



Joshua Maponga's interactions with Black theology, African identities and Indigenous belief systems

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The intersection of Black theology, African cultural identities and Indigenous belief systems has been topical in South Africa, given the apartheid history of the country. Black South Africans used theology to define their cultural identities and belief systems in their quest for liberation. The need to engage this symbiotic relationship in Zimbabwe arose with Joshua Maponga III, who used his theological background as a pastor to analyse the meaning of African cultural identities, Indigenous belief systems and the place of theology among suffering Africans. This article aims to interrogate Maponga's writings, presentations and interviews on social media to find out how he drew from African cultural epistemologies to develop a Black theological perspective and define African cultural identities and Indigenous beliefs. The article argues that Maponga's work offers a unique insight into how African culture can inform and enrich Black theological discourses. It discusses the methodology used and Maponga's background. It further analyses how African cultural resources, such as traditional myths, rituals and symbols, enabled Maponga to develop a theology rooted in Black people's experiences, challenging the dominant Western theological paradigms that have marginalised African culture and theological perspectives for years. Furthermore, the article discusses the implications of Maponga's work for the ongoing development of Black and African Theologies. It concludes by stating that Maponga's work offers an example of how African cultural resources can be used to develop a theology that is both contextual and liberative.

Contribution: This study highlights the significance of intersectionality and contextualisation in theological research while also challenging dominant Western theological paradigms and emphasising the importance of African cultural epistemologies. It contributes to methodological innovation in theological research and provides implications for the ongoing development of Black and African Theologies.

Keywords: Joshua Maponga III; African culture; black theology; cultural identities; Indigenous belief systems.

Introduction

The intersection of Black theology, African cultural identities and Indigenous belief systems (IBS) is an issue that has troubled Africa since the time of colonialism. Although the term Black theology was a later development (Molabi 2010:35), the conflicts between the missionaries and some African Christians who formed the African Indigenous Churches (AICs) describe how the natives used the Bible to fight for the liberation of their cultural identities and belief systems from being westernised. The use of theology to preserve African cultural identity is evident in the emergence of several AICs, such as the Lumpa Church of Alice Lenshina in Zambia (Mildnerová 2014), AmaNazareth of Isaiah Shembe in South Africa (Kumalo & Mujinga 2017) and Mai Chaza in Zimbabwe (Dube 2008), among others.

The intensity of the deculturation of Africans was evident in the definition of Christianity, which was often referred to as a European religion. According to Masondo (2005:89), 'the missionaries used the word Christianity selectively to refer to the European religio-cultural context. Any form of worship that contradicted the missionary standard of Christianity was repudiated'. The missionaries wanted to prove that the AICs were not religious institutions. Its members were pagans and corrupt with a rogue character (Masondo 2005:90). Instead of all the Africans standing

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on what they believed, those from mainline churches benefited from the colonial systems and epistemologies through westernised social amenities such as schools, hospitals and clinics introduced by the missionaries (Idowu 1974:228). Africans from the mainline churches compromised their identity and cultural belief systems for a better future.

With time, the need arose among African scholars who, although having benefited from a colonial system, could no longer compromise their cultural identities and belief systems. Many African scholars started to develop a pro-African theology that respected the God of the Africans, advocating for a Black Jesus who understands the lives and cultures of the black people and a God who tabernacled among the Africans and who understands Africans in their cultural diversities (Bujo 1992:5; Magezi & Igba 2011:1). In Zimbabwe, Joshua Maponga III is one such example of an individual in the 21st century who used his philosophical and theological education to challenge traditional theologies accepted by the Africans. Having been expelled from the Seventh Day Adventists (SDA) (Adventist Today 2024), Maponga III took his ex-communication as a platform to redefine the theological narratives that had been accepted by many Africans, including the SDA.

