

Patterns of Consumption and Materialism among Zimbabwean Christians: A Tale of Two Indigenous Churches

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Abstract

This article critically considers the role of religion in relation to patterns of consumption among members of two indigenous churches in Zimbabwe. Through an examination of their distinct theological orientations toward modernity and the accumulation of wealth, we set out to understand religion and materialism in the postcolonial context. Our analysis and findings are based on extended observation and interviews conducted in two indigenous churches in Zimbabwe between 2011 and 2013. We contend that despite their common theological heritage in the protestant ethics and its bible-centred dogma, the United Family International Church and the Johanne Marange Church have in the postcolonial context, each forged distinct theological and ecclesiastical understandings of their relation to consumption and materialism not only shape their members' patterns of consumption, but also raises critical questions about what constitutes religion in the postcolonial context.

Keywords: Materialism, Commodification, Postcolonial, Consumption

Introduction

This study examines how different theological orientations toward the accumulation of material wealth in selected Christian denominations in postcolonial Zimbabwe define and influence congregants' understanding of wealth and patterns of consumption. This paper does not attempt to judge any

denomination, but merely proposes to trace the link between two indigenous churches' doctrines and their congregants' conceptualizations of wealth, and how such conceptualizations shape congregants consumption patterns. Central to the analysis offered in this paper is the phenomenon of consumerism, especially its expression among Zimbabwean Christians. We argue that in Zimbabwe indigenous Christian doctrines shape and strengthen already existing consumption patterns, lifestyles and identities. As such biographies, narratives and symbolism attached to gadgets, clothing and other consumables that are ostentatiously paraded, or rejected, by church members are mapped and analysed to (1) understand religion's sway on their lifestyles and (2) how theological orientations towards wealth and consumption reflect postcolonial, indigenous Christian performances in relation to modernity.

This article starts with the premise that religion has a strong bearing on society and that it shapes individuals' behaviour and thought processes (Huntington 1993; Casanova 1994; Asad 2003). Weber (2002)¹ argued that religion has an independent influence on societies, an understanding that informed Clifford Geertz's definition of religion as:

a system of symbols which act to establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic (1973: 90).

Thus religion, through a powerful system of symbols, can be argued to be so persistent and pervasive that it has the ability to influence behaviour and shape daily practice. Analyses of linkages between religion and economic actions is not new in the social sciences and, prominent early scholars such as Tawney, Weber and Marx have done much to show the linkages between religion and economic organization among followers of a particular religion. Max Weber, in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, highlights the importance of Calvinism and its Protestant ethics in creating values of austerity and sustaining belief systems among its followers (Lessnoff 1994). Protestant ethics played a pivotal role in the rise of early capitalist economies in Europe,

¹ Weber's *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* was first published as a two-part article in 1904 and 1905.

fuelled by Calvinists teaching, wherein values such as industriousness, thriftiness, dutiful and efficient necessary practices that could guarantee one eternal salvation (Samuelsson 1993). Thus more than a century after Weber's argument - that protestant ethics made Protestants more successful during the inception of capitalism - scholars have continued to explore this dimension. In the Southern African context this has recently been exemplified by two research reports by Lawrence Schlemmer and Peter Berger, *Dormant Capital* and *Under the Radar* respectively, which explore the potential social and economic significance of protestant Pentecostalism in South Africa's economy (CDE 2008a, 2008b).

Weber (2002) argued that Calvinist doctrine advocated the idea that personal success, wealth and prosperity were indicators of one's faith and salvation. Calvinism insisted that wealth had to be accumulated through systematic and rationalized ways. Similarly, Protestant ethics encourage hard work, saving and diligence enabling believers to work and accrue more wealth while avoiding extravagance. For Weber, religion was thus pivotal in determining the extent to which followers participated in economic activities, as well as the approach they adopted. The Protestant Ethic, however cannot be said to have directly caused the rise of capitalism, it was a decisive factor in the development of capitalism (Forte 2008). Whilst industriousness was encouraged, Calvinism restricted extravagance and displays of wealth as hedonistic and preferred modest spending, accompanied by ascetic lifestyles. Weber concluded that:

In fact, the summum bonum of ethic, the earning of more and more money, combined with the strict avoidance of all spontaneous enjoyment of life, is above all completely devoid of any eudaemonistic, not to say hedonistic, admixture. It is thought of so purely as an end in itself from the point of view of happiness of, or utility to, the single individual, it appears entirely transcendental and absolutely irrational. Man is dominated by the making of money, by acquisition as the ultimate purpose of his life. (2002: 53)

Weber's work portrays the role of religion as critical in determining followers' understanding and exercise of economic activities. For Weber's Protestants,

worldly riches were necessary and acceptable in the eyes of God, hence followers sought it. The doctrinal teaching of Zimbabwean postcolonial Pentecostals suggest a similar attitude towards wealth accumulation, albeit fractured or adjusted insofar as it is accompanied by conspicuous display of wealth as divinely endowed. This stands in stark contrast to the theological orientation of the charismatic indigenous Christian church of Johanne Marange, whose members have embraced austerity but have rejected modernity. For Biri (nd) the emergence of charismatic Pentecostal churches is a deliberate move to resuscitate the dormant Pentecostal movement in post-colonial Zimbabwe. Postcolonial Pentecostal congregants in Zimbabwe, and United Family International Church (UFIC) members in particular, view wealth and its accumulation as divine provision. But unlike Weber's Calvinists, Zimbabwean Pentecostalism has become associated with unabated consumption and display of wealth.

