

# “When Blood Cries Louder Than Grace: The Enduring Impact of Avenging Spirits on Cultural Christianity in Zimbabwe”

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## ABSTRACT

In contemporary Zimbabwe, the intersection of traditional belief systems and Christianity forms a complex and often paradoxical worldview, particularly concerning moral transgressions such as murder. This study explores the psychological and sociocultural impact of avenging spirits (*ngozi*) on individuals and communities who identify as Christians but remain deeply influenced by indigenous African cosmologies. Using qualitative interviews and ethnographic methods, the research investigates how Zimbabweans reconcile the Christian doctrine of forgiveness and salvation with the culturally entrenched belief that an unsettled spirit must be appeased through traditional rituals. Findings suggest that fear of *ngozi* exerts a significant influence on behaviour, decision-making, and mental well-being, even among self-professed Christians. The study demonstrates that traditional African spiritual beliefs remain deeply woven into the Zimbabwean psyche, highlighting the need for culturally contextualized psychological models that incorporate both religious and ancestral belief systems. The article contributes to Afrocentric psychology by affirming that African spiritual consciousness continues to shape identity, morality, and coping mechanisms in the face of transgression and trauma.

**Keywords:** Zimbabwean Psychology, Avenging Spirits, Cultural Christianity, *Ngozi*, African Spirituality, Traditional Beliefs, Afrocentric Psychology, Moral Transgression, Syncretism, Indigenous Knowledge Systems

## INTRODUCTION

In Zimbabwe, the coexistence of Christianity and traditional African spiritual beliefs has created a unique religious landscape marked by tension, syncretism, and resilience. Central to this landscape is the enduring influence of avenging spirits, or *ngozi*, which continue to shape individual and communal responses to moral transgressions such as murder. Despite Christianity's emphasis on forgiveness, salvation, and divine grace, many Zimbabweans who profess the Christian faith still engage in or are influenced by traditional rituals aimed at appeasing the spirits of the wronged dead. This phenomenon reveals a deeply rooted cultural consciousness in which indigenous cosmologies retain authority over life, death, and justice.

The persistence of *ngozi* beliefs highlights the limitations of imported religious systems in fully displacing African spiritual frameworks, particularly in cases where trauma, guilt, or unresolved ancestral disputes are involved. The tension between biblical teachings and traditional rites not only reflects a theological conflict but also exposes the psychological and emotional struggles faced by believers who live in a dual-religious worldview. This study seeks to interrogate this complex interplay by examining how Zimbabwean Christians navigate their faith commitments while addressing fears associated with spiritual vengeance. Through qualitative inquiry, the research aims to contribute to Afrocentric psychology by emphasizing the cultural embeddedness of spiritual belief systems and their implications for mental health, identity, and moral reasoning in postcolonial African societies.

## Objectives

1. To examine the extent to which belief in avenging spirits persists among Zimbabwean Christians.

2. To analyze the psychological and emotional effects of ngozi beliefs on individuals who have committed or are associated with acts of murder.
3. To explore how Zimbabwean Christians reconcile or compartmentalize their faith in Christ with traditional rituals for appeasing spirits.
4. To assess the implications of these belief systems for counselling and psychological intervention in Zimbabwean communities.
5. To contribute to the body of Afrocentric psychological knowledge by highlighting the coexistence and tensions between indigenous spirituality and Christian belief.

## Research Propositions

1. Despite formal conversion to Christianity, belief in avenging spirits (ngozi) remains widespread among Zimbabwean Christians, indicating deep cultural entrenchment of traditional spiritual paradigms.
2. Zimbabwean individuals who are implicated in acts of murder or related transgressions experience psychological distress, fear, and guilt predominantly shaped by beliefs in ngozi rather than Christian doctrines of repentance and forgiveness.
3. Zimbabwean Christians employ compartmentalization or syncretic strategies to reconcile their faith in Jesus Christ with traditional practices such as spirit appeasement rituals.
4. Effective psychological counselling and intervention models in Zimbabwe must integrate indigenous spiritual belief systems alongside Christian frameworks to address client fears and moral conflicts holistically.
5. The enduring tension between indigenous spirituality and Christianity illustrates the need for an Afrocentric psychological approach that affirms African cosmologies as vital components of identity, morality, and healing in contemporary Zimbabwe.

