

Editorial: Religion and Gullibility in Zimbabwe

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Gullibility is not a unique phenomenon to religion. It appears in almost all social institutions including relationships, academia, finance, science, politics and war and justice especially criminal justice. Mercier (2017) reviewed evidence from a number of cultural domains ranging from religion and demagoguery to political propaganda and media, especially marketing and advertising in general. The study also showed that the medical field was not spared of gullible behaviour in the form of erroneous medical beliefs (Mercier 2017: 103). However, maybe more than other fields, religion has often proven to be a fertile ground for the expression of gullible behaviour, both in the portrayal of gullibility in religious characters and the devotees' unquestioning acceptance of any notion legitimated through an appeal to the supernatural (Green-span 2009:29).

Zimbabwe and the rest of the Southern African countries have not been spared of religious gullibility and what baffles the mind is that where and when the law is expected to take its course in respect to religious practice, it is either silent or it is found wanting on matters involving religious gullibility. In addition, in academic circles in Zimbabwe in particular, there has not been sufficient exploration of this subject.

This special issue of *Alternation* perhaps represents the first fruits of academic research towards such an important, yet often ignored subject. The authors explore various forms of gullibility with different motives and focus, but following a unified trajectory from the first set of articles right to the end. In the first part, we have articles that conceptualize gullibility through either defining, or explaining, or contesting, the articulation of religion and gullibi-

lity. The second set are articles that either look at African Indigenous Religion (AIR) and health matters, or that have AIR almost as the underlying religious or theological base, or both. The last three categories are articles that look at the Bible and gullibility, Pentecostalism and gullibility and finally, media and gullibility respectively.

While gullibility has not been a subject of much research in Zimbabwe, and perhaps the rest of Southern Africa, recent researchers elsewhere, especially in the West, have developed a keen interest in the subject. Greenspan (2009), chronicled stories that reveal forms of gullibility, from several spheres of life, ranging from the religious to financial and political spheres. Through an analysis of various forms of gullibility within these stories, Greenspan managed to map the theoretical and conceptual issues associated with gullibility. He managed to address three key issues that this special issue of *Alternation* also focuses on, namely, why so many people become gullible, the psychological factors that influence people into gullible behaviour and how best people can deal with gullibility. This special issue of *Alternation* thus aims to not only raise the urgency to consider the issue of gullibility much more closely than before, but also attempts to provide some academic direction as to forms of conceptualisation relevant to the study of gullible behaviour.

The focus in this section of the journal issue is on Zimbabwe, because gullibility has far reaching implications for practically all spheres of life in Zimbabwe. Many of these are traced in the journal. We do need to note that, indeed, no article in this special issue investigated gullibility in the financial sphere, though. This is despite the fact that gullibility is the major cause of arguably a perennial problem influencing the economic development of Zimbabwe in terms of so-called bubbles (Odlyzko 2010: 1). A bubble may mean an unusual excitement for investment that momentarily causes a steep rise in the prices of some assets and then collapses (Odlyzko 2010: 2). The economic sector in Zimbabwe has received its share of bubbles, which introduces some bizarre shifts in the pricing of some assets even when using the US dollar.

Yet, this is a universal phenomenon.

Teunisse (2015: v), for instance, confirms the observation that despite the fact that in 2014 alone, more than 300 000 people in the United States of America (USA) fell victim to one scam or the other, the subject of gullibility remains under studied. While she addresses quite a number of relevant topics in her thesis, Teunisse (2015: 6) investigates one form of gullibility that a

number of articles in this issue, also either explicitly or implicitly address, namely superstition. While authors here do not necessarily use the term superstition, they deal with gullibility that is closely linked to paranormal or pseudo-scientific or what Teunisse (2015: 6) calls, non-conventional beliefs. Studying this kind of gullibility is critical especially in times of crises, such as the COVID-19 crisis, that the whole world has found itself in. The gullibility associated with non-conventional beliefs often leads to, or is often closely associated with fake news, conspiracy theories, and irrational behaviour. Sometimes, the latter three phenomena are difficult to handle within governance circles.

