

On *pfukwa/mhvuko* and the Ndaus Christian Dilemma: A Case of the United Church of Christ in Zimbabwe (UCCZ)

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journals.sagepub.com/home/jas**Macloud Sipeyiye** 

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Abstract

The article engages with the notion of *pfukwa/mhvuko* (avenging spirits) among the Ndaus Christians using the case study of the United Church of Christ in Zimbabwe (UCCZ). The study was motivated by a recurring question among some members of UCCZ on the phenomenon of the avenging spirits and the plight of the Ndaus Christians. The article argues that the Ndaus Christian converts are not immune to the effects of the avenging spirits in the metaphysical spaces of the Ndaus because of the elaborate notion of collective existence (*unthu/ubuntu*) that defines the Ndaus identity. The article unpacks the notion of *pfukwa/mhvuko* and its embeddedness in the whole matrix of Ndauness that does not spare the converted Ndaus. The article is both a theoretical and empirical qualitative phenomenological enquiry that employs the netnographic research design. It uses the UCCZ WhatsApp social media microblogging site *Eya Eya Haiwa Haiwa*, to gather data through seminar (group) presentations and discussions. The article utilizes discourse analysis to filter data. It also engages with available relevant literature on the subject. The article uses two theoretical frameworks of *unthu/ubuntu*, and Goffman's back and front stage theory to traverse the *pfukwa/mhvuko* phenomenon among the Ndaus. The findings are that the Ndaus notion of *pfukwa/mhvuko* is an existential metaphysical reality among both the Ndaus practitioners of indigenous spirituality and Ndaus Christians. The study recommends an authentic dialogue between the two spiritualities to build a contextually relevant Christian doctrine of *pfukwa/mhvuko*. It also raises the challenges that may stifle progress on the recommended trajectory.

Keywords

Avenging spirits, back and front stage theory, Ndaus indigenous spirituality, netnography, UCCZ, social media, *unthu/ubuntu*

Introduction

The article is a culmination of a seminar discussion that was hosted by *Eya Eya Haiwa Haiwa*, the United Church of Christ in Zimbabwe (UCCZ)-related WhatsApp social media group on 3 September 2022. The group is a no holds barred 'congregational free dialogic platform for religious, economic, and socio-political engagement' (*Eya Eya Haiwa Haiwa* Group description

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2019). The platform hosts regular seminar series on topical issues in the church and society. The discussion was prompted by a recurring question on *pfukwa/mhvuko* (avenging spirits), a phenomenon of the Ndaun indigenous spirituality and where the Ndaun Christian converts stand in the whole matrix. The church has always responded to crises of various dimensions and sizes including natural disasters and economic, ethical and moral issues affecting individuals, institutions and society at large. However, the context of *pfukwa/mhvuko*, a social and religio-cultural issue, has exposed the inadequacies of the church in the authentic cultural context of its members. I was invited to share views from an academic perspective on this phenomenon and the plight of the Ndaun Christians therein. The discussion ran under the topic: Christianity and the avenging spirit (*ngozi*)! Are Christians immune or how can they deal with it? I have decided to substitute the term *ngozi* in this article with the more appropriate Ndaun terms, *pfukwa* and/or *mhvuko*. The article argues that the Ndaun Christian converts are not immune to the effects of the avenging spirits in the metaphysical spaces of the Ndaun because of the elaborate notion of collective existence (*unthu/ubuntu*) that defines the Ndaun socio-religio-cultural and political identity. The advent of Western civilization and European missionaries in the early 20th century trashed the issue of *pfukwa/mhvuko* and never fully engaged with it in a biblically sound, culturally effective and responsive manner. The Ndaun Christian converts were taught that the new religion did not subscribe to the belief in the power and influence of dead people's spirits neither as spirit elders, alien spirits nor avenging spirits (Konyana and Konyana, 2018). The religio-cultural practice of appeasing avenging spirits was condemned as unchristian, throwing the Ndaun into a quandary as they were to choose between two equally compelling belief systems. Therefore, the church ministers, particularly those belonging to mainline churches in general and UCCZ in particular, have been ineffective in addressing the crises of *pfukwa/mhvuko*; they have failed to assist the affected people practically. When the Ndaun, like any other Bantu societies in Southern Africa, encounter *pfukwa/Mhvuko* and other dire existential crises where the Christian faith fails to give an adequate response, they would revert to the values of the foundational spirituality of their forefathers (Chitando, 2018; Mbiti, 1975). Thus, the Ndaun are inextricably bound within their indigenous worldview regardless of their affiliation to an alternative spiritual orientation. The article seeks to do three things, that is, to unpack the notion of *pfukwa/mhvuko*, and examine its embeddedness in the whole matrix of Ndaunness. In the first task, it discusses the concept of *pfukwa/mhvuko*, provide their typologies and different ways of invoking them. The second task examines the *modus operandi* of *pfukwa/mhvuko*. The task will take us into answering the question of the vulnerability of every member of the victim family including the converted Ndaun members to the ravages of *pfukwa/mhvuko* and the need for an obligatory collective responsibility to find remedy through reconciliation rituals. The third task focuses on the need to look for potential sites for building an authentic Ndaun Christian response to *pfukwa/mhvuko* that is both biblically sound and compliant to the concrete lived realities of the Ndaun. It will also tackle the challenges involved in this endeavour.

