MOTHER EARTH, MOTHER AFRICA & AFRICAN INDIGENOUS RELIGIONS

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THE SEDATED SACRED

A socioreligious analysis of Zimbabwe's land reform programme and environmental degradation

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Abstract

Traditionally, amongst the Shona of Zimbabwe environmental conservation was greatly tied to their religious beliefs. The use of taboos was meant to regulate the way natural resources were utilised. Academic scholars have noted how taboos played a crucial role not in only promoting environmental conservation but also in punishing those who would degrade the environment. Appealing to the sacred was a useful tool in ensuring adherence to the socioreligious beliefs that were meant to maintain sustainability within the environment. That colonialism tampered to a certain extent with these beliefs is well documented. Within the Zimbabwean context, the Fast Track Land Reform Programme (FTLRP) of 2000 seems to have had a negative impact on what was left of the taboos amongst the various Shona ethnic groups. It is the contention of this chapter that the FTLRP has had the effect of 'sedating' the sacred, as people have violated the taboos related to the environment with impunity. The focus of this chapter is to find out if a process of reawakening the sacred amongst the Shona would help in promoting the kind of land ownership that is closely linked to environmental conservation, which would in turn eventually lead to sustainable development for Zimbabwean communities. In this endeavour, the critical role of women in environmental conservation needs some interrogation. The chapter is a desktop study, hence it draws largely on secondary sources. Ecowomanism will be used as the theoretical framework informing this study.

Introduction

The nexus between religion and the environment is indisputable and "it is not new" (Simkins, 2008:1). The contemporary world at large is facing an environmental crisis. It is beyond doubt that human beings are at the centre of this crisis. As such,

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the environmental crisis that Africa, in general, and Zimbabwe, in particular, face brings to the fore not only questions about how religions have contributed to the crisis, but also how they can offer a solution to this predicament. This chapter seeks to make a socioreligious analysis of the impact of the Zimbabwe Fast Track Land Reform Programme (FTLRP) on the environment. Our major argument is that the sedation of the sacred that occurred through, amongst other things, the silencing of women, the incapacitation of traditional leaders, and the perceived inaction of the spiritual entities has led to the exploitation of the natural environment both for the rural and resettlement areas in Zimbabwe. The chapter relied heavily on secondary sources, since it is largely a desktop study. In terms of theory, the chapter is informed by the African ecowomanist theory. According to Harris (2017), ecowomanism is a theoretical framework that features race, class and gender, as well as intersectional analysis, to examine environmental injustice on the planet. In her explanation, Harris (2017) says that ecowomanism builds upon an environmental justice paradigm that links social justice to environmental justice. As such, it highlights the necessity for race-class-gender intersectional analysis when examining the logic of domination and unjust public policies that result in environmental exploitation (Harris, 2017). Critical to this chapter is how the theory is shaped by religious world views reflective of African cosmologies that uphold a moral imperative for Earth justice (Harris, 2017). From an African ecowomanist perspective, we seek to analyse the environmental injustice that was unleashed by the FTLRP in Zimbabwe. By employing the ecowomanist theoretical framework, we seek to show that the reawakening of the sacred amongst the Shona requires the recognition of Shona women's knowledge of environmental management and protection.

Clarification of key terms

The term 'sacred' is etymologically derived from the Latin word *sacer* meaning holy. Defining the term can be done using substantial and situational approaches. In the former, the sacred is seen as the mysterious and powerful manifestation of reality, and emphasises the ultimacy of the supernatural significance. In the latter, nothing is seen as inherently sacred and the meaning of sacred is open to any interpretation (Chidester & Linenthal, cited in Mu, 2015). The two approaches are relevant for our conceptualisation of the sacred in this chapter. In our analysis, the 'sacred' is conceptualised at three levels. We conceptualise it first at the level of what Rudolf Otto (1869-1937) calls the 'Holy', meaning the *numinous*, and as that which is central to religious life. At the second level are the traditional leaders who are referred to as sacred practitioners and are seen as the custodians of the land (the environment included). The third level is that of the Shona women who, through an ecowomanist lens, are seen as the feminine divine and whose role within the environment cannot

