



Kairos consciousness and the Zimbabwean ecclesiology's response to crisis

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The Christian church in Zimbabwe radically indicated the courage and consciousness to identify itself with the struggle for liberation of the marginalised, the oppressed and the impoverished, more specifically in the context of *chimurenga* or the armed struggle. Thus, the Kairos model of ecclesiology consistently and unequivocally supported masses who were the majority Zimbabweans during the protracted struggle of the 1970s against racial system, thereby assuming such designations as the church of struggle, the Church of *chimurenga*, the church in trenches and combat with the people; hence, the liberationist language signalled a symbol of Kairos consciousness for Zimbabwean ecclesiology. Kairos consciousness implies the liberationist methodological framework of ecclesiology when the church becomes the interlocutor and articulator identified and associated with non-persons. Furthermore, the non-persons, the impoverished and the marginalised occupy the epicentre of epistemological space in ecclesiological discourse. Precisely, the socio-economic and political landscape of Zimbabwe radically shifted from 2000 onwards, marking the genesis of a crisis. This article based on ecclesiology investigates prophetic role and the impact of the church in the context of Zimbabwean crisis

Keywords: Kairos; *Chimurenga*; Consciousness; Black elite; Ecclesiology; Liberation; Crisis; *Jambanja*; *Ivhu* (land)

Introduction

This article investigates the Zimbabwean crisis of 2000–2013 through the liberationist framework of Kairos consciousness as articulated by Allan Boesak. The research analyses the crisis as a litmus test for Zimbabwean ecclesiology from a liberationist perspective in that the political elite constantly advised the church not to interfere and meddle with political processes. During the peak of the crisis, the political elite narrowly relegated the role of the church to spiritual matters, more specifically reading the Bible and offering prayers, thereby giving deaf ears to the daily struggles of the people and grinding poverty ravaging the Zimbabweans. Furthermore, this article is also a self-critique for the Christian church to analyse its boldness and commitment in identifying with the struggle for justice and liberation after the attainment of political independence. Meanwhile, in terms of methodological framework of Kairos consciousness, it implies evaluating what the church has not done after the demise of the armed struggle, because the seats of power are no longer occupied by colonial powers but fellow black African leaders, yet the practice of injustice remained higher. The framework focuses on whether the church has remained committed to the values of liberation and justice as the voice of the voiceless or sided with the status quo as the voice of the elite.

Kairos consciousness and ecclesiology

This study on ecclesiology is analysed through the lenses of Kairos consciousness, a liberationist framework of 'ecclesiology from below'. This model, above all odds, places in question the socio-cultural and economic conditions of people as a priority and the first business of the church (Boesak 2015). The liberationist model of ecclesiology cannot be unvoiced and silenced when the minority gets filthy rich, whilst the majority citizens are progressively languishing in grinding poverty. The Christian church begins to ask critical questions on the unbalanced and unfair historical journey emanating from colonial hangovers and bad governance in post-armed struggle which created a marginal status of captivity and hostage for ordinary people. Maposa (2011:47) postulates that consciousness becomes 'good news' as opposed to the 'bad news' for Africans, more specifically those in the peripheral, the marginalised and the 'ghetto' people. In re-reading their situation, they became aware of the effects of colonial evils and (mis)governance, and they themselves had to be artisans of their own eventual emancipation from the hangover of

Note: The Legacy of James Cone, sub-edited by Vuyani Vellem.

historical imbalances. The above statement in reference to 'good news' presupposes the presence of 'bad news' in the form of struggles of the marginalised people. It is from this backdrop that the article views the Zimbabwean church's response to the crisis through the lenses of Kairos consciousness as articulated by Boesak (2015).

In terms of methodological framework, firstly, Kairos consciousness implies that the victims, the people affected by the crisis, widows, the wounded, the broken, orphans, the unemployed and the impoverished who were denied their basic privileges and justice occupy the central epistemological space in this ecclesiological discourse (Boff & Elizondo 1985:75). In other words, the situation of crisis and conflict as obtained in the context of *chimurenga* in Zimbabwe creates victims in the form of downtrodden and those who were marginalised because of the situation.