Theoretical framework

The article is underpinned by two theoretical frameworks, that is, *unthu*, a Ndaun language version of the African principle of ubuntu and Goffman's (1959) 'back and front stage theory' derived from his dramaturgical model. *Unthu/Ubuntu* reflects the capacity in African cultures to express compassion, reciprocity, dignity, humanity and mutuality in the interest of building and maintaining communities with justice and mutual caring. More importantly, *unthu/ubuntu* is not limited to apply to the living people only, it also points to the power within persons living or dead who are integral elements of the cosmic totality of the Bantu (Konyana and Konyana, 2018). It is generally believed that in pre-colonial African societies, the concept of *unthu/ubuntu* was instrumental in

sustaining social cohesion, managing peace and order for the good life of everyone in the society, including strangers and passersby (Chisale, 2020). In this regard, the unthubu/ubuntu theory informs this study as it seeks for ways to build a cultural evaluative base to situate and confront issues of the threat of *pfukwa/mhvuko* among the Ndaus Christians in Zimbabwe. Goffman's theory, on the other hand, avers that how we present ourselves in the public (front stage) is not an adequate reflection of who we are. The presentation is often intended to portray an image that we think will make a positive impression on those around us. The real 'us' comes when we are alone (back stage). So, the issue is that human public actions, including our expressions of religiosity, are often misleading, overdramatized and almost gravitating towards pretence. All of life may be construed as drama. The theory helps in analysing data that point to the inevitable double standards and/or henotheistic tendencies of Ndaus Christians in moments of crises that life often throws at them including the threat of *pfukwa/mhvuko* that 'is healed lightly' in the UCCZ's context.

Methodology

The article is both a theoretical and empirical qualitative phenomenological enquiry that employed the netnographic research design and a review of available literature on the subject of avenging spirits among the Ndaus. The rationale for the choice of the research design lies in that the study deals with the social phenomena of religion and culture, that require a qualitative methodological approach that is interpretive and constructivist in nature. The goal was to analyse the concept of *pfukwa/mhvuko* through the interpretation of the lived experiences of the researched community within their prevailing concrete religious and socio-cultural contexts. The study is a netnographic study of the conceptions and experiences of the Ndaus Christians with *pfukwa/mhvuko* through an analysis of views shared in the presentations and discussions on the subject on the social media WhatsApp platform. Netnography is a research blueprint that entails the online adaptation of ethnography, that is, a technique of performing systematic ethnographic studies on online communication networks by combining archival work and observation (Sipeyiye and Mpofu, 2022). The article used discourse analysis to filter the views of participants in the presentations and discussions. The researcher also made a follow-up on individual participants in their inboxes with their consent for further clarification on issues arising from the discussion.

Sampling

The *Eya Eya Haiwa Haiwa* WhatsApp social media group had a membership of 265 by then. The group comprises largely UCCZ membership and friends located in all corners of Zimbabwe. The platform space is often described by its members as 'a hard hat area' because of its candid commitment to diversity of views on matters discussed; agreeing on some issues and agreeing to differ on others without fear or favour. In fact, this is what the name of the group means. In this regard, the group falls within the 'back stage' of the Goffmanian categorization. It is not an official structure of the church. Therefore, the platform affords the ordinary members a unique space to engage on matters affecting the church in particular and society in general freely and independently. The clergy and lay leaders participate in the group like anyone else. They either air their views in their individual capacities or clarify issues raised or defend the church position where they feel it is unfairly criticized.

Approximately 98% of the strong 265 membership are of Ndaus ethnic origin linked to Chipinge. The discussions were held on 3 September 2022 from 19:00 to 21:00 hours. The time slot was deliberately chosen to ensure a reasonably fair presence and participation of group members after work. Forty members of the group, constituting 15% of the entire membership, actively

participated in discussions. Forty percent (40%) of the group ‘were in the terraces’, a phrase used in the group to refer to members who follow the proceedings passively without making any contributions to the subject under discussion. The other 45% of the membership was either offline or they had challenges with their gadgets. The active membership had a fair representation of the cross section of the UCCZ membership. The participants included the former top clergy and lay leadership of the church, the clergy and lay leaders in various churches in the three conferences then, of the UCCZ. I have chosen to maintain their names and offices anonymous for confidentiality purposes. The participants included members of the Women Council (Ruwadzano), Council of the Volunteers, (VMC) and Council of the Youth (CYF). The group represented a fair balance of gender, age with a rich mix of office and former office bearers and the grassroots believing communities of UCCZ whose concrete authentic experiences were key in the research. The minimum educational qualification was ordinary level and the maximum was a doctorate degree. English and Ndaue were the languages used in the discussion. The composition of the group is quite convenient since it involved opinion leaders and powerful voices that influence policy on church and leadership issues in the church. These people were important in the discussion for they are key in the interpretation of the beliefs and practices of the church on avenging spirits. I also employed snow-ball sampling where participants in the discussion referred me to other people who could potentially participate in or contribute to the study. The researcher was invited by the group administrators and the group was ready to engage in the discussion to enrich their appreciation of the encounter between Christianity and the Ndaue indigenous metaphysical phenomenon of *pfukwa/mhvuko*. The researcher was committed to observing the ethical norms in qualitative research that include confidentiality, privacy and anonymity (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). Thus, the researcher used alpha-numerical codes instead of the actual names of the participants to maintain their anonymity and confidentiality, for example, FCL, MY, FY, RR1 VM1 and VF2 for Former Clergy Leader, Male Youth, Female Youth, Woman Council 1, Volunteer Male 1 and Volunteer Female 2, respectively.