be overlooked. On the other hand, the term 'sedation' is rooted in the medical field, where anaesthetics are used in order to make one unconscious of the pain in their body. In this chapter, we wish to show how the FTLRP has had the effect of silencing and disempowering the sacred, as conceptualised according to the aforementioned levels, to such an extent that environmental degradation goes on unabated. The application of 'sedation' in relation to religion was first used by Karl Marx, when he implied that the sacred is a narcotic which, while it may be utilised to alleviate pain, remains an illusory amelioration in a situation of despair (Luchte, 2009). In this chapter, we are not looking at the sacred as a sedative, but as an object that has been sedated. We apply the term sedation not in its literal sense, but as a metaphor for inaction, incapacitation, disempowerment and/or silencing of those who are usually expected to act in the interest of the environment. In the next section, we analyse environmental conservation in precolonial Shona society.

Environmental conservation in traditional Shona society: Bringing women to the centre

The environmental catastrophe that Africa faces today requires an exploration of the potential role that African Traditional Religions can play in mitigating the crisis. What this implies is that African indigenous ecological knowledge can offer a solution to the crisis. A reading of Mbiti (1969) has shown that it is very difficult to extricate the religiosity of Africans from their day-to-day lives, including their engagement with the environment. African Traditional Religions are closely linked to the environment. Nana (2016:164) highlights that "it is impossible to separate African Traditional Religion from ecological system and all that are in its trees, oceans, rivers and seas, mountains, stones which serve as mediums through which Africans worship the Supreme Being". A number of scholars agree that African Traditional Religions have inherent mechanisms that acted as a resource for environmental conservation and management principles (Daneel, 1999; Nana, 2016; Tarusarira, 2017).

The traditional³ Shona world view is consistent with the general traditional African world view (Taringa, 2014). Basically, Shona cosmology is tripartite in nature comprising the underworld, the physical world and the spirit world. Though divided into three discrete entities, these three worlds are closely interconnected. The spirit world is where the Supreme Being (*Mwari*) resides. *Mwari* produces the rain that fertilises the Earth. Very close to the Supreme Being are spirits, that is, ancestral and nature spirits. Moving from the spirit world, there is the physical world. People occupy the physical world. However, *Mwari* is also found in caves and mountains, for example, the Domboshava caves. The implication is that for the Shona, *Mwari* is

3 The word 'traditional' is used to denote precolonial society as well as the world view, cosmology and culture that have evolved from the personal experiences of indigenous African peoples.

both transcendent and immanent. Other things found in the human world are hills, mountains, trees, grass, animals, creatures and reptiles, caves, and birds. All these animate and inanimate objects are important because *Mwari* and spirits can reside in them, so to some extent they are sacred. Finally, there is the underworld. The underworld is the abode of the ancestors; they are buried in the graves. The dead are perceived not as dead, but as asleep. Once in the grave, the human being takes on a spiritual form. Water is also found in the underworld and can be the abode of mermaids. Eneji and Ntamu (2012) aver that despite humanity, nature and the gods being distinct concepts, they belong to some ontological categories that are interrelated and interdependent. Gwaravanda (2016) concurs with this view when he explains that African environmental philosophy through *ubuntu* emphasises cosmic interconnectedness, relationality and coexistence. As such, the Shona were able to use natural resources constructively in ways that ensured that they were not depleted. To this end, Shona practices ensured that the equilibrium within the ecosystem was maintained.

