



HOLY BIBLE

**Missionary Bible
Transliterations
Complicating Selection of
Funeral Songs and Readings
During the COVID-19
Pandemic**

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3. Missionary Bible Transliterations Complicating Selection of Funeral Songs and Readings During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

(chi)Shona is a group of 5 dialects spoken mainly in northern and eastern Zimbabwe. Christian Shona funerals have normally included readings and hymns which refer to the crown as a symbol of glory (Psalm 8:5, quoted in Hebrews 2:7). This symbolism has been subverted since 2020 by the fact that a crown shape, especially one with spikes, has become associated with a deadly virus. The problem is greatly exacerbated by the unfortunate fact that in the first Shona Bibles, “crown” was rendered by the transliteration “*korona*”. More recent translations have used the Shona word *chiremba*, but the original translation, and hymns based on it, have remained popular. However, popular consensus now is that such hymns must not be used at funerals for fear of invoking the virus. This example of transliteration reflects a deliberate policy on the part of the first European Missionary Bible Translators of avoiding certain vernacular words in order to emphasise the differences between Christianity and African culture.

Key words: *korona, chiremba, Bible transliteration, funeral, hymns*

Introduction

This article argues that transliteration of the word ‘crown’ to ‘*korona*’ in place of the equivalents *chiremba* and *ndaza yembiri*¹ has reshaped Christian funeral praxes among the Shona, usually accompanied by spontaneous selection of songs and readings. The all-night funeral services, choruses and fanfare have normally been dominated by reference to the ‘crown of glory’, or that of the passion of Christ (Psalms 8:5; Hebrews 2: 7; Matthew 27: 29; Mark 15: 17; John 19: 2; Revelation 2:10). The *spontaneous* singing and dancing to the *korona* songs have been outlawed by popular consensus of worshippers due to fear of invoking the virus, besides the mushrooming statutory instruments mandating social distancing sanctioned by arrests and jailing. In addition to legal proscriptions, funeral songs have been edited, or set aside altogether. Christians can hardly sing *korona* (crown of glory/passion of Christ) due to the existence of the coronavirus whose devastation has been frightening. In the minds of many Shona Christians, theological implications of the *korona* songs are now inextricably connected with invitations of the viral disease. Church synods have made the already bad situation worse, by either barring pastors from attending funerals, or by instructing them to adorn personal protective equipment whenever they have to attend the paltry funeral gatherings devoid of the *korona* songs. This requirement ‘questions’ the efficacy of God by reducing the clergy to ordinary virus-fearing people, which reinforces the unwritten ban on the *korona* verses and hymns/stanzas.

This article is motivated by the need to evaluate the saddening situation created by transliteration of the term crown by the inaugural Dutch-led missionary translators of the first Shona version of 1949. Some of the most popular Protestant, Evangelical and Pentecostal songs are based on that initial version, with the crown transliteration possible based on the Greek, Latin, Ancient English, Spanish, Dutch or German equivalents;² as opposed to the Roman Catholic version of 1966, which utilises the Shona equivalent, *chiremba*.³ It is also of interest to this article how cooperation between post Vatican II Roman Catholics and other Christian denominations has mitigated the COVID-19 intuitive ban on *korona* transliterations. Of particular note is also improvement in translation with the movement from missionary to indigenous translators, as elsewhere on the African continent.⁴

