



Dance and Song as Grieving: Examining the Role of (Pentecostal?) Christianity in shifting Ndebele Society's Perceptions of Grieving

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Abstract

Traditionally, the Ndebele people of Zimbabwe used to grieve silently and quietly around a corpse. Singing and dancing were considered to be taboo. However, recently this trend has shifted noticeably because of the growth of Christianity in Zimbabwe and more especially the growth of Pentecostal Churches. This paper examines how Christianity and its beliefs have shaped and influenced Ndebele perceptions of grieving and mourning the passing on of their loved ones. The Christian worldview and the Ndebele worldview regarding death and the afterlife differ greatly and funeral practises have inevitably brought these worldviews into contact with each other. The Ndebele people's culture of grieving 'silently' with singing and dancing being seen as unbecoming around a corpse, has shifted with the growth of Christianity in Zimbabwe and particularly in Pentecostalism. With the shifting of these perceptions, the Ndebele people have warmed up to the idea which was for a long time viewed as being foreign. The Christian Biblical view of life after death is in a way certain and hopeful while the Ndebele traditional religion view of death is shrouded in silence and mystery. The researcher observed that the assurance of a life in heaven for Christians has made them to view death as not an end, and they thus rejoice in knowing that their loved ones are in God's hands. Because of the influence of Christianity, singing, clapping and dancing have become familiar occurrences in most funerals. Paradoxically, this atmosphere of 'celebrating' has also been extended to those who are not Christians.

Keywords: Ndebele worldview, Christian worldview, funeral practises, Pentecostalism, dance and song

Introduction

Historians and scholars of culture that have written on the life and culture of the Ndebele people of Zimbabwe, make it abundantly clear that dancing and singing during funerary rites or services is something that has not been part of the Ndebele culture until more recently (e.g., Ranger, 2011:41-68; Mpofu, 2013a¹; Nyathi, 2016²). These scholars have noted that

¹ Isaac, Mpofu (2013a) 'Death, Burial in Ndebele Culture' **Southern Eye**, 30 August 2013. Available online at <https://www.southerneye.co.zw/2013/08/30/death-burial-ndebele-culture/> accessed on 6 January 2018. Isaac Mpofu is a notable historian and writer of Ndebele culture and history. This article comes as part of series that he writes as a columnist of history and culture.

² Pathisa Nyathi quoted in Robin, Muchetu (2016) 'Parading Corpse Uncultural: Chiefs' **The Sunday News**, 19 June 2016. Available online at <http://www.sundaynews.co.zw/parading-corpse-uncultural-chiefs/> accessed on



Christianity has contributed to a change in this kind of philosophy and worldview but their analyses have focused on a historical perspective, primarily documenting the rituals of Ndebele funeral rites and the changes that continue to come to pass which impact the Ndebele culture and its funerary rites. In this paper, the researcher argues that the changes that have taken place in Ndebele funerary rites are a reflection of the underlying battle of philosophies and worldviews. It is argued that it is a matter of the Christian world-view and philosophy versus the Ndebele philosophy and worldview. Theologically, issues of eschatology, belief about the afterlife, views and perceptions of death, culture, Christianity and Pentecostalism all play an important role in this phenomenon that has seen the Ndebele people warming up to the idea of singing and dancing during funerary rites or practises. The researcher argues that Pentecostal Christianity is at the centre of this change of perceptions as the change has come about at a time when Pentecostal Christianity is growing in 'leaps and bounds' in Zimbabwe.

In advancing the argument of this paper, the researcher starts by briefly explaining the Ndebele philosophy and worldview about funerary rites, and the changes that have taken place, giving ground to the argument that informs this research. Secondly, he makes a comparative analysis of different aspects of the Christian worldview and philosophy and the Ndebele worldview and philosophy, that seeks to elucidate on the differences in practises and rituals during funeral services. He then concludes the paper by summarising the findings and pointing out the paradoxical overlapping of Christian practises even when the funerary rites pertain to a non-Christian person.

Before proceeding, it is important to clarify the author's stance in this research. He is an Elder/Deacon in a Pentecostal church and also a member of the Ndebele community (from an ethnic perspective). He has attended and officiated at many funerals in Matabeleland.³ These include funerals for Christian brethren, friends, family members, relatives, neighbours and workmates. This includes funerals conducted for non-Christians. The research is largely based on observations drawn from the researcher's experiences at those funerals, and a range of discussions held with members of these communities and a general observation of trends regarding funerary practises in Matabeleland.