This article aims to discuss how Joshua Maponga III presented the intersection of Black theology, African cultural identities and IBSs. The article argues that, although Maponga's theology started a few years before his expulsion from the SDA, his arguments are critical in the 20-century theological discourse as they stretch where Africans are itching. The fact that Maponga III advocates for a homegrown African Jesus who has not been corrupted by white pigmentation and European philosophies makes his theology critical. For example, in one of his interviews, Maponga III lambasted the 'Whitesation' of Jesus, who is used to pacify Africans to rob them of their natural resources. This Jesus is also presented as an enemy of the African culture and belief systems. He argued that:

The day a white Jesus dies for Black people, I will believe in a white Jesus. The white people and their white Jesus promise Africans gold in heaven while they are taking gold from Africans. It does not make sense at all that you are promised to walk on gold in heaven while they are taking gold from you. (Pindula n.d.:1)

In discussing Maponga's redefinition of narratives of the interactions between Black theology, African cultural identities and IBSs, the article will begin by presenting the methodology employed. This will be followed by a brief submission of Maponga's identity and his theology. The article will conclude by arguing that, notwithstanding the circumstances of Maponga's theological engagement as a bitter cleric or an attention seeker portrayed by his retreat to the caves (Ncube 2024), his theology challenges dominant Western theological paradigms. It highlights the importance of African cultural epistemologies, contributing to methodological innovation in theological research and

providing implications for the ongoing development of Black and African Theologies.

Research methods and design

This article used qualitative research methodology to draw data from primary sources such as YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, Pinterest and Facebook of Joshua Maponga III. The need to access Maponga's information on his social media pages has been supported by Krantz (2024), who underscores that using the Internet in research offers a unique opportunity to find relevant data. The 21st century has seen the development and huge growth of 'social media' to a point where it has started to be regarded as universal and an important source of research (Krantz 2024). The choice of using Maponga's social media pages as key sources of information is also justified by the fact that social media has become the fastest-growing medium of communication and research. For example, by 2016, over 1.59 billion people were using Facebook monthly (Government Social Research 2016:1). In 2015, Twitter, now 'X', had more than 500 million tweets sent each day, thereby making it a greater way to connect the researchers and their fellow academics (University of North Dakota 2015).

The Government Social Research (2016:1) confirms that social media is a tool among many research toolkits. These platforms have become a part of everyday life, connecting families and friends and promoting business and research (Raghavan 2025). Most celebrities, such as Maponga III, are popularised through social media, and using these platforms as a research tool also assists in the wide reading of research papers on individuals, as researchers browsing these celebrities also encounter scholarly research about these superstars. The other reason for using social media platforms has to do with how the platforms connect new and peer researchers as the platforms establish the celebrities as influencers worth researching (Government Social Research 2016:1). Social media is a means of getting information for 21st-century research (Handavi & Prahataamia 2025). Rogers (2019:5022) also confirms that social media generates content, and research on social media involves producing groundbreaking information that social pages offer, which is unique in scholarship.

In using this methodology, the researchers consulted the social media platforms of Joshua Maponga III, including YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, Pinterest and Facebook, where he gave talks and answered interview questions. The other justification for using Maponga's social media is supported by Roza Tsvetkova, who predicted that:

[T]here are almost one million new users to some form of social media each day, or a new user every ten seconds; three hundred videos are uploaded to YouTube alone every minute. (Tsvetkova 2023:1)

Based on the above-stated arguments, social media has become a critical source of primary data collection in any research. The authors listened to some of the presentations

by Joshua Maponga III, as a pastor and also a public speaker. We also read some of his works as an author, his position as a philosopher, a leader, a musician, a social entrepreneur, an anthropologist and a hermit, to produce this research article.

Joshua Maponga III The Man

Born in 1973 as a firstborn in a family of five children, Joshua Maponga III relocated to South Africa, moved to Swaziland and later to the United Kingdom in 1998. While in the United Kingdom, he ventured into many businesses that included marketing, consultation and construction (Pindula n.d.). From both primary and secondary sources consulted, Maponga presents himself as a public speaker, an author, a philosopher, a pastor, a musician, a social entrepreneur, an anthropologist, a hermit (The Namibian n.d.) and a bishop (Events Cloud n.d.).

