

Full Length Research Paper

Water spirits and the conservation of the natural environment: A case study from Zimbabwe

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Currently in Zimbabwe, there is serious environmental degradation. This work advocates that the traditional and modern approaches to natural environmental conservation could be integrated into a new conservation paradigm. Such integration would help restore to the Zimbabwean psyche a reverence for water spirits and a respect for the sacredness of the natural environment. The research finding shows that there were tensions between the natural environmental conservation approaches of Shona African Traditional Religion (ATR) devotees and Zimbabwean western modernity adherents. The finding also shows that the disdain for and rejection of water spirits contributed to the environmental failure. In a mechanistic model of the natural environment, the power and authority of water spirits in Zimbabwe have been usurped by western modernity. The majority of Zimbabweans in their thinking and action encouraged and promoted the western mind set in determining how the natural environment could be protected, treated, and managed without respecting water spirits. The conclusion was that for over a century now, Zimbabwean attitudes towards water spirits and the natural environment gradually moved from one of intimate relationship and contact to one of alienation and disengagement because of the use of a rationalistic modernity approach which appeared to have little room for the respect of water spirits.

Key words: Environment, modernity, integration, spirit, technology, water.

INTRODUCTION

In this paper, the term 'western modernity' is referred to as Christianity, science, and technology together. The paper has five parts: the introduction; statement of the problem; the method employed; a discussion of the water spirits like the god (*Mwari*) and Dzivaguru spirits which were associated with the land prior to 1890. This includes their role in the maintenance of the natural environment; integrating water spirits and western modernity. Finally, there is a conclusion. There was need for recognition that Zimbabwe's natural resources were finite; there could also be a moral obligation on all Zimbabweans to make fair, responsible, and sustainable use of the natural resources so that they could meet the basic needs of present day Zimbabweans as well as those of future

generations. Among those needs, the ability of all Zimbabweans to feed themselves was a high priority.

There were tensions between the natural environmental conservation approaches of Shona African Traditional Religion (ATR) devotees and Zimbabwean western modernity adherents. Due to the ever increasing degradation of the natural environment as a result of disregard for water spirits, ATR devotees advocated a return to worshipping water spirits as the best natural environmental conservation strategy. Whereas modernity adherents advocated western environmental conservation approaches as the best solution. The aim is to integrate both of these seemingly opposed approaches into a new natural environmental conservation paradigm

which will restore the Zimbabwean natural environment to its pre-colonial state. Integration of Shona water spirits and western environmental conservation approaches is possible; it can be done in the same manner the Christian church in Zimbabwe especially the Roman Catholic Church integrated missionary Christianity and ATR (Gundani, 1994).

Environmental religion was practiced in the Zimbabwean patriarchal society in the form of a hierarchy of male ancestor spirits. In Zimbabwe, the right of the community to land was vested in the spirits of male patrilineal ancestors. Witches and wizards were viewed as people who destroyed the natural environment by blighting crops and withholding rains (Ranger, 2003). In Zimbabwean mythology, mermaids (*njuzu*) were viewed as water spirits. The mermaid spirits possessed some Zimbabweans who then became mermaid (*njuzu*) spirit mediums. Some of the duties of water spirit mediums were rain-making and to mobilize the chiefs (*madzishe*) and the community to conserve the natural environment. The water spirit mediums (*majukwa*) were not only restricted to rain-making but to the conservation of the whole natural environment.

The issue of mermaids (*njuzu*) blocking water pipes and hounding workers at dam sites ignited animated debates on the role of water spirits in natural environmental conservation in Zimbabwe. Water Resources Minister, Sam Sipepa Nkomo, a Seventh Day Adventist Christian, told a senate committee that mermaids have been hounding government workers on dam sites at Osborne Dam in Mutare, Manicaland, and Gokwe in the Midlands and that traditional chiefs were going to perform rituals to appease restive mermaids believed to inhabit water reservoirs in Gokwe and Mutare where workers were afraid to tread (Gonda, 2012; Staff Reporter, 2012). Nkomo is a Christian who is alluding to spiritual issues which are traditional. Traditional leaders, led by chiefs Misheck Njelele and Nemangwe of Gokwe South, arranged to have a traditional ceremony (*bira*) where they brewed millet (*zviyo/rukweza*) beer and slaughtered a number of cattle at the dam site. That was done to appease the angry water spirits (Mhlanga, 2011). Zimbabwe National Water Authority (ZINWA) Catchment Area Manager for Sanyati, Chengeto Gozo said that the authority started pumping water in Gokwe town from the Sengwa Two/Gwehava Dam after traditional leaders performed rituals to appease mermaids believed to have been blocking the water in the pipes (Dude, 2012). Gozo maintained that the pumps were switched on without any incident after the rituals (Dude, 2012).

Currently, the two approaches differ in their ways to the restoration of the natural environment. Western modernity, which has been embraced by the majority of Zimbabweans, rejects water spirits and advocates the control of the natural environment for economic benefits.

This approach has led to the loss of respect and worship of water spirits and thus severing the connection with water spirits, which resulted in the degradation of the natural environment. The argument is that an integration of water spirits with western modernity helps to restore water spirits to the Zimbabwean psyche by reminding them of the sacredness of the natural environment, and the "wonders of nature". The bone of contention is also that technology has a spirit because of its connection to, and relationship with Mother Earth. Hence, Zimbabweans should consider that technology also has a spirit; they could communicate with and respect this technological spirit, as was the case before colonialism. The debate is also that Zimbabwe lacks a set of principles, lacks a spiritual ethical framework for environmental conservation. The spiritual ethical framework should include water spirit mediums, chiefs, university and college trained natural environmentalists and local and central government officials working together in the conservation of the natural environment. There is an urgent need for Zimbabweans to be reconnected to water and technological spirits if the natural environmental degradation in Zimbabwe is to be reversed.

The conclusion was that since the advent of modernity, Zimbabwean attitudes towards water spirits and the natural environment gradually moved from one of intimate relationship and contact to one of alienation and disengagement.

Shona ATR devotees believed that water spirit mediums have psychological intelligence akin to that of pre-modern Zimbabweans. It would appear that a cultural psyche imbedded in water spirits makes it easier for Zimbabweans to give the natural environment the same care and recognition they bestow on human beings. The majority of Zimbabweans are now more drawn to western modernity which they view as a source of greater material and financial wealth. The place of water spirits in the cultural mind has been substituted by money. As a result the natural environment could be controlled and exploited to bring in more money. But a small number of Zimbabweans is still strongly attached to their culture, for example, chiefs, diviners (*n'angas*) ancestral spirit and water spirit mediums. The traditional Shona world-view has undergone some big changes due to western modernity, foreign systems of government administration, as well as the creation of inter-racial and inter-ethnic and international communities. Despite that, water and technological spirits may have a future role to play in the natural environmental conservation in Zimbabwe.

