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Towards a Land Conservation Ethic in Zimbabwe: An Ethical and Religio-Cultural Analysis of Land Conservation Policies and Practices in Communal Areas.

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TITLE

Towards a Land Conservation Ethic in Zimbabwe: An Ethical and Religio-Cultural Analysis of
Land Conservation Policies and Practice in Communal Areas

A Dissertation

Presented to

the Faculty of the University of Denver and
the Iliff School of Theology

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

by

Maaraidzo Elizabeth Mutambara

November 2008

Advisor: Professor Dana Wilbanks

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ABSTRACT

In this study I analyze the problem of land degradation in Zimbabwe's Communal Areas (CAs) from the viewpoint of the Shona of Zimbabwe with the aim to formulate a land conservation ethic that motivates people in CAs to promote ecological stability. The Shona in CAs are proximate agents as well as victims of environmental degradation. The imperative to survive in a situation characterized by drastic inequalities in the allocation of land and an exploitative global economic system, forces them to engage in unsustainable land use practices. Land conservation policies in Zimbabwe marginalize Shona values and norms, especially as they relate to land. Against this background, the study advances the thesis that the problem of land degradation in CAs is primarily social, involving our right relationship with nature and with each other. Therefore, technical approaches to the problem must be complemented by an ethic informed by Shona religio-culture whose main components are African Traditional Religions and Cultures and African Christianity.

The study employs the hermeneutical circle of liberation theology as a paradigm by which to do ethics. The paradigm follows the three methodological concepts of liberation theology, especially as Clodovis and Leornado Boff expound it. These are: the socio-analytical mediation and the historical-analytical mediation; the hermeneutical mediation and the practical mediation. In this method, the oppressed (the Shona), are the

key ethical category for assessing all ethical behavior. The paradigm begins with the lived experiences of oppressive social situations and proceeds to formulate a system of ethics aimed at changing the oppressive situation faced by the oppressed in CAs.

The study concludes that a land conservation ethic that effectively addresses the problem of land degradation in CAs is a liberative ethic that comes out of Shona people's experience of oppression. It is an ethic that seeks to remove conditions that degrade the land and dehumanize people in CAs.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Arguments linking environmental degradation to the poor often overlook the fact that the poor are impoverished people who are under compulsive pressure to exploit all natural resources in order to survive.¹ Land degradation, defined by D. Johnson and L. A. Lewis as “the substantial decrease in the areas of biological productivity of, or usefulness of land, due to human interference results as much from social processes as physical ones.”² Deforestation, overgrazing, overpopulation, unsustainable agriculture practices and industrial activities contribute to these problems. To make matters worse, in colonial Zimbabwe land was divided along racial lines into European Areas and Communal Areas (CAs).³ In the initial divisions, the total land allocated to Europeans was more or less equal to that allocated to indigenous people disregarding the population differentials of 96% indigenous and 4% European. The land was so divided that 74% of the CAs fell into the areas of the least rainfall where the soil is poor, acidic and sandy while European areas fell into areas most suitable for intensive farming. The land

¹ See A. G. M. Ahmed and W. Mlay, "Introduction," in *Environment and Sustainable Development in Eastern and Southern Africa, Some Critical Issues*, edited by A.G.M Ahmed and W. Mlay (London: Macmillan Press, 1998), 2.

² See D. Johnson and L. A. Lewis, *Land Degradation : Creation and Destruction* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 2. See also D. Nkala, "Tackling Agriculture with Land Dearth," in *Balancing Rocks: Environment and Development in Zimbabwe*, edited by C. Lopes (Harare: SAPEZ Books, 1996), 67. Nkala suggests that in Zimbabwe land degradation is caused by deforestation, overcultivation and desertification.

³ CAs are inhabited by indigenous people. Up until 2002, the majority of the occupants in European areas were white. A detailed discussion of the origin of CAs is given in Chapter three of this study.

distribution structure in Zimbabwe was still shaped along these lines up until the implementation of the Fast Track Land Reform Program in 2000.