The Ndaue of south-eastern Zimbabwe

The present-day Ndaue people occupy the south-eastern parts of Zimbabwe, concentrated specifically in the two districts of Chipinge and Chimanimani in Manicaland Province. They also sprawl into the central and western parts of Mozambique (Sipeyiye, 2023). It is not by coincidence that they are often identified as one large community that stride the international boundary (Patricio, 2011). Today the Ndaue find themselves in new geo-cultural contexts within their countries and in the diaspora through migration triggered by many factors. Regardless, they have maintained close links and are socially, religiously, economically and politically united. The Ndaue prize the institution of *mphuri* (family) which they conceive as a web of relationships that goes beyond the living beings to include the living dead as well as inanimate elements comprising the environment (Sipeyiye, 2020). At the core of the Ndaue indigenous beliefs and cultural practices is the belief in ancestral spirits or spirit elders or guardian spirits (*midzimu*) that are connected with the spirit world (Pfukwa, 2001). They also believe in *pfukwa/mhvuko* (avenging spirits) that often torment the family in search of compensation. The family spirit elders would not proffer protection against the avenging spirit for they desire justice to be observed by their living kin. The spiritual world is in constant touch with the physical. The *Ukama* (kinship) concept touches on the family relatedness and communal belonging that has kept the Ndaue family much the same as it was before colonization (Konyana, 2018). The Ndaue family is patriarchal. The most senior male member is the leader of the extended or connected family. He is the family advisor on all matters of life and a rapporteur between the living and the living dead. The Ndaue belief system and cultural practices compel them to come together and share in all their problems and difficulties because they ought

to constantly consult the *midzimu* together for solutions to social problems including appeasement, if need be, of either the angered spirit elders or avenging spirits (Sipeyiye, 2022). The close of the 19th century saw the convergence of the American Board Missionaries with the Ndaun indigenous locals in Chipinge.

UCCZ and the early Ndaun converts in Chipinge

The UCCZ, formerly American Board Mission in Rhodesia, is a congregational Christian denomination in Zimbabwe that traces its routes to the United States. It was established by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Mission (ABCFM) at Mount Selinda in Chipinge, south-eastern Zimbabwe, on 19 October 1893. The ABCFM itself had been formed on 5 September 1810 in Boston, Massachusetts, with a clear mandate to spearhead the spreading of the Good News of Christ to the whole world (The Recent History of UCCZ, 2013). The ABCFM was granted a charter in 1812 to send missionaries to the whole world, thus making the first Missionary Society in the United States. The ABCFM first had contact with Zululand before expanding further north to land a space for mission work in Gazaland courtesy of Cecil John Rhodes' interest in the board's evangelism and industrial training (The Recent History of UCCZ, 2013). The pioneering team of white missionaries of Rev and Mrs Wilder and their two children, Dr and Mrs Thompson, Mr and Mrs Bunker, Mr Bates and Zulu evangelists with their families landed at Mount Selinda from Durban Natal, on 19 October 1893. The evangelists were Mr and Mrs T. Zonzo Cele, Mr and Mrs. Laduma Njapa, Mr and Mrs. Lijah Hlanti and Mrs. Henry Mbese, Mjadu Shabane and Bangizwe Ndwandwe (Sithole and Maseko, 2023). The Zulu entourage was a critical cog because of its invaluable translation services since Zulu was the language of the people. The ABCFM later transformed to become the United Church Board for World Ministries (UCBWM) before it assumed yet another identity as Global Ministries constituted of the United Church of Christ and the Disciples of Christ which both found in the United States. The UCCZ is an affiliate of a number of local, regional and international ecumenical movements and bodies. It is a founding member in most of the bodies. These include the Global Ministries, World Council of Churches, All Africa Council of Churches, Ukama Partnership and a number of local ecumenical partners that include ZCC, United Theological College and Rusitu Bible College (The Recent History of UCCZ, 2013).