Maponga had a dream of being an engineer, but he joined the SDA ministry because his father was also a pastor there (Pindula n.d.). This change from physics to theology was necessitated by the need to fulfil his father's ministry since he (Maponga's father) had been released from prison and on death row in the 1979 Amnesty, and Maponga never knew that he would see his father again (Pindula n.d.). He enrolled as a theologian at Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan, in the United States of America, where he trained as the pastor of the SDA in 1991 (Adventist Today 2024). In 2020, Maponga was excommunicated by the SDA on the allegations of his controversial teachings, such as calling Jesus a 'blue-eyed boy with blond hair' (YouTube 2022). Maponga was banned from attending, speaking, preaching and officiating at any function of the SDA in Southern and Indian-Ocean regions because his theology was argued to be dangerous for the church in general and the SDA in particular (Adventist Today 2020). Moreover, Maponga shared his theological views through writing (Maponga 2017, 2020, 2022). He is also a television presenter, where he is hosting his television programme 'Joshua', which is broadcast on One Gospel on DSTV, Channel 331 (Events Cloud n.d.).

It has to be noted that Maponga has written, developed, produced, presented and anchored TV Programmes such as One Gospel and Education Channel (Pindula n.d.). In his career, he also serves as the Chief Executive Officer of the Institute of Farmers of Thought, where he presents his theological views to different groups in many countries around Africa. For example, in 2024, he visited the Zambia Farmers of the Thought group, where he was presenting on the *Rewiring and Rewriting of the African Theology in the Twenty-First Century* (Maponga 2024). In his opening remarks, he claimed Lusaka has the highest audience of the Farmers of Thought, followed by Pretoria, Durban and Johannesburg (Maponga 2024). When the authors viewed this Farmers of Thought YouTube site on 24 February 2024, the channel had 19000 viewers, signifying the impact of Maponga's influence on the African theological spectrum. Maponga also runs organisations such as the Zimbabwe Indigenous Movement and the African Indigenous Movement, which look to house

all of the intellectual property of how to transform Africa. The views of Joshua Maponga presented in this article are mostly those he shared towards his expulsion and after his ex-communication, which suggests that when he was still a pastor, he hid part of his identity that only manifested through a liminal study of his identity portrayed in his multiple identities.

Neo-Black theology: Maponga's quest for a colourless God talk in Africa

The history of Black theology traces its roots to Latin America and later South Africa. Its major tenets centred on the fight over the 'Whitesation' of Jesus, aiming to identify with the minority. This article will not delve into the saturated discourse of Black Theology in South Africa because it has since lost its momentum with the coming of independence in South Africa in 1994 (Adebo 2013:1; Chitando 2009:96). Black Theology in South Africa ran its course and completed its race with the independence of South Africa. The country has moved to another level of multiparty democracy, with the former colonised and the coloniser sharing powers in a coalition government, as of 2024, 30 years after the independence of South Africa (Mujinga 2025:2). Maponga's reignition of Black theology comes in the wake of an attack on a colonised Jesus who identified with the minority. He called this kind of Messiah a 'blue-eyed boy with blond hair' (YouTube 2022, 04:50). During this same interview, Maponga commented that:

Christianity is a religion of the academics. White Jesus does not accept a Black man until a Black man becomes a Whiteman. Jesus does not understand the African drums and dressing like an African because he is white. The iconography of the white Messiah, with blue eyes and blond hair, looks like the coloniser is dangerous, that is why Africans cannot fight a Whiteman because he looks like Jesus, whom they worship and adore. (YouTube 2022, 5:05)

The above mentioned interview was conducted 2 years after Maponga's ex-communication from the SDA. Maponga used his expulsion as an opportunity to deepen his theology because it was clear that he had chosen to follow a different path of religion (YouTube n.d.a). He confirmed his divergence from Christianity when he said:

When you go hunting, you dress like a hunter; when you go to teach you dress like a teacher. When I met with some sangomas in the Drakensberg, Swaziland, Ghana, and Nigeria during my research for the book titled *Going Places in the Spirit*, everything I had been told about Christianity and the Indigenous world was being challenged by the experiences I was now having. I was going there as a bishop, and because I am a sensitive person, my position on polygamy, indigenous medicine, tithe, weapons, and Christianity, especially Christians taking weapons like guns to fight for their land, the place of men and women in the community is no longer the same. I have moved, and I have changed, but the greater part of the Christian community still believes that I am carrying the title of bishop, which I did not steal. (YouTube n.d.b, 00:22 min)

The preceding statement presents several issues that fish out Maponga's theological treatise. Initially, it advocates for Black theology, where Jesus identifies with Black people. For Maponga, the 'Whitesation' of Jesus presents God as a coloniser, yet the entire Bible portrays God as the champion of liberation. For example, the narrative of Jesus' reading (Is 61:1–2 as reflected Lk 4:18–19) presents liberation as the central theme of Jesus' incarnation. In this text, the proclamation of the good news, freedom for prisoners, recovery of sight for the blind, setting free the oppressed and the proclamation of the Lord's favour are the characteristics of Jesus, who is on the side of the weak and the poor, not the rich minority.

An analysis of the foregoing discussion also presents a quest for a Jesus who understands the African culture because his death as an infant was spared by the Africans who gave him refuge from the Whiteman (Herod), who treated his enemy (Jesus) as a threat to his kingdom. Notwithstanding this importance of Jesus' refuge in Africa (Mt 2:13–23), Jesus also grew up in a Jewish culture, and worship only makes sense when it is being informed by its cultural setting, informing it. In addition, the mention of a Jesus who is made angry by an African form of worship that includes the beating of drums presents a cultureless Jesus who contradicts a biblical Jesus whose rite of passage on birth and death was defined by Jewish culture. This statement also challenges the interaction of Black theology, African cultural identities and IBSS.

Joshua Maponga III further challenges the 'Whitesation' of Jesus by arguing that, 'When Eurocentric religion came to Africa, they were not fighting over economy and business, they were fighting over the gods of Africa, ('the fact that your God did not protect you against yourself, how can your God be stronger than the white Jesus that you have accepted as a personal Saviour') (YouTube 2022, 0:51 min) For him, religion is a form of colonialism. By accepting a Eurocentric iconography of an 'adulterated' perception of a Messiah, it weakens African's fight against a colonised system that oppresses them (YouTube 2022, 1:10 min). Jesus is a colonised Messiah who only etymologically appeared 500 years ago. The letter 'J' on his name only appeared 500 years ago, and yet Jesus was born 1500 years back (YouTube 2022, 1:43). Jesus did not have the name that he is called today (YouTube 2022, 1:44 min). The name Jesus does not appear in the whole Bible until the Romans adulterated Yeshua:

To tell a 21st-century Christian that by accepting Jesus, you are accepting Romanism, they get offended because Christianity has become an identity, and it occupies the deeper side of an African. (YouTube 2022, 02:11 min)

'Africa is the home of Jesus. It is foolish for Africans to cut bread together with plastic. Plastic is Let us take the bread and throw away the plastic' (YouTube 2022, 13:00). The branding and packaging of Christianity were purely colonial, a European cultural artefact, and Jesus is the bread. 'Let us take the bread and throw away the plastic' (YouTube 2022, 13:00). The branding and packaging of Christianity were

largely influenced by colonialism. It is time for Africans to separate the plastic from the bread, meaning it is naïve to force people to eat the plastic; it is also obscure to force Africans to worship the European Jesus (YouTube 2022, 13:18 min). This call for the separation of the gospel from culture is the only way that can redefine Christianity in the context of conflict.