How do traditional Zimbabweans combine spirits and technologies? What discourses do they use when talking about modern technology and spirits or water spirits? Before the coming of colonialism in Zimbabwe in 1890,

there were technology experts (*mhizha*) who were possessed by technology spirits (*midzimu yewumhizha*) in various fields like black smiths, mining, pottery, basket making and weaving. Technology spirits have been there in Zimbabwe before the coming of modernity in 1890. My assertion is that water and technological spirits (*midzimu yewumhizha*) for example black smith spirits of making hoes, axes, spears, bows and arrows and of mining gold (*ndarama*) and copper (*mhangura*) are still present in ATR, among the traditional Shona people as can be seen among some specialist Zimbabwean gold panners (*makorokoza*). There are also technology spirits of making clay pots (*hari*), baskets (*matengu* and *tswanda*), mortar (*maturi*) and reed mats (*mhasa/ rukukwe*). The aim is to integrate traditional Zimbabwean values that linked the natural environment to the religious cults (for example god (*Mwari*) cult) with modernity so as to have a sustainable natural environmental conservation. The assertion is that water and technology spirits are still present in ATR, among the traditional Shona people. Water spirits are not dead and buried in Zimbabwe; they are present and active because they still possess people like Juliana (Ranger 2003) and they still inhabit water reservoirs as was witnessed at Sengwa Two/Gwehava Dam in Gokwe (Dude, 2012). Water spirits still have a role to play in the economic, social, scientific and technological lives of Zimbabweans today. They are still relevant to Zimbabweans today as they were before 1890 and they require constant worship and respect in order for them to be guardians of the natural environment. Water spirits are stopping natural environmental degradation in Zimbabwe through the advocacy of the water spirit mediums like Juliana (Ranger 2003) who mobilized, advised and encouraged the local chiefs and communities from causing environmental degradation. Water spirits are currently not an antiquated and archaic species for they are still the guardians of the land despite the coming of modernity in Zimbabwe.

The concept of water spirits is still there among a small number of traditional Zimbabweans like diviners and water spirit mediums (*majukwa*) who still have the knowledge of the inner workings of water spirits. Water spirits are not static but are dynamic and they fit in the scientific and technological modern Zimbabwe, for science and technology was there in Zimbabwe before colonialism. Water spirits do not need to embrace Christian values for they are a very important part of ATR which is a different religion from Christianity. Water spirit mediums and ATR devotees are not better off by embracing Christianity; they are better off when they are adherents of their own indigenous religion which is a natural environment based religion.

Very few Zimbabwean chiefs currently send emissaries with gifts annually to the supreme water spirits who are believed to reside at Matonjeni/ Njelele/ Matopos. Water

spirit mediums and rainmaking (*mukweverera/mutoro*) ceremonies are very rare now. Water spirits are neglected and abused by the majority of Zimbabweans. Despite the fact that water spirit mediums teach the chiefs and communities about natural environmental conservation, that teaching is not integrated into the government natural conservation strategy and policy and hence the dearth of water spirits in the Zimbabwean national cultural psyche. Despite this rejection by the central and local governments, water spirits may still be useful protectors and guardians of the natural environment. The arguments in this paper could answer the existential natural environmental problems faced by Zimbabweans of 2013 and beyond. Natural environmental conservation methods emerge from, among other things, a historic community and a people's experiences. It would be good if Zimbabweans had anthropocentric and pneumatocentric ethics which were identical with an environmental ethic of the pre-colonial times.

Problem

Zimbabwe is faced with the problem of the conservation of its natural environment. Natural environmental conservation is not only a chiefdom concern but is also of regional, national and international concern. There is no country which damages its natural environment without its effects being felt in other countries. If a country pollutes its rivers and air, the polluted water and air will go to other countries and negatively affect them. National environmental conservation is therefore an international project which needs the financial backing and the cooperation of all the countries. The interrelationships among Zimbabwean water spirit cults showed that ecological responsibility did not end at the boundary of the chiefdom but was an international responsibility.

'Gokwe town continues to face serious water challenges despite the completion of the construction of Gwehava Dam amid revelations that authorities were failing to draw water from the dam owing to angry water spirits which existed in the form of a mermaid and a large snake that dwelt near the dam. The spirit mediums of god (*Mwari*) cult, the town council leadership and villagers who lived close to the dam said that the strange snake, which at times takes the form of a mermaid, blocked the pumping of water by causing electrical failures that damaged the pumping system. Sometimes the large snake would simply coil itself inside and block the pipeline. The spirit mediums of the god (*Mwari*) and Dzivaguru cults said that the town's water woes would continue unless certain rituals were conducted to appease the angry spirits. The same problems occurred at a nearby dam where irrigation infrastructure was set up

more than 15 years ago' (Staff Reporter, 2012).

METHODOLOGY

All interviews were conducted in confidentiality, and the real names of the interviewees were withheld by mutual agreement. Interviews were needed to give the research paper a socio-cultural grounding. Oral and written sources, as well as direct observations, were used. Data for the article were drawn from a considerable literature dealing with the religious life of Zimbabwe prior to the arrival of western modernity. It is also based on the literature dealing with the continued importance of the relationship of Zimbabweans with water spirits until recent times. A qualitative research method was used. The qualitative approach makes it possible to understand the phenomena of natural environmental degradation based on discourse, actions, and documents on water spirits, and how and why individual scholars and the interviewees interpreted and ascribed meaning to what they said and did. A total number of forty eight interviewees were asked the following questions: What were the roles of the *Mwari*, Dzivaguru, Musikavanhu, *mhondoro* and Nehanda religious water cults during the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial periods in protecting the natural environment? They were also asked questions about the relationship of science and technology with water spirits and the natural environment before colonialism. They were asked how they thought Zimbabweans could be drawn closer to water spirits to enhance natural environmental conservation.

Face to face interviews were conducted in Gutu, Charter, Bikita, and Buhera Districts in Zimbabwe during the months of July and August 2011. Some chiefs, spirit mediums of water cults, members of the Zimbabwe National Traditional Healers' Association (ZINATHA), and of the Zimbabwe Traditional Medical Practitioners' Council (ZTMPC), Christians and professional scientists and technologists were interviewed. They were also asked such questions as whether they observed the traditional Shona day of rest (*chisi*) which was related to water spirits and whether they combined Christianity and ATR and sent messengers to Matonjeni with gifts so that the *Mwari* cult could avoid droughts in their areas. They were also asked about the effects of modernity on water spirits.

Of the forty eight interviewees who were interviewed, eight were chiefs; eight were members of the Zimbabwe National Traditional Healers' Association (ZINATHA) and the Zimbabwe Traditional Medical Practitioners' Council (ZTMPC). Eight priests were randomly chosen and interviewed from the mainline churches, two from each- the Roman Catholic, Anglican, Methodist and Lutheran churches and eight African Initiated Church (AIC) priests, two from each- Zimbabwe Assemblies of God Africa (ZAOGA), Apostolic Church –Johane Marange, Apostolic Church – Johane Masowe and African Apostolic Church- Paul Mwazha. Sixteen scientists who included medical doctors, engineers, pharmacists, biochemists, microbiologists, physicists and chemists were interviewed. The following list summarizes their views:

100% of the chiefs said that they wanted water spirits to be constantly venerated. They supported the idea of sending gifts to the *Mwari* cult at Matonjeni. 75% said that modernity was the main cause of droughts in their chiefdoms but they did not reject schools, hospitals, dams, construction of roads and hospitals in their chiefdoms. 25% rejected all forms of modernity in their chiefdoms and preferred the pre-colonial situation. 12.5 % said that they were rain-makers possessed by water spirits.