The mass confinement of indigenous people to the poor quality land of the CAs becomes a factor in soil erosion as the adverse impact of overcrowding. Approximately 57% of Zimbabwe's indigenous population lives in them.⁴ According to F. Tagwira, the average rate of soil loss in CAs is estimated to be of the order of 50 tonnes per hectare per year.⁵ At that rate, it is estimated that within the next 100 years, most soils in CAs will not be able to sustain subsistence yields.⁶

The Zimbabwe government's approach to the problem of land degradation in CAs is primarily technical. Land conservation policies which include *The Environmental Management Act (EMA) No. 13/2002 Chapter 20:27*⁷ and *The National Conservation Strategy: Zimbabwe's Road to Survival*⁸ are informed by a development discourse that privileges technical and western scientific systems of knowledge.⁹ Yet, the Shona in CAs are not irrational people exploiting the land for no reason. The imperative to survive in a situation characterized by drastic inequalities in the allocation of resources, especially

⁴ Nkala, "Tackling Agriculture with Land Dearth," 67.

⁵ F. Tagwira, "Soil Erosion and Conservation Techniques for Sustainable Crop Production in Zimbabwe," in *Environment and Sustainable Development in Eastern and Southern Africa*, edited by A.G. M. Ahmed and W. Mlay (London: Macmillan Press 1998), 119.

⁶ Ibid.,

⁷ *The Environmental Management Act (EMA) No. 13/2002 Chapter 20:27* consolidates all the environmental laws in the country including *The National Conservation Strategy: Zimbabwe's Road to Survival*. See Ministry of Mines, Environment and Tourism in Zimbabwe, *The Environmental Management Act (EMA) No. 13/2002 Chapter 20:27* (Harare: Government Printers, 2003).

⁸ See the Ministry of Tourism and Natural Resources, *The National Conservation Strategy: Zimbabwe's Road to Survival* (Harare: Government Printers, 1987), 1-36.

⁹ Sustainable development approach informs these policies. The biophysical and environmental management aspects are emphasized.

land, forces them to engage in unsustainable land use practices. Social justice that protects people, especially the poor, is needed in order to effectively address the problem of land degradation in CAs.

Policy makers concerned with land conservation matters in the country marginalize indigenous people's value systems and norms relative to the use of land.¹⁰ They overlook the fact that indigenous people's dispossession of the land and their confinement to CAs implied political, economic, religious and cultural subservience because land has religious as well as political, social, economic and cultural significance to indigenous people.¹¹ For the indigenous people of Zimbabwe, land is a God-given resource that offers history, identity, knowledge and livelihood.¹² Whatever undermines aspects of Shona religio-culture undermines Shona people's capacity to take care of the land. Only an interdisciplinary approach can do justice to the religio-cultural and socio-economic issues that are raised in this discourse on land degradation in CAs.

In addition, in Zimbabwe, Christianity and African Traditional Religions have influenced each other for over a century so that the majority of the indigenous people are Christians as African Traditional Religions and culture continue to shape their worldview.¹³ For the majority of the indigenous people in Zimbabwe, keeping the

¹⁰ See the Ministry of Tourism and Natural Resources, *The National Conservation Strategy: Zimbabwe's Road to Survival*, And *The Environmental Management Act (EMA) No. 13/2002 Chapter 20:27*.

¹¹ See S. Bakare, *My Right to Land in the Bible and in Zimbabwe: A Theology of Land in Zimbabwe* (Harare: ZCC, 1993), 46-47. Chapter two of this study provides a detailed discussion of this point.

¹² See Chapter two of this study. See also Bakare, *My Right to Land*, 46.