Fundamentally, the prophetic role of ecclesiology in this context is viewed 'from below', thus the church becomes an interlocutor and articulator in association and solidarity with the non-persons.

Secondly, Kairos consciousness is how the Christian church assumes the prophetic stance in reading and discerning the signs of times, the consciousness that the crisis in Zimbabwe also offers opportunities for self-critique by the church to align its pastoral and prophetic responsibilities in addressing the situation (Maposa 2013:139). Kairos consciousness means engaging a liberationist approach which starts specifically where there is pain, humiliation, oppression and suffering. In addition, the church becomes conscious to be in struggle with the marginalised and impoverished for liberation in society (Banana 1996b:363). Thus, our framework analysis places the church on the forefront of struggle for liberation more specifically to establish how its operation and mission serve the people in the peripheral.

Historically, the church in Zimbabwe indicated the boldness to identify its mission with the struggle for justice and liberation of the people. In the early 1970s, the church became concerned with the issues of black people's struggle and racial discrimination in Rhodesia. McLaughlin (1996) observed that the church in Rhodesia became committed to the armed struggle. In an analysis, the church was viewed as the listening church, conscious of the voiceless and the impoverished as opposed to the teaching church of the Rhodesian elite mostly concerned with the survival of its institution (Verstraelen 1998:258). This implies that Kairos consciousness existed in Zimbabwe in the black church which joined the masses during the liberation struggle. Our framework views the church of *chimurenga* as the church of the people, the church that takes sides consistently and unequivocally with the oppressed and the impoverished (Catholic Institute for International Relations 1985:25).

Thirdly, this framework is developed based on the notion which focuses on Christian church's openness to its social

environment in form of the society in a dynamic rather than a passive sense (Orobator 2005:31). This approach raises the symbol and appraisal of ecclesiology in public space which is relevant for this study because of church's role for liberation in Zimbabwe. Furthermore, this framework involves self-determination that the wounded and the victims have the potential to plan their own destiny (Banana 1991a:95). Crucially, the study is based on the approach that the authenticity of liberation is not merely based on its integral character but practically on its being affected by the victims and the wounded (Boff 1985:70).

Fourthly, this framework is hermeneutical based on the thrust that the Bible is a historical book of resistance and justice for the Christian church (Boesak 2011:7). The term 'hermeneutics' in the study implies the art of correctly reading and interpreting the Bible, interpreting historical events from a liberationist perspective, the consciousness and the new realisation of one's own destiny (Maposa 2011:46). Crucially, a thorough appraisal is raised on the ecclesiology prophetic communiques, pastoral letters, documents, primary sources, and engagements to establish critically the strengths and inadequacies of responses. The essence of this framework lies in the renaissance of consciousness in the Zimbabwean ecclesiology and its impact in public space with a contemporary outlook rather than the decorated hierarchical structures.

The Zimbabwean model of ecclesiology

The Christian churches in Zimbabwe (HOCD 2006) through their prophetic document, *The Zimbabwe We Want: Towards a National Vision for Zimbabwe*, understand its mandate as follows:

The church is a divine institution which has been called to serve God and all humanity by means of being actively involved in the transformation of the world. The church carries the mission of Christ by boldly standing for justice and liberation to make the world a better place. (n.p.).

The above liberation discourse serves as an entry point to our analysis of the Zimbabwean ecclesiology in context of liberation. Verstraelen (1998) provides an insight into the composition and framework of ecclesiological bodies in Zimbabwe profiled as the Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe (EFZ), The Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC 2009), The Zimbabwe Catholic Bishop's Conference (ZCBC 2007), Heads of Christian Denominations (HOCD 2006) and the African Initiated Churches (AICs) brand of Zimbabwe Amalgamated Christian Churches.

Undisputedly, the church occupies a strategic role in public space, and hence becomes a key stakeholder in socio-economic and political issues.

Importantly, the HOCD is a highly profiled Christian structure union which brings together all the fraternal Christian bodies in Zimbabwe in form of ZCC, EFZ, ZCBC

and some other branches of AICs. Some use the term 'Christian Alliance of Churches in Zimbabwe' referring to the HOCD.

