Chapter Thee

Shona Traditional Religions Dark Green Spirituality: An Indispensable Intangible Heritage for Sustainable Land Reforms in Zimbabwe

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INTRODUCTION

Zimbabwe's land reform programme has drawn a lot of attention at the political level. It appears there has been little attention to the role of the religio-cultural dimension that inspires this land reform. The role of Shona traditional religious culture in the land reform seems not to have been explored deeper enough. Kriger (1992) studied Zimbabwe's Guerrilla war which is commonly referred to as Chimurenga 2 and in his second chapter, dealt with the subject of land as one of the peasants' grievances that necessitated the rise of the guerrilla war. However, his analysis was shaped by his context in Political Science and inevitably the role of the Shona or Ndebele Traditional religions in both defining and shaping those grievances about land is conspicuously absent in his analysis.

Perhaps a study that draws closer to the kind of investigation that we bemoan for its apparent absence in research of this nature and what we therefore envisage here, is that of Lan (1985). Lan (1985: 31-42) covered a subject we would want to look at in detail here and that is, the role of religion in issues of land. In the particular chapter we cite above, Lan (1985) talks about the involvement of ancestors in land issues before and during the Chimurenga 2 liberation struggle. We do not want to take away credit from Lan (1985) for his detailed coverage of the subject, but perhaps because of his particular focus on the role of spirit mediums in other spheres of the struggle Lan's analysis of the role of religion in land issues in Zimbabwe becomes unfortunately limited. Yet, the liberation struggle is presumed to be the basis of the current land reform programme and the formulation of any policies regarding land and natural resources in general. It is against this background that this study has taken its root to investigate from a broader perspective how the Shona religious and, or, cultural cosmology informs the Shona people's attitude to nature, and land in particular. It is in pursuit of a critical observation that an earlier researcher, Daneel (2001: 25) made about the guerrilla war:

> ..as résistance and political agitation turned into a full-scale liberation struggle, traditional religion inspired the guerrilla fighters, often informed and even directed strategic operations at the front, and did much to secure close cooperation between rural communities and fighters.

Thus, in this chapter it is our insinuation that as the land reform goes on there is need to understand how the Shona's attitude to nature has been shaped by their religious and, or, cultural view of the creation and cosmos in general. Such an exposition is necessary to explain the traditional values and beliefs of the Shona behind such giant

moves such as regaining land and hence, what role Shona traditional religio-culture can play with respect to human treatment for the environment in the light of the land reform in Zimbabwe.

Critical questions in this regard are: What resources in the Shona traditional religio-culture can be harnessed to sustain a caring attitude towards nature? What are the features of the Shona traditional religio-culture which strengthen human respect for nature? From an analysis of our research findings this chapter argues that it is imperative to acknowledge the Shona traditional religio-culture's moral teachings behind any endeavour to conserve the environment among the Shona in order to ensure sustainable land reform. To do this the public education system will have to complement the scientific approach to environment education and environmental awareness with lessons drawn from serious consideration of the Shona traditional religio-culture.

Thus, the chapter argues for the validity of core Shona traditional beliefs as complementary responses to environmental degradation. The basic conviction is that this tradition has the resources necessary to constructively respond to the carelessness and inattention that have led to ecological devastation. The chapter argues that Shona religion contains ancestral inspired wisdom about nature, and that if we pay attention to this indigenous wisdom we can learn to relate to other creatures as *Mwari* intends.

A careful reading of Shona wisdom tradition reveals that authority over things belongs to the guardian of the land; we have no authority to destroy what we ourselves did not create; destruction of a grand master's work by its onlooker, beholder, or curator may be a disgrace to their creator (Bauman, 2011: 59). The job of land reform beneficiaries is to ensure that all creatures can maintain their proper connections with members of their own kind, with the many other kinds with which they interact, with the soil, air, and water upon which they depend for their life and fruitfulness. Thus in this study we find in the Shona wisdom tradition, the ecological lesson of kinship/interconnectedness which can be harnessed to conserve the natural environment. The resources to respond to environmental degradation already exist in the Shona tradition; only that they must be heard. The response of the Shona to ecology should be a recovery of the ecological wisdom waiting to be found in the Shona worldview.

We take particular cognisance of Bauman *et. al.* (2011: 69)'s point that the goal of the kind of reformation we envisage here, strikes a middle path between assuming that the Shona tradition has the answers and that it has none. It assumes that there is validity in what is inherited but also that some dimensions of this tradition like totemism for example, will need to be rethought or reanalysed in light of contemporary reality. Thus, our call for ecological reformation is an attempt to emphasize the validity of the tradition while also leaving room for significant change in the tradition in the light of contemporary scientific ecological insights on environmental degradation. The implication of this is that Shona religion is a vital and relevant tradition, but it must change and develop if it is to remain so.

