

Multiplying in the Spirit

African Initiated Churches in Zimbabwe



Ezra Chitando, Masiwa Ragies Gunda & Joachim Kuegler

Introduction

Given the rapid expansion of newer, more media conscious and assertive Pentecostal churches throughout most parts of Africa, one would be forgiven for thinking that the older, garmented African Initiated/ Independent/ Indigenous/ Instituted/ International Churches (AICs) have been removed off the religious map of the continent. The scholarly preoccupation with the robust and captivating Pentecostal phenomenon has created the impression that AICs have dwindled in size and significance. This volume seeks to challenge such an interpretation by bringing back AICs in Zimbabwe into academic focus. Whereas the popularity of Pentecostal churches has ensured that they attract scholarly attention (see for example, Chitando, Gunda and Kuegler 2013), the vibrancy of AICs demands that they should not be neglected.

This volume was motivated by the realisation that AICs continue to be a significant player on Zimbabwe's spiritual market. Members of predominantly Apostolic, but also Zionist, churches are highly visible in both rural and urban areas. Prophets from AICs are constantly in the news, alongside advertising their competence on various signposts in urban areas (Gundani 2001). In early June 2014, newspapers and the social media covered the case of one of the Johane Masowe weChishanu groups that attacked police officers who had come to support leaders of the African Christian Council of Zimbabwe (AACZ) who wanted to ban the particular group (see the chapter by Matikiti on the AACZ in this volume). This brought AICs into national prominence, although it reinforced the idea that AICs promoted a "suspect spirituality" (see the chapters by Chari, and Chitando and Mateveke in this volume).

The Academic Study of AICs in Zimbabwe: An Overview

We will not be able to provide an exhaustive account of the history of the study of AICs in Zimbabwe within the confines of this introductory chapter. Thus, we do not purport to provide a comprehensive literature/thematic review in this overview. However, we hope to draw attention to some of the key themes that have characterised this endeavour. First, there has been considerable debate over the most appropriate term. Although the label, “African Independent Churches” enjoyed a lot of currency up to the 1990s, other competing terms have since gained ground. These include, African “Independent, Initiated, Indigenous, Instituted” Churches (Chitando 2005). The overall goal has been to emphasise the agency of Africans in the establishment of the AIC movement. In this volume, we have embraced all the different labels, with “Initiated and Independent” enjoying an upper hand.

As we have indicated, the term AICs has generated multiple interpretations role of anthropologists and missiologists in shaping the contours of the study needs to be acknowledged. This follows the pattern in South Africa. Second, the towering figure of Marthinus Daneel is integral to the history of the study of AICs in Zimbabwe. His insights, activism and closeness to AICs in Zimbabwe, particularly in rural Masvingo and in forming ecumenical AIC bodies and environmentally-conscious AIC movements have been celebrated (see Cuthbertson, Pretorius and Roberts 2003). Third, and related to the foregoing, the importance of healing to AICs has emerged as a popular and recurrent theme. Daneel placed emphasis on healing as a recruitment technique in AIC expansion (see for example, Daneel 1970). It is beyond the scope of this introductory section to review other researchers who have examined the importance of healing to AICs.

Fourth, the rapid multiplication and schism within the AIC movement has drawn the attention of some researchers. Writing from within the context of South Africa, David B. Barrett’s (1968) classic, *Schism and Renewal in Africa*, drew attention to the tendency for AICs to split into various churches. The current volume captures this in the title, “multiplying in the Spirit.” The AIC movement in Zimbabwe has been characterised by continuous intensification and expansion, with smaller units emerging from mother bodies. The Johane Masowe movement, for example, has given rise to numerous other groups. These groups have proceeded to adopt colourful names. Consequently, different AIC groups

can meet at *masowe* (sacred spaces) that are a few metres from each other.

Fifth, and emerging from the foregoing, there is need to acknowledge the massive diversity within the AIC movement. The available studies (this one included) have not begun to do justice to the complexity and variegation characterising AICs. Some use the Bible, while others do not (Engelke 2007). Some AICs are millenarian in outlook (Bishau 2010), others are quite “here and now” in orientation. Some worship on Saturday, but others have adopted Thursday or Sunday as the day of worship. Some put on white garments, while others criticise this and put on khakis. Many AIC men shave their heads completely, but others have dreadlocks! Despite this diversity, AICs do sometimes come together in ecumenical gatherings, including interacting with the Catholic and Protestant churches, as well as Pentecostal churches (Pressler 1999).