Historical Underpinnings

Shona Bible translations, largely meant to introduce Christianity by suppressing indigenous spirituality, followed the introduction of Christian communities in the then Rhodesia, now Zimbabwe.⁵ Though a number of attempts were made by white missionaries to establish Christian communities in Zimbabwe prior to the colonisation of the territory by the British in 1890, such enterprises ended up dismally.⁶ The most well-known of those attempts related to a Portuguese Jesuit missionary, Fr Gonçalo da Silveira SJ, whose martyrdom in 1561 is commemorated in two Roman Catholic institutions named after him – Silveira Mission in Masvingo Diocese and Silveira House, a major vocational centre in the Archdiocese of Harare. The Jesuits remained seized with the Christianization of Zimbabwe, which enticed them to be part of the colonising force formally known as the Pioneer Column. They shared the Pioneer Column chaplaincy with the Anglicans, for which they were rewarded handsomely with land to build their expansive mission stations including the two ‘Silveiras.’⁷ The Dutch Reformed Church of South Africa followed suit and encamped in the vicinity of the Great Zimbabwe monuments, where they established Morgenster (morning star) Mission on 9 September 1891.⁸ By the end of the sixth decade of colonisation the Roman Catholic Christian communities had grown into three dioceses and two prefectures, while the Reformed communities had taken strong root in the Victoria Province, around Morgenster Mission. The clamours and necessities for translations of the Bible, lectionaries and missals could no longer be ignored. The use of Latin by the Catholics, and Dutch/Afrikaans by the Reformed Church, could no longer be condoned, particularly in the face of growing African nationalism.⁹

60% of Catholic missions lay in the areas dominated by the Shona, while those of the Reformed Church lay almost entirely among the Shona, which made the Shona translations more urgent.¹⁰ From the African perspective, translation contributed “towards the restoration of the indigenous speakers’ humanity, identity and culture.”¹¹ The idea was to counteract the association of African languages “with negative qualities of backwardness, underdevelopment, humiliation and punishment ... to transcend colonial alienation.”¹² That was to be achieved by rendering the sacred Christian scriptures in the local languages, which removed such languages from the profane tagging,

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which separated them from ‘sacred’ languages of the colonisers. The task of translation had been entrusted to the hands of the Dutch, Germans, English and Spaniards – missionaries with limited Shona vocabulary – which made transliteration unavoidable, besides the prejudiced reason of subverting the African spirituality by avoiding local equivalents as explained below. The politics of translation in many cases explains the choice of transliteration against translation. Missionaries were crucial in “fixing the ethnolinguistic maps of the African colonies during the early phase of European occupation. To a significant degree, these maps have remained intact and have continued to influence African research scholarship.”¹³ In that regard despite some prejudices, missionary linguistic boundaries remain the starting point in the demarcation of linguistic and translation studies.

The codified Shona, initially known as the Union Shona, embracing five major dialects – Karanga, Zezuru, Manyika, Ndau and Korekore – was heavily dependent on the Karanga and Zezuru dialects.¹⁴ The Catholic Church heavily utilised the latter, while the Reformed Church made excessive use of the former in their translations, before the Rhodesia Bible Society (RBS) comprised both Catholics and Reformers in the aftermath of Vatican II. Initially, the Dutch Reformers, specifically Rev. Andries Adriaan Louw of the Dutch Reformed Church, led the Bible Society of Rhodesia, while the Catholics initiated parallel processes.¹⁵

The Bible Society of Zimbabwe

The Zimbabwe Bible Society (ZBS) was formed in the 1940s with the express mission of affording “every Zimbabwean the opportunity to access the word of God in their preferred language through translation, production and distribution.”¹⁶ It was formed simultaneously with United Bible Societies the world over, which were meant to pool together non-Catholic resources for greater translation efficiency.¹⁷ It became more prominent at the close of that decade. Its publicity was accompanied by the launch of its complete version of the Shona Bible (largely in Karanga dialect) published by the Morgenster Press in 1949; the first in a local language. That was followed by the publication of the Ndau version in 1957. It was only in 1978 that the Ndebele (the second largest tribal language in Zimbabwe) version was published, closely followed by its second and third editions in 1982 and 1997. Though the original Shona

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version got new editions with Apocrypha/Deuterokanonika in 1979, 2002 and 2007, it remained the most preferred by many pastors, who equally preferred the King James Version from which it was translated, as opposed to its successors largely based on the Revised Standard Version.¹⁸ The first editions were horizontal translations – from one contemporary language to the other – leaving out the ancient languages (Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek). That was the procedure preferred by white missionary translators who dominated the first phase the world over, right into the 1970s.¹⁹ The procedure accounts for the Eurocentric worldviews dominating the earliest translations.²⁰

