sup> But Ranger's volume, featuring country-by-country case studies, provides examples of charismatic and evangelical Christians in Africa who have become purveyors of moral opposition to repressive governments, by seeking to address current crises of morality, poverty and conflict.<sup>49</sup> Jenkins explains this by arguing that the social and political world experienced by many African Christians is much like the world depicted in the Bible. He argues that Africans identify with the suffering of those who Jesus came to liberate, and are hence inspired to work for liberation themselves. Miller and Yamamori's global study of what they term 'progressive Pentecostalism' reveals similar trends of activism on behalf of the poor in various parts of the world.<sup>50</sup> Note, however, that while Miller and Yamamori do not claim that all expressions of Pentecostalism are 'progressive', their study does confirm trends and changes identified by Ranger and Jenkins.

Gifford – who wrote an afterword to Ranger's edited volume – remains sceptical about the role of charismatic Christianity in relation to democratization in Africa. He questions the spread and significance of the examples of socio-political engagement upon which Ranger and his contributors focus. For Gifford, the most significant scriptural paradigms in Africa remain the 'faith gospel' (or prosperity



gospel) and ‘demonic possession’. He contends that the ‘demonic possession’ paradigm undermines human agency by ascribing power to demons, ‘divert[ing] attention from a more obviously political level of analysis’.<sup>51</sup> Gifford argues that as long as African Christians interpret the bible in such ways, then their Christianity will not help them to overcome repressive governments, poverty, or achieve a democratic political culture.

### **Progressive charismatic Christianity: Mount Pleasant Community Church**

Mukonyora’s recent research on ‘salt of the earth’ evangelicals in Zimbabwe, who could be considered part of Miller and Yamamori’s progressive strand, indicates that this strand is more likely than others to promote democracy.<sup>52</sup> She claims that ‘salt of the earth’ evangelicals ‘seek to function as . . . “school(s) of democracy” in the sense that they emphasize Christian ideals of love, peace, and harmony and seek to oppose political injustice’.<sup>53</sup> This study engages with an example of the progressive variety in Zimbabwe, the Mount Pleasant Community Church.

I chose Mount Pleasant Community Church (MPCC) as a case study for the following reasons. First, I wanted to demonstrate how one small group of people from the wider yet often-overlooked progressive charismatic perspective try to deal with Zimbabwe’s political and economic crises. Secondly, few recent studies focus on *congregations* in Zimbabwe. Most of the current information coming out of Zimbabwe focuses on prominent clerics or Christian organizations, such as the former Catholic Archbishop of Bulawayo Pius Ncube, Christian Alliance, the Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe, or the Catholic Commission on Justice and Peace.<sup>54</sup>

MPCC is physically located in a relatively wealthy suburb near the University of Zimbabwe in Harare. People who attend the church are mainly well educated, young (under 35 years of age), and middle class. These factors make MPCC unusual in the Zimbabwean context.<sup>55</sup>

The most significant findings of the case study are related to a process of change within MPCC, which people call ‘de-institutionalization’. The best way to understand de-institutionalization is to describe how it has occurred.<sup>56</sup>

### **De-institutionalization: changing structures, changing leadership**

The term de-institutionalization refers to the way the MPCC congregation has sought to reduce or even eliminate structured events and activities. In interviews, people said they have done this because these events and activities were no longer helping them to develop their faith. Secondly, de-institutionalization refers to the fact that many congregation members now believe less than before in the authority of elders and other leaders. This is said to be an ‘organic’ process, occurring with the enthusiastic support of the elders, who were keen to stand down from their leadership roles, including fulltime paid employment by the congregation. The justification, the elders said, was that this was truer to the biblical model of

leadership – the Apostle Paul, after all, was a tentmaker as well as a minister of the gospel. The elders – an Ndebele man and a white man – expressed these views to me in a joint interview in March 2007.