Makaudze and Shoko (2015) posit that traditional Shona society jealously guarded against the devastation of the environment and other natural resources, since the focus was not only on exploring and utilising the environment, but also devoting equal attention to safeguarding it against extinction or pollution. In Makaudze and Shoko's analysis, this was crucial as it aided in curbing problems such as erratic rainfall patterns, desertification, siltation, etc. Other scholars writing on Africa concur with this view. In their study of Ghana, Alexander, Agyekumhene and Allman (2017) note that before the introduction of Western conservation methods to Africa, many communities had already established resource management systems based on complex religious and cultural belief systems that incorporated myths, taboos, totems and social norms. In the same way, the Shona had environmental taboos that played the moral role of sustaining the ontological well-being of both the people and the environment (Chemhuru & Masaka, 2010). Taboos, like other African oral art forms, are based on the immediate environment and are passed from one generation to the other (Makaudze & Shoko, 2015). For example, in order to protect the habitat in the mountains, there were prohibitions and restrictions through taboos that governed access. For the record, certain mountains amongst the Shona are considered to be sacred because chiefs are buried in caves in the mountains. A case in point is the Chikapakapa Mountain in the Kadoma district (Mashonaland, West Province). Traditionally, this mountain was believed to be home to the ancestors of the Mushava clan. Going by its name, Chikapakapa has sexual connotations. The term '*chikapa*' refers to the rhythmic sexual movements that are performed for the man by a woman during sexual intercourse. What this implied was that Chikapakapa was the mountain of creation. Reduplicating the

noun showed that it was not only the mountain of creation but of recreation as well (the woman is central to this creation and recreation). Tales are often told of how cries of young babies were heard on particular days from the mountain. The spirit medium of the Mushava clan resided close to this mountain and the rainmaking rituals were performed there. There is a point at which this mountain is split into two by the Manhize⁴ River. At the point of the split is where the river's source is situated and just below it is a sacred pool.⁵ People would observe taboos associated with both the mountain and the pool. For example, permission had to be sought if people wanted to go to the mountain to gather wild fruit and they were instructed never to complain if they found rotten fruit. The other taboo was never to throw stones as a way of getting the fruit from the trees. Only fruit that had fallen from the tree could be gathered. If one got thirsty and wanted drinking water from the pool, one was expected to use the shell of Mutamba fruit. The whole idea was that, if the shell accidentally falls into the pool, it would float and could easily be taken out of the water, thereby ensuring that the water remained clean. Such taboos apply in other areas such as natural vegetation and wildlife as well.

Through totemism, the Shona were able to maintain a balanced ecosystem. Mandillah and Ekose (2018) explain that a totem is any natural or mythical animal, plant, bird or insect that serves as a symbol of a family or clan whose members feel a close connection during their lives and these members do not eat, kill or trap such totemic animals, birds or fish. From Mandillah and Ekose's (2018) point of view, totems have been used for the primary purpose of preserving humanity, in that they have in many ways culminated in the preservation of other life forms bequeathed to humankind on whom one is dependent such as sacred forests, rocks, mountains and rivers. The belief in totemism needs to be understood as a way of trying to manage how these resources were used by the Shona. The chief and other sacred practitioners, such as spirit mediums, played important roles in this regard.

In terms of cultivation, the Shona had high regard for the land. Taringa (2014) points out that the sacredness of the land lies in the fact that the Shona believe that it is the back (*musana*) of the ancestors on which nature and humanity are carried. As such, it is in the land that one's *rukuvhute* (umbilical cord) is buried. This is the reason why there is a common phrase uttered by the Shona about themselves: '*mwana wevhu*' (a child of the soil). This is a clear indication of how the Shona understand their connection to the land, which clearly shows that a baby is not only a part of the family but of the whole community. The umbilical cord was also

4 Manhize is a name given to one of the ancestors of the Mushava clan, meaning that the river itself is sacred.

5 The sacred pools were dotted along the river until the point it met with Mungezi River.

regarded as a symbolic connection with one's ancestors. Women become crucial in this regard, because it is they who mediate the child's connection to the land by burying the umbilical cord in the soil. This is the reason why in precolonial Africa women often played a key role in indigenous systems of environmental protection, because for them the environment guaranteed the existence of future generations. As such, women were transmitters of key environmental knowledge to younger generations. In traditional Shona society, women played pivotal roles especially in the socialisation of the child. First, through the art of mothering, Shona women were able to transmit knowledge about the environment to their children. It is the mother who would teach the child the expectations of society, including how the child would relate to nature. It is therefore not surprising that the majority of storytellers amongst the Shona were women. Folk tales were told by women to children around a fire.

