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Reimagining the Copperbelt as a Religious Space

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Introduction

A narrative of urban progress, based on the early and formative knowledge production of Rhodes-Livingstone Institute (RLI) scholars, has long dominated Copperbelt historiography. For two reasons, religion and spirituality have never figured in it centrally. First, the Copperbelt was seen as a difficult mission field by early missionaries who feared negative influences associated with the urban lifestyle. They failed to see the urban apostolate as a fertile ground and instead emphasised its dangers. Second, this view was perpetuated in the secular literature. While RLI scholars did much to debunk the story of urban danger and turned it into the success story of urban modernity, they never saw religion as central to modern urban society. Their emphasis on the flexibility of ethnicity and kinship in the urban environment meant they accepted the nuclear Christian family as the core of the new modern society, and did not see the importance of examining religious expression further.

Subsequent generations of researchers have followed their path¹ – with the exception of missionary-authored publications, which study Christianity from a denominationally narrow angle² and the recent boom in the study

¹ James Ferguson, *Expectations of Modernity: Myths and Meanings of Urban Life on the Zambian Copperbelt*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); Miles Larmer, *Mine-workers in Zambia: Labour and Political Change in Post-Colonial Africa* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007); Patience Mususa, “‘Getting By’: Life on the Copperbelt after the Privatisation of the Zambia Consolidated Copper Mines”, *Social Dynamics* 46, 2 (2010), pp. 380–94.

² Hugo F. Hinfelaar, *History of the Catholic Church in Zambia* (Lusaka: Bookworld Publishers, 2004); Michael O’Shea, *Missionaries and Miners: A History of the Beginnings*

of Pentecostalism.³ Pentecostal churches indeed had an important impact on Copperbelt Christianity. They presented a real threat to mainline churches and, given their emphasis on individualism, the literature has linked their emergence to the rise of the neoliberal order.⁴ However, the argument of a total break with the past through conversion, which has characterised the literature on Pentecostal churches, has obscured the openness and interchange as well as continuities of spiritual forms characteristic of Copperbelt spirituality, which serves as this article's main focus.

There are some important exceptions in the historical literature. Walima T. Kalusa's study of Christian funerals on the Copperbelt stands out, as does David Gordon's work on the world of invisible agents. Gordon argues in favour of treating religion and spirituality in Central Africa as an integral part of modernity rather than its obstacle.⁵ His study helps us understand that Copperbelt urbanites were both – modern urban class-conscious miners *and* spiritual beings, nationalists *and* believers in a world of invisible agents. Kalusa's focus on mineworkers' appropriation of Christianity as a means to forge urban identity is central to this chapter.⁶

Building on their work, I propose to understand the history of migrant labour and mobility on the Central African Copperbelt through the lens of spirituality and religion. I am arguing that the worship practices on the Copperbelt, characterised as they were by denominational boundary crossing, egalitarianism, strong female initiatives and attempts at popular appropriation, and sometimes possessing a decidedly political agenda, parallel

of the Catholic Church in Zambia with Particular Reference to the Copperbelt (Ndola: Ndola Mission Press, 1986); John V. Taylor and Dorothea A. Lehmann, *Christians of the Copperbelt: The Growth of the Church in Northern Rhodesia* (London: SCM Press, 1961).

³ For research on Pentecostalism in Zambia see Austin M. Cheyeka, 'Towards a History of the Charismatic Churches in Post-Colonial Zambia' in Jan-Bart Gewald, Marja Hinfelaar, and Giacomo Macola (eds), *One Zambia, Many Histories. Towards a History of Post-Colonial Zambia* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), pp. 144–63; Naomi Haynes, *Moving by the Spirit: Pentecostal Social Life on the Zambian Copperbelt* (Ewing: University of California Press, 2017); Adriaan van Klinken, 'Pentecostalism, Political Masculinity and Citizenship', *Journal of Religion in Africa* 46, 2–3 (2016), pp. 129–57.

⁴ For one of the important articles which set the debate on Pentecostalism in Africa, see Birgit Meyer, 'Pentecostalism and Neo-Liberal Capitalism: Faith, Prosperity and Vision in African Pentecostal-Charismatic Churches', *Journal for the Study of Religion* 20, 2 (2007), pp. 5–28.

⁵ David M. Gordon, *Invisible Agents: Spirits in a Central African History* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2012), pp. 2, 22, 87.

⁶ Walima Tuesday Kalusa and Megan Vaughan, *Death, Belief and Politics in Central African History* (Lusaka: Lembani Trust, 2014), p. 92.

histories of mobility and migration and the distinct decentralised political mode of action on the Zambian Copperbelt. It is not within the reach of this chapter to present an exhaustive account of Christianity on the Copperbelt. However, the examples selected, that is the Union Church and the initiatives of Catholic women, are key for our understanding of how religious expression helped fostering a sense of Copperbelt identity, mirroring the mobility of migrants who were used to cross boundaries in order to belong.

The first Copperbelt Christian movement, the so-called Union Church, which was not only non-denominational but also initiated not by missionaries but by African migrant workers with diverse Christian identities, built the foundation for a subsequent Copperbelt spirituality. To Union Church adherents, as for many Catholic women in the second half of the twentieth century, the rejection of denominational exclusiveness was an integral part of their Christian identity, which frequently extended into the social and the political. As they engaged in denominational boundary crossing, Catholic women claimed urban belonging through religious expression. Church involvement gave many women the opportunity to participate in 'respectable' ways in social and political life, opportunities that were rare in the gendered hierarchies of Copperbelt society, which was still influenced by the early missionaries' negative portrayal of women. Copperbelt women took the opportunity to shape the religious space and to bring in their own agenda as they insisted on the mobility and flexibility of religious practices and boundaries. The focus on the Catholic Church and Catholic women in the second part of the chapter owes its existence to the fact that the Catholics eventually turned out to be more successful than other missions. They succeeded precisely because they were able to replicate Copperbelt decentralised political structures in their grassroots approach and pro-poor orientation, and because their Marian tradition reverberated with matrilineal tradition.

In order to understand the development of Christian life between the emergence of the Union Church in the 1920s and the initiatives of Catholic women in the second half of the twentieth century, the chapter explores the influence of early missionaries' narratives concerning gender hierarchies in the urban space as well as the uneasy relationship between industry and missions. It draws on a range of mission, government and mine company publications and archives, among them the little researched archives of the Franciscan friars and the Diocesan archives of the Catholic Church, both in Ndola, as well as the 'informal papers' of the Mindolo Ecumenical Foundation (MEF) in Kitwe.

