

(Mis)leading by the spirit: Transforming African spiritualities and political leadership

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African spiritualities and leadership have shared a profound connection throughout history. With Africans predominantly embracing spirituality, their engagement with national political leadership takes on a spiritual dimension. However, spiritualising contests for secular power often lead to manipulation, deception and other various consequential issues. Thus, this paper investigates the impact of African spiritualities on political leadership and vice versa, shedding light on the prevalent use and abuse of African traditional and Christian religions by prominent African politicians. While much has been written about religion and politics, less attention has been given to transforming these dynamics. This paper seeks to bridge that gap by examining the inherently influential role of African spiritualities on political leadership, highlighting manipulative tendencies that serve selfish interests. Various factors, including knowledge gaps, economic vulnerabilities, susceptibility to corruption and the co-optation of spiritual leaders, contribute to these abuses. The paper concludes with recommendations for mentorship, education, discipleship, enlightenment and empowerment of both current and emerging spiritual leaders to counteract self-centred political manipulation and promote inclusive transformation.

Interdisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary implications: This paper interfaces African spiritualities and politics with leadership for inclusive transformation.

Keywords: African spiritualities; African Traditional Religions; Christianity; politics; leadership; (ab)use; transformation.

Introduction

African Traditional Religions (ATR), along with Christianity and various other religions, play an important role in instilling and nurturing moral virtues, such as altruism, patriotism and charity, among individuals (Abioje 2010:790). As a result, their doctrines and practices exert both direct and indirect influence on the landscape of secular national leadership across all African nations. This phenomenon has been noted by various scholars, such as by Steenkamp (2020:1) in South Africa, Manyonganise (2022), Magezi and Tagwirei (2022) in Zimbabwe, as well as Gibbs and Ajulu (1999) in the regions of Southern and Eastern Africa. This also resonates with Ellis and Ter Harr's (1997) assertion that:

[A]ll religion advance a belief that invisible forces exist and influence human destiny. This is mostly because many Africans believe that the widely attested malaise of their public life may be explained largely, or even primarily, by reference to these invisible force. (p. 221)

Regrettably, the intersection of religion and secular leadership has been marked by complexities and challenges. As aptly quoted by Baba (2022:162), '[Y]ou cannot go to abattoir and come out without the stain of the blood', illustrating how the fusion of religion, politics and related secular leadership has often been tainted. As Mujinga (2018) highlights in Zimbabwe, religion has frequently been (*mis*)used as a political tool, and numerous studies on African spiritualities and leadership, including works by Foster (2022), Apyewen (2020:69–72), Musoni (2019:5–7), Chigwata (2016:70–90), Moller (2006:36–93) and Mwale (2016:22–37), focus on the (*mis*)appropriation of religion by politicians. They suggest that worldly leadership manipulates African spiritualities. In examining the (*ab*)use of religion by political leaders, this paper advocates for a more nuanced perspective that thoroughly assesses the impact of spirituality on political leadership. To achieve this, the paper first delves into the concepts of African spiritualities and political leadership. It subsequently evaluates the interplay of spirituality on secular leadership, considering how each impacts the other. Recognising that both have been marred by self-centred interests, the paper concludes by proposing a transformation of these dynamics and offers suggestions for how this transformation can be realised.

Understanding African spiritualities

The concept of 'spirituality' is very difficult to define (Ohajunwa 2019:41–46), primarily because of the intricate diversity of African ethnicities, religions and contextual factors that shape various expressions of spirituality. Moreover, spirituality is also problematic because it is naturally transient, a quality that is now more pronounced because of the influence of globalisation. As a result, spirituality lacks a fixed, unchanging form. Furthermore, given the diverse array of people, spirituality is inherently pluralistic. Within the context of Africa's rich multiculturalism, spirituality varies from one individual, family, group, society and culture to another. However, the term spirituality is traditionally used interchangeably with reference to religion, beliefs, practices and values.

Consistent with the perspective of Ohajunwa (2019:41–46), 'religion' is characterised by a more structured framework, involving specific rituals and belief systems centred on a deity or higher power. It often serves as a guiding set of principles for seeking meaning and purpose in life, yet it does not necessarily equate to an individual being spiritual. 'Spirituality on the other hand, is seen as an individual or collective search for meaning in life, as a personal (and/or collective) motivator; a way of being' (Dreyer 2014). Agreeably, as Tanyi (2002) notes, '[R]eligion expresses spirituality, and as such, it is a necessary component of spirituality'. Bearing in mind that individuals are part of holistically interconnected communities, they usually get directly and indirectly involved in spiritual engagements.