¹³ The colonial occupation of Zimbabwe in 1890 accelerated missionary activities in Zimbabwe despite the fact that some missionaries had been unsuccessful in the 1560s. For a detailed discussion of historical accounts of Christian interaction with African Traditional Religions in Zimbabwe see N. M. B. Bhebhe, *Christianity and Traditional Religion in Western Zimbabwe, 1853-1923* (London: Longman, 1979); D. N.

balance of the eco-system is not only a matter of technology, but also of an ordered religiously-based social life.¹⁴

Thesis and Scope of Dissertation

This study advances the thesis that the problem of land degradation in CAs is primarily social, involving our right relationship with each other and other non human beings and therefore technical approaches to the problem must be complemented and critiqued by a land conservation ethic informed by Shona religio-culture whose major components are African Traditional Religions and culture and African Christianity.

The discourse on land conservation in CAs ignores the perspective of indigenous women. Yet, women are not only the largest category of land users in CAs, they are also proximate agents of land degradation in the same.¹⁵ They deal with the land in their day

Beach, "The Initial Impact of Christianity on the Shona: The Protestant and the Southern Shona," in *Christianity South of the Zambezi*, Vol. 1, edited by A. J. Dachs (Gweru: Mambo Press, 1973), 25-40.; C. J. M. Zvobgo, *A History of Christian Missions in Zimbabwe, 1890-1939* (Gweru: Mambo Press, 1996) and John Weller and Jane Linden, *Mainstream Christianity to 1980 in Malawi, Zambia, and Zimbabwe* (Gweru: Mambo Press, 1984). The cross fertilization between the African Traditional Religions and culture and Christianity is ongoing and is well documented. See G. Z. Kapenzi, *The Clashes of Cultures: Christian Missionaries and the Shona of Rhodesia* (Washington DC, University Press of America, 1979; T. Ranger, "Religious Pluralism in Zimbabwe," in *Journal of Religion in Africa* 25, No. 3 (1995): 226-227. African Initiated Churches have also engaged creatively with African cultural realities especially in the areas of healing. See M. L. Daneel, *Old and New in Southern Shona Independent Churches* Vol. 1 (The Hague: Mouton, 1971). Indigenous theologians in Zimbabwe have engaged creatively with various aspects of Shona traditional religions. See Ezra Chitando, "Re-Wrapping the Christian Faith Indigenously: A Preliminary Study of African Theology in Zimbabwe," in *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 112 (March 2002): 3-21 and M. F. C. Bourdillon, ed. *Christianity South of the Zambezi*, Vol. 2 (Gweru: Mambo Press, 1977).

¹⁴Among the Shona and most African communities in Southern and Central Africa, maintaining the fertility of the land is lived as fidelity to tradition and custom prescribed by the ancestors. See Chapter two of this study. Also see J. M. Schoffleers, ed., *Guardians of the Land: Essays on Central Africa Territorial Cults* (Gweru: Mambo Press, 1979).

¹⁵ 96% of the population in CAs is female with as many as 40% of the families being managed by women whose husbands work in cities. M. Mutuma et al, eds., *An Evaluation of Agricultural Extension Services with references to Makonde District* (Harare: ZIDS Consultancy Report, 1990). Also quoted in S. Moyo, "A Gendered Perspective on the Land Question," in *SAFERE* Vol. 1 no. 1 (January 1995): 15. The

to day productive and reproductive tasks of providing wood fuel, water and food for household consumption.¹⁶ When these natural resources are scarce as is the case in CAs, the imperative of daily life forces them to exploit the natural resources in order to survive. Women in CAs are also victims of land degradation.¹⁷ The physical deterioration of natural resources greatly extends women's work-load in ways that affects their health and the health of their families.¹⁸ Therefore, women's perspective on the problem of land degradation in CAs is needed in the development of an effective land conservation ethic for CAs.

In Zimbabwe, land redistribution which is aimed at alleviating population pressure in CAs overlooks gender. Yet, inequalities in land ownership in the country were based on race and gender. Indigenous people's access to resources, differ for

ZWRCN Evidence to the Land Commission indicates that women provide approximately 70% of the labor requirements in family run farms in communal areas. See ZWRCN, *The Gender Dimension of Access and Land Use Rights in Zimbabwe: Evidence to the Land Commission* (Harare: ZWRCN, January 1994), 34.