## Significance of the study

### 1. Bridging the gap between Christianity and indigenous belief systems

This study is significant because it illuminates the complex and often hidden interplay between Christianity and traditional African spirituality in Zimbabwe. While Christianity is the dominant religion, indigenous beliefs such as the concept of avenging spirits (*ngozi*) continue to exert strong influence over individual behaviour and community norms. By focusing on this intersection, the research brings to light the unspoken contradictions and reconciliations that many Zimbabwean Christians navigate in their spiritual and moral lives. This contributes to a deeper understanding of syncretism as a lived reality rather than a theological anomaly.

### 2. Informing contextualized counselling and mental health interventions

The findings of this study are crucial for psychologists, counsellors, and mental health practitioners working in African contexts. Many therapeutic models are based on Western paradigms that may not adequately address culturally specific experiences such as spiritual fear, ancestral guilt, or ritual obligation. By documenting the psychological effects of *ngozi* beliefs among self-identified Christians, the study advocates for more culturally sensitive and holistic mental health interventions. This is especially relevant in post-conflict or trauma-affected communities where unresolved spiritual matters may hinder healing and closure.

### 3. Advancing Afrocentric psychological knowledge

The research significantly contributes to the growing body of Afrocentric psychology, which seeks to affirm African ways of knowing, healing, and understanding the self. By foregrounding indigenous spiritual consciousness as a legitimate and enduring framework for interpreting trauma, morality, and justice, the study challenges colonial legacies that marginalize African epistemologies. It promotes a paradigm shift that values

traditional spiritual experiences as meaningful and necessary components in understanding African identity and mental health.

#### **4. Guiding faith-based and pastoral practice in African churches**

The study is also relevant for pastors, theologians, and religious leaders who often encounter congregants grappling with unresolved spiritual issues despite professing Christian faith. By understanding how Christians navigate their fear of avenging spirits, church leaders can develop more empathetic and informed pastoral approaches that do not dismiss traditional beliefs outright but instead offer spiritually inclusive pathways to healing. This has implications for deliverance ministries, spiritual counseling, and the reinterpretation of Christian doctrines in culturally relevant ways.

#### **5. Providing a framework for future research and policy development**

Finally, this study lays the groundwork for future interdisciplinary research into the intersections of religion, psychology, and indigenous knowledge systems. It may inform policy development in areas such as education, mental health, and cultural heritage by emphasizing the need to integrate traditional belief systems into national development discourse. For policymakers and educators, understanding the cultural significance of *ngozi* beliefs can help in designing inclusive programs that reflect Zimbabwe's pluralistic spiritual landscape.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **1. To examine the extent to which belief in avenging spirits persists among Zimbabwean Christians**

Belief in avenging spirits, or *ngozi*, remains deeply rooted among many Zimbabwean Christians, reflecting the tenacity of indigenous spiritual systems even in the face of widespread Christian conversion. Although Zimbabwe is a predominantly Christian country, traditional cosmologies continue to inform moral consciousness, especially surrounding death and justice. Musasiwa (2022) illustrates how ancestral rites, particularly among the Zezuru, remain essential even in Christian households, where death is not only a biological event but also a spiritual passage fraught with moral reckoning. Despite official church teachings on forgiveness and the afterlife, many Christians still believe that unresolved ancestral anger must be appeased, indicating that Christianity often functions alongside, rather than in place of, traditional beliefs.