The Union Church

The first Christian movement on the Zambian Copperbelt, the Union Church, was initiated in the early 1920s not by European missionaries but by African labour migrants. While missionaries in Northern Rhodesia carved out monopolistic rural enclaves,⁷ Africans, many of them mineworkers or other labour migrants drawn to the copper towns from across Central and Eastern Africa, organised their own religious life, built churches and ran their own schools in the absence of mission societies. They financed these activities through membership contributions. The Union Church of the Zambian Copperbelt was inaugurated in 1925 with its own board of elders, a number of evangelists, a steady stream of baptisms and with branches in most mine compounds and in the city of Ndola.⁸ Their regular meetings were held in Mindolo near Kitwe, to which church elders cycled from Chingola, Mufulira and Ndola for open-air meetings, to discuss the organisation of the young church, or for intertown Christian fellowship. The Union Church thrived via the initiative of local and migrant Christians and the spiritual sagacity of the church elders who felt the need to establish a religious life in the rapidly growing copper towns.⁹ The migrants brought their diverse backgrounds with them. Exchanging and mingling with Christians from other denominations, joint worship, regular exchanges and social gatherings, as well as the effort to build churches with one's own hands gave a sense of identity in a broad Christian community instead of a narrow denominational one. This initiative also transcended the religious and helped mineworkers and other labour migrants to socially organise their new lives. Their worship practices and Christian activism brought new structures to urban social life, thus allowing Christian town dwellers to build a sense of identity beyond ethnicity, in the same vein as has been shown for other activities such as the famous Kalela dance and other leisure activities. For the community of cosmopolitan Christian labour migrants, M'Passou finds, 'denominational labels were historical accidents' and they united regardless of their different backgrounds.¹⁰

⁷ Taylor and Lehmann, *Christians of the Copperbelt*, pp. 13–24.

⁸ Hugh Cross, *To Africa with Love: A Memoir of Arthur Cross of the United Missions in the Copperbelt of Zambia* (Ottery St Mary: Cross Patch Editions, 2001), p. 36.

⁹ Denis M'Passou, *Mindolo: A Story of the Ecumenical Movement in Africa* (Lusaka: Baptist Printing Ministry, 1983), pp. 1–5.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

European missionaries, in contrast, deliberately ignored the population of the rapidly growing mine compounds until the landmark Davis commission of enquiry of 1933, 'Modern Industry and the African', called for missionary initiatives to help Africans adjust to the supposed dislocations of urban life. The commission studied the impact of copper mining on Zambian society and the work of the Christian missions in the Copperbelt and was undertaken under the auspices of the International Missionary Council's Department of Social and Industrial Research. Its report praised the 'initiative, leadership and sacrifice of the native Christians' and was impressed by the self-governing and self-supporting structure of the Union Church. It however believed the local church needed to be brought under systematic missionary influence, and recommended that missions co-operate to focus on welfare work and the inclusion of women and children to ease social discontent.¹¹ It was again African initiative, in the personal form of the Union Church's Elli Chola, whose wide networks and close friendship with London Missionary Society (LMS)'s Mike Moore enabled the merger between the Union Church and Protestant mission societies. The financial security and infrastructural assistance offered through the missions eventually overruled the initial independence of the Union Church, and they appealed for help.¹² Following the recommendation by the Davis commission, the LMS under Mike Moore's lead converted the Union Church into what would become the United Missions to the Copperbelt (UMCB), a union of Protestant churches.

Indeed, Moore and the UMCB's work was only successful because it was built on the foundations of the African Christian pioneers of the Union Church. Soon the Union Church's agenda was determined by the financially more powerful foreign missions. Through the conversion, the Union Church had lost the early ecumenical spirit that was its driving force. The United Missions focused on education: by 1941, they were in charge of all schools in the mine compounds of Chingola, Nkana, Roan and Mufulira.¹³ Especially the new urban elite embraced UMCB.¹⁴ However, its moral-

11 Merle J. Davis, *Modern Industry and the African: An Enquiry into the Effect of the Copper Mines of Central Africa upon Native Society and the Work of Christian Missions made under the auspices of the Department of Social and Industrial Research of the International Missionary Council* (London: Macmillan, 1933), p. 295, pp. 385–6.

12 Taylor and Lehmann, *Christians of the Copperbelt*, p. 35.

13 London Missionary Society Collection at SOAS (hereafter SOAS-LMS), CWM/LMS/1941–1950/Box AF 17, 'Fifth Annual Report 1941', pp. 6–7.

14 Jane L. Parpart, "'Where Is Your Mother?': Gender, Urban Marriage, and Colonial Discourse on the Zambian Copperbelt, 1924–1945', *International Journal of African*

ising approach to town life and especially to urban women (see below), was at odds with the Union Church's previous easy juxtaposition of worship approaches and lifestyles.

Denis M'Passou, who headed the research programme of MEF, the Union Church's ultimate successor in the 1980s, identified the Union Church as the cradle of the ecumenical movement in Africa, whose goal is world-wide unity of Christianity across denominational boundaries. This 'purely African initiative in ecumenism', he argues, 'was a spontaneous movement carried out to meet the unique spiritual needs of thousands of people who had found themselves away from their home, their churches and their pastors, and were now living in a new situation.'¹⁵

The Union Church was not restricted by aspirations of exclusivity. Embracing the coexistence of many spiritual paths and partially shared practices can indeed be said to be the essence of the urban religious experience, paralleling the mobility of the migration processes and the general experience of messiness that characterised rural-urban dynamics and ethnicity in the mining towns. The situation in Haut-Katanga was decidedly different. The Catholic Church, supported by the Belgian colonial state, soon grew into the one exclusive state church.¹⁶ Under the triple alliance between *Union Minière*, the Belgian colonial state and the Catholic Church, the Roman Catholics had successfully eliminated all competition.¹⁷ In contrast, more than a dozen other mission societies from various Christian backgrounds were in operation on the Zambian Copperbelt and there was no state church.

The joint efforts of early African Christians and the members of the Union Church in particular invert our conventional understanding of the primacy of missions in the development of African Christianity. Their initiatives, however, have been obscured by the narratives subsequently created by missions themselves about Copperbelt Christianity, to which this article now turns.

Historical Studies 27, 2 (1994), pp. 241–71, p. 259.

¹⁵ M'Passou, *Mindolo*, p. 1.

¹⁶ Bruce Fetter, *The Creation of Elisabethville 1910–1940* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1976), pp. 169–71.

¹⁷ Pascale Stacey, 'Missionaries in the Congo: The First 120 Years' in Prem Poddar, Rajeev S. Patke and Lars Jensen (eds), *A Historical Companion to Postcolonial Literatures: Continental Europe and its Empires* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), pp. 39–41.

Urban Anxieties: Early Missionaries' Worries

The mission churches were notoriously weak in colonial-era urban and industrial Africa, including the Copperbelt. This institutional weakness reflected missionaries' belief that new urban spaces did not provide the right environment for religious conversion. Instead, it was feared, urban Africans would succumb to the lure of materialism. From a missionary perspective, towns were messy not only because of the 'temptations' they had in store for their adherents, but also because of the competition through other mission societies – contrary to the countryside, where they had successfully carved out exclusive spheres of influence under early colonial rule. Missionary writings of the 1930s reinforced the rural-urban, tradition-modernity divide by depicting Africans as stuck in a temporal order distinct from 'modern time' and unfit to cope with allegedly 'un-African' town life.

As one example, LMS missionary Mabel Shaw painted a wistful picture of the emerging Copperbelt of 1932 as one in which the rural African social order was being broken on the wheels of industry. Shaw referred to an African miner as a 'savage in a powerhouse' who had been 'dragged forward to meet and share in our mechanical civilization'. According to Shaw, he had no means to 'meet the modern world and to understand it', but at the same time he had been cut off from his 'tribal fire'. In her view, they were 'adrift on an alien stream'.¹⁸ Likewise, LMS missionary Mike Moore thought that 'the African' was forcefully 'brought into the twentieth century and his soul left in the middle of the Iron Age'.¹⁹ Such fantastical portrayals highlighted the moral necessity of the missionary and provided a justification of their work and the civilising mission.