Women in traditional societies also had a close relationship with the environment, because they were the ones who gathered fruit and firewood, and collected water from the water sources. It is women who, on a daily basis, were confronted with the need to observe taboos associated with the environment. Thus, Mazarire (2003:41) notes that "though women were subordinate to men in pre-colonial societies, they were viewed as important in the roles of managing the environment". This is evidenced in that female symbolism is typical of Shona cosmology. In his study of Chivi society in Zimbabwe, Mazarire (2003) concludes that the importance of women and their role in utilising and conserving the environment was acknowledged.

Generally, in traditional Shona society women were tillers of the land. Precolonial Africa was dependent on agriculture, and women and children did much of the work. This is the reason why polygamy was acceptable, as men were looking for more people to work the land. In this regard, women were careful in the way that they treated the land, because they understood that their livelihood depended on the land. The Shona were to a very large extent not shifting cultivators,⁶ but had other ways of preserving the fertility of the soil. For example, practices such as crop rotation and intercropping were key. Since women were tillers of the land, they held the knowledge of how these activities were done. We make these assertions cognisant of the fact that Shona society was largely patriarchal and men would at times dictate what needed to be grown on which piece of land. However, women would always bring the knowledge of what was planted in the different pieces of land and what could be planted in each season, so that the fertility of the soil was not compromised. Women played pivotal roles during ritual performances that demanded a strict

6 A form of agriculture, used especially in tropical Africa, in which an area of ground is cleared of vegetation and cultivated for a few years and then abandoned for a new area until its fertility has been naturally restored.

adherence to specific regulations that had to do with the environment. For example, beer for rainmaking rituals was brewed by postmenstrual women.

Colonialism, the Shona and the natural environment: Pushing women from the centre

Ikuenobe (2014) notes that a significant difference between Africans and Europeans during colonisation was their moral attitudes towards nature. He further argues that activities that have raised environmental concerns in Africa did not exist prior to colonialism, because Africans adopted conservationist values, practices and ways of life. Although such a view tends to romanticise the African past, and are largely disputed by Taringa (2014), they do reflect the African attitude towards nature.

The land division through the Land Apportionment Act (1930), Land Husbandry Act (1951) and Land Tenure Act (1969) alienated the traditional African ecologists from the holy places situated on white farms because traditional land tenure had been badly disrupted (Daneel, 1999). The laws apportioned the land area equally between whites and blacks, with 50.8% of good-weathered fertile soils for the white minority and the rest for Africans and wild animals (Essof, 2013). Actually, Africans were given 30% of the low-rainfall areas with poor soils (Masengwe, 2011; Christopher, 1971). Manley (1995) argues that the Land Husbandry Act completely ignored the customary basis of African land tenure by introducing the principle of individual and negotiable rights to strictly demarcated registered holdings.

The colonialists brought with them their flora and fauna, which disrupted the ecological landscapes of most Shona societies. The Shona did not have any knowledge of how to manage these or their effect on the natural environment. Carruthers (2004) has highlighted the importance of the indigenous versus introduced or exotic animals and plants. The other danger was that colonial powers introduced to Africa the commodification of land.

Apart from this, there was a clash of religions: that is, African Indigenous Religions versus Christianity. To a large extent, African Indigenous Religions were demonised. Africans' reverence for nature was misconstrued as animism and therefore heathen. Africans were made to hate their traditional forms of knowing and ways of acquiring knowledge (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018). Christianity presented the Earth as an object to be subdued (Chidester, 1987). Human beings were to have dominion over the Earth. This was in sharp contrast to the traditional view that encouraged people to be responsible and accountable in their dealings with the environment. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018) has argued that Christianisation constituted a form of education and an epistemicide implying that it killed the African epistemologies. White (1967) blames Western traditions of technology and science for this ecological crisis.