We take cognisance of the fact that Shona religion is broad and cannot be exhausted in a single book chapter. Therefore, in this chapter we sample only a few religio-cultural-environmental themes namely, to borrow Daneel's (2001: 106) terminology: sense of place, sense of community (kinship/interconnectedness), renewal of human earth relations and awareness of divine presence that can even be traced back from the role

of religion in the liberation struggle. Even with these selected themes we mainly limit our analysis of them to Shona traditional religion in and around Zimunya, what is usually referred to as Jindwi Shona traditional religion. However, be that as it may, our overall analysis draws also from certain fascinating experiences from other regions in Zimbabwe which took place either during the liberation struggle referred to above, or earlier, that we include because of their fecundity to enrich and enhance our overall thesis in this chapter.

THE ROLE OF RELIGION AND ATTITUDE TO NATURE IN THE LIBERATION STRUGGLE

When one of the first batches of guerrillas first came to Chapeyama village among the vaJindwi in Zimunya, one of the researchers had the opportunity to have a recount of some of the observable steps they took. They approached one of the traditional leaders (*madzishe*), whom we latter came to know only as comrade Mambodzakuzvimbira, who took them to the *svikiro* (medium) of the area, Tenzi Mavhima. The researcher was not immediately privy to what transpired at the *svikiro*'s shrine, but came to learn that at the shrine the guerrillas were given spiritual guidance regarding when and how to attack the enemy, refraining from sexual immorality, taboos to watch out for, that included taking the natural environment, both vegetation and animals, as kith and kin. It was intriguing that among the instructions to follow was the encouragement to pay particular attention to animal behaviour, including sounds and gestures they made. Also, there were some stretches of land that were sacred space where even when the guerrillas came into contact with the enemies, engagement was forbidden. The other researcher also corroborated this with similar incidences that occurred in the Marange area where he comes from.

Therefore, that there was a strict connectedness between nature and the guerrillas in the liberation struggle is something that is almost an established fact. Confirmations abound of instances where such animals as baboons and birds like *chapungu* behaved in certain ways that gave warnings to the guerrillas that the enemy was approaching. Day bases were almost always located near sacred caves (*ninga*) whenever these were available. Examples include National day base which was located in a mountain called Mawewe in Mushati Village, Zimunya and Nehanda day base, located in a mountain called Rowa in Chapeyama Village, Zimunya. Reasons for this were many and varied, but the most common belief was that the guardians of the area were resident in and around their burial sites (the *ninga*) and as expected by traditional laws and customs, vegetation around these places would be preserved religiously and hence, the areas had a two-fold protective role. Naturally because of the very thick vegetation the guerrillas easily 'took cover' in such areas and second, religiously the guardians of the land would not allow their burial sites to be 'defiled'. The belief was that even if the enemies spotted the guerrillas, somehow they would either not engage or if they did engage the guerrillas would defeat them. This kind of spirituality that guided the guerrillas is a type of spirituality that has been referred to in scholarly circles as dark green spirituality whose deposits are found in Shona wisdom traditions which we analyse briefly later below before we zero in on the role of Shona traditional religion in land distribution. For now it is congruent to get some insights of dark green spirituality and how it was at play in the liberation struggle as a way of introducing our main subject of discussion.

TAKE COVER! THE ROLE OF DARK GREEN SPIRITUALITY AND CHIMURENGA 2

Dark green spirituality is a mark of dark green religions. Taylor (2009:13) defines dark green religions as those that develop from a deep sense of belonging to and connectedness to nature, while perceiving the earth and its living systems to be sacred and interconnected. Dark green religions place sacred value in the world of nature. Such religions are rooted in ancient traditions of animism and nature spirituality. Dark green religion represents for him a willingness to develop a new spirituality for a new reality, drawing on the old only insofar as it serves the cause of environmental conservation. He writes, laying bare the gist of his definition,

> By dark green religion, I mean religion that considers nature to be sacred, imbued with intrinsic value, and worth of reverence and care. Dark green religion considers non-human species to have worth, regardless of their usefulness to human beings. Such religion promotes an ethics of kinship between human beings and other forms of life (Taylor, 2008:89).