Philosophy and Worldview

It is important to clarify what is meant by worldview and philosophy as it is at the centre of this research. Ken Funk offers a definition of these terms:

A worldview is the set of beliefs about fundamental aspects of Reality that ground and influence all one's perceiving, thinking, knowing, and doing. One's worldview is also referred to as one's philosophy, philosophy of life, mindset, outlook on life, formula for life, ideology, faith, or even religion.⁴

6 January 2018. Pathisa Nyathi is a well-known historian who has documented a lot of aspects of Ndebele culture.

³ By Matabeleland, in this research, I refer to all the three provinces of Matabeleland in Zimbabwe; Matabeleland South province, Matabeleland North province and Bulawayo Metropolitan Province.

⁴ Ken Funk, 'What is a Worldview?', March 2001, available from <http://web.engr.oregonstate.edu/~funkk/Personal/worldview.html> accessed on 8 January 2018.



Funk goes on to add that one's worldview consists of epistemology, metaphysics, cosmology, teleology, theology, anthropology and axiological elements. Everyone has a worldview or philosophy whether they know it or not. This worldview is formed at both individual and group levels. The group worldview or philosophy greatly influences the individual worldview though individual worldviews within a group may differ slightly or greatly depending on the circumstances. The philosophy or worldview of a group plays a huge role in determining the approach to life taken by that group (Mbiti, 1969:1). A phenomenon may mean different things to different groups of people based on the interpretations they derive based on their diverse worldviews. The worldview or philosophy of a people provides the lens through which life (and other aspects of the universe) is viewed, interpreted and lived. In this paper the researcher argues that the Pentecostal Christian worldview has contributed to changes in the funerary rites of the Ndebele people of Zimbabwe, which in a way directly and subtly challenges certain aspects of the Ndebele worldview and philosophy as such. As he proceeds, the researcher shows that the differences in approaching funerary rites and practises are deeply rooted in the different worldviews and philosophies.

Ndebele grieving practises and Christianity

Like many societies in Africa and beyond, the death of a person among the Ndebele people of Zimbabwe is something that brings together people including family members, relatives, friends, neighbours and parish members if the person was a member of a certain Church. The Ndebele people are a society that values community relations and togetherness (Mpofu, 2011:71). It is this sense of communalism against individualism among the Ndebele peoples that makes them stand together during times of bereavement. It is therefore possible to find people attending funerals running into hundreds and at times getting to as high as thousand or so people if the person who passed on is renowned or has a recognisable position in the society. For most funerals, the number of funeral attendees usually ranges from about 40 people to about 300 people. Funerals among the Ndebele people are not private or family events, but are rather viewed as public events. The message of the passing on of a person is relayed by family members, friends, relatives, Church members and work colleagues using various channels including *inter alia* word of mouth, phones (telephone and mobile), letters, memos (usually within work environments), television and radio announcements (mostly for urban dwellers) and more recently, social media platforms.

The funeral practises being examined in this paper are those that run from the time a person passes on until the time the burial is ultimately concluded. This can take a day, a few days to a week, weeks or even months, depending on the circumstances surrounding the death of that person. These include the cause of death, the place of death (people who die at places far away from their home, for example, outside Zimbabwe, may take longer to be buried as the body repatriation process takes long) and the proximity of family members and relatives. It is not the intention of this paper to examine funeral practises and rites that lie beyond the demarcated scope of this research (and there are many such practises).

The Ndebele people of Zimbabwe are found in the western part of the country, mainly in Matabeleland South province, Matabeleland North province, Bulawayo Metropolitan province and parts of Midlands province. They are a Bantu people with a language (iSiNdebele or Ndebele) that belongs to the Nguni subgroup of the Bantu languages (Hadebe, 2002:49; Khumalo, 2004:107). The Ndebele (by then referred to as the Khumalo) came to Zimbabwe from Nguniland in South Africa, and were led by the leader, Mzilikazi. This group broke away from the Ndwandwe of Zwide and the Zululand of Shaka in the period 1818-1820 (Ndlovu, 2009:17). It is believed that Mzilikazi clashed with the Zulu king Shaka over some breed of cattle that Mzilikazi failed to hand over to Shaka after his raids as was the custom (see



Hadebe, 2002:5). This group of people under Mzilikazi moved from Nguniland and crossed the Limpopo River into modern day Zimbabwe and settled there. On their way, before crossing the Limpopo, they raided and incorporated other ethnic groups such as the Sotho and Tswana into their group. Upon settling in what is today Zimbabwe, they also assimilated some members of other ethnic groups such as the Nyubi, Kalanga and Shona into their group (Ndlovu, 2004:58-71). The resultant group was thus heterogeneous in nature. Other writers of Ndebele history have also buttressed this (Ndlovu et al, 1995, Sibanda, 2002, Nyathi 2005). Hadebe points out that the term Ndebele is today used:

Firstly to refer to all Ndebele speaking people once under the rule of Ndebele kings and assumed Ndebele identity. Secondly, the term has been used loosely to refer to the inhabitants of Matabeleland and parts of the Midlands provinces of Zimbabwe, regardless of their ethnicity or language (2001:16).