Another example comes from Australian researchers, who had to gather for a symposium to discuss the social psychology of gullibility that manifests itself in fake news, conspiracy theories and irrational behaviour. The results of the symposium are documented in Forgas and Baumeister (2019).

In Zimbabwe there are cases of journalists and political figures who have been arrested for their role in matters to do with what is deemed as either fake news (called falsehoods) or conspiracy theories. Also, during this COVID-19 era, media is awash with calls to reject COVID-19 vaccines based on the conspiracy theory that the vaccines are meant to cause harm to Africans. In this regard, a number of articles in this special issue also deal with gullibility and the media. This speaks volumes for the importance of this special issue of *Alternation*. It is important to pay particular attention to the issues raised and to reflect on how gullibility might be stalling, if not derailing, innovation and development in both the public and private sectors in Zimbabwe.

Outside the spheres of political and economic development in Zimbabwe, gullibility in the area of religion, and the discipline of religious studies, has manifested itself in different forms and to various degrees. In the Christian faith, it has manifested itself in the way both the untrained and the trained Christian believers interpret the sacred text in Christianity, the Bible. In particular, interpretations of the Bible have either been associated with or actually caused certain gullible behaviour in the way believers approach the subjects of wealth, health and well-being and gender and sexuality.

In this issue of *Alternation* these varying degrees of manifestation of gullibility in the stated areas show clearly in the various studies carried out. It is also noteworthy, that gullibility can also be detected in the area of religion and the natural sciences, religion, literature and folktales, and religion and religious freedom. Another very interesting area that features in this issue of

Alternation is the presence of what may be called ‘academic gullibility’ among academics in theology and religious studies.



Definitions, Explanations, and Contestations of Religion and Gullibility

In ‘Material/ Spiritual Seeding? Problematizing Religion and Gullibility in Zimbabwe’ **Tenson Muyambo**, explores various forms of behaviour patterns ranging from congregants eating grass, allowing some men of God to literally walk on their stomachs while lying prostrate on the ground, to accommodating being raped under the banner of receiving faith healing. Muyambo employed the phenomenological prerogative of the believer to zero in on one behaviour pattern of ‘seeding to the prophet’s ministry’ that is prevalent in the Pentecostal churches in Zimbabwe. Using the phenomenology of religion lens, Muyambo alludes to the perennial ‘insider and outsider’ debate among phenomenologists and theologians in the disciplines of theology and religious studies. A wider implication of Muyambo’s article on the conclusions made by the different authors on these issues, is when we talk about gullibility, who is better placed to describe and name a behaviour pattern, the devotee who is the insider having the lived experience, or the researcher who is an outsider to the lived experience? As insiders how do we represent objectively, something we are experiencing subjectively? Conversely, as outsiders how do we represent objectively that which we are not experiencing? Therefore, when researchers label the believer’s behaviour pattern as gullible, to what extent is this a valid representation of an experience that the researchers are not living themselves? It is interesting to read how Muyambo wrestles with these questions and what conclusion(s) he arrives at, as well as how the different authors in this special issue are balancing their descriptions, naming and evaluations of the various phenomena they are classifying under the notion of ‘gullibility’.

Beatrice Taringa, in ‘Wailing More than the Bereaved: Afrocentric Reflections on Gender Issues in Shona Traditional Religion and Culture’, grapples with similar questions as Muyambo although with a slightly different focus and motivation. Taringa queries the use of Western liberal feminist approaches to understand gender issues in African culture and religion. She argues that Western ontology and epistemology, approach gender issues with

pre-set categories that indicate that African women are oppressed. Gullible African feminists employ Western ontology and epistemology to address gender issues in African culture and religion. Inevitably, they have tended to reproduce, if not replicate, Western research on gender that tends to present a skewed picture of the status of African women in terms of gender. Taringa's article probes two central questions. First, are Shona women oppressed? Second but strictly related to the first question, is there a framework that can be used to account for gender issues in Shona communities in their own terms? Taringa interestingly negotiates and navigates through this contested area of gender relations among the Shona.

