



# Anthropomorphisation of God, the 2018 presidential election outcome and political change in Zimbabwe

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## Abstract

When societies are faced with socio-economic and political challenges, religion plays a crucial role in shaping citizens' perceptions and attitudes pertaining to interactions between political dynamics and supernatural beings. Anthropomorphism, a distinct religio-political phenomenon that emerged in Zimbabwe as a result of the 2018 general election, has received limited academic attention. It has been treated as a marginal phenomenon without due consideration to its impact on citizens' aspirations. This treatment of anthropomorphism has obscured its significance, as it is situational. Drawing from three political prophesies that circulated on the WhatsApp platform and YouTube in the run-up to and the aftermath of the 2018 elections, this study posited that anthropomorphism can lead to people being disinclined to take responsibility for their own well-being, even amidst political systems perceived as unjust. It shapes individual perceptions, preferences and patterns of participation, encouraging or discouraging collective action for political change. The study concluded that in 2018 anthropomorphism in Zimbabwe had a dual role; first it ascertained what is going on in the lives of ordinary Zimbabweans and their aspirations and second, it relinquished the responsibility to God to act in favor of the poor and the powerless.

**Keywords:** anthropomorphism, elections, God, political change, Zimbabwe

## Introduction

Zimbabwe was born on the eve of 18th April 1980 when it became an independent state free from minority rule. In 1983, however, Zimbabwe experienced a near civil war when the military was tasked to eradicate acts of banditry and dissidence in the Midlands and the Matabeleland regions. Subsequently, in 1987, a new era dawned when the Zimbabwe African Union Patriotic Front (ZANU PF) brokered peace with the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU), popularly known as the Unity Accord. A year later in 1988, the constitution was amended and the then prime minister, Robert Mugabe, became an executive president. A key characteristic of this first 18 years of independence was that Zimbabwe operated under a one-party state political framework. The growth and monopoly of political power held by ZANU PF began with the signing of the Unity Accord on 22nd December 1987. ZANU PF's successive electoral wins in the first decade (1980, 1985 and 1990) demonstrated a propensity towards employing electoral violence as a tactic to maintain political power (Machakanja, 2010:1).

By the time the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) was formed in 1999, ZANU PF was solidly entrenched in most populated rural areas and the legacy of a one-party state remained. Inevitably, this situation was entangled with the changing political context, from a one party state into multiple parties, which saw the emergence of the MDC in 1999. Given that western donors appeared sympathetic to the MDC, relations between the MDC and its rival ZANU PF



Government were strained and the bone of contention was the land invasion issue. The ZANU PF Government, working in collaboration with war veterans, derogatorily referred to the newly formed labour-based political party, the MDC, as a 'puppet', a 'sell-out' and a 'western stooge'. Hostilities between ZANU PF and the MDC flared into electoral violence in 2000 (Mandiyanike & Musekiwa, 2014:49).

In the aftermath of 1999, although Zimbabwe operated as a multi-party democracy with numerous political operators, it was the ZANU PF party that dominated the playing field, especially during the elections until 2018. Of note is that two main political constituencies, namely the centre-right ZANU PF and the centre-left MDC became the most visible after the 2002 elections, despite there being more than 20 political parties that contested the harmonious 2018 elections (Madhomu, 2018).

Over the next 40 years, until 2020, the ZANU PF party has enjoyed unbroken access to power for four consecutive decades through electoral processes. Typically, notwithstanding the legitimacy of such dominance, a political party with unbroken access to national executive power and a parliamentary majority in four elections as is the case with ZANU PF in Zimbabwe can be said to have crossed the threshold of a dominant political party (Sartori, 1976:193). However, with international community, regional and local civic groups churning out negative stories about Zimbabwe's human rights violation record during election time, which reached peak in 2008, the ruling party resorted to alternative strategies to electoral violence to engineer the failure of opposition parties through illicit practices which include among others gerrymandering and shenanigans (Dube & Makaye, 2013:35; Masunungure, 2014: 118; Ncube, 2013:107). This was the case in both the 2013 and 2018 elections. Compared to previous elections, the 2013 and 2018 election results were labelled peaceful but this was in essence a sham due to the alleged use of illicit practices by ZANU PF to retain political power. One of the major illicit practices by ZANU PF government has involved the non-registration of urban voters while over-registration was concentrated in rural areas perceived to be the ruling party's strongholds (Southall & Slabbert, 2013: 138-9). Other such practices involved shenanigans (vote rigging) and gerrymandering (the creation of constituencies in ZANU PF traditional strongholds) (Dube & Makaye, 2013: 34-5). The post-election violence on 1 August 2018 in which six people died and 35 injured proved the point that ZANU PF has used violence to sustain political dominance (Madhomu, 2018; Muzavazi, 2014: 100). By maintaining electoral dominance through illicit practices in the past four decades till 2018, ZANU PF continued to work against the democratic aspirations of the citizens of Zimbabwe (Madhomu, 2018).