While the later versions improved the quality of translation by doing away with transliteration, it is the transliteration that many pastors and evangelists prefer because it sets the Christian vocabulary apart from general usage. They see later translations as being mainly driven by enculturation being largely advanced by mainline churches including the Roman Catholic Church. During Dube's field research one Catholic "respondent appreciated the recent translation [2002] of the Shona Bible,"²¹ which did not obviously resonate well with some non-Catholics. On the whole, the success of the Catholic and Protestant churches was attributed to "the establishment of Christian villages, translation of the Scriptures and composing related literature in the local languages."²² Despite hundreds of denominations in Zimbabwe, to date the Bible Society of Zimbabwe has a denominational membership limited to the "Roman Catholic, Anglican, Methodist Church in Zimbabwe, The Salvation Army, United Methodist, United Church of Christ in Zimbabwe, Methodist Revival, Assemblies of God, AFM and ZAOGA."²³ This means all other denominations using modern Shona translations depend on these select denominations, which have inherited the prominence of the Dutch Reformers in the first Shona edition of 1949.

Parallel Processes by the Rhodesia Catholic Bishops' Conference

Prior to joining the Rhodesia Bible Society (RBS), the Rhodesia Catholic Bishops' Conference (RCBC) commissioned experts led by Fr Hannan SJ to translate both the Bible and liturgical documents. Where satisfactory translations were already in use by dioceses, the RCBC simply adopted with minor

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amendments what the various dioceses had already translated into Shona.²⁴ Before the church assignments, Fr Hannan, the leading expert on Shona language and orthography, was commissioned by the Rhodesia Literature Bureau to compile a Shona dictionary assisted by a team of experts. That work was accomplished in 1959 and published as the *Standard Shona Dictionary*.²⁵ His commissioning by the RCBC in 1962 resulted in the Shona versions of the New Testament,²⁶ Deutero-canonical books, Sunday and Weekday lectionaries, and the Shona Missal by 1968. Hannan “wished that he had been a native speaker so that he could have rendered his translation more intelligible and meaningful.”²⁷ Nevertheless, the University of Rhodesia awarded him the honorary doctorate in 1973 for his immense contribution to the development and study of the Shona language, four years before his death.²⁸ In the period following 1968 he was decommissioned from translating the Old Testament, in line with the new post-Vatican II focus of cooperating with non-Catholic Christians. He was instead reassigned to represent the Catholic interest on the RBS. That followed the signing of a memorandum governing the cooperation of Catholics and Christians of all persuasions represented by the United Bible Societies (UBS) of the world, in respect of acceptable guidelines in Bible translation.²⁹ The RBS allowed him to read through the modified 1949 Morgenster version, and make contributions as a renowned Shona expert of what would be acceptable to the post-Vatican II Catholics. Kumbirai credits him with the proliferation of the Shona idiom, and elimination of transliteration in the New Union Shona Bible of 1979. “He polished the language, improved the grammar and the spelling”, but his unbridled use of the Zezuru dialect was “eliminated.”³⁰

The Politics of Translation and Transliteration

The starting point would be to acknowledge that “Bible translation has enjoyed a privileged place in the history and mission of the Christian Church in Africa as elsewhere.”³¹ It has in fact been argued that it is indeed “the most translated book in the world.”³² This is despite the fact that the reasons for the translations are mixed resulting in good and bad translations, though both fit the ideology of the project convener and financier.³³ For Chatzitheodorou “the lack of ability to speak the languages in which the Bible was originally written and continual changes in the languages we speak have created the need

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to translate the Bible.”³⁴ For a good translation one must be familiar with both the source and receptor languages and their contexts, including the world-views of the native speakers. This is because ‘translation theology’ sees a good translation as incarnating the word onto the receptor culture, just as in the beginning the word translated into flesh (John 1.14).³⁵ Kumbirai contends that “translating from one language to another is a difficult operation, particularly when one is not a native speaker of both the source and receptor languages.”³⁶ This means it would be easier for a Shona speaker than a European, who neither belongs to the source (Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek) nor to the receptor (Shona) language; and yet the first missionary translators were neither. The native to the receptor language could mitigate literalism and over-interpretation, through the use of “closest equivalents,” which is considered the best option.³⁷ It is exactly the politics of equivalents that the missionaries dodged by making use of the terms “*k’rona*” and “*korona*” for crown, in place of *chiremba/ndaza yembiri*.³⁸ And yet, “the choice of words should, as far as possible, be based on two factors, the cultural significance of the item to which the word refers and the linguistic status of such a word.”³⁹ The translation must maintain the meaning of the original through the use of such linguistic equivalents.