She castigates Christianity for establishing the dualism of humanity and nature, while at the same time insisting that it is God's will that humans exploit nature for their proper ends. Boersema, Blowers and Martin (2008:218) have called this the "desacralisation" of nature. White (1967) further argues that by destroying 'pagan animism', Christianity made it possible to exploit nature with indifference to the imperatives of natural objects. This has been due to the fact that the whole concept of sacred groves is alien to Christianity, as well as to much of the philosophy of the West, which has resulted in missionaries destroying sacred groves that, from their point of view, were idolatrous because they assume the immanence of spirits in nature (Daneel, 1999). The sacred practitioners overseeing these groves were stigmatised as idol worshippers. Zimbabwe is currently faced with the dangers of Pentecostalism and its theology of prosperity that calls for domineering the Earth. The literalistic reading of biblical texts is dangerous for the environment, because it does not pay attention to the effects of resource depletion or environmental degradation.

From a gender perspective, it is imperative to engage with the history of colonialism and its impact on natural environmental conservation. From the onset, as alluded to above, traditional land tenure practices were greatly altered by colonial officials. Colonialism introduced a cash economy that prioritised male labour over female labour. As a result, men migrated to either the white farms or the urban areas to get formal employment and women were left to work on the land in the rural areas. However, Tiondi (2000:16-18) argues that "even when women became the primary breadwinners of families because of male migration, for instance, they continued to be defined in colonial practice largely as dependent housewives and mothers" and "under colonial law ... women were declared legal minors and often lost their customary rights to land". Colonial administrators failed to appreciate the significance of indigenous land-tenure practices based upon principles of obligation and responsibility that guaranteed women access to land and control over certain crops (Tiondi, 2000:18). In such cases, the knowledge that women had in terms of environmental conservation was often not recognised. Yet when Western farming technologies were introduced, it was the women in the rural areas who continued using traditional methods that ensured environmental protection. However, in postcolonial Zimbabwe, this knowledge has been overlooked, because the post-colonial state has assumed the governance structures of the colonial power. The trivialisation of women's knowledge has been very evident from the environmental effects of the FTLRP in Zimbabwe.

The Fast Track Land Reform Programme

An overview

Land ownership has been a central issue in Zimbabwe since 1890 when the Pioneer Column set foot in Zimbabwe. The 1890 invasions by the Pioneer Column, led by Cecil John Rhodes, disenfranchised Africans and negated their land rights, amongst other things. They took away from the kings and their representatives the custodianship of the land (Bakare, 1993). This ultimately led to the war of liberation.

After independence, the government engaged itself in the first phase of land reform and resettlement, which was meant to decongest the 'reserves' that had been created in the pre-independence period and also to enable rural people to access arable land. Unfortunately, the government's plans could not materialise rapidly enough because of a number of issues, some of which were economic. The policy of willing seller/willing buyer also became an impediment to the government. Masiwa and Chipungu (2004) have dealt with this issue at great length. In order to deal with the economic challenges, the government convened a donor's conference in 1998, which was aimed at soliciting external financial support for the second phase of the land reform and resettlement programme. Donors who pledged funding for this exercise made it clear that the government should first come up with a clear land policy and should establish transparent and accountable mechanisms for land acquisition and redistribution. From Essof's point of view, "the donor conference held in 1998 forced the government to concede that any land taken would be paid for up front" (2013:25). All this happened in the face of growing opposition from civil society, trade unions and the general public. In 1999, the Movement for Democratic Change, which later became a strong opposition party, was formed. It was at the same time that the government embarked on a process of replacing the Lancaster House Constitution. A referendum to adopt the draft constitutional document was held in February 2000 and Zimbabweans overwhelmingly voted against it. As a result, when the 2000 draft constitution was rejected, it provided the government with an opportunity to take the land forcefully. Various explanations have been given as to why, at this particular point, the government of Zimbabwe chose to take away land forcefully from the whites. Chan (cited in Sachikonye, 2003) views the land invasions as serving two purposes. First, it was meant to seize land and thus punish the white farmers for their political stance and, second, it was meant to close off the commercial farming areas to campaigning by opposition parties. In the following section, we look at how the land reform was conducted as well as its effect on the environment.