Therefore, as we show above, we can safely surmise that during the Second Chimurenga, the guerrillas were aided by a dark green spirituality. Following instructions from spirit mediums in the various areas they operated in the guerrillas respected immensely the animal life (Fauna) as well as the plant life (flora). The partnership that was created between the freedom fighters and the environment has been captured and finds its expression in the abounding traditions about the war that developed and crystallised into legends and, or, liberation myths. For example, some traditions report that the guerrillas forged a cementing partnership to the extent that animals could give warning to guerrillas about an impending danger and they would react accordingly. Various species in the animal kingdom such as baboons and snakes for example, were the most reliable among the animals that spirit mediums singled out for this function. It is believed that the animals could communicate with the spiritual world and transmit instructions that could guide the combatants. More often than not the enemy was left puzzled: how could they have been detected? (Taringa and Sipeyiye, 2013).

Communication with the spiritual world via the animal kingdom would not be possible if kinship between the guerrillas and the natural environment was absent. Even harmful animals and reptiles spared the guerrillas' lives and vice versa. The combatants would not kill these animals unless a proper ritual was conducted with the assistance of a spirit medium. This underlines the notion that there had to be a justifiable necessity to destroy the animal life.

Similarly, sacred woodlands, wetlands and mountains were used as a refuge by both the combatants and masses during enemy attacks. In the war zones it was a taboo to be seen felling trees or causing veld-fire because everyone knew that without good vegetation they were like fish out of water. The bush also availed fruits and other edibles to energise the freedom fighters and some medicinal herbs to ensure that they remain in sound health. A popular fruit and herb that the guerrillas used among the vaJindwi in Zimunya include *Munengeni (*Ximenia caffra fruit or sour plum) which apart fruit being a delicious fruit, was also a very good antibiotic, especially its leaves. Another herb which the guerrillas who operated in this area used especially to treat wounds was the *Teu*, as it is known among the vaJindwi, or *gavakava* (Aloe Vera). The guerrillas

were enriched with this profound knowledge from the mediums of the area and valued religiously this sacred knowledge.

The land itself was the stage where the interplay of all these forces took place. It gave life to animals and the vegetation as well as hiding places like caves for the guerrillas; it was and is still the abode of the ancestor spirits to whom the people gave libations from time to time for spiritual guidance. In short, the land was an invariant core in the equation of life and therefore, a precious treasure. The spiritual attachment to the land inspired by the Indigenous Religion and revered by the people, ensured a very positive environmental ethic. Overall, in the light of the traditional scenario one can argue that in the past the Shona knew how to deal with nature and the environment. They knew how to use dams; they knew how to protect forests and water sources with the use of belief and value systems attached to those places. They acted as custodians of these resources for future generations within the kinship social group and it was the Indigenous Religions then that inspired an environmental conservation culture by fostering a society that respected some order and harmony amongst all the constituents of the cosmic totality. Thus, the guerrillas' famous outcry: 'Take cover,' was a cry to identify with, and therefore, seek the protection of the land. Hence, the land was the people, the animals, the birds, the plants, the forests, the mountains and the water bodies. It was the entire earth community. The logical conclusion from this analysis is that the second Chimurenga was without doubt grounded in a dark green spirituality whose wellspring was the Shona traditional religio-cultural ecology. The ecological wisdom of kinship and interconnectedness was at play.

It is interesting that the dark green spirituality during the liberation struggle had quite a lasting grip on the guerrillas who spent long stretches of time at the battle front. In an interview recently one such ex-combatant disputed that it was genuine war veterans who were responsible for destroying the natural environment (Lovemore Tandadzayi, personal interview, Seleous Resettlement Area, Chegutu, 1 November, 2014). He was adamant that no genuine war veteran would cause veld fires and kill animals at will as seems to be the case now. Challenged by the researcher that most resettlement areas seem to be under serious environmental degradation, he insisted that many people were of the mistaken idea that most people in those areas are war veterans; yet if the truth were told there may be one or two war veterans in such areas. Whether Tandadzayi's claims are true or not is neither here nor there. Our point remains that the dark green spirituality had quite some grip on the guerrillas and what they believed about their relationship with nature constituted a reality that guided them throughout the liberation struggle.

