Law, Religion and Leadership in Africa
Published by AFRICAN SUN MeDIA

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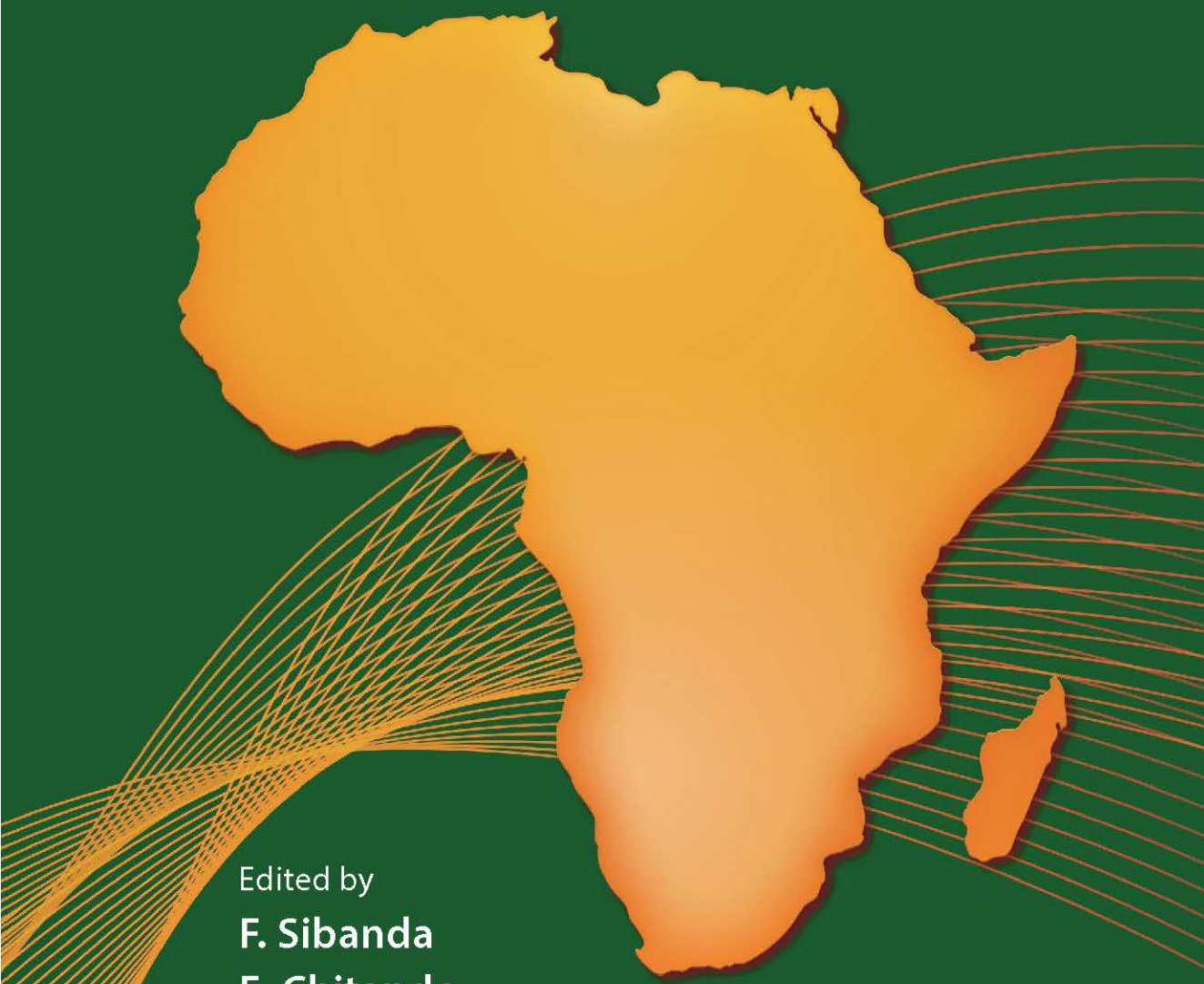

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https://doi.org/10.52779/9781991260888