On its establishment, the highly profiled Christian structure discussed matters of common interest, especially those related to church–state relationship (Verstraelen 1998:8). In other words, this constitutes the most powerful ecumenical voice of Zimbabwean Christianity network. Mucchechete (2009:1) in the work, *A Historical Analysis of the Role of Churches in Advocacy for Good Governance in Zimbabwe*, advanced the notion that the political role of church in Zimbabwe intensified during the crisis but, most importantly, was the engagement facilitated by the HOCD (Mucchechete 2009:1). By and large, there is a need to establish the impact of this Christian grouping in Zimbabwe's political landscape.

The umbrella bodies of churches converged into a solid block under the banner of this alliance (HOCD) and this was rather a paradigm shift, particularly from the year 2000 onwards. Therefore, it was no longer a business as usual whereas in previous years church denominations voiced their concerns in a shambolic way and from an individualistic point of interest (Mucchechete 2009):

The HOCD confronted the issues affecting the Zimbabweans particularly political intolerance, rule of law and political repression. Furthermore, the ZCC, EFZ, ZCBC also collaborated [with] other civic organs such as the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace in Zimbabwe (CCJPZ), Peace and Justice Commission (PJC) and the Church in Society (CIS) respectively. (p. 2)

This collaboration became a major landmark through which the churches in Zimbabwe voiced their concerns in a more visible way in public space.

Crucially, the HOCD (2006) authored one of the most unique documents: *The Zimbabwe We Want: Towards a National Vision for Zimbabwe by the Churches of Zimbabwe*. The main thrust of the document was prophetic and advocating a national vision for Zimbabwe. The document impacted Zimbabwe, shook the status quo and registered the voice of the church more audibly and visibly. Furthermore, the HOCD was proactive in its consciousness towards election processes, monitoring and observing as well as calling for free, fair, harmonised and credible elections. More importantly, the HOCD had constructed a culture of engagement and dialogue; hence, the historical event of meeting the then head of the state, President Robert Mugabe, took place in 2006 to discuss the political impasse in Zimbabwe. In a nutshell, the visibility of the HOCD and the organs attached to its operations was a clear indication that religion in the form of Christianity has a role in the political processes and the public space.

Kairos consciousness and *chimurenga*

This research is developed in the context of the Zimbabwean ecclesiology as an appraisal of the action and views of church

within the third *chimurenga* struggle. *Chimurenga* is a Shona word meaning war, revolt, riot or revolution (Dale 1983:25). The usage of the term 'third *chimurenga*' has assumed several names within the 21st century political discourses in Zimbabwe. It implies the struggle for liberation or *jambanja* (fast-track land redistribution) or *hondo yeminda* (war for land restoration) (Maposa 2012:70). In other words, all names and designations of the term *chimurenga* connotes some historical grievances based on the account of colonial imbalances in the Zimbabwean society. The issue of *chimurenga*, which sent some shocking waves in Zimbabwe and the world over, anchored in our view within the framework of liberation struggle in pre and post-independence Zimbabwe.

Historically, Zimbabwe's political independence was achieved after a protracted liberation struggle popularly known as the second *chimurenga* (armed struggle) from 1966 to 1980 (Maposa 2012:70). This protracted struggle captured the imagination of many people, particularly in the Global South. The churches strongly collaborated with the liberation movements of Zimbabwe National Liberation Army (ZANLA) and Zimbabwe People's Army (ZIPRA) during the armed struggle. More importantly, the church became a fertile ground for the grooming of nationalists such as Canaan Banana, Joshua Nkomo, Robert Mugabe, Abel Muzorewa, Herbert Chitepo and others. Banana (1991) described the church as an extension of the liberation front as follows:

We have seen the daily struggles by our people, we cannot remain in comfort zone but join them in solidarity as a church of trenches and combat, placing emphasis on anthropology over ecclesiology. (p. 364)

Meanwhile, our hermeneutics of liberation guides the framework in re-reading the situatedness and culturedness, and hence informs that Zimbabwe has been troubled by colonial evils and hangovers. As such, the notion of third *chimurenga* resonates as the issue and mantra of *ivhu kuvanhu* [land to the landless] ushered in the struggle. Accordingly, Bakare (1993:72) uses the metaphor of land as *amai* [mother] in Shona, which entails that land is sacred, and hence cannot be a commodity to be sold. Furthermore, the third *chimurenga* is revolutionary and violent; this explains why the term *jambanja* [violence] is used, meaning that the issue of land is nonreversible and non-negotiable to redress the colonial imbalances.