Data Collection Methods

Between September 2011 and May 2013, numerous fieldwork visits were made to the two churches, namely UFIC (at Masvingo and Harare) and Johanne Marange Church (at Masvingo and Chivi)². As part of fieldwork the principal investigator (and first author) attended church services and interacted with members to gain access to willing participants. Gaining access to UFIC was less challenging due to the church's open door approach. However, access to the Johanne Marange church was mediated by relatives of the principal investigator who acted as sponsors and introduced him to the church and its members. Background information about the two churches was provided by the gatekeepers and sponsors, who also served to introduce the research project to congregants. A total of one hundred and eighty respondents from both churches participated in the study. Data was collected using unstructured interviews with one hundred and twenty-three (123) and in-depth conversations with seventy-eight (78) congregants which captured histories,

² UFIC churches are located in urban areas. In Masvingo, UFIC members gather in at a huge local warehouse that they rent from a local businessman. In Harare, members meet at City Sports Centre. *Vapositioni* meet at Maparanyanga, a peri-urban location near Masvingo town on an empty plot owned by the church. In Chivi, *vapositioni* gather in Zvamapere in open air.

perspectives and narratives of church members on wealth and prosperity³. Participant observation was used to authenticate subjective accounts given by participants that were interviewed, especially in terms of display of gadgets and ways of dressing. Interviews were largely conducted after church services to probe explanations from members about observed phenomena. Questions on wealth, spirituality, and choice of church were explored during the interviews and conversations. The methodology was premised on the idea that each of the two churches offer a unique perspective on how Zimbabwean Christians within the two postcolonial indigenous churches, Johanne Marange and UFIC, imagine and represent the relation between their churches' teaching about wealth and members' patterns of consumption.

African Charisma: African Apostolic Church of Johanne Marange

The origins of African Apostolic Churches (AAC) such as that of Johanne Marange have been said to be largely influenced by ideological schisms present in Mission churches (Oduro 2006: 1). Johanne Marange is an offshoot from mission churches and resulted from divisions between white missionaries and black members over issues of leadership, and practices such as prophecy, exorcism and healing (Bourdillon 1982). The emergence of the church in 1932 was also significantly shaped by an African nationalist ideology which at the time sought to assert indigenous leadership and social practice. Anthony Wallace (1956) argued that this trend must be understood as part of a wider movement towards indigenous revitalization of religious and cultural practices. Schooled and baptised at a Methodist mission, Johanne Marange, the founder of the African Apostolic Church of Johanne Marange, started preaching, converting and baptizing the newly converted (Machoko, 2013; Bourdillon, 1982) into his own church. Soon such things as western medicine and western clothing were forbidden for members of the church, and so was the use of

³ Ethical Clearance was granted by, and exercised in line with the Procedures and Guidelines of the Great Zimbabwe University Research Board. In this regard all interview data such as names of persons, places and positions are not specified to as to ensure the anonymity of the participants.

English during services. The full charter of the church with all its rules, practices and ideologies, is claimed to have been received from the Holy Spirit (Engelke 2007). As such, this charter is believed to elaborate how the church was to be structured, as well as followers' behaviour both at the church and in their social life. The beliefs and practices of the Johanne Marange church are structured in a way that is consistent with traditional Shona cosmology, which is evident through the church's practice of spiritual healing, prophesy and belief in witchcraft (Anderson 2000).

Saturday is set aside as the day of worshipping, and members, known as *Vapositori*⁴, are forbidden from engaging in any type of work. Men and women dress in distinctively modest white robes, and women keep short natural hair, with their heads always covered (Reese nd), while men maintain clean shaven heads and an elaborate beard. At no time are metal objects, electronic gadgets, money or shoes allowed at their open-air places of worship (Bourdillon 1982), and likewise no musical instruments or public address systems are allowed during religious gatherings. According to Sundkler (1961) members are encouraged to be self-employed and as far as possible seek employment with or in cooperation with members of their own faith group in 'self-contained economies'. As such, their work lives are oriented towards income generating projects such as basketry, shoes repairs and other handicrafts that would also allow them time to be free on the Sabbath (Reese nd, Dillon-Malone 1978; Bourdillon 1982). Despite the seemingly anti-modernist practices and beliefs enshrined within the charter of the church, Johanne Marange has remained a popular church that has managed to spread into both rural and urban areas, totalling 1, 8 million members nationwide (Reese nd).

