RELIGIOUS PEACEBUILDING IN ZIMBABWE
The role of the printing press

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Introduction
It is now a truism that the definition of religion is contested. One approach has been the attempt to provide substantive or functional definitions of religion (see Cavanaugh 2009). A substantive definition of religion defines religion based on its substance by referring to spirits, gods and such entities (Bourdillon 1991). The functional definition defines it in respect of what it is deployed to do or realize, that is to say religion is defined in terms of its function.

The debate regarding the relationship between religion and peace or conflict has centered on religion as inherently violent or inherently peaceful (see Alger 2002, Appleby, Omer and Little 2015, The British Academy 2015). These studies (Berling 2004, Coward and Smith 2004) are mainly based on such substantive or functional definitions of religion.

General research discourse
A significant body of literature (Boulding 1986, Alger 2002, Berling 2004, Coward and Smith 2004, Appleby, Omer and Little 2015) exists, which teases out the dual role of religion in terms of escalating conflict and peacebuilding globally. Scholars have also examined the extent to which religion may indirectly foster or tolerate violence. On the one hand, there are scholars (Galtung 2014) who foreground the positive role of religion with regard to conflict and peacebuilding and on the other hand are those researchers (see Huntington 1998) who put emphasis on the negative attributes of religion in terms of fermenting divisions, conflict and intolerance. Focusing on the positive role of religion to conflict resolution, Galtung (2014) posits that it can be used to maintain or build peace. He acknowledges that different religions have different degrees of potential to promote peace. Galtung (2014, 32) rejects the notion of religious conflicts, as conflicts are multi-dimensional and complex and cannot usually be reduced to only one causal factor. Scholars who focus on the negative role of religion in conflict and peacebuilding overemphasize its influence in causing structural violence through discrimination and exclusions (The British Academy 2015). In other words, religious identities are viewed as having the potential to erect potent boundaries and provoke fierce confrontation within a group when there is excessive emphasis on claims by some that they belong and adhere to or are protecting a set of absolute truths. Moreover, the
distinction between an in-group and an out-group can lead to structural violence (Galtung 1969) within societies. Religion is also seen as the source of cultural violence, a form of violence that is used to legitimize other forms of violence (Galtung 1969). Extending this view further, Huntington (1993) argues that religious and cultural identities are the main drivers of international conflict (between the Muslim and non-Muslim world) in the new world order following the end of the Cold War. However, this argument has been criticized for being based on weak history and for underestimating or ignoring deep fault lines that have existed within and among denominations of the same religious family (The British Academy 2015).

In view of the above debate, there is equally limited literature on religion, journalism, dialogue and peacebuilding. Extant studies (Marsden and Savigny 2009, Loo 2011) look at the coverage of religious conflict and peacebuilding by the media. In this regard, Marsden and Savigny examine the political discourse surrounding religion and conflict and the ways in which these are played out in media agendas. They argue that the media are not neutral actors but play a role in constructing these political discourses (Marsden and Savigny 2009). The media can positively influence reconciliation in the aftermath of violent religious conflict just as the negative use of the media magnifies and promotes conflict (Yamshon and Yamshon 2006). Journalism cannot only help to distribute information but also counter hate speech and create an environment of balanced opinions, an “information equilibrium” (Koven 2004). In their recent study, Demarest and Langer (2018) investigate to what extent Nigerian newspapers practice peace journalism by emphasizing the underlying causes of conflict in their reporting rather than stressing ethnic and religious divisions. They found that Nigerian newspapers do not explicitly use divisive language when discussing conflicts, but they rarely stress underlying structural causes either. While there is a willingness among Nigerian journalists to avoid potentially escalatory language, a dearth of resources and capacities impedes independent and in-depth analysis concerning the underlying drivers of conflicts (Demarest and Langer 2018). Notwithstanding these studies, Hackett (2009) argues that there has been a lack of attention to issues of conflict in this emergent research on the intersections of religion, media, and culture, specifically in Africa but also in the field more generally.