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AFRICAN CONSORTIUM FOR LAW AND RELIGION STUDIES

9 Power and leadership disputes in the Mugodhi Apostolic Faith Church in Zimbabwe: A case study of a selected assembly

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INTRODUCTION

There have been many instances of church wrangles over the years in Zimbabwe. Zimbabwean journalist Veronica Gwaze's newspaper article in the *Sunday Mail* titled "Another church war hits Zim", foregrounds the many church leadership wrangles that have affected many churches in Zimbabwe.[3] In 2022, a newspaper article published on 17 April 2022, titled "Zimbabwe, dozens injured as Mugodhi Factions violently clash during Easter gathering", only reinforces how, over time and consistently, power and leadership struggles have affected churches in Zimbabwe.[4] The Mugodhi Apostolic Faith Church in Zimbabwe has not been spared. These leadership wrangles are believed to have emerged after the church leader, Tadewu Mugodhi, appointed his son Washington as bishop of the church to the disgruntlement of some church members. These contradictory voices were largely muted during Tadewu Mugodhi's lifetime, but upon his death in 2019 disputes over the leadership of the church became prominent. The power vacuum that was created by the leader's passing opened an opportunity for other church members to start openly arguing against and contesting the appointment of Washington Mugodhi as the bishop on the basis that this act was a breach of the church's constitution. The backdrop of their argument was that church leadership is not supposed to be passed through a hereditary line; hence, Washington Mugodhi's appointment was considered unconstitutional.

Church wars are not new in Zimbabwe, and Gwaze's newspaper headline to the effect that "another" church war has erupted is proof of the constant struggles that churches have to negotiate when it comes to power and leadership. The situation is similar in many parts of the world. Development specialists, Victor Selorme Gedzi, Wise Treve and Alexander Yao Segbefia, in their analysis of congregational conflicts in Ghana, reveal their commonplace nature and show that such conflicts impact

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3 Gwaze V. 2019. "Another church war hits Zim," *Sunday Mail*, 27 October.

4 "Dozens injured as Mugodhi apostolic sect factions violently clash during Easter gathering", *New Zimbabwe*, 17 April 2022.

https://doi.org/10.52779/9781991260888

the general society whenever they occur.[5] Almost all the time, these conflicts are primarily about power, leadership and the rewards that accrue from these. They are hardly ever driven by spiritual reasons alone. Governance and leadership experts, Luke Teddy Chigwanda and David Foya, in their studies of the Anglican Church in Zimbabwe, poignantly stress how "the hostile attitudes and violent behaviours of these church elders during the conflict were enough proof that they are hypocrites and money mongers masquerading as church leaders".[6] Considering the important roles that churches play in the communities where they operate, these issues cannot be ignored, since they impact societal and national decision-making processes. These conflicts within churches usually have negative effects on both the congregants and the society at large.

Churches without conflicts have a higher chance of becoming involved with other denominations in critical development programmes which alleviate poverty and improve well-being of the communities around them. This brings to the fore the fundamental importance of proper governance in the church, which stems from best practices of leadership as well as proper succession procedures. With proper governance, a church gains trust from other denominations and partners, and this trust allows churches to play expected and effective roles in people's lives. This idea is buttressed by Vhumani Magezi, a professor of practical theology and pastoral care, who proposes the need to "manage denominational or church strife as a priority threat".[7] Indeed, Magezi observes, "Individualistic and selfish motives of some churches should be changed through focusing on real community needs. Any difference or different views should be addressed patiently, graciously and in a mutually respectful way. The goal of addressing community needs should be the focal priority."[8]

Churches are best placed to achieve their stated objectives if they can be trusted and if there is trust within their structures. This study primarily seeks to explore the causes of leadership wrangles in different denominations, with specific focus on the Mugodhi Church. In the process, the study also helps to reveal and initiate critical discussions on the intersections between the law and religion which are often taken for granted and even obfuscated on the premise that spiritual matters within the church do not need the interference of man-made laws. Critically, in light of the role the Church plays in communities and the nation, the study also explores how succession and leadership disputes in churches end up impacting the nation

5 Gedzi VS, Treve WK and Segbefia AY. 2020. "Congregational conflicts and societal impacts: A case of Evangelical Presbyterian congregation in Ghana", *Journal of African Political Economy and Development* 5(1):21-45.

6 Chigwanda LT and Foya D. 2022. "The Impact of Church Politics on Education in the Anglican Diocese of Manicaland in Zimbabwe", *Journal of Asian and African Social Science and Humanities* 8(4):72.

7 Magezi V. 2017. "Making community development at grassroots reality: Church driven development approach in Zimbabwe's context of severe poverty", *In die Skriflig [In the Scripture]* 51(1):11.

8 Magezi, "Making community development at grassroots reality", 11.

https://doi.org/10.52779/9781991260888

at large. Our position is that a disjointed and fractured church cannot participate fully in community development projects, and this demands that churches foster and uphold a culture of peace among congregants and their leaders and within leadership for development.