Postcolonial Pentecostalsms: United Family International Church (UFIC)

Like the Johanne Marange church, the UFIC emerge out of an ideological and theological split from an established mission-oriented denomination. Emmanuel Makandiwa, a former member of Apostolic Faith Mission, parted ways from this church to establish the United Family International Church

⁴ A vernacular term for apostles which is mainly used to refer to members of Johanne Marange and Johanne Masowe.

(UFIC) in 2010 making it one of the newest postcolonial Pentecostal Churches (PPC) in Zimbabwe at the time. From its humble interdenominational gatherings at Harare City Sports Centre, the UFIC would grow into a full blown postcolonial Pentecostal church, where it, like other churches, embraced modernity in every sense (Swindler 2013). UFIC is an urban-based denomination, commonly situated in upwardly mobile neighbourhoods in most of Zimbabwe's cities, where the middle-class, the aspiring middle class and the nouveau-riche can easily access them. Since its launch in the capital city Harare, UFIC expanded to cities such as Masvingo and Bulawayo. In Zimbabwe Pentecostal charismatic churches, like UFIC, are characterised by their material extravagance validated through the preaching of a health and wealth theology, which according to Paul Gifford understands material wealth and good health as a manifestation of a positive confession of faith (Gifford 2001:62). UFIC churches are also known for their conspicuously decorated places of worship, coupled with an aggressive use of various kinds of media. For example satellite television, the internet, CDs of sermons and devotional materials, an in-house published magazine together with stickers, banners, wrist bands, badges and other religious memorabilia and paraphernalia such as key holders, handkerchiefs and bandanas, are sold to followers. Thus while UFIC, as an indigenous Christian denomination presents a unique brand of the protestant ethic, it differs from that of the Johanne Marange church primarily in the way that it is oriented towards material-consumer cultures.

Pentecostalism has begun to be regarded as a 'pre-eminently a global religion' characterized by a 'global cultural flow that starts historically in the West and expands to cover the globe' (Meyer 1998:752; Robbins 2004:118). In terms of Pentecostalism in Africa, Machingura (2011) argued that for the most part, the proliferation of PCCs occurred after periods of economic and political instabilities. In postcolonial Zimbabwe, various economic crises have stifled employment opportunities, while the cost of living has escalated amidst dwindling disposable incomes (Raftopolous and Mlambo, 2009). Thus hordes of people swelled the informal economic sectors, and the subsequent 'violence

of the economy' has forced people into the *kukiya-kiya*⁵ practice (Prickle, 2004; Jones, 2010).

Zimbabwean PCCs, like the Johanne Marange church during the late colonial period, emerged out of similarly sombre economic and political conditions, offering hope to people subjected to the violence of the economy (Cox 1996; Anderson 2000; Maxwell 2000). With assurances of health and wealth as its theological locus, some scholars have called PCC's teaching a 'prosperity gospel' or 'name-it-and-claim-it gospel' through which it 'successfully explains and exploits popular insecurities' (Maxwell 1995:351; Cooper 2005). Ukah (2007) argues that PCCs are particularly attractive to middle class followers who possess university degrees and have an appetite for foreign commodities that are difficult to acquire in struggling economies. In Zimbabwe PCCs attract the middle-class as well as those who are relatively poor. To the former, it is a mechanism to regain a sense of upward mobility and control in an uncertain economic and political terrain (Parsitau 2010; Theron 2011). For the poor PCCs are windows of hope that promises temporal and spiritual mobility out of impoverishment (Maxwell 2013).

The strand of PCCs in Zimbabwe is characterized by young and trendy leaders who are known for their trendy dress and possession of high-end luxury vehicles such as Lamborghinis, Ferraris, Mercedes Benz, BMWs and Range Rovers. These leaders, popularly known as prophets, claim to be rich and can live comfortably in any country on the globe. The Bible is invoked to illustrate that wealth is a blessing from God to His faithful followers. Jesus is considered 'The Boss' by some of the prophets. As 'The Boss' he is responsible for all the wealth that the prophet possesses and that followers would receive if they follow the teachings. This explains why these churches' teachings are referred to as prosperity gospel or 'gosprenuership'. During some sermons, money is dubbed 'miracle money' that is produced miraculously and congregants attest to finding such money stashed in their pockets and bank accounts.