Following on Taringa's study, **Tabitha Bishau**, in 'Gender, Religion and/ or, Culture and Academic Gullibility in Zimbabwe' uses the phenomenological prerogative of the believer to test key axioms in contemporary gender discourse among academics in Zimbabwe. The question is whether ordinary Zimbabweans indeed identify with these established axioms. She looks at ten selected studies from Zimbabwean academics in and outside Zimbabwe. The article focuses on the Shona people living in Zimunya, Mutare, Zimbabwe. To note, is Bishau's observation about how Zimbabwean academics interpret and analyse issues to do with *roora* (bride wealth) and patriarchy among the Shona, which she attributes to what she is calling 'academic gullibility'.

While being critical of the evils of Shona culture, Taringa and Bishau raise important critical points related any movement or philosophy that seeks to apply Western solutions to African problems. Both agree that gender and related issues of *roora* among the Shona, are best understood within the context of what Taringa refers to as a 'truly [Shona] relational ontology'. This represents a paradigm shift from the mainstream studies of gender and Shona cultural studies, and is likely to attract attention.

The next two authors, who still belong to this first set of articles, look at slightly different forms of gullibility.

John Douglas McClaymont in 'Religion, Science and the Paranormal' grapples with a very important question especially among the Christians – the question of miracles and what scholars like Ellis, David and Lynn (2010) refer to as irrational behaviour. Drawing on studies that flourished in 2010 on irrational behaviour, such as those by David and DiGussepe (2010), Wilson (2010), and Szentagotai and Jones (2010), McClaymont looks at it from within the nexus of religion, science and what he calls 'paranormal' behaviour. In what he calls paranormal claims, McClaymont isolates miracles

for study. This raises an intricate philosophical discourse that probes first the distinction between cultural and critical thinking, and proceeds to look at the relationship of both, to scholarship and secularism. The article discusses how one should respond to paranormal claims, taking into account two approaches of dealing with the claims. First, the study uses Gill's approach to dealing with smokescreens that paranormal claimants use when confronted. Then second, the study of the Catholic theologian Adolphe Tanquerey's approach to claims of private revelation, is proposed. These approaches are then employed to evaluate the Humean approach to miracles. Like the earlier studies, McClaymont opts for the evidence to speak for itself without prejudice tipping the scales either way.

Margaret Chinyadza in 'Of Political Theology, and Gullibility in Zimbabwe: The Cases of Ralph Dodge (1956 – 1964), and Pius Ncube (1997 - 2007)', uses the historical analytical approach, to study two periods in the history of Zimbabwean politics, analysing these historical epochs through political theological lenses. She isolates for study, Bishop Ralph Dodge, a UMC minister of religion who ministered during the period leading to the Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI), and Archbishop Pius Ncube, a Roman Catholic Church cleric who ministered during the political crisis period in Zimbabwe between 2000-2008. Chinyadza argues that both clerics, in their practice of political theology, defied all odds towards gullibility to go along with the *status quo* even though it was extremely dangerous to do so. She then raises the critical question regarding the extent to which such a gullibility-free practice of political theology may contribute to better governance in Zimbabwe. Bishop Ralph Dodge and Archbishop Pius Ncube who stood out and spoke up for the oppressed, refusing to be gullible of the oppressive policies of their respective governments, are taken as role models of this gullibility-free way of doing theology. She recommends this approach to all clergy in Zimbabwe as a model that improves governance in Zimbabwe.

Francis Machingura and **Nomatter Sande** in "It is the Gullible ones that Survive": Armour-bearers and Bodyguards in the New Pentecostal Movements in Zimbabwe', shift attention from socio-political phenomena to purely religious phenomena. The two researchers look at the New Religious Movements (NRMs) in Zimbabwe, particularly focusing on the ways the NRMs try to distinguish themselves from the other Christian movements in Zimbabwe. The NRMs are characterised by flamboyance, glamour and an executive touch, in their approaches that are often copycats or supersedes

national presidents and celebrities. The study observes that the leaders, who are usually the founders, of these churches have become filthy rich and qualify to become celebrities. What is interesting is that the Bible is against celebrity worship which is commonly regarded as evil, a form of enslavement, idolatry, false and superficial. What is noteworthy, is that the leaders, in their celebrity personality, require body guards, popularly known within the NRMs circle as armour-bearers, to keep them safe and protected. The article explores the meaning, significance and role of 'armour-bearers' in NRMs. It raises the pertinent question regarding the extent to which the concepts of armour-bearers and bodyguards are morally compatible with both the Bible and the ideals of the contemporary Christian church.