For Chiorazzi (2015:n.p.), 'African spirituality simply acknowledges that beliefs and practices touch on and inform every facet of human life, and therefore African religion cannot be separated from the everyday or mundane'. According to Marumo and Chakale (2018:11697–11699), spirituality in the African context can be described as a culturally shaped and influenced amalgamation of profound human values, attitudes, beliefs and practices. It is founded on a range of African worldviews and interactions with the deceased or entities in the spiritual world. For them, African spirituality connects the living with the dead, as well as the human and divine:

Africans believe that there is a Supreme Being, who is able to do what human beings cannot do. The Creator is also envisioned as a formless, self-conscious and intelligent entity, believe that the creator is beyond form, containment and can transmute into anything, thus the various forms manifested across this earth. It is held that this Essence, or Spirit, of the Creator, is what is present within all things – both animate and inanimate and gives form and life. In African Spiritualities, there are many different expressions of the Creator/God and an unlimited number of the forms it can take, hence why it is common to have Africans paying homage to a range of naturally occurring forms with no mental conflict as to its divine nature. (Marumo & Chakale 2018:11699)

In a broader sense, African spirituality maintains that all of humanity originates from God and does not need to be

converted back to God and to adhere to a specific set of religious doctrines. However, the concept of spirituality may sometimes resemble religious syncretism. As described by Mokhoathi (2017:11), it can be seen as an amalgamation of Christianity and ATR, where 'many Africans have resolved to live by double standards, professing to be Christians in public, while reverting to the practice of ATR in private'. Mbiti (1992:264) also characterises the phenomenon as 'religious concubinage'.

Conversely, Masango (2006:932–935) asserts that African people traditionally regarded their ancestors as intermediaries to God, showing respect and veneration for the deceased while maintaining their submission to God. Thus, '[T]hey found themselves practicing the African way of life, and also kept Christian principles which were foreign and western'. This is why, with the arrival of White missionaries, Christianity gradually underwent a process of Africanisation, as Africans contextualised and integrated the gospel into their own cultural and spiritual contexts (Ekpenyong & Okoi 2021:84–85; Young 2005). As a result, Moywaywa (2020) argues that:

[I]nculturation mainly sought to make Christianity more relevant, more appealing, more understandable or even more feel-at-home to the African continent... to address mistakes made by some of the pioneer White missionaries who condemned indigenous culture as devilish and therefore one of the evils from which Africans required to be liberated from. (pp. 496–498)

In conclusion, African spirituality is unmistakably all-encompassing, as it embraces and exerts an influence over every facet of human existence – socially, physically, politically and economically. That means it does not separate the secular from the sacred. As Kappen (1994) states,

[C]ontemporary spirituality impacts on the totality of life, it is non-dualistic, it does not posit a bifurcation between the secular and the sacred. It encompasses the entire life of faith, which includes body, mind, and soul as well as the social and political dimensions. (p. 33)

Understanding political leadership

The concept of 'leadership' is multifaceted (Ulrich n.d.). Different perspectives, such as those from Christian, business, management, social, psychology and political standpoints, offer varying views on leadership, which continue to change over time. To explore the interplay between spiritual and secular leadership, we can glean insights from Klingborg, Moore and Varea-Hammond (2006:280–281) and provide a historical perspective on leadership. They observe that during the late 1800s through to about 1930, prevailing leadership theories emphasised the notions of control and the centralisation of power. A notable example is the 'Great Man' theory, which posits that leaders are inherently born rather than made. This theory promoted the idea that certain enigmatic qualities were inherent in specific individuals and were often thought to be passed down through generations. Klingborg et al. (2006:280–281) assert that leadership evolved to eventually influence servanthood and collaboration. These

transformations facilitated the development of practices such as sharing visions, goals, tasks, addressing situational needs and fostering transformation.

In summary, as Thomas (2018:108) suggests, leadership primarily entails the ability to bring about results, and there are shared traits between religious and secular leadership. While every religion advocates for respect and adherence to its principles, they also draw inspiration from certain concepts in the secular realm, just as worldly leadership incorporates ideas from religious leadership.