In this chapter, we discuss how religion and leadership relate and how they intersect with the law. We demonstrate how the Mugodhi Apostolic Faith Church has been involved in leadership and succession disputes, unpacking how the law has intervened to curb these disputes. The chapter also focuses on the challenges that come with succession disputes within and external to the church. The main argument proffered is that the role that the church plays in peacebuilding in Africa, particularly in the Zimbabwean context, cannot be ignored. Squabbles, if not handled well, threaten the positive outcomes that these churches have the potential to bring. This is poignantly illustrated by Munetsi Ruzivo, a historical theologian, who argues:

> In the absence of church canons that address issues of leadership and other aspects of church life precisely, AICs (African Initiated Churches) rely on traditional law which at times is not consistent. Traditional law, which is not codified, is subject to manipulation by elders in order to safeguard their interests in the Church. Tradition can be misinterpreted or adjusted to suit certain interests. It is based on those who still remember how leadership succession and inheritance were done in the past. Where people no longer remember, they are likely to innovate to bypass the gap in memory.[9]

The presence of a clearly laid out church constitution helps to alleviate conflicts that emanate from leadership succession disputes. This also guards against some of the loopholes that creep in when information on succession plans is disseminated through the word of mouth. We are cognisant of the fact that constitutions can be unwritten, but our emphasis is that churches ought to have written constitutions which might not be easy to manipulate compared to unwritten rules and guidelines which are at the mercy of the whims of people whose selfish agendas are central to power struggles in churches.

Several newspaper articles have attempted to give the history of the Mugodhi Apostolic Faith Church. Scholarly articles have captured leadership and succession wrangles of many churches in Zimbabwe, especially the Apostolic Faith Mission. The Mugodhi Apostolic Faith Church was founded by the late Bishop Elijah Mugodhi, father to Tadewu Mugodhi. As alluded to above, Tadewu Mugodhi is the one alleged to have appointed his son, Washington as his successor. This church was a breakaway movement from the Apostolic Faith Church (AFC), of which Mugodhi was originally a member. Mugodhi left the AFC after he had been prohibited from marrying a second wife as per the church's anti-polygamy

9 Ruzivo M. 2014. "Succession debates in the Johane Marange African Apostolic Church -An analysis of Contemporary developments in an old movement", in Chitando E, Gunda MR and Kügler J (eds). *Multiplying in the Spirit: African Initiated Churches in Zimbabwe,* vol 15. Bamberg: University of Bamberg Press, 26.

https://doi.org/10.52779/9781991260888

laws. There were also disagreements over church beliefs besides polygamy, such as accessing medical drugs from hospitals and the immunisation of children. Mugodhi's departure further splintered the AFC, and as many as four factions of the Apostolic Faith Church came into being. To date, many more wrangles and splits have emerged. After Elijah Mugodhi, the following leaders came into being, Chakuwinga, Chikwenha, Mabvuwiwa—then Tadewu Mugodhi. This information was also corroborated by the two key informants of this study, who are in the church leadership. From this background, the chapter argues that leadership and succession disputes affect the smooth running of the church. This calls for the need to have proper church constitutions and supporting documents that clearly outline succession issues to avoid future wrangles.

The present study was guided by the following questions: (1) what were the leadership disputes that emerged over the years within the church, (2) in what ways have these leadership disputes affected worship in the church and (3) how has the law intervened to deal with the leadership and power disputes? To examine these questions, we conducted interviews and focus group discussions to uncover perceptions of the congregants on how disputes affect the church as far as peace and development are concerned. The study consisted of fifteen interviews with church members, including two church leaders, who were the key informants of the study. Two focus group discussions were conducted, with six and seven participants, respectively. The participants were purposively selected with members who had been in the church for at least twenty years. Informed consent and voluntary participation were sought. Names and interview locations were withheld to uphold confidentiality. Most participants used Shona, an indigenous language of Zimbabwe. Selected newspaper articles ranging from the period 2019 to 2022 were analysed to examine how the church disputes were depicted in the media and with the goal of discussing how the law intervened in addressing the leadership and power disputes.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: PEACE AND VIOLENCE

This study is largely informed by sociologist Johan Galtung's conceptions of peace and violence. Galtung argues that there indeed is a relationship between violence and peace, but it is always necessary to define violence first.[10] We adopted Galtung's conceptions for this study specifically to demonstrate the importance of peace in any society. The fact that Galtung unpacks an understanding of peace from the perspective of violence assists us in situating this study in the context of larger societal issues associated with church leadership and power wrangles as shall be demonstrated later in this chapter. In Galtung's view, violence has the effect of people failing to reach their physical and mental potential as a result of factors ranging from economic challenges and wars to ideological pressures and threats. Galtung further elaborates that "a culture of peace is a culture that promotes peace,