Be that as it may, we make a very sad observation here that in taking back its land, Zimbabwe seems to have lost this dark green spirituality (Taringa and Sipeyiye, 2013). Why this is so is not immediately clear. However, it is our immediate insinuation in this chapter that perhaps more than thirty years now from the immediate context where the dark green spirituality was at play, the young generation that came out of the liberation struggle and some elements among the old generation are beginning to doubt the efficacy of this spirituality in mitigating some of the negative impact of our land reform on the natural environment. Perhaps, what may be a subject of investigation in a separate research endeavour is the impact of the absence of legitimate traditional leaders in the resettlement areas who would legitimately enforce the dark green

spirituality based on the traditional beliefs about land in the areas where the resettlements are situated. What is clear is that in most resettlement areas either the dark green spirituality is absent or there are no explicit systems in place to enforce it and as we hinted above, it is perhaps because those who are settled in the areas have limited appreciation of the role of the dark green spirituality in environmental preservation. It is in this regard that we revisit the role of some elements of the Shona traditional religion towards the environmental degradation. However, before we do this, or in order for us to do so, there may be need to make a reassessment of the magnitude of the problem we are dealing with.

THE TRAVAIL OF NATURE UNDER LAND REFORM: GREATER EQUITY WITHOUT ECOLOGICAL BALANCE?

The travail of nature under the land reform was observed by Daneel well soon after the Fast track land reform programme launched in 2000. Daneel (2001:8) observed the problem of achieving greater equity in terms of land redistribution which lacked ecological balance. He writes,

> One anticipated that after Zimbabwean Independence there would be a redistribution of land and that, if properly implemented, this would contribute towards greater equity and ecological balance. One assumed that there would be control and conservation in what traditionally had been regarded as sanctuaries. It was not to be. Soon after Chimurenga a large number of squatters were allowed to settle in the catchment area of Lake Kyle near Great Zimbabwe. In no time large sections of the Musasa and Mutondo forests were gone, and the sandy soil lay bare in the sun, ready to be carried away by the ton to the watery depth of the lake where it would add to the problems of siltation and, as side effect, bedevil the sugar cane industry in the low veld.

This problem seems to have dogged the beneficiaries of the fast track land reform. The players this time are no longer squatters as during Daneel's time of writing. The new players are people who have been formally allocated land. Below we present three cases in which it is clear that the spirit of greater equity with ecological balance and the dark green spirituality that aided the armed struggle seem to be lacking among newly resettled farmers.

1. **We have been allocated land in the area…**

   The chief was also engaged in a wrangle with farmers. One of the most worrying environmental disasters was the massive destruction of trees in the area adjacent to the Great Dyke around Kildonia area, near Mutoroshanga. Several vehicles and trucks were seen loaded with firewood going from the area to Harare. They bought large stocks of firewood for resale, which was big business in Harare. Most of the farmers said they had been allocated the land and that is why were cutting down trees so haphazardly. "We have been allocated land in the area". Deforestation was controlled by well-organised cartels that included politicians, businessmen and farmers. The chief was facing resistance. The chief's lamentation is captured in the following words: 'The farmers are now blatantly defying my orders to vacate the area, despite the promise to have land reallocated to them elsewhere. We are fighting

running battles with these farmers almost every day, but some of them are seeking protection from political leaders and this is very sad for our environment. I gave them a three day eviction notice, but they resisted eviction order.' There was also rampant cutting down of trees near a sacred shrine called Maringambizi, which had traditionally been a place reserved for ancestral worship and performing traditional rituals. Chief Zvimba has made an arrangement with ministry of lands to take over all the places that are considered sacred in the area (Bwititi, 2009: 16).

2. **Clear much of the trees to farm! This section has not been used for crops……..**

   When Phides Mazhawidza was shown her newly allocated A2 farm in Goromonzi, she was dismayed to find that it was covered with trees. While she admired the miombo woodlands with its beautiful musasa and munondo trees, her heart sank when she realised that she would have to clear much of it to farm. Phides farm was a subdivision of a large commercial farm in a region of high agricultural potential and her section had not been used for crops" (Hanlon, Manjengwa and Smart, 2013: 175).

   Land reform means unused land is being cleared and land is being used intensively, which makes trees a key issue. There is an increased demand for wood for fuel, in particular for curing tobacco and to sell to urban dwellers. So far land-reform farmers seem to be managing their trees, but they will need to be monitored. Fast track land reform and economic crisis caused by hyper-inflation have created two serious environmental problems that will not be solved by simple enforcement (Hanlon, Manjengwa and Smart, 2013: 187).