Constant, however, was the electoral dominance of ZANU PF post 1980. ZANU PF has enjoyed unbroken access to power for four consecutive decades. However, since 2000 there has been a major shift in that, although ZANU PF has retained its rural support base, the MDC controls almost all urban centres. ZANU PF's political dominance since independence has put into perspective the notion by Banana (1981) that when a system has the character of permanency and is perceived as ordained by God, even poverty and suffering can come to be seen as natural and people thus accept it as such.

In his book, *Engaging the Powers*, Walter Wink (1989), discusses the thorny issue on the effects on ordinary people of dominating political systems. He explains the prevailing powerlessness, injustice, gender inequality and poverty, among other social ills, as a direct impact of a dominating political system. He expresses regret that such dominating systems masquerade as systems of the people that are divinely constructed, but that are in reality deleterious to the people's welfare. Wink (1989) explains that deluding the masses is a game played by domineering political systems.

The word *delude* is derived from the Latin *deludere*, which means 'to play with anyone to his injury, to defraud, to befool the mind so as to cause what is false to be accepted as true' (Wink,



1989). The problem with dominated masses is that they have the propensity to internalize the values of domination to the extent of identifying submission to oppression and injustice with loyalty. As a direct effect of domination, the masses come to regard political and economic stratification as decreed by God (Banana, 1981). These attitudes insinuate that the masses are actually deluded. Typically in Zimbabwe, the masses are led to believe that ZANU PF is the only political party from whom they can benefit, that no other political party can secure public law and order, that God has ordained ZANU PF to rule the country and that no other can take on that responsibility. The most difficult battle to fight is not against ZANU PF but against what ZANU PF has done to the minds of the people. However, ZANU PF's extended period in power is one such deleterious experience, as people continue to suffer from the triple three, namely poverty, unemployment and inequality (Machakanja, 2010:1). In the context of experiences of domination, religion, in particular Christianity, plays a crucial role in shaping citizens' perceptions and attitudes pertaining to the interaction between political institutions and supernatural beings (Ukuekpeytan-Agbikimi, 2014: 31). Against this background, the study assess the use of anthropomorphic inferences about God in relation to the 2018 presidential election outcome in Zimbabwe. The emergency of anthropomorphic descriptors during and after the 2018 presidential election outcome direct attention to the need for understanding how the anthropomorphism of supernatural beings can be a decisive factor in reducing future political participation (by means of the voting process) in Zimbabwe.

The study is framed within the Cognitive Science of Religion n, which emerged in the 1980s but began to gain currency in the 1990s. The Cognitive Science of Religion is essentially considered to be an academic sub-discipline that studies the psychological capacities and processes that stimulate recurrent forms of religious thought and behavior. The primary stress is on unconscious processes including for example opinions, preconceptions, opinions, and inducements. The study focuses on the various perceptual and conceptual representations of supernatural concepts and assumes that the human mind operates on the basis of inferences by means of which human beings interpret supernatural beings in terms of human characteristics, resulting in humans imagining and assigning supernatural beings with human attributes, such as the capacity to speak and interact with humans (Martin, 2004:201; Purvis, 2013:66). Shaman, Saide & Richert (2018:3) contend that people make anthropomorphic inferences about God because they cannot see Him as He is unobservable. Ukuekpeytan-Agbikimi (2014: 29) posits that assigning superhuman attributes to God is intentional, as people turn to religion as a source of comfort when faced with adversity, such as exploitation, economic uncertainty, poverty and injustice. By implication, if people are not faced with adversity then religion ceases to be relevant and useful.