Materialism and Eschatology in Religious Teachings

The teachings of the Johanne Marange church and UFIC present diametrically

⁵ Vernacular for 'getting by', 'hustling', 'informal economy', See Jeremy Jones (2010).

opposite points of view about materialism. The Johanne Marange church's teachings emphasise an eschatologically-oriented doctrine with strong anti-modernist sentiments, while UFIC's theological teachings are entrenched in a supposedly divinely-endowed materialism as the church promotes amongst its congregants the idea that through their 'health and wealth' theology God offers relief from poverty, if you believe. Despite these differences, Engelke (2007) and Machoko (2013) argue that both AICs and PCC were profoundly affected by the socio-economic conditions in the country from the early 1990 and that theological teachings in Zimbabwe became increasingly oriented towards socio-economic material security.

Historically, for the Johanne Marange Church's *vapositori* their devotion is expressed through asceticism. *Vapositori* mainly advocates spiritual purity, denial of what they understand to be modern materialism as congregants seek to inherit the kingdom of heaven. Notwithstanding the *vapositori*'s rejection of modern materialism, congregants are encouraged to start their small businesses which can enable them to survive and escape from the vagaries of poverty. As such *vapositori* engage in petty trading, basketry, carpentry, metalwork and tin ware (Machoko 2011: 4). Through their self-contained economies, Reese has (nd) observed that, although *vapositori* can accumulate assets such as trucks and cars for use in their business, these assets have little or no religious significance. The Johanne Marange church's doctrine encourages self-denial by trivializing modern materialism and accumulation of wealth as signs of salvation.

Unlike the Johanne Marange church's *vapositori*, UFIC teachings encourage congregants to view faith as a resource to facilitate an escape from poverty through the belief that material wealth is a reward for faith in God. This is clear in UFIC, and was noted as very clear in the teaching by a member who said that:

being poor and living in deprivation is a sin, believers must not lack anything that they want or desire.

The conspicuous display of material wealth and commodities is viewed by congregants as not just about an escape from poverty but is also presented as willed by God. Thus in her reflections about Pentecostal churches in

postcolonial Africa, Hackett (1998; 264) concluded that ‘the ultimate icon of conspicuous salvation is the Mercedes Benz’.

God’s Economies: Teachings about Wealth and Congregants’ Behaviour

Religious teachings and beliefs form the bedrock upon which members establish an understanding of their purpose, and the meaning of life in general. Churches inculcate general beliefs with regards to wealth, prosperity and material goods. People are taught mainly about God’s expectations and the churches interpretation of ‘God’s word’ as laid down by the founder and the elders. From observations of UFIC and the Johanne Marange church, it appears that both churches’ teachings and members’ lifestyle reveal a radical revision of the Protestant legacy with regards to wealth and the meaning of material goods. As will be discussed below, for UFIC members worldly success is regarded as evidence of God’s favour blessed and a relative assurance of salvation. The Johanne Marange church’s doctrine, on the other hand, emphasises material self-discipline and asceticism among members as a path to salvation, locally referred to as *kufakupona*⁶. This church insists on anti-materialism as they believe that this is stated in the scriptures. The human body, which is carnalized in Johanne Marange church’s teachings, is believed to incline the mind toward the sensual. The accumulation of wealth is viewed as ‘earthly’ and generally regarded by churches’ elders as a distraction from following God’s will. This is well illustrated by one respondent’s remark:

*Ndarama yakawandisa yakaipa, munhu uvova nekuzvikudza okangamwa kwayakabva*⁷

⁶ The act of dying sinless so that one is saved and has eternal life. The word is a compound word particular to AACs, *kufa* means to die, while *kupona* in this case means to be delivered or saved. Thus if one follows the teachings his or her death is celebrated because the person would have overcome earthly problems and will be enjoying eternal life after death.

⁷ Too much wealth is bad, it makes one pompous and turns one away from God who gave him the wealth

Wealth, monies and riches are not openly discussed or encouraged during sermons because they are viewed as trappings that ensnare members away from God's will – a position supported by teaching on a myriad of bible verses that condemn excessive wealth and riches. When Johanne Marange congregants' opinions were sought on wealth and money, the common responses from these followers were citations of biblical texts from Matthew 19 verse 24⁸. A frequently used statement among the *vapositori* is *Mari yakaipa yakaita kuti Judas atengese Jesu*⁹.

Johanne Marange congregants are not allowed to have money or any electronic devices, such as wrist watches or cell phones on their person during sermons and services. This church's teachings are aligned and oriented towards a 'spiritual life in heaven' (Machoko 2013: 10), thus making it difficult for its doctrine to allow members to pursue such earthly and polluting riches that might make it impossible for one to inherit the kingdom. Wealth and prosperity are not honoured virtues and members rarely parade them. The church leaves no room for ostentatious display of material goods or wealth in all aspects. All men are clean-shaven, with long beards, women keep short hair and they do not use cosmetics. Members don white modest gowns, shoes are not allowed at the church and members attend services barefooted. *Vapositori*'s lifestyle is modest and this is perpetuated through ritual mechanisms and practices employed to facilitate conformity when attending services.