¹⁶ This situation is a result of the lack of a developed infrastructure in CAs. For example, the lack of electricity in CAs increases women's dependence on natural resources especially firewood. According to Moyo, more than four million tonnes of wood are consumed annually and this is equivalent to the clear felling of 100,000 hectares of reasonable quality wood. S. Moyo, *Zimbabwe's Environmental Dilemma: Balancing Resource Inequities*, 44.

¹⁷ They are vulnerable to the depletion or restricted access to natural resources because their domestic needs rely heavily on natural resources. According to the Zimbabwe Women's Resources Center Network (ZWRCN) *Evidence Report to the Land Commission*, "Women understand the process of degradation not in the textbook sense but in their own experience and observations in their local situation when they have to walk long distances to fetch firewood and water. When they observe yields dwindling as soil is exhausted and eroded away." See ZWRCN. *The Gender Dimension of Access and Land Use Rights in Zimbabwe: Evidence to the Land Commission* (Harare: ZWRCN, January 1994.), 30-31. The evidence presented in this report is based on the experience of grassroots women farmers compiled through a review of research, field surveys, field reports, a series of provincial conferences and workshops held by the department of Women's affairs from 1982 through to 1988.

¹⁸ The situation in CAs is also exacerbated by male exodus to towns and mines for wage labor. Women and children and older men are left to carry out most of the work in the home. See R.W. M. Johnson, *The Labor Economy of the Reserve, Occasional Paper No.4*, Dept of Economics, University College of Rhodesia and Nyasaland (Salisbury: Unitas Press Ltd, nd.). Similar observations were made in India. See A. Agarwal, "Beyond Pretty Trees and Tigers in India", in *The Future of the Environment: The Social Dimensions of Conservation and Ecological Alternatives*, edited by David C. Pitt (London and New York: Routledge, 1988), 93-125.

women and men. In land policies designed in the colonial period and in present Zimbabwe, only men have proprietary rights over the land so that women, especially married women, have no independent access to it. As Mukonyora convincingly argues, a special relationship is forged between women and land in African Traditional Religions¹⁹ to make them both victims of patriarchy but also agents through whom much can be learned about the environment.²⁰ Yet, not much attention is paid to women in the current political discourse on land redistribution in Zimbabwe. With the introduction of Economic Structural Adjustment Programs in the early 1990s, the discourse on land redistribution in Zimbabwe moved from the concern for justice, of which the woman question is a part, to a concern for efficiency and productivity with men as the guardians of the land.²¹ An effective land conservation ethic²² for CAs cannot ignore issues of social and gender justice in land redistribution.

In Zimbabwe, a land conservation ethic informed by Shona religio-culture must consider ways of speaking meaningfully to people outside of its own religio-cultural traditions or value system i.e., an effective land conservation ethic that is informed by Shona religio-culture, must address how its views are to be understood in the public

¹⁹ Here Mukonyora refers, especially to African Traditional Religions as it is practiced by the Shona people in Zimbabwe.

²⁰ I. Mukonyora, "Women and Ecology in Shona Religion," in *Word and World* (Summer 2000): 276-284.

²¹ In 1980, land was to be distributed to refugees and the landless. See Government of Zimbabwe, *Socio-Economic Review of Zimbabwe* (Harare: Government Printers, 1985); Moyo represents the current position of the government on this issue. See S. Moyo, *The Interaction of Market and Compulsory Land Acquisition Processes with Social Action in Zimbabwe's Land Reform*, Paper Presented at SAPEZ Colloquium on 9/24, 2000. (Unpub). See also S. Moyo, *Land Reform Under Structural Adjustment* (Uppsala, Sweden: Africa Institute, 2000).