People dated the beginning of de-institutionalization to 2002, when people began to develop these ideas at once-per-week prayer meetings. By 2005, the prayer meetings were taking place five days a week. People said God spoke to them then, and God said that they were depending too much on the MPCC leaders and other structures to interpret the bible for them and to discern ‘God’s will’ for their lives. People identified ‘structures’ as cell groups (that is, small bible study groups that meet during the week) and other organized activities such as men’s breakfasts and women’s fellowship meetings. Consequently, the cell groups were replaced by smaller ‘discipleship groups’. Discipleship groups consisted of people from the congregation who met on a regular basis to pray, study the bible, and share a meal. These groups were intended to promote deeper spiritual growth, more meaningful relationships with others, and dependence upon God in the sense that people would no longer require elders or leaders to interpret the scriptures or ‘God’s will’ for them. They were however discontinued in 2006, from which time regular participants in the prayer meetings encouraged others to attend prayer meetings and to meet informally in homes. The elders said they supported these developments at worship services. In my interviews, people at MPCC said some of the results of the changes outlined above were that they no longer expected the elders or other leaders in the congregation to ‘spoon feed’ them with interpretations of scripture or to discern ‘God’s will’ for them.

Despite the process of de-institutionalization, elders and some lay leaders still prepared sermons for Sunday morning worship services. This was reported to me in interviews with elders and lay leaders, and I observed that such people would bring prepared sermon notes to services. But the participation of congregants in the services increased from 2002. By 2007, at least the first hour of a Sunday service was devoted to spontaneous prayer, worship and testimonies. Sometimes a congregant shared a spontaneous sermon, and the prepared sermon was never delivered. Elders said that this way of worshiping re-enforced the biblical idea of the ‘priesthood of all believers’, removing authority from the elders and placing it in *all* the people, where it rightfully belonged.<sup>57</sup>

This is unlike the authoritarian structure of congregational life that Maxwell documents in his study of the Pentecostal Zimbabwe Assemblies of God Africa (ZAOGA) denomination.<sup>58</sup> Rather, de-institutionalization at MPCC has produced a congregation in which many people felt empowered to think for themselves and contribute to decision-making within the congregation. All 18 people I interviewed said that they were now thinking and doing more for themselves. Others in the congregation also mentioned this in casual conversations.<sup>59</sup> This is notable, as many African cultures have been regarded as hierarchical or even dictatorial, presenting a view that elites often wield unchallenged power.<sup>60</sup> The voluntary laying down of power by the people in positions of authority in MPCC (even though this is on a

small scale) provides an alternative to that generalization. On the other hand, some people at MPCC were concerned about the potential for leaders to 'abdicate' their roles and to allow the congregation to become too inward-looking, neglecting service to the poor when times got tough. They also worried that a congregation with so few 'structures' could be easily shaken by personality clashes and internal power struggles.<sup>61</sup>

De-institutionalization in the MPCC at the congregational level produced what I regard as an example of participatory democracy. Many members of the congregation rejected authoritarian leadership in favour of a form of equality whereby church members were encouraged to participate in all aspects of congregational life. This process is similar to that observed by Freston, and some of the scholars in Ranger's volume, who see churches in Africa as empowering people as they learn skills that can be transferred to participating in democratic politics.<sup>62</sup> Regarding the concerns of this article, we can note that the spiritual capital generated at MPCC produces a worldview which was participatory, anti-authoritarian and relationship-centred; it also dovetails well more generally with democratic principles in a wider political sense. The following sections explore how such a worldview developed at the micro-level through the articulation of empowering religious ideas, which were then nurtured and developed through networks of relationships.

### **Ideas and the development of spiritual capital**

Research on 'new social movements' has emphasized the importance of ideas for encouraging political change. For example, members of such movements may develop ideas to justify the actions they take to try to bring about social and political change.<sup>63</sup> Similarly, people at MPCC developed ideas to justify the removing of structured activities and the redefinition of leadership that defines the de-institutionalization process. Many members of the church attach great importance to what is *said* during worship services and prayer meetings, interpreting these words as the prompting of the Holy Spirit or God's direct revelation. Through analysis of my interviews, field notes, and consultation with the elders, I identify four major discursive themes: (1) Relationships (with God and with others), (2) Acknowledging difficulties/injustices and yet persevering, (3) Waiting, and (4) Action through service. A detailed analysis of the content of these discursive themes is beyond the scope of this paper, although I have begun this elsewhere.<sup>64</sup>

These discourses are linked together, logically building upon each other and ultimately justifying *action* to serve the poor and in some cases to critique the government. The emphasis on action is crucial in a Zimbabwean context where charismatic Christians have either been accused of pietist withdrawal from society and politics or a passive adherence to the prosperity gospel.<sup>65</sup> The relationships between the discourses can be explained as follows. Discourses about relationships explain how trusting relationships are built. Trusting relationships allow people to freely and openly acknowledge the difficulties and injustices in their lives and in the wider society. This is not something that can be taken for

granted in Zimbabwe, where it can be dangerous to criticize the government or even to imply that government policies are unjust. Then, once people start to talk about injustices, they move to speaking about patiently waiting for God's deliverance, and/or taking God-inspired action through service.

