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ARTICLE

"Faith it, till you make it": Prosperity Gospel and Spiritual Hustling among Young Pentecostal Christians in Harare

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Abstract

Pentecostal charismatic churches that preach prosperity gospel in Zimbabwe have attracted a youthful membership. In the context of a deeply uncertain economic future, young Pentecostal Christians devise performativity strategies for optimizing their chances of converting prosperity gospel into material prosperity. These strategies include sartorial elegance in adorning counterfeit suits, the performance of obedience, and the use of social media technologies. The picture that emerges is a complex and at times contradictory one in which the potential realization of upward spiritual and social mobility rests, ultimately, on the transformative and volatile nature of value. Data for this project was collected in Harare through ethnographic research and interviews over a year-long period.

Résumé

Les églises charismatiques pentecôtistes qui prêchent l'Évangile de la prospérité au Zimbabwe ont attiré des jeunes membres. Face à un avenir économique très incertain, les jeunes chrétiens pentecôtistes mettent au point des stratégies performatives afin d'augmenter leurs chances de transformer l'Évangile de la prospérité en prospérité matérielle. Ces stratégies consistent en l'élégance vestimentaire dans l'ornementation de costumes contrefaits, la performance de l'obéissance et l'utilisation des technologies des médias sociaux. L'image émise est complexe et parfois contradictoire, selon laquelle l'accomplissement possible de la mobilité spirituelle et sociale ascendante dépend, au fond, de la nature transformatrice et changeante de la valeur. Les données ont été collectées à Harare par le biais de recherches ethnographiques et d'entretiens sur une période d'un an.

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Resumo

As carismáticas igrejas pentecostais que pregam a doutrina da prosperidade no Zimbabué têm atraído a adesão de novos membros jovens. No contexto de um futuro económico profundamente incerto, os jovens cristãos pentecostais encontram estratégias performativas para otimizar as suas hipóteses de transformarem a doutrina da prosperidade numa prosperidade material. Entre estas estratégias, contam-se a elegância da indumentária, adornando os fatos de contrafação, a performance da obediência e a utilização das tecnologias das redes sociais. O retrato que daqui emerge é complexo e por vezes contraditório. Nele, a potencial concretização da mobilidade espiritual e social depende, em última análise, da natureza transformadora e volátil do valor. Em Harare, foram recolhidos dados através de investigação etnográfica e de entrevistas realizadas ao longo de um ano.

Keywords: prosperity gospel; consumption; youth; performative; hustling; Pentecostalism; Zimbabwe

> We are still a long way from being the type of Christians that Papa[1] preaches about, I know of some ladies that pay tithe from the money they get from married men. They dress in trending clothes, but is that [money and clothes] from God? When you see all these guys in double-breasted suits you would think they got it from the same shop where Papa buys his. These guys go to Dublin House and order fake double-breasted suits and African attires that are similar to those that Papa wears…
> (Simba, 22 years, November 13, 2016)

> One of the days I attended a church service and no message was given to me that I had to send someone back home to collect my gold watch … Whenever I put on my gold watch, messages from God just flow like a river and I can see things easily and God gave me the grace to research more about gold from Bible scriptures and I believed it and proved it as well scientifically. If you check your electrical gadgets you will discover that the plugs are coated with gold so as to pass electrical power … God showed me in his Bible scriptures how precious and important gold is in disseminating messages and whenever there is gold there are supernatural powers.
> (Prophet Ben during a sermon he delivered on September 25, 2016)

Introduction

There is a large body of literature on the activities of Pentecostal Christian movements in southern Africa. Amongst a host of other topics, the structural hierarchies, gender dynamics, and aspirations of members tied to theologies steeped in prosperity have been widely discussed (Mate 2002; Maxwell 2006; Haynes 2012a, 2012b; Chitando, Gunda, and Mapuranga 2013; van Wyk 2014; Faimau, Lesitaokana, and Behrens 2018). This article builds on the already

extensive literature by exploring ways in which mostly unemployed young Pentecostal Christians in Zimbabwe negotiate the sartorial dynamics of prosperity gospel. The article draws specifically on ethnographic fieldwork amongst young Pentecostal Christian males[2] in One Ministry of God (OMG), and how they engage in performative practices that lend a semblance of economic and spiritual success, when in reality they are unable to match the conspicuous lifestyles cultivated by the prophet, church leadership, and some older Pentecostal Christians.

Of course, as indicated in the opening quotations, the economic status of the young men we focus on here is widely known within and outside of church circles. The dynamics that unfold are thus necessarily complex and at times apparently contradictory. Within this wider context, we discuss three ethnographic examples to evidence our argument. Firstly, we focus on the suit as a multivocal symbol around which dynamics of "spiritual hustling" play out in the daily lives of many young members of the congregation. By imitating the clothing styles of the prophet and older members of OMG, young Pentecostal Christians are more likely to get "noticed" by church officials. The second example outlines strategies of obedience as a way of negotiating and manipulating generational and institutional authority. Lastly, we describe the ways that young people have harnessed social media technologies in attempts to increase their chances of being "noticed." If they are noticed, our ethnographic evidence suggests that young Pentecostal Christians are likely to be employed in some capacity by the church or through networks of patronage around relatively wealthy older church members. This can result in them achieving some level of economic independence, which influences their tithing practices, potentially bringing more blessings and upward spiritual/social mobility.

We thus present ethnographic examples that bring the agency of young Pentecostal Christians to the fore and through which they negotiate and retool prosperity gospel in times of uncertainty, hardship, and opaque economic activities. "Spiritual hustling" emerges as the dominant paradigm through which most young Pentecostal Christians in OMG engage with micro-politics and economic opportunities linked to the church. The term denotes a broad-based practice through which young congregants who cannot afford expensive clothes and other markers of divine blessing at OMG improvise and find alternative ways of performing their spirituality with aspirations of receiving divine blessings.

But this presents a paradox. In one sense, spiritual hustling can be understood as a way of concretizing the prosperity gospel by promoting the direct relationship between wealth and godly blessings. To take one example, fake suits—and the wider spiritual hustle from which they emerge—present opportunities for upward mobility and spiritual blessings which simultaneously promote discipline and obedience to patriarchal authority through the desire to be "noticed." On the other hand, it poses a potential challenge to prosperity theology in that it seems to undermine the foundations of a wealth/blessing nexus through the conspicuous consumption of *fake* attire. The analysis of spiritual hustling thus exposes the precariousness of being young and unemployed in a Pentecostal charismatic church that promotes the prosperity gospel, whilst revealing a

dynamic and creative set of ways to navigate uncertainty in postcolonial Zimbabwe that hinge, ultimately, on the transformative potential of value.