Togarasei notes that transliteration was preferred as a way of snubbing local equivalents even where such equivalents were so obvious.⁴⁰ He gives the example of translating the name ‘prophet’ as *muporifita*, instead of *svikiro raMwari* (prophet of God/spirit medium) used in the Catholic and post 1949 versions of the Union Shona Bible.⁴¹ Togarasei is not amused that “the reception of the new translations has been mixed, and many Shona Bible readers still prefer the 1950 [1949] Shona Union Bible.”⁴² This is due to pastors pressing for the departure of Christians from contextual linguistic usages, in order to find simpler ways of denigrating traditional institutions and terminologies. The politics of “translating the Bible into indigenous languages was strongly influenced by the missionary attitude towards Africa and its people.”⁴³ The missionary was divided between the obvious advantage of using Shona to reach the populace, and the need to maintain distance between Christianity and the local worldview. That was despite the fact that “the theological language and content of a Christian theology designed for African contexts must embrace and interact with the indigenous religious thought forms of Africa.”⁴⁴ For that reason translations into local languages were not

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objective processes.⁴⁵ Thus in understanding any translation one has to take cognizance of “the role of the ideology of the translator in the praxis of translation.”⁴⁶ It is argued that translation into African languages entails penetration and to a larger extent damage of African cultures, because ‘translation is power.’ Musa Dube brands this power over local cultures an outright ‘colonization of local languages and thought processes.’⁴⁷ She is particularly worried by the deliberate translation of demons as *badimo* (ancestors in Setswana), as a way of driving away Africans from ancestor veneration, or causing a schism between traditionalists and Christians.

The availability of locals on subsequent panels of translators has obviously done a major boost to modern translations by improving quality. These more succinct translations have however been snubbed by many users due to the theology of alienation, which pushes to the background those terms resonating well with local religious institutions and concepts. To pile pressure on quality translations, pastors often denigrate them by questioning their sacredness in front of congregations.⁴⁸ In this way such transliterations as *k’rona* and *korona*, have largely remained intact despite their local imprecision, due to unfounded sacredness being thrust upon them by some pastors. To that effect if someone ‘googles’ the Shona equivalent for crown, *korona* comes out despite it not being Shona. The Shona were equally forced by the colonial enterprise to call the 25 cent-piece with the likeness of Queen Elizabeth adorned with a crown, *koroni*. Queen Elizabeth’s head on the obverse of the coin was replaced by the Zimbabwe bird after independence, and the *koroni* gradually ceased to be an issue. The very idea of putting heads with glittering crown spikes of the sun on coins was ubiquitous among Roman kings who borrowed it from Greek kings. The Greek kings from the third century BCE, especially Alexander the Great, were seen as embodying the invincible strength of Helios the sun god, hence the radiant solar spikes around their heads.⁴⁹ The same was implanted in Rhodesia by the British crown. Today the coronavirus is home to similar spikes, to the great chagrin of Shona believers, who have to cope with the use of equivalents for *korona*. The word *korona* no longer attracts as much halo as it used to before the advent of coronavirus. Chorba bemoans the disruptive effect of the advent of COVID-19 on the symbiotic relationship between Helios and crowns of glory thus:

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Helios and crowns are associated with power and joy in Western art in ways contradictory to the reality of the tragic pandemic that we are now experiencing with a novel pathogen featuring surface projections that are likened visually to the life-saving rays of the sun.⁵⁰

Chorba is worried about the disruptive effect on the usually pleasurable art. That means the solar spikes which normally effected joy, now bring about connotations of disease and death, originating a certain dislike for that kind of art celebrated since the third century BCE. Christians have equally enjoyed the halo as the distinguishing feature of Christ, and at times the entire Holy Family. Now the same halo invokes fear and premonitions of death. Chorba wishes the coronavirus spikes could “become targets of successful therapeutic and prophylactic interventions,” which “may somehow resolve the paradox of the resemblance of the spikes of this pathogen to the welcome rays of Helios.”⁵¹ In this case the coronavirus spikes’ eventual representation in art in their collapsed form could theologically rescue the invincibility of the solar spikes represented in the crown.