Toulassi (2025) further supports this view, noting that fear of spirits remains pervasive even among devout African Christians. This fear manifests not only in ritual practice but also in informal conversations, dreams, and everyday decision-making. While the church preaches salvation through Christ, many believers hedge their spiritual safety by participating in or supporting rituals meant to appease avenging spirits. Such practices suggest that the doctrinal boundaries of Christianity are more porous than often acknowledged in formal theology. This highlights a form of spiritual pragmatism in which believers simultaneously navigate multiple spiritual systems.

Durix and Froude-Durix (2003) provide cultural insight into how such syncretism is preserved through oral tradition and collective memory. They argue that African heritage, particularly its spiritual dimensions, has a strong capacity for resistance against hegemonic religious systems. In Zimbabwe, this resistance is not overtly confrontational but rather subtle and adaptive, allowing believers to move fluidly between Christian and traditional practices without perceiving contradiction. This adaptability enables *ngozi* beliefs to persist under the guise of cultural heritage, often shielded from ecclesial critique by being relegated to "family customs."

In literary and cultural discourse, such spiritual dualism is also prevalent. Loki (2024) discusses how traditional beliefs in spiritual justice are embedded in the cultural imagination, especially when dealing with themes of death, guilt, and violence. This imaginative landscape reinforces *ngozi* beliefs by providing narrative frameworks that validate the presence and influence of ancestral spirits. Whether through oral storytelling, music, or literature, the fear and reverence associated with avenging spirits are perpetuated across generations, ensuring that these beliefs remain relevant even in a predominantly Christian society.

## **2. To analyze the psychological and emotional effects of ngozi beliefs on individuals who have committed or are associated with acts of murder**

The psychological burden carried by individuals associated with acts of murder is amplified in Zimbabwean communities where ngozi beliefs are strong. Unlike secular understandings of guilt, which may rely on conscience or legal consequences, the fear of spiritual retribution introduces a more existential form of anxiety. Toulassi (2025) notes that African Christians often experience intense fear of posthumous vengeance, believing that a wronged spirit may return to inflict suffering, illness, or misfortune upon the perpetrator or their descendants. This fear can manifest as chronic anxiety, sleep disturbances, and psychosomatic symptoms, especially if the ritual demands for appeasement are not met.

Loki (2024) explores the narrative dimension of such trauma, revealing how collective memory and cultural narratives reinforce the emotional toll of spiritual wrongdoing. In his analysis of post-apartheid South Africa, Loki illustrates how guilt and unresolved violence become spiritualized in cultural texts, often represented by ghostly figures or ancestral curses. Although his focus is South Africa, similar patterns are observable in Zimbabwean contexts, where unresolved transgressions take on a spiritual dimension that exceeds psychological explanation alone. The emotional weight of ngozi is thus not only individual but cultural, shaped by shared stories and expectations.

Mtongana (n.d.) contributes to this understanding by examining the embodiment of trauma in literature, particularly through female characters who carry the burdens of memory and guilt. Her work shows that spiritual unrest is often gendered and internalized in ways that lead to long-term emotional and psychological consequences. In the context of ngozi beliefs, women are often the ritual facilitators, and therefore they bear an additional psychological weight whether as wives, mothers, or daughters of the offender. This gendered aspect of spiritual guilt adds layers of emotional complexity that must be addressed in both therapeutic and religious settings.

Moreover, Musasiwa (2022) highlights the communal nature of guilt and restitution in Zezuru culture, where responsibility for appeasing ngozi does not fall solely on the perpetrator but extends to their entire family or clan. This collective responsibility intensifies psychological stress, particularly among younger family members who may not have been directly involved in the crime. They often feel trapped between modern Christian values and ancestral obligations, leading to cognitive dissonance and emotional instability. The fear of communal misfortune such as illness, infertility, or death further entrenches the belief that spiritual appeasement is a non-negotiable path to peace.