To be sure, young people are known globally for their desire and consumption of global commodities (Featherstone 1991; Nyamnjoh 2005). In this paper, we are interested in looking at the ways young Pentecostal men in Zimbabwe have responded to the dual pressures of socioeconomic uncertainty and expectations of conspicuous consumption. What strategies do they deploy to create a semblance of prosperity, to create the conditions for potential upward social and spiritual mobility? As we explain, the notion of spiritual hustling can be traced to the concept of *kujingirisa.* Gukurume (2019), Chagonda (2015) and Jones (2010, 293) have discussed this notion in detail. It denotes a concept in the Shona language of getting by and solving problems with limited resources or opportunities (cf. Mate 2014, 2021b; Gukurume 2019; Oosterom and Gukurume 2021; Taru and Settler 2015). It might be loosely translated into the English term "hustling." Kujingirisa denotes how young people in Zimbabwe negotiate access to the economy from the margins, making possible consumption of the latest globally advertised electronic gadgets, vehicles, and—relating directly to the argument presented here—clothes.

Methods and ethical considerations

As evidence for our argument, we present several strategies of *kujingirisa* at the intersection of wealth creation, spiritual hierarchies, and generational authority. It is perhaps prudent at this juncture to pause briefly for an explanatory note on the methodology behind the evidence presented. The majority of data was gathered between June 2016 and August 2017 among OMG Pentecostal Christians by the first author during doctoral research.[3] During this period, he engaged in participant observation at two sites in Harare, conducting interviews and observing religious practices and the everyday lives of congregants. Sixty in-depth interviews and life histories with purposively selected young male congregants were conducted. In this paper, we draw upon field observations and narratives of dressing, adornment, worship, and "spiritual hustling" of twenty-one male interviewees aged between eighteen and thirty years who were part of the sixty respondents interviewed for the wider project.

During the same period, the first author joined several WhatsApp groups created by OMG members to share sermons and announcements. Entry into the WhatsApp groups was facilitated by group administrators who either shared a group link or added the author. Members of the groups were informed about the research and the researcher's presence, and that consent would be sought from individuals whose posts would be used in any publications.[4]

Due to the first author's long research interest in Pentecostal Christianity in Harare and elsewhere, interlocutors upon whose stories we call in this paper were already familiar with the researcher and the research process. All interviews were recorded, transcribed, and translated from Shona to English. Data analysis involved organizing narratives and making connections between

emerging and recurring themes (Spradley 2016). In this way, in the wider research project and in this paper, the data led the argument and not vice versa.

OMG structure and history

The Pentecostal Christian church in which the research was conducted was founded by prophet Ben in 2008 at the age of thirty-one. The size of OMG membership is a subject of debate. However, estimates place its membership between 800,000 and 1.5 million.[5] Prophet Ben epitomizes the prosperity gospel that he preaches. The prophet is heavily guarded and cultivates a culture of inaccessibility. To meet prophet Ben for one-on-one encounters, one must book into guesthouses operated by OMG. During fieldwork for this project, booking into the guesthouse cost US$300 for three days.[6] This cost is beyond the reach of most Zimbabweans. Due to a large number of guests, usually foreigners, the one-on-one meeting with prophet Ben seldom goes beyond five minutes. During fieldwork, the first author of this paper checked into one of the many guest houses. The one-on-one encounter with the prophet lasted less than three minutes.[7]

The prophet surrounds himself with older people whom he has appointed to key positions of responsibility. The position of church administrator, for example, is held by a pastor in his late forties while finance and health directors are in their mid to late fifties. There is a group of elders, composed of the prophet and prophetess's parents, relatives, and mentors, which serves as an advisory board. Old age—in the church and wider society—is equated with authority, power, and wisdom. The gerontocratic and largely patriarchal system prevalent in wider Zimbabwean society is thus reproduced to a significant extent in this religious space. OMG organizes seminars and workshops, ostensibly to "build capacity" within its membership. The seminars focus on financial literacy and business management. It is one thing to receive the training, it is another to apply the knowledge and skills in the opaque Zimbabwean economy (Taru 2020). A fee of between US$40 and US$100 is charged to attend the seminars and workshops. The cost of the seminars is high, especially for unemployed Pentecostal Christians, but illustrates a common belief in Pentecostal communities that spending money "unlocks" doors to more money. This mirrors the symbolic intention behind tithing and offerings made by Pentecostal Christians.

However, OMG—similar to many other Pentecostal-Charismatic churches across the globe—is constituted mainly of younger people (Togarasei 2005, 355, 361; Dube 2019; Rocha 2019). In the Zimbabwean context, the youthful membership at OMG reflects the general demographic composition of the country.[8] Young congregants are often attracted to Pentecostal-Charismatic movements by the prosperity gospel and a perception that these movements have a less rigid approach to daily life (Togarasei 2005, 355). Indeed, Charismatic Pentecostal theology encourages a lifestyle that mirrors the luxuries of Western modernity (Mate 2014) and the excesses of youth culture (Farrugia 2019, vii; see also Rocha 2019). This is in stark contrast to other churches in the area which have significantly more conservative expectations of their congregants.

Prophets of prosperity gospel serve as role models and peddlers of Western versions of modernity—particularly attractive to young people influenced by global multimedia—through the consumption of bespoke tuxedos, customized vehicles, and designer homes (James 2019; Taru and Settler 2015; Mate 2014). Despite the prohibitive economic environment, young Pentecostal Christians at OMG actively engage in the stylization of the self along with the images promoted by the prophet. Rocha (2021), for example, notes that the clergy is a conduit through which the "Cool Christianity" community is constructed among young Pentecostal Christians in Australia. She discusses a largely top-down process in which the clergy consumes and presents clothing brands and labels as "Christian," thereby influencing younger, middle-class Pentecostal Christians to consume accordingly. In the Australian case, however, young people are more likely to have the means to afford highly priced "Christian brands," leading to a different set of dynamics where expensive "original" clothing is often worn by young followers.

Although this is not the case in Zimbabwe, the comparison with Australia is instructive. Lacking the relative wealth associated with older members, young people in OMG—if they are appointed to any position at all—are relegated to less influential positions without significant responsibility. Younger congregants may be active in providing services related to security, entertainment during worship, and the selling of religious merchandise. In a bureaucratic machinery run by the older generation, young Pentecostal Christians creatively forge relations with older gatekeepers in attempts to access cash and material goods that are—like the Australian example—signifiers of divine blessings.

Hustling in the Zimbabwean context

Before presenting the ethnographic evidence for "spiritual hustling," we must first consider the broader contexts in which "hustling" has been considered anthropologically. It has been defined as a "means of crafting an identity ... simultaneously adapting to material constraints and attempting to reproduce a self-efficacious, meaningful existence" (Venkatesh 2002, 93). Recall here the translation of the Shona term *kujingirisa* and the symbolic resonance between both concepts is clear. The term "hustling" has a reasonably long usage in anthropological and sociological literature that illustrates the agency of individuals and subaltern groups that "insert themselves actively into the unpromising economic circumstances they face" (Hart 2015, 13). As an analytical tool, it provides a conceptual lens for understanding the everyday agentive struggles of people living on the margins of and interacting with global neoliberal capitalism and postcolonial state bureaucracies. This might include, but is certainly not limited to, migrants who interact, with state bureaucracies (Venkatesh 2000, 2002), females who eke out a living outside of male or state control (Chernoff 2003), unemployed youth (Di Nunzio 2019, 3), young people who fashion African versions of modernities (Newell 2012), or individuals who live in postcolonial postcolonial African urban spaces characterized by economic and social

inequalities (McNeill 2016; Thieme 2017; Thieme, Ference, and van Stapele 2021; van Stapele 2021; Monteith and Mirembe 2021; Mate 2021a).