The way discourses build upon each other can be illustrated in the conduct of a prayer meeting in February 2007, where a handful of people gathered. The meeting started with a man called Simeon<sup>66</sup> reading Colossians 3:15/16:

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.

This particular passage of scripture emphasizes the importance of *relationships* between individuals and God (let Christ rule in your hearts) and among individuals (teach and admonish one another).

Simeon's contribution was followed by a period of silence, during which time Ben entered the meeting. After silence for several minutes, he said that he was reading Psalm 33 during the day and found it encouraging. Ben read it, emphasizing the verses from 12 onwards:

Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord, the people he chose for his inheritance. From heaven the Lord looks down and sees all mankind; from his dwelling-place he watches all who live on earth . . . no king is saved by the size of his army; no warrior escapes by his great strength. . . .

This scripture emphasizes the idea that God is just, and even those rulers who abuse their power (no warrior escapes by his great strength) will one day face his judgment.

Then a man called Jabulani read I John 3:18: 'Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.' He quoted from the book of James, where it talks about showing faith by your works. He said that love in action is difficult to implement when you think about the acts that the early church considered normal, such as, selling what they had and having all material goods in common. He posed the question to everyone: What do we do? Do we press on with this vision God has given? Or do we wait and then God has to bring it before us again? His implication was that people should be *acting* now on their faith.

Simeon then referred back to what Ben had said, noting that it was amazing that God meets our individual needs and helps us to meet others' needs. He said that the way others get to experience God is through the deeds that we do. He then read Psalm 96, emphasizing verses 10–13:

Say among the nations, the Lord reigns. The world is firmly established, it cannot be moved; he will judge the peoples with equity. Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad; let the sea resound, and all that is in it; let the fields be jubilant, and everything in

them. Then all the trees of the forest will sing for joy; they will sing before the Lord for he comes, he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples in his truth.

Again, this scripture emphasizes God's just judgment. That, linked with prior points made about the need to put their faith in *action*, provides an example of how people utilized the bible to interpret their present situations and to justify doing something to change those situations for the better.

Later in the meeting, after prayers about meeting individual needs, such as, providing food for relatives and paying school fees, Ben quoted Romans 5:5 and said that we live in a poverty-stricken nation, where there is a 'terrible situation'. He thanked God for the groceries that people from MPCC purchased the day before for orphans and child-headed homes. He said that although none of them made a lot of money, they should not make excuses about being unable to help. His comment reflected a trend where people from the middle classes, like those at MPCC, had seen a dip in the real value of their salaries, due to inflation. Even some medical doctors in the congregation had set up small businesses on the side to try and make ends meet. He then quoted Psalm 33 again, saying the Lord 'loves righteousness and justice' and that he had promised to bring it about on earth. Ben then said that some of the economic policies in the country just were not fair. He mentioned the dual government and black market monetary exchange rates. He prayed that God would encourage people like the nineteenth century anti-slavery campaigner, William Wilberforce, that is, politicians who would do what was good and just and right for the benefit of the whole nation. This was an explicit critique of the government, articulated during a typical meeting. It was significant in that it highlighted injustice, locating its root in the dysfunctional *politics* of the country. It should be noted, however, that I never heard anyone at MPCC advocate direct action against the government. Rather, when they advocated action, they talked primarily about *service* to the poor and needy – those whose lives had become so difficult in large part due to unjust government policies.

