



From the Periphery to the Deep End: A Critique of Joshua Maponga's Religio-Cultural Pedagogy

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ABSTRACT

A plethora of discourses have emerged on the religio-cultural pedagogy of Joshua Maponga, a Zimbabwean clergy. Maponga's religious and cultural pedagogy has been oscillating from the periphery to the deep end. This dithering behaviour has drawn the attention of the writers of this paper, prompting questions about how Maponga manages to transition from one end to the other. The paper, therefore, sought to critically examine Joshua Maponga's pedagogical thrust to ascertain his identity in line with his teachings and sermons available on his social media pages. This is the first scholarly research on Joshua Maponga. Using the theory of liminality, the paper presented Maponga's identity and his religio-cultural pedagogy. The theory of liminality helped locate the life between Maponga's extreme religious life and the far end of cultural identity. The findings highlighted the religio-cultural pedagogy of Maponga, which begins from the periphery and extends to the centre, ultimately reaching the deep end of becoming a hermit. The paper concluded by arguing that Maponga's teachings and actions are antagonistic, and a contrast exists between his high theological pedagogy and his highly African traditional religiosity, resulting in another man whose identity is situated in the liminal space. The article presents the first scholarly research on Joshua Maponga, filling a knowledge gap and providing a foundation for future studies. It further contributes to a deeper understanding of the complexities of religious and cultural identity, highlighting the need for critical examination and nuanced analysis.

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INTRODUCTION

Joshua Maponga, a Zimbabwean clergyman, has been at the centre of controversy due to his multiple identities and conflicting teachings. With a background as a pastor in the Seventh Day Adventist Church, Maponga has evolved into various roles, including public speaker, author, philosopher, leader, musician, social entrepreneur, anthropologist, and hermit. This paper investigates Maponga's religio-cultural pedagogy by examining his transition from a pastor to his current multifaceted identities and the implications of his teachings on African spirituality, culture, and Christianity. This is a qualitative research paper that drew data from different social media pages of Joshua Maponga. The paper is framed within the theory of liminality. It navigates the other characters portrayed by Maponga to unmask his religio-cultural identity, which is camouflaged in his multiple roles. In some of the sources, Joshua is referred to as Maponga 111. This paper will not focus on the 111 parts of his surname, as this does not seem to present a different Maponga. Throughout the paper, Maponga will be addressed without a suffix, with no intention of downplaying his full name, but for the sake of continuity with

what is common in the religio-cultural circles regarding his identity. The paper concludes by arguing that Maponga's teachings and actions are antagonistic, and a contrast exists between his high theological pedagogy and his highly African traditional religiosity, which consequently presents another man whose identity is situated in the liminal space.

Theory of Liminality

The identity and teachings of Joshua Maponga have brought some challenges in the religious and cultural circles. Besides being a pastor at the Seventh Day Adventist Church in Zimbabwe,¹ Maponga presents himself as a public speaker, author, philosopher, leader, musician, social entrepreneur, anthropologist, and hermit.² With these multiple identities, Maponga's pedagogy has been dithering between two extremes of his religio-cultural life. The need to discover his identity in these serial roles has necessitated the use of the theory of liminality, which was originated by the ethnographer Arnold van Gennep in 1909 in his *Les Rites de Passage*.³ Van Gennep presented the theory in his study of rituals, but did not make it clear from which Latin word he derived the term liminality. He defines liminality as a state of 'in-between-ness' during rites of passage. Such rites are accompanied by a territorial passage, such as crossing a threshold.⁴ The rite of passage is marked by three phases: separation, marginality (or liminality), which signifies the threshold, and aggregation.⁵ On the one hand, separation compromises symbolic behaviour, signifying detachment from the individual or group, either from an earlier fixed point in social life, from a set of cultural conditions of the state, or both.⁶ On the other hand, marginality or liminality denotes an ambivalent state of limbo.⁷

In 1967, Victor Turner adapted and expanded van Gennep's concept of liminality.⁸ He agrees with van Gennep that liminality is a threshold or boundary that connotes the position of being betwixt and between the positions assigned or arrayed by law, customs, conventions, and ceremonies.⁹ In other words, liminality is a process of continuous change toward an anticipated outcome.¹⁰ Broadhurst defines liminality as a transitional space between two distinct places.¹¹ Liminality is thus considered a particular state experienced by people as they transition from one phase of life to another. It is the state of being between statuses, whether these be fixed cultural classifications or more formalised legal statuses.¹² The arguments above resonate well with how Joshua Maponga oscillates between identities, ranging from the religious extreme to the deep end of culture, and sometimes contradict his role in gaining widespread acclaim.