Improvisation, creativity, risk-taking, and experimentation in the face of uncertain economic relations are core attributes of the hustler. Hustling is a display of the potential, cultural, and symbolic capital of young people in addressing their situation (Newell 2012). These attributes are also central tenets of religious entrepreneurship and indeed one might argue with reasonable conviction that all religious enterprises comprise a sense of "the hustle" (see, for example, Werbner 2011).[9] However, our focus here is on the ways in which spiritual hustling amongst young Pentecostal Christians in the context of prosperity gospel in Zimbabwe engage with ideas of value in creative–and often risky–ways. At the core of spiritual hustling in this context are performative stylizations of the self that portray young Pentecostal Christians as overcoming inhibitive socio-economic realities of unemployment, high inflation, and exorbitant prices in the hope of appearing "blessed" and prosperous. The risk that they take in this hustle is, however, that their actual economic circumstances are well known: Will wearing a fake suit not simply advertise their relative lack of prosperity, amplifying their *lack* of blessing? Possibly, but it would appear that they are willing—as we suggest in this article's title—to "faith it till [they] make it." Indeed, the evidence presented below suggests that the spiritual hustle in Zimbabwe involves a transformation in value. A fake suit, if worn in the correct context and by the young Pentecostal Christians with whom it is associated, can be collectively understood as a genuine statement of aspiration through which young men effectively increase their chances of upward spiritual, and socio-economic mobility. It would appear to be worth the risk.

Since the introduction of the neoliberal Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) in the early 1990s and simultaneous government policy decisions that were at odds with economic growth, the Zimbabwean economy has been in decline. The failure of the economy has seen rising inflation rates, a decline in the overall standard of living and increasing unemployment rates, especially among young people.[10] Eighteen of the twenty-one young men who participated in this study were not in formal employment.[11] Only three of the respondents were employed in the formal sector. Two were employed as part-time teachers at a private college owned by a member of OMG, while the other worked for an insurance company. The remaining interlocutors had completed their secondary, tertiary, and graduate education but remained unemployed, sustaining their lives through various informal activities.

Zimbabwe has experienced an economic and political crisis for the past two decades. Daily life for the majority is characterized by uncertainty and precarity. To survive, most Zimbabweans, youth included, have to be resourceful. Several studies show that young people can be innovative in ways that allow them to circumvent and at times gain from structural limitations that work against them (Mate 2014; 2021b; Pilossof 2021). This article offers a fresh perspective by analyzing prosperity gospel through a lens focused on the agency of young people.

This of course raises the question as to why OMG youth do not enter the market for the provision of fake suits worn at church gatherings. Most ordinary

Zimbabweans cannot afford clothes sold in established retailers such as Truworths, Edgars, and Woolworths. People generally get their clothes second-hand, imported from Europe and the United States (for a regional analysis of this, see Tranberg Hansen 2000). These clothes are relatively cheap. Youth OMG Pentecostal Christians, however, are not looking for just any clothes; they seek specifically to imitate the designer suits worn by the prophet. Even "fake" suits are associated in this context with significant value. Market economics of supply and demand dictate that an oversupply of these suits would lead to a loss of perceived value. There is thus value in being one of the few wearing a suit similar to the one the prophet was wearing a few Sundays ago. Setting up a business to reproduce fake suits in competition with the existing counterfeit market would likely not be lucrative, and potential customers would likely avoid an OMG tailor in favor of an established one. The market for suits imitating the prophet's clothes is limited to OMG members. In this way, we might think of the industry in question as producing "genuine fakes" in a market that has not—at least not yet—started to produce "imitation fakes," as it is simply not big enough to support more production of these garments.

Most of the youthful population in Zimbabwe, then, eke out a living through hustling: *kujingirisa.* One young OMG congregant shared a narrative shedding light on the insecurities and precariousness that reflect wider experiences endured by Zimbabwean youths:

> You must grab whatever comes your way, you wake up in the morning, you don't even know where your breakfast is going to come from, you don't know whether you will be offloading cement, flour, and sugar or you will be cleaning shops ... You don't know where and what you will be doing all day. You take each day as it comes. You go home with nothing, at times with a few dollars ... You grab whatever can give you a few dollars to buy food, airtime, and transport. (Taurai, 32 years, September 16, 2016)

This captures succinctly the deeply uncertain nature of economic life for most young people in Zimbabwe (Blatterer 2010; Mate 2014; 2021a; Oosterom and Gukurume 2021). However, even those *with* formal employment face financial constraints. Interlocutors routinely stated that their monthly salaries were insufficient, often not lasting a month due to the ever-rising cost of living. The type of gospel preached at OMG thus speaks to the prevailing economic conditions as it offers promises of success, hope, and aspiration. As prophet Ben is quoted at the start of this paper, "Gold attracts God."

Prosperity gospel and generational dynamics

Indeed, in order to fully appreciate the ethnographic examples we will present, a brief outline of what exactly "prosperity gospel" purports to be is necessary (van Wyk 2014; Gukurume 2011; Watson 2011, 101). Prosperity gospel portrays salvation as a *transaction* between Pentecostal individuals and God. Pentecostal Christians thus donate tithes and offerings to the church as a petition for

material and spiritual growth. Through prayers and donations, Pentecostal Christians cultivate individualized, intimate relationships with God (Meyer 1998; Luhrmann 2012; James 2019). To materialize prosperity, Pentecostal Christianity fosters new subjectivities that value industriousness, breaking ties with relatives that practice Indigenous religion, and abandoning "wasteful" activities such as sponsoring Indigenous rituals, gambling, beer drinking, smoking, and extra-marital affairs (Maxwell 1998, 353–55). In constructing such behavior as frivolous, they are encouraged instead to generate—and conspicuously consume—wealth as a way of demonstrating their spiritual connection with God. In this way, OMG appeals to many young people in urban Zimbabwe who might logically choose not to waste any financial income they have and, in a wider sense, to embrace the perceived advantages of individualization as promoted through mass media on a global scale.

Coleman (2011) has framed the operations of prosperity gospel along with Mauss's (1990 [1925) ideas around gift exchange. The elaborate exchange of money and labor for divine blessings forms what he terms a sacrificial economy. The concept of sacrifice applies differently to all categories of people (young, old, rich, poor, male, and female) found in Pentecostal movements. Furthermore, sacrifice denotes a "mode of submission and a means of engaging in goal-directed spiritually charged action" (Coleman 2011, 39). Sacrificial economy, then, is about constructing the self in the context of relations that emerge with others who participate in the same sacrificial economy. Coleman (2003, 197) further notes that sacrifice "is oriented towards future, potentially unlimited reward; it permits assessment of the effects of one's action on the world; and it helps to render material one's inner state of faith." Pentecostal Christians who participate in this economy do so as a test of their faith and in the hope of eternal salvation and the promise of prosperity.