In the mid-twentieth century, the colonial government and the mining companies were preoccupied with the question of labour stabilisation.²⁰ Copperbelt missionaries found themselves drawn into urgent discussions about the dangers of unwanted and uncontrolled permanent settlement of African 'migrant' workers, resulting in so-called 'detrribalisation'. All European observers assumed that the 'detrribalisation' resulting from labour

¹⁸ Mabel Shaw, *God's Candlelights: An Educational Venture in Northern Rhodesia* (London: Edinburgh House Press, 1932), pp. 38, 40.

¹⁹ Zambia Consolidated Copper Mines Archives (hereafter ZCCM-IH), 10.7.10B, African Churches, 'Co-Operative Work in the African Copper Belt by Rev. RJB Moore of the LMS', 14 November 1937, p. 7.

²⁰ Ferguson, *Expectations of Modernity*, pp. 18–49.

migration would – despite the evidence of earlier initiatives such as the Union Church – destabilise the social order of African society. Very much in line with this reasoning, most missionaries envisioned a rural modernity based on religious education, and practical and vocational training, without competition through other mission societies. They did not see the need for urban missions. The one exception was LMS's Mike Moore. Precisely because he saw the nature of capitalist exploitation in the copper mines so clearly, Moore understood the establishment of urban missions as a Christian and moral obligation in order to stabilise and protect African migrants.²¹ Eventually, Moore, who had become too critical of industry and colonial state, was removed from the Copperbelt and transferred to a rural station.²²

From a missionary perspective, the labour stabilisation discourse was enmeshed with a Christian understanding of the relationship between morality, materialism and sin. Protestant ethics of hard work were combined with the classical view that a society's morality is mirrored through the behaviour of women in general and their sexuality in particular. Accordingly, from a missionary perspective, sinful behaviour was most commonly associated with African women who, LMS missionaries believed, were particularly susceptible to a corrupted lifestyle on the Copperbelt. Mabel Shaw described a typical newly arrived urban woman who

wore loose wide-legged pyjamas, gay flaunting garments, she carried a sunshade, and walked with her head thrown back, a cigarette in her mouth. A group of young men followed admiringly. A year ago, she would have been one of the crowd of unclad girls who followed by bicycle, shouting and laughing as I passed through the village, a child of the river and the forest.²³

Shaw's depiction of this urban woman suggests a paradise lost. While the 'child of the river and the forest' is a symbol of innocence, the grown woman has lost her moral standing by succumbing to cigarettes and fashion, taking pleasure in the admiration of men.

In a similar vein, Moore observed that money and 'gay clothes' were enough to persuade a wife to leave her husband and

21 Reginald J. B. Moore, *These African Copper Miners: A Study of the Industrial Revolution in Northern Rhodesia, with Principal Reference to the Copper Mining Industry* (London: Livingstone Press, 1948).

22 Sean Morrow, "'On the Side of the Robbed": R. J. B. Moore, Missionary on the Copperbelt, 1933–1941', *Journal of Religion in Africa* 19, 3 (1989), pp. 244–63, p. 253.

23 Shaw, *God's Candlelights*, pp. 39–40.

stay on with another man and then with a third. She is one of many caught by our materialism. Women, even more than the men, need guidance in the use of their new leisure and need, too, a new code of moral behaviour.²⁴

This patronising, if not outright misogynous, view reflected the anxiety felt by missionaries about the independence many women found in the towns. The ‘problem’ of Copperbelt women and the ‘general paranoia’ which characterised male–female relationships on the Copperbelt has long been debated. Jane Parpart demonstrated how the image of the immoral woman was constructed because the new liberties that opened up for women in the copper towns since the 1920s were perceived as a threat; economic opportunities that enabled women to challenge male dominance and to resist formal marriage or even marriage at all.²⁵ Parpart showed that the transformation from temporary ‘mine marriages’ to greater marital stability from the 1950s, at best in the form of the modern nuclear Christian family, was a joint project of elite Africans, colonial administration, senior African men and missionaries in an effort to fix gender roles and limit the economic freedom of unattached Copperbelt women.²⁶

Ideas about female respectability changed in the following decades under British rule and in post-independence Zambia. However, the female body is still at the heart of crucial debates concerning the morals of the nation, as the ban on mini-skirts in the 1970s and a later, shrill debate around ministers wearing mini-skirts in the late 1990s show.²⁷ In the 1930s, however, missionary concern about urban moral disintegration in general and women’s behaviour in particular was arguably prompted by some missionaries’ own inability to make sense of a rapidly changing world. Their desire to preserve an alleged rural harmony in Africa stemmed from the fact that such a scenario was long lost to industrialism in their native Britain.

24 ZCCM-IH, 10.7.10B, African churches, ‘Co-Operative Work in the African Copper Belt’, p. 5.

25 Jane L. Parpart, ‘Sexuality and Power on the Zambian Copperbelt, 1926–1964’ in Sharon B. Stichter (ed.), *Patriarchy and Class: African Women in the Home and the Workforce* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1988), pp. 115–38.

26 Parpart, “‘Where Is Your Mother?’”, p. 269.

27 Karen Tranberg Hansen, ‘Dressing Dangerously: Miniskirts, Gender Relations and Sexuality in Zambia’ in Jean Marie Allman (ed.), *Fashioning Africa. Power and the Politics of Dress* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), pp. 166–85.

The Mining Industry and Christianity

The Union Church's ecumenical vision and open spirituality was replaced by UMCB's more moralising approach to town life, driven by the anxieties of early missionaries. However, mission and church structures on the copper compounds were sites where miners and other labour migrants, many of them women, actively engaged with and shaped their urban environment. Given the negative attitude of many missionaries to the exploitative nature of the copper industry, it is unsurprising that mining companies and missions had uneasy relations. Mining companies feared that the missionaries' critique of urban materialism would encourage criticism of their activities, including from their African employees. As a consequence, the industry was ambiguous about the Christian missions and their contribution to welfare work and education. On the one hand, they encouraged the influence of Christian missions in encouraging hard work and a morally upstanding lifestyle: such values had the potential to maintain high production and social order. In fact, missions were necessary to create a stable and reliable work force by providing welfare services that the industry did not offer before the 1940s as well as by creating a spirit of spiritual belonging for a diverse migrants' society. On the other hand, mining companies worried about some missionaries' critical view of the industry's failure to provide safe working conditions and fair pay. Mine companies therefore did not actively discourage the work of missions in the mine townships, but instead tried to limit their interaction and influence by withholding substantial financial assistance.