The convergence of the American missionaries and Africans, that is, the Ndaun and the Zulu at the American Board Mission (ABM) at Mount Selinda, was poised to have serious ethical and metaphysical contradictions (Sithole and Maseko, 2023). The missionaries ushered in a massive cultural recalibration in a subtle way through weakening the cherished traditions and the social and religio-cultural belief systems and values that had formed the bedrock of the matrices of Ndaunness for a long time through the church and the school. The parent board, ABM's social policy, had directed the missionaries to be preoccupied exclusively with transmitting faith in Africa. It had forbidden the 'Christian missions from tampering with the linguistic, social and cultural practices and beliefs of Africans. Their main task was to transform their religious beliefs' (Sithole and Maseko, 2023: 3). The missionaries, however, thought otherwise. They argued for the reorientation of Africans because they perceived Africans to be 'children' with inferior religious and socio-cultural systems (Sithole and Maseko, 2023). They could not differentiate Western culture and Christianity. They did not move an inch from their position until the board yielded and allowed the 'civilization' and Christianizing of Africans concurrently. Even some British colonial administrators queried the American Missionaries' approach to their propagation of Christianity. For instance, one 'native commissioner queried the extent to which Christianity was being imposed on the Ndaun especially considering that they had their own religion' (Rennie, 1973 cited by Sithole and Maseko, 2023: 4).

The cultural reorientation programme targeted practices that included polygamy, payment or receiving of bride wealth, drunkenness and ancestor veneration. The UCCZ did not and still does not allow its membership to consult indigenous and faith healers or prophets, the offices that specialize in dealing with pfukwa/mhvuko and other spiritual crises of the indigenous Ndaulife-world (UCCZ Constitution, 2021: vi (Preamble and Statement on Faith), 40 (3.10.1.7), 41 (3.10.2.9), 48 (4.15.9, 11 & 12)). It regards the latter as a metamorphosed form of the former and therefore an anathema in the spaces of the church. For example, in the 1990s, the UCCZ experienced instances of frictions ‘within the church as some members sought to change the practices and traditions of the church to meet their (*Penteco-charismatic*- my own insertion) fashionable expectations’ (The Recent History of UCCZ, 2013: 31). The Ndaulife then resisted by way of threatening to withdraw their church membership if the missionaries did not rescind their decree that abolished bride wealth. They registered remarkable gains on *fuma* (bride wealth), *guta* (polygamy) and *nthaka* (wife inheritance). They insisted that the said practices helped in maintaining their identity. All this points to the idea that, ‘the notion of African Christian identities is closely connected to the evaluation of African Traditional Religions (ATR)’ (Chitando, 2005: 181). This is the reason why in the first place, the ABM missionaries found it difficult to convert the Ndaulife because the latter would rather have the missionaries’ teaching side by side with their socio-cultural practices. If the teaching meant giving up on their traditional socio-cultural practices including partaking of their traditional brew, they wanted none of it and would rather remain as they were.

This section has given a brief discussion on the encounter of the ABM missionaries and the Ndaulife at Mount Selinda. The section aimed at highlighting the major sites of contestations and dialogue between the Western culture and Christianity fronted by ABM Missionaries and the local Ndaulife converts. The brief helps to show that the maintenance, making and remaking of social and religio-cultural identities is a negotiated landscape that should never be an imposition by the assumed superior party. It also intended to show the strong partnerships that UCCZ has with local, regional and international ecumenical movements and boards that always have an indirect effect on the church’s handling of doctrinal issues. This makes a humongous challenge for the UCCZ to appropriate some doctrinal changes that might be in bad taste of the cherished partners.

Findings and discussion

The notion of pfukwa/mhvuko

The participants in the group discussion generally agreed that among the Ndaulife, *pfukwa* or *mhvuko* (avenging spirit), *mweya wemunthu wakafa akapumphunika unonga weichema kuripwa* (an avenging spirit is a spirit of a person who died with a grievance and is manifests making demands for compensation. The definition is in sync with available literature on the subject. For instance, Musanga (2017) defines an avenging spirit as the spirit of a person who died with a grievance coming back to seek revenge or take vengeance on the family of the offending individual until the affected corporate group accepts responsibility and agrees to make compensation for the loss of life. The participating FCL pointed out that,

[M]ukugara kwevaNdaulife, vanthu vanozwa vane chekuita nevakafa. Kuripa kuitira kudzima muriro (In the worldview of the Ndaulife, the living are connected to the dead; they have a duty to ensure a peaceful rest of the deceased. Payment of compensation for an avenging spirit is a practice meant to cultivate harmony, peace and unity).

Ellis and Ter Haar (2007) aver that in the African cosmovision, the material world and the immaterial world are intricately intertwined and mutually interdependent. Thus, the two worlds are separate but not distinct, and dual yet unified. The spiritual world is in control of the affairs of the physical world. The two are in constant communication. To understand and appreciate *pfukwa/mhvuko*, there is need to be conversant with the religio-cultural context and the cosmological underpinnings of the Ndaui society.