87.5% of the ZINATHA and ZTMPC members said that they were

anti-modernity. 37.5% said that they were possessed by water spirits. 12.5% advocated for an integration of water spirits and modernity.

75% of the main-line churches priests said that they wanted water spirits to be respected in Zimbabwe in an effort to conserve the natural environment. They also advocated for the integration of water spirits and modernity. 25% of main-line churches rejected water spirits and viewed them as works of the devils. 62.5% of AIC priests condemned water spirits as works of the devil. 37.5% of AIC priests wanted water spirits to be respected as was the case before colonialism but they did not want to be forced to observe the traditional day of rest (*chisi*), attend rain-making ceremonies (*mukweverera/mutoro*) and to pay gifts to the *Mwari* cult at Matonjeni. They advocated for the co-existence of the water spirits and modernity.

81.25% of the scientists believed in the physical existence of mermaids. 56.25% of scientists advocated for the integration of water spirits and modernity as the best way to conserve the natural environment.

43.75% rejected and condemned water spirits as mere superstition without any scientific basis. They said that water spirits were not the cause of droughts. 18.75 % of the scientists said that they do have relatives who were possessed by water spirits.

An overwhelming majority of the interviewees believed in water spirits and the need for them to be constantly venerated during the holding of rainmaking ceremonies. They also expressed that messengers could be annually sent to Matonjeni with gifts for rain. Many of the interviewees expressed ignorance about the existence of science and technology in Zimbabwe before the coming of colonialism. They thought science and technology was a colonial innovation in Zimbabwe. They did not know that mining and the making of iron and copper tools were there in Zimbabwe before colonialism. Only a very small number, 25% of Christians, scientists, and technologists rejected water spirits. They advocated for the scientific and technological management of the natural environment without the involvement of water spirits, which they viewed as the works of the devil and mere superstition which held no water. Less than 30% of scientists and Christians dismissed water spirits as ideas of a primitive society based on fear of ancestors and water spirits.

It was believed that snakes, mermaids, and territorial ancestors (*mhondoro*) were the guardians of the land and that included sacred pools, trees and mountains (Bernard and Kumalo, 2004:). The Dzivaguru cult was centred on the symbols of the sacred pool and the python and it possessed the institution of spirit wives (Schoffeleers, 1979). The concepts of sacred pool and python were drawn from the Dziva religion or Dziva complex (Schoffeleers, 1979). Nyaminyami the Zambezi River snake was believed to be a female god (Ranger, 2003). Divination cults formed a later development of snake cults. The concept of the pool was reinforced by the facts that Nyandoro, Tavara, and Mukate went into the pools after their defeat by the Korekore and Budya dynasties (Bourdillon, 1979). Sitwanyana Ncube, a chief priest of *Mwari*, spent months in the Sihazabana cave in Matonjeni during his apprenticeship to be a priest of *Mwari* (Ranger, 1999). He talked directly to a snake which showed him all the caves at Matonjeni. That entry into the state of nature empowered the priest or priestess to guarantee the prosperity of agriculture (Ranger, 1999). The symbols of pythons and mermaids were linked to fertility, rain, pools, healing and divinatory power (Bernard and Kumalo, 2004). Snakes and mermaids were believed to have influence over the natural environmental conservation for they represented great spirit deities of an African earth religion (Bernard and Kumalo, 2004). They acted as powerful constraints to the natural environment abused by the

society. The Dzivaguru cult was centred around the symbols of a pool and a snake (Bernard and Kumalo 2004: 120). Mbuya Juliana claimed to be possessed by a mermaid spirit in the pool at Dzilo shrine where she lived under water for four years (Ranger 2003)

Mermaids were found in the Matonjeni pools. Water spirit mediums were the *Mwari* priests and priestesses who were said to have gone into the pools for years unending where a mermaid taught them how to protect and manage the environment (Ranger, 2003). It was believed that all the rivers and pools in Zimbabwe were populated by mermaids which originated from the shrines of Matonjeni /Njelele which together formed a female ecological army (Ranger, 2003). Many women in southern Zimbabwe were possessed by mermaid spirits for they were rainmakers and had power to cure infertility (Ranger, 1995). Juliana connected the mermaids to the *Mwari* cult to natural environmental conservation, for she was a messenger (*hossanah/nyusa*) of the *Mwari* cult. She brought mermaids to the centre and cosmology of the *Mwari* cult. She was apprenticed into her profession as a water spirit medium of Machokoto by a mermaid under water. According to Juliana, the mermaids and not god (*Mwari*) were angry and were the cause of droughts because places that were holy to mermaids were cemented when dams and boreholes were constructed (Ranger, 1995). Juliana's mission was to make the land fit for mermaids to return and that would only be done when science and technology is shunned by Zimbabweans. Ranger cited Ravai Marindo-Rangani who maintained that the female Tsungumi spirits who lived under the waters of a river, and who were 'white and blonde haired,' lived on fish and mud, communicated with humans only when warning of either floods or droughts and then demanded the sacrifice of 'a beautiful young virgin girl' (Ranger, 1995). The Tsungumi spirits were mermaid spirits which had relationships with the natural environment, like the *Mwari* cult, and were devoted to peace and fertility. A mermaid diviner was believed to be endowed with spiritual gifts which nurtured the entire community and natural environment (Gelfand, 1959, 1973; Bourdillion, 1973).

Water spirits associated with the land prior to 1890 and their role in maintenance of the natural environment

Matonjeni was called the Stone of Pools (*Mabwe adziva* or Mbedzi) from whom rain comes, and from whom mist arises when one stirs the water (Ranger, 1999; Rennie, 1979). The perennial pools in the shrine caves were identified with the uterus and the amniotic fluid of a pregnant woman, and as the source of life (Ranger, 1999). When people in the Matonjeni prayed for fertility, the seed was sprinkled with the water from the cave. It was water of life, they said, for it came from the rock, and also from god (Ranger, 1999).