While 'politics' is historically complex and difficult to define (Modebadze 2010:40), it generally refers to what Moyser (1991:4) explains as 'the collective decision-making process to the benefit of a large group of people (mostly a nation) that reside in a particular environment'. Typically, it speaks to governance, mobilisation, management, distribution and the sustenance of resources. Thus, in this paper, 'political leadership' will refer to the role of serving citizens in the state's government.

As stated by Langlais (2020), political leaders are:

[T]hose who are elected by citizens to represent them, talk on their behalf and they must embody the beliefs, wishes, and will of populations, and must act as citizens' representatives.

In alignment with Kroesbergen (2020),

[L]eadership in Africa is inextricably connected to the spirit world. Leaders may be chosen through elections or other human processes, but ultimately, they are seen as appointed by God. Leaders may base their decisions upon science or intuition, but ultimately, they let themselves be inspired by revelations from the spiritual realm. (p. 1)

This leads to the next section, which explores the influence of African spiritualities on political leadership.

The influence of African spiritualities on political leadership

Religion holds an integral place in African society (Agbiji & Swart 2015:1). Interestingly, ATR, various forms of Christianity and other religious groupings exert a tremendous influence on the thought processes of Africans (Ndemanu 2018:70). An illustrative example of this influence can be seen in the late former Zimbabwean president, Robert Gabriel Mugabe, who, during his campaigns for the acquisition and retention of his lengthy rule, actively involved both traditional and Church leaders. Incumbent president, Emmerson Mnangagwa, continues this tradition. A recent example of this is when his administration erected a statue of Zimbabwe's liberation spirit medium, Mbuya Nehanda, strategically positioned at the intersection of two main roads in the capital city, Harare: Julius Nyerere and Samora Machel roads (Madzimure & Zinyuke 2021:n.p.). Additionally, the president submits to chiefs, headmen and village heads. Traditionally, before each election, the ZANU-PF party used to purchase new vehicles for chiefs and provide them, as well

as headmen and village heads, with monthly allowances. While it is common for traditional leaders to receive some allowances from the state worldwide, it becomes politicking when done by a political party. This practice implies that politicians seek the support of traditional leaders for both spiritual and political backing in the domain of secular leadership.

In the meanwhile, Zimbabwe's main opposition leader, Nelson Chamisa, has been consistently sharing messages of his strong commitment to Christianity on all his social media accounts. Recently, he emphasised that he would continue to post Bible verses, highlighting that he finds it transformative to do so. He stated,

I must say that I will not stop treading verses. I could actually give you [interviewer] another verse here just for your edification. At the end of the day what's more important is out eternal life. As a leader I am not just looking for transformation in the now. There is power and there is profit in being Godly and that's why I say God is in it!. (Mhlongo 2023:n.p.)

The (*mis*)use of spirituality in politics is not exclusive to Zimbabwe. As noted by Mwale (2016:27–30), Zambian political leaders also engage with religion in their campaigning and power contestations. Kroesbergen (2020:1) concurs and observes that Africans often find themselves naturally inclined to hold spiritual beliefs and live spiritually. They have a tendency not to separate their politics from religion, even when engaging in political contests for personal gain. Similarly, Beyers (2015:154) recounts that the African National Congress (ANC), the ruling party in South Africa, was indeed established within a church in Bloemfontein in 1912. Notably, some of its early leaders included clergy members. Since the apartheid era up to the present day, the church has played significant roles, fulfilling spiritual, social and political functions. The current president, Cyril Ramaphosa, is a Christian, having previously served as an evangelist, and he continues to seek and follow Christian counsel (Mashau & Kgatle 2021:1). In agreement with Beyers (2015:160), politicians appeal to religion because African spiritualities are highly regarded as standards of morality, trustworthiness, tolerance, stewardship and accountability. Additionally, as noted by Frahm–Arp (2019:317), Bompani and Frahm–Arp (2010), religion and South African politics are deeply intertwined, unfortunately often driven by selfish interests.