African theology and African cultural identities

Joshua Maponga III's quest for cultural identity is evident in his teachings and dressings, both before and after his expulsion from the SDA. Identity is also evident in his teachings and attire. In one of his presentations, Maponga argues that:

I have a farm in Beatrice, along the Masvingo-Harare Highway in Zimbabwe, where I plan to create a village or sanctuary inspired by African spirituality. This sanctuary will be located along the Masvingo-Harare Highway in Zimbabwe. I aim to create a space that embodies the essence of African spirituality, drawing from the traditions of great leaders like Mkhulu Credo Mutwa. (Pindula n.d.:1)

In analysing the preceding statement, Maponga sought to create a platform of unlearning and relearning programmes for Africans to appreciate African theology and cultural identities. African theology has been used as an umbrella term for different theologies arising from the continent, referring to Christian theologies distinct from the theology of African traditional religion (Pöntinen 2013:35). Maponga challenges this distinction and advocates for a theology that speaks with an African voice, in an African context, speaking for Africans. This is a shift from African theology, whose cultural identities are tinted with missionary regalia.

The mention of a temple in his plans for a new theological discourse is a shift in his theological understanding of a temple as a meeting place of God and humanity in the Bible. Maponga's temple will be defined by African spirituality that is grounded in oral history and not the Scriptures. He also gave credit to Vusamazulu Credo Mutwa, a renowned South African traditional healer, author, artist and philosopher (South African History Online n.d.). Mutwa was respected for his prophecies of world events, including the destruction of New York's World Trade Centre in 2001, the 1976 June 16 uprising, HIV, the ouster of Thabo Mbeki as President of South Africa and load shedding (South African History Online n.d.). Maponga decided to take this approach through a programme called Social Re-engineering, which is rewiring the African mindset and preaching to teach people to appreciate their food, clothes, medicines and villages (Maponga 2022). Maponga is coming from the deep end of the philosophies of Platonism to the deep end of African traditional religion, thereby making his teachings contradictory. He is also challenging the scholarly ideas that reject African traditional religion as a source of African theology because it sought God's intervention from the point of Africa's dehumanisation.

African theology for Maponga should not only refer to the Europeanisation of God talk, 'Whitesation' of Jesus or making it an academic discipline but should speak of God who identifies with people in their cultural backgrounds because African theology draws heavily from African traditions (Muzorewa 1984:11). Maponga bemoaned that, African history has been stolen, rewritten and shipped back to Africa (YouTube 2022, 2:50 min). Theology in the 21st century is defined by Eurocentric language, which compels Christians to kiss the icon of Mary, the mother of Jesus, and also move around carrying a cross of the white Jesus. 'This is unfortunately idolatry in the name of emblems of faith' (YouTube 2022, 04:44 min). In contrast, the whites can kiss Jesus because he looks like them, He argued. He underscored that when Jesus speaks in the African language, this is called a demon, but when he speaks in English, they say the Holy Spirit is at work. The two white people who came to Africa destroyed the fibre of the African heritage, which is grounded in their culture. The mercenaries and missionaries had dinner together every day, strategising ways of subjugating Africa. They succeeded in preaching the gospel of reconciliation and non-violence and, at the same time, confiscating the African resources (YouTube 2022, 05:14 min).

When he was asked about what history says about the missionaries' concepts about demons and witchcraft, Maponga said:

In my book titled *The African Space*, I explained the names of God. African traditional religions are all monotheistic – all the names of God in Africa refer to a monotheistic God. When an African is found worshipping under a tree, the Europeans think he is worshipping a tree. Ancestors are historically connecting cables to the creation of what happened before us. Ululating, mentioning ancestors is not worshipping them but recognising what was there before us, those who connect us to the one who made us. There is no African religion or spirituality that teaches people to worship ancestors. No prayer does not end with ... please tell the one who created you to deal with the problems. This is sacred African history interpreted in Eurocentric language. When an African calls his father just like the Jews, he will be calling the same God. Whites do not have ancestors because they do not have surnames. The culture and religion of the Bible are not European. Eighty per cent is polygamy, and the whites do not know that. What we believe in is Eurocentrism, not Christianity. (YouTube 2022, 05:49 – 07:49 min)