In sum, we have explored examples of religious discourses that encouraged and justified action to serve the poor and, implicitly, to reform political leadership – issues crucial for democratization outcomes in Zimbabwe. There were, however, limits both to these discourses and how MPCC members understood them. For example, some MPCC people criticized what they saw as their congregation's unwillingness to speak out explicitly against the government, as organizations such as the Christian Alliance have done.<sup>67</sup> They believed this limited their congregation's potential to contribute to achieving justice in their country. I also asked some people if they thought that what their congregation was saying and doing was 'political', and they said 'no'. Perhaps surprisingly, MPCC members did not appear to make conscious links between what was happening in their congregation and wider social and political processes. While as a social scientist I may identify a worldview within MPCC that seems conducive to producing democratic citizens, many MPCC members saw themselves as doing God's work, meeting immediate

needs and making the world around them just a little more bearable for others. Even so, people at the grassroots, including MPCC members are de facto creating democratic spaces, whereby they can develop their own ideas about their religion and the kind of society they want to live in. The ability to do this is itself essential to democratization. Now we turn to ways in which such ideas are spread within Zimbabwe.

### **Networks and the development of spiritual capital in Zimbabwe: impact on democratization**

MPCC's emphasis on relationships ensures that most congregants have rich networks of relationships both within and without the congregation. This does not mean that people in other congregations or organizations do not participate in such networks. But everyone I talked with at MPCC said that de-institutionalization prompted them to cultivate their personal networks. This resulted in an increased level of social activism by people in the congregation. MPCC congregants also told me that those who already worked or volunteered for non-governmental organizations (NGOs) felt their work was better appreciated.<sup>68</sup> There were also new congregational initiatives to provide for orphans and widows in Harare's high-density suburbs, and in poor, rural areas, several hours' drive from the capital. MPCC includes a number of medical doctors among its members, so such activities also included medical missions whereby poor people received free health care. MPCC also has several sister congregations throughout Zimbabwe, associated with the United Kingdom-based New Frontiers Network of charismatic churches. MPCC publicizes the activities of these congregations and the Zimbabwe-based ministries of New Frontiers, including a widespread eco-farming project called 'Farming God's Way', based at another congregation in Harare. Several people I spoke with at MPCC had collaborated with or worked for the Farming God's Way initiative. Activities such as the medical missions and farming initiative drew on the particular strengths of people at MPCC and directly addressed the adverse effects of the economic and political crises by providing health care and a source of food.

The cultivation of such networks is crucial to democratization. Many MPCC members subsequently felt empowered to begin new initiatives to address the pressing social and economic needs brought on by the political crisis. They at least implicitly recognized that the state had failed to deliver on its developmental agenda and that as a result citizens would need to step in to undertake such activities to the extent they were able. The wider point is that democratization is not possible unless people believe that their actions to address social and political problems can make a tangible difference, even if it is small and incremental. Further, many people I spoke with in MPCC emphasized that their activism was not simply a form of philanthropic aid, rather it was aimed to help poor people take greater and better care of themselves. Thus, MPCC visits orphans, widows and the rural poor, suggesting practical tips on job training and farming. The spread of these skills

is also important to democratization, as democratic politics is very difficult or impossible until or unless people's most basic economic and health needs are met.<sup>69</sup> In other words, assistance poor people receive from MPCC may help enable them to move beyond a concern with basic survival to a greater concern for political changes, including a demand for democracy. Finally, MPCC's participatory, anti-authoritarian and relationship-centred worldview might spread beyond the congregation by way of these networks. It is however beyond the scope of this article to examine if or to what extent the religiously-based discourses articulated at MPCC are present in other congregations and organizations in the country, including the issues of networks generally and whether people recognize that such ideas in particular stem from the MPCC. Further research focusing on how ideas and skills are transmitted through networks such as these is needed for a fuller understanding of the links between spiritual capital and how religious networks might facilitate democratization in Zimbabwe.