In this analysis, the second *chimurenga* (armed struggle) from 1966 to 1980 was an inevitable enterprise because of the land issue, hence the salutation *mwana wevhu* (son of the soil) in Shona was popularised during the war of liberation as a way of motivation to value land as the cause worthy to fight for (Bakare 1993:46). In addition, the popular dimension that Zimbabwe *ndeyeropa* (Zimbabwe came through the price of blood) explains that the value of liberation is fulfilled and achieved through sacrifice. The Christian Council of Zimbabwe endorsed the armed struggle and sponsored the guerrilla movements during the second *chimurenga* (1969–1980) (Watyoka 1991:16). The scope of this study critically examines

whether the Zimbabwean ecclesiology is pro-third *chimurenga* or anti-*chimurenga* considering James Cone's (1975) notion that:

Neutrality is not an option when people are oppressed, the fight for justice and freedom is a divine right for every Christian. (p. 141)

However, the council of churches in Zimbabwe issued a statement in the climax of the third *chimurenga*, stating the following (HOCD 2006): 'The land question remains the single most emotive subject in our country and its resolution have far more reaching benefits for the nation of Zimbabwe' (p. 30)

Meanwhile, an analysis is rendered pertaining to the appraisal of Zimbabwean ecclesiology to third *chimurenga*. Firstly, Christian churches endorsed the first and second *chimurenga* because of their view against racism, segregation, land imbalances and violence of the Rhodesian regime and oppression as a threat to black people. More so, the same church which endorsed the second *chimurenga* (1966–1980) could not celebrate the value of independence if people remain landless. Secondly, the term *chimurenga* also connotes shelling in the Christendom in that it became a turning point and new dawn in the Zimbabwean ecclesiology to have an autonomous Afrocentric ecclesiology. Furthermore, the dawn of political independence in Zimbabwe also meant the recognition of some AICs who had suffered under the yoke of colonialism in terms of derogatory naming and undermining.

However, the church was always divided; whilst it accepted the value of land and giving land to landless, some Christian circles disagreed with the method employed, especially the use of force *chirongwa chejambanja* [the violent taking of land] (Maposa 2010:192). In addition, the third *chimurenga* started in Marondera as a typical liberation enterprise initiated by the people as artisans of their own emancipation, but it got the backup of state machinery. Thus, it became a well-timed programme to give the ruling Zanu-PF party a political mileage over other political rivals in the form of Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). What started as a crisis response to the third *chimurenga* in 2000 became a fully blown struggle, thus reducing Zimbabwe to a pariah state (Mlambo 2014:231). As such, the third *chimurenga* brought a package of economic decline, poor performance of agricultural sector, which was a backbone of Zimbabwe's economy, and changed the political landscape in terms of ushering in of unprecedented violence.

Political and cultural consciousness

Daneel (1991:129) observed that most churches (AICs) in Zimbabwe openly supported the second *chimurenga* (armed struggle), hence they were proactive in nationalism and party politics. Having noted this development, there was a need to highlight the fact that the second *chimurenga* (liberation struggle) was all about expression of very deep grievances by the black people in Zimbabwe. Further, some prominent leaders of AICs such as Samuel Mutendi, Johane Masowe and Wimbo *Vadzidzi va Jesu* used their gatherings and churches as basis of the ZANLA and ZIPRA forces or

vakomana (freedom fighters) (Daneel 1991:129). As a matter of coincidence, AICs greatly thrived in most rural areas of Zimbabwe, which in this case became liberated zones or political strongholds for liberation fighters.