10 Galtung J. 1969. "Violence, peace, and peace research", *Journal of Peace Research* 6(3):167-168.

https://doi.org/10.52779/9781991260888

and peace can be understood in a number of ways, as it impacts so many aspects of life. First, peace is to violence what health is to disease. It can exist within a person or group. A person can be healthy in the same way that a person, group, a state or a civilization can be peaceful. Peace also exists between persons, groups and so on, so peace is a form of love."[11] The observation above points to the relationship between peace and violence. What is more, Galtung further elects to define peace as a form of love. Anchored upon this conceptualisation of peace, our paper reiterates the critical role that churches play as they deal with people at grassroots levels. This peace-based theory therefore assists in describing how religious conflicts can also contribute to instability at higher levels.

Understanding leadership wrangles from Galtung's theory greatly assisted in describing how disputes at church level can also feed into larger constituencies thereby affecting other fabrics of fostering peace in Zimbabwean communities. According to Zimbabwean theologians, Ezra Chitando, Beatrice Taringa and Tapiwa Praise Mapuranga, "Although the phenomenology of religion has been criticised for failure to clarify its identity, there is agreement on its descriptive stance. This enables phenomenologists of religion to achieve their commitment to understanding religious phenomena in context, as they are lived, using context derived terms and categories."[12] In resonance with this assertion, we uphold the view that this phenomenology, even though with its own weaknesses, was best suited for this study because of its capacity to enable an understanding of lived experiences.

Borrowing from Galtung's notions of peace and violence helps to identify the roles that churches play in maintaining peace as well as addressing areas that might need to be dealt with in the promotion of peace. Of significance to this study is how the definitions speak to the relevance of peace and therefore link us to the role that church leaders have played, are playing and will play in ensuring sustainable peace. This theoretical lens helps us to read and understand the effects of leadership and succession disputes on congregants. Understanding the church disputes through an appreciation of violence and peace will assist in proffering sustainable solutions to the ongoing wrangles. Galtung's conceptions of peace and violence to help explicate issues.[13] Adopting Galtung's theory on the conceptions of peace and violence, this study adds a strand towards academic discussions on the intersections between the church and the law in handling disputes.[14]

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11 Galtung J and Fisher D. 2013. "What is a culture of peace and what are the obstacles?", in Galtung J and Fisher D (eds) *Johan Galtung: Pioneer of Peace Research*. Berlin: Springer,151-155.

12 Chitando E, Taringa NT and Mapuranga TP. 2014. "On top of which mountain does one stand to judge religion? Debates from a Zimbabwean context", *Journal for the Study of Religion* 27(2):115-136.

13 Galtung, "Violence, peace, and peace research".

14 See Galtung, "Violence, peace, and peace research"; Galtung, Peace, positive and negative".

https://doi.org/10.52779/9781991260888

CONGREGANT PERCEPTIONS OF LEADERSHIP AND POWER DISPUTES IN THE MUGHODI APOSTOLIC FAITH CHURCH

Zimbabwean theologian Vengesai Chimininge tenders that "religion values and imposes rules about how we ought to relate to one another and helps us come to grips with where we think we fit in the world".[15] Chimininge's assertion is critical in this discussion as it expresses the role that religion plays among societies. Religion should unite, rather than divide people among communities. Where it then fails and disputes and misunderstandings occur, the law must intervene to maintain peace and order in the church. What follows is a discussion of the information gathered from the interviews and focus group discussions with members of the Mugodhi Apostolic Faith Church.

In response to the question, "how did the disputes emerge," the participants cited their leaders' autocratic leadership styles and insatiable appetite for power as the leading causes of the disputes. Participants in this focus group discussion were intensely aware of the disputes in the church. They further expressed how they were negatively affected by these disputes, especially when the disputes would manifest when they were least expected. Church members wanted to worship and benefit from the teachings as usual, but it became difficult to worship in the midst of these conflicts. The other issue which was consistently raised by many participants who expressed it in the Shona language is that, "*Iyi ndiyo chechi yatakaberekerwa, hazvigone kuisiya. Inhaka yatakasiirwa nemadzibaba. Hatina imwe chechi yatinoziva*."[16] This is translated to say that this is the only church they know since birth—it is an inheritance that they cannot just let go of. This shows how affected these congregants were, as they could not find an alternative church. These sentiments express how participants all agreed that they were very much committed to their church since most of them were born in the church.