Departing from aforementioned highly charged debate, our point of departure is that religion is neither inherently violent nor peaceful because of the plurality of interpretations. We assert that the human factor is key in this discourse: People identify particular scriptures or religious tenets, which they deploy for peace or conflict depending on their motivation. To communicate their standpoints, various media is resorted to. To say that religion is instrumentalized for specific expediencies is not to intimate that it is something that is out there that people can grasp and deploy. We depart from the point that definitions of and approaches to religion are intrinsically linked to the discourse of the time. They are linked to discourse and field. Rather than looking for a better definition of religion, it might be fruitful to focus on describing, analyzing and demarcating the religious fields of discourse (Von Stuckrad 2010). Religion is a constructed category that emerged out of a specific socio-economic, political and cultural context, thus is not transcultural and transhistorical (Asad 1993).

In this chapter, we resort to describing, analyzing and demarcating the religious fields of discourse in Zimbabwe. Characterizing the religious landscape of Zimbabwe as a field helps us identify the differences and alliances built or broken between the different religious groups and political actors with respect to peacebuilding. In doing so we acknowledge that Zimbabwe is not religiously monolithic and thus, regarding peacebuilding, different religious actors have promoted or undermined peace and reconciliation via various media including print media. This is influenced by the socio-economic and political objectives at particular given times. For specificity, we will focus on one religio-political organization.
The Zimbabwean religio-political landscape

The Zimbabwean religio-political landscape has been filled with contestation over what religious peacebuilding is, how to contribute to it and who is the legitimate actor to facilitate it, including from the religious realm. The landscape thus has been a discourse in the Foucauldian sense and a field in the Bordieuan sense (Thompson 1977). Discourse refers to the totality of thought-systems that interact with societal systems in manifold ways (Foucault 1980). The field is defined as a social arena within which struggles or maneuvers take place over specific resources and the access to them. The field is a space of action or struggle; the struggle is over forms of capital on the field (Thompson 1977). Religious groups in Zimbabwe have developed a particular discourse regarding peace and reconciliation, as well as competed over forms of capital with the state in relation to peace and reconciliation (Munemo and Nciizah 2014). The state has perceived what religio-political actors in pursuit of peace and reconciliation call the theology of liberation, as bent on facilitating regime change and instigating violence in the country. In this case, religion tends to be perceived as generating violent responses. However, religio-political organizations understand their faith and theology as aimed at facilitating peace and justice in the country (Tarusarira 2016). Based on these two perspectives, one can argue that that religion has a Janus face that is double sided. This constellation resonates with debates that have ensued in the broader discourse of religious peacebuilding, including that of the “ambivalence of the sacred” (Appleby 2000, 30). Religion has the capacity to generate a range of responses ranging from violent to non-violent militancy, ability to generate as well as contain violence (Girard 1977) and is like a knife, which one can use to stab someone in the back or cut bread, just as one can use fire to burn someone or cook tasty food.

Religious peacebuilding focuses on the positive contribution of religious actors to peace and reconciliation. It is defined as peacebuilding motivated and strengthened by religious and spiritual resources and with access to religious communities and institutions (Dubois 2008). It recognizes religion as a valuable dimension of peacebuilding and conflict transformation, despite it succumbing to the modernist dichotomization of the religious and the secular. The modernist approach to governing public affairs prioritizes the secular at the expense of the religious, notwithstanding that the problem that the distinction between the two is difficult to sustain. Secularism perceives religion as irrational, absolutist and divisive to be resorted to for peace and social cohesion. For these reasons, religious peacebuilding has been pushed to the realm of soft power (Haynes 2012). Against the backdrop of these challenges, religious peacebuilding should therefore be critical of assumptions surrounding and undergirding it. It should also engage with the interpretations of religion and other themes connected to or pitted against it such as ethnicity, culture and politics. How this has played out in Zimbabwe, mediated by print media, is the focus of this chapter. This chapter describes, analyzes and demarcates the religious field and discourse in Zimbabwe in respect of peace and reconciliation and discusses the role of print media (i.e., with the print media constructing narratives, ideas and ideologies about religion and peacebuilding), in service of or against religious peacebuilding. It is first important to do an appraisal of the historical trajectory of print media in Zimbabwe. Of focus is how that, which is described as religion,
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has been packaged and communicated via print media and how the form of packaging has influenced peacebuilding in Zimbabwe.