In opting for the liminal theory, the authors took cognisance of the fact that Maponga presents himself differently and liminality searches for meaning in between the transitional stages.¹³ The theory not only highlights isolation from hardened structures but also the potential for forming alternative

¹ Adventist Today, "Adventist Pastor Calling for Decolonization of Christianity Banned from Speaking in Southern Africa," 2020, <https://atoday.org/andrews-educated-pastor-calling-for-decolonization-of-christianity-banned-from-speaking-in-southern-africa/>.

² YouTube, "Joshua Maponga - Public Lecture in Zambia on Universities," 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FVbZRW16SI0>; Joshua Maponga, "African Questions and Solutions: Farmers of Thought," <https://www.amazon.com/African-Question-Solutions-Farmers-Thought-2022>.

³ Jasper Balduk, "On Liminality Conceptualizing 'in between-Ness,'" 2008.

⁴ Arnold Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, Translated by Monika B. Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Caffee, Introduction by Solon T. Kimball. (Van Gennep, Arnold: The University of Chicago Press, 1960).

⁵ Victor Turner, *Liminality and Communitas in the Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Chicago: Aide Publishing, 1969); Mathieu Deflem, "Ritual, Anti-Structure, and Religion: A Discussion of Victor Turner's Processual Symbolic Analysis," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 1991, 1–25.

⁶ Turner, Victor, *Op Cit*, 359.

⁷ Patricia Hynes, *The Dispersal, and Social Exclusion of Asylum Seekers: Between Liminality and Belonging* (Bristol: The Polity Press, 2011).

⁸ Ellen Finn, "Losing Liminality: Turner's Theory of Transition in the Funerary Archaeology of Prepalatial Crete," *Journal of Anthropological Archaeology* 63 (September 2021): 101291, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jaa.2021.101291>.

⁹ Turner, *Liminality and Communitas in the Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*.358.

¹⁰ Turner, *Liminality and Communitas in the Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*.358.

¹¹ Susan Broadhurst, *Liminal Acts: A Critical Overview of Contemporary Performance Theory* (London: Cassell, 1999). 1.

¹² Lisa Christine DeLosso, "A Phenomenon of Thought: Liminal Theory in the Museum," 2010.

¹³ Victor Turner, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of the Ndembu Ritual* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1967).

structures, which constitute the primary function and aim of the liminal theory.¹⁴ For Turner, an individual who moves to the liminal stage finds themselves in the gap between worlds; they are a specific medium between the alternative structures of here and there.¹⁵ Such trajectories are critical to understanding Maponga's extremist tendencies as a pastor, a hermit, and ostensibly a cult leader. Turner feels that the liminal phase in the rites of passage is mostly explicitly characterised by a kind of anti-structure because it is about creating an alternative structure from the one already known.¹⁶ and this speaks to Maponga, who is known as a pastor. Yet, he continues to incorporate other controversial identities into his religious and cultural life, likely to garner attention from diverse audiences. Turner's view is that the temporary detachment of an individual from a hardened social structure imparts to the individual not only an ambivalent social status but also frees them/from any laws, norms, and rules of behaviour where status is ambivalent and hazy.¹⁷

The theory of liminality also denotes an experience that cannot be adequately understood based on identity because it is defined precisely as what falls through the cracks of any binary division and thus precedes or escapes a moment of identification.¹⁸ Liminality in this sense is a designation of the excluded third space that defies an ontology of the identical altogether on a different space. Moelbak summarises the liminal experience in three ways: first, it is a marginal, undefined area or unknown space; second, it is a borderline or threshold between two spaces or identities; and lastly, it is a temporal transition or passage from one state of being to another.¹⁹ These three ways justify the use of the theory of liminality as the authors grapple with the undefined space of Maponga, his borderline state between being extremely culturally aware and extremely atheistic in clerical regalia. These extremist spaces create a temporal transition from the previous state, which makes many people confused between the Maponga they listened to as a preacher and the same man castigating the Bible as a tool of extortion, for example, when he said,

Jesus did not pay tithe, so why do you pay ... Tithe is a circumcision of greed. It is a cutting of the foreskin of what is mine... salary is a seed and should be invested and not given as a tithe, the same as a loan... tithers today are not cheerful givers because they are tithing seeds (school fees). Converting tithes into money is wrong. People must tithe from agricultural seeds. The twenty-first century has been commercialised and monetised for people without land for agriculture, poor people, and beggars are being abused because of giving tithes from a poor revenue base.²⁰

The above explanation presents the conflictive identity of Maponga, and the theory of liminality assists in understanding his identity.

METHODOLOGY

This paper used qualitative research methodology. In this methodology, the authors analysed primary sources, such as YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, Pinterest, and Facebook, where Maponga presented and responded to interview questions. Rogers argues that "research is about producing new information, and social media offers unique opportunities to present new content."²¹ Roza Tsvetkova projected that "there are almost one million new users to some form of social media each day, or a new

¹⁴ Irma Ratiani, "Liminality and the Liminal Theory of Conceptualizing Time and Space in the 20th-Century Eschatological Anti-Utopia," 2012, <https://api.semanticscholar.org/CorpusID:201923890>.