From field observations the researcher was able to confirm other scholars' (Engelke 2007; Reese n.d.) conclusions about *vapositori* ritual practice. For example, anyone attending services pass through a 'gate' where they confess their sins to two or three people manning the gate, who at the same time check if the individuals are in possession of specified objects. The modesty of the religion and its members is also portrayed through how the church is organized. There are no erected buildings or infrastructure because services are conducted in open air with members sitting on the ground. Such a simplistic approach translates to the casual and modest lifestyle led by members of the Johanne Marange church. Members' dress code during

⁸ And again I say unto you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.

⁹ Money is evil, it influenced Judas to betray Jesus.

services and at home is similar: *vapositori* avoid elaborate clothes and opt for plain colours such as white, purple and blue. Thus in general *vapositori* austerity stands in clear contrast to the apparent opulence popular among UFIC members.

From visits to UFIC church services it was evident that theological teachings and ritual practice were almost diametrically opposite to that of the *vapositori*. Among other things, it was declared that the aim of the Gospel ‘is to end the demon of poverty that dogs most people’¹⁰ which is supposedly effected through exorcism, and through teaching believers about investments and financial intelligence. This has been identified as one of the core elements of UFIC prosperity gospel. The church’s teaching advocates that since God is the creator of all things, those who believe in Him must not suffer because all things on earth are theirs. In one sermon, titled ‘Kingdom Prosperity’, the UFIC’s Prophet Makandiwa¹¹ asserted that the ‘cross is the epitome of prosperity’ for believers. He implored his listeners to accept the relationship between the death of Christ and victory over material poverty by invoking scripture. He cited:

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich (2 Corinthians 8: 9 ESV).

In his teachings, Prophet Makandiwa, here advances a certain theological teaching which suggests that congregants must not tolerate poverty. Instead his message equates seeking paths out of poverty, and the accumulation of wealth, as synonymous with God’s divine mission. As testimony to the validity of his claims, he recalls how a new convert and former witch, through the Gospel, was able to ‘acquire a motor vehicle’¹² thus reinforcing the idea that faith leads to wealth and material security. On one DVD recording of a

¹⁰ The teaching was titled Pfuma Yakavanzika Munyika, by Prophet Makandiwa at City Sport Centre. The sermon is found on a DVD titled Vhangeri Kuvarombo (Message for the Poor) produced by Reel Production.

¹¹ Teaching titled Kingdom Prosperity by Prophet Makandiwa of UFIC in Harare.

¹² Same sermon as above.

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sermon, one pastor reinforced the conviction that wealth accumulation and escape from poverty is an almost divine promise: He asserted that:

*God is going to give you money, we are talking of serious money*¹³.

In the UFIC the first lesson towards material and spiritual prosperity is the exorcism of the demon of poverty which inculcates a culture of poverty among people (Maxwell 358). Members are taught not to be content with their lives because the devil has stolen their wealth and inheritance from God or alternatively that their material security is frustrated by a supposedly malevolent 'spirit of poverty'. During one sermon, members were instructed not to be content with banal or mundane lifestyles. To illustrate the point, the preacher used air travel as an indication of upward mobility, arguing that it was a shame if children of God had not travelled by air¹⁴. The preacher's insistence that believers must always travel in the luxury cars as God's will for his followers encouraged members to shun mundane goods, services, food and commodities. In his article on Pentecostalism in Zimbabwe, David Maxwell reminds us that to offer evidence of their blessedness 'born-again dress up for church. Men flaunt their new suits and expensive wrist watches. Women show off their jewellery and elaborate hairdos' (1998: 363).

In UFIC, for the faithful to prosper, they are encouraged to pay tithes religiously, this is underscored by the belief that if one gives to God, s/he will receive the amount multiplied many folds¹⁵. The church convenes prayer

¹³ Sermon by Prophet Makandiwa titled *Why You Should Make Money* at City Sport Centre. A DVD by the same title was produced by UFIC.

¹⁴ Prophet Makandiwa during a sermon in Harare at Show Ground.

¹⁵ For members to prosper and grow financially, they should follow the seed, tithe and harvest principle. Prosperity/ harvesting is conditional. Prophet Makandiwa clearly explains this principle in a teaching titled *Why You Should Make Money* delivered at City Sports Centre in Harare, there is a DVD under the same title. During the teaching he told members that: 'I know the exact amount that I am supposed to make you give I know how much'. The prophet claims that God informs him about the amount certain individuals must give (as offering, tithe or seed) to unlock their wealth and blessings.

sessions for faithful tithers so that their businesses and enterprise prosper. It is common for believers to pay as large amount of money as tithe, some declaring as much as 5000 USD. A number of interviewees viewed tithing as a form of 'sowing' - borrowed from agriculture - resonating the strong theological sentiments about investment in future growth. Within the UFIC when one tithes, a believer places his or her financial seeds in the ground and God will enable the seeds to grow and multiply. For many Zimbabwean Pentecostals tithing is believed to unlock blessings, prosperity and wealth for the individual (Maxwell 2006). Thus tithing becomes a mechanism that enables congregants amass more money. Conversely, the UFIC also seeks to exorcise or expel the evils associated with money, encouraging congregants to actively engage in public display of their generosity - confirming their salvation.