### **Conclusions: spiritual capital at the macro-level and the potential for democratization?**

There is a great deal of confusion in the literature about spiritual capital and its relationship to democratization. Accordingly, part of the work of this article has been to develop a clearer conception of spiritual capital. This included both its micro-level aspects (including the religious ideas and networks of individuals) and its macro-level aspects (how religious ideas and practices might have a wider impact on culture, society and politics). The concept also is useful as an analytic framework for mapping diverse religious worldviews. But questions remain about the extent that spiritual capital can have an impact at the macro-level. Following Weber and Wuthnow, the next logical step is attempting to identify if or to what extent such religious worldviews pass into wider public consciousness.<sup>70</sup>

This article has identified a religious worldview at MPCC that is relationship-centred, participatory and anti-authoritarian. It has obvious resonances with a political worldview that might inform a desire for democratization and consequently if it were to spread more widely in Zimbabwe, it could potentially encourage a wider democratization process. As discussed, this can potentially happen as the relevant ideas and practices are transmitted by religious networks in the country. MPCC has well-established networks of relationships with other congregations and organizations within charismatic Christianity within Zimbabwe. But it is not clear that MPCC has developed strong networks with the mainline churches or with charismatic churches outside of the New Frontiers network, which could mean that other Christians may never learn about its ideas or practices.

In their work on contemporary Zimbabwean civil society, Raftopoulos and Alexander claim that church-based organizations and congregations are amongst the most active and prominent in the country. At the same time, they acknowledge that little is known about the extent that such organizations are able to spread their ideas and effective practices.<sup>71</sup> As a case study, my research at MPCC is similarly

limited. This points to the necessity of a more ambitious research agenda, building on this first step to identify varieties of spiritual capital conducive to democratization. The next step is to evaluate if or how such varieties of spiritual capital are being spread, asking if they are reaching critical tipping points in which their ideas and practices could lead to widespread democratic changes.

This could in turn aid in our understanding of how Christian churches and organizations can contribute to a wider democratization process in Zimbabwe. It is clear that such churches enjoy high levels of citizen trust, thus carrying a moral authority that the government and some other civil society groups lack.<sup>72</sup> Indeed, ZANU-PF has recognized that some of the churches represent a challenge to its authority, as well as an alternative power base. For example, the BBC reported that many Zimbabweans believe that ZANU-PF was behind the 2007 sex scandal involving the government's most prominent critic, Archbishop Pius Ncube.<sup>73</sup> Certainly, compromising images of Ncube were prominent in *state-run* newspapers and television.<sup>74</sup> Ncube resigned his position as archbishop and has not been as prominent a public figure as he was before the scandal broke.<sup>75</sup> It seems ZANU-PF feels compelled to silence church-based critics who ground their discourses in biblical ideals of justice for the poor, and critiques of unjust leadership. Further, ZANU-PF has orchestrated its own campaigns of religiously-based rhetoric in an attempt to legitimate its positions, for example to justify farm seizures.<sup>76</sup> The fact that ZANU-PF appears to take religion so seriously indicates that in the Zimbabwean public sphere, religious discourses matter.

Whether these discourses and the actions that flow from them can contribute to wider progress of democratization in Zimbabwe remains to be seen. Research by the Institute for a Democratic Alternative in South Africa (IDASA) in 2008 indicated that of all civil society groups in Zimbabwe, the churches have been the most consistent in placing healing and reconciliation on the public agenda.<sup>77</sup> 'The Zimbabwe We Want,' a discussion document prepared for civil society organizations and government officials by the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops Conference, the Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe, and the Zimbabwe Council of Churches, identified important political issues to be addressed, including reconciliation of opposing groups.<sup>78</sup> It cannot be demonstrated definitively, but it may be the case that the churches' public discourses on reconciliation helped create a climate in which the new power-sharing government included a ministerial post for Healing, Reconciliation and Integration. Like the rebuilding of the economy, the rebuilding of trusting social relationships through a society-wide reconciliation process is an important precursor to democratization.

Finally, the MDC's Prime Minister, Morgan Tsvangirai, has indicated that he wishes to promote free expression and lift restrictions on the press.<sup>79</sup> But even as Tsvangirai toured Western nations in June 2009, wooing donors and seeking diplomatic respectability, Amnesty International warned that civil rights activists were still being arrested and that citizens still lived in fear.<sup>80</sup> It may be the case that with the advent of the power-sharing government, Christian churches, organizations and other civil society groups would become bolder in advocating and working for



social and political change. But there are still many obstacles to overcome before democratization can be realized in Zimbabwe.