3. **Cutting down trees, Veld fires**

   Maposa, Hlongwani and Muguti (2011:160) decry the impact of the land reform on the environment. They observe that "In spite of the fact that the Land Reform programme has posited some apparent successes in the particular provision of land as a source of livelihood for thousands of peasants who were landless, it is causing almost unmitigated environmental disaster. It is a hard reality to note that *varimi vatsva* (new farmers) are involved in wanton tree cutting in resettled farmlands. Trees are disappearing at catastrophic rapidity. This is causing deforestation, an issue that is intrinsically linked to environmental degradation. Kwekwe town is fast turning into a desert. The reasons are not far to seek. The new farmers have occupied the adjacent former white commercial farming properties such as Congela, Dunlope Extension, Milsonia Ranch and Maivalle Ranch.

   Apart from the indiscriminate cutting down of trees, *varimi vatsva* have been widely accused of causing veld fires in the former white farmlands across the country. However from the onset, it must be stated that the issue of who causes the fire is a contentious one. Firstly, it is alleged that communal peasants cause veld fires. Fire outbreaks commonly occur during the dry season when conditions favour the spread of the fire from one point to the other. The communal peasants move around and smoke out bees in search of honey from the veld. Secondly, some *varimi vatsva* incidentally cause veld fire during land preparation. Despite being motivated by the practical need to survive, *varimi vatsva* are the chief culprits in the sense that they are also involved in hunting animals for game meat in their new found domains (Maposa, Hlongwani and Muguti, 2011: 161).

From the above scenarios we observe with concern that land reform and economic crisis have created serious environmental problems that will not be solved, as Hanlon, Manjengwa and Smart (2013: 187) correctly state, by simple enforcement. The first scenario reflects an attitude that the mere allocation of land gives the recipients of the land the right to only want to destroy trees without heed to calls from the traditional leaders and the chiefs. The actions of the resettled farmers display utter ignorance of the spirituality that guided the guerrillas to wrestle the land from the white settlers in the first place. It boggles the mind what exactly are the philosophical principles informing their actions. The second scenario may be a genuine quest to clear land for farming. However, it seems the farmers are limited in terms of their farming options. Is farming limited only to tilling the land? In such a scenario too, some scholars have argued for a balance between the need to clear the land for farming and the concern to preserve the natural environment. We carry this debate in some critical way later in the analysis towards the conclusion. Scenario number three is interesting. Explanation for the rapid destruction of trees is difficult to explain at first, but upon closer analysis and as with elsewhere where the new farmers have been resettled, four reasons have been given for this wanton cutting of trees and veld fires. First, clearing land for farming; second, firewood for both domestic use more occasionally for curing tobacco which has become bewitchingly popular among the new farmers; third, firewood for sale to urban dwellers who are experiencing lots of power cuts that leave them with few if not no alternative sources for energy for use in the home; and finally, though the most interesting of the reasons particularly for veld fires, trees have been cut down and veld fires initiated to clear hunting grounds for game. In the latter case then it is not just the trees and grass that are in danger of total destruction, but also the wild animals that have always enjoyed these forests as their natural habitats. The initial relationship of connectedness with nature that became manifest in the liberation struggle is completely lost.

It is in this light that this chapter calls for a crucial reconsideration of the use of Shona traditional religion to reinstate dark green spirituality that as we observe above, left a marked impression in the majority of the ex-combatants. Traditional indigenous religion has an important contribution to make. It can give meaning and motivation in the overall process of building an ecological ethos, and thus it can contribute to the foundations of an ecological ethics for sustainable land reform. For many people around the world, religious faith continues to provide fundamental meaning to many social phenomena and processes. Given the history of the involvement of religion in the struggle, it would seem that for the Shona people, especially those involved in the liberation struggle and those who value it, ecological commitment can receive its deepest grounding only at a religious level.

There are many beliefs and practices that are life-giving within the indigenous wisdom traditions, ones that can be brought forward into the contemporary world and nurture and sustain present day social development processes. Of course this is not to say this is an easy task to harness old religious traditions to answer to present day challenges. It is a hermeneutical task that cannot be ignored that easily. In fact, all religious traditions face this hermeneutical challenge, which Ferguson (2010: 35-36) succinctly articulates: asking the sacred events of their history, often written about in sacred scripture or kept alive in oral tradition, to leap forward into the present for instruction and give guidance for the future.

As may have been observed already this paper unearths both the cosmological roots and belief systems of the Shona as motivating forces in the mobilisation of an environmental ethic for sustainable land reform programme. We agree with Daneel (2001) who argues the unparalleled fecundity of the Shona religion to do so. Daneel (2001: 106) argues that,

> The insight it (indigenous or as he calls it primal religion, in this case Shona traditional religion) generates may be significant for the development of a relevant eco-theology or environmental ethic in the global village. Numerous anthologies comprising contributions from all parts of the world reveal acute awareness among academics of the value of the "primal" religions, alongside other world religions, for a radical rethink of the prevailing anthropocentric ethic in industrial consumer societies with its devastating impact on natural resources. Generally they do so by giving examples of the role primal religions with a view to replacing this anthropocentric ethic, understood as an emphasis on human wellbeing at the expense of nonhuman life and the resources of the earth.