With most of the church's teachings oriented towards wealth accumulation and liberty from poverty, eschatological concerns are side-lined as. Prayers, towels and prophecy are used to ensure that members accumulate as much wealth as possible. During the interviews the UFIC members noted that they received 'towels' – a piece of fabric that they can use to wipe anything they desire. The church introduced handtowels as religious artefacts or talismans that are believed to enhance a congregants' ability to own and consume desired commodities by virtue of the fact that these artefacts have sacred power, through which a church member may claim a desired object by rubbing it with such a hand towel. One interviewee noted that he had '*wiped a similar model to his dream cars and has managed to buy the car*'¹⁶.

Although ideas about tithing, devotion and hard work are seen as individual engagements with the two churches theological teaching, the spirit of individualism, self-reliance and autonomy are cultivated quite differently among the congregants of each of the churches. Like Johanne Marange, UFIC does not permit members to participate in traditional rituals. Obligation to kinsmen is greatly reduced as UFIC members distance themselves from gatherings and performances of traditional rituals. The individual depends more upon other church members, God, and church teachings that inculcates self-reliance and individualism. Allan Anderson (2000), in his *Zion and Pentecost: The Spirituality and Experience of Pentecostal and Zionist/Apostolic Churches in South Africa*, reminds us that African Pentecostals in general orient their theology and ritual practice with reference to the bible, and

¹⁶ Interview conducted on 10 February 2013 at City Sports Centre, Harare.

not to indigenous religion or culture. Yet despite their common theological heritage – in the protestant ethics and its bible-centred dogma – UFIC and Johanne Marange have in the postcolonial context, each forged a distinct theological and ecclesiastical understandings of their relation to consumption and materialism.

Work, Wealth and Consumption

Differences in religious teachings on wealth and money, in each church translates into very particular types and forms of employment that members choose and regard as acceptable. Machoko (2013) reminds us that considering the size of the churches and their large number of followers, it would be naïve to expect uniform adherence with regard to church teachings. Many congregants do not follow church teachings in a strict sense, for example a number of Johanne Marange leaders own successful businesses. Drawing on this, we will in this section trace the influence of religious doctrines over what is regarded as acceptable work for believers.

The Johanne Marange Church encourages members to be self-employed and engage in various artisanal jobs that allow them to attend church services that are held during the week, especially to attend their Tuesday meetings. Furthermore, self-employed members freely attend services on Saturdays and they are able to make the pilgrimage to Manicaland where they participate in two-week long interdenominational services and other religious activities. In Zimbabwe the *vapositori* dominate in employment sectors such as welding, motor repairing, petty trading, farming, carpentry and building. Such forms of labour are flexible in terms of time available for them to engage in routine prayers. These activities are largely informal, not registered and fall under *kukiya-kiya* economies (Jones 2010) where incomes are unstable and in some cases too little. There are a handful of *vapositori* who are formally employed but most of *vapositori* populate the informal sector, this can be explained partly as a ripple effect of the church's shun of formal education. Most *vapositori* have basic primary education and as such are obliged to work within a 'self-contained economy' in which they are employed by other members of the church (Sundkler 1961).

UFIC doctrine, on the other hand, encourages and inculcates entrepreneurship among its members and followers. That entrepreneurial skills

are taught within Pentecostal churches is not uncommon (Musoni 2013; Lewison 2011) and in UFIC entrepreneurialism is validated through prophesies. Members are encouraged to embrace government's initiative to indigenize the economy by engaging in income-generating programmes. During the 'UFIC 2013 Financial Summit' members were encouraged to form their own entrepreneurial enterprises and to pay taxes to the government. UFIC conferences are attended by both international and local motivational speakers, business leaders and distinguished captains of industries¹⁷. UFIC Judgment Night which was held on 19 April 2014 at National Sports Stadium was widely advertised and attended by prominent and flamboyant business people. This enabled the creation of social networks among attendees, which enabled other members to share business ideas and visions. Members are introduced to others who have already become established in the business world. From the interviews with congregants we have been able to gather that informal tenders are handled by members of the church who supply most of the goods and items required by the church. A number of members at UFIC who operate businesses in Harare confirmed that they have supplied goods to the church at market prices¹⁸. These trade arrangements enabled members to earn money and it provided them with good references that could be used in other tenders. Through men's and women's fellowships, members discuss businesses and advertise business opportunities that can be taken by members. Togarasei (2005) argues that in the context of Pentecostalism, religious networks serve as a stepping stone into prosperity, this is echoed by congregants interviewed who confirmed that established businessmen nurture the novices and teach them the ropes of the trade. Church networks thus emerge as a significant source of social capital.