**Journalism, religion and print media in Zimbabwe: an historical appraisal**

The relationship between religion and journalism in Zimbabwe cannot be understood outside the influence of missionaries who played an instrumental role in the development of education and printing presses (see Saunders 2000, Mukasa 2003). The emergence of African newspapers in Zimbabwe (formerly Southern Rhodesia) can be traced to the second decade of the 20th century and owes much to the role played by the missionaries, in promoting literacy and cultural notions of public participation. As Dombo (2014a) observes, the missionaries laid a strong foundation for the birth of an African press by encouraging Africans to attend schools, which they had founded. The process of evangelization led to the emergence of Africans who were eager to read and write and to consume and disseminate information about what was happening in a racially divided but nationalizing geographical space (Bourdillon 1991). Furthermore, the missionaries in collaboration with the government in the late 1920s started a newspaper specifically for Africans (Dombo 2014b). The government offered an annual subsidy that contributed to expenses met by the missionaries in producing the newspaper.

Churches like Dutch Reformed Church, Roman Catholic and Methodist were key in the early development of newspaper culture in Zimbabwe. The main news published by the newspapers were predominantly Christian teachings and moral instruction aimed at civilizing Africans (Bourdillon 1991, Dombo 2014a). It was from these humble beginnings that African newspapers became prominent and an important feature of African politics up to the mid-1960s. These missionary newspapers latter metamorphosed into semi-secular press with the likes of the Rhodesia Native Quarterly and Native Mirror coming into the fold (Dombo 2014b). The papers were printed in the local languages such as Karanga, Zezuru and isiNdebele, together with English. As Dombo (2014b) observes, the main purpose of these newspapers was to provide reading material for converts, but more importantly, to help missions move toward a standardization of the vernaculars. It was only in the mid-1930s that an autonomous press owned by private, white capital took shape with the sole aim of advancing white minority interests (Bourdillon 1991, Dombo 2014a). This was followed by the rise of the African press in the 1960s, which contested the narrative of white colonial settlers and played a pivotal role in the mediation of armed liberation struggle (see Dombo 2014b).

In 1980, Zimbabwe inherited a fairly diversified media landscape characterized by a vibrant state-owned media and a blossoming private press reflective of the existing economy, which was dominated by private white capital (Chuma 2010). Unlike in other jurisdictions, the mainstream public press adopted a *developmental journalism* approach, which emphasized supporting the ruling elite rather than blowing the whistle for offside situations. Besides introducing significant ownership and editorial changes in the public print and broadcasting sector, the ZANU-PF government maintained the state monopoly in broadcasting as well as the repressive legal infrastructure used by the colonial regime (Saunders 2000, Ndlela 2009, Chuma 2010). As Rønning and Kupe (2000) argue, this resulted in a dynamic tension between a *democratic* (as reflected in the Lancaster Constitution) and an *authoritarian* impetus (in-built inherited restrictive laws), which undermined the diversity and pluralism of political opinion in the Zimbabwean mainstream public sphere. Because of these “legacies of the past” (Voltmer 2013, 115), the resultant new values and practices adopted in the course of transition led to hybrid forms of journalism and political communication in Zimbabwe. The
net effect has been a failure to democratize participation in the mediated public sphere by groups or interests other than those sanctioned by the powerful elite (Mare 2016). The public press continues to exhibit editorial policies and practices that reflected the ideological and socio-political environment of the country (Mukasa 2003). Scholars (Saunders 1991, Mukasa 2003) concur that despite the fact that the ZANU PF led government has always argued that the press was free after independence, it soon became clear that the government regarded the media as an important apparatus in extending and maintaining its political legitimacy.

It was only during the second decade of independence (1990–1999), which is often touted as the golden age of the Zimbabwean press (see Chari 2009), that the country experienced a phenomenal quantitative growth of new private newspapers and magazines. The launch of private newspapers (like the Financial Gazette) and magazines (like Moto magazine) provided a formidable counter-hegemonic challenge to the ruling government’s hegemony-construction project (Saunders 2000, Willems 2011), although most of them found it difficult to survive in a contracting economy. However, it was the launch of the Daily News by the Associated Newspapers of Zimbabwe (ANZ) at a time when the country was experiencing an economic maelstrom, which completely changed the face of the Zimbabwean media landscape (Chari 2009, Moyo 2009). Practicing a normative approach to news reporting that became known as “oppositional journalism” (Chuma 2010, 21), the paper became a strategic conduit for venting popular discontent against the oppression, lack of freedoms and violence that was obtaining and threatening peace in Zimbabwe. Under a new broadcasting act, both personnel and content of the broadcast media must rigidly conform to the policies dictated by the Minister. This blatant control of the press is a defining characteristic of the legacy of colonialism in the post-colonial state in Africa (Mare 2016). The journalistic ethos of those times was to promote European cultural standards while denigrating African culture and political agitation as the nemesis of Western civilization and Christianity (Dombo 2014a). Stories about Africans were largely, if not exclusively, negative and demeaning.