In this paper the researcher uses the term Ndebele in line with the first definition as proffered above by Hadebe.⁵ For the Ndebele people, funeral activities start during the moment the message of death is heard. Family members, friends, relatives, neighbours and Church members gather to comfort the bereaved. Whilst burial arrangements are put in place, people continue to come to comfort the grieving. During other days, usually, close family members and relatives will sleep at the homestead or house where people are gathered while others will leave in the evening and come back again the following day. On the night before the burial day however, the gathering becomes bigger and people spend the night gathered there in preparation of the burial the following day. It is during these gatherings, both on days preceding the burial and on the burial day, that changes have taken place.

Singing and dancing has not been at the centre of these practises in the traditional contexts. Quietness and silence used to engulf these occasions. Where there was singing, it was very moderate and was never accompanied by dancing. Mpofo observes that there have been changes even pertaining to the funeral procession on the day of burial. He points out that:

Nowadays, Christian people may sing a hymn or a chorus and this has become accepted due to changing culture. But dancing or any kind of merry-making is not accepted in Ndebele culture because this is a sad and solemn occasion.⁶

Mpofo goes on to point out that talking was even done in low voices. As a child growing up in the rural areas of Matabeleland South, the author recalls, that when it was announced in a village that someone had died, radios had to be switched off and farming activities had to come to a halt until the burial of that person had been concluded.

⁵ I need to emphasize that in my use of the term Ndebele, I am referring to Ndebele language speakers who have adopted the Ndebele identity. I use the term Ndebele in a very narrow sense that excludes other ethnic groups such as the Tonga who are found in Matabeleland. This is not meant to start an argument of who is and who is not Ndebele. Neither is it used to discriminate anyone. I use this term this way simply because of the awareness that some ethnic groups like the Tonga have their own unique funeral practises that differ from those of the Ndebele. For the purposes of the argument of this paper, I am therefore using the term Ndebele in its narrow sense.

⁶ Isaac, Mpofo (2013a) 'Death, Burial in Ndebele Culture' **Southern Eye**, 30 August 2013. Available online at <https://www.southerneye.co.zw/2013/08/30/death-burial-ndebele-culture/> accessed on 6 January 2018.



Ranger (2011: 50-52) notes that by the 1940s and 1950s Makokoba, a black township or Location in Bulawayo, Matabeleland's largest city, was surrounded by many Churches. From the names of Churches that Ranger gives, it is clear that these were dominantly mainline Churches such as Anglican, Greek Orthodox and Roman Catholic at the time. He also argues that the culture of black Ndebeles in Bulawayo had already been Christianized even long before the period of the late 1950s. He goes on to quote interviews of Ndebele people who had converted to Christianity by then. One of them is Mzongelwayizizwe Khumalo who had been baptized in the Roman Catholic Church. Khumalo had grown up during the 1910s, 1920s and 1930s and had observed how during this period Ndebele people were being buried in line with their traditional customs and practises while at the same time pointing out a realisation of how Christianity was making inroads in black townships in Bulawayo. A dour and sober atmosphere characterized the atmosphere of Ndebele Christian funerals of that time. In an interview with Ranger, Khumalo observes,

In the funeral gatherings we were not seeing these singing and dancing *pungwes* (all night Shona services) during that time. You know, typical Ndebele funeral gatherings mourners could sing one Christian song and then spend the whole night just quite on that very sorrowful occasion. If we heard people in a funeral gathering singing and playing some traditional drums we could tell that these were not Ndebele people (Khumalo, quoted in Ranger 2011:51).

Evidently, singing and dancing was not part of the Ndebele people's practice. Whilst the Tonga people and Shona people seem to have had such a tradition of singing and dancing at funeral gatherings, the Ndebele people did not, except at certain times, maybe for just one song or so, which was never accompanied by any dancing. Even during the period described by Ranger, when mainly Christian Churches were dominant in Matabeleland, it seems that this kind of quiet, sober and dour atmosphere was maintained-though one would not deny that subtle changes were beginning to take place there.