Due to the church's recognition of education as a path out of poverty many congregants are furthering their studies and many of the leaders themselves hold degrees. This, coupled with the entrepreneurial orientation of the church has resulted in UFIC's increasing popularity among young people, university students and young professionals. (Musoni 2013; Lewison 2011) Likewise, the church's coupling of faith and material prosperity means that a

¹⁷ UFIC Judgment Night held in April was advertised and attended by prominent and flamboyant business people.

¹⁸ November 2012 at City Sport Centre, Harare.

number of members have high profile jobs ranging from middle-level to high-level managers.

An analysis of hymns, songs of worship (and a close reading of verses) from both churches revealed that in both the Johanne Marange Church and UFIC, praise and worshipping songs serves to reinforce their particular orientation towards consumption and materialism. From observations of the UFIC musical performances during church services it was evident UFIC musicians exhibited a similar global consumerism cultivated by the leadership to ordinary members through teachings. The musical style draws on contemporary transnational musical genres such as fusion of hip-hop, electro and dancehall, with a religious message. The titles of some of the songs reflect the worldview cultivated by the religious teachings of UFIC. For example among the title there are *Ndaita Mari* (I've got money)¹⁹, *Ndiri Magnet* (I am a magnet)²⁰ and *Havanyare* (They have no scruples)²¹. This reflects the extent to which wealth and the acquisition of wealth is central to the church's teachings - so much so that even songs portray the accumulation of earthly and material commodities, not simply as good and acceptable, but also desirable.

Likewise, there is a spiritualization of both commodities and consumption itself. UFIC members believe that money has been sanctified and exorcised of all its evils²², thus members can freely use it to purchase the desired commodities, goods and services. There is a belief that Prophet Makandiwa had and can again produce 'miracle money'²³ for congregants.

¹⁹ I Got Money. The song highlights that through praying and teachings, believers, him included, have amassed a lot of money.

²⁰ I'm a Magnet. The general meaning being that through Jesus I have attract money and wealth

²¹ They have no scruples. People who criticise the church leaders and followers because of their prosperity.

²² In a sermon dubbed Pfuma Yakavanzika Munyika, Prophet Makandiwa notes that money and wealth are spiritual gifts. Spiritual rank determines the levels of wealth one has in life.

²³ It was claimed that during a church service congregants found their pockets stashed with money while some had their bank accounts balances increased. Interviewed respondents claimed to know of members who received miracle

Unlike for the *Vapositioni*, for whom money is regarded as something which corrupts a followers' sanctification, to UFIC congregants money is a blessing and a divine resource that must be utilized to uphold and sustain God's blessing – made manifest through being afforded elite status through consumption of commodities. For example, Biri (nd), in the '*The silent echoing voice: aspects of Zimbabwean Pentecostalism and the quest for power, healing and miracles*' notes that congregants are classified in categories in accordance with the amount of tithe paid per month. Congregants who pay a tithe over 1000 USD fall under the gold category, those whose tithe is between 500 USD and 900 USD are categorised as silver. Bronze categories are made up of congregants whose tithe is between 100 USD and 400 USD. Furthermore, Biri argues that congregants who pay less remain the unknown Others. By implication, tithing categories into which congregants are organized serve also as categories of sanctification. In one example of opulent sanctification, a member of UFIC Praise and Worship was given a luxury executive car as a wedding present²⁴.

The leader(s) of UFIC personify the church's health and wealth doctrine and through wearing expensive clothing, ownership of a fleet of expensive vehicles and residing in exclusive neighbourhoods. The church leader becomes the physical embodiment of the 'truth' of the church's teaching. In one sermon a leader announced '*hapana mutupo wemota wandinozeza ini!*' (There is no automobile brand that I hesitate to purchase) to show his confidence as divinely endowed and blessed²⁵.

As we have sought to argue above, through a Weberian analysis of the protestant ethic, religious teachings have a bearing on attitudes towards wealth. Unlike UFIC Pentecostals, the *vapositioni* of the Johanne Marange church seek to lead a modest life characterised by both industriousness on the one hand, and material austerity, on the other hand. While UFIC congregants also understand 'protestant' industriousness as a basic religious ethic, they pursue

money. Accounts of miracle money can be found at: www.herald.co.zw/2013-the-curious-case-of-miracle-money/

²⁴ In December 2011, Prophet Makandiwa gave a newly-wed couple, Michael Mahendere and Vimbai Nyatsambo, a Mercedes Benz E320 as a present, cf: <http://nehandaradio.com/2011/12/27/prophet-makandiwa-buys-benz-for-newly-weds/>.