In a bid to counter oppositional journalism, which exposed its violence and oppression, the ZANU-PF government attempted to monopolize the public sphere (by shutting down private newspapers) through forcing the state-owned media to practice patriotic journalism (Chuma 2010, 21). This normative approach to news reporting manifested itself through the narrativization and dissemination of a highly selective discourse Zimbabwean nation, which was deliberately calculated to interpellate the people of Zimbabwe (Ranger 2004, Willems 2011). It was also intended to whip up Pan-African sentiment across the continent in the fight against Western enemies seeking to overthrow the country’s hard-won independence. The state-owned media became a political player in its own right privileging the hegemonic discourse of the ruling party over others (Mare 2016).

Between 2001 and 2005, the ZANU-PF government fearing that oppositional journalism would mobilize people into the streets passed a series of legal and extra-legal restrictions (see Moyo 2009, Mare 2016) meant to curtail freedom of speech, assembly, political association and expression and access to information (Moyo 2009, Willems 2011, Mare 2016). This was accompanied by a serious clampdown on journalists (foreign and local) and activists who were blacklisted as anti-ZANU-PF. Newspapers which refused to comply with the provisions of AIPPA (including the Daily News) were forced to close down (see Moyo 2009). The state broadcaster, ZBC, was forced to introduce seismic changes in radio and television programming. These included the removal of critical foreign news bulletins as well as the virtual banning of radio airplay of locally produced songs that were critical of government (Willems 2011). In the end, the state-owned media offered a magnified image of the ruling elite through churning out patriotic media content.
With the systematic colonization of the mainstream press by the political elite, citizens were left with fewer spaces of civic engagement and public debate meant to challenge violence, oppression and repression and advance peace and social cohesion (Moyo 2009, Mare 2016). Empirical research (Moyo 2009, Mare 2016) suggests that citizens had to turn to diasporic newspapers like NewZimbabwe.com, the Zimbabwe Daily, the Zimbabwe Situation and other news websites that served as alternative voices on Zimbabwe. These constituted the “parallel markets of information” (Moyo 2009, 551), platforms through which most of these subaltern or anti-state discourses articulated and exerted themselves. These sites provided citizens inside the country as well as the diaspora with as much information and news on political and social developments. Communicative channels (like popular cultural forms such as music and tabloid newspapers) allowed citizens and activists to produce, disseminate news and to counter state propaganda churned out via the mainstream public press in Zimbabwe (see Ndlela 2009, Willems 2011, Mare 2016). Despite the consummation of the inclusive government between 2009 and 2013 as well as the military takeover in November 2017, the press in Zimbabwe has seen varying amounts of state control.

The case of Zimbabwe Christian Alliance and print media in Zimbabwe

Religious organizations interested in contributing to Zimbabwe’s political landscape, especially democratization and peacebuilding founded on their religious faith, faced demonization and negative criticism from the state (Tarusarira 2016). What religious organizations perceived as religious peacebuilding was perceived as part of the regime change agenda and a cause of violence and instability in the country. The definitional challenge we highlighted earlier, as well as the ambivalence of the sacred, reared their ugly head when it came to how to define religion and its role in the public sphere including the pursuit for peace. The state had its own definition of what religion is and how religious actors should act in the public sphere. If anything, theirs (religious groups) is to do social and humanitarian work and avoid what politicians called meddling in politics (Kastfelt 2003, Tarusarira 2016). The state resorted to various mechanisms, including its print media to denigrate religio-political organizations, thus, indirectly thwarting their efforts for religious peacebuilding. Print media is an effective tool in Zimbabwe because of the country’s high literacy rate. As we alluded to earlier, we refer to a religious organization called Zimbabwe Christian Alliance (ZCA), which asserts that its mission is to be a prophetic voice in pursuit of peace in Zimbabwe. The Zimbabwean state deployed its print media to counterattack the efforts of the ZCA. The way The Herald, a government sponsored and controlled newspaper, reported about ZCA, is based or determined by the newspaper’s relationship with the ZANU PF government, which has its own self-serving interpretation of what it means to be a religious organization and what religious actors should do in the political realm. The Herald thus, plays the role of disseminating the rhetoric of the state. In an interview, a university professor of religious studies presented the perspective of the Zimbabwean state regarding religio-political organizations as follows:

The politicians would say: You church people; you have no business with what we do with people here on earth, because your interest is in heaven. Robert Mugabe in particular has been very shrewd in terms of defining religion and politics, because he says the church is a key player, spiritually and socially, in terms of building schools, but the church has no business in politics, because that is their terrain. So, when he talks of state-church partnership the spheres of influence and the lines of communication are very clear in his mind. The church is spiritual, politicians are earthly and practical. Then
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He says please, church people do what you know best while we do what we know best, let not these categories mix, because when there is a confusion of categories the following happens and I want to quote him: ‘This is a soccer match and we politicians know how to play our football and you people of the cloth when you come to our terrain, because we also do crude tackles here let nobody cry, that’s how we play, so our rules are different from yours and let those who dare cross over to us be willing to suffer the consequence.

(interview with a University Professor of Religious Studies by the authors in 2012)

The Herald has been key in creating narratives that vilify the ZCA and promoting a certain perspective of the organization. By being an outlet of the ruling party and state actors, it compromised peacebuilding by being inflammatory regarding anyone perceived to be against the state. It labelled ZCA “a quasi-political group” and an ally of the opposition political party, the MDC (Murwira 2012). The police refused to grant ZCA permission to carry out the events on the basis that the activities would disturb public order and security and used The Herald to label it illegal. A spokesperson of the police speaking via The Herald following an application by ZCA to carry out a public activity, which the police turned down, responded: “I am not aware of a … clear notice. If they don’t follow the law, then the gathering is illegal” (Shawa 2007). The same police spokesperson told The Herald newspaper “the Save Zimbabwe Campaign is a political gathering and not a prayer meeting” (see Gonda 2007). The Herald further described the Save Zimbabwe Campaign as “an organization bent on seeking political attention through illegal means” (Murwira 2012). Through The Herald, the police accused the ZCA of “seeking political attention and relevance” (Murwira 2012). The remarks of the then Minister of Home Affairs in the Herald regarding the ZCA’s Save Zimbabwe Campaign meeting which was violently disrupted by police prove the point that the Herald served to promote a particular identity of the ZCA by providing space to state agents who wanted to denigrate the ZCA. The Minister said:

last weekend’s planned gathering was not a prayer meeting as the opposition had claimed under the so-called Save Zimbabwe Campaign coordinated by the MDC’s purported Democratic Resistance Committees (DRC) and other anti-Government civic organizations. It was not a prayer meeting because there are flyers which said it was an MDC defiance campaign and they were coercing people to attend the rally.

(The Herald 2007)

What we see here is an alliance between the state organs and The Herald.

The Herald has, therefore, framed the ZCA as an organization that identifies itself as religious, yet it is quasi-political, an ally of the opposition. The dominant frame in The Herald has been that of constructing the ZCA as a disruptive organization as well as a threat to public order and security. This bastardized identity has been repeated to the point that being a quasi-political, an ally of the opposition as well as a disruptive organization has been taken as an inherent character of the ZCA. This identity invites treatment, not as a religious organization pursuing peace and democratization, but a political actor advancing a regime change agenda. The mantra of regime change has been used by ZANU-PF to delegitimize and justify attacks on organizations viewed as working with foreign nations to promote democratic ideas. Describing it as such transforms its identity from a religious to political organization. The ZCA had to find a way out to express itself and pursue its agenda of peace and democratization in Zimbabwe. Thus, it resorted to alternative media. As Ndlela (2009) argues the
relentlessly critical civil society, opposition parties, and other pro-democracy movements, not happy with the suppression of their voices and the restricted access to the public sphere, are increasingly turning to the alternative communicative spaces. We therefore focus on one newspaper that sympathized with its cause called *The Zimbabwean* and ZCA’s own newsletter called *The Christian Voice*. It is important to note that *The Zimbabwean* is an example of a diasporic media outlet. It published newspapers from the United Kingdom. *The Zimbabwean* positively reported ZCA’s launch. It interviewed an official of ZCA at the launch who said:

> We are here to serve the people and will not focus on the symptoms. Poverty, hunger, these are symptoms; we will engage government in dialogue concerning the root cause of these social ills which is bad governance (...) After years of silence the church has finally awoken to pursue justice and peace and if necessary, to defy unjust laws.