Within this wider theological context, Pentecostal Christians form elaborate fraternal networks to assist fellow Pentecostal Christians. The assistance sought is both material and spiritual, providing accommodation, money, and prayers in times of need (Maxwell 1998; Haynes 2012a, b). Such networks of spiritual and material support are evident among OMG members, who create intimate bonds not only with God but also among themselves. Importantly, for the argument being made here, this often includes linkages between old and young Pentecostal Christians. At OMG services, the clergy actively fosters close relations between their followers. This was illustrated during the time to "give back tithe and offering,"[12] when attendees were encouraged to:

> Check if the person next to you is holding something in their hand. If the person is holding nothing, please give them something, a dollar or more so that they don't miss the opportunity to be blessed by God. The person may be lacking today but God will bless them next time. (A pastor conducting tithing and offering service in August 2016)

In this way, giving money to other attendees to donate as an offering to God is acceptable. The blessings expected from the counter-gifts accrue to the person

who places the money in the buckets. In most cases, the ethnographic evidence from OMG showed that older Pentecostal Christians and those with formal or informal employment give young unemployed congregants money to donate. The relationship with God at OMG is not as atomized as the one van Wyk (2014) discusses among members of the Universal Kingdom Church of God in South Africa, which she describes as a "Church of Strangers."[13] Rather, the relationship with God is both individual *and* collective, as some OMG congregants assist others in creating relations through the provision of notes and coins. Nonetheless, whilst this collective giving fosters a sense of shared tithing, it is rooted in the hope that the generosity will be reciprocated spiritually. As Mauss (1990 [1925]) may have observed, there is no such thing as a free gift.

For OMG churchgoers, then, God accepts such money and gifts because He reads the mind and intentions of the giver. The idea of God judging intentions was supported during interviews by young Pentecostal Christians who were quick to cite biblical verses such as Mark 12: 41–44 which, in their interpretation, elevates intentions and motives over actions.[14] The application of these "principles" is not limited to tithing and offerings only; OMG members extrapolate the same principle to areas such as consumption and judgment of their actions and deeds.

It is in this context that "Fake it till you make it" is a popular saying not just amongst OMG congregants but also young Zimbabweans in general who cannot afford global brands and resort to counterfeits or cheaper imitations thereof (see also Newell 2012). It suggests that they—and by extension older, more wealthy church members—are aware of the imitation commodities on show in and around services. As a means to an end, and under specific economic conditions, it is what might be termed a "public secret" between the two generations (McNeill 2012). As we now go on to demonstrate through ethnographic narratives of *kujingirisa*, the older generation at OMG plays along with this ostensible obfuscation for different reasons, not least of which is that the process serves to bolster their own positions of authority and power. In doing so, they actively occupy the role of gatekeepers who mediate youth participation in circuits of economic participation, consumption, and the accumulation of blessings.

Spiritual hustling: Narratives of *kujingirisa*

It should be clear by this stage that young men in OMG try to show that they are receiving providential blessings and that they are upwardly mobile both spiritually and socially. Various make-do strategies and performative practices are combined in attempts to materialize their understanding of prosperity gospel as preached by prophet Ben. Spiritual hustling takes many forms, some of which, as we now see, pose a potential threat to the very theological foundation upon which they are based.

"Spinning" money

As mentioned above, the prosperity gospel is premised upon petitioning God for spiritual and material blessings through tithes and offerings. OMG members are often reminded by the clergy that "they cannot come to the house of the Lord empty-handed." This applies direct and significant pressure on young congregants who mostly have very limited means of earning or otherwise acquiring the cash to donate as tithe. As we have seen above, many young Pentecostal Christians are assisted by elder members who are employed and have regular financial income. Nonetheless, several young Pentecostal Christians interviewed felt uncomfortable with this arrangement. Tatenda expressed his frustrations with being assisted to pay for tithe:

> It is more satisfying to give money that comes from your sweat. God will bless you more than when you give money from parents or brothers … It makes me look like a child who still needs my parents' assistance. If you donate tithe with your own money, it invites more blessings … so *kutojingirisa nekuspina mari* [cut deals / hustle] to earn a little more so that I can add something to what I received from my parents. (Tatenda, 24 years, April 23, 2017)

Tatenda's narrative illustrates clearly the perceived frustrations wrought by his inability to tithe using his own money and resources. He perceives God to reward those who donate their own hard-earned money more than those who are assisted by parents and fellow congregants. As a potential solution to this spiritual conundrum, Tatenda disclosed that at times he would "spin" the money he receives from his family before tithing.[15] For Tatenda, *spinning* money involves betting on the outcome of local and international soccer matches. He has in the process become a proficient gambler—in absolute contradiction to Pentecostal morality—in a perpetual attempt to augment what he receives from his parents. If he is lucky, he raises small amounts of personal funds that he pays back to the church on Sundays in the hope of receiving spiritual and financial blessings in return.

In this way, some of the money donated by unemployed young people in similar situations to Tatenda is "earned" through processes that are directly pitted against Pentecostal morality. Moreover, several young men disclosed during interviews that they engage in overtly illegal currency arbitrage such as touting and foreign exchange at bus terminals to supplement their offerings at church. Many young Pentecostal Christians' relationships with God are often mediated by money that is earned through *kujingirisa* which, in this context, takes on intriguing characteristics of Coleman's sacrificial economy. The sacrifice, in this instance, would appear to be a high-risk strategy of breaking the moral code of the church to increase respectability within it. This appears, ostensibly, to be contradictory. However, as already noted, "hustling" is often characterized by inventive, creative, and risk-taking behavior. For Tatenda and others who spin money in various ways, the ends clearly justify the means.

Suits and sartorial performativity

Spinning money is perhaps a specific form of spiritual hustling because attempts are made to conceal it from others. Wearing affordable fake suits, on the other hand, is less surreptitious and indeed for this hustle to be efficacious, it *must* be conspicuous in nature. It thus presents us with different, but related, dynamics to the spinning of cash in that it depends upon a specific, collective, form of performativity. As we suggested above, wearing suits to and around OMG churches signifies a desire for upward mobility or "*middle classing*" (Chipkin 2013), success, and divine blessings from God. Maxwell (1998, 353, 362) notes that Zimbabwe Assemblies of God Africa (ZAOGA) Pentecostal Christians throughout southern Africa, "dress up for church. Men flaunt their new suits and expensive wrist watches," imitating successful entrepreneurs and business executives.

Suits have a long and fascinating history. The suit as we know it today can be traced back to England in the early 1800s and a man by the name of Beau Brummell. Brummell invented and popularized the two-piece suit (jacket and full-length trousers) at a time when wealthy, well-groomed gentlemen were expected to wear uncomfortable and impractical garments ranging from knee-high silk stockings to powdered wigs.[16] Brummel's concept revolutionized men's clothing and has evolved into the various styles of suits worn today. During colonization, this style took on global significance. Wearing a suit became a symbol of civilization and power, adorned by colonial administrators and eventually grafted onto different hierarchies cross-culturally, in association with ideas of Christianity, education, literacy and in opposition to perceived barbarism and related concepts of "primitive" and "traditional" dress.[17]

Examples of this in southern Africa are abundant in the ethnographic literature dating back to the Rhodes Livingston Institute and the specific theoretical developments of anthropologists working in southern Africa in the 1940s–50s. They developed what became known as the Manchester School (Macmillan 2024), making a seismic change from ahistorical description to real-time political analysis of the colonial contexts in which researchers were working. For example, Mitchell's (1956) work on the *kalela* dance in Zambia and Gluckman's (1940) "analysis of a social situation" in South Africa provide evidence of the complex ways in which interactions with Europeans and Africans involved the borrowing and appropriation of clothing styles associated with status, suits being central to the changes wrought through colonization and the resultant "cultural osmosis" (van Onselen 1990). Of course, these ideas have been critiqued. Magubane (1971, 425) argues that Africans' adoption of European-style clothing was neither an act of imitation nor aspiration. African societies were incorporated into the colonial global capitalist system that availed those commodities.