²⁵ Teaching titled Kingdom Prosperity by Prophet Makandiwa of UFIC in Harare, 2012.

this through entrepreneurship and an accompanying orientation toward wealth accumulation. Both postcolonial Pentecostal teaching as represented by UFIC, and the radical anti-materialism of the *vapositori* show a marked shift from Weber's analysis of the protestant ethic – as characterised by industriousness and modest lifestyles. We wish to propose that such fractured or local expression of the protestant ethic is both the product of, and a response to postcolonial conditions in Zimbabwe.

Patterned Consumptions and Materialism

The consumption patterns and social values attached to commodities by members from these two Christian denominations are premised upon the general teachings and doctrines of the church. *Vapositori*'s consumption patterns are heavily influenced by the church's promotion of austerity and dismissal of 'modern' commodities, a doctrine largely born out of their early leaders' anti-Westernism, coupled with an appetite for emerging African nationalist ideals. This can be witnessed in most aspects of their social lives, ranging from complete jettison of western medicine and education, and in their refusal to submit to national registration regimes in the form of birth certificates and identity cards. This partly explains *vapositoris*' prevalence in the informal economic sector because they lack conventional educational certificates and forms of identity cards which are often prerequisites for formal employments or formal registration of companies. Not only are the *Vapositori* negatively disposed towards brand commodities and materialism due to the religious habitus that discourage consumptions of such commodities, but their worldview is structured around its disassociation with western products and values. Members' perceptions and justification of their consumption patterns conforms to the norms of their religious representation of both the natural and supernatural world. Belief systems are instilled in members through teachings and religious mythologies that later on structure their social practice in a similar manner. *Vapositori* see no religious value in material goods or wealth accumulation but instead networks of trust are reinforced through shared values – such as the rejection of an apparently modern, western consumerism. They not only believe that their modest lifestyles slow the pace of a global

consumer cultures but also that their church's teaching offer an alternative imaginary of a postcolonial, African religious future.

In contrast, UFIC doctrines cultivate and create a postcolonial religious orientation that emphasizes conspicuous consumption of global brands and commodities. UFIC church teachings inform lifestyle and consumer practice, which produces a cult of opulence and materialism that evident in members. The use of gadgets such as iPad, iPhones, laptops and other accessories by UFIC members reflect a church ideology that encourages the use of latest technologies. Telecasting and video-conferencing are common during services. Members dress in flamboyant colours, with their hair styled and they wear expensive accessories. Among UFIC congregants this type of dressing is referred to by non-member as *anopfeka semwana wemuporofita* (you dress like a prophet's child)²⁶. As such clothing is not a mere act of putting on garments, rather, it carries symbolic meanings which makes it part of a situated body practice that reinforces member's sense of belonging. Such extravagant adornment confers symbolic capital to the member because it is regarded as an indication of God's blessing. Thus not unlike the *Vapositioni*, members of the UFIC through their holy consumerism map a religious field that that imagines a postcolonial African future characterised by acquisition, flamboyance and victory over poverty.

Conclusions

What we have sought to demonstrate in this article is how in postcolonial Zimbabwe, religion – and particular understandings of the protestant ethic - has a transformative capacity to influence congregants' social experiences, practices of meaning-making, their expectations and how they imagine the future. Through interrogating conceptions of wealth, money and commodities among Christians in the Johanne Marange Church and the United Family International Church we have tried to illustrate how such conceptions are the product of religious habitus and disposition created by church doctrines and teachings which members are exposed to.

We contend that the patterns among consumption of congregants within a particular church will reflect the theological values and belief systems

²⁶ You dress like a prophet's child. The leader of UFIC is known passionately by his followers as Prophet. His followers are known as Prophet's children.

of that church. In postcolonial Zimbabwe, Pentecostal Charismatic Churches embrace global consumerism and view wealth accumulation as a divine imperative, while among the *vapositori* material commodities are rejected in pursuit of modesty and austerity.

We have sought to show how commodities have a separate social and religious life among *vapositori* and the UFIC. Despite their proximity and shared theological heritage in Weber's protestant ethic, their social histories of good and commodities differ significantly because of differences in doctrines the two churches. In PCCs global commodities are elevated to a sacrosanct levels while for *vapositori* the same commodities remain banal, and are often reviled. Patterns of consumption, goods consumed, the meaning of such practice, and the inclusion or exclusion of such goods by the members of these two postcolonial Christian churches, highlights the persistence of religion as powerful force of legitimization by, and among, followers who are seeking to make sense of their faith in the postcolonial context characterised by indigenous responses to questions of poverty and identity. Finally, we argue that through our focus on the social and religious significance of good and commodities in the two churches, that the postcolonial context demands a more nuanced examination of the relation between religion and materialism. Further, we contend that any attempt to interrogate the history of goods in African religious contexts, require a necessary move beyond simply examining religious orientations to modernity, but need also to draw attention to the particular ways in which such orientations inform the reform, and commodification, of religion in postcolonial Africa.

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