Its operationalisation and the sedation of the sacred

The land reform of 2000 was officially termed the ‘Fast Track Land Reform Programme’ (FTLRP) or Third *Chimurenga*. In some circles, it has been viewed as ‘land invasions’ or ‘land occupations’ and unofficially it has been called *jambanja*. Shoko (cited in Taringa & Sipeyiye, 2014) explains that *jambanja* is an informal Shona euphemism for violence. In this case, it denotes the violent nature with which land was taken. Sibanda and Maposa (2014:132) posit that “the *jambanja* was characterised by the use of unprecedented force leading to unprecedented loss of blood”. In the same vein, Saunders (2011:124) argues that *jambanja* marked the “reintroduction of systematic political violence under the patronage of the state”. Sachikonye (2003) is of the view that the overall image that the invasions conveyed was one of degeneration into lawlessness and violence. This is clearly evidenced by the way white farmers and their workers were displaced from the farms, with a lot of other abuses taking place in the process. Ganiel and Tarusarira (2014) observe that the farm invasions were accompanied by a wave of anti-white rhetoric and violence, which the security forces largely ignored. Chitando (2011) concludes that the philosophy of *jambanja* (militancy) that had emerged during the FTLRP implied that the rule of law could no longer be guaranteed. As such, the FTLRP is viewed in Zimbabwe as the starting point and/or the exacerbation of the Zimbabwean crises in the new millennium. In this case, the FTLRP can be viewed as aggravating the environmental crisis that Zimbabwe faces today. In this regard, we agree with Hentze and Menz’s (2015) contention that the success of the land reform in Zimbabwe can be measured according to its impact on fighting environmental degradation in transferred farmlands and former communal areas.

The FTLRP led to a haphazard movement of people, with some settling in unfamiliar places. In most cases, the people resettled on lands that were farms or game parks. In addition, due to the fact that the traditional leaders were not fully engaged from the outset of this programme, taboos pertaining to sacred places within the resettled areas were not observed. As a result, the sacred places were desecrated. A good example is the Chikapakapa Mountain, alluded to above, where people from Buhera and Chikomba districts were resettled. The resettled people engaged in activities that desacralised the mountain. Once settled close to the mountain, the people wantonly cut down trees, including the fruit trees, so that they could sell firewood for profit. The sacred pool was desecrated and polluted to the extent that the water is no longer fit for human consumption. As noted by Chigumira (cited in Hentze & Menz, 2015), much of the environmental degradation is the consequence of human activity rather than climate change.

In other areas, the resettled people engaged in excessive hunting of wild animals. While on these hunting escapades, they usually started veld fires that destroyed large

tracts of land, while at the same time affecting the ecosystem. Dube (2015) notes that the increase in the incidence of veld fires can be attributed to the resettled smallholder farmers. These fires have also destroyed those places and objects that the traditional Shona people have considered to be sacred.

Yet in other areas the resettled peoples have abandoned farming and have resorted to gold panning and gold mining. Gold panning is taking place unsustainably and unsystematically, usually in riverbeds, banks and flood plains, with no concern for the environment (Kori, 2013). Gold panning has affected the smooth flow of water in the rivers and this has been the major cause of floods. Gold mining is being carried out in the fields within which farming is expected to be taking place. In a study carried out in three resettlement areas in Kadoma (Fox, Chigumira & Rowntree, 2007), it was found that apart from the gold panning and mining, sand was being taken from absentee landlords' plots with or without the owner's knowledge. Furthermore, there was clearing of woodland, bushland and grassland for settlement and cultivation. Kori (2013) has accordingly concluded that environmental management is poor in resettled areas. What compounds the situation is that resettlement areas are government-controlled areas. A research participant interviewed by Manley (1995) highlighted that in the resettlement areas the traditional taboos do not apply.