We get into the cosmological roots and belief systems that give Shona religion this unparalleled fecundity to avert environmental degradation.

THE PRIMARY UNITY: HUMAN BEINGS, SPIRITS AND NATURE

In the Shona worldview we may infer that people look out upon cosmos partaking at once the qualities of human beings, nature and God/ancestors. That which the Shona confront seems not to be three separate things. But it is rather one thing with different aspects of vitality. We note that if we compare their worldview with a triangle of the three conceptions of human beings, nature and God/ancestors- the Shona worldview is one in which the triangle itself might not be very apparent. This unitary character of the cosmos in the case of Shona people is recognised when it is said that the world of the Shona is pervaded with sacredness. So there seems to be an aspect of the primary unity which the land reform programme managers may use.

KINSHIP WITH NATURE: I-THOU VIS-A-VIS I-IT RELATIONSHIP

Contemporary environmental policies have much to learn about kinship from traditional cultures of indigenous peoples. The kinship model challenges the scientific model of domination and exploitation. The Shona people emphasise intense knowledge of the aspects of nature in the land in which one lives and have rapport with nature. Shona attitudes may be confined to one geographical region. So it may be difficult to translate to other places where different aspects of nature do not necessarily hold the same religious significance. The underlying assumption is that the Shona people identify some aspects of nature as positive and vital parts of religious life particularly providence and soteriology. Because there is kinship between ancestors, human beings and nature there is a sense in which the Shona worship nature. In the myth of creation we learn that humans and nature descended from the same ancestors. So in relation to kinship the Shona emphasise appropriate restrictions or taboos for relating to nature. There is need for an **I-Thou** relationship. Human relationship with nature is seen far more than an I-**IT** relationship. This moves from objectifying nature as an "**IT**" (Edwards, 2006:

24). There should be a relationship of mutuality. Mutuality is a central norm for Shona environmental ethics. Ferguson (2010) confirms this life-giving dimension of traditional Shona wisdom with reference to indigenous wisdom traditions in general. He states that,

> [t]he indigenous wisdom traditions have tremendous respect for nature and see human life as integrated with nature rather than as exploitative. Their outlook, while not fully articulated in a scientific way, is fundamentally ecological in character. These people know that they belong to nature, heart and soul, and must live in harmony with it in ways that honor the patterns and order of the universe. The whole human family is learning this "inconvenient truth" that they must now live in ways that respect nature, given the overwhelming challenges of a deteriorating environment and global warming. Spirituality is profoundly ecological in character (Ferguson, 2010:36).

Paul Santmire rightly argues for such a truly personal relationship between human beings and nature. He takes up Martin Buber's **I-Thou** concept, proposing that the human relationship with nature is to be seen as far more than an **I-IT** relationship. He argues for an extension of Buber's personalism to include nature as a mysterious other to which a human I can relate. In this sense, he argues for relationships of mutuality between persons and other creatures of nature (Edwards, 2006: 24). Daneel (2001: 90) confirms the kinship model in the following words,

> Traditional African ecology, like everything else in Shona society, is inseparably linked with traditional religion. Environmental protection is sanctioned by the creator God and the guardian ancestors of the land. Trees symbolise ancestral protection and/or various forms of continuing ancestral involvement in the community of the living and their habitat. Birds and animals are considered a legitimate food resource for humankind. But strict rules were laid down for the protection and survival of all species and, as was poignantly illustrated during chimurenga, certain animals and birds were considered to be direct emissaries from the spirit world to the community of the living. Water resources were protected through the prohibition of river bank cultivation and elaborate rules regarding the prudent use of marshlands, springs, and fountains. In the event of abuse, mystical retaliation could be expected: animal predators or snakes threatening human life at the site of the spoilt water resource, or the departure of benevolent water spirits.