Zobgo contends that challenges of Bible translation are not unique to Africa, and therefore, Africans must tackle those challenges peculiar to the continent head-on.⁵² While a faithful rendering of the original text has always been a challenge for translators worldwide, “the local renderings may have been chosen with very little anthropological or theological research. Moreover, it goes without saying: rectifying incorrect or misleading past translation choices may prove very difficult indeed.”⁵³ As shall become apparent, the current difficulties with the mistranslation of the term crown, emanates from the inertia to migrate from the 1949 transliteration to the 1979 RBS-RCBC translation.⁵⁴ The skepticism that greeted subsequent Shona translations is responsible for the current difficulties otherwise the Shona Christians would have long buried the use of the term *korona*, and put in its place *chiremba/ndaza yembiri*. Mbiti blames Western financial power for the prevalence and persistence of certain renderings and theological positions.⁵⁵ He contends that Westerners recruit and finance Africans to make translations with western versions as source texts, which distorts their landing in the receptor societies with no economic power to resist the misrepresentations. In that regard Bible translations are seen as alienating and pro-colonialist and subjugating.⁵⁶ That often results in

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lack of respect for the relevant features of the receptor language and its potentials in rendering successful and meaningful translation.⁵⁷

Translations of selected verses in the RBS/ZBS and Catholic versions (1949-2007)

The Morgenster version of the Shona Bible, 1949, compiled by a team led by Rev Louw of the Dutch Reformed Church, translated the crown of glory and fame in Psalms 8:5 as “*korona yokubginya nokukudzwa.*” Here *korona* stands for ‘crown’. This transliteration runs away from Shona equivalents for crown, such as *chiremba* and *ndaza yembiri*. The rest of the phrase – *yokubginya* (of glittering/glory) *nokukudzwa* (and being honoured/respected) – follows Shona equivalents more closely. But the crown could not thus be interpreted because that would demean the Biblical crown by equating it to that of the untutored Africans.⁵⁸ Instead of exploiting the intersection between the unitary *Ubuntu* and the early Christian “*koinōnia*, often used to describe Christian fellowship or unity,”⁵⁹ they sought to rapture the community by putting Christians at loggerheads with the rest of the society. Their narrative was formed by what Manji and O’Coill noted as unsubstantiated dichotomies of viewing Africans as “chaotic, not ordered, traditional not modern, corrupt not honest, underdeveloped, not developed, irrational not rational, lacking in all of those things the West presumes itself to be.”⁶⁰ Even the book itself, Psalms, had to be transliterated *Mapisarema*, instead of *Nziyo* (songs) to keep it clear of the local impressions of songs, which could not be matched with Biblical songs. For some reasons the Roman Catholic team led by Fr Hannan SJ, translated the same phrase as “*chiremba chembiri nechorukudzo*” (crown of glory/fame and honour/respect) (*Nziyo* [Psalms] 8: 5). The same phrase was adopted in the 1979 version to which Fr Hannan SJ had made a contribution as an expert on Shona grammar and translation. The same translation has been maintained in the 2002 edition. The Morgenster version emanated from the King James version (KJV) which says “and hast crowned him with glory and honour,” while the Catholics made use of the Revised Standard Version (RSV) which renders the same as “and dost crown him with glory and honour,” both not source versions. Both translations use *makamushongedza* (you adorned him) to denote crowning. In this case they only differ markedly

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in the denotation of the crown, with the RBS opting for transliteration and the RCBC opting for the receptor equivalent.