The interviews for this study were carried out based on the role played by religion in society as alluded to by Chimininge, who writes that "religion is one of the strongest components of social cohesion components of social identity."[17] Significant to note is how the disputes did not emerge from this smaller sect, but whatever power wrangles happen in the church affects even the smaller congregations. These congregants expressed how the leadership disputes negatively affected their way of worship. This meant that the struggles at the top cascaded to impact the outlier congregations, which sometimes had no idea of the issues under dispute.

One participant mentioned how they had looked forward to the church conference at the church's headquarters in Wedza, only to leave the place without having been given any information regarding the long anticipated annual pilgrimage. The conference lost its sacred nature, as congregants witnessed their church elders

15 Chimininge V. 2021. Ecumenical Ingenuities as Instrumental Political Tool of Conflict Transformation in Zimbabwe's New Dispensation", *Religious dialogue and cooperation* 2:37-53.

16 Focus Group Discussion with S Matanga, at a selected assembly in Mashonaland East Province, Zimbabwe, 24 March 2024.

17 Chimininge, "Ecumenical Ingenuities as Instrumental Political Tool".

https://doi.org/10.52779/9781991260888

fighting. Another participant reported that these disputes resulted in a wastage of resources, stating, *"Imbofungai wabhadhara mari yako yemusangano wodzoka usina kuwana zvawafambira uye zvawanga wakatarisira. Itori loss chaiyo."* (Imagine after paying money to cover the expenses for attending the conference and you just go back home without receiving any concrete information regarding logistics. It is indeed a loss.)[18] Another critical setback of church disputes, centred around which leader to follow, is how it brings divisions in the church between formerly close associates. To this end, one of the participants also highlighted that it had become common to hear some members of the Mugodhi Apostolic Faith Church saying, "*Ini ndiri wekwanhingi*," (I belong to this faction).[19] This often led to members of different factions distancing themselves from other members aligned to the other factions.

Violence was also cited as one of the challenges that come with leadership and succession disputes. When the competing leaders fail to resolve their conflicts, they resort to violence, which in turn hurts ordinary congregants, as was the case at the Chitope shrine.[20] Following the physical and violent attacks at the church shrine, one participant lamented, "*Zvechechi izvi zvinogona kuuraya munhu*." (These church controversies can lead to one's death.)[21] Violence has also led to the destruction of valuable church property. Church disputes bring confusion and fear amongst congregants. To buttress this idea, another participant said, *"Ukaudza vanhu kuti ndinoenda kwaMugodhi vanokubvunza kuti ipi yacho?"* (If you tell people that I am a Mugodhi congregant, they will ask you which faction you belong to?)[22] This shows that even people who are outsiders in this church know of the power wrangles in Mugodhi Apostolic Faith Church.

Another participant narrated how some of the conflicts had bigger implications on congregants' lives, sometimes even costing them their lives at times when leaders were fighting over paths to follow and who to follow. The participant observed, "It is sad how we lost our relatives to diseases that could have been treated at the local clinics, but this was later abolished, are we going to bring back our loved ones to life?"[23] The participant was referring to conflicting ideas with regards to accessing medical help from the hospitals for the sick. This was one of the major causes of

18 Interview with Mrs Z, a church lady, by S Matanga, at a selected assembly in Mashonaland East Province Zimbabwe, 13 March 2024.

19 Interview with, Mr B, church member, by S Matanga, at a selected assembly in Mashonaland East Province, Zimbabwe, 26 March 2024.

20 The violence which erupted at the Chitope Shrine, the headquarters of the Mugodhi Apostolic Faith Church in Wedza, Zimbabwe, was a result of the clash of the two warring factions. For more information on this, See Mashonaland East Bureau. "Mugodhi Church factions fight at shrine." (2022). The Herald, 17 February

21 Interview with Ms P, church member by S Matanga, at a selected assembly in Mashonaland East Province, Zimbabwe, 13 March 2024.

22 Interview with Mr J, church elder by S Matanga, at a selected assembly in Mashonaland East Province, Zimbabwe, 21 March 2024.

23 Interview with, Mr V, church member by S Matanga, at a selected assembly in Mashonaland East Province, Zimbabwe, 27 March 2024.

https://doi.org/10.52779/9781991260888

disputes and splits that occurred within the church, as some church elders were against the idea of receiving medical treatment. The participant further lamented how they suffered as mere congregants in ways that resulted in loss of lives. This fact resonates with peace and conflict specialist Norman Chivasa's assertion that some conflicts, in the end, can be positive, as they bring change in the church for the betterment of congregants' livelihoods. In Chivasa's analysis, "conflict resolution training is a valuable investment for the church and must be supported if the church is to help create harmony and growth".[24] The response above shows how the ordinary congregants were affected by the disputes among their leaders. Had the leaders agreed on use of biomedical interventions, some of the splits could have been avoided and many lives would have been saved. It is therefore clear that there are some problems which can be avoided if the church is united. Religion and gender scholar Manyonganise, also critiques how members of the African Apostolic Churches, like the Johane Marange sect, are prohibited from seeking modern medical solutions, based on religious beliefs and practices.[25]