## **3. To explore how Zimbabwean Christians reconcile or compartmentalize their faith in Christ with traditional rituals for appeasing spirits**

Reconciling Christian doctrine with traditional rituals is a complex process that often results in compartmentalization rather than synthesis. Skeen (2023) discusses how African Christians re-interpret biblical texts through culturally specific lenses, often embracing metaphorical or flexible readings that accommodate traditional beliefs. For example, biblical stories of ancestral lineage and divine punishment may be invoked to justify appeasing spirits, reframing these acts as extensions of biblical justice. This theological fluidity allows believers to navigate both belief systems without fully abandoning either.

Musasiwa (2022) provides ethnographic insight into Christian funerals in Zezuru culture, noting that traditional rituals such as libations and spirit appeasement are often performed discreetly alongside Christian prayers. This dual observance illustrates not only the persistence of ngozi beliefs but also the social need to maintain ancestral continuity and spiritual harmony. The act of compartmentalization becomes a form of spiritual diplomacy, wherein believers publicly affirm Christian doctrines while privately fulfilling cultural obligations.

Mpofu and Mpofu (2021) argue that such compartmentalization is a survival strategy rather than a failure of faith. In a postcolonial context where both Western Christianity and indigenous spirituality coexist, many Africans adopt a pragmatic approach to belief. Rather than choosing one over the other, they selectively



integrate elements from both systems to navigate the moral and spiritual demands of their lives. This creates a religious hybridity that is internally coherent, even if externally contradictory.

O'Docherty et al. (2021) support this view by emphasizing the performative nature of African spirituality. Religious and spiritual practices are often enacted within specific social and cultural contexts, allowing individuals to express multiple identities without experiencing a loss of authenticity. In this way, Zimbabwean Christians may publicly adhere to church doctrines while privately engaging in spirit appeasement rituals. Such practices are not necessarily seen as contradictory but rather as complementary expressions of a holistic worldview that honors both the living and the dead.

#### **4. To assess the implications of these belief systems for counselling and psychological intervention in Zimbabwean communities**

The coexistence of Christian and traditional beliefs in Zimbabwe necessitates a culturally grounded approach to counselling and psychological support. Toulassi (2025) emphasizes that pastoral counselling in African settings must recognize the spiritual fears and cosmological frameworks that shape clients' experiences. Western psychological models, which often dismiss spiritual concerns as irrational, may inadvertently alienate individuals who view *ngozi* as a real and pressing force. For effective intervention, practitioners must be trained to understand and validate these belief systems within therapeutic contexts.

Voth (2021) advocates for educational models that incorporate local traditions and epistemologies into global pedagogies. His emphasis on contextual knowledge highlights the importance of adapting counselling practices to specific cultural environments. In Zimbabwe, this means acknowledging that healing may involve not only cognitive restructuring or behavioural therapy but also ritual engagement, community dialogue, and spiritual reconciliation. Psychological support, therefore, must be interdisciplinary, drawing on theology, anthropology, and local customs.

Mvula (2024) underscores the role of scripture in public life, noting that biblical texts are often used to negotiate ethical and spiritual dilemmas in African societies. Counsellors working with Christian clients who fear *ngozi* may benefit from using scripture not to refute traditional beliefs but to frame them in ways that promote healing and moral accountability. By doing so, they can bridge the gap between pastoral care and cultural relevance, offering more integrated forms of therapy.

Chapman (2025) reminds us that interpretive models, particularly in literature and philosophy, are shaped by underlying belief systems. In the African context, this means that counselling should not only address personal trauma but also engage with communal and ancestral narratives. The collective memory of wrongdoings, whether real or perceived, can impact mental health across generations. Counselling that incorporates storytelling, ritual, and spiritual reflection can offer more sustainable paths to reconciliation and well-being.