MV1 posited that *pfukwa/mhvuko* comes in various types that include a victim of murder, a servant who was mistreated and deprived of their rightful recompense and often become victims of ritual murder, a parent who was deeply hurt by his or her child, a spouse who was neglected by their partner and one defrauded of their goods through theft or failure to return borrowed goods or pay rendered services. He said that all these forms of *pfukwa/mhvuko* are dangerous but stressed that the most dangerous of them all is the avenging spirit of a victim of murder. His submissions resonate with the views of scholars on the subject that include Jeater (2015), Benyera (2015), Musanga (2017), Tirivangana (2011), Mutekwa (2010) and Shoko (1997). FCL and MV2 explained that *pfukwa/mhvuko* can be self-generative because of the gruesome manner of death or the unresolved unfairness surrounding the social or material transactions. RR1 shared that *pfukwa/mhvuko* can be triggered by rituals performed on the child by the parents involving the indigenous baby formulae. Muyambo (2018) confirms this view when he avers that the Ndaui children partake of *shupa*, a herbal ritual porridge (that comprises a cocktail of herbal ingredients) that serves as an indigenous immunization against diseases, witchcraft and murder. This is corroborated by Honwana's (1998: 77) research findings among the Ndaui on the Mozambican side of the border. She posits that,

[I]n the tradition of the Ndaui, every individual has to drink a liquid derived from the *mvuko* plant just a few weeks after their birth. This is believed to make the individual stronger and, when he or she dies, to ensure that vengeance will be sought if the proper burial rituals have not been observed.

The participants shared that this indigenous shrub is known as *munyamhvuko* among the Ndaui on the Zimbabwean side of the border. It is used by the living to invoke *pfukwa/mhvuko* where the head of the family plants it on the grave of the deceased. It has the effect of harvesting a life from the offending family once it sheds off a leaf. The participants in the discussions were unanimous that *pfukwa/mhvuko* could also arise when the deceased had voluntarily undergone rituals that would trigger their spirit into action in the event of an unfair death or a failure by their debtors to reimburse borrowed goods or honour unpaid services. The FCL expanded on the characteristics of *pfukwa/mhvuko* to say that it also has a self-quantifying tendency that is achieved through inviting other spirits of the deceased kin to fight their cause. The views of the participants to the discussion corroborated by the views of scholarship on the notion of *pfukwa/mhvuko* show that this socio-cultural and religious phenomenon is an existential reality among the Ndaui.

Methods of operation and ways of resolving the crisis

Pfukwa manifests in various ways and the extent of their demands also vary. MV2 explained that *pfukwa* causes illness, a litany of misfortunes, suffering or death to the offender's corporate group/family. These are signals of flaws in social relations between the corporate social group concerned and the individual aggrieved family or families within the community. FCL said that,

Kazhinji *pfukwa* aiyiqondi nyakuipara, inotangira muhama dzepasinde kuitira kuti mukasire kurumba ndiyo. Inodarozve ngekuti ikaqonda nyakupara, unokona kuita maqinga ekuinyaradza kuti zvisamushoorea

ngeveukama, vogara muchidima vasikaziyi kuti pane pfukwa yakatsikirirwa. Inonga yeidazve kushononesa nyakupara kuti azwe kurwadza kunoita kuurayirwa hama. (Quite often, the avenging spirit does not target the offending individual. Rather, it attacks close relatives of the offender to expedite the reconciliation agenda. If it were to target the offender, they (the offender) may concoct some strategies to suppress and silence it before the social strain is known by members of their corporate social group for attention. It is also a way of making the offender experience the pain of losing a loved one).

The shared views above help to explain the Ndaun philosophy of collective existence enshrined in *unthu* (ubuntu). It attacks the members of the extended family of the offender because in the Ndaun cosmology, an offence is construed as a collective social error and the whole family is susceptible to punishment (Sipeyiye, 2020). The rationale for skirting the individual offender and shelving them for the last lies in the understanding that first, the avenging spirit wants the offender to feel the pain of losing their loved ones for some members may succumb to its wrath if the family takes long to seek explanation for any misfortunes and deaths taking place in the extended family. So, this is intended to trigger the corporate group into action and thereby according the matter of recompense the urgency it deserves because the effects of the avenging spirit are felt by everyone in the corporate group. Second, the avenging spirit intends to evade any suppression by the individual offender who might resort to perform rituals of pacifying/suppressing its manifestation thereby delaying a lasting recourse that comes with compensation.

The participants averred that *pfukwa/mhvuko* can be dealt with through two ways. The permanent measure is through reparation or compensation. The *pfukwa/mhvuko* of a murdered person cannot be exorcized. Rather, it is the responsibility of every member of the offending corporate group to participate in appeasing the angered spirit with the help of an experienced *n'anga* (traditional healer) with special powers in resolving a *pfukwa/mhvuko* crisis. Murder entails the 'spilling of blood by another blood'. The issue is not about an individual perpetrator. Rather, it is about the held belief of the culpability or complicity of everyone within the social group of the offender by virtue of sharing a common bond of blood. The traditional healer prescribes reconciliatory rituals that always involve traditional brew. One key discussant emphasized that,

Doro (traditional brew) is critical. It is meant *kushononesa* the offender. *Kuti zvakhombe kuti zviitwe, ngazviitwe kudzime muriro. UKristu uneshwiro, unobuda kana kumbatso kune order. Tisazvitsikirira, ngapashandiwe, kuripa. MuKristu munthu kutanga nekupedzisira.* (Traditional beer is a critical part of the reconciliatory rituals. It is meant to punish the offender. If that is what has been prescribed to resolve the crisis, let it be done to (extinguish the fire) offset the danger. (Ndaun) Christian way of life thrives when there is order in the home. The offending family must work towards compensating the deceased in the tradition of the Ndaun. A Christian is a human being first and foremost).