Sixth, the dimension of gender has received considerable scholarly attention, with Zimbabwean women scholars investing in establishing the status of women in AICs. Lilian Dube (1999) has highlighted the importance of women healers to the AIC movement, while Mukonyora’s *Wandering a Gendered Wilderness* (2007) examines gender dynamics within a specific AIC. Mabhunu (2010) has described the role of prophetesses, while Mapuranga (2013) has highlighted the ambivalence of the status of women in AICs. Elizabeth Vengeyi (2013) has described the survival strategies adopted by women in an AIC that is characterised by patriarchy.

Seventh, the role of AICs in Zimbabwean politics has come under increasing scrutiny. After 2000, AIC groups began to feature more prominently in national political gatherings, particularly at Independence festivities, or at the burial of heroes at the National Heroes Acre. One of the most striking expressions of the interface between AICs and politics in Zimbabwe was the figure of President Robert Mugabe putting on a garment and carrying an Apostolic staff (*tsvimbo*) during a campaign for the 2013 presidential elections (see references to this in the chapters by Manyonganise, and Vengeyi and Mwandayi in this volume). Other politicians such as Morgan Tsvangirai, leader of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) and Joice Mujuru, the Vice President, have also interacted with AICs. Machoko (2013) has examined the interface between AICs and politics in

Zimbabwe, while Obvious Vengeyi (2011) and, Sibanda and Maposa (2013) have addressed the same theme.

Eighth, the issue of AICs and human rights has come to the fore, particularly in relation to AICs that discourage the uptake of (western) biomedicine and education. Maguranyanga (2011) has drawn attention to the internal differences within the AIC movement in relation to attitudes towards biomedicine. On the other hand, Machingura (2011) is highly critical of polygamy in AICs in the context of HIV and AIDS. The right of children to access quality education continues to be debated within academic circles in the face of some AICs that discourage western education (see, for example, the chapter by Machingura in this volume).

Ninth, there is an emerging interest in AICs and peace-building in Zimbabwe. The country has experienced violence at various points in its history. Some researchers have begun exploring the possible contribution of AICs to the emergence of cultures of peace in Zimbabwe (Dodo, Banda and Dodo 2014). Overall, it is critical to note that the study of AICs in Zimbabwe has grown in scope. This has been in keeping with the significance of the AIC movement.

Chapters in this Volume

To a large extent, the chapters in this volume pick up and amplify many of the themes we have outlined in the foregoing section, as well as exploring new topics. In the historical section, in chapter one Munetsi Ruzivo examines succession debates in the Johane Marange African Apostolic Church. He shows how the struggle for control and ownership of Marange's grave must be grasped within the context of competition for power by various factions within the movement. In chapter two Vengesayi Chimininge outlines the historical development of the Zion Christian Church in Zimbabwe. Chimininge describes the expansion of the movement under the leadership of Bishop Nehemiah Mutendi. In chapter three Lovemore Ndlovu analyses the growth of the African Apostolic Church led by Paul Mwazha as a response to secularization. Kudzai Biri examines the centrality of sacred space to politics in the Zimbabwe Assemblies of God Africa (ZAOGA in chapter four. Although ZAOGA would ordinarily be categorized as a Pentecostal church, Biri argues that there is merit in classifying it as an AIC. Bernard Mlambo and Taurai R. Mukahlera undertake a comparative analysis of the

appropriation of pre-existing religious beliefs in Greek religion and AICs in chapter five. Robert Matikiti analyses the African Apostolic Christian Council of Zimbabwe (AACZ) in chapter six. These chapters confirm the importance of adopting historical approaches to the study of AICs, in Zimbabwe and on the continent. In addition, they update the histories of AICs by highlighting contemporary developments, including succession debates and struggles within the older AICs.

The historical chapters are followed by a cluster of chapters focusing on perceptions and practices relating to AICs in Zimbabwe. In chapter seven Tendai Chari exposes the persistence of negative images of AICs in the media in Zimbabwe, while in chapter eight Ezra Chitando and Pauline Mateveke contend that the emergence of gospel music groups in AICs has contributed towards positive images of the movement. In chapter nine Masiwa R. Gunda explores the importance of the Bible to AICs. Molly Manyonganise focuses on the intricacies surrounding the political involvement of AICs in chapter ten, while Francis Machingura debates the responses to education and health in the Johane Marange African Apostolic Church. He is quite critical in his approach. In chapter eleven Elizabeth Vengeyi and Canisius Mwandayi explores the rather neglected theme of sacred attire in Zimbabwean AICs.