¹⁵ Turner, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of the Ndembu Ritual*.

¹⁶ Turner, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of the Ndembu Ritual*.

¹⁷ Turner, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of the Ndembu Ritual*.

¹⁸ Rune, L, Moelbak, "A Dialogue between a Philosophical- Phenomenological Understanding of Liminality and an Empirical-Existential Study of Flirting." (McAnulty College and Graduate School of Liberal Arts, 2010).

¹⁹ Moelbak, "A Dialogue between a Philosophical- Phenomenological Understanding of Liminality and an Empirical-Existential Study of Flirting. "

²⁰ YouTube, "Jesus Did Not Pay Tithe so Why Do You Pay Deep? Bishop Joshua Maponga," 2023, <https://www.google.com/search?client=opera&q=joshua+maponga+teaching+on+tithes&%09sourceid=opera&ie=UTF-8&oe=UTF-8#fpstate=ive&vld=cid:56d4b0a6,vid:AHtawFwnBew,st:0>.

²¹ Jessica Rogers, "The Use of Social Media and Its Impact for Research," *BioResources* 14, no. 3 (2019): 5022.

user every 10 seconds; 300 hours of video are uploaded to YouTube alone every minute.”²² Based on the arguments above, social media has become a critical source of primary data collection in any research. The authors listened to some of the presentations by Joshua Maponga, a pastor and public speaker. They also read some of Maponga’s works as an author, as well as his roles as a philosopher, leader, musician, social entrepreneur, anthropologist, and hermit.

DISCUSSION

The Identity of Joshua Maponga

From both primary and secondary sources consulted, Maponga presents multiple identities, including those of a public speaker, author, philosopher, pastor, musician, social entrepreneur, anthropologist, and hermit.²³ Events Cloud confirmed that Maponga is a Bishop, motivational speaker, social entrepreneur, philosopher, musician, and leader with a keen passion for community development.²⁴ His experience was gained in working with organisations such as EDSA (Entrepreneurial Development Southern Africa), Global Management Centre (UK), and Vision Design House. This section will provide a brief background of Maponga’s life and also summarise each of the given identities as their multiplicity is the primary reason for his unidentified identity, which the use of the theory of liminality endeavours to clarify.

Maponga was born the firstborn and the oldest of five children of Lazarus Maponga. The name of his mother is not mentioned. He moved to South Africa and Swaziland and later relocated to the United Kingdom at the end of 1998. He returned to South Africa and started a new job in Marketing, Consulting, and Construction.²⁵ Maponga mentioned that he had wanted to pursue a career in engineering or medicine. Still, his father steered him down a different path because he was a pastor who had been released from prison and on death row in the 1979 Amnesty, and until that point, he did not know if he would ever see his father again.²⁶ After acquiring his degree in Philosophy, he also pursued other professional courses, including Construction Entrepreneurial Training – an International Labour Organisation initiative aimed at developing local consultants and supporting emerging contractors and manufacturers.²⁷ Joshua Maponga relocated to Zimbabwe after being pressured to leave South Africa by #PutSouthAfricansFirst campaigners, who did not want him to be involved in South African issues.

Maponga the Pastor

Maponga enrolled as a theologian at Andrews University (Berrien Springs, Michigan, USA) and became the pastor of the Seventh Day Adventist (SDA) in 1991.²⁸ In 2020, Maponga was suspended by the SDA because of his controversial teachings. Maponga was banned from attending, speaking, preaching, and officiating at any function of the Church in Southern and Indian-Ocean regions because of his controversial statements, such as calling Jesus this boy. At one time, he said,

The day a white Jesus dies for Black people, I will believe in a white Jesus. The white people and their white Jesus promise Africans gold in heaven while they are taking gold from Africans. It does not make sense at all that you are being promised to walk on gold in heaven while they are taking gold from you.²⁹

²² Roza Tsvetkova, “Amazing Social Media Statistics and Facts,” Brandwatch, 2023, <https://www.brandwatch.com/blog/amazing-social-media-statistics-and-facts/>.

²³ n.d. Pindula, “Joshua Maponga Biography, Age, Career & Net Worth,” https://www.pindula.co.zw/Joshua_Maponga_Biography/, n.d.

²⁴ Events Cloud, “A Motivational Speaker, Social Entrepreneur, Philosopher, Musician, and Leader,” n.d., <https://na.eventscloud.com/ereg/popups/speakerdetails.php?eventid=129384&language=eng&speakerid=35388>.

²⁵ Pindula, “Joshua Maponga Biography, Age, Career & Net Worth.”

²⁶ Pindula, “Joshua Maponga Biography, Age, Career & Net Worth,” n.d., https://www.pindula.co.zw/Joshua_Maponga_Biography/.