*(Special Correspondent 2006)*

The members of ZCA say they are united by similar themes, how to address them and the thinking behind the formation of the organization. The preceding quote spells out some of the themes of concern around which ZCA members converge, which the organization publicizes with the help of print media. These include poverty, hunger, violence, governance and the alleged silence of mainstream churches. In connecting ZCA with these themes, *The Zimbabwean* frames ZCA as a fighter and defender of the weak and oppressed. It presents it as a religious organization that is not only restricted to dealing with spiritual issues but one that believes that the religious and the secular are intertwined. All the concerns outlined above fall under the gamut of peacebuilding directly or indirectly, because as long as they are not addressed only negative, that is the absence of direct violence, will exist in Zimbabwe and there will be no real peace.

ZCA members also agree on how to address the themes raised above within the context of a violent political environment. In describing the modus operandi of ZCA, *The Zimbabwean* reported that the organization would

> “give form and action to our goal of mobilizing Christians to give witness to the life of Christ as defined by his core mission statement on earth; “I have come that you may have life and have it to the full”

*(John 10:10)* *(Special Correspondent 2006)*

Fullness of life is understood as or includes prosperity and health for the total human being, including the body, mind, emotions, relationships, material needs, concern for human worth in the areas of oppression, poverty, disease, hunger, injustice inter alia. By presenting this picture, *The Zimbabwean* is justifying ZCA’s pursuit of the above-mentioned concerns. This gives ZCA a particular identity that is different from that of other religious entities that seem not to challenge an unsatisfactory socio-economic and political order. This approach includes using radical strategies meant to “apply pressure on the regime until it capitulates and accepts the will of the people of Zimbabwe. The Campaign needs to engage in more rather than less incidents of confrontation with the dictator” *(Makumbe 2007)*. ZCA also confronted mainstream church leadership, whom it accuses of co-option by the ruling elites and inaction in the face of human suffering. To justify their criticism of dominant religious and political leaders, the ZCA members identify themselves with Old Testament prophets especially the prophets who spoke against the persecution of the people by kings.

*(Special Correspondent 2006)*
The reference to Old Testament prophets can be understood symbolically. With respect to political parties, Spencer (2006, 359–360) notes that the ability of a political party to set an agenda through the media is reinforced by symbolism and presentation.

Likewise, the Old Testament prophets can be viewed symbolically, because they are known to emerge in times of crises to challenge political systems such as the one articulated above. Using the media to identify with charismatic Old Testament prophets creates an appealing identity for ZCA, but attracts the label agents of the regime change agenda in support of a particular political party.

ZCA maintains that it is neither for regime change nor for a partisan organization. In an opinion piece published by The Zimbabwean, a member of ZCA, writing about the Save Zimbabwe Campaign (SZC), one of the key activities of the ZCA, stated that those in power use SZC as a convenient tool for their own political interests.

Through its own newsletter, The Christian Voice, ZCA sought to legitimize its identity and to justify its actions by claiming to derive its mandate from the bible. They made reference to Psalm 82:1–4 where the mandate of the religious actors is to defend the weak and the fatherless, maintain the rights of the weak and oppressed, rescue the weak and the needy and deliver them from the hand of the wicked. Such a citation serves numerous objectives. In addition to showing that the organization is Biblical (Zimbabweans respect the bible as pointed out earlier, hence the bible is a credible source of legitimacy), the preceding quote spells out wherefrom ZCA takes as its mandate. This mandate: “Rescue the weak and needy. Deliver them from the hand of the wicked” (The Christian Voice 2008, 4) is also an expression of its identity. The quote as well provides the rationale of the activities of ZCA that is if it is a Christian organization concerned about the total human being, then it is has to defend the cause of the weak and fatherless, translated in the context of this chapter to mean the victims of socio-economic and political collapse in Zimbabwe. The members of ZCA agreed on this rationale. The newsletter therefore presents and promotes ZCA whose identity and subsequent actions are biblically based.