²² By effective land conservation ethic is meant an ethic that motivates persons to promote ecological stability.

realm that is characterized by multiple value systems that are secular and religion based.²³ It is also necessary to address this issue because environmental problems often transcend individual, national or even regional boundaries.²⁴ In addition, land dispossession which underlies the problem of land degradation in Zimbabwe and most parts of Africa, is a result of activities by both indigenous people and by giant agribusinesses and multinational corporations. The latter are not necessarily bound by the tenets of African Traditional Religions or Christianity.

In developing a land conservation ethic for CAs, I am guided by the following research questions: (1) How is land perceived and valued by the indigenous people of Zimbabwe, especially the Shona? (2) Why is there a problem of land degradation in CAs? (3) What does African Traditional Religions and cultures and African Christian Theology teach about the right relationship between human beings (males and female) and human beings and the land in CAs? (4) What are the implications of a land conservation ethic for this context?

The loci of this investigation are CAs inhabited by the Shona people who comprise the largest group of indigenous people in the country.²⁵ CAs cover over 16.3 million hectares of land, representing 42 % of all land in Zimbabwe.²⁶ While CAs inhabited by the Shona are not an exact replicas, of each other, I suggest that

²³ In Zimbabwe, Sustainable Development, African Traditional Religions and cultures and Christianity represent competing value systems that have implications for how people relate to one another and to the land.

²⁴ In the Southern Africa region, shared natural resources (rivers, wildlife, forests) are a compelling situation for a regional approach to understanding problems relating to land degradation in the region.

²⁵ See Chapter two of this study for a detailed discussion of the Shona people and their religio-culture.

²⁶ S. Moyo, *Zimbabwe's Environmental Dilemma: Balancing Resource Inequities* (Harare:ZERO, 1991), 81.

generalizations are possible through abstraction.²⁷ Common characteristics of CAs are poor land quality, acute land degradation, depletion of natural resources and 99% of the population is indigenous. According to the *Rukuni Report*, 90% of the severely eroded lands in the country are in CAs.²⁸ Moyo also noted that 75% of that area exhibit severe degradation such that the regeneration of the vegetation cover under the existing circumstances is not likely to occur.²⁹

The study covers the period from 1930 to the year 2002. 1930 is a good starting point because it marked the legal creation of CAs under the Land Apportionment Act (LAA) of 1930. The year 2002 is a good and convenient date to end for two reasons. First, the year 2002 officially marked the end of the “Fast Track Land Reform Program 2000” that was aimed at dismantling the status quo established by the LAA of (1930). Second, in the year 2002, the government passed the Environmental Management Act (EMA) No. 13/2002 Chapter 20:27 which marked a shift to sustainable development as an approach to land conservation in Zimbabwe.³⁰ In this study, reference shall be made to the Native Land Husbandry Act of (1951), and the Environmental Management Act No. 13/2002 Chapter 20:27 because they govern Zimbabwe's land conservation policies, especially in CAs.

²⁷The origin and physical characteristics of CAs are discussed in more detail in Chapter three of this study.

²⁸ M. Rukuni, *Report of the Commission Of Inquiry Into Appropriate Agricultural Land Tenure Systems: Main Report*. Vol. 1. ‘Main Report’ (Harare: Government Printers, 1994), 81. See also Table 3: 9.

²⁹ S. Moyo, *Zimbabwe’s Environmental Dilemma*, 81.

³⁰The Act consolidates all the land conservation policies in the country. See Ministry of Mines, Environment and Tourism in Zimbabwe, *The Environmental Management Act (EMA) No. 13/2002 Chapter 20:27*. (Harare: Government Printers, 2003).

Literature Review

Abundant literature exists on the technical side of land degradation and conservation in Zimbabwe since colonial times.³¹ This literature from the natural scientists is useful for this study because it explains the physical/environmental process that causes the decline in the physical qualities of the soil in CAs. The analysis of the physical causes is important for the selection of appropriate conservation practice for specific places that exhibit the symptoms of land degradation such as deforestation and gully erosion. To date there is an increasing volume of literature that seeks to rectify this imbalance by examining the social,³² political³³ and economic³⁴ aspects of land degradation in the country. The authors suggest solutions that include indigenous people's need to improve land management skills and the redistribution of land. Efficiency and productivity are the criteria for land redistribution. I concur that land redistribution is needed in order to effectively address the problem of land degradation in CAs. However, the criteria for land redistribution suggested by the authors ignore issues of economic justice that that I consider to be central to solving the problem of land degradation in CAs.