The Shona myths of the creation of water were situated at Matonjeni (Ranger, 1999), and the Shona creation story of Moon (*Mwedzi*) and Morning Star (*Masasi*) celebrated both male and female fertility (Ranger, 2003). The *Mwari*, Dzivaguru, Chaminuka, Musikavanhu, *mhondoro*, Julian and Dzilo cults were ecological cults. Rituals were performed to the religious cults to avoid droughts, calamities, floods, pests and epidemic diseases affecting humans, animals and plants. The water spirit cults were interested in the social, political and economic wellbeing of the people. The *Mwari*, Chaminuka, Nehanda, *mhondoro* and Dzivaguru cults during the 1896-97 guerrilla war (*chimurenga*) argued that natural disasters like the drought, the eclipses of the sun and moon, locusts and rinderpest were caused by the British occupation of Zimbabwe. For that reason, the cults organized the communities to fight against British colonialism (Ranger, 1967). The water spirit cults have been invoked by the Shona religious leaders in so far as

rainmaking and the conservation of the natural environment were concerned (Mawere and Ken, 1995). Rainmaking ceremonies were done at Matonjeni and the Salukazana shrine in Chinhoyi (Ranger, 1995). The *Mwari*, Chaminuka, and Nehanda cults were used for the mobilization of Zimbabweans for social, political and economic change and also for the preservation and conservation of the natural environment. The focus of the cults was to mobilize the communities and to root out 'evil' within themselves, to bring about good relationships in the communities and to conserve the natural environment (Mawere and Ken, 1995). The *Mwari*, Chaminuka, Dzivaguru, Musikavanhu, Nehanda, Dzilo, Salukazana and Juliana cults were institutional and religious innovators who responded to and were created by Zimbabweans to unite communities for their social, political, and economic well-being, and also to conserve the natural environment. The *manyasa/hossanah* took cattle and gifts as offerings to *Mwari* for rain and fertility. The *Mwari* cult was linked to the people politically, socially, economically through the natural environment. The *Mwari* cult used 'moral economy' – bad societal morals which were believed to be among the causes of droughts - to mobilize the communities to conserve the natural environment (Mawere and Ken, 1995).

The *Mwari* cult at Matonjeni operated a system of ecological religion which it used to control the environment, determine which areas should be cultivated and which not, which water was for the people to drink and use for cooking, and which water was for animals and washing; which trees were to be cut down, and which were not to be cut down (Ranger, 1999, 2003). Shrine guardians controlled agriculture. Seeds soaked in the water of the rock were bound to be fertile (Ranger, 1999; Schoffeleers, 1979). The voice of *Mwari* told the people when to plant seeds, and when not to plant, and when to harvest, and when not to harvest, and they also told the people where fire could be used for clearing the land and where not (Ranger, 1999).

In the beginning, the cult was managed by women. Later they were replaced by patriarchy. The *Mwari* cult was not about lineage and succession, although it endorsed candidates for chieftainships. The main function of the *Mwari* cult was about creation, human and natural fertility, rain, and the conservation of the natural environment. The female Dzilo shrine, whose original name in Ndebele was *zame* (breast), and in Shona was *zamu* (breast) was managed by a woman, and it was a source of rain, and was associated with prophetic ecological movements led by female spirit mediums of the *Mwari* cult (Ranger, 2003). The *Mwari* and *mhondoro* cults had spirit mediums who had rainmaking powers and were interested in maintaining the right relationships among humanity, animals, and the natural environment. The link to Matonjeni made the *Mwari*, *mhondoro*, Chaminuka, Dzivaguru, Nehanda, Musikavanhu, Dzilo, Salukazana, and Juliana cults claim that they can meditate over rainfall and other ecological calamities. Their powers for rainmaking were derived from Matonjeni. Juliana maintained that she was possessed by Machokoto spirit and was empowered by a mermaid which connected her to the *Mwari* cult at Matonjeni. She also attested that she can bring forth water and make sacred wells by rubbing her kudu horn on the bare, dry earth (Mawere and Ken, 1995).

The Tembo- Mvura ethnic group of the Dande region in the Zambezi valley maintained that they did not own the land, but operated within it along with the animals, spirits of large animals, hunters and important people who were referred to as spirits of the forest (*midzimu yesango*). The spirits of the forest controlled activities related to hunting and gathering as well as the way human beings interacted with the plants and water environments (Ranger, 1995). Prophetic religious cultic movements like that of Nehanda (1896-97), Murimi (1915), Mbuya (1917) and Juliana (1993) arose

during ecological crises. They all pre-eminently involved female rainmakers, messengers and prophetesses. The *Mwari* and *mhondoro* cults used mass mobilization for natural environmental conservation. Boudillon cited Van der Merwe who argued that Dzivaguru was one of the Shona names used for *Mwari*, the giver of rain (Bourdillon, 1979). Daneel supported Van der Merwe. He gave Pool (*Dziva*) and Dzivaguru as praise names given to the *Mwari* of Matonjeni. Lobengula was a rainmaker who was connected to the *Mwari* cult, and by cooperating with the *Mwari* cult priests, he improved his talent for rainmaking (Bhebhe, 1979). Europeans called Lobengula 'the clerk of the weather and the rainmaker general of the country,' for he was good at making thunderstorms, had powers to cause rain and knowledge of the moon phases (Bhebhe, 1979). Traditional culture was physically, mystically and spiritually based on water spirits and equally on the natural environment. Traditional Zimbabweans performed rainmaking ceremonies to worship water spirits.

Oliver Zvabva was cited by Ranger as saying the voice of Dzivaguru speaks in the Nyachiranga Mountains on the frontier between north-eastern Zimbabwe and Mozambique. The Dzivaguru cult, which was famous as a rainmaker, was based at the shrine in the foothills of the Mavhuradonha Mountains (Ranger, 1967). Dzivaguru was the father of Karuva who had the powers to bring mist (*mhute*) in which he and his people and possessions could hide whenever under attack by Nyabapa (Bourdillon, 1979). Dzivaguru and Karuva cults were the original owners of the land and they maintained ritual power over it and the political power of governing the people was given to the invading conquerors (Bourdillon, 1979). Autochthonous were the most powerful producers of rain (Bourdillon, 1979). Messengers of Mutota went with gifts of snuff tobacco to Dzivaguru and Karuva in order to receive rain. Kamoti, a spirit medium of Dzivaguru and a rainmaker in the Murehwa district, mobilized the people to rise against the British during the Maperera rebellion of 1901 and against the Portuguese during the Makombe war of 1917-18.

The Musikavanhu chieftainship linked its origins with the *Mwari* cult and was *Mwari's* emissary (Ranger, 1999; Rennie, 1979). The Musikavanhu cult was a rainmaker for the Pool (*Dziva*) people of Musikavanhu and had a special relationship with rain (Rennie, 1979).

Chief Mutoko appointed a woman, Charewa, a chieftainess who ruled over half the territory of the chieftainship. Rainmaking ceremonies were held under her auspices for she was a reputable rain god (Ranger, 2003). Nehoreka was the son-in-law of a woman, Big Pool (*Dzivaguru*), the female founding ancestor of the Mutoko chieftainship. Jechete Mountain was sacred woodland on which no tree was to be cleared (*rambatemwa*) for it was a place for the burial of chiefs (Mawere and Ken, 1995).

Interviewee Temurayi Dovi argued that since the advent of colonialism, very few Zimbabwean chiefs sent emissaries with gifts annually to the supreme water spirits who were believed to reside at Matonjeni/ Njelele/ Matopos. The spirits were neglected and abused. Dovi went further and asserted that nobody taught the nation about water spirits hence the dearth of water spirits in the Zimbabwean cultural psyche. Despite the rejection, they may still be useful protectors and guardians of the natural environment. The spirits of the founding chiefs, the territorial/regional spirits (*mhondoro*) were the guardians of the land, possessed both males and females, appointed chiefs, cleansed the land from the stains of incest and murder, made rains, and gave the people ritually treated seeds (Ranger, 2003, 1967). The cults supported chiefs, resistance against colonial and post-colonial governments. The cults were political figures and their spirit mediums articulated social, political, economic and natural environmental issues. Cults were involved in

healing, divination, and politics- appointing, installing, and counseling of chiefs.