Despite its claim that it is a biblically based organization as we have already seen, the state machinery has refused to acknowledge it as such. As a result, ZCA has not only suffered media vilification, but also physical attacks. Its newsletter, The Christian Voice, publicized its negative experiences, thereby presenting it as a victim of state machinery. It reported the raiding of ZCA offices by armed police, as well as the harassment, arrest and detention, in filthy cells, of its leadership in August 2006 and January 2007, the raiding of its Harare offices by the military intelligence Support Unit and Criminal Investigation Department (CID) on 9 June 2008, armed with AK 47s. Each time the members were arrested they were not found guilty of any wrongdoing by a court of law (The Christian Voice 2008, 3).

To juxtapose the media presentations and representation with the interviews to see the extent to which that tallies with how they were reported about in the newspapers, we interviewed some members of ZCA who outlined their motivation to participate in ZCA activities as follows:

I believe that my decision to participate in ZCA is not a question of choice to be involved or not to be involved. But I understand that my faith places on me certain obligations and one of those obligations is to be involved in acts that safeguard rights. For me it is therefore my understanding of God at work through Jesus Christ in society.

(Interview with a member of the ZCA by the authors)
Another said:

The word of God is very clear about the role of the church in politics. Rulers of Israel were first of all spiritual leaders, Moses was a spiritual leader. Spiritual leaders were given the task of ruling the people of Israel. We are not saying pastors should abandon the church buildings and go to Parliament, but they should question whatever goes on in Parliament, as the government passes laws which will disadvantage or oppress the people. The Bible speaks very strongly against oppression. If you oppress the people you incur the wrath of God. But the mainline churches have largely paid a blind eye to the repressive measures that were being implemented by the ruling regime and we said no, that is not the totality of the Christian life.

(Interview with a member of the ZCA by the authors)

A Pentecostal Bishop who is a member of ZCA, on the other hand, referred to the New Testament:

We are of the opinion that Jesus on earth responded to issues of his time in a manner that was holistic. He did not just over-spiritualise issues; he really was relevant; he ridiculed and made a parade of the Pharisees for their hypocrisy. He was quite keen to deal with issues regarding justice, rebuking them for selective application of the law.

(Interview with a Pentecostal bishop by the authors)

The preceding quotes concur with the identity of ZCA as can be abstracted from *The Zimbabwean*, as well as how ZCA has presented itself through its newsletter *The Christian Voice*. In the final analysis from these two print media outlets the ZCA has presented itself and has been presented as the church and subsequently the voice of the church, a believer in the unity of the religious and the secular, non-partisan defender of peace, justice and freedom, radical and fearless, prophetic, but biblically based hence legitimate.

What we also see from *The Zimbabwean* and *The Christian Voice* is that ZCA emphasizes its collective identity. Members do not speak as individuals but in the name of the organization. While they do have individual motives and individual identity, the newspaper and the newsletter mainly accentuated its collective identity. Members do not separate themselves from the institution. The identity of the institution is sustained by the convergence of its members on themes, approaches and rationale guiding its being and operations. The language of factions does not therefore apply. The members share the same interpretation of the bible with regard to the role of religion in politics. The organization is one faction, glued together by possessed knowledge (in this case biblical knowledge), its interpretation and application (including the normative interpretation of false and true), and opinions and worldview based upon the knowledge. No wonder collective terms such as a network, the church, alliance, joint-initiative, nation-wide coalition feature in how it presents itself and is presented in the newspapers.