Research carried out by other scholars has shown that the majority of black farm workers were of foreign origin (that is, non-Zimbabwean Black farmers) and they were also displaced together with their white employees. Sachikonye (2003) highlighted that it has been very difficult to account for these displaced Black non-Zimbabwean farmworkers. However, some of the workers were Zimbabweans who had sought employment on the farms. These displaced Zimbabwean farm workers came back to the rural areas, which the government had said it wanted to decongest, thus leading once again to overpopulation. The natural environment could not sustain the large numbers of people. The obvious result was that people ended up settling in areas that were meant for livestock grazing. This, to a large extent, altered the landscape of a number of rural areas, with some even settling on wetlands. In 1995, Manley noted how the rural areas were acutely congested, leading to a drastic reduction of grazing land to accommodate the excess population. He noted then that the result was severe overgrazing and land degradation. In his analysis, the major contributor to this was the limitation of the chiefs' powers in dealing with environmental issues, amongst others.

Tracing the place of women in the midst of this environmental degradation stemming from the FTLRP is important. Moyo (2013) is of the view that the FTLRP increased women's access to land ownership, although a number of women scholars dispute this view. From his statistics, 12-18% of women now own land.

He does acknowledge, however, that the women who own land do not come from vulnerable groups such as the poor, widows and divorcees. In resettlement areas that were given to the general (that is the non-elite) public, commonly known as A1 farms, the land permits were recorded using names of male spouses only. In other words, women were reduced to spectators of the whole land reform process. Chiweshe (2015) has highlighted the gendered nature of the post-fast track farms and blamed this on the patriarchal values that ascribe particular roles to men and women resulting in the determination of where women are located within social systems. In African social systems, a good woman is one who learns from and observes without challenging patriarchal power. In this regard, the FTLRP is no exception. Hence, women are practically silenced on what happens on the land, increasing environmental degradation through government's failure to enable women to either own or co-own land. What boggles the mind is why the violators of the taboos have not met with the punishment that the elders would always say the ancestors would impose? Observing the culture change in Zimbabwe, Bourdillon (1993) asked a pertinent question: Where are the ancestors? While this question still needs answering, we further ask whether the sacred can be reawakened to ameliorate the current environmental crisis? The next section looks at how Zimbabwean society can redeem itself from the environmental crisis.

Reawakening the sacred: Towards re-mothering the environment

The environmental crisis that Zimbabwe faces requires the reawakening of the sacred. In this study, we strongly put forward our claim that in order for this to happen there is a need to restore women's place in environmental conservation amongst the Shona people. In the colonial and postcolonial periods, environmental discourses have tended to marginalise women. Nnaemeka (1997:2) urges us to rethink marginality by insisting that we listen carefully to "marginal discourses" as manifested by the silences and other patterns of articulation of the marginalised. In dealing with the environmental crisis in Zimbabwe, there is a need to bring women from the margins to the centre. Madongonda (2017) notes that the role of women, especially in contemporary society, has often been ignored in the environmental discourse and they are often portrayed as the victims of land degradation and not key players in its protection. It is critical for Shona society in particular to take particular notice of the fact that their sacred has existed through the agency of women. It is unfortunate that colonialism, through industrialisation and urbanisation, tried to diminish the woman's role of mothering that ended up, to a large extent, creating a distance between women and their children, as well as destroying the social and religious spaces that were useful in the transmission of the much needed indigenous knowledge systems (IKSs) about nature. We are therefore indebted to academic scholars and

gender activists from Africa and beyond who challenged the reductionist notions of motherhood. For example, Hudson-Weems, the Africana womanist (1997), sees mothering not as a weakness but a strength of the African woman.