SACREDNESS OF THE LAND

The Shona share with most Africans the belief in land as sacred. Land is sacred because it bears the remains of the ancestors, particularly in the form of graves of the chiefs. Shona religion is based on the grave. In the central rituals of *kumutsa mudzimu* (rituals in honour of ancestors) the point of entry is the grave. In other rituals, libations are poured on the ground. In the land is also buried the umbilical code of a people. It is the abode of the dead and when counting members of the family the Shona always include *varipasi* (those who are dead). Land is the rallying point because non-human creatures also live on the land. Although non-human creatures do not get buried when they die as humans do, they, like human beings, decompose on the land after they have died. As

a result, land is respected or sacralised in sayings such as *pasi ratsamwa, pasi panodya* (the land is angry, the land eats). (Taringa, 2014: 49).

The issue here is that if everything dies and decomposes, it will form part of the soil, hence *pasi panodya*. Land belongs to the living, the unborn and the dead of both human and non-human creatures. The Shona believe that if one does not relate to sacred aspects of nature according to prescribed taboos and restrictions the ancestors would be angry *(kutsamwa)* and as result some misfortune, such as drought and epidemics, might befall the community. So the fundamental attitude to land is a religious one and is based on fear of mystical sanction by the ancestors. This underlies all attitudes to other aspects of nature like animals. In fact the land is the entire earth community (Taringa, 2014: 49). Daneel (2001:107) confirms this observation succinctly. He writes:

> It is not coincidental that the Shona people's overriding concern during the political liberation struggle and in our current war of trees was and is still the lost land. This concern is rooted in a religiously inspired sense of place. The land is the people, the animals, the plants, the entire earth community-unborn, living, dead. In other words, the land is the totality of known and unknown existence. Invasion of the land by foreigners and destruction of its resources for human gain or "progress" make the people living there rootless serfs and aliens. Through internal and external displacement they lose touch with the dwelling places of their ancestors, hence with their own cultures and history. Thus recapturing the land politically and restoring the land environmentally are integral processes in the individual and group experience of spiritual rebirth, revival and growth.

SOTERIOLOGY

To the Shona, both human beings and nature have intrinsic value. Furthermore, the sacredness of some aspects of nature is linked to ruling chiefdom and the fertility of the land. So life forms depend on nature. It is good to respect nature because only happy ancestors in liaison or communication with spirit creatures such as the Lion or the Python who are deemed to be guardians of the land work together to give people good rains. Thus, the Shonas' attitude to nature is a model of restraint in the knowledge that not everything we can do should be done. For instance, in order to get good rains, we must not kill terrestrial creatures unnecessarily.

Thus, human beings and nature are bound together by mutual limits and prohibitions. The interaction has both personal and ritual meaning. Shona people hear voices in sacred beings around them that guide them in living together for mutual benefit. This is based on the concept of *shura* (an mystery). The Shona way is an ethic of minimal intervention. Since ancestral spirits are part of nature's furniture, there is a sense in which nature takes care of itself.

REVERENCE FOR LIFE AND RESPONSIBILITY

Reverence for life is accepted in the worldview of traditional Shona religio-cultural worldview. It entertains the sacredness of nature. Yet the vision that seems to be driving

the land reform programme is more influenced by mechanistic thinking. The mechanistic thinking finds it hard to entertain the sacredness of nature. The Shona people believe that all life forms are important including the lives of non-human creatures. Responsibility is a principle that enables the Shona to revere nature and appreciate its trans-physical dimensions. It is an ethical principle in the sense that as the Shona understand the unity of life and the fact that they are part of nature, and one with nature then they take responsibility for life, for all life. So the understanding of the sacredness of nature implies responsibility for it. Scientific and rational land reform ethic without responsibility is monstrous to the environment. In fact ethics without responsibility is empty. Shona traditional religion is consistent with observations made about indigenous wisdom in general.

The indigenous wisdom traditions teach an ethical way of life that places value on personal character, respect for all and responsibility and duty within the social order. Other religious and philosophical traditions do as well, but there is persuasive and evocative understanding of the call to an ethical life in the wisdom traditions, one rooted in nature, story and personal experience. Again, we are cautious not to romanticise native peoples; they struggled in the ways that all humans struggle to close the gap between the **is** and **the** ought. Were there those within the communities that practised the faith of the tradition and are there hypocrisy in their current expression? Of course, but the vision of the ethical way of life in these traditions is one model for those of us who struggle to live with integrity and honour our deepest beliefs and values, pulled away by as we are by a selfish and materialistic culture, which teaches that happiness consists in the abundance of things possessed (Ferguson, 2010: 37).