Maponga scoffed at how Africans glorified the whites at the expense of their gifts. He argued that 'In Africa, a man who gives you herbs to drink is regarded as a witch. A man who aborts your wife, takes the foetus to make tablets, and gives them to you to drink is regarded as a doctor. The African governments called this witchcraft, and they introduced the *Witchcraft Suppression Act*. These governments wanted to say, 'Which craft did you use?' but in fear of the whites, they called it witchcraft' (YouTube 2022, 08:42 – 09:49 min). He agrees with a famous singer, Hosiah Chipanga, who criticises the Africans for worshipping in English. For him, such prayers are directed to the whites and not the Africans:

The white Jesus does not hear African prayers; that is why Africans would pray in English. If a person comes to the church

wearing African regalia, people will run away unless that person buys the Whiteman's boutique, they are prepared to listen to that gospel. (YouTube 2022, 08:15 min)

Maponga argues that, 'the God who hates the African culture is never a God who created me in the first place, because God does not have colour' (YouTube 2022, 12:00 min). Speaking on redefining religion in Africa, Maponga maintains that:

The mind of the colonised person is pathetic that we have to sit in this day and age and protect a system that has vandalised and destroyed us to the extent that we can still sit around and debate its veracity within our cultural corridors. It is a shame that we must seek tolerance for external forces that are encroaching on our space. (YouTube n.d.b)

For Maponga (2024), the world has become a global village. This global village demands that we bring our culture into it, or other cultures will swallow us up. Other Africans can rewire their lives:

No one will come to rewire their brain; they will not come to say traditional food is healthier than white food, even if they know that. Ancestral memories speak to your knowledge of yourself, where your parents were before you were in their arms. Your DNA is passed through them, with expertise and trauma transmitted. Activation of ancestral memories brings a new identity. Walk to the ground, eat their food, drink their water, pick their memorabilia, clean their graves, etc. (Maponga 2024, 06:38 min)

The preceding statement is a testament to how Maponga recognises the need for Africans to be reconnected with their cultural heritage. Most Africans were made to believe that eating traditional food, talking about ancestors or associating with them is un-Christian. Most prayers would cast the ancestral spirits as demons. For Maponga, theology must respect their cultural identity if it is to make sense in Africa.

Maponga's interpretation of cultural identities in theology

Having discussed the relationship between African theology and cultural identities, Maponga goes further to analyse the place of cultural identities in theology and how they should help Africans to worship God as Africans. As a theologian who has made significant contributions to the field of African theology, particularly in the area of cultural identities, Maponga's understanding of cultural identities is rooted in the African concept of Ubuntu, for him, Ubuntu emphasises the interconnectedness and interdependence of human beings (Maponga, YouTube 2024b, 02:23). He argues that cultural identities are not fixed or static, but rather dynamic and fluid, shaped by the complex interactions between individuals, communities and cultures. These dynamic cultural identities display Ubuntu. For him, the Ubuntu concept has unfortunately been commercialised and ceased to incorporate the Africanness perspective of 'I am because we are' (Musonda 2024). Maponga's interpretation of cultural identities is also influenced by the concept of 'inculturation', which refers to the process of adapting Christian theology and practice to local cultures (Isichei 1995:15).