Pursuing nearly the same line of thinking, **Gift Masengwe** in 'Crossing Over from an Ideal to a Real Church: Journeying from Gullibility to Responsibility', look at the Church of Christ in Zimbabwe's (COCZ) failure to move with time and to indigenize its theology, due to the indigenous leadership that gullibly idealize missionary traditions that they cling to. Masengwe probes factors that influenced and perhaps contributed to, the awakening of the COCZ from its religious gullibility to a common heritage through conference centre construction and constitution making. The COCZ has been run like a family business where individual missionaries appointed their own successors without use of church laws, and where such successors have humiliated every member who questioned how things were done in the church. The article probes the preparedness of the COCZ to build structures to localise the church to a common heritage, after a damaging seventy-year period of stagnation.

From Masengwe's focus, we shift to the African Indigenous Religion (AIR), and matters of health.

Gullibility in African Traditional Religions/ Health

Tabona Shoko, in 'Religion, Gullibility, Health and Well-Being: The Case of Traditional Healers in Harare, Zimbabwe', focuses on how a number of people in Zimbabwe got duped by some traditional healers and prophets who took advantage of the hyperinflationary economic environment in Zimbabwe beginning from the year 2000. The hyperinflationary economic environment led to a sharp decline in bio-medical facilities and the resurgence of traditional and faith healers. The recourse to gullible means by the traditional healers and their clients was exacerbated by exorbitant fees charged by some unscrupulous

health practitioners in hospitals. Shoko's paper gathers empirical data on the practice of traditional herbal practitioners under the banner of traditional medicine in Zimbabwe. The paper observes some gullible behaviour on the part of clients who rush to herbal vendors in Harare, Zimbabwe, in search of healing. Unfortunately, the traditional healers turn out to be fake practitioners, and shrewd and cunning business entrepreneurs, who fleece innocent people of their income in a depressed economic environment in Harare.

Canisius Mwandayi in 'The Concept of *Shiringoma* among the Manyika People of Mutasa – Navigating the Misty Horizon between Reality and Gullibility' probes a religious phenomenon, *Shiringoma*, within the AIR. The study is a phenomenological navigation of the indeterminate but much talked about concept of *Shiringoma* among the Manyika people. The article begins by defining who the Manyika are, and then moves on to look at the practice of *kuromba* 'acquisition of special powers' at *Shiringoma* done by some of the Manyika people. Mwandayi invokes the 'insider - outsider' debate to explore the complex phenomenon of *kuromba*, which makes it difficult, if not almost impossible, to tell realistic appearances from those which are not unless one is given to the art. Like the earlier authors, Mwandayi concludes that although *kuromba* appears unrealistic and gullible to the ordinary Zimbabwean, there is evidence that there are some Manyika people who have embraced the practice and indeed, have been initiated into the cult. Therefore, as stated earlier, care is needed when describing stories about the practice as products of people who fall gullibly into superstition. It is not clear though whether the Manyika people who practice this do so seeking good health. The material benefits of the practice are non-existent.