In colonial Zimbabwe, the suit held different meanings for different categories of people. For white colonial settlers, the suit was a symbol of European "high fashion" that separated the "civilized" and the uncivilized. The suit differentiated colonial citizens from subjects, whites from blacks, and the rich from the poor (Burke 1996, 102–103). European settlers were widely known to object to Africans wearing the suit, noting that the suit was never meant for Africans who wore it "loudly" (in a crass manner). Missionaries complained that Africans who

wore suits were referred to insultingly as "mission boys" regardless of whether they had attended mission school or not (Burke 1996; West 2002, 14; 2012). Colonial police and white settlers unleashed violence on Africans who wore suits. For the growing African middle class, which colonial processes created, suits became a status symbol pointing to their upward mobility and aspirations. It marked their arrival into what was perceived at the time as a more civilized, higher economic and social class. In the post-colony, the suit continues to convey the same status as it did in colonial times. The suit is associated with a specific social status—middle class, formal employment, wealth, and global cultural competence (West 2012; Friedman 1991 and 1994—discussion of *la sapeur* in Congo). A long history of missionary education inculcated the belief that dressing conveys respectability, decency, and morality.

In keeping with historical regional trends, suits hold specific significance within the OGM community. As we mentioned above, younger male members acquire cheap versions of the expensive designer brands worn by prophet Ben and older men. These "fake" suits are produced in an old gray and red building in downtown Harare known as Dublin House. The building was recently condemned by the City of Harare Health and Fire departments but remains fully operational. Inside, a multitude of tailors, self-taught computer and cell phone repair technicians, and Chinese medical practitioners ply their trades. The area is bustling with street vendors selling fruits and vegetables, taxis picking up and dropping off passengers, and people lingering on the streets.

In November 2016, the first author accompanied Thomas, a young OMG congregant in his mid-twenties, to Dublin House to collect his new suits and African attires from a tailor. Thomas graduated with a degree in history from the University of Zimbabwe. He was fortunate to be employed as a teacher at a college owned by an elderly OMG member. Dublin House has three floors. The ground floor houses hardware and retail shops selling computers and phones. The second floor, where Thomas's tailor operates, is densely populated with tailors and dressmakers. The corridors are dark, lit only by sunlight coming from windows and through open doors. The ventilation is poor, and the air is thick with cigarette smoke and sweat. Small heaps of lint accumulated over time are scattered on the floor. The sound of sewing machines can be heard from the stairway to the second floor. Four or five tailors can occupy a single room, creating a hive of activity in significantly constrained workspaces.

One of the suits that Thomas collected was designed the same way as a made-to-measure Angelo Galasso suit that prophet Ben had worn a few weeks before our visit. Thomas was open about imitating prophet Ben's taste in clothes. When asked about the cheap imitation suits, he replied: "I am faithing it till I make it!" Wearing cheap counterfeit clothes, he explained, is a way of indexing his desire and aspiration to afford original designer suits. He continued to explain that in imitating prophet Ben's clothing through the outward semblance of prosperity, he and other young Pentecostal Christians were more likely to get noticed by church officials. If this happens, there is a reasonable chance they will be recruited by the church in some informal or formal capacity. Thomas might be offered the chance to join ushers, welcoming people into the building at the start of a service and showing them to their seats, or into the security department

where he might be given the responsibility to guard cars during services or mid-week gatherings. Any of these opportunities would bring him closer to church leaders—many of whom run businesses and mines or are employed as executives in a variety of industries—and who might assist him in getting on the ladder toward some form of regular, secure income generation with which he can supplement his tithe and start to climb the economic/spiritual ladder.

In the context of a deeply uncertain future, Thomas and many other young men in OMG express an explicit and widely held belief that by "faithing it," ultimately they *might* make it. The incessant economic crisis in Zimbabwe presents challenges for young Pentecostal Christians to the extent that Thomas and Simba (introduced in the opening vignette) are *faithing it* for lengthy periods without any prospects of actualizing the consumption of original designer suits. The twin practice of simultaneously *faithing* and *faking it* becomes an end in itself. The mimicry that young Pentecostal Christians exhibit is steeped in aspiration and Pentecostal imagined futures anchored in the prosperity gospel. This impersonation of the prophet in terms of suits, hairstyle, and ways of talking illustrates agency, creativity, competency, and desire for upward mobility (see also Arnaut 2012, 2). Furthermore, the mimicry involved shows the "centrality of optimistic fantasy to reproducing [prosperity] and surviving in zones of compromised ordinariness" (Berlant 2006, 35).

The suit as a symbol

As indicated above, suits have historically been multivocal symbols (see Turner 1967). They have been sites of subversion, confrontation, resistance, and aspiration. In the context outlined above, the suit is a site of struggle embedded in a historical and contemporary milieu that provides shifting meanings to specific garments. The act of wearing a suit can thus be understood as an embodied attempt at "truth-telling," a technology of the self through which the wearers create and promote knowledge of themselves by straddling the boundary between self-denial and self-mastery (see Besley and Peters 2007). The struggles over who could or should wear suits in colonial Zimbabwe continue to shape how suits are perceived in the postcolonial era. They have remained symbols of status, power, and success in Zimbabwean society, and specifically for congregants of Pentecostal movements, they "confer symbolic capital to members because [they are] regarded as an indication of God's blessing" (Taru and Settler 2015, 132; see also Maxwell 2006).