Recently, Matabeleland has seen a rapid growth of Pentecostalism. Bulawayo, the largest city in Matabeleland is now home to many Pentecostal Churches. Some spaces in Bulawayo that were previously for industries are now booming with massive Church buildings in evidence. This growth has also translated to a change of perceptions on Ndebele funeral rites or services. Pentecostal churches are known for playing musical instruments such as drums, pianos, guitars and so on in their services. Pentecostal services are also characterised by dancing. When someone asks you about your Church and you mention a Pentecostal Church, it is common to hear someone saying 'Oh, those who play guitars and organs!' At Pentecostal services, reference to David's dancing (2 Samuel 6:14, 20-22) is not something uncommon. Dancing and singing are embraced and encouraged in Pentecostal services. These kinds of services have also been translated to funeral services, primarily for Church members but at times also for non Church members.

Dancing and singing have become a part of funeral services or practises among the Ndebele people. Nowadays, singing and preaching usually last for the whole night preceding the burial service. Musical instruments are also nowadays played in funeral services. Because funeral gatherings are attended by different people, with different worldviews, singing and dancing as a way of grieving has been accepted with mixed feelings, though, in the main, they have been accepted. There are, however, small pockets of people who still find them unacceptable and this is especially the case in the rural areas. In the next section, the author seeks to explain the different worldviews that contribute to differences regarding dance and singing as grieving aspects in Ndebele society's funeral services. In doing this, he contrasts the Christian philosophy and worldview and the Ndebele philosophy and worldview, pointing out the differences in how death and the afterlife are



viewed that resultantly influence the acceptance and non-acceptance of dancing and singing as grieving.

Hope versus lack of Hope

In approaching issues of death and grieving the Christians are guided by the Word of God that says, 'Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope'. (1 Thessalonians 4:13, NIV). The Christians are empowered by this portion of Scripture and others (e.g., 1 Thessalonians 4:14-15, John 14:1-3) not to lose hope and become excessively sorrowful about their loved one who has died. Interestingly the scripture quoted above (1 Thessalonians 4:13) makes it clear that those who have passed on are asleep whilst some of the Ndebele traditional terms of describing death are '*ukubhubha*' and '*ukutshona*' which connote to a sense of perishing/state of being destroyed or going down/sinking respectively, hence explaining the excessive sorrowfulness and loss of hope embedded in the Ndebele philosophy and worldview regarding death. Seeing death as a state of being asleep, gives Christians no reason to refrain from conducting services with singing and dancing, preaching hopeful sermons and encouraging the bereaved to be strong and hope to meet their loved one in heaven provided both are in the Lord. For Pentecostal Christians, there could be no better way than to sing and dance in the same way as done in their other services.

John Mbiti (1969:4), when discussing African religion, argues that all African societies do believe that life continues after death but in doing so there is no expectation and hope that the coming life will be better than the now. He goes on to observe that the concentration is placed on the life in the present, the physical life. It is therefore, according to African religion philosophy, in this life that one hopes for the better. The Ndebele worldview and philosophy seems to be slanted towards such a worldview. African religion also plays a part in the shaping of the Ndebele philosophy and worldview in its traditional sense. The Ndebele philosophy and worldview based on traditional customs is heavily linked to African religious thought, in this case, the traditional Ndebele religious culture and thought that was in place long before Christianity made inroads into the Ndebele culture. This, however, should not be seen as a denial that even after the Ndebele culture became Christianised, certain funeral practises remained in place. It should also be noted that there are Christian Churches that do not support dancing and singing as grieving or during funerals, such as the Greek Orthodox Church. However, this is beyond the scope of this paper.

Loss versus Gain

The Ndebele people, from a traditional perspective, view the death of a person as a severe loss, while in Christianity, this kind of 'loss' is not seen in a severe light, albeit it is sad, for there is still hope. One of the Ndebele terms describing bereavement is '*silahlekelwe*', loosely translated 'we have lost'. Undeniably, having a close relation pass on is not an easy situation to comprehend, process and accept and yet the difference lies in how one perceives this situation from their cultural worldview. From an Ndebele worldview, this situation spells pain, gloom and despair. For the Christian, in the midst of this pain there is hope and comfort. The 'loss' comes with hope. The Apostle Paul, expressed this hope clearly when he said 'For to me to live *is* Christ, and to die *is* gain' (Philippians 1:21, KJV). What Paul is saying is not that death is good nor is to be desired. Rather he is saying even when a Christian dies, he has hope to be with Christ. Death is not the end of it all for the Christian. In the quoted chapter of Philippians, Paul wrestles with the desire to depart and



the need to stay on this earth, and in that wrestling states that departing to be with Christ is better by far (Philippians 1:23), though he chooses to stay because of a need to continue labouring for the Gospel among the believers (Philippians 1:24-26).