Maponga raised several questions in trying to unpack inculturation. What is African culture, and what fibres hold our communities together? Why is Africa constantly becoming more Whiter than African? Do we all see the gradual acquisition of the characteristics and norms of our culture by another culture? Are we becoming ourselves or losing ourselves? Looking at the modern environment, we must ask again: What is the African culture of money and wealth? What does it take for Africa to be called wealthy? Has that culture changed, or is it changing? What is our culture of health? What do we do culturally to maintain our health? What is our culture of education and/or fashion, who teaches and what do they teach? Where are the references to this knowledge base? How can it be preserved and passed on to generations? What is our culture of entertainment, what makes the Africans tick and celebrate? Inside culture is the ritual – the things we do. What are these rites, and how do we pass them on and convert them into a resource and capital for the new dispensation? Are we holding on to that African identity, or have we let go to hold onto another? What role have business politics and religion played in suffocating the African out of his skin? (Maponga 2019a). When one answers these questions, one will conclude that inculturation is essential for the development of a contextualised African theology that takes into account the unique cultural, historical and social contexts of the continent.

One of the key themes in Maponga's work is the importance of recognising and valuing diversity in cultural identities. He argues that the traditional Western approach to theology has often been characterised by a 'one-size-fits-all' approach, which ignores the diversity of cultural experiences and perspectives (Maponga 2013). In contrast, Maponga advocates for a more inclusive and diverse approach to theology that recognises the value of different cultural identities and experiences. His work also highlights the importance of power dynamics in shaping cultural identities (Bediako 1969). He argues that cultural identities are often constructed and negotiated within power relationships and that dominant cultures usually seek to impose their values and norms on marginalised cultures (Kärkkäinen 2003). In response, Maponga advocates for a more nuanced understanding of power dynamics and their impact on cultural identities. There is no doubt that Maponga's interpretation of cultural identities in theology emphasises the importance of recognising and valuing diversity, inculturation and power dynamics. His work provides a valuable contribution to the field of African theology and highlights the need for a more nuanced and contextualised approach to understanding cultural identities.

Maponga's interpretation of Indigenous belief systems and the place of theology

Maponga's interpretation of IBS and the place of theology is multifaceted. He argues that IBS are an integral part of African cultures and identities (Maponga 2013). He borrows from Kwame Bediako, who defines IBS as 'the complex of

beliefs, values, and practices that are rooted in the traditional cultures and worldviews of African societies' (Bediako 1969:12). For Maponga (2024b), IBS are not static or monolithic, but rather dynamic and diverse, reflecting the complexities and variations of African cultures. Maponga's interpretation of IBS is shaped by his understanding of the concept of 'Ubuntu', which emphasises the interconnectedness and interdependence of human beings (Maponga 2013). He argues that IBS is rooted in a holistic worldview that recognises the intricate relationships between humans, nature and the divine (Maponga 2019b). This worldview is characterised by a sense of community, reciprocity and respect for the land and the ancestors, as alluded to by Mbiti (1969).

In terms of the place of theology, Maponga argues that theology must be contextualised and inculturated to be relevant and meaningful in African contexts (Maponga 2013). He advocates for a theology rooted in African cultures and experiences, one that takes into account the complexities and diversities of African spirituality. Maponga emphasises that theology must be a dialogue between African cultures and the Christian faith rather than an imposition of Western theological categories and concepts. This was also highlighted by Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013), who discusses the coloniality of power in post-colonial Africa, with an emphasis on the decolonisation of Western Christianity to fit the African realm.

Maponga's interpretation of IBS and the place of theology is influenced by the work of African theologians such as Mbiti (1969) and Bediako (1990). He also draws on the insights of post-colonial theory and decolonial thought, which emphasise the need to challenge dominant Western epistemologies and centre African perspectives and experiences. In brief, Maponga's interpretation of IBS and the place of theology highlights the importance of contextualisation, inculturation and dialogue between African cultures and the Christian faith. His work underscores the need for a theology that is rooted in African cultures and experiences, taking into account the complexities and diversities of IBS.