The Juliana cult focused on the causes of the 1986 and 1992 droughts, and it challenged the state, business, church, and chiefs. The cult developed new combinations of ecological and political ideas and greatly restructured local social relations and natural environmental conservation practices (Mawere and Ken, 1995). The Juliana cult challenged the status of legitimacy in the face of socio-political, economic and ecological change. Juliana maintained that she was sent by Machokoto of the monkey (*shoko*) totem (*mutupo*) to preach and to brew beer for the rainmaking ceremony for the people, in order that they draw good chances of rainfall. She was given a mission to mobilize people to deal with the drought, starting with the rural areas and then taking the message to the towns. She attributed the drought and the plague of mice in 1993-94 in Southern Zimbabwe to the breakdown of relationships within the community between people and their natural environment, the community and the guardian cult spirits of the land and between the government and the spiritual guardians of the people and their land (Mawere and Ken, 1995).

Juliana had affirmations about the cause of drought and she aroused the interest of the people in natural environmental conservation by asking them not to break the taboos given to them by the *Mwari* cult, which were - not killing wild animals in big numbers, some churches should not indulge in drum beating, jingling of bells and rattles; for the noise was frightening away the spirit of leopards (*mbada/ingwe*) and lions (*mhondoro/shumba*), that lived on top of hills and bring rain, no more drilling of boreholes and using borehole water, since drilling boreholes frightened the water spirits; people were to draw water from the sand in the river beds and from natural wells; and no trees were to be cut at sacred places (Mawere and Ken, 1995). She introduced a whole new range of taboos which were to be enforced by the chiefs, for example, holding rainmaking ceremonies, no work was to be done on both Sunday and Wednesday (day of rest-*chisi*), nobody was to refer to baboons with their Karanga name (*makudo*) because they belonged to the same totem (*mutupo*) as the spirit of Matonjeni; baboons should be referred to as grandfathers (*sekuru*) (Mawere and Ken, 1995; Schoffeleers, 1979). Juliana prohibited people from committing fornication and adultery in the forest where water spirits dwelt and from growing crops like sunflower and cotton, (Mawere and Ken, 1995; Ranger, 2003). Juliana also told the churches not to baptize their adherents in pools of water or to climb sacred mountains for prayer and fasting. Once taboos were adhered to, the sacred creatures like mermaids would come back to those sites, no longer being frightened by the people. Baptism was to be held at these sites only by scooping water with gourds (*mikombe*) and also only 'traditional' drumming was allowed as that would encourage the return of mermaids to the country (Mawere and Ken, 1995). The government was blamed by Juliana as the one that caused droughts because it excluded chiefs, and sub-chiefs from formal power, failed to relate to the *Mwari* cult, and did not conduct the cleansing rituals after the 1966-80 guerrilla war (Mawere and Ken, 1995). The taboos of the *Mwari* cult were: not to plough on the first rains (*gukurahundi*), in the event of a storm, or in the period from the last quarter of the moon to its first quarter (Ranger, 1999). There was logic of causal connection between the moral condition of the community and the condition of its physical/natural environment (Schoffeleers, 1979). Good management of the natural environment depended on good morality in the society. Without it, ecological disaster threatened the life of the community (Schoffeleers, 1979). Water spirits occupied central positions in moral and religious systems and were an important ecological factor. The cults were based on the idea that the satisfactory

functioning of the natural environment depended, not only on the direct ecological activity of humans, but also on the satisfactory functioning of the society as a whole. Moral laxities like incest, murder, and adultery were abuses which led to ecological disaster. Societal behaviour was linked to the ecological process.

Mushongavhudzi was a chieftainess, higher in rank than the chiefly successor of Chigango, who was a high priest of Karuva who ranked second only to Mushongavhudzi (Bourdillon, 1979). Chiefs obtained their mystical powers by committing incest with a sister who was a water spirit medium (Bourdillon, 1979). In chief Chimoyo's area, the most important spirit was incarnated by a woman medium who was not related to the chief at all, but who represented the original rainmakers who owned the area before Chimoyo moved in. She held major rainmaking ceremonies (Ranger, 2003). The Dula shrine represented the male aspect of Mwari and the Dzilo represented the female aspect (Ranger, 1999).

Ranger (2003) argued: 'Female participation in positive rituals of the natural environment did not work in hidden opposition to patriarchy. Instead, women occupied public religious roles, either within the patriarchal system, or in the cult of the Creator god (*Mwali*) which operated above patriarchy'. The roles of being a wife or messenger or spirit medium of the *Mwari* cult uplifted the status of wives of *Mwari* (*mbonga*), messengers of *Mwari* (*manyusa/hossanah*), and female spirit mediums higher than males. For even chiefs obeyed the instructions given to them by the female spirit mediums of the *Mwari* and *mhondoro* cults. Some chiefdoms in Zimbabwe, like Seke, Nyakusenga, Rusambo, Masunda, Makoni, and Mutasa, were founded by women ancestors and had chieftainesses (Ranger, 2003).

Chibanya was a woman spirit medium of the Makonde people who had great political and spiritual power. Mzilikazi and Lobengula, the two first Ndebele kings, obeyed her instructions. Ranger (2003) cited archival materials which say: '.....Chibanya told Mzilikazi that if he came to these parts with his evil ways, his killing of the people, and so forth, he would be driven out by the wind. And so Mzilikazi left us alone, and thereafter he used to send four cattle every year, three for Chibanya.....Lobengula [the second Ndebele King] continued with this custom after Mzilikazi's death...'. According to the archival material which was used by Ranger (2003), Isaac Shimmin was told, 'A great prophetess... Salokazana (old woman)... was acknowledged by mighty Moselikatse.....The reigning Salokazana came to power after his death and Lobengula has always been largely governed by her prophecies and advice....The natives clothe her with authority almost divine. They say she can make rain, govern harvests, avert sickness, or bring punishment.' People entering the sacred groove of Karuva the rainmaker must remove their shoes, wrist-watches and men must remove their shirts (Bourdillon, 1979). The *Mwari* cult chose Lobengula to succeed his father, Mzilikazi, because the second claimant was said to be in South Africa where he had imbibed European ideas and was likely if he came to power to open the country to western civilization (Bhebhe, 1979). Rainmaking ceremonies were done at Matonjeni and the Salokazana shrine in Chinhoyi (Ranger, 1995).