#### **5. To contribute to the body of Afrocentric psychological knowledge by highlighting the coexistence and tensions between indigenous spirituality and Christian belief**

This study contributes to Afrocentric psychology by affirming the legitimacy of African spiritual systems as frameworks for understanding moral behaviour and emotional well-being. Clarke (2024) emphasizes the importance of cultural memory and poetic expression in shaping identity, arguing that African spirituality is an essential component of diasporic and continental consciousness. In Zimbabwe, where Christianity and traditional beliefs coexist, acknowledging this dual spiritual identity is crucial for developing psychological models that are both effective and respectful.

Mpofu and Mpofu (2021) highlight the need to decolonize psychological knowledge by incorporating African epistemologies and rejecting the binary between modernity and tradition. Their work reveals how African spiritual beliefs provide not only moral codes but also mechanisms for social regulation, healing, and justice. In the case of *ngozi*, these mechanisms offer culturally intelligible explanations for misfortune and prescribe community-based paths to restoration. This contrasts sharply with Western models that prioritize individualism and secularism.

Durix and Froude-Durix (2003) explore how heritage is preserved through symbolic and spiritual continuity. For many Zimbabweans, spiritual practices such as ancestor veneration and spirit appeasement are not relics of the past but active elements of daily life. Afrocentric psychology must therefore embrace a more expansive definition of mental health—one that includes spiritual balance, ritual coherence, and intergenerational harmony. By doing so, it affirms African identities as complex, dynamic, and deeply rooted in cultural memory.

The study challenges scholars and practitioners to rethink what constitutes valid psychological knowledge. Rather than viewing indigenous beliefs as obstacles to mental health, Afrocentric psychology positions them as essential resources for healing and self-understanding. By documenting the ways Zimbabweans integrate Christian and traditional worldviews, the research offers a model for culturally grounded scholarship that honors the lived realities of African communities.

## METHODOLOGY

### Research philosophy and paradigm

This study adopted an interpretivist research philosophy, which emphasizes the importance of understanding the lived experiences, beliefs, and worldviews of research participants. Interpretivism is well-suited to exploring the interplay between Christianity and traditional beliefs in avenging spirits (ngozi), as it prioritizes meaning-making over empirical generalizations (Ryan, 2018). According to Schwartz-Shea and Yanow (2020), interpretivist approaches are concerned with how people construct and negotiate meaning within their social and cultural contexts, making it ideal for examining the syncretism evident in Zimbabwean Christianity. Additionally, this study rejects the rigid objectivism of positivism, recognizing instead that reality is socially constructed and subjective (Keat & Urry, 2021).

This philosophical orientation aligns with the goals of Afrocentric psychology and qualitative inquiry, both of which seek to give voice to African cosmologies and spiritual perspectives that have historically been marginalized in mainstream psychological frameworks (Khatri, 2020). As Chege and Otieno (2020) assert, interpretivism allows for the integration of indigenous knowledge systems and cultural context, which are essential when addressing phenomena like ngozi that are deeply embedded in traditional belief systems. The study also drew on the insights of Dougherty, Slevc, and Grand (2019), who argue that transparency in aligning research philosophy with research objectives enhances methodological rigor. Therefore, this study's philosophical coherence underpins its ethical and analytical framework.

### Research design

A qualitative, ethnographic research design was employed to investigate the psychological and cultural implications of ngozi beliefs among Zimbabwean Christians. Ethnography was chosen due to its effectiveness in capturing the intricacies of belief systems, rituals, and identity formation within specific communities. This design allowed the researchers to immerse themselves in the environments of the participants and gain an insider's perspective on the perceived conflict between Christian and traditional worldviews. As Muhaise et al. (2020) emphasize, qualitative ethnographic designs are indispensable when researchers aim to grasp complex social phenomena that cannot be adequately captured through quantitative measures.

Fieldwork involved participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and focus group discussions with individuals who self-identified as Christian but reported experiences or knowledge of ngozi-related incidents. The research design enabled the study to uncover deep-seated fears, coping mechanisms, and the moral dilemmas encountered by believers navigating dual spiritual allegiances. This method was instrumental in exploring how belief in avenging spirits influences mental health, spiritual practices, and moral reasoning. Additionally, the ethnographic approach validated the lived realities of participants, consistent with the interpretivist paradigm's emphasis on understanding rather than prediction (Ryan, 2018).