Suits as a symbol of aspiration

Among Pentecostal Christians, dressing is a statement of intent. In the 1990s when the economy was stable in comparison to the current context, Pentecostal Christians were encouraged to buy new suits and shoes with their first paycheck (Maxwell 1998, 363). Similarly, young Pentecostal Christians at OMG attend church services and gatherings in their "Sunday best"—clean, well-ironed, and fake. The evidence suggests that their counterfeit designer suits are intended

to be associated with white-collar jobs, business executives, and postcolonial political leaders. This idea was expressed by one interlocutor who noted in an interview that:

> You can come to church in jeans and hoodies, it is not wrong, but no one notices you. Come in a nice suit, everyone compliments you. Nothing beats a suit. It shows that you got your act together, you are someone respectable and worth noticing. Look at people who serve during Sunday services, they wear black and gray suits. They look great, it shows that we [OMG] are not just any other church, we are a church of God. (Mike, 23 years, July 12, 2017)[18]

Through extended interactions with young congregants after Sunday services, the elaborate performative aspects of these consumption practices and patterns were confirmed. Young Pentecostal Christians stand outside OMG premises talking and showing off their new suits and enjoying compliments from fellow Pentecostal Christians. In an informal interview, Simba suggested, albeit indirectly, that clothes might be spun in a similar way to money by stating that:

> You cannot be seen in the same clothes every Sunday and Tuesday,[19] at times you make a plan to get some clothes from friends. You go to friends who are not members of OMG [*laughs*]. It is cool to wear clothes that are not already known at church. You choose someone who does not attend the same church and no one will know the person or where you got the clothes from [*laughs*]. (Simba, 22 years, November 9, 2016)

The compulsion to appear prosperous has thus pushed young people to find ways in which they can give a semblance of prosperity through commodities they consume and display during church gatherings and events. Simba engages people outside of the OMG community in his efforts to convince churchmates that he is blessed with the means to afford new clothes every week. For Simba, God reads his intentions and might look favorably upon them, whilst casting a blind eye on the methods behind them. Through these elaborate schemes of attempted deception, young people find ways for themselves to participate in prosperity gospel in the hope of becoming genuinely prosperous. In doing so, they are embodying the characteristics of what we call spiritual hustlers.

At the core of this tactical agency is a performative aspect of aspirations to material success. The example introduced in the opening vignette illustrates both the tactical agency that OMG youth put into practice and the performative aspect of their consumption. OMG youth understand that the bespoke suits worn by prophet Ben are beyond their reach, just as the older, more prosperous members of the congregation understand that younger, unemployed churchgoers simply don't have the economic means to purchase original designer clothing. Young Pentecostal Christians such as Simba, Thomas, and Tatenda are thus involved in an elaborate performance of self-deception that is broadly

understood by all OMG congregants as a means of negotiating economic uncertainty and aspiring to prosperity.

The suit as a symbol of generational authority

Members of OMG, then, are aware that most of the suits worn by younger members are either counterfeits made in town (at Dublin House) or borrowed from relatives and friends outside of the church. The practice, however, is *not* condemned by the church leadership or elders. Indeed, through the lack of condemnation, one may read a covert encouragement of the behavior. One reading of the ethnographic evidence on the official silence around this elaborate hoax could be that older Pentecostal Christians, church officials and Prophet Ben himself, may be inclined to refrain from open comments, mockery, or other forms of judgment for their own strategic reasons.

Looking at this as a form of indirect communication (see Hendry and Watson 2001), the public secret behind these dynamics reveals the interplay of age, power, and authority. Everyone knows that the suits are counterfeit, but it is also widely accepted that young members *ought* to be "presentable." As mentioned above, this is in part related to the desire to get noticed. However, in addition to this, the encouragement of presentability should be understood in terms of OMG as a commercial brand. It goes without saying that churches preaching prosperity gospel are, at least in part, the public face of a business model at the core of which lies the generation of wealth. Branding is a fundamental aspect of this—and any—business, and the presentability of all members, regardless of age, maintains and builds the church brand, making it stand out from other competitors in the spiritual marketplace while acting in and of itself as a form of marketing for the business model of the church.

In addition to the overt or covert economic motivations of presentability, we find another possible motivation for the silence maintained by older members concerning the fake designer clothes worn by younger members. It directly maintains and promotes the rigid disciplinary patriarchal structure of authority through which the church attempts to cultivate future generations of congregants (and thus, in turn, maintaining the business model mentioned above). In this vein, it also serves as an attempt to underpin the theological underpinnings of prosperity gospel. If church leadership openly condemns or discourages the practice, young OMG Pentecostal Christians may question the spiritual efficacy of tithing and, by extension, the authority of the prophet in mediating and facilitating material success for his youthful followers. Ignoring or incorporating hustling by the clergy is a way of silencing and bringing young Pentecostal Christians under control (see Di Nunzio 2019).

In this sense, the young members of OMG donning counterfeit suits are defined in opposition to the more economically stable older congregants who are more likely to be wearing original branded clothing. The generational distinction of authority is thus mapped, at least to some extent, onto the sartorial elegance of the congregation in general. Younger members, we might speculate, are being *rewarded* for their resourcefulness and innovative character in

acquiring appropriate clothing for worship. These characteristics, which we refer to as "hustling," are valuable assets for young people trying to establish themselves in a socio-economic context such as that experienced by people in contemporary Zimbabwe. If the congregants are generally aware that the suits worn by younger members are imitations, then it could be argued that the suits do *not* index spiritual blessings and prosperity. They are, the evidence would suggest, at the center of an economically and spiritually inspired but openly accepted illusion.

"Obedience" as a spiritual hustle

Young Pentecostal Christians are, in the context outlined above, generally determined to present themselves as prosperous despite the unfavorable economic conditions in which they find themselves. Some younger members of OMG lamented during interviews that the current economic crisis is exacerbated by feeling "trapped" in the social category of "youth."

Taurai, who stays with his parents, noted that:

> I am over thirty, but *handina plan* [I have no idea what my future will be], I am not in a serious relationship. I do not have money to pay lobola, no wife and no kids [*sighs*]. If I marry, I must move out of my parents' house, where do I go? I am not employed, and I can't pay rentals. I must remain under my parents' care. They assist me, they feed, clothe, and house me. If I marry, they will stop. [Taurai, 32 years, September 16, 2016)

Taurai and his parents are members of OMG. His parents provide him with cash for tithes, through which he seeks spiritual blessings of prosperity with which he aspires to establish himself as a socially recognized adult. By observing obedience, Taurai assures his parents' continued support. He gets home early, attends church services, helps out at church by arranging chairs, and stays away from things that are unlikely to warrant his parents' approval, such as alcohol and drugs. Taurai noted that he has to be or *look* "obedient," especially on religious matters, as a tactic that will prolong his stay at his parents' house. The onus is upon Taurai to deploy his tactical agency and balance his spiritual and economic aspirations with his parents' expectations, thus reinforcing parental authority over him.

This dynamic is not limited to Taurai alone; it is a generalized pattern of behavior. During interviews and through observation, it became clear that many younger members of OMG participate in church activities such as cleaning, ushering, and singing as a symbolic performance of obedience through which they aspire to spiritual blessings. Such activities open avenues to being "noticed" and increase the potential for securing the benefits that come with this recognition.

In this sense, young Pentecostal Christians at OMG willingly subject themselves to the patriarchal structure of authority at OMG in the hope that they might, one day, become successful elders in their own right. Themba joined a group of young Pentecostal Christians who volunteered to work in parking lots

during church services.[20] Themba, like other young Pentecostal Christians, receives tips from car owners for their services.[21] Due to his pronounced height, physique, consistent payment of tithe, and outstanding fashion style, he was eventually noticed. This led to a recommendation from a prominent church elder and subsequent recruitment into the official OMG security department through his zonal leader. Commenting on his style of dressing during an informal interview, Themba noted that:

> I had two suits then and I always made sure that they were clean and ironed and polished my brown shoes. I would stay at the car park guarding cars in a suit. For me guarding cars was a way of serving God and the prophet. Pastors and other leaders always joked that I dressed like them. In May of 2015, I was recruited into the security department ... This is better, we received salaries and I have been trained on the use of light firearm. (Themba, 27 years, April 30, 2017)

Since his recruitment, Themba provided security at businesses owned by the prophet, eventually being posted as security detail at the prophet's private residence. It is thus not surprising that most young church-goers, like Themba, deliberately cultivate the image of obedience and discipline to attract the attention of the clergy and economically well-off members (James 2019). Such intentional actions of obedience are thus examples of spiritual hustling, in the hope of securing the promises of prosperity gospel.