Ranger (2003) cited Isabel Phiri as having demonstrated that in Malawi between 900 -1600, women were controllers of territorial rain shrines, regarded as nurturers of the environment, exercised ritual political control, and ruled over the Banda clan. Phiri was quoted again by Ranger (2003) as going further and maintained that 'the role of spirit mediums passed over from women to men due to changes in traditional religion brought about by external factors such as conquest and the pre-dominance of the new ideology and in one striking case, Mbona, a male martyr, replaced the Mbona spirit wife'. Ranger (2003), suggested that it appeared

that what happened in Malawi happened in Zimbabwe. He said, 'Before the sixteenth century, the main rain shrine in north eastern Zimbabwe took the form of sacred pool set among white trees. Here a manifestation of the high god, Dzivaguru (Great Pool), was venerated. The shrine was tended by the Karuva/Chikara priestess who guarded the spirit wives of god. Requests came in from a wide area for rain and for divinely treated seeds. The shrine monitored the environment, drawing on symbols of female fecundity....The Dziva culture was strongly feminized, its totem was pool and its ritual experts were recognized as great rainmakers. The central figure of what later came to be called the Musikavanhu cult was, in these early days, the virgin priestess Chapo, possessor of rain charms.' Ranger (2003) argued that just as in Malawi, women in Zimbabwe controlled the central shrines of the original Zimbabwean eco-religion, for the shrines were conquered by incoming rulers who were legitimated by male ancestor spirits and that resulted in a masculinization of eco-religion. Ranger (2003) attested, 'Karuva/Chikara, now....recognized male chieftainship.....There was a shift from female shrines to male *mhondoro* spirits... The powerful women mediums of the Mutema chieftaincy, now thought to incarnate male chiefly ancestors were originally linked to the Musikavanhu shrine and to the environmental powers of princess Chapo. Cooption and masculinization of female shrines and nature spirits were common practices. The female shrines and nature spirits were inserted into the genealogies of the victors. Under the Mutapa rulers, the female mediums of the Nehanda spirit were crucial in ensuring fertility of the nation and crops, for they were major rainmakers (Ranger, 2003).

ZINATHA interviewee Tangidzirai Chakanyuka argued that, 'Disunity among Zimbabwean politicians was another cause for drought because the various political leaders of different political parties did not unite and go to Matonjeni together with chiefs and rainmakers. ZTMPC interviewee Bope Dzito maintained said, 'Matonjeni has been desecrated by the use of western science and technology in Zimbabwe and also by the failure by chiefs all over Zimbabwe to observe Wednesday only as the *chisi* day, for chiefs observe different *chisi* days throughout the week'. Interviewee Masaramuse Kwenyu who was a water spirit medium said, 'The Movement of Democratic Change (MDC) led by Morgan Tsvangirai was formed by the British government so that it can recolonize Zimbabwe. The MDC used goblins (*zvikwambo*) witchcraft to cause droughts so that people can blame the Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) for making people poor and therefore, people would not vote for President Robert Mugabe during elections. When churches, chiefs, and rainmakers who supported ZANU- PF prayed for rains, MDC aligned churches, chiefs and rainmakers prayed for the drought to come.'

Juliana advocated that the absence of joint prayers by politicians, churches and diviners and rainmakers caused droughts. She went further and maintained that Zimbabwean government officials, leaders of political parties, churches, diviners, rainmakers and the state President were asked to unite and visit Matonjeni annually to offer sacrifices and prayers to the *Mwari* cult.

Witchcraft, corruption, adultery, disunity among politicians were cited by Juliana as some of the causes of drought (Mawere and Ken, 1995). Edgar Tekere, Bishop Abel Muzorewa and Reverend Ndabaningi Sithole were cited as causing droughts to undermine Mugabe's legitimacy (Mawere and Ken, 1995). This agrees with Kwenyu who attested that Tsvangirai and the MDC were the causes of droughts so that they could replace ZANU-PF and Mugabe with a puppet British sponsored government.

A priest interviewee Gumbo Muchabayiwa argued, 'We are

experiencing droughts because Zimbabweans have turned away from the precepts of God and the *Mwari* cult. Material and financial greediness, witchcraft in the form of goblins (*zvikwambo*), corruption, fornication, adultery, incest and political intolerance which result in the beating killing of people of different political parties are the causes of droughts' Interviewee chief Svinurai Jochore said, 'All Europeans and what they stand for should be banished from Zimbabwe, and that will please our water spirits ancestors especially Nehanda, Kaguvi and Chaminuka who will bring rain.' A scientist interviewee Deredzai Gumindenga said, 'According to Shona culture and traditions, it is believed that if one kills and eats a totemic animal there will be droughts. Chiefs should be given the powers to punish anybody who eats his/her totemic animal'.

INTEGRATING WATER SPIRITS AND WESTERN MODERNITY

Was the *Mwari* cult against science and technology? Before colonialism, Zimbabweans were involved in science and technology in the mining of gold, iron, and copper; and the making of tools like spears, hoes, and axes. They made iron tools. The methods and tools used in mining were fire setting (the process of heating the rock and then cooling it rapidly with water), iron hoes and chisels, wooden bowls, wedges and baskets (Masiya *et al* unpublished). Interviewee Tanonoka Mukaka said, 'Technology was used but it did not conflict with religious cults. Technology was part of the culture and was integrated with water spirits'. At the shrine of Karuva, an old man had to light the fire for brewing the millet (*zviyo/rukweza*) beer at the shrine by rubbing two sticks together during the *chipware* ritual (Bourdillon, 1979). A scientist interviewee Sesedzai Gwande argued, 'Science, technology, and water spirits did not oppose each other, but supplemented and complimented each other'. The people possessed by the spirit of *Mwari* swept the Karuva shrine with their hands and not with brooms, stone tools rather than metal ones were used to cut grass, and *Mwari's* priests mounted the heights clad in leopard skins (Ranger, 1999). The *Mwari*, Dzivaguru, and Juliana cults urged the people to return to the pre-colonial ways of their ancestors. No schools, stores or water reservoirs were allowed in chief Choma's area so as to please the Karuva cult (Bourdillon, 1979). In 1970, a Dzivaguru spirit medium in chief Choma's area fell into disrepute by the people when he told them not to ask for schools and dams (Bourdillon, 1979). That tallied with the mentality of some chiefs and people of Umnga municipal area in the Eastern Cape, who objected to the construction of a hydropower plant in their area, arguing that the hydropower would disturb the tranquility of mermaids at the local waterfalls, the electricity generated would drive mermaids away from the pools, lead to droughts, electrical storms, and floods (Bernard and Kumalo, 2004).

Juliana attributed the drought to modernity which resulted in the abandonment of the *Mwari* cult, environmental taboos and rituals by Zimbabweans, and the abuse of ritual power by the chiefs and sub-chiefs (Mawere and Ken, 1995). The government was said to have refused to relate to the *Mwari* cult and institutions because of the influence of modernity and political leaders, chiefs, and sub-chiefs, were not interested in the well-being of the people (Mawere and Ken, 1995:). Interviewee Madora Muzondiwa said, 'The conflicts that are caused result in the anger of the *Mwari* spirit and hence *Mwari* withholds the rains. Droughts are the product of the *Mwari* cult punishing Zimbabweans for their collective sins'. Droughts have always been attributed to modernity and the failure to adhere to ATR rituals and traditions (Mawere and Ken, 1995). Each time there was drought, modernity was blamed. It was argued that the political and traditional leaders, the chiefs, sub-chiefs, spirit mediums, and messengers of the *Mwari* cult were modernized, and not doing rituals and their religious obligations correctly (Mawere and Ken, 1995). The general populace was also held to account for being modernized and failing to respect the whole range of taboos linked to rainfall and ecological productivity (Ranger, 2003). Modernity was not to blame for droughts and natural environmental destruction, but poor natural environmental management, agro-ecological change, basically, deforestation, were attributed to lack of vegetation cover (Mawere and Ken, 1995).