²⁷ Pindula, “Joshua Maponga Biography, Age, Career & Net Worth.”

²⁸ Adventist Today., “Adventist Pastor Calling for Decolonization of Christianity Banned from Speaking in Southern Africa,” <https://atoday.org/andrews-educated-pastor-calling-for-decolonization-of-christianity-banned-from-speaking-in-southern-africa/>, 2020.

²⁹ Pindula, “Joshua Maponga Biography, Age, Career & Net Worth.”

In one of his interviews after his excommunication from the SDA church, he was clear that he had chosen to follow a different path in religion.³⁰ Maponga confirmed his divergence from Christianity. He argued that:

When you go hunting, you dress like a hunter, when you go teaching, you dress like a teacher... When I met with some *sangomas* in the Drakensberg, Swaziland, Ghana, and Nigeria during my research for the book titled "Going Places in the Spirit," everything I had been told about Christianity and the Indigenous world was being challenged by the experiences I was now having. I was going there as a bishop, and because I am a sensitive person, my position on polygamy, indigenous medicine, tithe, weapons, and Christianity, especially Christians taking weapons like guns to fight for their land, the place of men and women in the community is no longer the same. I have moved and I have changed, but the greater part of the Christian community still believes that I am carrying the title Bishop, which I did not steal.³¹

Although Maponga was a Seventh Day Adventist for thirty-three years, he was surprisingly conferred the title of Bishop from the Pentecostal and Evangelical community.³² In the Seventh-day Adventist Church, the term "bishop" is not used in the traditional sense of the word. Instead, the church has a system of conference and union leadership.³³ However, the church does have a position called "Union President" or "Conference President", which is similar to a bishop in other denominations.³⁴ In the Seventh-day Adventist Church, the process of becoming a bishop differs somewhat from that in other Christian denominations. An overview of the process shows that,

The first step is to be ordained as a pastor in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. This typically requires completing a theological education program, gaining experience in ministry, and receiving a recommendation from the local conference. After gaining experience as a pastor, an individual may be elected to a leadership position within their regional conference, such as a departmental director or an associate pastor. If an individual demonstrates strong leadership skills and a deep understanding of the church's mission and values, they may be elected to a leadership position within their union conference. This could include roles such as a union departmental director or an assistant to the union president. The next step would be to serve in a leadership position within one of the church's thirteen divisions. This could include roles such as a division departmental director or an assistant to the division president. Finally, an individual may be elected to a leadership position within the General Conference, which is the highest governing body of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. This could include roles such as general vice president, departmental director, or even president of the General Conference.³⁵

It is worth noting that the Seventh-day Adventist Church does not have a formal "bishop" position. Instead, leadership is organised around a system of conferences, unions, divisions, and the General Conference. Leadership positions within these structures are typically filled through an election process by the relevant governing body. That being the case, Maponga's bishopric raises his controversial identity.

³⁰ YouTube, "Joshua Maponga Finally Explains Why He Is No Longer a Pastor or a Bishop!," 2024. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5xodyvA14As>

³¹ YouTube, "Joshua Maponga Finally Explains Why He Is No Longer a Pastor or a Bishop!,"

³² Pindula, "Joshua Maponga Biography, Age, Career & Net Worth."

³³ Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual (20th Edition), *Seventh-Day Adventist Church Manual (20th Edition)*, General Conference Corporation (USA, 2022).

³⁴ Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual (20th Edition), *Seventh-Day Adventist Church Manual (20th Edition)*, General Conference Corporation.

³⁵ Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual (20th Edition), *Seventh-Day Adventist Church Manual (20th Edition)*, General Conference Corporation.

Maponga the Author

Maponga has several books published in 2017, titled *Going Places in the Spirit*.³⁶ In this book, he argues that readers will rediscover Christ in Christianity and the Spirit of God in humanity, as they were created in His image to have dominion on Earth as it is in Heaven. This is the book that led to his excommunication from the SDA. The other book is *So, You Want to Be the Master* (2020).³⁷ In this book, Maponga offers tools and techniques for taking control of one's thoughts and outward actions, enabling navigation of a complex society with confidence and ease.³⁸ He listed ten guiding values of life, namely privacy, effort, development, action, self-esteem, sympathy, situation, service, joy, and direction, as means of how one should conquer the harsh world.³⁹ He mentioned that one's beliefs are how one behaves. Faith influences morality, enabling individuals to address issues ethically and morally.⁴⁰ He also published other books, such as "The African Questions & Farmers of Thought," "Find Your Truth," and "A Contested Ground Through Women," where he celebrates the works of women.⁴¹