Spiritual hustling in cyberspace

Our final example of spiritual hustling is rooted in the understanding and application of technology. As explained earlier, the majority of OMG members are young people. Despite their significant numbers, they do not hold positions of authority in the church. Prophet Ben has surrounded himself with older men and women who act as his advisory council. Young Pentecostal Christians, however, have another ace up their sleeve in the hustle for spiritual blessings: technology.

Several young Pentecostal Christians have created WhatsApp groups for congregants, regardless of age and gender, that deal with OMG and wider spiritually related issues. In these groups, young Pentecostal Christians assume the role of group administrators in which they lay down rules and regulations that members of the group must follow. These young religious entrepreneurs have seized opportunities presented by new technologies to gain some form of authority that they would otherwise not have access to in offline religious contexts (Taru 2019). WhatsApp group administrators are well respected and increasingly seen as authorities who can sanction group members whose conduct is against the established rules and regulations. Group administrators have the power to remove members from WhatsApp groups for posting content deemed nonreligious or inappropriate for OMG congregants. When misunderstandings arise, members report to the WhatsApp group administrators, who act as adjudicators and have in this way become self-imposed authorities in certain

communication channels used by OMG members. Young Pentecostal Christians thus to some extent actively reconfigure power dynamics by deploying social media to shift decision-making processes and impose parameters around online discourse in their interests.

This is a relatively recent strategy to increase the chance of being noticed, and within this social media space, specific dynamics have arisen. Several young church members have gained reputations as online dream and vision interpreters, "prayer warriors," and exceptional teachers of the gospel. Our evidence would suggest that the deployment of agency in these online platforms is to some extent bypassing and replacing prophet Ben in activities that used to be—indeed which *ought to* be—his sole preserve. There is no space here to explain in detail why church hierarchies allow these practices to continue, but the explanation would appear to be similar to why young people adorning counterfeit designer clothing are not discouraged, as argued above.

One interlocutor shared a story of his friend who is an administrator in one of the WhatsApp groups:

> He knows how to interpret dreams, and people call him so that he helps them make sense of the visions they see in their dreams. He doesn't charge for the services but at times those he assists give him 'an appreciation' for his gift. God has blessed him [with this gift] to be a blessing to others. (William, 25 years, July 13, 2017)

In this way, social media created a space for younger church members to venture into the realm of ritual expertise that is monopolized by prophet Ben and his clergy in offline situations. Some earn a living from the "appreciation" they get from those they assist, and this money—like that earned as tips from guarding cars or "spinning" cash—is converted into tithes through which spiritual gifts of prosperity are sought.

Social media and new technologies have therefore opened avenues through which younger OMG congregants deploy their tactical agency to negotiate positions of authority. In offline relations, they hold no significant position in the church hierarchy and are not considered part of the clergy. Nonetheless, their ability to navigate and manipulate online spaces enables them to become akin to "ritual experts" (see McNeill 2012), recognized by fellow church members with whom they interact online, increasing their chances of being noticed. We argue that in doing so, the younger generation actively takes advantage of prophet Ben's significant and intentional inaccessibility which we highlighted at the start of this paper. The potential for social media and new technologies to shift the scales of highly gerontocratic and autocratic bureaucracies—as evidenced, for example, during the Arab Spring uprisings across the Middle East that began in 2011—find a particular localized expression within the power dynamics of OMG. It is difficult to remove the *kujingirisa* ethos in understanding these emerging youthful social media entrepreneurs. Dream interpretation in particular, and WhatsApp groups for all members in general, are part of the spiritual hustle that has emerged from highly inhibitive economic situations and

strongly authoritative gerontocratic establishments. They are subtle yet significant ways of "faithing it till they make it."

Spiritual hustling: Some theological implications

Moving towards a conclusion, the practice of spiritual hustling exposes, to some extent, aspects of the prosperity gospel as an illusion — a collection of legerdemain — dependent upon an individual's efforts, but which, if made efficacious, may harvest divine blessings. Having neither employment nor stable means of income, most younger church members are yet to experience the material success that comes from tithing. Whilst some of them may experience this as a temporary stalling of the gospel of prosperity, the silence from the church hierarchy and the prophet who does not condemn it serves to legitimize the backhand maneuvers through which they may find themselves in a position to offer tithe with the hope of a return on their money.

The dynamics of spiritual hustling outlined above have significant theological implications. It is prudent at this final juncture to briefly consider some of these ramifications. Young Pentecostal Christians' "faithing it till they make it" essentially removes prophet Ben as the head of the church and the direct link to the divine, bypassing his role in the matrix of relations between young members of OMG and God's blessings. By noting that God is observant of their *intentions*, young Pentecostal Christians are effectively displacing prophet Ben from, or reducing his involvement in, the tithing/ prosperity matrix. The prophet's role in this is to receive tithe; however, God reads the minds of the youth and blesses them accordingly. The practice of "faithing it" can thus be read in theological terms as a *direct* appeal to God to bless young people's creativity and persistence so they can afford to tithe, and buy clothes and gadgets required to showcase prosperity. Some interlocutors noted that they understood the prevailing economic situation in Zimbabwe could not be addressed directly by prophet Ben, but by God alone. Hence, they appealed to a superior authority, effectively bypassing the prophet in the process.

The practice of "spinning money," outlined above, is an instructive example here. The conflation of religion and gambling has implications for the prosperity gospel and religiously inspired understandings of morality. Young Pentecostal Christians involved with this practice understand that it is morally "wrong," but under the circumstances, the means justify the ends. The distinct symbolic resonances between the operations of prosperity gospel and gambling do not go unnoticed by those who choose to spin money. This potentially converts religion into—or brings it in line with—secular activities that depend largely on luck. Receiving spiritual blessings—hitting the metaphorical jackpot—is understood as the result of a combination of personal creativity, obedience, persistence, God's ability to read your thoughts and the power of the prophet to maintain the space in which spiritual blessings may be received.

Spiritual hustling is, then, simultaneously a creative and disruptive theological process. It slowly dislodges the responsibility of the prophet to actualize the

teachings of the prosperity gospel, whilst reinforcing the structures of authority around him. Though spiritual hustling shows creativity on the part of young Pentecostal Christians, it also works in prophet Ben's favor. Failures to attract spiritual blessings, even after tithing, can be blamed on the young Pentecostal Christian's behavior of "cutting corners" (see, for example, Evans-Pritchard 1937, 330; Gifford 2015, 96 and Graeber 2001, 244–45). The ethnographic evidence presented here suggests that young people perceive spiritual hustling not as a Godly-inspired set of procedures, but rather as a way to curry favor with God by increasing the chances of being "noticed" and thus fulfilling the desire for economic prosperity. This approach gradually brings them closer to receiving spiritual blessings–not necessarily though the prophet's prowess, but by nurturing a direct relationship with God through the structures of the church, which necessarily maintain the powerful position of the prophet and those close to him.