ANALYSIS OF FUNDAMENTAL OBSERVATIONS: SHONA DARK GREEN SPIRITUALITY IS INDISPENSABLE

It goes without saying that ecology is at the heart the Shona Traditional Religio-Culture. The indigenous Shona wisdom traditions have tremendous respect for nature and see human life as integrated with nature rather than as exploitative of nature. Their outlook while not fully articulated in a scientific way is fundamentally ecological in character. These Shona people knew that they belong to nature, heart and soul and must live in harmony with it in ways that honour the patterns and order of the universe. Shona spirituality is profoundly ecological in character. Humanity considered as members of a larger spiritual family. Humans are not at the centre of the world or superior to the rest of creation. It is the human responsibility to respect and live in harmony with all other beings.

Human beings are members of a larger spiritual family. It is common to hear members of indigenous communities call non-human living beings "people". For example birds are said to be winged people, trees standing people, and fish people who swim in the waters. This is not a result of a limited vocabulary in indigenous languages, but because all beings in the shared indigenous worldview are typically understood to be members of one spiritual family. From this perspective we humans live in a bio-centric as opposed to an anthropocentric, world. Humans are not thought to be the centre of the world or superior to the rest of creation. Humans are thought to have souls and other beings also have souls or spirits.

For indigenous people all life is spiritual. The spiritual world is not separate from us; we live in a spiritual world at all times, whether we are aware of it or not. Indeed as must be stressed there is, but one world from the perspective of the indigenous worldview. The indigenous worldview is bio-centric and animistic, meaning that all living beings are seen as members of one interdependent spiritual community. From this perspective, it is critically imperative that humans live in harmony with the rest of the natural world.

The traditional worldview of indigenous cultures affirms that other beings are alive and conscious just as humans and with humans, form a single ecological community. There is a sense of kinship which causes indigenous people to have a sense of kinship with all beings and approach other beings as brothers and sisters. Other animals are considered fellow people whose rights must be honoured and who have a great deal to teach those who are attentive. Stones, trees, mountains, lakes and all other natural objects also are alive and can educate those willing to listen to them. We are in one nest. The earth as a whole is alive and must be treated with respect. In the indigenous worldview, the world exits in a delicate balance, so humans must always act reciprocally, taking only that which is truly needed and replacing whatever is used. Everything done is seen as part of scared interaction between humans and the rest of nature (Young, 2005: 283).

CONCLUSION

This chapter has demonstrated how the Shona's attitude to nature has been shaped by their religious and, or, cultural view of the cosmos and creation. Such an exposition was necessary to explain the traditional values and beliefs of the Shona behind such giant moves such as regaining land and hence, what role Shona traditional religio-culture can play with respect to human treatment of the environment in the light of the land reform in Zimbabwe.

From an analysis of our research findings in this chapter, we argue that it is imperative to acknowledge the Shona traditional religio-culture's moral teachings behind any endeavour to conserve the environment among the Shona in order to ensure sustainable land reform. Core Shona beliefs/ideas/practices are valid as a response to the environmental problem and we strongly believe that this wisdom in tradition has the resources necessary to constructively respond to the carelessness and inattention to that may lead to ecological devastation. The wisdom, as demonstrated in this chapter, is embedded in beliefs and practices related to the primary unity: human beings, spirits, nature, kinship with nature: i-thou vis-a-vi-it relationship, sacredness of the land, soteriology and reverence for life and responsibility. These are couched in the strong Shona belief in ancestral spirits and animism.

Shona traditional religio-culture contributes a dark green spirituality since it develops from a deep sense of belonging to and connectedness in nature, while perceiving the earth and its living systems to be sacred and interconnected. We need to draw from the old only insofar as it serves the cause of environmental conservation. Shona traditional religion consists of a worldview and an ethos that combine to reinforce each other. The set of beliefs that the Shona have about what is real, what spirits exit and so forth (worldview), supports a set of moral values and emotion s(ethos) and guides them as

they live and thereby confirm their beliefs about nature. It is hard to imagine that ancestors exist as part of the Shona worldview, but then in taking back the land we treat the environment as if there are no ancestors and *Mwari*.

One crucial question that may need further exploration is: Is the environmental problem a problem to which Shona religion is prepared to respond to constructively? If the resettled farmers seek to do something about this problem, are they best served by *recovering* wisdom in the tradition they have inherited, by *reforming* those traditions in light of the new situation, or by *replacing* traditional religion in favour of something new and better suited to the current crisis? There may be need to take a middle path between assuming that the Shona tradition has all the answers or that it has none; and assume that there is validity in what is inherited, but also that some dimensions may need to be re-thought or re-analysed in light of contemporary reality. Nevertheless, conservation strategies that do embrace the green religion practices could yield positive results if they are ingenuously explored and adapted.

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