Anthropomorphism is the tendency to assign human characteristics to non-human or supernatural beings such as God, Satan, angels or demons, to mention but a few. Epley, Waytz & Cacioppo (2007:864) define anthropomorphism as the tendency "to ascribe real or imagined behaviours of non-human agents with human like characteristics, motivations, intentions or emotions." Anthropomorphism goes beyond describing the behaviours or actions of non-human entities and extends to representing their mental or physical characteristics. It may involve making inferences about unobservable attributes of non-human entities (Epley, Waytz & Cacioppo, 2007: 865).

There are several motivations for people's anthropomorphic tendencies, chief of which is that people ascribe human characteristics to non-human entities in order to make sense of supernatural beings. These human characteristics include but not limited to that God speaks and walks (Genesis 3: 3, 9), God as having eyes (2 Chronicles 16:9); God as having a voice (Job 37:5); God as having hands (Nehemiah 2:18) and ears to listen (Isaiah 59:1). Others anthropomorphise in a bid to predict the behaviours of the non-human entity to reduce the uncertainties associated with non-human agents in future. Some people ascribe human characteristics to non-human entities for social connection, which is sought when people



perceive a lack of social connection. This social connection increases in intensity when people feel disconnected from other people. It is therefore logical to argue that anthropomorphism has psychological benefits in that people ascribe human features to non-human entities in an attempt to connect with the perceived supernatural being that inhabits an unfriendly and thus frightening environment (Epley, Waytz & Cacioppo, 2007: 866). The benefit of anthropomorphism is that it helps to endorse strongly held beliefs about non-human entities. It also influences what people think and believe about that a particular non-human entity (Epley, Waytz & Cacioppo, 2007:867).

The protestant Christian bible contains attributes that biblical writers have assigned to God that depict some of the anthropomorphic trends that find expression in modern Christianity. All Christian denominations embrace these anthropomorphic aspects. These include that God speaks, walks (Genesis 3: 3, 9), leads (Exodus 3: 17) and fights, is a god of war (1 Samuel 17: 45) as well as the patron of peace Roman 15: 33). Other popular attributes are that God is eternal (John 1: 1), omnipresent (John 4: 24) and omnipotent (Luke 1: 37). Overall, God is depicted as one for whom nothing is impossible (Genesis 18: 14). All these attributes in the Christian bible serve to confirm observations advanced by Shtulman (2008:1123) that human beings have the tendency to ascribe to supernatural beings characteristics that override human systems. The quotation in Genesis 18: 14 states: "Nothing is too hard for the Lord", reiterated in Luke 1: 37 as follows: "For with God nothing shall be impossible" is a case in point. This attribute places God in a category of His own, as people are aware of their limitations as humans. In my Christian experience of more than three and half decades, I have heard people affirming, and have myself affirmed that God is the God of impossibilities and numerous other attributes. It is only now that I am realising that in making such affirmations I was drifting towards a tendency to infer and ascribe superhuman characteristics to God.

The anthropomorphism of non-human entities is not only a Christian characteristic, as politicians also tend to anthropomorphise at times. In Zimbabwe, the late RG Mugabe once said 'God who puts me on this position is the one who will remove me' which is what the French Bourbon Kings believed as - 'The divine right'. Similarly, President ED Munangagwa in his inauguration speech was quoted as saying '*Mwari ari kumusoro ndiye anoziva nokuti ndiye unotungamira nyika. Zvakare anoda vanhu vake*' (God who is up above is all-knowing and is the leader of this country. He also loves his people) (Chimininge, 2019). These veteran politicians demonstrate their awareness of anthropomorphic descriptors taken for granted in Christian circles to assign to God the final authority and the power to override human systems.