Kenya, like many other African countries, grapples with similar challenges (Catherine 2014:25; Kwatamba 2008). While the (*mis*)use of African politics and spiritualities cannot be standardised across the African continent because of the diverse variables that distinguish experiences in each context, it can be contended, as John Mbiti, one of Africa's most esteemed theologians, does in the opening remarks of his book, *African Religions and Philosophy*, that 'Africans are notoriously religious' (Mbiti 1969:1). As Sanni (2016:5) similarly emphasises, Africans are undeniably predominantly spiritual. Religion is deeply interwoven into all facets of their lives, to the extent that it becomes exceedingly challenging

for them to separate from it. Consequently, African politicians and religious leaders tend to utilise, and unfortunately, sometimes abuse their spiritualities, as has been observed throughout this paper. Having provided an overview of the situation, let us now look at the (ab)use of African spiritual and political leadership in Zimbabwe.

The (ab)use of African spiritualities and political leadership

It is evident that African politicians often utilise, and occasionally misuse, spiritual beliefs as a means to secure and maintain their political power. Mudzanire and Banda (2021:1) noted that Zimbabwean president Emmerson Mnangagwa misused religion to bolster his presidency after ousting the former, and now late, President Robert Gabriel Mugabe, through a coup. They highlighted that:

Mnangagwa (2017a) ascended to the seat of power by claiming that 'the voice of the people is the voice of God'. Ironically, the claim to be chosen and ordained by God to rule Zimbabwe was also a major strategy Mugabe used to entrench his 37-year rule.

Similarly, the main opposition leader, Advocate Nelson Chamisa, who leads the Citizens' Coalition for Change (CCC) and is also a theologically trained pastor in the Apostolic Faith Mission (AFM) in Zimbabwe, employs religion in his pursuit of political power. During the 2018 election, Nelson Chamisa contested the presidency against Mnangagwa using the slogan '#Godisinit'. He also integrated various Christian symbols into his electoral campaigns, including a recorded prayer. In addition, Chamisa called upon citizens to engage in fasting and prayer vigils as part of their efforts to defeat the ruling Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF).

Meanwhile, there has been limited public attention given to the misuse of politics by African religious practitioners. Nonetheless, it is apparent that while politicians may (*mis*) use religious beliefs, practices and practitioners for their objectives, religious ministers likewise manipulate politicians and politics to serve their own interests. To understand this dynamic, let us examine the cases of Zimbabwean President Emmerson Mnangagwa and the main opposition leader, Nelson Chamisa, and their interactions with spiritualities, as an example. Subsequently, conducting a concise survey of other African political leaders and their relationships with spiritualities will provide further insight into the topic.

President Emmerson Mnangagwa and African spiritualities

Upon the death of former president Robert Mugabe in 2019, President Emmerson Mnangagwa, who had come to power through a military-assisted coup, made unsuccessful attempts to exhume Mugabe's body. He sought to extract a mystical sceptre known in Shona tradition as 'tsvimbo yaMambo' strongly believing it held the power to enhance electoral victory (Ndoro 2021:n.p.). Similarly, various sources, such as Chibamu (2019:n.p.), ZimEye (2019:n.p.) and

Ndlovu (2019:n.p.), report that the president consults local and neighbouring African witch doctors to bolster his political rule.

Stories like these and others demonstrate that President Emmerson Mnangagwa actively engages with spiritual beliefs and practices. In a related development, in early March 2021, he appointed Prophet Uebert Angel as his presidential envoy and ambassador to the Americas and Europe. The rationale behind this appointment was the belief that the prophet, with his extensive evangelical, business experience and global exposure, could help promote investment in the country (Murwira 2021:n.p.). Prophet Uebert Angel, whose jurisdiction covers Europe, North America, South America and Central America, is the founder of the Good News Church (formerly Spirit Embassy) and is based in the United Kingdom.

Later on, Zimbabwe's investigative newspaper, *NewsHawks* (2023), published an article proffering that the president was (ab)using the prophet for self-enrichment through corrupt deals, while the prophet was also benefiting as a middleman. According to the report,

[T]he Qatar-based international television news channel *Al Jazeera's* Gold Mafia undercover[s] film on gold smuggling, money laundering and corruption unfolds and audiences navigate the story arc, President Emmerson Mnangagwa has firmly emerged as the protagonist: Leading actor, ... whose plenipotentiary self-styled prophet Eubert Angel (real name Uebert Mudzanire), facilitate[s] prospective investors to meet president Mnangagwa for potential investments in Zimbabwe for a US\$200 000 'facilitation fee'. (*Al Jazeera Investigative Unit* 2023:n.p.)