Maponga the Celebrity and Presenter

Maponga also hosts his television programme 'Joshua', which is broadcast on One Gospel (DSTV, Channel 331).⁴² Moreover, he has written, developed, produced, presented, and anchored TV Programmes such as One Gospel and Education Channel.⁴³ Maponga is one of the most controversial public figures in religion, culture, and politics. He appears on DSTV reality TV show *Abafundisi*, which had three million viewers for Season One in 2020 and Season Two in 2021. At the time of writing, Maponga was a presenter on the show *Amabishop*, broadcast on DSTV Channel 160 (Moja Love) every Sunday at 9 pm. He is the host of religious and African content TV shows on DSTV channel 500, called Samkomota. He appears on DSTV BET Africa Channel 129 on the Tbo Touch show, which hosts international speakers. He has a massive following on Facebook, with over 250,000 followers on his Farmers of Thoughts page. His controversy regarding religion, politics, and African truth has sparked a public debate that trended in 2020, prompting many South Africans and people from other countries to seek a deeper understanding of African cultures and politics, as opposed to conflicting religious beliefs and politics.⁴⁴

Maponga the Businessman

Maponga is the Chief Executive Officer of the Institute of Farmers of Thought. He also has two organisations: the Zimbabwe Indigenous Movement (ZIM) and the Africa Indigenous Movement, which aim to house all the intellectual property on how to transform Africa, providing a template for others.

Maponga the Philanthropist

Maponga mentioned the claim that he has a plot in Beatrice along the Masvingo-Harare Highway in Zimbabwe, where he plans to create a village or sanctuary, similar to a temple, and everything will be centred around African spirituality. He said, "I will stop walking around. I want to do what great Mkhulu Credo Mutwa and others did. You will take off your shoes and walk around, sit, and talk."⁴⁵

³⁶ Joshua Maponga, "Going Places in Spirit. AbeBooks," <https://www.abebooks.com/9780639978987/Going-Places-Spirit-Maponga-Joshua-0639978983/plp>, 2017.

³⁷ Joshua, Maponga, "So You Want to Be the Master?," https://books.google.com.gh/books/about/So_You_Want_to_Be_the_Master.html?id=IDENLAAACAAJ&redir_esc=y, 2020.

³⁸ Maponga, "So You Want to Be the Master?"

³⁹ Maponga, "So You Want to Be the Master?"

⁴⁰ Maponga, "So You Want to Be the Master?"

⁴¹ Maponga, "African Questions and Solutions: Farmers of Thought"; Joshua Maponga, "Find Your Truth: Farmers of Thought," 2021, https://bridgebooks.co.za/products/9780620910873?srsId=AfmBOophIOQFmg5I226qk0sHGP0WxtPF-Ki-IFU_uZERYwFh6poZKge.

⁴² Events Cloud, "A Motivational Speaker, Social Entrepreneur, Philosopher, Musician, and Leader."

⁴³ Pindula, "Joshua Maponga Biography, Age, Career & Net Worth."

⁴⁴ Pindula, "Joshua Maponga Biography, Age, Career & Net Worth."

⁴⁵ Pindula, "Joshua Maponga Biography, Age, Career & Net Worth."

Maponga decided to implement a programme called Social Re-engineering, which aims to rewire the African mindset by teaching people to appreciate their food, clothes, medicines, and villages.⁴⁶

Controversial Teachings of Maponga

Joshua Maponga has sparked considerable controversy regarding his teaching, debates, and theological perspectives. In one of his debates on the Denny J. Show on YouTube, he openly questioned how one can ask him to believe in Jesus whom he considers to be an illusion of modernity and language and a created being in the Catholic system or the Council of Nicaea yet when one goes to history one cannot find a man called Jesus.⁴⁷ This demonstrates that Maponga, who was once a pastor and bishop, has withdrawn from the religious circles to the social engineering and political spaces, which he calls spaces of silence or the pharmacy of thoughts, where he engages with practical issues. In doing this one can interpret Maponga as one who has moved from the periphery (church realm as a young Seventh Day Adventist in particular) where he grappled with unanswered questions and moved towards the centre where he entered theological or ministerial formation after which he remained confused and had to pass through the centre to yet another periphery of his African spirituality where he now castigates Christianity as an illusion.

Furthermore, Maponga vowed that he did not believe in the Bible as the word of God, but he believed in the Scriptures.⁴⁸ It is interesting to examine the differences between the Bible and the Scriptures. The terms "Bible" and "Scriptures" are often used interchangeably, but there is a subtle difference between them. On the one hand, Curtis refers to the Bible specifically as the collection of sacred writings that are considered authoritative and inspired by God in the Christian faith.⁴⁹ The Bible comprises the Old Testament (also known as the Hebrew Bible) and the New Testament, which together contain sixty-six books. The Bible is considered the supreme authority for Christian doctrine and practice.