In numerous of sources of information in a variety of contexts, people assign various attributes to God. In a country such as Zimbabwe with a variety of Christian traditions, (33% Catholic; 42% evangelical Pentecostal; 17% Anglican, Methodist and Presbyterian and 8% African independent churches), there are bound to be contradictory anthropomorphic descriptors (Tarusarira, 2016 cited in Chimininge, 2019). Those traditions that perceive God as having a keen interest in human affairs are likely to anthropomorphise God in relational terms. Those that perceive God as prophetic are likely to anthropomorphise God in prophetic terms and those that view God as a miracle worker are likely to anthropomorphise God in supernatural terms and so on. The process of ascribing human characteristics to God correlates with the manner in which people view God within their context and culture (Shtulman & Rattner, 2018:2). The cultural context determines the manner in which supernatural beings are anthropomorphised (Shaman, Saide & Richert, 2018:3).

The downside of anthropomorphism is that a number of anthropomorphic descriptors utilised in Christian traditions are not theologically correct. A newspaper reported in 2013 that Prophet E. Makandiwa allegedly prophesied a miracle birth in which a married woman would give birth after being pregnant for only 3 days. The prophet claimed that God had the power to defy the nine month pregnancy period, reducing it to three days (Langa, 2013; Zim Jokes Corner, 2013). Ironically, those that believe in such anthropomorphic descriptors claim that their beliefs





have grown stronger over time despite the covert contradictions within Christian traditions. What is clear is that the attributes assigned to God are incoherent and result in conceptual tension (Shtulman & Rattner, 2018:2).

In religious studies anthropomorphism has been treated as a marginal phenomenon without due consideration for its decisive influence on political participation, particularly in electoral processes in the modern world. This treatment of the anthropomorphism of supernatural beings obscures its significance because of its situational nature. In this study, the researcher focuses on how the anthropomorphism of supernatural beings often fails to lead to political participation, although people are aware of the root causes of their socio-economic and political instability. This study reviews the anthropomorphism of supernatural beings as a decisive factor in reducing political participation (by means of the voting process) even if the incumbent political system is perceived as unfair and illegitimate. The anthropomorphic dynamics need to be taken into account in order to understand the link between Christian perceptions and the ways in which perceptions of supernatural beings affect the preferences that make people disinclined to participate in politics. All these attributes in the Christian bible serve to confirm observations advanced by Shtulman (2008:1123) that human beings have the tendency to ascribe to supernatural beings characteristics that override human systems. Whether or not anthropomorphism has the potential to make people reticent to accept responsibility for their own well-being, even amidst political systems perceived as domineering is the question to be addressed?

### **Methodological note**

The article adopted a qualitative research approach to address the identified issues because of its reliance on extracts that are situational in nature. Three audio clips of different men of the cloth, herein referred to as 'prophets', were utilised as sources of data to understand how the anthropomorphism of supernatural beings can be used to support specific actions. The selection criteria was that the prophetic declaration must have been directed towards the outcome of the 2018 presidential election in Zimbabwe. The respondents who utilised anthropomorphic descriptors were limited to three Zimbabwean men of the cloth. To maintain their anonymity these men were coded as Prophets A, B and C (see Appendices for full prophetic declarations).

The demographic data pertaining to age, marital status and level of education were regarded as unimportant, as the researcher was only interested in anthropomorphic utterances by prophets and the impact of these utterances on the masses in relation to political change. Given that the three anthropomorphic prophesies were delivered audibly, the researcher took time to listen to each with a view to understanding their context and the human characteristics assigned to God in relation to presidential elections in Zimbabwe in 2018. Listening to the audio clips assisted the researcher to note the tone of voice, the inflection and significant pauses for clues to hidden meaning in the patterns of speech. This process made the transcribing of data possible, although laborious. Content analysis was employed to break the data into smaller units to reveal their characteristic elements and to identify themes.

### **Findings and discussion**

The findings addressed the question of whether and under what circumstances anthropomorphism can potentially make people reticent to accept responsibility for their own well-being, even amidst political systems perceived as being domineering and unjust?