Taking on board Oosthuizen's (1968:7) comment that AICs emerged because of racial discrimination, disrespect of Africans by the white minority and selective disciplinary action on black people, these remarks explain the reason why the church became a fertile ground for grooming of nationalism and political mobilisation of the armed struggle. On the other hand, Hastings (1971:208) noted that AICs emerged because of colour bar and lack of opportunities for black people in politics, industry, churches and civic spheres. However, one cannot rule out the existence of leadership schism within the framework of AICs which led to splits and division. There was also a consensus that the schism was not squarely based on leadership wrangles because some theological and doctrinal issues were also not ruled out.

Fundamentally, the Ethiopian and spirit types of churches constitute the most commonly known brand of AICs which originated as a reaction against negative perception by some white people-dominated churches. This band of AICs was militant against white people's supremacy which imposed itself on African religious space during the colonisation process. As such, the Ethiopian churches reflected and expressed the message of political and cultural protest by black people in that the western Christianity invaded the most crucial space of Africans. Subsequently, our framework raised in our pillars of Zimbabwean ecclesiology highlighted the church of struggle in trenches and combat with oppressed masses, thus the AICs brand fought white domination right from the onset of colonialism (Sundkler 1961:53). The study takes note that the emergence of AICs was indeed a cultural and political conscience, a great step towards an Afrocentric ecclesiology.

Decline of Kairos consciousness in post-independence Zimbabwe

Kairos consciousness is our continuous probing of the question as to why the prophetic voice of the church faded after the attainment of political independence (Boesak 2015:2). With some sentiments, the church has moved from 'combat' to 'compliance'. The leading prophetic voices of the church were no longer audible as they were during the second *chimurenga* [liberation struggle]. The prophetic voices became inaudible during the inception of new political dispensation or the black government (Chitando 2009:96). In other words, the framework of Kairos consciousness critique what the church has not done after the attainment of political freedom with lenses focused on a theology of ecclesiology 'from below', starting with the impoverished, downtrodden, the excluded and those who have remained marginalised.

Firstly, the attainment of political independence in Zimbabwe brought a decline to the prophetic voice of the church. The new political dispensation ushered in the black political and

economic elite under the banner of majority rule, and black administrators took over major functions and top civil service functions. Ibbo Mandaza (1986) argued that the black elite emerged within the nationalist ideology but disguised the class structures of the Zimbabwean society. However, the black elite enhanced the reality of class struggles in a way that reinforced neo-colonialism (cited in Weiss 1994:139). This implies that the new black elite lifestyle matched those of white elites, thereby stratifying the Zimbabwean society. A new black elite wealth class emerged in Zimbabwe. This new elite in African society just crossed the line to join the minority whites who control power and privileges in society (Van Aarde 2001:8). In other words, the voiceless, the marginalised and the impoverished remained powerless without control even in post-independent Zimbabwe. Thus, the emergence of black elite, the minority wielding power and control in politics and economy stratified the society.

Secondly, the attainment of political independence in 1980 was also interpreted as the 'pay-back time' for the church's participation in the struggle symbolised by the appointment of Rev. Canaan Banana, a clergy, as the country's ceremonial president. Banana was one of the vocal, prophetic liberation theologian mouthpieces of the church during the liberation struggle in the 1970s. Quite a good number of clergies were absorbed into various platforms and positions of government in 1980. This implied that eventually the church became part and parcel of the government of the day, putting to a compromise the critical voice and prophetic ecclesiological brand.

Thirdly, the church in Zimbabwe largely shared Robert Mugabe's Afrocentric approach of black empowerment, especially the quest towards land restoration. Meanwhile, the western Christian church played a part in land thefts as a colonial handmaid; it also differed with the black ecclesiology, particularly the African-initiated ecclesiology, which felt that land must be restored back to its rightful owners. However, in 1980 the church remained silent on the land issue because of its possession of vast pieces of land and mission stations distributed to them during the colonial era. The church became non-confrontational to follow black leaders with some politicians claiming to be having been born and bred in the church. As such, the church was neutralised, and Kairos consciousness and prophetic mode of the church declined on attainment of political independence in Zimbabwe in the following decade. The silence and absence of prophetic ecclesiology in Zimbabwe gave room to recurrences of state and Church theologies which negated the concerns of the poor in favour of the elite.