Scriptures, on the other hand, are a more general term that refers to any writings that are considered sacred, authoritative, or inspired by God. Scriptures can include the Bible, as well as other holy texts, such as the Quran, the Torah, the Bhagavad Gita, and other religious writings.⁵⁰ In other words, all Bibles are Scriptures, but not all Scriptures are Bibles. The term "Scriptures" is more inclusive and can refer to a broader range of sacred texts, whereas the term "Bible" specifically refers to the Christian Scriptures. In some Christian traditions, the term Scriptures is used to refer to the Bible, especially in contexts where the authority and inspiration of the Bible are being emphasised. However, in general, the term Scriptures is more flexible and can refer to a broader range of sacred texts. Maponga regards the Bible as not a conclusive word of God because it did not incorporate other extra-biblical texts during the process of canonisation, which he firmly believes is the work of the Global North. As a result, the Bible is Eurocentric, and Jesus is never in the Bible. However, Maponga brings inconsistencies when he discredits Christianity as being Eurocentric and the Bible as not being the word of God. He forgets that God is the creator of all things and is at the centre of it all through Jesus Christ. Yet, when he discusses African spirituality, he also refers to the same God who is the creator, and he quotes the same biblical verses that he considers not to be the word of God.

His main thrust is to believe in African epistemologies and not Jesus, who is not African, who is colonised and not liberated from Eurocentrism. For Maponga, anything propagated by whites is not palatable; instead, it is a poison that is meant to subjugate and brainwash Africans, and yet he obtained his education from the Western theological system. From a psychological perspective, Maponga reveals deep-seated bitterness toward his former church, which played a significant role in shaping him into the person he is today. He emulates his father, who was a pastor in the same church where he once rose in ranks to be a "Bishop." It could be that the pain of what was done to him by the Seventh Day Adventist left a deep scar on him that is traumatising him to the extent of wanting to demonise

⁴⁶ Pindula, "Joshua Maponga Biography, Age, Career & Net Worth."

⁴⁷ Joshua Maponga, "Bishop Maponga's Message Titled But the Lord," 2024, YouTube.com/watch?v=AvjyboyeXG1.

⁴⁸ Maponga, "Bishop Maponga's Message Titled But the Lord."

⁴⁹ Maponga, "Bishop Maponga's Message Titled But the Lord."

⁵⁰ Maponga, "Bishop Maponga's Message Titled But the Lord."

anything called Christianity as a way of venting out or seeking revenge given that even the atheist would not go to the importance of making Jesus a bustard. His theological compass and pedagogy are questionable. He is in the process of writing his bible to counter what he considers a polluted and Euroized word of God. Maponga categorically declared his withdrawal from the church, as he sought meaning that the church was no longer providing.⁵¹ It should be understood from the outset that Maponga made it clear that he abandoned Christianity several years ago to embark on a pilgrimage of reconnecting with Mother Earth.⁵² In doing so, it forms part of a healing process for discovering his ancestral roots and reconnecting with cultural connections.

Retreat to the Caves

When Maponga was excommunicated from the Seventh-day Adventist Church, he began a pilgrimage that he regards as reconnecting with Mother Earth for a spiritual healing process aimed at reviving his ancestral roots and revitalising cultural connectivity. He indicated that he had found his new church in the caves when he said:

There is healing in the silence of nature. Take time to experience nature. Listen to the rocks & birds. Take off your shoes and walk on the ground—no need for a pilgrimage to Mecca, Israel, or Nigeria. Go to the sanctuary of nature and renew your soul... This is my new church.⁵³

This action by Maponga sparked debate among citizens, who questioned the truth behind his actions. Some commented and said he was possessed. This could be attributed to the way Maponga dressed himself while retreating or his castigation against the church. The irony of it all is that he purports to be doing cultural things, yet he is posing for pictures, and the question will be, who is taking those pictures? To serve what purpose on someone who is soaked in cultural things that do not mix with European gadgets, which he demonises? It could be that Maponga, as a public orator, might be seeking attention from the whole world for heroism. One commentator said, “*Why is he posing for pictures? When you see a camera in place, you should conclude that this is an act of surveillance.*”