This was entirely different in the bordering copper mines of Katanga, where the Roman Catholic Church and *Union Minière* cooperated in education as well as labour recruitment.²⁸ These differences between the Katangese and the Zambian Copperbelt can be explained by the paternalistic policy in Katanga, which aimed at a stabilisation of the miners and their families, and the cordial relations between the church and the state. Since there was no state church in the Zambian Copperbelt, denominational fluidity and openness was neither encouraged nor impossible. Unlike *Union Minière*, the Anglo American Corporation (AAC) did not regulate where and if their workers worshipped. Thus, the absence of one powerful state church and the lack of a union between churches and industry gave Christians of the Zambian Copperbelt the freedom to live sometimes unorthodox Christian lives that could include idiosyncratic appropriations of Christianity and lead to denominational flexibility.

28 Fetter, *The Creation of Elisabethville*, p. 171.

After initial refusals, Northern Rhodesian mine management reluctantly granted permission to missions to erect churches in mine compounds, although in 1939 church services in Nkana were still held in a hospital because mine management resisted the building of a church.²⁹ In the early years Copperbelt Christians financed and erected their own churches.³⁰ It is notable that the sense of belonging and unity joint worship offered to them propelled Copperbelt Christians to use their own financial resources. Following the recommendations of the Davis commission, mining companies offered plots of land and a limited degree of financial support to the mainline churches. *Union Minière*, however, continued to rely mainly on government grants.³¹ The cool relationship between mines and churches grew frostier from the mid-1940s when mines introduced their own welfare programmes, and when the colonial government took over responsibility for schooling.³² Now mine management no longer had to rely on church-provided education, and the last UMCB school was handed to government in 1952.³³

As a consequence, it became more difficult for the churches to assert their influence on the life on the mines. In the *African Roan Antelope*, a weekly publication provided by the Roan mine in Luanshya for their workers from the late 1950s, religion did not feature prominently. The dominant themes in its educational and advice columns were manners, correct use of the English language, education on cleanliness and workplace safety. When Christianity was evoked, it sought to foster appropriate morals by recourse to Christian values, or to discipline women.

Missions and industry were generally in competition. This becomes clear in an article of 1956 heralding the publication of the Bible in the Bemba language. The article read: 'The whole bible in Chibemba: It is as if one said: "a new mine is now open," because the bible is very like a mine, and all those who go into it well will make the discovery that a great number of valuable things come from it.'³⁴ The metaphor here is revealing – by comparing the holy book to a mine, a link to the domain of the invisible is established. Copper mining is invisible as the mine's infrastructure lies

29 SOAS-LMS, CWM/LMS/1941–1950, AF 15B, United Church accommodation by Moore, January 1939, p. 1.

30 Cross, *To Africa with Love*, p. 46.

31 SOAS-LMS, CWM/LMS/1941–1950/Box AF 17, 'Fifth Annual Report 1941', pp. 4, 7.

32 Mindolo Ecumenical Foundation archives (hereafter MEF), UMCB II, Minutes 1952–53, 'Christian Co-Operation in the Copperbelt', n.d., p. 1.

33 M'Passou, *Mindolo*, p. 13.

34 ZCCM-IH, 'The African Roan Antelope', 42, September 1956, p. 3.

underneath the surface of the earth, just as the spiritual kingdom is invisible to worldly dwellers. Yet the comparison suggests that both the copper industry and Christianity were powerful precisely because of their respective invisible realms. This power, however, can also be associated with the danger invisibility brings by its very nature – what is invisible cannot be controlled. The imagery of invisibility and its potential connection to danger and power is well known in the region.³⁵ The article thus can be read as an attempt to suggest equality between the sacred value of the Bible and the worldly wealth of the mine and as a hint at the danger of such powerful invisible worlds. The mines were competing with the church for the souls of the copper town residents; industry and Christian morals were incompatible, and both had a potentially dangerous side.

The theme of dangerous urban women that had so occupied earlier missionaries also reappeared in the magazine. One reader ‘would like to point out that a large number of girls lack a sound religious background. They think religion is a secondary way of living.’ In addition, ‘unwed mothers’ should always bear in mind that they were at ‘the bottom rung of the ladder.’³⁶ Discipling women and the attempt to fix gender relations indeed was a theme that had the potential to unite mine management and churches. But it could also bring discord. The Christian elite felt that the church, having blessed their marriages, should be consulted over domestic quarrels, while mine management and the colonial government had installed tribal representatives to control marriages on compounds after 1940.³⁷ Generally however, the scarcity of religiously themed articles shows both the unease of mine management with the Christian perspective on materialism, as well as their occasional efforts to hijack Christianity for their own ends.

Against the odds, the churches kept providing their services to the mining companies. Following in the footsteps of UMCB, MEF, successor to both the Union Church and UMCB, continued to train students for the expanding mine welfare services.³⁸ In line with independent Zambia’s Mulungushi reforms of 1968, MEF promoted economic justice and contributed to nation-building, for instance training staff for Barclays Bank in

³⁵ Gordon, *Invisible Agents*, p. 77.

³⁶ ZCCM-IH, ‘The African Roan Antelope’, 140, 24 June 1961, letter, p. 10.

³⁷ Parpart, “‘Where Is Your Mother?’”, p. 258.

³⁸ MEF, ‘MEF Paper Files – M6 – Rhokana Corporation’, 1965–68; MEF, ‘MEF Paper Files – 13 – Nchanga Mines Correspondence’, 1963–68; MEF, ‘MEF Paper Files – 11 – Roan/Mpatamatu Correspondence’, 1965–68.

order to achieve a quicker Zambianisation of its personnel.³⁹ The Foundation's interest in nation-building was twofold. They sought to lift Christian ecumenical values from the household to the national level while at the same time they endeavoured to produce more Zambian graduates who would benefit from the economic redistribution.

In addition, MEF offered courses for both mine employees and their wives. Most popular was the Christian home-making course, whose reputation was enhanced by the participation of the president's wife, Betty Kaunda, in the 1950s.⁴⁰ The course, MEF claimed, had a positive influence on general work discipline in the mines. 'A miner who reads makes a better leader', argued the director of MEF in 1971:

many marriages have been helped as a result of wives attending the ... Christian home-making courses. We have received reports from husbands employed in the mines saying that after their wives had attended the training here, they had started to live new lives. A miner with a happy home makes a better worker.⁴¹

From the mid-1970s however, the mines were no longer interested in Mindolo's seminars. This shift happened not only because of the falling copper prices, but also because mine management was not at ease with the new economic drift under the Mulungushi reforms. Anglo American stopped sending their new expatriate recruits to the seminar for newcomers to Zambia because they were 'mainly aimed at the individual who intends to mix very fully with the Zambians and to a certain extent to 'do gooders'.⁴² The companies used the pretext of the sharp fall in copper prices in the mid-1970s to end their annual donations to MEF, although private connections between clergy and mine personnel continued and today still generate donations for church projects, albeit not in a systematic or structural way.⁴³ The annual grants and donations

³⁹ W. Grenville-Grey, 'Mindolo: A Catalyst for Christian Participation in Nation Building in Africa', *International Review of Missions* 58, 229 (1969), pp. 110–17, pp. 113–14.

⁴⁰ Jonathan Kangwa, 'Christian Mission, Politics, and Socio-Economic Development: The Contribution of Mindolo Ecumenical Foundation', *International Review of Mission* 106, 1 (2017), pp. 167–187, p. 177.