Fourthly, Chitando (2009) argues that the formation of black elite class is to be viewed from Christian context. In fact, the church was trapped in a power matrix because it was closely connected to the foregoing, the emergency of majority government in Zimbabwe (Chitando 2009:96). During the dawn of political independence in Zimbabwe in 1980, the church leaders strongly cooperated with the government. The two crucial institutions, the state and the church,

shared common horizons, particularly the post-armed struggle themes such as reconciliation, peace-building and development (Chitando 2002). The cordial relations in church-state matrix continued unchecked from the time of struggle of independence.

Fundamentally, the background to the development of this thesis is formed by the fact that the political elite in Zimbabwe relegated prophetic role of the Church from political processes and public space to spiritual matters, thereby narrowly placing its role to what the ruling political elite referred to as the important business of reading the Bible, offering lengthy prayers and preaching the message of heaven (Chitando 2013:44). To the political establishment in Zimbabwe, particularly the ruling elite, 'The Church must always desist from sin', and to them, the worst sin is when the Church makes utterances on political issues (Chitando 2013:44). By virtue of its theological mandate, the Church cannot stand aloof if bad activities happen in their midst, particularly where human lives are subjected to a system of oppression.

Kairos consciousness and the Zimbabwean crisis

The years of crisis in Zimbabwe from 2000 onwards ushered in a period described as the 'turbulent years'. The genesis of the titanic third *chimurenga* (land restoration) contributed to triggering of fully blown Zimbabwean crisis (Sibanda & Maposa, cited in Chitando 2013:138). From 2000, Zimbabwe experienced a full-blown crisis, which implied a total collapse of the economic, political and social systems. Key issues in this article that could be viewed as 'hot spots' include the titanic third *chimurenga* (land redistribution). This enterprise was violently implemented in 2000. Overall, the programme completely changed the political landscape, economic performance and even caused broken relationships amongst citizens as well as the international community, including the UK, the USA and the entire block of European Union. Furthermore, Operation Murambatsvina in 2005 saw the government endorsing the forceful eviction of its own citizens in towns and cities. This operation was not well received by the Christian church, who viewed the exercise as gross injustice to the lives of people. The Zimbabwean society also grappled with the problem of culture of violence in political space, especially after the birth of a strong opposition party, the MDC in 2000, which proceeded to become a strong competitor to Zanu PF on the political sphere.

Crucially, the events which erupted in Zimbabwe had a direct massive impact on the church. Vambe (n.d.) described the period as the 'deepest crisis' which provided faith crisis in terms of prophetic responsibilities of the Christian church in Zimbabwe. This faith crisis is a Kairos for the Christian church (Maposa & Sibanda, cited in Chitando 2013:137). As articulated in the study, Kairos is the moment of grace and opportunity, a favourable time in which God issues a challenge to decisive action (Catholic Institute for International Relations 1985:4).

More importantly, the church which understands its political and social role in a society stands within a prophetic stand.

Importantly the period under review by the study is well tabulated as the 'crisis years and turbulent years' in Zimbabwe (Mlambo 2014:231). Thus, denying that Zimbabwe suffocated and suffered a crisis of staggering proportions from 2000 is tantamount to a dishonesty of the highest order (Chitando 2013:x). This crisis also entails that Zimbabwe also captured global attention in terms of media coverage. For the purpose of clarity, Mangena and Hove (2013:228) observed that the Zimbabwean crisis took various forms in that at once it became economic, social, political, legal and moral crisis. As a follow-up to these observations, Chitando (2013) is justified to implore and refer to the term 'full-blown' crisis. In other words, the situation described total collapse of the pillars that define nation's survival.