### **Situational anthropomorphic descriptors associated with the 2018 election results**

Findings indicate that anthropomorphic descriptors used by three prophets have significance because they are situational, as illustrated in extracts 1, 2 and 3. A typical example is illustrated



in extract 1. This prophecy was delivered on 22 July 2018, a week before the general elections in 2018. The notion that “*The results will be announced and Zimbabwe will continue to put on the same clothes...*” is an indirect way of saying that ZANU PF will win the elections as usual. The phrase used by Prophet A that “*it is not yet time*” implies that there would be no turning point in the Zimbabwean election. The ZANU PF party would win the election. To buttress the widely held view about the election’s outcome, Prophet A declared:

Today I want you to know that next week people will be disappointed because it’s not yet time. .... But the time will come before the fullness of time. I am talking about Zimbabwe elections it’s not yet time but the time shall come. .... but we need to pray for the month of August there will be so much trouble and strife around election [Prophet A, see Appendix for full declaration].

As the elections were held on the 30th of July, by the 1<sup>st</sup> of August the populace expected the results to be announced. With that in mind, the statement, “*So the month of August I saw a dark cloud hovering over the nation of Zimbabwe. We arrest the spirit of violence, spirit of bitterness we arrest it in the name of Jesus*” appears to be one that regurgitates known facts about Zimbabwe that violence often occurs during elections (Chari, 2017:75; Kriger, 2005:10; Sachikonye, 2011).

In the second extract prophet B opens with a statement devoted to the content of the prophecy. He says, “*The second prophecy, it concerns the coming elections.*” This is followed by a review of historical precedents of negative situations. “*The people of Zimbabwe are going to be seriously disappointed again.*” This phrase concurs with what Prophet A had to say in extract 1, when he implied that there would be no turning point in the 2018 Zimbabwean election; the crisis would continue without relief. Prophet B declared:

..... What I know is the plan of God is not yet ripe? It is still being cooked. The person is not meant to lead this country this year.... And tomorrow am going to tell him that. I am going to see him. Because ever since I gave him the prophecy I talked to him on Thursday... [Prophet B, see Appendix for full declaration].

In his anthropomorphic descriptions, the prophet crystallizes into a chain of reactions expressed through a refined questioning route, “*People are going to ask did anything wrong happen? Was there some vote rigging? Was there some vote buying, election engineering?*” Why are people disappointed? This question is not answered until later when the prophet’s tone turns from one of denial to acknowledging the inherent force of disappointment when he states, “*I don’t know even myself? I don’t know.*” He identifies God as the hand behind electoral disappointment. In other words, the prophet places God in the spotlight. “*What I know is the plan of God is not yet ripe? It is still being cooked.*” The notion of God as the winner of the 2018 election is discussed in detail in the ensuing section.

The prophecy in the third extract was delivered after the outcome of the 2018 presidential election was announced and ZANU PF had won by beating the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). Placing this prophecy into context, the presidential election results were contested in the constitutional court and the MDC lost their case. Here, the words of the prophet read like an admonition rather than a prophecy, as it was based on a historical biblical account, which is totally different both in context and approach to leadership. Israel was under a theocratic type of government in which God selected the leaders. In the contemporary world, people vote for a president in a democratic voting process. The two scenarios (Zimbabwean elections versus narratives pertaining to David and Saul) should not be taken literally, as Prophet C implied when he said:



Let Saul be in the palace and let David play an instrument for Saul. Let Saul enjoy the palace-because if you are not doing that Saul will lift up a sword and look for David. And the days will not be nice for David. I render my prophecy. If you are wise you have heard it! [Prophet C, see Appendix for full declaration].

In order to avoid accusations and dip into politics, the prophet resorted to counseling the one perceived as David (the candidate that lost the 2018 election) to be submissive to Saul (the 2018 election winner - the president). The difference between these two scenarios was that David did not take part in an election but was unconditionally elected to take up the position previously held by Saul (1 Samuel 16:1; 13). There were no elections during the time of Saul and David. In contrast, in the Zimbabwean scenario, this was a political conflict with more than 20 political parties in the contest.

There are numerous drawbacks of associating current political arrangements and characters with the biblical narrative, chief of which is that if the story of David and Saul is to be put into context, literally, Saul was rejected by God because David was already anointed but awaiting inauguration (1 Samuel 18: 12-16). As such, typifying Saul as the incumbent leader who won the 2018 election and David as the loser creates hermeneutical problems. ZANU PF's victory in the 2018 elections did not mean that God endorsed this political party and the election outcome.