Finally, on church members' perceptions of leadership disputes, one member had this to say: "In our church, there is a song that we sing which says, *'Chechi dzemweya dzine runyararo.'* (Apostolic Churches are endowed with peace and peaceful relations) and *'Rudo rwaJesu rwatisanganisa.'* (The love of Jesus has brought us together)."[26] The song speaks of love and unity that is derived from Jesus, who was the greatest example of love. The question then is where the disputes are coming from within the church, where peace and love must thrive. This participant emphasises the need to shun violence and conflicts in religious denominations for the church to achieve its goal and mandate in line with what Jesus would do.

These squabbles and their effects take on added significance when viewed within the larger Zimbabwean environment, where there is serious economic decline and therefore greater need for the church's intervention to maintain peace and help those in serious need. Leadership styles and qualities become important entities in this regard, as espoused by recreational theologians, Vhumani Magezi, Osward Sichula and Patrick Nanthambwe.[27] Two church leaders who we interviewed were also affected by the disputes that happened within the church's national leadership. One of the church leaders stated: "In this district, we have agreed not to be involved in the conflicts that happen at national level. We have since decided to just worship peacefully without really taking note of the disputes between our founders."[28] It became clear that the church leaders were also tired of being

24 Chivasa N. 2021. "Managing Conflict in Faith-Based Organizations in Zimbabwe", in Fahed-Sreih J (ed). *Organizational Conflict-New Insights*. London: IntechOpen.

25 Manyonganise M. 2023. *Daring patriarchy? A biblical engagement with gender discourses on political participation in post-colonial Zimbabwe*. Bamberg: University of Bamberg Press.

26 Interview with Mrs V, church lady, by S Matanga, at a selected assembly in Mashonaland East Province, Zimbabwe, 17 March 2024.

27 Magezi V, Sichula OP and Nanthambwe P. 2023, "The organisational life cycle principles applied to leadership practices in growing churches", *Theologia Viatorum* 47(1):a202.

28 Interview with Mr T, church leader, by S Matanga, Zimbabwe, 21 March 2024.

https://doi.org/10.52779/9781991260888

derailed by the conflicts that emerged, especially when the followers were focused on developing the church at their level. To support the above contention, African political scientists Sabelo Ndlovhu-Gatsheni and Everisto Benyera, in advocating for the establishment of a reconciliation commission in Zimbabwe, emphasise the role of the church in peacebuilding projects as they argue that "by authenticating the work of the truth commission, faith-based organisations, in a way, encourage their members to support such institutions". [29] Regarding the role of churches, they further maintain, "At a more practical level, they can assist with logistical issues as venues, personnel, counsellors and even financial resources."[30] If the church is not bound by unity, then it cannot be eligible to participate in larger national causes of bringing peace. If the church is disjointed, as is the case with violent attacks and fights at the church shrine, it will be difficult for the church to offer its resources to help in development.

From the interactions with congregants, it emerged that the leadership disputes had caused such chaos, that for most of these congregants, their focus was now on the local church structure and their allegiance to the local bishop. Another participant from the focus group discussion had to this to say, "*Mufundisi ndivo vangatoziva zvakawanda. Isu tangova vapindi vechechi hatina zvatichaziva.*" (Please ask the local pastor, as he is the one who knows about most of these things. As for us we are just ordinary churchgoers who are not privy to some of the discussions and disagreements at the higher echelons of power.)[31] Clearly, some of the elderly congregants no longer have information and knowledge of these factional struggles and power changes. It becomes a challenge when members no longer know the history of their church. Whatever knowledge they used to have about the church seems invalid to them. As it stands, there are Mugodhi factions at Chitope Shrine in Wedza. One participant expressed how these church disputes have affected them at family level when they do not worship under the same church, for example, a husband who stays in town and has a wife in the rural area but with the two worshipping at different factions. This is how complicated the disputes are.

As is common with many other indigenous churches in Zimbabwe, women are often excluded when it comes to leadership positions in the church. One of the key informants highlighted that women were not involved in the leadership or larger decision-making processes of the church except when participating in women's programmes. Such a gender-biased stance has been critiqued by Manyonganise, who argues that if Zimbabwe is to prosper, there is need for gender inclusion and gender parity.[32] The involvement of women in whatever happens in the church is

29 Ndlovu-Gatsheni S and Benyera E. 2015. "Towards a framework for resolving the justice and reconciliation question in Zimbabwe", *African Journal on Conflict Resolution* 15(2):26.