### Acknowledgements

This research was funded in part by the Association for the Sociology of Religion's Fichter Grant and the Trinity College Dublin new lecturer's start-up fund. I am grateful to all at MPCC who so generously participated in the research. I wish to thank Karin Alexander, Jeff Haynes, Isobel Mukonyora, Terence Ranger, Jim Wellman and participants at the Luce Symposia for Religion and Human Security (Seattle, 2008 and 2009) for their insights as I developed this case study. Therese Cullen provided proofreading assistance and helpful comments.

### Notes

1. Salih, 'African Liberation Movement Governments and Democracy'; Haynes, 'Religion and Democratization in Africa'; Merkel, 'Embedded and Defective Democracies'.
2. Salih, 'African Liberation Movement Governments and Democracy', 675–676; Merkel, 'Embedded and Defective Democracies'; Dahl, *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition*.
3. Koelble and Lipuma, 'Democratizing Democracy'.
4. *Ibid.*, 3.
5. Bratton, Chikwana and Sithole, 'Propaganda and Public Opinion in Zimbabwe'.
6. Moore, 'A Reply to the Power of Propaganda: Public Opinion in Zimbabwe 2004'.
7. Bhebe and Ranger, *The Historical Dimensions of Democracy and Human Rights in Zimbabwe*; Hill, *What Happens after Mugabe?*; Holland, *Dinner with Mugabe*.
8. Hill, *The Battle for Zimbabwe: The Final Countdown*.
9. Eppel, 'Gukurahundi: The Need for Truth and Reparation'; Reeler, 'Sticks and Stones, Skeletons and Ghosts'.
10. Raftopoulos, 'Unreconciled Differences: The Limits of Reconciliation Politics in Zimbabwe', xi–xii.
11. Between 1980 and 1997 '3.6 million hectares was transferred from large-scale white farmers to 71,000 black small-farmer households'. Sachikonye, 'Land Reform and Farm Workers', 69. The UK government supported this programme with £44 million. It claims that by 1996 £3 million of this funding had not been spent. It subsequently withdrew its financial support for land reform, claiming, 'we would support a land reform programme that was transparent, that was carried out within the rule of law, within a well-managed economic framework and was pro-poor. Those are the principles that the Zimbabwe government committed themselves to in 1998 but have not adhered to in practice'. FCO, 'UK Policy on Zimbabwe'.
12. FCO, 'UK Policy on Zimbabwe.'
13. Bond and Manyanya, *Zimbabwe's Plunge: Exhausted Nationalism, Neoliberalism and the Search for Social Justice*, 45.
14. Holland, *Dinner with Mugabe*, 138–9; Feltoe, 'The Onslaught against Democracy and Rule of Law in Zimbabwe in 2000', 197.
15. Hammar, Raftopoulos and Jensen, *Zimbabwe's Unfinished Business*; Raftopoulos, 'Current Politics in Zimbabwe: Confronting the Crisis'; Sachikonye, 'The Promised Land'.
16. Masunungure, 'Travails of Opposition Politics in Zimbabwe since Independence', 175–90.