The same RBS – Catholic dichotomy and eventual cooperation is also visible in the New Testament, where the 1949 version states that *korona yeminzwa* (a crown of thorns) was plaited and put on Jesus' head (John 19:2). The Catholic version of 1966 translates the same as “*chiremba choumambo neminzwa*” (crown of kingship with thorns) (John 19:2). The combined RBS – RCBC effort of 1979 rendered the same translation as “*chiremba cheminzwa*” (crown of thorns). Both the KJV and the RSV render the same: “crown of thorns.” The subsequent translation (*chiremba cheminzwa*) has remained in force in the post-1979 versions, meaning that the translators eventually set aside transliteration in preference for translation. The equivalents in Mark and Matthew follow the same pattern. Thus Mark 15:17 is transliterated “*vakaruka korona yeminzwa*” (they plaited a crown of thorns), 1949, and “*ndokumudzika chiremba choumambo chakarukwa nemizwa*” (and adorned him with the crown of kingship plaited out of thorns) in the 1966 Catholic version. Though the trend generally followed the Catholic version, there was a slight departure in the 1979 version, before returning to it in the 2002 and later versions. The 1979 version maintains that “*vakaruka hata yeminzwa*”. *Hata* is a circular soft cushion/wreath mainly put on the head before seating a bigger/heavy load on it. This translation was dictated by shape rather than the function of the crown of thorns. Thus it was eventually discarded in the next version, and replaced by one resonating well with function (*chiremba cheminzwa*) (Mark 15:17). In Matthew the trend is reestablished: “*vakaruka korona yeminzwa*,” “*vakaruka chiremba choumambo neminzwa*” “*vakaruka chiremba cheminzwa*” (Matthew 27: 29). *Choumambo* (of kingship) is generally dropped in the combined Catholic – Bible Society of Zimbabwe translations because it is already implied in the crown.

The translations for Hebrews 2: 7 run as follows beginning with the 1949 one: “*korona yokubginya nokukudzwa*” (crown of glory and honour/respect), “*chiremba choukuru norukudzo*” (crown of greatness and honour), “*chiremba chembiri norukudzo*” (crown of fame/glory and honour), and then “*ndaza, nembiri norukudzo*” (cloth of honour, fame and respect).⁶¹

Shared Hymn Book: Lutheran and Reformed Church in Zimbabwe

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Zimbabwe and the Reformed Church in Zimbabwe share the same hymn book, which maintains transliteration for crown and chorus. The two swapped territory in 1906; with the Reformers taking over Chibi Mission, Gutu Mission and Zimuto Mission in the then Victoria Province from the Berlin Missionary Society, and the Lutherans taking over the evangelization of Belingwe District in the Midlands Province.⁶² The two mainline Protestant denominations maintain the old transliteration of crown as *k'rona*, which is pronounced as *korona*, while the chorus is rendered *koro*. Two examples from the section on funeral songs entitled “Death and resurrection of believers” will suffice.

Hymn number 174 has a line in stanza three which reads:

Ndingarega kuzokwasha
*K'rona yokum'soro*⁶³
(Can I desist from seeking
The crown of on high?)

Hymn number 176, stanza three, has a line which runs:

Simbisai kutenda kwangu,
Ndigova nesimba
Kuzofamba rwendo rwangu,
*K'rona mugodipa*⁶⁴
(Strengthen my faith,
That I may have strength
To travel my journey,
So you can grant me the crown).

This hymnal rendering of ‘crown’ as *k'rona*, is most likely taken from German *kron* or Dutch/Afrikaans – *kroon*. It is unlikely that it was taken from the Greek *korone* since these translations were horizontal rather than vertical ones which move from source languages to modern or contemporary languages.⁶⁵ Though *corona* was used for some time in English, around 1500, it had been