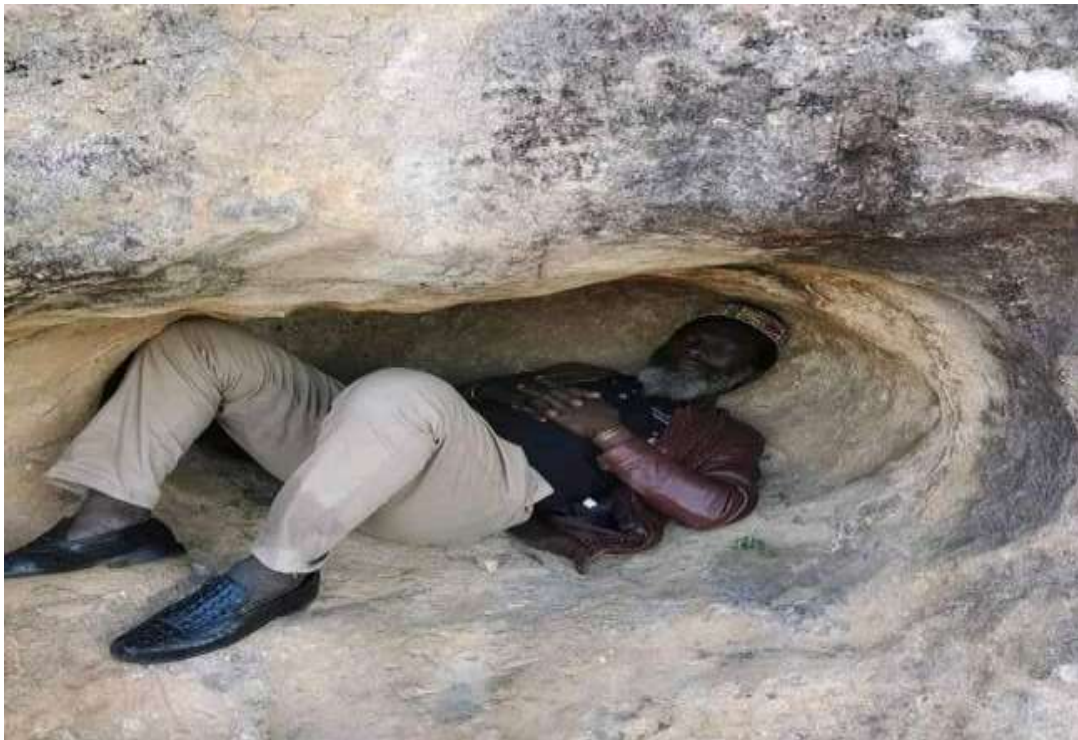


Picture adapted from: *Local Zimbabwe News, News* .<https://iharare.com/zimbabwean-philosopher-joshua-mapongas-wilderness-retreat-and-cave-dwelling-sparks-social-media-buzz>

⁵¹ Joshua Maponga, “Finding Relevance, Bishop Maponga the Cultural Breach,” YouTube.com/watch?v=WtINH7to87k. line 17.39 and 57.51, 2019.

⁵² Maponga, “Finding Relevance, Bishop Maponga the Cultural Breach.”

⁵³ Audrey L Ncube, “From Christianity to Nature’s Sanctuary: Maponga’s Unconventional Spiritual Journey,” *Local Zimbabwean News*, July 16, 2024.. <https://iharare.com/zimbabwean-philosopher-joshua-mapongas-wilderness-retreat-and-cave-dwelling-sparks-social-media-buzz/> Accessed on 08 October 2024.



Picture adapted from: Local Zimbabwe News, News <https://iHarare.com/zimbabwean-philosopher-joshua-maponga-wilderness-retreat-and-cave-dwelling-sparks-social-media-buzz>

A closer look at the photos shows that Maponga was strategically positioned for a photo shoot. He is even contradicting his statement of taking off his shoes while in ancestral space. He is smartly dressed in his boots, which is not only a violation of tradition but a compromise to the traditional regalia while seeking solace with the ancestors in the spiritual realm. The actions of Maponga have led the writers of this article to suggest that Maponga has transitioned from a religious space to a cultural identity, ultimately becoming a comedian who rose to public attention. He further argued that,

Most churches must be closed down and be made factories because Pastors are now forming churches for them to make money and be rich, not to preach the word of God. He said, “Imagine after sharing one verse with you, they will now tell you that for God to bless you, pay thanksgiving, pay to tithe, pay pastors' basket, pay offering, pay leadership participation, pay leadership training, and so many programmes within the church. Christians are now working for pastors, not for their families and God. They need to open their eyes.”⁵⁴

From the above statement, one can infer that Maponga harbours bitterness towards his excommunication from the Seventh Day Adventist Church, which was responsible for his upkeep through the same offerings that he was criticising. His criticism of churches is not a balanced evaluation of all denominations that have a national mandate and participate together with the government for national development and the emancipation of citizens.

Furthermore, Kalimbe reiterated that Maponga lives in caves. His supporters claim it is Pan-Africanism, an ideology and movement that encouraged the solidarity of Africans worldwide.⁵⁵ Pan-Africanism is based on the belief that unity is vital to economic, social, and political progress and aims to ‘unify and uplift’ people of African descent. The ideology asserts that the fates of all African peoples and countries are intertwined. At its core, Pan-Africanism is the belief that African peoples, both on the continent and in the diaspora, share not merely a common history but a common destiny.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Joseph Kalimbe, “Zimbabwean Man Joshua Maponga Is Now Living in Caves and Mountains,” <https://zambianobserver.com/zimbabwean-man-joshua-maponga-is-now-living-in-caves-and-mountains/>, 2024.

⁵⁵ Kalimbe, “Zimbabwean Man Joshua Maponga Is Now Living in Caves and Mountains.”