### **God as the winner of the 2018 election**

Two conditions for the disappointing election results were declared by Prophet B. The first, common among Christians, was to attribute the outcome of the elections to God: "*This election has no winner. God is the only one winning this election.*" As stated in the foregoing section, the prophet was making inferences but the phrase, "*God is the winner of this election*" is not a fact, as God does not take part in elections as He is a non-human entity. Elections are human institutions and God cannot be subjected to competition. The declaration that "*God is the only one winning this election*" implies that although people are disappointed by the 2018 election, they should not ask questions about the outcome of the election because God won that election. By implication, the audience has to accept, and must not question, the outcome of the election. In some sense this prophecy assists to maintain the status quo. How can people question a non-human entity such as God, given that he is unobservable?

The second condition for the disappointing election results was built on the premise that "man's fate is determined by his own conduct" (Snyman, 2003:718). To buttress these two conditions, Prophet B declared:

...because the preparations that this one who is coming that he is supposed to do he has not even started the preparations. So the next five years are a preparation period for him....Five more years and probably more than five if he does not do the homework that he has to do enough... [Prophet B, See Appendix for full declaration].

As the preceding extract appears to suggest, this prophecy adopts an approach known as 'theology of the signs of the times', which Pilario (2003:26) defines as a theology that "tries to feel the pulse of what is going on in history in order to discern what is going forward in the aspirations of peoples". However, in this prophecy God is a flat character in that he does not identify with the poor and downtrodden but rather with the elites (political leaders). In saying "*the reason why he is given five years God wants him to shed off the caliber of the people that he is working with*", prophet B implies that God is indifferent to the economic difficulties and



chaotic political scene responsible for creating a hostile environment thereby hindering opportunities for change in Zimbabwe.

The statement by prophet B that “*This election has no winner. God is the only one winning this election*” places God on the dark side of history, because He (God) appears to sacrifice the wellbeing and freedom of the general populace in the name of training one person whom he has identified to take over from the current leadership after five or more years. What is worrying in prophet B’s declaration is that we are not even sure whether the identified (candidate) leader will have done his homework enough to qualify to lead Zimbabweans by 2023, which is five years from the time that the prophecy was made. An analysis of the declaration made by Prophet B that “...the *preparations that this one who is coming that he is supposed to do he has not even started the preparations*” suggests orthodox reading of reality that after five years, if the current leadership proves to be inefficient, people will obviously opt for the person who lost the 2018 election.

Furthermore, the impression created by the declaration that “*God is the winner of an election*”, rightly or wrongly, is that the more the outcome of the election is attributed to God, the more people accept it as credible and final, because people perceive God as being fair and just, omnipotent and omniscient (Shtulman, 2008:1123), which is what He is. Inherent in this view is that an election is seen as a process that cannot be tampered with by human beings, as God is involved in the process.

Prophet B’s declarations are contrary to literature which confirms that ZANU PF employed illicit practices to retain political power in both 2013 and 2018 presidential results (Madhomu, 2018 Masunungure, 2014:100). Apart from that, God stands for justice and peace but the impression created by prophet A, B and C is that He (God) has given ZANU PF a nod of approval implies that God condones domination, injustice and violence in which six people were gunned down in a post-election violence on 1 August 2018 (Madhomu, 2018). The implication is that there is no recourse, as God appears to favor a political system that exploits the people whose best interests it is meant to serve. If this prophecy is perceived as true then God appears to have abandoned the populace in its time of need. The declaration that “*the people of Zimbabwe are going to be disappointed again*” indicates that people feel trapped by oppressive forces with no escape route. This perception is partly due to Zimbabweans perceiving elections as the only route to political change (Dorman, 2014), which explains why they were once again disappointed. By implication, the outcome of the 2018 election was an unsuccessful transition and God appeared to side with a system that obstructs change. God appears to be without sympathy for the people of Zimbabwe who are in a hopeless situation due to economic distress, unemployment, a shortage of cash and polarization, which has persisted since 2008 and the beginning of an oppressive political system. From the perspective of the biblical Paul (Romans 8:17, 20-22), people of Zimbabwe are perhaps receiving a trial through socio-economic and political tumult to strengthen them of their faith in God.