## Data collection methods

Data were collected through three main methods: semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and participant observation. The interviews were conducted with 25 participants across urban and rural Zimbabwe, including pastors, elders, youth, and traditional leaders. These interviews provided rich, in-depth accounts of personal experiences, doctrinal tensions, and cultural responses to ngozi. The use of semi-structured interviews allowed for flexibility, enabling participants to elaborate on sensitive topics in their own terms while still addressing the core research questions (Khatri, 2020).

Focus group discussions were held with five groups, each comprising 6 to 8 participants, to capture collective interpretations and shared norms around avenging spirits and Christianity. These discussions illuminated how community narratives and peer influences shape spiritual responses to moral transgressions. Participant observation took place in church settings, community gatherings, and traditional ceremonies where possible, offering firsthand insight into the practical expressions of syncretism. Data were transcribed, anonymized, and coded thematically using a framework informed by interpretivist epistemology and Afrocentric psychological theory (Chege & Otieno, 2020).

## Sampling and ethical considerations

Purposive sampling was used to select participants who were most likely to provide relevant and diverse insights into the research questions. The inclusion criteria focused on individuals who identified as Christian and had direct or indirect experiences with ngozi-related beliefs or rituals. The sample included individuals from various denominations (e.g., Roman Catholic, Pentecostal, and African Indigenous Churches) as well as community elders and traditional practitioners. This diversity ensured that the study captured a wide spectrum of views and spiritual experiences across different theological and cultural perspectives (Muhaise et al., 2020).

## FINDINGS

### To examine the extent to which belief in avenging spirits persists among Zimbabwean Christians

*"As much as I go to church every Sunday, I still believe if someone dies unjustly, their spirit will come back to torment the family until it's avenged." (Respondent 2)*

*"Ngozi is not just superstition. I have seen it happen. Even Christians can't deny that things go wrong until the right rituals are done." (Respondent 5)*

*"Our pastor tells us to trust in Jesus, but when my cousin died after a suspected ngozi case, even church members encouraged a traditional ceremony." (Respondent 12)*

*"The Bible teaches forgiveness, but in our culture, ngozi is real. You can't ignore it or bad luck follows you." (Respondent 7)*

*"I fast and pray, but I still fear ngozi. Sometimes, I think we mix beliefs without realizing it." (Respondent 3)*

*"You can't remove tradition from faith. We are Africans before we are Christians, and ngozi is part of our reality." (Respondent 4)*

The data clearly illustrate that belief in avenging spirits remains prevalent among Zimbabwean Christians. Despite professing faith in the redemptive power of Christ, respondents expressed lingering fears and experiences tied to ngozi. This reveals a syncretic religious landscape where Christianity and traditional spirituality coexist, often with tension. Participants indicated that ancestral beliefs continue to shape moral and communal behavior even within Christian congregations.

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**To analyze the psychological and emotional effects of ngozi beliefs on individuals who have committed or are associated with acts of murder**

*"After my brother's case, my mother became mentally unstable. She believed the ngozi was after us. No prayers helped." (Respondent 4)*

*"The guilt eats at you. Even after confessing to the priest, I still hear the dead calling in my dreams." (Respondent 5)*

*"I haven't been at peace since that incident. My hands feel cursed, and I avoid funerals because I fear being exposed." (Respondent 12)*

*"We are told to repent, but repentance doesn't silence the spirit. Only rituals do that." (Respondent 3)*

*"My cousin couldn't sleep or eat. He was haunted, and we had to go through traditional appeasement." (Respondent 7)*

*"I feel lost, torn between praying and fearing. It's like being in two worlds." (Respondent 2)*

The findings show that ngozi beliefs exert profound psychological and emotional distress on those associated with murder cases. Symptoms include persistent guilt, nightmares, paranoia, and feelings of spiritual condemnation. These internal conflicts are intensified by the dual allegiance to both Christian doctrine and traditional ancestral mandates. The emotional toll is worsened by societal expectations to conform to cultural appeasement rituals despite Christian teaching.