The spirit mediums of the cults who mobilized the people to conserve the natural environment and against foreign political intervention during the pre-colonial period did not issue taboos which were against science and technology because they knew that science and technology were practiced in their daily lives and were part of the culture. Interviewee Rusere Gwatidzo said, 'Some people in the society were possessed by spirits of craftsmanship (technology) like the spirit of blacksmith. Pre-colonial Zimbabwean blacksmiths used anvils, hammers and bellows (*bvuto*) and were called specialist blacksmiths (*mhizha/nyanzvi dzekupfura*). A ritual sacrifice of millet beer and a goat was offered to the ancestral blacksmith spirit so that it could give the host more wisdom and intelligence to make better tools. Hence, there was no antagonism between technology and religious cults'. Interviewee Revesai Mapepeteta said, 'Spirit mediums of the *Mwari*, *mhondoro*, and Dzivaguru cults who came during the colonial and post-colonial periods, introduced anti-science and anti-technology taboos because they faced conquest by a religion, Christianity, which denigrated and rejected them as forces of the devil'. Christianity was a conquest religion which rejected the worship of water spirits and regarded them as idolatry (Schoffeleers, 1979). Before 1896-97, Christianity did not grow much in Zimbabwe because

Zimbabweans resisted it. They had great faith and trust in their *Mwari*, lion (*mhondoro*) and Dzivaguru cults. Ranger, as cited by Schoffeleers (1979), attested that after their defeat in 1897, Zimbabweans lost faith in cults and increasingly turned to Christianity. A wave of disappointment swept the whole population. Interviewee Zvidzai Gumbochuma said, 'More and more Zimbabweans openly converted to the Christian religion because it had schools, hospitals, and farms which provided them with education, health care, skills in various trades, and employment, which water spirits could not provide'. Interviewee Pfuurai Musemwa said, 'Christian organizations like the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops' Conference, Zimbabwe Council of Churches, Zimbabwe Christian Alliance, Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe and Pentecostal Assemblies of Zimbabwe, together with their bishops, priests, and pastors, eclipsed spirit mediums of water spirits in articulating the political, social and economic needs of Zimbabweans'. The spirit mediums were also faced with Zimbabweans who were very different culturally from Zimbabweans who lived during the pre-colonial period and soon after colonialism, in 1890. Later Zimbabweans included people who were well educated, some with university degrees. They then lived in cities and towns; they did not depend on agriculture as the sole source of livelihood; they needed jobs in commerce and industry; and they were very critical and questioned almost everything which they were told, seeking empirical evidence. Interviewee Tsava Svikiro argued, 'It is not easy now for water spirit mediums to tell Zimbabweans that a spirit of a cult had told her/him to observe certain taboos in order for rain to come. Zimbabweans will question and criticize that spirit medium until she/he produces tangible results. In an attempt to regain lost glory, the spirit mediums make Christianity, science and technology, scapegoats which cause droughts. They mislead Zimbabweans, arguing that science and technology were not there before colonialism. Therefore, Zimbabweans should discard them in order to get abundant rain'. In all their pronouncements, spirit mediums did not articulate issues of democracy, human rights, unemployment, and the oppression of women by men, issues which were very important and were faced by most Zimbabweans. In all that ignorance, asserting that science and technology were innovations of colonialism, the spirit mediums were backed by chiefs who wanted to regain their political power after losing it to elected politicians, urban, and rural councils. Colonial and post-colonial governments interfered in the religious duties of the cults. The anti-schools, anti-science and anti-technology taboos of the cults were in conflict with the interests of colonial, and post-colonial governments, and Christianity. Interviewee Gunguwa Tsimba said, 'The powers of the cults were eclipsed by colonial and post-colonial elected political

leaders and Christianity'. In 1970, the people in chief Choma's area believed that their water spirits would not come again because of the power of the British in the area (Bourdillon, 1979). The cult of Dzivaguru organized unsuccessful up-risings against the British. From 1920, there was a decreasing dependence on agriculture as the sole means of livelihood (Rennie, 1979). Interviewee Musafare Zvichaera said, 'The coming of secular chiefs controlled by the government and Christianity reduced the powers of the mediums of water spirits'.

With an ever increasing population, science and technology was needed to help conserve the natural environment (Ranger, 1999). *Mwari* was related to the landscape, the natural environment, the political power-the chiefs and culture of the people (Ranger, 1999). The colonial *Mwari* ideology fused the natural environment and society but that did not exclude science and technology. Matonjeni represented the natural environment but it was the natural environment which existed inseparably with science and technology. It was a natural environment in which agriculture, fishing, hunting, mining, and the making of tools, took place. The *Mwari* cult had a doctrine of the natural environment which did not exclude science and technology.

After a month of beer-brewing, the messengers assembled again at the rock and the voice ordered them 'to stick to the new rules brought by Juliana' (Ranger, 1999). Some of the taboos of the *Mwari* and Dzivaguru cults, such as those against schools, dams, boreholes, cement, science, and technology were

not accepted by Zimbabweans because they put Zimbabwe back to the pre-colonial times in terms of social, political, economic, scientific and technological developments. Juliana introduced the taboos as a means of re-establishing the pre-colonial socio-ecological order, but the people rejected them because they restricted their economic and social activities.

Interviewee Dzingai Mangwiro argued, 'Uncontrolled commercial and subsistence agriculture destroyed the natural environment. Sugar, cotton, tobacco, coffee and timber plantations replaced indigenous grasslands and forests'. The solution to sustainable natural environmental conservation in Zimbabwe lay in the belief systems and spiritual links between the people and their natural resources (Bernard and Kumalo, 2004). Interviewee Kubvobvo Mavandandini said, 'The spirit forces that existed within the natural environment during pre-colonial period were expressed through the spirit mediums of the *Mwari* and the Dzivaguru cults. Due to the mismanagement of the natural environment, a complex of spiritual ecology had died in Zimbabwe'. Spiritual ecology was defined as denoting how the concepts of the supernatural and the spiritual world influenced a group's management and use of an ecological resource (Bernard and Kumalo, 2004).