In addition to utilising religious leaders like Euebert Angel for these self-serving deals, President Emmerson Mnangagwa established a partisan pastoral association to amass political support within churches. As noted by Chinowaita (2022:n.p.), 'Emerson Mnangagwa forms *Pastors4ED* [meaning Pastors for Emmerson Mnangagwa] movement and deploys its members to churches to mobilize and encourage Christians to support his leadership'. Moyo (2022:n.p.) reports that the leaders of *Pastors4ED* have been actively encouraging all church leaders to join the group to further the president's leadership contests, stating, 'we want every church leader in Zimbabwe to join *Pastors4ED*': Game over for Nelson Chamisa'.

Concurrently, the president also initiated an ecumenical body, the Zimbabwe Independent Indigenous Council of Churches (ZIIICC), through Prophets Andrew Wutaunashé and Samuel Mutendi (Magezi & Tagwirei 2022:3). Additionally, the president is widely recognised for his close relationships with prominent ecclesiastical leaders in Zimbabwe, including White garment apostolic church leader Paul Mwazha, Prophet Emmanuel Makandiwa of United Family International (UFI) and the archbishop of the Zimbabwe Assemblies of God in Africa (ZAOGA), Ezekiel Handinawangu Gutu. On 05 May 2023, Archbishop Ezekiel

Guti, who sadly passed away on 05 July 2023 (Moyo 2023:n.p.), celebrated his 100th birthday, and President Mnangagwa attended the centenary birthday celebration (Pillay 2023:n.p.). As noted by Mujinga (2018:253) and Majome (2016:n.p.), it is well documented that Mnangagwa's ZANU-PF party traditionally cultivates relationships with influential religious ministers, often for political purposes.

The same pattern extends to President Mnangagwa's interactions with traditional leaders. As reported by Chingono (2021:n.p.), Mnangagwa's administration placed a high priority on erecting an expensive statue of the liberation spirit medium, the heroine and anti-colonialism figurehead Mbuya Nehanda in the capital, Harare. This decision was made at the cost of addressing other urgent needs, including the struggling healthcare, industrial and education systems, as the president sought spiritual support for his political campaigns.

Nehanda Charwe Nyakasikana, known as Mbuya – 'grandmother' in the Shona language – was a spiritual leader of the Shona people who led a revolt against the 19th century colonization of Zimbabwe by Cecil Rhodes and his British South Africa Company, whose officers eventually captured and hanged her in 1898. While commentators from different sectors disregarded the development as economically insensible as Zimbabwe has been in unending crises for long, the president confirmed his veneration of the influence of spiritualities. The president and his government officials believed in the spirit medium and honoured her with a larger-than-life bronze statue atop a lofty footbridge in Harare city centre. (Chingono 2021:n.p.)

During the unveiling ceremony, the president invited traditional leaders from across the country to partake in vibrant festivities. He honoured them with a military parade, traditional music and dance. While this gesture could be seen as a display of great respect for African spiritualities, it may also be perceived as another strategy to win the support of spiritual leaders and (*ab*)use them to campaign for his presidential bid, together with his other mentioned attempts (e.g. Pastors4ED and partisan ecumenical ZIICC).

Furthermore, in early 2023, as reported by Pindula News (2023:n.d.), 'President Emmerson Mnangagwa distributed cars to 38 newly appointed chiefs during an annual chiefs' conference held in Bulawayo.' The theme of the conference was 'Cultural Foundation for Community Development'. In a clear electioneering move, the president assured the traditional leaders that, should he emerge victorious in the elections, his administration would prioritise improving their living conditions. He implored the chiefs and headman to back his candidacy for the 2023 elections. He also pledged to construct additional roads, provide medical aid and facilitate access to solar energy for these leaders. To summarise, President Mnangagwa actively sought the support of traditional leaders while simultaneously cracking down on dissenting voices, which included the outspoken Zimbabwean chief Felix Ndiweni. Chief Ndiweni faced persecution and was eventually dismissed from his position

for opposing the president's rule (Staff Reporter 2022; Zhuwawo 2019:n.p.).