As alluded to above, traditional society had interventions in place to deal with environmental conservation and interventions that targeted young audiences. The reawakening of the sacred requires that we restore the role of women as environmental conservationist teachers. The fireplace in the round hut needs to be reinvented, because it offers that sacred space where the woman would tap into cultural memory to impart knowledge about the environment to the children. From Nnaemeka's analysis:

Story-telling registers survival on two scores – the survival of the story teller and that of his listeners. The story teller survives to tell the story and his/her listeners survive because they learned from the story. Those that fail to learn do so at their own peril. (1997:2)

We do understand that in contemporary Shona society it is no longer possible to gather children around someone in the villages to tell them stories in whatever form, because of the major changes that were brought about by Western civilisation. The introduction of formal education through schools has made this a daunting task. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018) has called for epistemic freedom as he highlights that colonialism did not only destroy African Indigenous Knowledges (AIKs) but planted European memory as well. In concurrence, Chigidi (2009:183) observes that “the school encourages divergent thinking, creativity and individualism which tend to undermine the traditional mode of doing things and the basis for the implementation of the taboo system”. Today's children, according to Chigidi (2009:184), may laugh off the perceived “lies” that are contained in the taboos. We, therefore, propose to make use of the schools as spaces for storytelling. There has been within Zimbabwe's urban primary schools an introduction of the concept of culture huts. These are round huts that are being constructed to educate the young children about our culture. We have noted with interest that the culture huts are being supervised by elderly retired female teachers. It is our conviction that this testifies to the important role that women play in educating young children about African cultural values and practices. It is only through this that children in contemporary Shona society can learn to value our indigenous culture. The ancestors and the traditional leaders will only gain respect when women within the culture huts at the schools play their important role of transmitting the knowledge about the environment and about key stakeholders in environmental protection. We do understand that the traditional taboos have been overtaken by new information technologies and have been rendered ‘useless’ by Western education. We, therefore, concur with Chigidi's (2009) submission that the taboo system needs to be modified

and improved, so that it moves with the times. Instead of using taboos to create fear in children because they do not want to be punished, it would be wise to create new taboos that promise rewards to the children if they act positively towards the environment. Consequences of one's action need to be presented in the affirmative. For example, children could be told that if they desist from panning for gold in the river, the rivers would not be affected by siltation. This would be very effective, because children are able to see the detrimental effects of gold panning and mining within their various communities. These culture huts need not be a feature of urban primary schools only, but should be constructed in the rural as well as the resettlement areas. In doing this, there is a need to situate the new taboos within the socioreligious context of the Shona people. White (1967:1206) made the point aptly when she argued that "more science and more technology are not going to get us out of the present ecological crisis until we find a new religion, or rethink our old one". The second option is more appealing to us, because the African indigenous religious perspective allows Shona society to introspect and see where we have gone wrong. There is a need to rethink how Shona society has treated the ancestors, the sacred practitioners and women in the whole discourse about the environment. The following questions could act as a guide in this introspection:

1. Has society's total disregard of the ancestors been helpful in the light of the environmental challenges that are so glaring in rural and resettlement areas?
2. What has been the effect of disempowering and incapacitating chiefs and other sacred practitioners on the environment?
3. Can Shona society continue to marginalise and silence women if it wants to successfully solve the environmental crisis that has resulted from the FTLRP?

Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to undertake a socioreligious analysis of the impact of the FTLRP in Zimbabwe on the environment. The intention was to see whether the FTLRP in some way 'sedated' the perceived 'sacred' within Shona society, especially considering the environmental degradation that is taking place both in rural and resettlement areas. The chapter, in its focus on precolonial, colonial and post-colonial Zimbabwe, and its discussion on the role of key indigenous stakeholders in environmental conservation, sheds light on the fundamental dynamic changes that have resulted, especially the marginalisation of women. This, in turn, has led to inaction from the ancestors and the disempowerment of the traditional leaders who, in Shona religious cosmology, are seen as sacred. In this case, the chapter has shown the simultaneous construction and influence of gender, religion and the environment, with an emphasis on women's roles and perceptions as well as the disempowerment

of traditional leaders. This was shown to have resulted in people not fearing the consequences. In the final analysis, the chapter acknowledges that the very act of sedation is not permanent, as the sedated will come to a point of reawakening. As such, the chapter hinges the reawakening of the sacred on the restoration of women as transmitters of key environmental knowledge and has suggested that this be done within the culture huts that are being constructed at schools.

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