Furthermore, it was a time when the political elite unvoiced and pacified the church. A strong myth has been perpetuated by the political elite in the form of Robert Mugabe that religion has nothing to do with the public space, hence his popular statement in Shona says *vemakereke itai zvekunamata, hamuripedze musiye zveomatongerwo enyika* (meaning the church's business must be focused on praying and reading the Bible and also desist from politics) (Chitando 2013:11). Zimbabwe was at crossroads and the Christian church raised consciousness in the form of resistance to be silenced by the political elite, particularly at a time when the society was severely threatened by crisis.

Prophetic ecclesiology in Zimbabwe

Consciousness is discovery, an awareness of the situation of injustice, and is also the courage to make life-transforming decisions in difficult times (Boesak 2015:7). The crisis in Zimbabwe from 2000 onwards raised the consciousness of the church to stand against injustice and abuse of power by politicians. Meanwhile, Taringa, Chitando and Mapuranga (2014:183) discovered that in Zimbabwe Christian resistance emerged during the years of crisis against political ideology in the form of the ruling Zanu PF. In addition, this section of the article reiterates once again that Robert Mugabe defined politics to a narrow perspective, bragging that only brave persons like himself were fit to play the game, and the church leaders' business is in pulpit and prayers (Taringa et al. 2014:184).

However, despite fear and intimidation from political elite, Christian organisations and Christian alliances courageously challenged fearful politicians, particularly in their deliberate abuse of human rights. More importantly, the situation in Zimbabwe also raised the consciousness of Christian churches. Hence, some church leaders did not fear to stand against what they believed as true values of democracy. We thus noted the visibility of figures such as Pius Ncube from the Catholic Church and Levy Kadenge from the Methodist Church in Zimbabwe, Sebastien Bakare from the Anglican Church, Oscar Wermter of the Catholic Church in Zimbabwe

and Jimmy Dube of the Methodist Church in Zimbabwe. It is important to note the emergence of theology of resistance in Zimbabwe during the period under review, hence the challenge to political elite and their ideologies.

Kaulemu (2010:31) argues that there was a prophetic stand within the Zimbabwean Christianity in that the church leaders did not sit idly whilst the country was undergoing a crisis of immense proportion. As such, Christian leaders spoke with conviction and eloquence on issues which badly affected Zimbabwe from 2000 to 2013. Importantly, as alluded to in this article, Robert Mugabe insisted that the word 'crisis' was misplaced and misused; in fact, he over-emphasised that the church was venturing dangerously in political domain, leaving spiritual matters unattended (Chitando 2013:44). The perpetuation of this myth did not stop or deter the consciousness of Zimbabwean Christianity as they shelled out silence, thereby challenging the political environment of Zimbabwe in public. The church also sought relevance, particularly to its adherents and citizens. In taking a stance to address issues affecting the general populace, it also antagonised those who oversee the political power.

The church undertook some exposition of the crisis and presented an action plan. Christian response to the Zimbabwean crisis was guided by an ecumenical document, *The Zimbabwe We Want* (HOCD 2006). The document was unique, historical and a theological exposition that reflected a stance taken by the church to correct the character of silence in face of a fully blown crisis (Manyonganise, cited in Chitando 2013:155). More importantly, the document, produced by the ZCBC, ZCC and EFZ, contained very useful details for national discourse as it was authored by Zimbabwe's Christian consensus.

An analysis of some pastoral letters presented in the form of Christian response to Zimbabwean crisis is considered in this part of the article. Thus, the eloquent and provocative pastoral letter entitled 'God hears the cry of the oppressed' by the ZCBC produced in 2007 at the peak of the crisis is worth of consideration. The pastoral letter is heart-searching, accurate, bold and prophetic. However, the letter was viewed as gross antagonism and undermining the status of President Robert Mugabe, hence prompted immediate response to pastoral letters that are fond of criticism (Togarasei 2013). Importantly, the pastoral letters spoke on most of the issues bedeviling Zimbabwe such as political violence, myopic land redistribution, fraudulent electoral process, massive displacement of citizens in urban areas with Operation *Murambatsvoina* and economic crisis. Other pastoral letters produced by Christian fraternity in response to activities unfolding in Zimbabwe during the crisis are also considered in this study. The perceived notion is that the Church in Zimbabwe has been in the forefront as part and parcel in the struggles bedeviling the nation. Therefore, as the crisis intensified, several Christian bodies, over and above the well-established traditional bodies cited earlier in the study

such as ZCC, ZCBC and EFZ featured prominently on issues of crisis in public discourse (Togarasei 2013:100).