In light of this, Mashininga (2018:n.p.) contends that Zimbabwean traditional leaders face a dilemma presented by the ruling party – they can either actively support the Zanu-PF's agenda and reap the benefits of the entrenched patronage system, or they can choose to resist and risk victimisation. This situation appears to run contrary to the Constitution of Zimbabwe, as Section 281 of the constitution explicitly states that traditional leaders must not (Mashininga 2018):

(a) be members of any political party or in any way participate in partisan politics; (b) act in a partisan manner; (c) further the interests of any political party or cause; or (d) violate the fundamental rights and freedoms of any person. (n.p.)

Nkomo (2015:85–118) traced the historical relationship between ZANU-PF and the chiefs and revealed that when Zimbabwe gained independence in 1980, the government neglected the chiefs and all traditional leaders. However, when the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) emerged as a formidable opposition party in 1999, it garnered substantial support from both rural and urban areas. This development alarmed ZANU-PF leaders, as they realised they were losing their grip on power. Acknowledging the closer connection that spiritual leaders have with the people compared to political administrators and officials, ZANU-PF re-engaged, courted and once again employed traditional leaders in rural areas to counter both real and perceived opposition. They adopted a similar strategy with mega-church leaders to manipulate public support in urban areas. In summary, most traditional leaders yield to leading politicians to mask their economic and political insecurities, ultimately serving their interests for economic survival.

Opposition leader Nelson Chamisa and Zimbabwean spiritualities

When preparing for the primary elections to select his party's candidates for the 2023 harmonised elections, Nelson Chamisa publicised the requirements for his party contestants, which included demonstrating loyalty to God. As reported by Ndoro (2023):

CCC leader Nelson Chamisa yesterday made public the form which is being used to process applications by aspiring election candidates. On page 3, the form demands that the applicant should "provide details of your proven loyalty to: Citizens/ Citizens Movement, Country and The Creator". (n.p.)

Therefore, Tarusarira (2020) aptly summarised this observation by stating:

In the post-colonial history of presidential aspirants in Zimbabwe, no politician has been as overtly religious as Nelson Chamisa, the current leader of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). Chamisa, who studied law and political science at the University of Zimbabwe and theology at a local theological school, identifies himself as a politician and a pastor whose politics are guided by his Christian faith. A former Member of Parliament and cabinet minister from February 2009 to July 2013,

Chamisa has held numerous posts in the MDC, including chair of the national youth assembly, spokesperson of the party and organizing secretary. In 2016, he was appointed to serve as one of the three vice-Presidents of the MDC. Upon the death of Morgan Tsvangirai, the founding President of the MDC, the party's national council appointed him as its president... From the liberation struggle of the 1960s to the present, politicians have always deployed religious rhetoric to mobilize support. However, Chamisa took this to an unprecedented level by explicitly blurring the boundaries between his functions as politician and pastor by calling on Twitter for and leading a week of fasting and prayer from 29th July to 4th August 2019. (pp. 31–32)

Like Mnangagwa, Chamisa and his party officials have reportedly consulted prophets and witch doctors concerning his leadership engagements (Staff Reporter 2019). Furthermore, Tarusarira (2020:32–33) reports that Chamisa utilised a live video on 26 July 2019 to urge Zimbabweans to engage in prayer and fasting, with the aim of addressing issues related to human security and the broader economic and political challenges faced by the country. Subsequently, from that point onward, Chamisa has continued to share Bible verses and publicly profess his commitment to Christianity. In light of the fact that 85% of the Zimbabwean population identifies as Christians (Gaga, Masengwe & Dube 2023), Mpofo (2021:13–16) suggests that Chamisa strategically incorporated religion and religious rhetoric into his political discourse to better connect with voters.

Chamisa declared hashtags '#GodIsInIt and #BeholdTheNew' on his Twitter (now X) account, signifying his submission of his political campaign to God. That is why Mpofo (2021:31) argues that 'the submission to God through prayer on the campaign trail, his court petition of results, etc. suggest the centrality of God in Chamisa's presidential bid'. Chamisa and his supporters likened the electoral contest to a journey from oppression to the Promised Land, drawing parallels from the Zimbabwean experience over the past two decades, marked by socio-economic and political crises under the Zanu-PF regime. Just as President Emmerson Mnangagwa visits churches, Chamisa also engages in such visits, offering prayers and preaching in a manner that signifies his reliance on God for guidance in his leadership endeavours.