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directly borrowed from Latin which had adopted it from Greek. “Corona is derived from the Ancient Greek κορώνη (korōnè), meaning ‘garland’ or ‘wreath,’ coming from a proto-Indo-European root, sker- or ker-, meaning ‘to turn’ or ‘to bend.’”⁶⁶ From Greek it entered other European languages from which it eventually found itself into the Shona Bible and hymns. As indicated earlier, the initial Shona versions of the Bible were translated from the KJV and the RSV, and not from source languages. This means the term entered Shona through a European language other than Greek, because Greek versions were not directly consulted in these translations. Chorba is convinced that the “conceptualization of club-shaped spikes on the coronavirus surface comes from traditional representations of crowns as radiate headbands, worn as symbols of sovereign power, to liken that power to that of the sun.”⁶⁷ It is this linkage which is the subject of the current discussion, centering on the ambiguity for the use of songs in which the term *korona* is used. In our case the difficulty was not as coincidental as suggested by Chorba or due to difficulties in reconciling two different languages as suggested by Venuti,⁶⁸ but sheer love of maintaining deliberately created dichotomies by Shona believers preferring transliteration to quality translation. Otherwise by the advent of the coronavirus, the term *korona* would have long been history, or a subject of archival research as noted in the use of *koroni*.

Catholic Popular Crown Funeral Hymns

The Catholics have a tendency of taking extant verses for their songs. One of the commonest examples is taken verbatim from the Hannan translation of Revelations 2: 10 which runs: *Ramba uine chitendero dakara ufe, ndigozokugadza chiremba, chinova ndihwo upenyu* (Lit. Remain faithful till death, and I will crown you, with the crown of life). The 1949 version, which is a faithful rendering of the KJV except for the transliteration runs: *Uve wakatendeka kusvika parufu, ndigokupa korona yovupenyu* (Revelation 2:10 KJV “be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life”). Hymn number 31 of the *Holy Songs* often sung at funerals has its second line in the first stanza translated thus: *Musoro wakagadzwa/ nendaza yeminzwa*⁶⁹ (The head was adorned with a wreath of thorns). The most popular of the Catholic funeral songs original composed for martyrs is named *Mwari inhare yavakarurama/ panguva yokutambudzika*⁷⁰ (God is the protector of the faithful/ in the time

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of grief). The song has a refrain emphasising that *munogadza ndaza yendarama pamusoro pake* (you adorn him with the honorific cloth of gold on his head).

These few examples suffice to demonstrate that the Catholics are exempted from the confusion of the crown of honour with the coronavirus, because their songs and choices of Bibles are free of the transliteration of the term. The next section deals with the empirical solutions to the *korona* songs and verses.

Empirical Mitigation for *Korona* Verses and Songs

Praxes prior to the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic increasingly provided a window for interdenominational participation in funerals, just as seen in Bible Societies beginning from 1968. Pastors from various churches were allowed to provide homilies at a single funeral of one belonging to a particular denomination. As it turned out, each pastor read from the version preferred in his church, allowing the audiences to experience a proliferation of Bible renderings. That resulted in some pastors, preachers and elders calling out to the audience for those with Bibles with renderings other than theirs whenever such translations made their expounding easier. In so doing many Christians became aware that the legal Shona Bibles had differing, though similar translations. In that way, many got to know that the maiden version of the complete Shona Bible had peculiarities not found in other versions. It was therefore easy to snub it when focusing on those verses that resonated with the crown of glory or the passion of Christ during COVID-19 era funerals. In that regard it was set aside by many, with the efficacy of its transliteration questioned for the first time by others.

Now it has become difficult to read out '*korona*', followed by an immediate disclaimer that reference was not being made to the disastrous pathogen. One preacher admitted that it was prudent to avoid unnecessary disclaimers followed by murmurs of disapproval from the mixed funeral congregations. He noted that it was necessary to adjust "before the COVID-19 storm."⁷¹ One learned pastor was sure that if adjustment was not done in time "and the misfortune of India and Brazil catches up with us, then possibilities of violence may not be ruled out if one forces *korona* verses into the ears of the bereaved and their sympathisers."⁷² He vouchsafed, like many, that avoidance

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was the best way forward as long as the pandemic continued to traumatise believers by claiming the scalps of their loved ones. The feeling by some was that the longer the pandemic lasted, the greater the chances of adopting quality translations, especially if at any one time the situation deteriorated. Such a scenario was dubbed ‘progress by compulsion’ by those who foresaw the prominence of the local voice in translation in the event of a prolonged coronavirus scourge.