Restoring the balance of the ecosystem was not only a matter of science and technology, but also of an ordered social life (Schoffeleers, 1979). Community based natural environmental management programs should be sensitive to the role of spiritual ecology, especially the ways in which it influences perceptions and uses of certain resources and features of the landscape (Bernard and Kumalo, 2004). There may be a close association between spiritual ecology and the spirit mediums of the *Mwari* and Dzivaguru cults, the central government, urban and rural councils. Interviewee Zvikimborero Zingizi said, 'Colonial and post-colonial governments eroded the powers of chiefs and also corrupted them by making them civil servants who were on the government's pay roll with lots of benefits, such as a vehicle and a house built by the government for each of them'. Elected urban and rural councils eroded the authority and powers of chiefs (Bernard and Kumalo, 2004). Councils were given the authority to produce their bye-laws and to develop their respective areas and that included the management of the natural environment. Interviewee Nyamadzavo Gurure argued, 'Zimbabwean chiefs are no longer significant players in local governance and they are no longer involved in natural environmental conservation. They are no longer consulted by the local councils during droughts. Instead, the central government is informed of any droughts, and in collaboration with non-government organizations (NGOs), they bring food to the affected areas' Interviewee Ndaiziveyi Njerere said, 'Colonial and post-colonial governments took over management of the natural environment and that affected the traditional management structures of the natural environment. Chiefs have been divorced from their spiritual advisers-the spirit mediums of the cults'. According to Bernard and Kumalo (2004), rural communities in Southern Africa preferred the traditional system of natural environmental conservation. That was because they were still an agrarian society which depended on rain. The traditional way of natural environmental conservation connected the people to their culture and identity. Rural communities believed that scientifically informed notions of natural environmental conservation were concerned with the natural environment's ecological, functional, aesthetic use values, rather than its more complex relational (economic, political, social, and spiritual) representations (Bernard and Kumalo, 2004). Christopher Tilley was cited by Bernard and Kumalo (2004) as saying, 'Landscape is the fundamental reference system in which individual consciousness of the world and social identities are anchored. The Landscape anchors the people to both the present and past.' The spirit mediums of *Mwari* and Dzivaguru anchor Zimbabweans to the past through relational memories. Spirit mediums and the natural environment have the ability to condense time acting as

reminding devices. By maintaining a connection with the past and affirming a strong identity with the natural environment, a sense of stability arises. The *Mwari* and Dzivaguru cults systems of natural environmental management were more enduring and often had a greater continuity with the past than the Community – based Natural Resources Management (CBNRM) system of the European Economic Community (EEC), the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), and Zimbabwe government, whereas the CBNRM was more sensitive to the vagaries of unpredictable market and political forces (Bernard and Kumalo, 2004). The CBNRM system was negatively affected by the highly fluid state of emerging democracies, global economic systems, local regional and national power struggles, and competition for wealth.

Bernard and Kumalo (2004) cited an incident in Zimbabwe where the Mid-Zambezi Rural Development Project (MZRD) which was aimed at the conservation of the natural environment in the area and was to be funded by the EEC and the FAO was rejected by the water spirit mediums and people in the area because they believed that it was a foreign imposed and funded project, and also that the Zimbabwe government was intrusive and oppressive. The solution was not to refuse modernity, foreign aid and expertise, central and local government intervention for Zimbabweans, but to embrace all, and work together for the conservation of the natural environment, as Zimbabweans were living in a global village. There was a need to balance the sustainable use of the natural resources and the sustainable development of Zimbabwe. Juliana attributed the drought to the breakdown of respect that the people had for land and the earth's resources, the lack of social harmony, the abandonment of traditional practices and beliefs, and the failure of the government to acknowledge the role of the spirit world in the war of independence (Bernard and Kumalo, 2004).

How traditional was traditional? A tradition which prevented people from drinking borehole water which was purer than water from the sands of a river, as maintained by Juliana, was not progressive. Also Juliana's tradition which prevented the government from constructing dams, boreholes, and using cement, was equally retrogressive. Juliana's taboos were rejected because they did not resonate with the ever dynamic social, political, economic, scientific and technological trends of the people. By opposing the construction of dams and boreholes, and restricting the activities of the churches, Juliana divorced the *Mwari* cult from modernity. A Tradition which forbade schools and dams, as was propounded by a Dzivaguru spirit medium in chief Choma's area, was not acceptable to the people. The fact that Zimbabweans responded to the pronouncements of the *Mwari* and Dzivaguru cults was

proof that people then respected water spirits and the fact that they rejected the pronouncements of the Dzivaguru and Juliana spirit mediums, was also proof that they wanted an integration of religious cults and modernity in as far as natural environmental conservation was concerned. The *Mwari*, Chaminuka, Nehanda, *mhondoro* and Dzivaguru cults were used to mobilize popular support for the successful execution of the guerrilla wars of 1896-97 and 1966-80, to reduce conflicts and fights among communities, and to conserve the natural environment (Ranger, 1995). The same cults which helped bring Zimbabwe's independence could be used to mobilize Zimbabweans in an effort to conserve the natural environment. The *Mwari*, Dzivaguru, and *mhondoro* cults could be seen as vehicles to effect that change. That then calls for the integration of the water spirits with modernity in the conservation of the natural environment.

The new approach, centered on integration of modernity and water spirits, could allow Zimbabweans to make inter-connections and inter-relationships with agricultural production and the exploitation of other natural resources. The natural environment had the ability to nourish and sustain life, was sacred, and was endowed with spirits. The realization that all creation had spirit because of its original link with Mother Earth, who was spiritual and sacred, could be the starting place for the creation of a new Zimbabwean environmental ethic. A scientifically and technologically flowering natural environmental management would be inseparably linked with water spirits. Zimbabweans would consider and acknowledge that technology has spirits because of its connection and relationship to its original source – Mother Earth. Interviewee Dzingireni Muchato argued, 'Before the advent of modernity in Zimbabwe, technology has spirits and was spiritual in nature. To be a technologist like a black smith, a maker of clay pots and a weaver of baskets was a spiritual practice'.

Zimbabweans could reconcile technology with ATR spirituality. Did the material that came from a rock (mineral) that existed in technology have a spirit? Interviewee Muchaneta Vavarirai said, 'Some components of computers, cell phones, tractors, and different kinds of machines, are made out of minerals (rocks) mined in Zimbabwe. The components are still part of Mother Earth and for that reason have spirits. Hence, technology has spirits. The spirits did not go away because the mineral had been worked out and made into machines. The spirit is in the machine, therefore all technology is spiritual'. Interviewee Teereraai Mukurunge said, 'Tools like hoes, axes, spears, assegais and arrows, which were made by Zimbabwean blacksmiths before colonialism, were believed to have spirits, for they were part of Mother Earth. The miners and blacksmiths who were involved in manufacturing were believed to be

possessed by ancestral spirits of technology (*vaive vanhu vaisvikirwa nemidzimu yaive yeumhizha/nyanzvi*). An understanding and respect of water spirits would be implemented in all scientific and technological enterprises to disseminate natural environmental conservation messages so as to effectively rally Zimbabweans in natural environmental conservation schemes. Respect for water spirits could be an integral part of Zimbabwean natural environmental conservation and agricultural policy. Integrating water spirits with modernity gave Zimbabweans a fuller and a more coordinated natural environmental conservation approach. It catered to Zimbabwean economic interests without causing natural environmental degradation.

An integrated natural environmental conservation approach, through education, could bring Zimbabweans back to their pre-colonial environmental mind set so that they could realize that they were destroying the environment on which they depended for their survival and lead them to take practical actions to rehabilitate it.

Conclusion

For over a century now, Zimbabwean attitudes towards water spirits and the natural environment gradually moved from one of intimate relationship and contact, to one of alienation and disengagement. The rationalistic modernity approach appeared to have little room for the respect of water spirits. Reversing destructive impacts on natural environment could be achieved by the use of an integrated natural environmental conservation approach, born of a combination of water spirits and modernity. Zimbabweans could cultivate re-enchantment with water spirits so as to rekindle the sacredness of the natural environment.

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