Engaging the symbiotic relationship of Black theology, African cultural identities and Indigenous belief systems

From the teachings and presentations of Joshua Maponga, a seamless relationship is evident that threads from Black theology, transcending African cultural identities, to the IBS. In explaining this relationship, he argues that 'we cannot think of worshipping God without having to expose the myths of the definition of religion which was imposed among the Africans as a white-sided religion' (YouTube n.d.b). He cautions that the challenge of religion in Africa is to think that Whiteman's culture must be respected as a new form of religion in Africa. Such thinking destroys the meaning of a colourless Jesus, who is not controlled by any

culture and one who understands and tolerates the IBS. Maponga challenged the docility of Africans as they accepted as an honour the submission of a white Jesus who hears English hymns, who understands preachers with Western regalia, a Jesus who condemns anything African. He accuses such branding of a white Jesus of being a doctrinal and dogmatic nuisance that reduces the African to the position of an enslaved person for an earthly master. The embracing of a white Jesus deprives Africans of their conscience, as such action resembles handing themselves to a God of the oppressor whose pigmentation is the same as that of a white Jesus.

Black theology, African cultural identities and IBS cannot be separated in the theology of Maponga because they all push Africans to have a homegrown theology. Maponga charges that a religion that does not remove Jesus from the cockpit of white supremacy is not a religion for Africans. It betrays the African culture and their belief system of a God of justice who embraces people with their shortcomings (Maponga 2024).

From Maponga's theology, we note a push for a liberative theology that centres the family more than the church, as was taught by the missionaries. Missionaries introduced a Jesus who is unjust, unpardoning, ruthless and always punishes people, especially when they do not give to the church. For him, such an oppressive religion is un-African because God does not punish people for not giving out of their poverty. The religion that presents a white Jesus who does not understand Africa and who offers him hospitality in his infancy is a Eurocentric religion that stands with the oppressor and manipulates the oppressed to worship idols of self or systems, to believe and worship the structures and organisations (Maponga 2024). Maponga cautions that any religion that weakens Africans, intimidating them with some unseen demons, sickness after sinning and death as a punishment is a curse and not a religion. True religion fights corruption and seeks liberation, which is true to the African belief system. A 'better than thou' religion has become a breeding ground for heretics and fanatics.

Critique of Maponga's work

Although Joshua Maponga is rising as a voice of the fading African theology, his writings are influenced by his multireligious experiences, which makes it difficult to accept as a solution to the conflictive African theology and Indigenous knowledge systems. The reading of Maponga's works requires a critical engagement to be able to liberate African theology from the extremist position that it is being pushed by Maponga, who started as a pastor and now writes as a bruised theologian, probably suffering from the trauma of his ex-communication from the SDA Church, for example, his propensity to call Jesus the blue-eyed boy demonstrated that his confusion of the doctrine of Christology where the human nature of Jesus is an emphasis of him as a revealed one and the revelation of God and not God himself.

Conclusion

Joshua Maponga's theology emphasises the importance of African cultural identities and IBS in shaping a contextualised and inculturated African theology. He argues that African theology must be rooted in African cultures and experiences rather than imposing Western theological categories and concepts. Maponga's interpretation of IBS is shaped by the idea of Ubuntu, which emphasises the interconnectedness and interdependence of human beings. He argues that IBS is dynamic and diverse, reflecting the complexities and variations of African cultures. Maponga's theology also emphasises the need for a liberative theology that centres on family and community rather than the church. He critiques the missionary who introduced Jesus as unjust, unpardoning and ruthless and argues that true religion fights corruption and seeks liberation. Furthermore, Maponga argues that Black theology, African cultural identities and IBS are interconnected and inseparable. He challenges the docility of Africans in accepting a white Jesus. He argues that a religion that does not remove Jesus from the cockpit of white supremacy is not a religion for Africans. Maponga's theology emphasises the importance of contextualisation, inculturation and liberation in shaping a truly African theology that is rooted in African cultures and experiences. His work provides a valuable contribution to the field of African theology. It highlights the need for a more nuanced and contextualised approach to understanding African cultural identities and IBS.

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Authors' contributions

M.M. conceptualised the study and contributed to methodology, formal analysis and investigation. P.M. was also involved in the investigation and wrote the original draft.

Ethical considerations

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Data availability

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

Disclaimer

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