30 Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Benyera. "Towards a framework for resolving the justice and reconciliation question in Zimbabwe", 26.

31 Focus Group Discussion by S Matanga, Zimbabwe, 24 March 2024.

32 Manyonganise M. 2015. *The church, national healing and reconciliation in Zimbabwe: A womanist perspective on churches in Manicaland (CIM)*. Pretoria: University of Pretoria.

https://doi.org/10.52779/9781991260888

critical, as in most cases women bear the brunt of misfortunes.[33] Involving women addresses the societal challenges that women often face in terms of finding solace, hope and affirmation in a religious environment. Engaging with the congregants also revealed how there are also many factions of the same church within the town, and that these are now under different bishops. The churches even have different uniforms.

INTERVENTIONS OF THE LAW TO SETTLE CHURCH DISPUTES

Norman Chivasa, a peace and conflict resolution specialist, is of the view that faith-based organisations should appreciate the importance of conflict for growth, as "this perspective demonstrates a shift from the unschooled and myopic view that regarded conflict as a vice to human survival yet when better managed it provides the opportunity to learn more about people's needs, values and rights".[34] Indeed, on the surface, this stands to scrutiny and Mugodhi congregants have highlighted how leadership strife has sometimes led to the emergence of leaders who have allowed them to seek medical treatment thus helping to save them and their families' lives. Still, this perception of conflict from a positive light does not undercut our standpoint in this chapter that conflict brings mostly divisions in church organisations. It takes time for the church to embrace conflicts positively, hence the need to avoid conflicting views from the onset, especially when they stem from leadership and power misunderstandings and especially when they are about personal benefits of the leadership. In this section, we explore how the law deals with these leadership wrangles among the Mugodhi Apostolic Faith Church congregants in efforts to end the incessant succession disputes in the church.

In a bid to address the prevalence of conflicts and disputes in the church, Molly Manyonganise and Lillian Mhuru assert that, "while the fact of freedom of religion still subsists, religions need to subject themselves to the dictates of the laws of countries they find themselves in".[35] This submission is forged on the need for the law to intervene when disputes emerge and on the fact that the law sometimes offers protection against the conflicts even starting. As is clear in the Mugodhi case, churches always struggle to solve their conflicts internally, and the law needs to intervene for peace and for the larger good of the church in this case.

Journalistic accounts of the Mugodhi Apostolic Faith Church struggles reveal that the church did not have a proper constitution governing its operations. On 9 December 2019, the *Chronicle* newspaper published an article titled "Mugodhi

33 Chirongoma S. 2021. "Voices from the margins: Religio-cultural perspectives of women, children and the elderly amidst the Tokwe-Mukosi Dam displacements in Zimbabwe", in Chirongoma S and Mongo E (eds) *Mother earth, postcolonial and liberation theologies*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield/Lexington Books, 151-170.

34 Chivasa, "Managing Conflict in Faith-Based Organizations in Zimbabwe", 79.

35 Manyonganise M and Mhuru L. 2023. "Religion, Culture and Health in Zimbabwe", in Beyers J (ed) *What Has Religion Studies in Africa Been Up To?: Relevant Themes and Topics*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 165.

https://doi.org/10.52779/9781991260888

Apostolic sect faces fresh divisions".[36] This was followed by an article titled "Mugodhi Apostolic Faith Church war rages on" that was published by the same newspaper on 25 December 2019 and stated, "Following the death of Tadewu in October, Reverend Reverend Tony Sigauke, is now angling to snatch power from Tadewu's son, Washington Mugodhi, who had succeeded him."[37] These newspaper articles highlight how the death of Tadewu in 2019 fuelled succession disputes. The media captures how Sigauke was intent on snatching power from Washington Mugodhi, who is said to have been anointed by his father as the rightful successor. Sigauke died in November 2024 at the age of 88. In response, one leader explained how there was need to have the constitution issue resolved.