⁴¹ ZCCM-IH, 17.5.4B, Mindolo Ecumenical Foundation, 'Letter by MEF Director J. C. Mfula to Mr C. Halliday, Roan Selection Trust', 12 July 1971.

⁴² ZCCM-IH, 17.5.4B, Mindolo Ecumenical Foundation, 'Letter by JF Drysdale, Personnel Consultant, Nchanga Consolidate Copper Mines Ltd., Anglo American Corporation Ltd. to John?', 22 August 1970.

⁴³ Interview, Fr Ferena Lambe, Ndola, 3 April 2017.

that had been paid by mining companies since the foundation of UMCB were eventually terminated in December 1975.⁴⁴

This interaction at a distance between churches and mining companies was both boon and bane. Ironically, the uneasy stance of the Zambian industry towards religion led to a certain *laissez-faire* attitude with as little interference as possible, but also with as little support as possible. Faith was more of a private matter that would not be endorsed by the industry. Copperbelt Christians could choose how and where to worship without a patronising state church. This fit with the tradition set up by the Union Church. In addition, it afforded the clergy as well as congregants the possibility to develop an industry- or state-critical stance, as the Catholic Church eventually did (see below).

Pragmatism and a Pro-Poor Orientation: The Roman Catholic Church

Among the mission churches, the Catholic Church proved to be very popular with Copperbelt residents. They managed to tackle the big challenges of Copperbelt society in a less ideological manner, focusing not on the small African elite but on the urban poor. They fostered their Marian tradition, and the devotion to the Virgin Mary surely struck a chord with Copperbelt women and society at large.

The Conventual Franciscans (OFM Conv) were the first Catholics to arrive on the scene. The first Bishop of Ndola, the Italian Franciscan Francis Mazzieri, embraced the chance to proselytise on a large scale in the densely populated and rapidly growing mine townships. He issued a series of measures designed to integrate migrant workers into the urban environment, aimed at providing a 'passport to a good moral sacramental life'.⁴⁵ Focusing more on community building than on education or doctrinal orthodoxy, the Franciscan approach was more pragmatic and less moralising. The friars typically put more emphasis on catering to the poor, which attracted the lower working classes and informal inhabitants of the compounds. They were less dedicated to educating their congregants and accepted converts more easily than other congregations as they sought to embrace the structurally less-advantaged population.

⁴⁴ MEF, DO 280 Box F. Roan Mines, 'Letter by Managing Director Designate Mr. Phiri to MEF Director Mfula', 9 December 1975.

⁴⁵ Quoted in O'Shea, *Missionaries and Miners*, p. 280.

This focus on ministering to the poor and converting local communities into strong parishes, ultimately made the Franciscans and by extension the Catholic Church highly influential on the Copperbelt. It is notable that the friars, not usually known for their liberal inclinations but rather as a ‘church within the church in Zambia’⁴⁶, fostered a particularly participatory, inclusive spirituality. Their non-elitist and pro-poor orientation paralleled the political, social and cultural structures that developed on the Copperbelt. Political culture in the Copperbelt was characterised by strong community mobilisation around trade unions. Such a decentralised mode of action, in which ordinary mineworkers and other Copperbelt residents participated in successful social initiatives, resonated with the comparatively inclusive religious practice promoted by the friars. The downside from church perspective was that due to their non-elitist approach, Catholic adherents were more inclined to transgress denominational boundaries and take their faith ‘into their own hands’, as we will see below.

After a late start, the Catholic Church gained ground quickly. After developing a critical position towards the colonial state in the 1950s it subsequently distanced itself from its colonial entanglements. This new autonomy from the state helped the Catholic Church to develop a critical stance towards the post-independence state. From the 1970s on and in the 1980s in particular, it became one of the post-independence government’s most vocal critics.⁴⁷ Similar to developments across the border in the Katangese Catholic Church, the Catholic Church in Zambia was the only formal organisation with the capacity and resources to mobilise large parts of the population without having to rely on government resources.⁴⁸ This put them into a position to channel resistance or to act as a mediator, a position they inhabit until today.

⁴⁶ Interview, Fr Patrick J Gornmley, Kitwe, 30 December 2017.

⁴⁷ Marja Hinfelaar, ‘Legitimizing Powers: the Political Role of the Roman Catholic Church, 1972–1991’ in Jan-Bart Gewald, Marja Hinfelaar, and Giacomo Macola (eds), *One Zambia, Many histories: Towards a History of Post-Colonial Zambia*, Leiden: Brill, 2008), pp. 129–43; Yvonne Kabombwe, ‘A History of the Mission Press in Zambia, 1970–2011’, MA Thesis, University of Zambia, 2015.

⁴⁸ Hinfelaar, ‘Legitimizing Powers’, p. 131; Stacey, ‘Missionaries in the Congo’, pp. 40–1.

Mobile Christian Women

For many Copperbelt Christians, devotion to the Virgin Mary provided an easy path to identification with Catholicism as it struck a chord with matrilineal societies in Central Africa, prompting many Copperbelt residents to debate and rework their understanding of Christianity. This conversation transcended the boundaries of Catholic orthodoxy. Besides the challenge this posed to the Catholic Church, the practice of reworking can itself be understood as a way of making sense of and claiming belonging within urban life. Reworking Christianity as inspired by the figure of Mary was most attractive to those who sought a sense of belonging beyond the conventionally gendered hierarchies of the mining industry. By promoting strong women as leaders, such Christian initiatives provided an alternative image to the economically successful yet immoral urban women who populated the missionary accounts, and helped creating role models of 'respectable' and powerful women at the same time. These women too, were sometimes perceived as dangerous, though not because of their sexuality (see below.)

The example of devotion to Mary demonstrates a broader argument about mobility among Copperbelt Christians; at times the Catholic Church successfully accommodated such heterodox enterprises, and at other times felt the need to sever ties with what were labelled 'heretic' movements. The church's reaction depended on the level of threat they felt by the respective offshoot.

In the 1950s, Alice Lenshina's *Lumpa* Church and Emilio Mulolani's *Mutima* Church provide cases that illustrate this argument. *Lumpa* and *Mutima* were both popular on the Copperbelt, and both Lenshina's and Mulolani's teachings should be understood in the context of Central African matrilineal tradition. *Lumpa* was a hybrid movement combining Protestant, Catholic and Watchtower (Jehovah's Witness) elements as well as those from a purification movement called *Bamuchape* from the 1930s which sought to eradicate witchcraft in Zambia. The *Lumpa* Church had a clear pro women agenda. It was initiated by a woman and perceived as a great threat not only by the churches, but also by senior elders and the colonial government.⁴⁹ The White Fathers lost nearly 90% of their flock to *Lumpa* in some parts of the Northern Province.⁵⁰ *Lumpa* arrived and thrived on the Copperbelt in 1956 amid political turmoil and was suppressed by the

⁴⁹ Gordon, *Invisible Agents*, pp. 95, 99.