## Conclusion

The findings indicate that the adversity faced by the majority of Zimbabweans, as highlighted by the use of anthropomorphism, is that people always attempt to attribute responsibility for their problems to supernatural beings, despite being well aware of the identity of their oppressors. This kind of behavior and attitude partly supports the notion that human beings are infantile and neurotic and feel powerless, like infants that need a father or mother figure to come to their rescue (Chimininge, 2019:48). Sociologists such as Emile Durkheim observed that where there are human beings there is God and where there is God there are human beings, hence the premise that God and society are one. This implies that God is socially





constructed (Dawson, 2011 cited in Chimininge, 2019:48) as people make inferences (Purvis, 2013:66). This is true considering that religion is a social institution. This means that God is a product of society, as He exists in the minds and spirits of people (Ukuekpeytan-Agbikimi, 2014:31).

This article argues that as we now understand that religion is just like any other social institution that is a product of society, social change in Zimbabwe can only be made possible if people are to firstly, come together, engage, plan and strategize to bring about the much needed change. Second and final, augment local agency with prayers to God to strengthen their agenda for political change. Having said this, it follows logically that when politicians appeal to religion and use religious language in their speeches, they do this to confuse and further exploit and subjugate the oppressed masses (Chimininge, 2019:43). In this study, prophet A, B and C employed anthropomorphism to reinforce the notion that people must appeal to the supernatural to intervene on their behalf without them doing anything to help themselves.

As a direct effect of domination, the masses come to regard economic stratification as decreed by God (Banana, 1981). These attitudes insinuate that the masses are actually deluded. Typically in Zimbabwe, as Cole (2015:14) notes ZANU PF “claims that opposition parties are not viable alternatives to the incumbent party.” He argues further that, ZANU PF is bent on convincing voters that opposition parties are counter-revolutionary. Britz & Tshuma (2013: 184) content that ZANU PF “believes they have earned the right to remain in power forever.” For that reason, the masses are led to believe that ZANU PF is the only political party from whom they can benefit, that no other political party can secure public law and order, that God has ordained ZANU PF to rule the country and that no other can take on that responsibility. The most difficult battle to fight is not against ZANU PF but against what ZANU PF has done to the minds of the people. It follows that the masses have succumbed to elite domination resulting in them experiencing disillusionment and disappointment. Kalilombe (1999) observed that whenever people at grassroots succumb to elite domination, they accept images of them as ignorant, powerless and attitude of inferiority, thereby rendering themselves powerless to the dominant forces.

Similarly, people use imagination or conceptions to anthropomorphize supernatural beings. Typically, the declaration that God was the winner of an election is an imagined scenario, as it is remote from our human experience. God as the winner of an election detracts from God as a supernatural entity and assigns God human properties that allow Him to compete in an election. Is it possible for God to compete in an election? It is not clear what the prophet meant by saying that God was the winner of the election. On the basis of these arguments, anthropomorphism appears to create more problems than solutions with regard to the 2018 elections in Zimbabwe. The claim that God was the winner of an election is imagery because the claim is remote from our everyday human experience. It can logically be argued that this prophecy can be classified as mental simulation or an imagined scenario.

As findings suggest, anthropomorphism appears to assign responsibility to God to act in favor of the poor and the powerless in Zimbabwe. It seems logical to expect preachers to anthropomorphize when society is faced with socio-economic and political challenges such as those faced in Zimbabwe since the 2008 electoral violence. A worrying factor is that anthropomorphic descriptors in Christian circles today may not show that people are willing to take up responsibility to hold the new dispensation government to account for falling to repair the economy since its inception in November 2017. Inertia and passivity underpinned by anthropomorphism have provided limited reasons to hope that a society like Zimbabwe with Christians that make up 84% of the entire population (Tarusarira, 2016 cited in Chimininge, 2019: 47) will bring the new government closer to reality or trigger collective action for social and political change in the near future. The study, therefore, argues that in cases where



political systems are perceived as unjust and illegitimate, perceptions of supernatural beings and fear of violence make people disinclined to take collective action to improve their circumstances.