**Conclusion**

This chapter succinctly confirms that the relationship between religion and peacebuilding which is mediated by the print media can be conceptualized as a discourse as well as a field. This discursive space and field are characterized by contradictions and constructions. In the Zimbabwean context, the print media has played a role in framing the
ZCA with some meaning for instrumental purposes. The Zimbabwean newspaper and The Christian Voice identified the ZCA with radical Old Testament prophets who are known for speaking truth power (to both political and religious leaders of their time). This makes it more radical in action through direct condemnation of political and religious leaders. Because charismatic prophets (like Amos, Jeremiah and Isaiah) are linked to criticizing power holders and demand peace and justice, just as ZCA does, their relationship with the power-holders is often sour. As this chapter has shown, the ZCA and other religious leaders have resorted to using alternative communication spaces in order to articulate issues, which are silenced and censored in the mainstream public media. On the other hand, the state-owned newspaper The Herald constructed the same organization as an agent of imperialist forces and therefore not fit-for-purpose to be referred to as a religious organization championing issues of social justice and democracy. As already pointed out, the conflict over the identity is a contest for hegemony and power, which are key coordinates at the center of a discourse. The attempt to control ZCA through The Herald, by labelling it a quasi-political organization justifies subjecting it to state vilification, demonization and violence. It also paves way for domination and hegemony over the meaning of what it means to be a religious organization. One can conclude that the identity imposed on ZCA by The Herald can easily be used by political actors to justify deployment of violence and intimidation against genuine religious leaders in an autocratic regime. This dovetails with the African proverb that “If a hyena wants to eat its children, it first accuses them of smelling like a goat.” The net effect of this de-legitimization exercise is that religious peacebuilding undertaken by religio-political organizations like the ZCA has been undermined in the mainstream public media. The identity of ZCA has been constructed with particular meanings by The Zimbabwean, The Christian Voice and The Herald, which have amplified and extended the motives of ZCA and the state. This means that print media became a tool to frame particular entities and their actions for particular interests. Print media is thus a communicative tool that can be deployed to advance or even undermine peacebuilding depending on the societal balance of forces. The chapter has also demonstrated clearly that the media can be used by different actors (for instance, a religious organization and the state) to advance certain causes. The print media is a powerful tool to promote both religious and political ideas and discourses, which influence readers’ actions. It has the capacity to create hostility and hatred on one hand and peace and reconciliation on the other.

This chapter has broadened our understanding of the complex relationship between religion, journalism and peacebuilding in Africa. It has examined how the print media can become a discursive site for contestations around religion and peacebuilding. In future, the entrance of digital media platforms, which provide alternative spaces for organizations like ZCA, which are muscled out of the mainstream public sphere, will provide an important space to tease out the interrelationship between religion, media and peacebuilding in Africa. There are already many Pentecostal organizations in Africa with a huge following on social media platforms. Like the print media, digital media platforms can also be conceptualized as Janus-faced. One the one hand, they can be used to foster peace and reconciliation but on the other hand can be harnessed for conflict escalation, fostering structural and cultural violence as well as sowing seeds of religious intolerance. Future research, however, needs to focus on how to counter the current challenge of fake news, hate speech and religious intolerance fueled through digital media platforms. Research also needs to unpack the framing of some religious traditions as better than others as well as presenting secular violence as justifiable against so-called religious violence.
Further readings


The article observes that there has been a lack of attention paid to issues of conflict in the emergent research on the intersections of religion, media, and culture, specifically in Africa but also in the field more generally. It argues that the religious factor is absent from recent publications that investigate the relationship between media and conflict in Africa, yet Africa’s new media revolution is replicating, if not intensifying, old polarities, as well as generating new forms of religious intolerance and conflict.


This article sketches a general overview of the media, religion and culture research in Africa. The presents the scholars that are involved in the field of religion and media in Africa, their major findings, the theoretical grounds for the study of media and religion within the African landscape, and a road map for future areas of study of the interface between media, religion and culture in Africa.


The article reviews increasingly sophisticated research methodologies in the field of media and religion available for studying a wide variety of questions and issues: assessing the audience impact of religious broadcasting; verifying the claims of religious broadcasters; evaluating religious reporting in the press; the application of the uses and gratifications methods to religious media; using life-story methods in religious audience research; analyzing how audiences use general TV programming to reaffirm personal religious identity; analyzing personal construction of meaning in religious media; using methods of political-economy for critical examination of social power operating in religious media; and assessing the role of religious media in non-Western countries in the globalization process.


Emphasizing the importance of religious literacy for journalists, this handbook examines the role religion has played in the growth of mass media, how major media formats such as print, broadcast and online media deal with religion, how journalists cover major religious traditions, the religious press and how the American press covers the world.

References


Religious peacebuilding in Zimbabwe