⁵⁰ National Archives of Zambia (hereafter NAZ), NP 3/12-6432-003, 'Lenshina (Lumpa), Intelligence Report', June 1956, p. 55.

state after its clashes with United National Independence Party (UNIP) followers in 1964.⁵¹

Mutima was a Catholic offshoot, sharing similarities with the *Jamaa* movement in Katanga.⁵² Emilio Mulolani, founder of the *Mutima* Church, was a drop-out from a White Fathers seminary, dismissed due to mental health problems.⁵³ Mulolani's personal history was characterised by abandonment during childhood. Mulolani, son of a Bemba father, was rejected by the Scottish husband of his Bemba mother. A true migrant, he was raised by his grandmother, joined a Catholic seminary in Tanganyika and taught at a school in Malawi before he returned to the Copperbelt to register his church in 1957.⁵⁴ His teaching and preaching drew large crowds in rural and urban settings. In particular in the copper towns, he attracted the first members of an indigenous middle class – contrary to the Franciscan mobilisation of the working poor.⁵⁵ In all likelihood, his Copperbelt followers were attracted by Mulolani's mobile life and his analysis of the Catholic doctrine that caused deep tensions with Catholic missionaries. *Mutima's* urban followers saw the reflection of their own mobility and intellectual achievement in their affiliation with the church.

Mary was central in Mulolani's teachings. According to his prophetic revelation, the Virgin Mary had given birth not only to Christ, but also the Godfather and the Holy Spirit. The villages of *Mutima* adherents were called Mary Queen, and both female and male priests celebrated mass. Emilio Mulolani claimed that his church was Catholic, but not Roman Catholic. His male priests, who were allowed to marry, were soon suspected of promiscuity. The movement's free mixing of men and women clergy, and leisure activities such as naked bathing, led to accusations of indecency, and many *Mutima* congregants were brought before the courts for indecent exposure.⁵⁶ There were also political allegations, such as that Mulolani's church

51 Gordon, *Invisible Agents*, p. 101.

52 Willy de Craemer, *The Jamaa and the Church: A Bantu Catholic Movement in Zaïre* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977); Johannes Fabian, 'Charisma and Cultural Change: The Case of the Jamaa Movement in Katanga (Congo Republic)', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 11, 2 (1969), pp. 155–73.

53 Hugo F Hinfelaar, *Bemba-Speaking Women of Zambia in a Century of Religious Change (1892–1992)* (Leiden: Brill, 1994), p. 99.

54 Robert Gary Burlington, "'I Love Mary": Relating Private Motives to Public Meanings at the Genesis of Emilio's Mutima Church', PhD Thesis, Biola University, 2004, pp. 88, 105.

55 Hinfelaar, *Bemba-Speaking Women*, p. 107.

56 Hinfelaar, *History of the Catholic Church in Zambia*, p. 184.

was anti-European and – in the 1970s – that he supported the opposition politician Simon Kapwepwe. Both the *Mutima* church and Kapwepwe's breakaway United Progressive Party (UPP) were banned by the Kaunda government in the 1970s.⁵⁷ Such rumours are reminiscent of the rivalry between the *Lumpaa* Church and UNIP, demonstrating both the earthly power of Copperbelt churches and the distorting effect of attempts to disconnect its secular politics from the spiritual realm.

Mutima and *Lumpaa* both accorded a special role to women. Again, women's significance in leading roles and their high number of female adherents shows that the religious was one of the few realms in which women could play a leading and 'respectable' role at the same time in a society that was shaped by a highly gendered conception of productive and reproductive labour. As noted above, economically successful women on the Copperbelt, especially unattached women, had a bad reputation. In contrast, church involvement in general and *Mutima's* egalitarian gender concept in particular offered women the opportunity to participate in 'respectable' ways in social and political life and to occupy leading positions.

Another Catholic formation that was rooted in women's action is illustrated by the so-called *BaBuomba* groups. The agenda of *BaBuomba*, groups consisting mostly of women, was to integrate elements of Bemba royal praise song into Catholic ritual. Originally, Bemba society had rested upon a strong tradition of divine kingship. *BaBuomba* groups integrated this idea into Catholic liturgy by weaving royal praise song into it; a practice distinct to migrant workers in Southern and Central Africa as Joel Cabrita records for South Africa.⁵⁸ *Ubuomba* literally translates as 'being a royal Musician'.⁵⁹ As their approach effectively challenged orthodox Catholic liturgy, women like the *BaBuomba* initiated change in the church and sought to localise worship practices. *BaBuomba* have similarities with *Banacimbusa*, women who traditionally initiated girl children, and acted as midwives. Like the *BaBuomba*, the figure of the *Banacimbusa* was reconceptualised to serve in a new context. 'Traditional' *Banacimbusa* were replaced by or turned into chair-ladies of Catholic lay groups who served also as midwives and godmothers

57 Hinfelaar, *Bemba-Speaking Women of Zambia*, pp. 101–25.

58 Joel Cabrita, 'Politics and Preaching: Chiefly Converts to the Nazareth Church, Obedient Subjects, and Sermon Performance in South Africa', *Journal of African History* 51, 1 (2010), pp. 21–40.

59 Kapambwe Lumbwe, 'Ubuomba: Negotiating Indigenisation of Liturgical Music in the Catholic Church in Zambia', *Journal for Transdisciplinary Research in Southern Africa* 10, 2 (2014), pp. 151–65, p. 151.

to the christened newborns.⁶⁰ Both *BaBuomba* and *Banacimbusa* were firmly anchored and influential in the parish structures of the Catholic Church.

The growing appeal of *BaBuomba* groups since the 1980s can be understood, aside from the Vatican II changes, as a response to the economic decline Zambia faced at that time. In a world in which people struggled to make a living, *BaBuomba* and *Banacimbusa* groups helped the women involved to feel a sense of purpose and to restore agency.

A greater threat to the Catholic Church emerged in Kitwe in the early 1990s in the form of the ‘World Apostolate of Mary’ (WAM). This movement considered Mary, not Christ, to be the Saviour, following this line of argument: ‘Thus it is that the three persons of the holy trinity made Mary necessary unto themselves in accomplishing the redemption of fallen man. ... Mary is necessary to all mankind for their salvation. Thus we proclaim Virgin Mary as Saviour.’⁶¹ The movement was led, among others, by a woman who claimed to have been visited and instructed by ‘Our Lady Mary’ during night vigils. The group criticised the ‘world full of evil’ in which they lived. One of their documents reads: ‘Almost everybody in Zambia claims to be a Christian and yet there is so much evil as if the country has never been evangelised before.’⁶²

The World Apostolate of Mary’s period of popularity coincided with the neoliberal course of the Zambian Government at the time. Emerging in the copper towns, it was a movement that appealed to urban residents and their families. After a brief period of popularity for the freshly elected president Chiluba’s neoliberal course, the radical economic liberalisation and privatisation of the mines led in the 1990s to the loss of more than 50% of the jobs in the mining and supply industries, leaving the mining sector devastated.⁶³ In that context, the ‘evil’ that WAM referred to, that allegedly surpassed the evil of a pre-evangelisation Zambia, can be read as a metaphor for the people’s distress and their attempt to make their voices heard in a situation in which many felt powerless. As mentioned above, recent literature has linked the

⁶⁰ Thera Rasing, *Passing on the Rites of Passage: Girls’ Initiation Rites in the Context of an Urban Roman Catholic Community on the Zambian Copperbelt* (Aldershot: Avebury, 1995), pp. 95–8.