The views of the key discussant serve to explain that the (Ndaun) Christian is rooted in the indigenous religio-culture; therefore, they cannot sever themselves completely from their cultural and traditional links (Konyana and Konyana, 2018). The Ndaun indigenous spirituality, like the general African indigenous belief system, holds that the dead continue to live among the living and affect them either positively or negatively as spirit elders or avenging spirits, respectively. They are the living dead or living timeless as Mbiti (1975) and Banana (1991) call them, respectively. Being the integral elements of the metaphysical spaces of the Ndaun implies that the dead are never completely forgotten and that they affect the living either positively or negatively. At best, *pfukwa/mhvuko* provides indicators or signals of a violated moral order, the killing of a human being. So, *pfukwa/mhvuko* is a strong religio-cultural deterrent against social injustices including murder. At worst, *pfukwa/mhvuko* can cause a hotchpotch of calamities if neglected. This is the reason for the fears that are held about it. In this analysis, therefore, the living dead or living timeless need to be

recognized. In this regard, the Ndau Christians are not immune to the wrath and ravages of the avenging spirit. To make the situation even more dire and frustrating for Ndau Christians is the current lack of zeal, serious commitment and religious ingenuity in finding ways and strategies of addressing *pfukwa/mhvuko*-related problems. This scenario has the effect of pushing the Ndau Christian to subscribe to two belief systems, being officially Christian but resorting to their indigenous spirituality whenever it is convenient. From Goffman's perspective, the Ndau Christian identity constitutes the front stage and the Ndau Indigenous spiritual identity points to the back stage.

The temporary measures at halting the menace of *pfukwa/mhvuko* involve *kurashira* and *kut-sipika*. The *kurashira* ritual is where an animal dedicated to the avenging spirit is left to wander about in the bush in the hope that an unsuspecting passerby might take it home. This would transfer the *pfukwa/mhvuko* to the unfortunate passerby. *Kutsipika* is a ritual that is meant to exorcize the avenging spirit with the help of a *n'nga* without conducting propitiatory rites. The ritual may threaten the life of the *n'nga* because it incurs the anger of the spirit. On a positive note, the concept of *pfukwa/mhvuko* provides indicators or signals of a violated moral order, the killing of a human being. The spiritual world is the watchdog of morality in indigenous spirituality. Life is sacred and should not be withdrawn by anyone for any reason. The downside of the concept of *pfukwa/mhvuko* is that it can cause a hotchpotch of calamities if neglected. This is the reason for the fears that are held about *pfukwa/mhvuko* among the Ndau.

Building an authentic Ndau Christian doctrine on pfukwa/mhvuko

The key point that emerged from the discussions is that *pfukwa/mhvuko* is an integral element of the Ndau self-consciousness. From this perspective, *pfukwa/mhvuko* rightly deserves a sincere acknowledgement and recognition in the mainline churches in general and UCCZ in particular with a view to expanding their theological praxis guided by concrete lived realities. The question that formed the basis of the discussion of avenging spirit that this paper engages is an indication that the phenomenon of *pfukwa/mhvuko* is an existential reality in the Ndau lifeworld that knows no boundaries between the Christian and non-Christian Ndau people. This reality begs for a permanent solution to the threat of *pfukwa/mhvuko* within the UCCZ. The good starting point is that the participants showed a great appreciation of this metaphysical threat when they pointed out that whenever the Ndau Christians make the statement, *Zvode Chianthu* (the situation now demands recourse to tradition), the implication is that the Christian approach to the existential spiritual challenge is limited. The biggest challenge is that members are not comfortable to accept that they patronize Ndau indigenous spirituality where the church route proved to be inadequate. There is, however, an unwritten policy where a member who is so convinced that they are tormented by *pfukwa/mhvuko* would humbly announce to the local church authorities their decision, '*kubvisa uniform kuti vamboite zvepasichigare*' (to take off their church uniform temporarily to pursue traditional religio-culture) (FCL).