Milcah Mudewairi's 'Religion, Gullibility, Health and Well Being: The Paradox of Faith Healing in Zimbabwe with Insights from the Levitical Priestly Code', provides a contrast both in analysis and prescribed solutions to health matters in studies from Shoko and Mwandayi. She shifts attention to the Bible and its role in resolving issues of gullibility in matters of health. The health sector has proved to be one of the breeding grounds for religious gullibility. The purpose of this study germinated from the problems associated with faith healing in Zimbabwe in which the faith healers proclaim that they can treat any type of sickness. Yet, their clients are seldom healed, unless they are treated by certified medical practitioners. This is against the backdrop of the very disturbing evidence of some people who die upon termination of bio-medical treatment in favour of faith healing. Mudewairi conducts a herme-

neutical exposition of healing in the Old Testament, to offer a comparative model to contemporary faith healing in Zimbabwe. The study concludes that although the Levitical priests were active in terms of faith healing within religious circles, they had some bio-medical means to ‘certify’ patients who claimed to have been healed through faith healing. Based on a careful exegesis of selected texts from the Old Testament, Mudewairi recommends a model of faith healing where claims of healing through faith need to be referred to bio-medical tests for a clean bill of health.

In ‘Spiritual Gullibility in Search of Health: Tragedies of Scarcity and Sanctity in African Contexts’, **Peter Maiko Mageto**, still focused on the Bible but look at the ethics of faith healing and the crisis that faith healing produces from the point of view of biblical ethics. The article is premised on the axiom that health faces tragedies, nowadays, that are more economic and social rather than medical, as well as sanctity, which provides an understanding that all human beings, no matter the condition of their bodies, are created in the image of God. Therefore, the value of each life makes all humans equal. Approaching the matter of faith healing from perspectives in ethics, Mageto argues that when sanctity and scarcity collaborate, what is at stake, is the issue of identity, character, and virtue, in searching for health; and that the notion of sanctity ensures the holistic health of human bodies, which may be undermined by gullibility related to economic and social scarcity – two central matters that concern the search for health and healing. Gullibility then sways human beings who seek health in regard to sanctity of their being, and the scarcity of their resources.

Vincent Mabvurira and **Jabulani Makhubele** in ‘Religious Gullibility, Health and Wellbeing among Epilepsy Patients in Zimbabwe’, probe almost the same questions that Mageto raised focusing on the ever mushrooming ‘church industry’ in Zimbabwe. Indications are that congregants blindly and sheepishly follow their leaders, despite questionable ethical issues associated with them and dubious relationships with the God they purport to serve. Mabvurira and Makhubele observe that these leaders exploit religion and spirituality because of their worthlessness, as sources of strength and resilience during tough times in human life. Against this background, the two scholars explore the religious and, or, spiritual factors influencing the health and wellbeing of epileptic members of Christian churches in Zimbabwe. They discuss, in a very critical manner, the role of the participants, who had a high commitment to their churches in their equally high expectations of miraculous healing from their epileptic condition by the leaders of the church. The article

is informative, in so far as it critically examines the various healing methods used by the healers, and the meaning that the generality of the church membership attach to the faith healing activities propagated by their leaders.

The Bible and Gullibility

Unlike Mabvurira and Makhubele, **Fairchild Siyawamwaya** in ‘Sickness and Healing in the Old Testament and Pentecostalism: Then and Now’, focuses on the Old Testament as a canon and as a mirror through which healings in Pentecostalism can be interrogated. Siyawamwaya explores selected cases of sickness and cure in the Old Testament and juxtaposes them on similar phenomena in Pentecostalism today. It is interesting to read how for him the Old Testament seems to speak for posterity as the healings within Pentecostalism follow after the Old Testament healings in asserting the undisputed role of the divine. However, the shenanigan behaviour of Pentecostal healing practitioners today has left researchers with mixed feelings – whether the divine is really the source of the healing power, which nonetheless, most believers in fact do not experience. The article raises serious questions about religious fundamentalism within Pentecostalism, which is probably the source of the gullibility that embraces faith healing at face value.

Henerieta Mgovo in ‘A New Testament socio-political analysis of Pentecostalism and political passivity in Zimbabwe’ follows in Siyawamwaya’s footsteps and explores Pentecostalism as a fertile ground for the expression of gullible behaviour, owing to political passivity in Zimbabwe. She traces political passivity among Zimbabweans from Pentecostal interpretations of such New Testament texts like Romans 13: 1 - 7. Mgovo assesses the extent to which political passivity among Zimbabweans has become a hindrance to political contestations. How do uninterested raw calls for unquestionable reverence to political leaders, resonate with the members’ unquestionable submission to their Charismatic Pentecostal Church leaders? Mgovo raises critical questions regarding the role of the teaching to obey sheepishly the Charismatic Pentecostal leaders in the political life of many Pentecostal Church members’ reluctance to protest against any political maladministration in Zimbabwe. This is an interesting study that contributes a different mix of perspectives into the conversation about the gullibility discourse, that deserves attention.