It is therefore common in Ndebele funeral services of today to hear Pentecostal preachers comforting the grieving with a sermon based on David's response to the death of his son. Whilst David had gone on a fast when the son was ill, the moment they informed him that the son had died, he washed, anointed himself, dressed well and went to worship in the house of the Lord and after that he ate food (2 Samuel 12:15-23). Pentecostal Christianity has cultivated this perspective among the Ndebele; to accept what has happened and hope to meet the loved one in heaven if both parties are in Christ. Interestingly, in the story of David, there were servants who were afraid to tell him that the child had died, fearing that he would be further grieved after spending seven days fasting and petitioning God for the welfare of the child. On the contrary, David did the opposite. In the Ndebele worldview and philosophy it is very common to see people struggling in terms of how they can tell someone that his or her relation has passed on. It is even possible to hide the news from the person until a strategy is devised to break the sad news. This is not to say that within Christian circles, breaking the news of death is easy. It can also be extremely difficult and results in angst. Many living relatives and friends of deceased persons can testify to that. The response to the news however differs, largely based on one's worldview. The argument is also not about Christians getting pained by death or not getting hurt. They do get pained and the degree of it differs with the individual involved. The Christian philosophy is that in the midst of this pain, one should not totally lose hope.

Whilst in the Ndebele worldview the dead goes down to a place of '*abaphansi*'⁷ for the Christian worldview the ultimate goal in death is to finally meet Christ and spend eternity in heaven (1 Thessalonians 4:17). Interestingly, the spiritual direction for heaven is above whilst for the '*abaphansi*' is below. *Abaphansi* means those who are in a place under, below or beneath. The heaven above is a sure place described by Jesus when he said he is going there to prepare a place for Christians (John 14:1-3). The below place is shrouded by mystery and uncertainty as earlier noted. All these issues contribute to the way death is viewed among the Ndebele. There are, however, some Ndebele people who are in Churches that do not support dancing in funerals. This does not mean they lack hope. They are as hopeful as the Pentecostal believer for an eternal life in heaven. Singing is the norm in many Churches whether they be mainline or Pentecostal. It is in dancing where churches tend to differ the most. Within the Ndebele traditional worldview and philosophy, however, both singing and dancing are unpopular, with singing only tolerated when done in moderation.

Celebrating Death?

The question that has been raised from the Ndebele Philosophy and worldview concerning singing and dancing in funerals is why celebrate death at all? From the perspective of the Ndebele worldview, the passing on of a person (and other ensuing funeral practises) and dancing are things which should not go together. They are totally incompatible. Dancing and playing musical instruments like organs are seen (from an Ndebele worldview) as some kind of merry-making which should not be associated with funerals. As argued above, the

⁷ Isaac, Mpofu (2013b) 'Death, Burial of the Ndebele... (Part 4) After the Burial'. **Southern Eye**, Available online at <https://www.southerneye.co.zw/2013/09/13/death-burial-ndebele-4-burial/> accessed on 6 January 2018.



Ndebele philosophy favours a dour atmosphere at funerals. The researcher once heard of certain villagers from Matabeleland North province who queried the singing of a particular song at a funeral. The argument was that the song in question was celebratory in theme and tone. This is a paradox in the traditional Ndebele set up. A celebratory song is seen as being somewhat out of place in a funeral. It is also possible that the query was raised by Church members from Churches that do not support dancing as a way of grieving. Needless to say, the song in question was being sung by members of a Pentecostal Church. The Ndebele philosophy interprets dancing in particular as a way of expressing happiness or joy. The reluctance to dance and show any sign of joy is embedded in the fear of being seen as happy as this might be interpreted as being happy that the deceased has indeed died. Such interpretations lead to one being viewed in negative light, and in extreme cases one is suspected of having had a hand in the death of the person who is being mourned.