The ongoing leadership dispute seemed to continue attracting the media's attention. Some years later, on 17 February 2022, the *Herald* newspaper online published an article with the headline, "Mugodhi church factions fight at shrine",[38] followed by another on 11 September 2022 referencing the "Mugodhi church leadership wrangle" and highlighting how Reverend Sigauke, who was contesting the takeover of the church by Washington Mugodhi had appealed in the courts to stop Washington's ascension.[39] Sigauke's court application was dismissed, however, on the basis that the courts found he had "no *locus standi* to bring the present application".[40]

On 22 September 2022, the *Zimbabwe Independent* newspaper captured the raging disputes and this time focus was on another claimant to the leadership and as the newspaper reported in the story titled "Mugodhi church wrangle set for full trial", which noted, "Aaron Munodawafa is leading a faction contesting the way Washington, who has his own followers, assumed leadership of the church, resulting in the matter spilling to the courts."[41] This news account clearly reveals the ugly head of the leadership dispute, and the diction rightly emphasises how the disputes have reached a level that the church cannot solve but requires the intervention of the law. To this effect, the newspaper, quoting from the courts, revealed, "With these divergent positions by the parties, where one says there is a written constitution and the other says there is no written constitution and attacks what is referred to in the said written constitution, I am persuaded that there is a material dispute of facts which requires the adducing of viva voce evidence to resolve it."[42]

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36 Netsianda, "Mugodhi Apostolic Church faces fresh divisions".

37 Netsianda M. 2019. Mugodhi Faith Apostolic Church War rages on", Nehanda Radio 25 December.

38 Mashonaland East Bureau. 2022. "Mugodhi Church factions fight at shrine", *The Herald*, 17 February.

39 Mandizha RJ. 2021. "Mugodhi Church Leadership Wrangle. High Court Dismisses Sigauke's High Court Application", iHarare.com, 11 September.

40 Mandizha, "Mugodhi Church Leadership Wrangle".

41 Muchabaiwa T. 2022. "Mugodhi leadership wrangle set for full trial", *The Independent*, 22 September.

42 Muchabaiwa T. 2022. "Mugodhi leadership wrangle set for full trial", Zimbabwe Independent, 22 September.

https://doi.org/10.52779/9781991260888

The courts directed that the involved parties proposed rely on an agreed-upon constitution to resolve the conflict. As reflected in the above statement, there was confusion as to whether the constitution was there or not, as well as on the authenticity of the said constitution. This position shows that when disputes arise within the church, courts of law can be consulted to avoid further disputes and are best placed to give direction and enforceable decisions—something which rival parties will never achieve on their own. While this approach can last years and even lifetimes, there is the hope that the courts and the law can at least bring some peace and even sanity to the church. Nigerian law and religion scholars Wahab Egbewole and Hanafi Hammed have also highlighted the importance of the judicial system in settling disputes.[43]

The analysis by Zimbabwean theologians Gift Masengwe and Bekithemba Dube of constitutional conflicts in the Church of Christ in Zimbabwe posits that conflict is inevitable.[44] This is because wherever there are people, they are bound to disagree. An analysis of the media articles has revealed how the church took its conflicts to court. The courts ordered for proper documents especially the draft constitution to be brought for analysis. This means that engaging the law was also a way of bringing the disputes to the attention of many as well as a call for the law to intervene to find some solutions to the conflicts. The major takeaway was the emphasis on the need for a constitution that governs all church operations.

CONCLUSION

Using the congregants in the selected assembly as research participants, the focus of this study was to explore power and leadership disputes within the Mugodhi Apostolic Faith Church, together with the effects of these struggles within the church and in the larger society. An analysis of the findings of this study has revealed that even when there are no recent wrangles, the past wrangles still affect the congregants, hence, the need to heal from the traumas associated with power wrangles. The study therefore concludes that there is need for the law to provide a fair ground for all actors for the promotion of peace, not just in the Mugodhi Apostolic Faith Church, which is the case study for this paper, but for the sake of promoting peace in the nation at large. This chapter has endeavoured to outline how leadership disputes can affect the smooth running of a church. Not only does it disrupt church operations, but it also fuels hatred, which in turn can lead to unending, recurring disputes or even to death. There is a need for the church to have a proper working constitution that governs the church on leadership and succession. If the church is divided, then church activities are also disrupted. Lastly, the study recommends the inclusion of women in the key leadership and decision-making

43 Egbewole WO and Hammed HA 2018. "Curbing religious extremism of Boko Haram Insurgency in Nigeria", in Green MC, Gunn TJ and Hill M (eds) *Religion, Law and Security in Africa*. Stellenbosch: African Sun Media, 3-19.

44 Masengwe G and Dube B. 2023. "Patterning Constitutional Conflicts in the Church of Christ in Zimbabwe", *E-Journal of Religious & Theological Studies (ERATS)* 9(6):206-220.

https://doi.org/10.52779/9781991260888

forums of the church. The discussion of findings based on the representations of the church disputes, particularly in the news media, clearly revealed that women are excluded from the Mugodhi Apostolic Faith Church's top leadership.

https://doi.org/10.52779/9781991260888