David Bishau demonstrates this point in ‘The Bible and Gullibility among the Johanne Masowe WeChishanu in Zimbabwe’. Since ‘gullibility

takes diverse forms and dimensions religion as religious gullibility, it is difficult to definitively to describe and characterize it. Since religious gullibility, without doubt, has a psychological disposition, which religious rituals and language often mystify, the possibility of the prevalence of gullibility, its exact nature as to where and when it occurs, and its depth and spread, are often difficult to ascertain. Studying gullibility, therefore, requires a careful multidisciplinary approach that analyses its salient features, to make a case for its existence, and to map its nature, depth and breadth, among the devotees of a given religion. This is the rationale for this study – the possibility of the occurrence, nature and depth and breadth of religious gullibility among the Johanne Masowe WeChishanu using the theoretical framework of transactional psychology. To demonstrate the presence of gullibility in the Johanne Masowe WeChishanu's attitude and overall reception of the Bible, the article makes use of ethnographic field notes, taken from the study of the Johanne Masowe WeChishanu in Chitungwiza, during the period, 1998 to 2008. This is an interdisciplinary study of religious phenomena that may raise some interest in broadening and enriching our methodological approaches to the research of religious phenomena.

Pentecostalism and Gullibility

Using a different window, that of feminism, **Henerieta Mgovo, Enias Konyana, and Caroline Dimingu**, in 'Religious Gullibility and Female Leadership in Pentecostal Churches in Zimbabwe: A Feminist Inquiry', pursue almost the same argument as Mgovo above. They look at the role of Pentecostal Churches' understanding of female leadership in the creation of gullible views on female leadership among Pentecostal church members, which have roots in patriarchy. The trio explore the extent to which women who assume leadership roles in most Pentecostal Churches ride on their husbands' backs, to position themselves as wives to influential male leaders and how that impacts their ability to question patriarchal leadership, and decisions. The study makes several interesting observations and raises critical points that make it a must read.

The Media and Gullibility

Nhlanhla Landa and Sindiso Zhou in 'Media engagement with the abuse and

deception narrative in the church in Zimbabwe: a critical discourse analysis’, introduce a shift to gullibility issues related to religion, faith matters and the media. The duo explore the relationship between religion, abuse and deception, which is a relationship that is complicated by the notion that ‘things religious are things pure’. The study focuses on the role of media engagement in generating the abuse and deception narratives of women and girls by church leaders. Using the Critical Discourse Analysis and Agenda Setting theories, the study analyses media reportage of abuse and deception of women and girls in the church in Zimbabwe. What makes the study not only interestingly complex, but also exciting to read, is the inclusion of a critical discourse on how the justice system restricts newsmakers in the reportage of court cases involving the abuse and deception of women and girls in the church in Zimbabwe. The authors’ reflections on how the restrictions on the media reduces the role of the media to focusing only on scandals, naming and shaming; falling short of critically engaging with the underlying issues, are helpful.

Joyline Gwara and **Francis Machingura** in ‘Accepting the Unacceptable: The Clash between Faith and Reason in New Pentecostal Churches in Zimbabwe’ do shed some light on the question raised above. They see in religion an ironical ideology that tends to evoke emotions that are protected from criticism both from within and without. Within the Pentecostal structures that Gwara and Machingura analyse, there are embedded systems that target reason, which is condemned and portrayed as a demonic antithesis to faith. It is interesting to read how the duo manoeuvre the reason - faith debate to come up with possible pathways, to counter gullibility within the religiously plural environment in Zimbabwe.