17. Ranger, 'Historiography, Patriotic History and the History of the Nation: the Struggle over the Past in Zimbabwe'.
18. BBC News Online, 'Zimbabwe PM Jeered by UK Exiles'; BBC News Online, 'UK Announces £5 million Aid for Zimbabwe'; *Mail & Guardian*, 'Zim Government Making Progress, says Tsvangirai'.
19. BBC News Online, 'Rights in Zimbabwe "precarious"'.
20. Inglehart and Welzel, *Modernization, Cultural Change, and Democracy*, 287
21. BBC News Online, 'Zimbabwe Inflation Reaches 2,200 per cent'.
22. BBC News Online, 'Zimbabwe Abandons its Currency'.
23. Raftopoulos and Alexander, *Reflections on Democratic Politics in Zimbabwe*.
24. *Ibid.*, 38.
25. Koelble and Lipuma, 'Democratizing Democracy', 22.
26. *Ibid.*
27. US Department of State, 'International Religious Freedom Report'.
28. Dube, *A Socio-Political Agenda for the Twenty-First Century Zimbabwean Church*, 8.
29. Putnam, 'Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital'; Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. See also Coleman, 'Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital'.
30. Norris and Inglehart, *Sacred and Secular: Religion and Politics Worldwide*, 192.
31. Iannaccone, 'Religious Practice: A Human Capital Approach'; Stark and Finke, *Acts of Faith: Explaining the Human Side of Religion*; Berger and Hefner, 'Spiritual Capital in Comparative Perspective'; Malloch, 'Social, Human and Spiritual Capital in Economic Development'; Woodberry, 'Researching Spiritual Capital: Promises and Pitfalls'; Unruh and Sider, *Saving Souls, Serving Society: Understanding the Faith Factor in Church-based Social Ministry*; Haynes, *Religion and Development: Conflict or Cooperation?*
32. Carkoglu, 'Social vs. Spiritual Capital in Explaining Philanthropic Giving in a Muslim Setting: The Case of Turkey', 113.
33. Iannaccone, 'Religious Practice'; Iannaccone, 'The Consequences of Religious Market Structures: Adam Smith and the Economics of Religion'.
34. Stark and Finke, *Acts of Faith*.
35. Berger and Hefner, 'Spiritual Capital in Comparative Perspective'.
36. Haynes, *Religion and Development: Conflict or Cooperation?*, 109; see also Berger, *Pyramids of Sacrifice*.
37. Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*.
38. Ranger, *Evangelical Christianity and Democracy in Africa*; Haynes, 'Religion and Democratization in Africa'; Gifford, *African Christianity: Its Public Role*; Gifford, *The Christian Churches and the Democratisation of Africa*.
39. Haynes, 'Religion and Democratization in Africa', 87.
40. Ranger, *Evangelical Christianity and Democracy in Africa*.
41. There is considerable debate about how to define 'charismatic' Christianity and related traditions such as evangelicalism and Pentecostalism. Recent work by Ranger (2008), Jenkins (2006), and Freston (2001) point out the historical developmental links between these expressions of Christianity, and consider them part of a broader movement (see Gifford 2003, 2004 for an alternative perspective). I take that broad view, conceiving evangelical, Pentecostal, and charismatic Christianity as sharing core characteristics, as outlined in the main text of this article. In this article, I use the term 'charismatic' broadly to include these three expressions of Christianity, while acknowledging that there are significant differences between them. Throughout the text when I am discussing other authors' work, I use the term that they use in their own writing (i.e. Ranger and Mukonyora on evangelicalism or Miller and Yamamori on Pentecostalism).

42. Freston, chapters on 'Kenya', 'South Africa', and 'Zimbabwe' in *Evangelicals and Politics in Asia, Africa and Latin America*; see also Balcomb, 'From Apartheid to the New Dispensation: Evangelicals and the Democratization of South Africa'.
43. Haynes, 'Religion and Democratization in Africa'.
44. Ranger, *Evangelical Christianity and Democracy in Africa*, 17.
45. *Ibid.*, 15.
46. See Freston, *Evangelicals and Politics in Asia, Africa and Latin America*.
47. Maxwell, 'Catch the Cockerel Before Dawn'; Maxwell, 'The Durawall of Faith'; Martin, *Tongues of Fire: The Explosion of Pentecostalism in Latin America*; Martin, *Pentecostalism: The World their Parish*; van Dijk, 'Pentecostalism and the Politics of Prophetic Power'.
48. Freston, *Evangelicals and Politics in Asia, Africa and Latin America*.
49. Ranger, *Evangelical Christianity and Democracy in Africa*, 23–8.
50. Miller and Yamamori, *Global Pentecostalism*.
51. Gifford, 'The Bible as a Political Document in Africa', 22; see also Gifford, *Ghana's New Christianity*.
52. Mukonyora, 'Foundations for Democracy in Zimbabwean Evangelical Christianity'.
53. *Ibid.*, 136.
54. Raftopolous and Alexander, *Reflections on Democratic Politics in Zimbabwe*, 36–8; Mukonyora, 'Foundations for Democracy in Zimbabwean Evangelical Christianity'.
55. About 100–150 people regularly attend the main Sunday morning worship service. Its cultural or ethnic composition is about 80–85% Shona, 10–15% white, and 5% Ndebele, other Africans, Europeans, and others. The high percentage of Shona is due to the fact that the dominant ethnic group in Harare is Shona. Whites make up less than 1% of Zimbabwe's population, so they are 'over-represented' in the church. My research took place between February and April 2007. My methods were ethnographic, including participant observation at worship services and prayer meetings, as well as informal conversations and semi-structured interviews. I wanted to discover what people thought was important about their congregation and their hopes and concerns for Zimbabwe. I conducted 18 in-depth interviews. Participants in the interviews included seven Shona, seven white Zimbabweans, two Ndebele, one white European and one from another African nation. There were an equal number of females and males. Whites were over-represented in my interviews because there were more whites in the over-40 age group. Most people who had been attending the congregation for more than a few years were white, and in order to get an accurate picture about the early days of the congregation I needed to speak with them. MPCC began as a nearly all white congregation in 1997, so their perspectives were especially important for explaining how it became multicultural. The congregation met six days a week for either prayer or worship, and people interacted informally outside of church meetings on a daily basis. This meant that I also interacted with people from MPCC nearly every day.
56. Ganiel, 'Beyond Pietism and Prosperity'; Ganiel, 'Ethnoreligious Change in Northern Ireland and Zimbabwe'; Ganiel, 'Religion and Human Security in Zimbabwe'.
57. Interview with elders, March 8, 2007.
58. Maxwell, *African Gifts of the Spirit*.
59. All 18 interviews were conducted in Harare in February and March 2007. The identity of interviewees is confidential.
60. Davidson, *Black Man's Burden: Africa and the Curse of the Nation-State*; Moyo, *Dead Aid: Why Aid is Not Working and How there is Another Way for Africa*.
61. Two interviews with different congregants, March 5, 2007; interview with congregant, March 21, 2007.
62. Freston, *Evangelicals and Politics in Asia, Africa and Latin America*; Ranger, *Evangelical Christianity and Democracy in Africa*.