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## **APPENDICES**

### **Prophecy A**

*Today I want you to know that next week people will be disappointed because it's not yet time. So the month of August I saw a dark cloud hovering over the nation of Zimbabwe. We arrest the spirit of violence, spirit of bitterness we arrest it in the name of Jesus. It's not yet time. But the time will come before the fullness of time. I am talking about Zimbabwe elections it's not yet time but the time shall come. The results will be announced and Zimbabwe will continue to put on the same clothes but we need to pray for the month of August there will be so much trouble and strife around election. We declare that not one child of Zimbabwe will shed blood because of politics. Blessings do not come from politics, they come from God!*

### **Prophecy B**

*The second prophecy, it concerns the coming elections. The people of Zimbabwe are going to be seriously disappointed again. People are going to ask did anything wrong happen? Was there some vote*



*rigging? Was there some vote buying, election engineering? I don't know even myself? I don't know. What I know is the plan of God is not yet ripe? It is still being cooked. The person is not meant to lead this country this year. And tomorrow am going to tell him that. I am going to see him. Because ever since I gave him the prophecy I talked to him on Thursday. Ah he wanted to see me last week I was not available I couldn't meet with him. So I called him on Thursday and said can we meet and he said he was going out. So I am going to tell him like I told him that things were going to happen like this. The person I am talking about is the person that is, the beneficiary of the 2014 prophecy that he is going to lead this country. He was not yet 40 years in 2014 but he is now 40 years of age. Whatever, he is doing, he is not yet ripe to lead this country. Patience is a difficult virtue. A lot of people are not patient. He is not doing anything wrong, what he is doing is right but is not working to get the victory in this election. He was not designed to win this election.*

*This election has no winner. God is the only one winning this election [People clapped their hands]. The procedure of this gospel we are preaching, this gospel we are preaching is the one that is controlling the politics of this country. You may not believe it but this is the truth [laughter by the Apostle]. Write it down.*

*The person that is leading this country today is the one who is going to win the election. Not because people love him but because the preparations that this one who is coming that he is supposed to do he has not even started the preparations. So the next five years are a preparation period for him [audience claps hands].... [Check prophecy in 2014 on YouTube].*

*Five more years and probably more than five if he does not do the homework that he has to do enough. The people that he is working with today are not the people that he is scheduled to enter into government with. And the reason why he is given five years God wants him to shed off the caliber of the people that he is working with. He is working with crooks. He is working with that do not tell him the truth. People that are coat jesters to him. They say you will make it. This country needs a father. Somebody who can look at some wounds and say let us do something to heal them. This country needs somebody with ears to listen. This country has had a leadership that does not listen to its people since independence from British colonial rule.*

### **Prophecy C**

*You know there is a time when prophecy is given to someone but when you are given such a prophecy, you need to also understand the timing. You know there was a time when God anointed David but he never allowed him to be in the thrown. He actually went back to the sheep and obeyed Jesse. But if he does not follow those small things the bush will swallow you there! And the palace will be a strange place to go. I hope you are hearing me!*

*Where you are supposed to go, it was prophesied years back out of Judah a scepter shall raise but the time David was supposed to come it was the time Saul was anointed. David must allow Saul to complete his assignment. I hope you are hearing me!*

*It is God who said to Samuel anoint someone from a house that is not in any prophesy. It is God who said to Samuel anoint. God does not make mistakes. So when God is saying this: the only thing you will not hear anymore about David is when he wants to fit into the time which is not his time. You can have all your points and knowledge but if the divine calendar is not in place your wisdom will be in the drain.*





*And if you are not wise the people who celebrate you will start to attack you and you will decay and die in the bush.*

*Wisdom! Let Saul be in the palace and let David play an instrument for Saul. Let Saul enjoy the palace- because if you are not doing that Saul will lift up a sword and look for David. And the days will not be nice for David. I render my prophecy. If you are wise you have heard it!*