⁶¹ Catholic Diocesan Archives of Ndola (hereafter CDN), D4/40, Heretic Groups in Diocese, ‘Virgin Mary the Saviour’, n.d.

⁶² CDN, D4/40, Heretic Groups in Diocese, ‘Letter by Mr J. G. Chikwanda, Mrs A. M. Chikwanda, Mr K. J. Mumba’, n.d.

⁶³ Miles Larmer, ‘“The Hour Has Come at the Pit”: The Mineworkers’ Union of Zambia and the Movement for Multi-Party Democracy, 1982–1991’, *Journal of Southern African Studies* 32, 2 (2006), pp. 293–312, pp. 302, 331.

saliency of the charismatics and the Pentecostal ‘gospel of prosperity’ to the economic insecurity of the neoliberal order. Like them, WAM also emerged during a time of economic hardship and promised to deal with the ‘evil’ of the neoliberal order in a new way. It emerged and appealed on the Copperbelt, where other movements that accorded a special role to women had flourished.

Bishop de Jong saw no alternative but excommunication for what he understood to be ‘not a Catholic Apostolate, but a dangerous heresy’.⁶⁴ The movement challenged Catholic doctrine using a language of sin and corruption that recalled earlier purification movements in the region as well as the early missionary ‘urban perils’ narrative. This, coupled with the rise of Pentecostalism of the 1990s, explains Bishop de Jong’s harsh reaction.

The exponential rise of Pentecostal churches presented a huge challenge for the mainline churches and was met by the Catholic Church with a degree of accommodation, albeit under the condition of guidance by priests. A partial Catholic embrace of the charismatic renewal movement allowed the church to tend to Catholic ‘surfers’ who were susceptible to the appeal of healing ministries and other churches. Charismatic prayer sessions could be integrated because they neither challenged liturgy (as *BaBuombas* did) nor doctrine (like WAM). But the church sought to appear ‘Catholic enough’ in other respects; the straightforward rejection of the World Apostolate was one such case, particularly because it brought back painful memories of the Catholic losses to *Lumpa* in the 1950s.

Like *Mutima* and *Lumpa* before them, WAM drew on Bemba matrilineal tradition, with a woman leader promoting the uplift of another woman, Mary, into the Holy Trinity. *Mutima*, *Lumpa*, *BaBuomba*, *Banacimbusa* and WAM were not women’s movements in an exclusionist sense. Nonetheless, many of their adherents were motivated by the desire to build a counter-balance to the ‘heroic culture of the mining industry’⁶⁵ that dominated the mine compounds and later the trade unions, as well as Copperbelt politics. The situation of economic decline in which miners could no longer support their families, presented at the same time, difficult as it was, the opportunity for women to engage in unconventional enterprises to support their families or to reclaim a sense of belonging.

Notably, the movements discussed were all – aside from *Lumpa* with its mixed heritage – Catholic offshoots. One reason is that the Catholic Church

⁶⁴ CDN, D4/40, Heretic Groups in Diocese, ‘Letter by Bishop de Jong to Mr J. G. Chikwanda, Mrs A. M. Chikwanda, Mr K. J. Mumba’, 1996.

⁶⁵ John Iliffe, *Honour in African History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 287.

with its Marian tradition offered a way of celebrating female success that the Protestant churches did not. Other reasons were the grassroots work of the Roman Catholics in the copper towns and the inclusive and pro-poor spirit initiated by the Franciscan friars, which had created a decentralised church. The decentralised small Christian communities made it easier for their adherents to attempt to improve and shape their church. Both *Mutima* and WAM saw themselves as deeply rooted in Catholicism, even as reformers of the Catholic Church, and never as initiatives to create a new church. But their departure from Catholic doctrine was too great to be accommodated by the bishops. However, it was the Catholic Church that lent its imageries to foster women's sense of urban belonging and their presence in liturgy, and gave a face to their aspirations. While this was not an exclusively female world and was not meant to be so, it was a world filled with strong women, a world in which elevating a woman into the Holy Trinity seemed not only possible but advisable. The Catholic Church with its Marian tradition thus attracted those who were critical of 'traditional' gendered hierarchies.

The negative discourse about urban women and their limited choices of either confinement to labour with a bad reputation or marriage drove women to seek respectable forms of public engagement. These were offered by the churches and, ironically, mostly by the most conservative force, the Roman Catholic Church. Participating in church life and community and persevering and shaping their agenda was a way to enhance female respectability and offered women opportunities to lay claim to build their society in a moral and practical sense.

Boundary Crossing and Healing Ministries

As elsewhere in Africa, many Copperbelt Christian converts did not use spirituality, prayer, the sacraments and scripture in the way missionaries had envisaged. Other scholars, most prominently Walima T. Kalusa, have pointed to the creative appropriation of Christianity in Zambia in order to make claims for their own agenda. The Catholic offshoots which centred on the figure of Mary are one example, but there were also constant attempts by Christians to 'surf' between various churches, a process which continues today. The fluid nature of the migrants' spirituality was the greatest challenge from the perspective of individual churches. Moving between churches across weak denominational boundaries, what Lehmann and Taylor called the 'restlessness' and 'general indifference

towards dogmatics' of Copperbelt Christians,⁶⁶ has long been the norm. It was and is not uncommon for a Copperbelt Catholic to also attend a Pentecostal service or an ecumenical procession, as well as seeking the healing ministries of other denominations outside regular mass. Many Copperbelt residents rather tend to get as many blessings as possible, while the source of the blessing is not a matter of orthodoxy.

Surfing was not a distinctly urban phenomenon, but it was more pronounced in the towns for several reasons. The infrastructure and the mixed social communities of the Copperbelt as well as mission competition have fostered such practices. Copperbelt religious flexibility characterises religious expression and worship and at the same time is manifestation of and reaction to the mobile life lived by Copperbelt urbanites.

The sensual and material aspects of the Catholic faith, represented in the sacraments, in anointing, and in blessing cars and houses, seems to be greatly cherished by many Copperbelt Christians. But sometimes believers wished to express the materiality of their faith in ways that challenged Catholic doctrine. For instance, some members of the Catholic Church challenged the privilege of ordained priests to be the sole administrators of the sacraments. They stole wine and hosts and initiated their own healing sessions, celebrating mass and anointing others.

We had a case where they would come, steal wine and hosts and go have their own celebration in the compound. ... And then they start anointing others because they feel that, me, I have been given the gift of prayer, I can heal, so bring the oil, I can anoint you, but it's not the priest. They create a lot of confusion. Because there we also have the charismatic movement among the Protestants. ... What I see my brother who is a Protestant doing, I can do it. So we copy things from TV. They see the charismatics on TV, the Nigerians, they are praying, they are jumping and then they fall down, they heal a person, so they would like to do the same. So in that sense there can be confusion if we don't give them guidance.⁶⁷

This example again demonstrates the paralleling of religious and political structures on the Copperbelt. Popular mass mobilisation and participation and the principle of egalitarianism, as practised in trade unions, together with the decentralised and comparatively non-elitist approach of the Franciscan friars, resulted in attempts, albeit unsuccessful, to decentre the privileged role of priests and to democratise church structures.