Makaza (2019) notes that Nelson Chamisa has been actively recruiting pastors and other church leaders through his Chaplaincy department to provide spiritual counsel, direction and moral support to his leadership and party. Despite not adhering to traditional beliefs and practices, Nelson Chamisa has been reaching out to traditional leaders as part of his campaign strategy to garner support from rural communities in the lead-up to the elections (Muzuzu 2017:n.p.). Considering that the Zimbabwean intersection of politics and religion has primarily been driven by self-interest for power conquests, there is a need for transformation to make it more focused on the welfare of the entire population. The following section delves into how this transformation can be achieved.

Towards transforming African spiritualities and politics

It is evident that if leaders are educated and mentored to become and remain servant-leaders, they will prioritise serving the citizens over serving politicians and pursuing their self-interests. As noted by Tagwirei (2023:5–6), religious ministry cannot be effective without proper mentorship. Just as Joshua was mentored by Moses, Elisha by Elijah, the 12 disciples by Jesus Christ, Paul by Barnabas and Timothy by Paul, mentorship plays a crucial role in leadership development. 'When leaders lack mentorship and accountability, they neglect servanthood and become authoritarian, because nobody advises and corrects them' (Tagwirei 2023:5). Hence, by embracing the principle of servanthood, as exemplified by Jesus Christ in the account found in John 13:1–18, and by fostering the spirit of *Ubuntu*, characterised by godly love, humaneness, African values of collectivism, reciprocity, cooperation, harmony, dignity, selflessness and a commitment to serving one another, leaders from various religious and political backgrounds can unite. They can work collaboratively, offer constructive criticism, generate transformational ideas and effectively serve the citizens by aligning their leadership approaches with these principles.

In a similar vein, recognising the numerous factors that sustain the (*mis*)use of African spiritualities by self-serving political leaders, a crucial step would be for their ecumenical bodies to organise training seminars and conferences. These events can play a vital role in educating and empowering religious leaders, enabling them to advocate for both themselves and the rights of citizens from a well-informed position.

Furthermore, given that many religious leaders have fallen prey to political co-option because of economic and political insecurities, as well as a lack of self-sustainability, they should explore the concept of tent-making. This approach, as exemplified by the Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 11:9 and 2 Corinthians 12:13–16, has been well explored by Tagwirei (2022). In light of the economic challenges in Zimbabwe and the precarious state of congregational support, tent-making can serve as a means for gospel ministers to generate income, ensuring their well-being and the sustainability of their ministry. It also promotes their independence and shields them from becoming reliant on congregants, as well as vulnerable to political manipulation for self-serving power acquisition and retention.

Therefore, it is advisable for traditional associations, such as the Zimbabwe National Traditional Healers Association (ZINATHA) and *Dare reMweya neVadzimu* (Committee of Spirit mediums), to facilitate enlightening and empowering training sessions and fellowships focused on mentorship, servant leadership, responsible citizenship and constitutionalism. Similarly, ecumenical bodies (such as the Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe and Zimbabwe Council of Churches) should work to transform Christian leadership in a similar manner.

Given that individuals who understand their roles and constitutional rights might be deterred by the fear of political reprisals and the economic struggles they face, non-political civic organisations should be proactive in advocating and strengthening their humanitarian and legal support to facilitate the transformation of the relationship between African spiritualities and political leadership for the betterment of citizens. Some spiritual leaders may be hesitant to seek such assistance because of issues of pride. To address this, the author proposes that theological educators and experienced spiritual leaders take steps to contextualise their teachings and mentor emerging leaders from the younger generations, ultimately fostering the much-needed reconciliation and transformation of African spiritualities and political leadership.

Conclusion

This paper has revealed that African spiritualities and political leadership can both influence and, at times, abuse each other. Considering the prevailing religiosity among Africans, it is important to recognise that religion holds the potential for transformation. Simultaneously, political leadership should embody selflessness, drawing inspiration from Christian values like servanthood, African ideals encapsulated in *Ubuntu*, and democratic principles that encompass citizens' freedoms and service delivery. These principles collectively promote qualities such as divine love, human values, African unity, mutual support, reciprocity, cooperation, harmony, dignity and selflessness. If religious leaders and political figures wholeheartedly embrace these principles, they can potentially initiate a beneficial transformation in African spiritualities and politics, ultimately serving the greater good of all.

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K.T. declared sole authorship of this research article.

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Disclaimer

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