Greater trouble was observed in funeral songs, because unlike *korona* verses read and expounded on by learned preachers, the area of music was dominated by the ordinary country people with no theological training. More so, selection of songs tended to be spontaneous, hectic and nonprofessional. The *korona* songs enjoyed selection from across the denominational divide because the Christian’s mission on earth was summarised as ‘seeking the crown of glory.’ The song hit hardest by the intuitive ban was what many informants dubbed the “funeral announcer/anthem”; an interdenominational hit whose accompaniment by the African drum always brought premonitions of death. It was a short chorus which ran in the spirit of Revelations 2:10 like this:

Ko-orona!
Ndichashingiria ndiri pamuchinjikwa
*Dzamara ndawana korona*⁷³
(Crown!
I shall endure on the cross
Until I find the crown).

None of the seventeen funerals attended by the author in the period under study were announced by the “anthem.” Seven of the funerals were partially attended (*kubata maoko*); a traditional requirement for every adult to empathise with the bereaved through handshakes (a gesture outlawed by COVID-19 laws) before or soon after the burial of the deceased. In all the seven cases the author attended the pre-burial services, but did not witness the burials. For the remaining ten he was there to the end. On one occasion a man with a drunken stupor raised his voice as a cantor but only managed the first three letters of the song: “*Ko-o...*”⁷⁴ He was brushed away by a murmur of disapproval similarly used by wild guinea fowls after detecting danger to their young ones – spontaneous guttural quack with finality. The only other occa-

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sion was when a woman rose from a long agonised cry with a frenzy, raising a shrill voice to start the inspirational song, but was immediately outcompeted, leading her to come down with a thud like one whose tendons had been untimely snapped.⁷⁵ That was the last attempt at the song that came to the ears of the author during a funeral.

For the Evangelical Lutheran Church and the Reformed Church in Zimbabwe funerals, editions of the songs were more common. Luckily it had become common for pastors and preachers to request the congregation to sing particular verses of chosen songs to aid their homilies. In that case it did not seem out of place for the clergy to snub third stanzas for hymns 174 and 176, thus wisely avoiding disapproval. It was further simplified by the fact that the songs were sung from a service booklet, which made it easier to edit out unwanted stanzas before singing. Many Lutherans and Reformers were adamant that the “k’rona” as a distinct relic of Protestantism could be superseded by Catholic choices of equivalents as happened to the original Morgenster version of the Shona Bible. They were confident that since the editions protected it from open theological examinations, it would survive the pandemic.

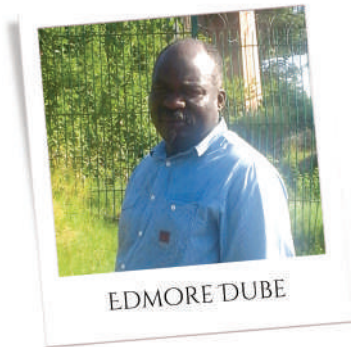
Conclusion

The foregoing has demonstrated that the stifling effects of COVID-19 regulations on funeral praxes have been further complicated by inertia among many believers continuing to hold onto transliteration in the face of subsequent quality translations. Forty years after the replacement of thirty-year old transliterations, Reformers, Lutherans and many Pentecostals continued to hold onto missionary transliterations of the crown of passion and glory. Their adherence to the use of the term *korona*, instead of *chiremba/ndaza yembiri* left them to be overtaken by the confusion caused by the advent of the coronavirus. Their reason for snubbing the latest translations was both ideological and theological. They maintained the missionary attitude towards African traditions as backward, repugnant and worth dissimulating. Thus they used the name *korona* to distinguish the Biblical crown of glory from its loathed and denigrated traditional equivalents. The stalemate created by the advent of COVID-19 led to the ‘editing out’ of *korona* songs and verses. In editing songs, the approach was simply to skip the stanzas with the term *korona*, by

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following an established technique of specifying stanzas to be sung. For the verses, resort was made to those versions using crown equivalents, to give mourners respite from trauma aroused by the pandemic.

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- 74. Observation 2
- 75. Observation 3