However, in as much as church establishments in Zimbabwe took their prophetic responsibility, the matrix of public space remained a contested terrain. The political elite in Zimbabwe constantly reminded the church to avoid meddling in political space.

Evaluation

The research is categorically based on ecclesiology and its relevancy in addressing and solving crisis in Zimbabwe. Importantly, the article was developed from a liberationist perspective of Kairos consciousness. The research problem was navigated based on political elite's claim that the church must not interfere with the public space and political processes of Zimbabwe. Furthermore, the research has been a self-critique on the prophetic role of the Christian church in standing for the justice of the marginalised and impoverished people of Zimbabwe against the backdrop of emergence of black elite class holding power and control at the expense of the majority. In other words, a prophetic ecclesiology cannot put on sale the price of justice by endorsing the *status quo* when people's lives are subjected to marginalisation and grinding poverty.

The navigation by the research reflected that the *chimurenga* in Zimbabwe was traced from the liberation struggle of the 1970s, and land redistribution was a genuine Afrocentric liberationist enterprise in addressing historical imbalances. More so, *chimurenga* is a form of black people's empowerment. However, there was manipulation of indigenous spirituality pertaining to land reform programmes by political and economic elites to scramble economic resources (Sachikonye 2011:28). The impoverished did not improve their livelihood as expected, but instead the economic and political elite gained a mileage in this crisis.

This implies that the crisis in Zimbabwe was a clear indication of lack of justice by state custodians and the elite cartel of society. Crucially, in this article, justice is viewed in the context that the poor, widows, marginalised and impoverished become masters of their own destiny. The church is viewed in our framework as the centre and fountainhead of justice in helping the community to understand fully the doings of God and the value of life. This study reflected on the notion that the dignity and respect of people's lives is not attainable if justice does not prevail based on the biblical teaching that God created man in his own image (Gn 1:27).

In evaluation, the study closely noted that political violence has developed into a political culture, which has been justified as a tool for achieving political and economic power. Importantly, political violence is also driven by powerful sources of society, the political and economical elite, for gaining materialistic mileage at the expense of the depreciating Zimbabwean society. In Zimbabwe, political violence has now almost become a culture.

However, recurrences of the church and state theologies cannot be ruled out in Zimbabwe because of partisan affiliation by some of the church establishments in favour of political elite. Crucially, the status quo in Zimbabwe by ruling political elite devised a counter-machinery in the form of state theology by some church establishments who came out openly as government mouthpiece in endorsing every action taken by the state. The study noted with concern that partisans and divisions in ecclesiology limited its responses to the situation of crisis and conflict in Zimbabwe.

Conclusion

A *'tour de force'* was made in this research highlighting the liberationist framework of Kairos consciousness and ecclesiology in Zimbabwe. In general, as some scholars and theologians wrestling with the history and development of Kairos consciousness and ecclesiology have a consensus that it is about God's liberating acts of justice in history for the souls of the oppressed and downtrodden, our framework portrays liberationist views 'from below'. Nevertheless, this research has been navigated and articulated in search of the efficacy of Christian participation in public life precisely in the Zimbabwean crisis of 2000–2013.

Above all odds, Kairos consciousness has been in Zimbabwe particularly the participation of the church in the liberation struggle popularly known as *chimurenga*. However, there has been a decline in prophetic voices in post-independent Zimbabwe under the black government. Silence of the church after political independence left power and control of resources in the hands of black elite at the expense of the impoverished majority. However, Kairos consciousness is a good news for the marginalised people in Zimbabwe as the church spoke prophetically on what had gone wrong in the Zimbabwean society. Our probing question was based on what the political independence signified to the impoverished in Zimbabwe; hence, the role of the church is to take a bold stance in seconding the genuine causes of the marginalised people.

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Author's contributions

K.P. was responsible for all the research in the article.

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