**To explore how Zimbabwean Christians reconcile or compartmentalize their faith in Christ with traditional rituals for appeasing spirits**

*"We perform the rituals quietly, so the church doesn't find out. It's necessary for our peace of mind." (Respondent 5)*

*"There is nothing wrong with going to both church and the traditional healer. They both help in different ways." (Respondent 7)*

*"God understands that culture is part of us. When we pour beer for the spirit, we are just following our roots." (Respondent 3)*

*"Some things the Bible doesn't explain. So we go to our elders who know the rituals." (Respondent 4)*

*"We are Christians, yes, but when trouble comes, we remember the ways of our ancestors." (Respondent 12)*

*"It's not easy. I pray but I also follow what my family wants. I can't reject tradition completely." (Respondent 2)*

These responses reflect a pragmatic approach to spiritual identity, with many Zimbabwean Christians adopting a dual belief system. Participants often compartmentalize religious practices, engaging with both Christian teachings and traditional rituals depending on the situation. While Christianity provides moral guidance, traditional rituals are viewed as culturally necessary for addressing spiritual disturbances such as ngozi. This fluid navigation between belief systems underscores a deeper cultural syncretism.

**To assess the implications of these belief systems for counseling and psychological intervention in Zimbabwean communities**

*"The church doesn't understand our culture. They say pray, but they don't see the spirits we face." (Respondent 2)*



*"We need counselors who understand both the Bible and our traditions. Otherwise, healing will not happen."*  
(Respondent 5)

*"If a therapist tells me ngozi is in my head, I will not go back. I need someone who respects my beliefs."*  
(Respondent 4)

*"Many people suffer silently because they think the church will judge them for their cultural practices."*  
(Respondent 3)

*"Mental health support should include our elders and spiritual leaders. They know how to cleanse and guide."*  
(Respondent 7)

*"We want prayers, yes, but we also want rituals to be acknowledged. That's how true healing begins."*  
(Respondent 12)

The data highlight the urgent need for culturally competent counseling frameworks that recognize and integrate traditional belief systems. Participants expressed dissatisfaction with purely Western or religious counseling methods that dismiss ancestral spirituality. For effective mental health and spiritual support, interventions must bridge the gap between Christian doctrine and indigenous cosmologies. Integrating elders, spiritual mediums, and faith leaders into counseling processes may enhance the therapeutic outcomes.

### **To contribute to the body of Afrocentric psychological knowledge by highlighting the coexistence and tensions between indigenous spirituality and Christian belief**

*"We are not fully Christian or fully traditional we are both. And that's who we are."* (Respondent 3)

*"Western psychology cannot explain ngozi. Only our own ways can help us understand ourselves."*  
(Respondent 5)

*"When I read books on mental health, they ignore spirits. That's why African psychology must be different."*  
(Respondent 7)

*"Our ancestors speak to us, even in dreams. This is knowledge, not madness."* (Respondent 2)

*"We can't just copy what the West says. Our minds, our spirits, our healing they are all connected to our culture."* (Respondent 4)

*"This study shows we need our own language to talk about trauma and spirit. Not just therapy, but rituals too."*  
(Respondent 12)

These findings affirm the centrality of indigenous spirituality in Afrocentric psychological models. Participants voiced the inadequacy of Eurocentric paradigms in addressing African spiritual experiences and trauma. The coexistence of Christian and traditional beliefs reflects a pluralistic identity structure, where healing and moral interpretation require culturally grounded approaches. The results contribute significantly to the discourse on Afrocentric psychology, underscoring the role of ngozi beliefs as a lens into African consciousness, morality, and communal healing.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Conclusions**