Wellington Gadzikwa in ‘Selling “hot air”: An Analysis of the Perceived Media Influence on Prosperity Gospel Related Gullibility in Zimbabwe’ zeros in on gullibility associated with the Prosperity Gospel and probes a baffling question about the manner in which the populace has imbibed the Prosperity Gospel and its promises in the land of Zimbabwe, that, to the contrary, resembles a desert. Gadzikwa, through an analysis of selected print media articles on Prosperity Gospel in mainstream newspapers in Zimbabwe, analyses the extent to which the media, through mass manipulation, has aided and entrenched religious gullibility in unprecedented ways, even among the elite.

One may raise the question as to if Gadzikwa would come to different conclusions had he widened his population to other media platforms. Even so,

in this special issue of *Alternation* we enjoy the benefit of reaping complementary results through articles that complement each other. In this regard, it would be prudent to read Gadzikwa's article alongside the last two articles from Mutangadura and Manyanhaire and Chitando, Chimbarange and Maidza.

Josephat Mutangadura and **Itai Offat Manyanhaire** in 'The Church and New Media Technology: Communicating and Sharing Faith through the WhatsApp Media Platform' add onto the number and types of media platforms that can be studied. The duo look at the possibility of believers to both exist in the digital era, and at the same time effectively proclaim the gospel today exploiting all the technology that the new age has to offer. The study particularly focuses on the generation that is keener to adapt to the digital era, and the content and target audiences of Christian WhatsApp 'chat' messages. The study debates the positive impact that the WhatsApp platform has had, especially reaching out to the wider consumers, against the backlash of side effects like the issues do, with security and privacy, as enshrined in the use (or abuse) of WhatsApp on mobile and other computer technologies and devices. It appears though that evidence of new media utilization in evangelism and Christian community building speak more to the undisputed value and relevance of such platforms for the church's missions of evangelization, spiritual formation, and community-building and their use should continue in future generations. What this study does is to raise enough curiosity for further research that would elaborate more on the negativity, especially how the WhatsApp platform may either promote or counter, gullibility among the younger generations, so as not to accept anything digital as progress. Apart from issues of security and privacy, there would be a need for further research, that would explore how, while using such media, there would be structures in place to compensate for loss of, say, happenstance conversations, congregant - congregant interaction, and the duty of care, for each other, as congregants, that come to face-to-face congregational services. For further study, there is also a need to explore the general unease among politicians regarding the promotion of social media in religious formations, along the lines suggested by Nichols, McKinnon and Geary (2016).

Finally, **Ezra Chitando**, **Advice Chimbarange** and **Newturn Maidza** in "‘Come and Receive Your Miracle Today!’ Advertising and ‘Gullibility’ in Selected Pentecostal Churches in Harare, Zimbabwe", provide more light on how the media may be exploited to the extent of abuse, with those receiving

the advertisement not even noticing that they are being gullible. The article looks at how, pushed by intense competition, rivalry and jostling for members, within the spiritual market, newer Pentecostal ‘mega churches’ have adeptly and aggressively taken to the various media platforms to advertise themselves. This is unlike the historic mainline churches who do not advertise themselves in the media. Through an analysis of the content of the messages the prophets of the ‘mega churches’ use to attract new members and the role of television stations owned by particular prophets/ ministries in the expansion of the same ministries, the article looks at ways in which the advertising often feeds on the ‘gullibility’ and desperation of clients who would be facing pressing existential issues. In this respect, the article provides a balanced approach, in its reflection on gullibility, pointing out that the concept of gullibility is problematic, as it downplays the combined power of advertising and serious existential challenges that push the hordes of clients who patronise Pentecostal churches, to continue attending services at these mega churches.

Overall, what the articles in this special issue of *Alternation* point to, is the long tradition of scholarship spanning across, at least, the religious divide, on the fact that humans are highly gullible (Mercier 2017: 102). But, as the authors in this special edition recommend, there is nothing that should stop us as fellow human researchers of religion, from being more critical and vigilant towards the arguments that various exploiters of the religious phenomenon, at any level within the religious community, are offering to the people. We owe it to them – our people.

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Editorial

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