The last two chapters highlight the economic activities of AICs. In chapter thirteen Fortune Sibanda and Richard S. Maposa describe the various activities that members of AICs have engaged in, while in chapter fourteen Tapiwa P. Mapuranga employs a gendered perspective to examine the survival tactics deployed by AIC women during the crisis years in Zimbabwe.

This volume, 'Multiplying in the Spirit: African Initiated Churches in Zimbabwe,' therefore, updates developments within the AIC movement, alongside availing new material on a highly significant and complex religious phenomenon in Zimbabwe. As the first volume in the Exploring Religion in Africa (ERA), a BiAS sub-series, it seeks to highlight the ongoing centrality of religion to the African (Zimbabwean) imagination.

References

- Barrett, David B. 1968. *Schism and Renewal in Africa: An Analysis of Six Thousand Contemporary Religious Movements*. Nairobi: Oxford University Pr.
- Bishau, David. 2010. *Reign with Him Thousand Years (Rev 20:6): A socio-hermeneutical exposition of biblical and contemporary millenarian movements in Zimbabwe as responses to deprivation*. Bamberg: UBP.
- Chitando, Ezra. 2005. "Naming the Phenomena: The Challenge of African Independent Churches," *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 31(1), 85-110.
- Chitando, Ezra, Masiwa R. Gunda and Joachim Kuegler. 2013. eds., *Prophets, Profits and the Bible in Zimbabwe*. Bamberg: UBP.
- Cuthbertson, Gregor, Hendrik L. Pretorius and Dana L. Roberts. 2003. eds., *Frontiers of African Christianity: Essays in Honour of Inus Daneel*. Pretoria: University of South Africa.
- Daneel, Marthinus. 1970. *Zionism and Faith Healing in Rhodesia – Aspects of African Independent Churches*. The Hague: Mouton.
- Dodo, Obediah, Richard G. Banda and Gloria Dodo. 2014. "African Initiated Churches, Pivotal in Peace-Building: A Case of the Johane Masowe Chishanu," *Journal of Religion and Society* 16, 1-12.
- Dube, Lilian. 1999. 'African Women Spirituality: A Study of Women Prophets in Zimbabwe. D.Th. (Missiology). University of Stellenbosch Dissertation.
- Engelke, Matthew. 2007. *A Problem of Presence: Beyond Scripture in an African Church*. Berkeley: University of California Pr.
- Gundani, Paul H. 2001. "Church, Media and Healing: A Case Study from Zimbabwe," *Word & World* 21(2), 135-143.
- Mabhunu, Loveness, "Revolt against the Biblical and Traditional Stereotypes of Women? Women Prophets in African Initiated Churches," in Lovemore Togarasei and Ezra Chitando (eds), *Faith in the City: The Role and Place of Religion in Harare*, Uppsala: Swedish Science Pr., 2010, 63-84.
- Machingura, Francis. 2011. "A Diet of Wives as the Lifestyle of the Vapostori Sects: The Polygamy Debate in the Face of HIV and AIDS in Zimbabwe," *Africana* 5(2), 185-210.
- Machoko, Collis G. 2013. "African Initiated Churches and Party Politics: The Zimbabwean Experience," *The International Journal of African Catholicism* 4(1).
- Maguranyanga, Brian. 2011. *Apostolic Religion, Health and the Utilization of Maternal and Child Health Services*. Harare: UNICEF.
- Mapuranga, Tapiwa Praise. 2013. "AICs as a Gendered Space in Harare, Zimbabwe: Revisiting the Role and Place of Women," *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 39(2).
- Mukonyora, Isabel. 2007. *Wandering a Gendered Wilderness: Suffering and Healing in an African Initiated Church*. New York: Peter Lang.

- Pressler, Titus. 1999. *Transfigured Night: Mission and Culture in Zimbabwe's Vigil Movement*. Pretoria: University of South Africa Pr.
- Sibanda, Fortune and Richard S. Maposa. 2013. "Behind the Smokescreen: African Instituted Churches and Political Processes in Zimbabwe," in Ezra Chitando, ed., *Prayers and Players: Religion and Politics in Zimbabwe*. Harare: SAPES Books.
- Vengeyi, Elizabeth. 2013. "Gender-based Violence in the Johane Marange Apostolic Church: A Critique," in Ezra Chitando and Sophia Chirongoma, eds., *Justice Not Silence: Churches Facing Sexual and Gender-Based Violence*. Stellenbosch: EFSA.
- Vengeyi, Obvious. 2011. "Mapostori Churches and Politics in Zimbabwe: Political Dramas to Win the Support of Mapostori Churches," *Exchange* 40(4), 351-368.