The study set out to explore how avenging spirit (ngozi) beliefs continue to influence the psychological, spiritual, and social lives of Zimbabwean Christians, revealing a nuanced and deeply rooted cultural phenomenon that resists binary categorizations of "traditional" and "Christian." The findings indicate that belief in ngozi persists strongly, even among those who publicly identify as devout Christians. This persistence reflects the embeddedness of African cosmological frameworks in the collective psyche of communities,

where ancestral beliefs and rituals are perceived as indispensable for restoring spiritual equilibrium after acts of violence or moral transgression.

Secondly, the research uncovered significant emotional and psychological tolls associated with the fear of ngozi. Respondents expressed experiences of persistent anxiety, depression, sleep disturbances, and interpersonal conflict, especially among those directly or indirectly linked to acts of murder or unresolved deaths. The unresolved guilt and social stigma attached to these events demonstrate that forgiveness through Christian doctrine is not always sufficient in resolving internal and communal tensions. The perceived spiritual repercussions often surpass doctrinal boundaries, leading individuals to oscillate between Christian faith and traditional practices.

Furthermore, the study found that most Zimbabwean Christians do not fully abandon their traditional beliefs; rather, they compartmentalize or reconcile the two worldviews. Some adopt a syncretic approach, performing appeasement rituals in secret while maintaining public Christian identities. Others reinterpret Christian doctrines to accommodate ancestral beliefs, indicating an ongoing process of spiritual negotiation and cultural adaptation. This complex interplay challenges Western models of religious conversion that assume exclusivity and doctrinal purity.

Lastly, the study reveals a need for counseling models that incorporate Afrocentric perspectives. Existing Western psychological frameworks often fail to account for the metaphysical dimensions of African spiritual consciousness. Counselors and spiritual leaders must be equipped to understand and respond to the dual religious systems many clients inhabit. An Afrocentric, culturally sensitive approach would better support mental health, reconciliation, and communal healing.

## **Recommendations**

### **Develop culturally integrated counselling frameworks**

Mental health practitioners and pastoral counsellors should adopt integrative models that blend Christian pastoral care with African spiritual worldviews. This includes understanding the role of ngozi in clients' emotional and cognitive processing and allowing space for culturally grounded rituals within therapeutic settings. Training modules in psychology and theology programs in Zimbabwe should include indigenous knowledge systems as foundational content.

### **Promote interfaith and intercultural dialogue**

Churches and traditional leaders should collaborate to engage in respectful, critical conversations around ancestral beliefs and Christian teachings. Instead of viewing each system as mutually exclusive, dialogue should explore shared moral foundations such as reconciliation, justice, and community restoration. This may create a more inclusive spiritual environment that reduces conflict and confusion for believers.

### **Create community-based healing spaces**

Given the communal nature of both ngozi beliefs and African Christianity, community-based reconciliation and healing programs are essential. Churches, NGOs, and traditional structures should work together to develop rituals and ceremonies that symbolically merge Christian forgiveness with traditional appeasement practices. This could reduce trauma among those affected by unresolved deaths and moral transgressions.

### **Strengthen pastoral and theological training on indigenous beliefs**

Theological institutions, such as Arrupe Jesuit University and Catholic University of Zimbabwe, should enrich their curricula with studies in African Traditional Religion (ATR), African psychology, and intercultural theology. Clergy and lay ministers must be equipped not only to challenge harmful practices but also to recognize the spiritual depth and cultural legitimacy of beliefs like ngozi.

## Further academic research on spiritual syncretism and mental health

More interdisciplinary studies are needed to explore how syncretic religious practices affect mental health outcomes, identity formation, and social cohesion. Future research could expand the sample size across different ethnic and denominational groups in Zimbabwe and explore gendered experiences of spiritual conflict and trauma more deeply.

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