63. Touraine, *The Voice and the Eye: An Analysis of Social Movements*; Eyerman and Jamison, *Social Movements*; McAdam, McCarthy and Zald, *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements*; see also Ganiel, 'Religion and Transformation in South Africa?'
64. Ganiel, 'Beyond Pietism and Prosperity'; Ganiel, 'Ethnoreligious Change in Northern Ireland and Zimbabwe'; Ganiel, 'Religion and Human Security in Zimbabwe'.
65. Gifford, 'The Bible as a Political Document in Africa'; Gifford, *Ghana's New Christianity*; Freston, *Evangelicals and Politics in Asia, Africa and Latin America*.
66. Names have been changed for the sake of confidentiality.
67. For examples, visit the website of the Christian Alliance, <http://www.christianalliancezimbabwe.org/index.htm>. This includes a News Room section with press releases, some of which directly criticize the government. Christian Alliance members also have been on the receiving end of violence by government forces, as occurred at a prayer meeting in Harare on March 10, 2007, when I was in the country conducting my fieldwork.
68. People at MPCC worked in a range of secular, religious, international and local NGOs. Given that the work of some NGOs has been hampered by the Zimbabwean government, I do not name the specific organizations here in order to protect the confidentiality of the organizations and the people working in them.
69. Moyo, *Dead Aid*, 42; see also Norris and Inglehart, *Sacred and Secular: Religion and Politics Worldwide*.
70. Weber, *The Protestant Ethic*; Wuthnow, 'How Religious Groups Promote Forgiving'.
71. Raftopoulos and Alexander, *Reflections on Democratic Politics in Zimbabwe*.
72. Dube, *A Socio-Political Agenda*; Raftopoulos and Alexander, *Reflections on Democratic Politics in Zimbabwe*.
73. BBC News Online, 'Zimbabwe's Dirty Tricks Brigade'.
74. BBC News Online, 'Zimbabwe Bishop "Victim of State"'
75. BBC News Online, 'Mugabe Critic Quits as Archbishop'.
76. Chitando, 'In the Beginning was the Land: The Appropriation of Religious Themes in Political Discourses in Zimbabwe'.
77. IDASA, 'Southern African Regional Assessment Mission Zimbabwe'.
78. Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops Conference, the Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe, and the Zimbabwe Council of Churches, 'The Zimbabwe We Want.'
79. BBC News Online, 'UK Announces £5 m Aid for Zimbabwe'.
80. BBC News Online, 'Viewpoint: Tsvangirai's Ambiguous Trip'.

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