Conclusion

The argument made in this paper demonstrates that through different strategies of spiritual hustling, young members of OMG negotiate the means by which they generate income to increase their tithe, and thus their chances of becoming genuinely prosperous. Within the unforgiving prevailing economic climate where this takes place, however, the odds are clearly stacked against them. Returning to Coleman's notion of a sacrificial economy, spiritual hustling might be best understood as "goal-directed spiritually charged action" (2003, 39). The examples presented here, however, present their own particular spiritual, moral and practical conundrums.

This spiritually charged action, to paraphrase Coleman, hinges on the transformative and flexible transformative nature of value. Through wearing counterfeit designer suits, adhering to strict codes of obedience and exploiting generationally specific abilities to mobilize social media technology, we show that ideas of value in deeply uncertain economic circumstances are volatile and open to manipulation. The cheap fake suit is transformed into a commodity of potentially significant value through its capacity to increase the chances of being "noticed." The values of generational authority simultaneously benefit older church members and young congregants who seek to actively exploit hierarchical structures of authority designed to regulate their actions, but which can in practice be manipulated in their interests. Establishing virtual networks through which OMG congregants can communicate with relative ease appears ostensibly for the overall benefit of *all* church members, but the evidence presented here shows clearly that the value of technology means different things to different people. Young members have harnessed technology to carve out niches of authority that are unavailable to them in offline settings. The overall picture that emerges, then, is one of complex, occasionally contradictory and always dynamic cross-cutting performances of agency and transformations in value, through which young members of OMG seek to "faith it till they make it," hustling through a spiritual nexus under deeply uncertain economic conditions.

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Notes

1. This is a term used to refer to prophet Ben, the founder and leader of One Ministry of God. All names of persons and religious organizations are anonymized with pseudonyms.
2. By "young" we are referring to young males between the ages of eighteen and thirty. The dynamics of spiritual hustling for young females are very different from the ones we observed in men. Data from young female persons tell a different story and address a different set of arguments.
3. In the interests of full disclosure, the second author was the supervisor for this project. His contribution to the paper was in terms of constructing the overall argument, structure, and style of the piece.
4. The research received ethical approval from the University of Pretoria, approval number 15413668 (GW20160518HS). Leadership at OMG issued a letter consenting to the research being conducted on its premises and among its members.
5. The size of OMG membership is difficult to estimate; it is difficult to distinguish regular members and people attending church services for faith healing. Furthermore, OMG is a transnational Pentecostal Christian church with members in the diaspora joining church activities online. However, OMG claims that over 70,000 people attend Sunday services in Harare. There are also estimates from media that claim over 150,000 people attended an all-night prayer service organized by OMG.
6. US$300 is for a communal guest room, where you share a sleeping and eating area. When the first author conducted fieldwork, OMG was introducing self-catering guesthouses. The guesthouses came with privacy. The prophet visited these guesthouses to meet with guests. He spent a relatively longer period with guests in self-catering guesthouses. All this came at a minimum cost of US$1000 depending on the type of guesthouse.
7. The first author checked in on Thursday April 13, 2017 and the group spent most of the day praying, singing, and listening to recorded sermons on television. Prophet Ben came briefly in the afternoon of the next day for the one-on-one encounters. It took him close to two hours to conduct one-on-one meetings with all guests.
8. The 2014 Human Development Report showed that 68 percent of the 13 million Zimbabwean population was under the age of thirty-five. We are using 2014 data to contextualize ethnographic data collected from 2016 to 2017. Using latest data to contextualize data collected seven years ago gives a wrong context.
9. Spiritual hustling is similar in many respects to Werbner's (2011) concept of "holy hustling." In this case, Werbner is referring to the practice by which young urban prophets juggle their "streetwise" skills and the Holy Spirit for personal gains, ultimately to prop up different factions of the Eloyi church in Botswana. In this paper, we focus on young Pentecostal Christians whose hustling practices are "from below" and are aimed specifically at demonstrating aspirations of upward mobility and divine blessings, and not necessarily furthering consolidation of power by the clergy embroiled in intricate localized power struggles as demonstrated in *Holy Hustlers*.

10. The Zimbabwe Labour Survey of 2014 shows that Zimbabwe has a workforce of 7.8 million people. Of 7.8 million people, 750,000 are categorized as economically inactive because they are still pursuing education; 800,000 are unemployed. 350,000 people have formal employment while 5.9 million operate in the informal economy. We cite the 2014 survey because that was the latest survey when fieldwork was conducted. Using current data (from 2024), in which the unemployment rate is significantly lower, distorts the ethnographic reality in that government categories of "employed" have been changed to include anyone who is informally employed.
11. Eleven participants had a bachelor's degree, seven had a diploma, and the remainder had completed secondary school.
12. In Pentecostal Christian parlance, tithing is giving back or returning a portion of what God has blessed you with. In returning a portion, you attract more divine blessings in the form of financial breakthroughs.
13. UKCG is a Brazilian church in South Africa that relies on clergy from foreign countries. OMG is a Zimbabwean church with local pastors who stay for long periods of time leading several churches. This facilitates formation of a closely knit religious community.
14. The story of a widow's offering places emphasis on the sacrifice being made rather than the amount donated.
15. Dealing in exchange of currency without registration is illegal in Zimbabwe. However, the practice is widespread to the extent that most people get US dollars—which is the de facto currency in the country—through informal channels.
16. https://www.gq.com/gallery/the-gq-history-of-the-suit-by-decade (accessed January 18, 2024).
17. Interestingly, many forms of "traditional" dress also became a product of global capitalism. In the Venda region of South Africa, for example, the traditional *minwenda* made from *salempore* cloth was stylized into the way it is worn today by laws on taxation of the material, which was imported from India. Anything above a specific length and width (which changed over time) was subject to significantly more tax than material below the designated size. As such, the two times wrap around now associated with "tradition" in that region is in fact a product of global capitalist, modern regulations (see McNeill 2012).
18. Mike is one of the few young people who had a wife. Despite being married, Mike and his wife still attended the Youth Service, the couple felt that they had not "matured" to attend the couple's service. The teachings at Youth Service resonated with their situation.
19. OMG holds a mid-week service every Tuesday between 5:00 PM to 7:00 PM.
20. This line of thinking has a strong resonance with earlier Marxist interpretations of ritual, exposed specifically by Bloch (1989). Marxist interpretations of ritual argue that initiates go through initiation processes and willingly subject themselves to humiliation in the hope that they themselves will one day be the ritual elders on the other side of the ritual process. In this way, ritual has the potential to crystallize and reproduce structures of power and authority.
21. There were increases in cases of smash and grab robberies during church services—young Pentecostal Christians organized themselves to provide security at the parking lot. They also direct vehicles to parking bays to avoid congestion and delays after church service, subjecting themselves to extreme heat in the process.

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