The statement has become a gesture indicating commitment to taking a break from church business to pursue the indigenous approach to settling the *pfukwa/mhvuko* threat through undertaking appeasement ritual. But this is a second stage. As raised by MV2, the question that remained inadequately answered is how would they have known that they are tormented by *pfukwa/mhvuko*? From Goffman's back stage and front stage perspective, the question is part of what takes place in the back stage in the life of concerned Ndau Christian. It is possible, but hardly true that the victims could successfully rely on a strong suspicion informed by their cultural background that what is tormenting them might be *pfukwa/mhvuko*. The strongest assumption that has been confirmed by the data from the discussion is that the victims often secretly patronize the services of practitioners

in the Ndaу indigenous culture for diagnosis and explanation of the source and reason of their misfortunes. The said unwritten policy becomes confirmatory evidence as it is indicative of the existence of a dual society that embodies both the Christian and indigenous ways of life (Taringana and Nyambara, 2018). The consultation is conducted in private indigenous sacred spaces and times, away from the church. What is lacking is an honest and serious commitment to finding ways of integrating the two with a view to finding a lasting solution to the Ndaу Christian dilemma on *pfukwa/mhvuko*.

The efforts to indigenize Christianity are not new. It should also be realized that they are not also fixed within a specific historical epoch. Rather, they are, and should be an ongoing practice. This is so because religion is a structure of identity, and by nature (religious) identities are unfixed (Van Den Heever, 2001). They change as circumstances of individuals and societies change. Some initiatives aimed at indigenizing Christianity have not gone down well with the Mainline Christian version to which UCCZ belongs. For instance, African Independent Churches (AICs) have managed to remain Christian, while its members appreciate African Traditional Religion (ATR) and African cultural and traditional practices, such as appeasing avenging spirits which are generally viewed as un-Christian. To this end, they have been labelled post-Christian movements (Oosthuizen, 1999). AICs and their prophets have been described as ATR's fundamentalists because of their penchant with protecting the past in ATRs, particularly the beliefs and practices in religious healing (Taringa, 2013).

So, in light of the previous attempts at indigenization, and for the sake of relevance and authenticity, the UCCZ's response ought to be based on a critical balance of the Ndaу's concrete lived experiences with *pfukwa/mhvuko* and the biblical texts that proffer potential sites for an authentic integration of approaches. The FCL's statement, '*tisazvitsikirira, ngapashandiwe kuripa*', (let us not suppress the issue of avenging spirits. People should focus on paying compensation) is an admission that *pfukwa/mhvuko* is a reality among the Ndaу whether Christian or non-Christian. However, such views are limited as they do not propose the strategies or desired inculturation processes and procedures for the UCCZ that will operate as the terms of reference in any engagement with *pfukwa/mhvuko*. The article argues for the crafting of an authentic integration of relevant *pfukwa/mhvuko*-compliant biblical texts and the lived experiences of the Ndaу Christians. As praxis is often informed by belief, it does not help Ndaу Christians in particular and many other African Christians in general, to emphasize texts that do not promote dialogue with their lived experiences when dealing with *pfukwa/mhvuko* and expect victims to overcome. There has to be concerted efforts at promoting those that pose a great potential for enriching engagement or authentic dialogue to motivate practical acceptable responses. For example, the major challenge with many mainline Christians on the issue of *pfukwa/mhvuko* is their uncompromising position on denying the possibility of communication between the living and the dead, yet the Ndaу indigenous cultural responses involve such. The position is based on the Deuteronomic and Priestly laws in the bible that condemned necromancy (Deut. 18-9-14, Lev. 19:31, 20: 27).

Nonetheless, there are texts that show the possibility of communication between the two worlds that can be harnessed to advance a sincere and contextually relevant integration of the two, and posing as potential sites for the building of a doctrine of *pfukwa/mhvuko*. 1 Samuel 28: 1–20 carries the narrative of Saul, the first king of Israel in a serious quandary. He had tried to invoke God in the context of the Philistine garrison that threatened to overrun Israel, through available permissible channels (Urim and Thummim) to no avail (1 Samuel 14: 36–42). In that critical dilemma, he resolved to seek the services of a medium to invoke the Spirit of Samuel, the dead great prophet, to hear the mind of God. There are many interpretations of the identity of the spirit, but Saul was

convinced that it was Samuel. Again, the events that followed this consultation were confirmatory of his conviction. There are two different but related views about the incident that can help in the rethinking of *pfukwa/mhvuko* among Ndaui Christians.

The first view is that what happened in the incident can be a recurring experience whenever people consult the dead; thus, they can communicate with the dead in the same fashion as indicated in the narrative. The second view contends that the spirit in the narrative is indeed of Samuel, but, 'the passage does not set a pattern of what can always happen whenever people consult the dead' (Magezi and Myambo, 2011: 6). The view interprets the narrative as, 'a unique incident that serves to demonstrate a special working of the power of God in a particular situation' (Gehman, 1999: 145, cited by Magezi and Myambo, 2011: 6). The two views confirm two things: the possibility of communication between the living and the dead, and that the frontiers of permissible and non-permissible (religious practices) experiences are not cast in stone. Rather, they can be expanded depending on the urgency of the matter. In other words, it may be a case of an extra ordinary response to an extra ordinary existential reality. The second view evinces the age-old paternalistic view of Judeo-Christian attitudes of employing silence on some of its aspects that have resonances in what they deem inferior religious options for fear that it might be tantamount to giving credit to the latter. It is hoped in this article that the acknowledgement of *pfukwa/mhvuko* and the authentic integration informed by biblical texts would eventually lead to the building of a contextually relevant and authentic doctrine of *pfukwa/mhvuko*.