Whilst the Ndebele philosophy believes in a dour funeral atmosphere, Christianity in general and Pentecostal Christianity in particular believes in singing and dancing in funerals and this belief has shaped the Ndebele perceptions of grieving. In many funerals today, dancing and singing takes place and more especially in those conducted by Pentecostal Churches. Whilst the Ndebele worldview sees this as a celebration of death and therefore an unfit phenomenon, the Pentecostal Christians see it as a celebration, not of death but of life. Christians take the opportunity to celebrate a life that has been lived by an individual and also the afterlife the believer will spend in heaven with Christ. Proceeding along this view, dancing and singing are not amiss. The researcher remembers in particular a certain funeral programme that was clearly written 'we are not mourning the death of Mabuza (not real name) but celebrating the life that he lived, the life that God gave him' (paraphrased).

Focusing on the positive side of the coin, the Christian believer has seen no need to refrain from conducting a funeral service of a fellow believer 'the way he would have loved to have it' based on the way he has lived and worshipped God. Interestingly, because of the growing influence of Christianity on the Ndebele people, the pattern employed for conducting funerals for Christians is sometimes extended to non Christians. Christianity has been so influential to an extent, that it has become a norm for Church services to be conducted in almost all funeral gatherings, at times regardless of the fact that the deceased would have been an unbeliever.

At the core of practises surrounding death, is a society's beliefs in the notion of human destiny and purpose as influenced by one's social structures, religion, belief and relations (Jindra and Noret, 2011:5). Christianity in general and Pentecostalism in particular, have revolutionized the Ndebele perceptions of grieving and practises surrounding death. In today's funerals among the Ndebele it is not uncommon to find people singing, dancing, clapping, and at times, playing musical instruments. Dancing and singing has become an accepted form of grieving among the Ndebele people of Zimbabwe. Even the food that is served in today's funerals among the Ndebele has undergone a radical change; from the traditional *ingovu* (meant used to be eaten without salt at funerals) to delicious dishes that are not different from those served at weddings.⁸ Prayer and preaching have become a norm in funerals, even if the deceased was an unbeliever.

⁸ Isaac, Mpofu (2013b) 'Death, Burial of the Ndebele... (Part 4) After the Burial'. **Southern Eye**, Available online at <https://www.southerneye.co.zw/2013/09/13/death-burial-ndebele-4-burial/> accessed on 6 January 2018.



Differences within the Church⁹

Within the Church, there are, undeniably, differences regarding singing and dancing in funerals. While many Churches agree on singing being necessary and appropriate at funerals, dancing is not acceptable for other Churches. Within the Pentecostal Churches, dancing is widely accepted at funerals though some do not accept it. The phenomenon of dancing and singing in funerals, among the Ndebele people has grown synonymously with Pentecostalism. Different views from different quarters of the Church can be attributed to differences in doctrines and regulations. These differing views within the Church are minor when they are compared to the differences between the Christian and the Ndebele worldview. The impact of the Christian worldview on the Ndebele worldview is very evident. This impact has not happened overnight, it is a product of many years of change. In the process the Ndebele worldview has, in some quarters, offered resistance. In some instances, the result is a compromise between Christian practises and Ndebele traditional practises. Where these compromises seem to contradict Holy Scripture, the Christian approach has been that of avoiding compromise by all means, though it sometimes happens as a result of the power the family of the deceased wield over matters concerning the burial of their member.

Conclusion

Through years of exposure to Christianity, particularly Pentecostal Christianity, the perceptions of the Ndebele people of Zimbabwe surrounding death and funerals have shifted radically. From a time where singing was only allowed in moderate and dancing not allowed at all, the Ndebele people have shifted to a position where dancing and singing are now widely accepted ways of grieving during funerals. From a time when the news of the passing on of a person was met with radios being switched off to a time where musical instruments like organs are played in funerals, one notices that perceptions have greatly shifted. The rise of Pentecostalism in Zimbabwe has been synonymous with this change. The shift can be explained as a shift from the traditional Ndebele worldview and philosophy to a Christian worldview and philosophy regarding death and funerals. Whilst this shift has been widely accepted, there are some who still desire and thus practise the traditional approach to funerals as guided by the Ndebele worldview and philosophy. It can also be noted that the Christian ways of conducting funerals have paradoxically, been extended even to non Christian members at times. In such circumstances this is usually taken as a good gesture from the Christians and thus accepted but at times it is taken as an unwelcome imposition of Christian ways of doing things and thus resisted. To imagine that the shift in funeral practises of the Ndebele people of Zimbabwe can be reversed will be a farfetched imagining. One can only envisage that changes will still continue to take place, overtly and covertly.

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⁹ On this particular instance, I use the word Church to refer to the body of Christ in its entirety and not to denominations.



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