⁶⁶ Taylor and Lehmann, *Christians of the Copperbelt*, p. 274.

⁶⁷ Fr Ferena Lambe interview.

The Catholic Church was however, after the initial Pentecostal challenge, successful at targeting and reintegrating ‘lost’ adherents. It was easier for the church to embrace lapsed Catholics than those who, like WAM, challenged doctrine from within. They even instituted a sacramental programme for this purpose, consisting of three months’ instruction and culminating in a ritual to welcome the returnees.⁶⁸ The reintegration programme shows that the Catholic clergy dealt with the less threatening forms of boundary crossing in a lax way, ready to re-embrace a lost flock and sometimes keeping a blind eye to hybrid forms of worship. In that sense, they followed the old tradition of spiritual inclusiveness established by the first African Christians on the Copperbelt and their Union Church.

Urban Belonging and Social Justice

The Catholic Church’s popularity and openness created the right environment for the church’s politicisation in the 1970s. It was driven by a migrant society’s quest for a more egalitarian distribution of the copper wealth, a wealth that they built through their very labour. Contrary to the Pentecostal gospel of prosperity and true to their original pro-poor approach, Catholic adherents voiced egalitarian aspirations not only on a domestic inner church level but also politically. The Catholic Church began to articulate its vision of social justice for the poorer section of labourers and informal residents by the 1970s. While the literature on the politicisation of the church has focused on the clergy, European and Zambian alike, such an orientation was in fact to at least a similar degree based on and influenced by the grievances of ordinary congregants and their vision of social justice.

Several priests promoted the church’s new social teaching, thus generating tension with government.⁶⁹ Bishop Denis de Jong promoted and supported protests against the eviction of squatters in the 1980s. Mission Press, run by the Franciscans since 1970 and located in Ndola, was famous for its critical stance towards a one-party state which curtailed press freedom; its editors had to endure periodic intimidation by the state. The prominent Bemba magazine *Icengelo* initially focused on evangelical issues, but practically became an anti-government paper in the 1980s after clashing with the Kaunda government first on the issue of scientific socialism, and

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Joe Komakoma, *The Social Teaching of the Catholic Bishops and other Christian Leaders in Zambia: Major Pastoral Letters and Statements 1953–2001* (Ndola: Mission Press, 2003).

subsequently growing uneasy with the state's increasing authoritarianism.⁷⁰

Mission Press also launched the popular youth magazine *Speak Out!* in 1984. Thanks to a large section of stories written by young readers and a wealth of letters to the editor, *Speak Out!* provides ample material to foreground ordinary Catholics' ideas of social justice. Aside from evangelistic themes, *Speak Out!* covered topics such as the rights of girl children and people with disabilities, sexualised violence, especially in a situation of high youth unemployment, and of course many features about 'true love', partnership and marriage. The following example takes up the familiar trope about the danger of urban women.

In a passionate letter sent by Lydia B. Chalwe, a student of Luanshya Girls' Secondary School, Lydia made a compelling case for equal education for girls. In this letter, Lydia took up and developed the earlier described debate about urban women as problems. She argued that, against the 'commonly held belief that if the wife has obtained equal educational status with the husband, she becomes pompous and disrespectful towards her husband', an older concept of the girl child existed, according to which she was highly valued. She was usually 'given more attention than the boys in the family'. Lydia's argument was that the way girl children were deprived of their rights in the current situation was a recent development, which was not in accordance with tradition. In her conclusion, she elevated the discussion to the national level, yet she did so in a nice twist; not in order to use the female body as a metaphor for the nation's collective honour, but to show the equality of men and women. She wrote: 'I would like to conclude my arguments by saying that denying girls an education deprives their future husbands, their parents and the nation as a whole of the immense contribution they can make both in the home and outside it.'⁷¹

The example of Lydia's letter shows that the trope of dangerous women, be they economically and sexually independent as early missionaries and tribal elders had worried, or educated and thus perceived as a threat to the hierarchy of the household, still occupied popular discussions in the late 1980s. Lydia demonstrated her fluency in the debate, challenged it and did so in a Catholic youth magazine which subscribed to the concept of equality before God. By making the argument that a woman could and wanted to make a contribution to her family, her society and her nation, she demonstrated the same aspirations that women engaged in

⁷⁰ Kabombwe, 'A History of the Mission Press', pp. 4, 11, 85.

⁷¹ *Speak Out!*, September–October 1988, pp. 8–9.

BaBuomba groups or leading women in WAM or other religious movements had – she claimed to speak for herself, and to shape her own and her society’s agenda. Lydia, too, was one of the Copperbelt women who claimed urban belonging by challenging the gendered hierarchy that she perceived as unjust, doing so through the channels the church provided.

Like Lydia’s opinion on equal education, there were many more small contributions in *Speak Out!* that were directed towards a more just world. Taking up everyday life issues, they nonetheless concerned a broader vision of social justice that was influenced by the social teaching of the church and often transcended it. The famous clashes of the clergy with the state were the official face of the church, but they were carried by active and passionate congregants, many of them women.

Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated that Copperbelt Christians were open to navigate and embrace spiritual messiness, instead of attempting to resolve it. Such spiritual openness is an expression of the history of the mobile Copperbelt, shaped as it was by labour migrants from various places. It was built on the earliest Christian movement on the Copperbelt, the African Union Church.

Seen from the perspective of labour migrants, doctrinal and liturgical transgressions as well as the rearrangements of elements from different traditions make perfect sense in a society that could not be united by claims to a shared rural background or autochthonous identity. Instead urban dwellers were moved by an interest in joint worship, healing ministries, social programmes and visions of social justice. Ultimately, this spiritual openness was a logical initiative by a migrant society to create a spirituality that paralleled their migration histories. While this is not a distinctly urban phenomenon, it found strong expression in the copper towns due to the heterogeneity of its residents.

The Catholic devotion to Mary provided a particularly fertile ground for women who grappled with the question of urban belonging in a society that rested on a highly gendered division of labour. By imagining and proposing a spiritual world of high-ranked women, by being active in the small Christian communities, and by voicing a vision of social justice that promoted women’s rights, these women dominated and transformed the everyday practices in their parishes and lay claim to a legitimate urban identity that built upon notions of matrilineal descent and fostered support networks among women in both a spiritual and worldly sense.

Catholicism on the Zambian Copperbelt differed from the Katangese brand, and yet on both sides of the border the Roman Catholics were the most successful church. Catholic success in Katanga was not built on decentralised structures and a pro-poor orientation, but simply on a monopoly sanctioned by the state. The Belgian colonial state endorsed a paternalistic labour policy, into which the Roman Catholics were easily co-opted. In contrast, on the Zambian Copperbelt there was no state church and the relations between the churches and industry were much more distant. There, the Catholic Church attracted adherents through their comparatively egalitarian culture and the opportunity to popular participation and appropriation.

Considering publications such as *Speak Out!* and *Icengelo*, the social teaching of clergy and congregants as well as both the connections and frictions between *Mutima* and *Lumpa* alongside political opposition and activism shows that it does not make sense to disconnect the religious from politics on the Copperbelt. The spiritual and the religious do indeed form a lens through which we can glimpse a central but neglected aspect of Copperbelt society.