What also emerged from the discussion is that there is need for a robust authentic dialogue between the Ndaui Christian leadership that is clergy and lay leaders with practitioners of indigenous spirituality who are believed to have experience and expertise in handling *pfukwa/mhvuko* crises with a view to intelligently borrow, refine and integrate resources from indigenous spirituality. The net effect of such engagements is that of motivating situations where the victims of *pfukwa/mhvuko* could feel God's presence taking practical action in responding to their spiritual crises. This practical step would ordinarily yield the intended results if it is built on the first step above. The UCCZ has a number of traditional leaders among their membership as well as members with a background in traditional healing who can provide a crucial entry point for fruitful engagements. Such individuals are a crucial section that can make an incredible combination with the gifted clergy in coming up with a trusted authentic grassroots response to *pfukwa/mhvuko* in the church. The dialogue has great potential to raise an awareness about the inevitability of dialogue with the indigenous spirituality for it forms the base of the Ndaui Christians in particular and African Christians in general. Transforming beliefs, infusing new contextually relevant content, requires walking (on) a tight rope. It calls for a delicate balance. It demands boldness and courage to make difficult and hard decisions that are required by the context of the believers. If the two steps are implemented, the church will have capacity within its ranks and file to deal with *pfukwa/mhvuko* without outsourcing in secrecy.

Challenges of integrating Christian and Ndaui indigenous resources

The task of integrating the two spiritualities to achieve contextual relevance, plausible as it might be, is fraught with challenges on three levels. These are the global context, covert and overt utilitarian dividends and the burden of change. First, the UCCZ, like many other mainline churches, desires to have a global appeal through embracing anyone regardless of ethnicity, tribe and race. The UCCZ intends to shake off the general perception that *ichechi yeMaNdaui* (that the church is exclusively for the Ndaui) (The Recent History of UCCZ, 2013: 31). In this regard, an official

integration of the elements of the Ndaun indigenous spirituality would be akin to eulogizing Ndaun ethnicity thereby contradicting the cherished desire to have a global traction. Studies have also shown that in the globalizing world, geographical and cultural boundaries are broken down, with the notion of culture as something unified and undivided giving in to the understanding of the same as something people are in the process of making and remaking rather than something they have (McLoughlin, 2005).

Second and closely related to the above, the UCCZ is affiliated to a number of local, regional and international ecumenical movements and boards as discussed early in the article. This requires a diplomatic balance of shared principles for mutual benefit. Some doctrinal changes, critical they might be, have a propensity of threatening partnerships, so they are better conveniently denied official recognition. The disturbance of partnerships often has far-reaching consequences on covert and overt utilitarian dividends. In light of this position, therefore, the church is more likely to heed to transformative agendas that have a high likelihood of attracting moral and financial support from global partners and stakeholders at the expense of local contextual relevance. In this regard, the exploitation of the resources from the indigenous spirituality is likely to continue to be done clandestinely, when it is convenient, and left to the affected individual's discretion. Third, there is the burden of change. If it is not managed well, change can at best transform the identity of the church and at worst, it can cause the loss of identity of the same. Changes are also expensive as there is often an urgent need to send the clergy for further training to acquire the required new skills. They are also characterized by risks that include loss of positions and related opportunities due to the lack of required skills. Hence, the church has no resentment for change, but the change does not have to compromise the 'fundamental values and norms that make us who we were, who we are and who we will be. Change is good but it needs to be managed' (The Recent History of UCCZ, 2013: 31).

Conclusion

The article has done three things. First, it has unpacked the notion of *pfukwa/mhvuko* and examined its embeddedness in the whole matrix of Ndaunness. In this first task, it discussed the concept of *pfukwa/mhvuko*, provided its typologies and different ways of invoking them. Second, it examined the methods of operation of *pfukwa/mhvuko*, explaining the question of the vulnerability of every member of the victim family including the converted Ndaun members as well as ways of remedying the situation. Third, the article focused on the need for locating potential sites for building an authentic Ndaun Christian response to *pfukwa/mhvuko* and the challenges of this trajectory that are unlikely to motivate serious commitment from the church leadership. From the ensuing discussion, it has emerged that the phenomenon of *pfukwa/mhvuko* is an existential reality of the Ndaun life-world that affects both the Christian and non-Christian converts. The UCCZ acknowledges the metaphysical reality of *pfukwa/mhvuko* and the inadequacies of the Church in addressing it. The solution to the challenges of *pfukwa/mhvuko* lies within the Ndaun indigenous spiritual spaces. There are potential sites that can be mobilized to build a sound practical approach to the challenge but the church is less committed to pursue that trajectory because it has more to lose than gain. As a result, the affected families often use the parallel structures of the Ndaun indigenous spirituality on their individual discretion in dealing with *pfukwa/mhvuko*.

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