⁵⁶ Elisa Larkin Nascimento, *Pan-Africanism, and South America: Emergence of a Black Rebellion* (Buffalo: NY: Afrodiaspora, 1980).

Unfortunately, Maponga misread Pan-Africanism to mean retiring to live and sleep in caves. Pan-Africanism acknowledges, encourages, and strengthens the bond of cohesion between all Africans and diasporas of African identity, dating back to the Atlantic slave trade, and the movements extending beyond continental Africans.⁵⁷

Moreover, Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (ZANU PF) sympathisers known as *Varakashi* scoffed at Maponga's decision, particularly highlighting the current economic situation, saying, "Given the state of rent these days, I don't blame Maponga for staying in caves."⁵⁸ This move to the caves could be a clear attention-seeking gesture, or Maponga may be facing social challenges. This metamorphosis into different identities brings more questions than answers, leaving him in a liminal space.

Maponga's identity- Between and Betwixt the liminal space

Based on the above presentation, Maponga's identity is situated in a liminal space, navigating different cultural, religious, and philosophical traditions. These themes are discussed next.

i. Liminality and Identity

As indicated earlier, liminality refers to a transitional or transformative state in which an individual or group is suspended between two or more identities, cultures, or worlds. Maponga's identity seems to embody this liminal state, oscillating between traditional and modernity. Maponga's background in Adventism and his subsequent involvement in various organisations and ministries suggest a tension between traditional and modern approaches to faith and spirituality. As a Zimbabwean clergy, Maponga's identity is rooted in African culture and traditions. However, his involvement in Western-style organisations and his use of social media suggest a negotiation between African and Western influences. Maponga's role as a clergyman and his involvement in social entrepreneurship and anthropology imply a blurring of boundaries between the religious and secular spheres.

ii. Implications of Liminality

Maponga's liminal identity has several implications, including hybridity, ambiguity, creativity, and tension. On hybridity, it can be argued that Maponga's identity is a hybrid of different cultural, religious, and philosophical traditions. This hybrid character allows him to navigate multiple worlds and create new meanings. His identity is also ambiguous. Maponga's liminal state creates opacity, making it difficult to categorise him neatly into one identity or label. Creativity: The liminal space can be a catalyst for creativity, as Maponga navigates different worlds and creates new meanings. Maponga's last liminal space also brings tension as Maponga navigates conflicting values, beliefs, and identities, which stretch his identity from the periphery to the end of his religio-cultural background.

Discussion Summary

The article discusses a scholarly research paper that critiques Joshua Maponga's religio-cultural pedagogy. Maponga is a Zimbabwean clergyman with multiple identities, including a public speaker, author, philosopher, and hermit. The paper analysed his teachings and sermons on social media, using the theory of liminality to understand his identity. Key findings from the discussion revealed that Maponga's teachings and actions are contradictory, presenting a liminal identity between Christianity and African traditional religiosity. His pedagogy oscillates between the periphery (Christianity) and the deep end (African spirituality). Maponga's multiple identities (pastor, philosopher, social entrepreneur, anthropologist, hermit) contribute to his liminal state. The study contributes to scholarship by providing the first scholarly research on Joshua Maponga. It also fills a knowledge gap in Maponga's religious and cultural pedagogy, offering insights into the complexities of spiritual and cultural identity.

⁵⁷ Varakashi Correspondent, "Mock Joshua Maponga for Staying in Caves," <https://www.zimeye.net/2024/07/18/varakashi-mock-joshua-maponga-for-staying-in-caves/>, 2024.

⁵⁸ Varakashi Correspondent, "Mock Joshua Maponga for Staying in Caves."

CONCLUSION

The article has presented a critical examination of Joshua Maponga's religio-cultural pedagogy, highlighting his multiple identities and controversial teachings. Through the theory of liminality, the authors have analysed Maponga's transition from a pastor to a public speaker, author, philosopher, leader, musician, social entrepreneur, anthropologist, and hermit. The article has revealed the inconsistencies and contradictions in Maponga's teachings, particularly his rejection of Christianity and the Bible while still referencing African spirituality and the same God. His decision to retreat to the caves, which he claims is a pilgrimage to reconnect with Mother Earth and his ancestral roots, has been met with scepticism and ridicule. Through the theory of liminality, Maponga's identity can be understood as being in a state of transition, caught between different worlds and struggling to find a sense of belonging. Maponga's journey raises essential questions about identity, culture, and spirituality in the modern world. The authors conclude that Maponga's identity remains in a state of liminality, characterised by ambiguity, tension, and contradiction, as he navigates between different cultural and religious spaces. Maponga's identity, situated in a liminal space, reflects the complexities of navigating multiple cultures, religions, and philosophical traditions. His hybrid identity, ambiguity, creativity, and tension contribute to a rich and nuanced understanding of what it means to be a Zimbabwean clergy in the modern world.

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