³¹H. A. Elwell, "The Degrading Soil and Water Resources of the Communal Areas," in *Zimbabwe Science News*, Vol. 19: (9/10) 1983:145-147; Haviland, P.H. "Soil Erosion", in *Rhodesia Agricultural Journal*, 24 (1928): 329-333.

³²P. A. Made, "Women and Dessertification Tillers of the Land, Keepers of Knowledge," *SAFERE 1:1* (1995): 32-38, and Moyo, S, "A Gendered Perspective of the Land Question", 13-31.

³³ J. A. Elliott, *Soil Erosion and Conservation in Zimbabwe: Political Economy and the Environment*, (Ph.D. thesis, University of Technology Loughborough, 1989). See also Sam Moyo, "The Political Economy of Land Redistribution in the 1990s," in *Land Reform in Zimbabwe, Constraints and Prospects*, edited by T.A. S. Bowyer-Bower and Colin Stoneman (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2000), 873-82. And S. Moyo, *Land Reform Under Structural Adjustment* (Uppsala, Sweden: Africa Institute, 2000).

³⁴ F. Grohs, *An Economic Evaluation of Soil conservation Measures in Zvimba and Chirau Communal Lands*, Mt. Pleasant, Harare, Zimbabwe: Dept. of Agriculture Economics and Extension (University of Zimbabwe: AEE 91/8, 1991).

Some scholars have suggested that combating land degradation and soil erosion in Zimbabwe requires a multifaceted strategy which addresses political and socio-economic conditions and land tenure.³⁵ Whitlow, a prominent natural scientist who specializes in Zimbabwe's soils and geography, has argued that the difficulties with reducing soil erosion in the country are socio-economic and not technical.³⁶ Blaikie and Brookfield are political economists who echo this point.³⁷ These authors argue that soil erosion or land degradation is an interdisciplinary issue that involves both the natural sciences and the social sciences as well.³⁸ The political economic analysis of land degradation helps us to understand the social causes of land degradation in CAs. The limitation of this approach is that it overlooks the religio-cultural dimension of the problem of land degradation.

Matowanyika,³⁹ Muchena⁴⁰ and Murphree⁴¹ have criticized the overly technocentric approach to the problem of land degradation and conservation in CAs. They argue that indigenous people's value systems and norms are relevant to matters

³⁵ See International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED), *Environmental Synopsis of Zimbabwe* (London: The Institute, 1992), 26.

³⁶ J. R. Whitlow, *Land Degradation in Zimbabwe: A Geographical Study*, Department of Natural Resources/University of Zimbabwe (Harare: Government Printer, 1988).

³⁷ See Piers Blaikie and Harold Brookfield, *Land Degradation and Society* (London and New York: Methuen, 1987). See also Piers Blaikie, *The Political Economy of Soil Erosion in Developing Countries* (London and New York: Longman, 1985).

³⁸ The former provides the physical reasons why the land becomes degraded, while the latter provides social causes of land degradation that are rooted in social relations and it also provides the reasons why adequate steps are not taken to counter the effects of land degradation as described by the natural scientists Ibid., 2.

³⁹ J. Z. W. Matowanyika, *Indigenous Resource Management and Sustainability in Rural Zimbabwe: An Exploration of Practices and Concepts in Commonlands* (Ph.D. thesis, University of Waterloo, Ontario, Canada, 1991).

⁴⁰ O.N. Muchena, *An Analysis of Indigenous Knowledge Systems: Implications For Extension Education with Particular Reference to Natural Resource Management* (Ph.D. thesis, Iowa State University, 1990).

⁴¹ M. W. Murphree, *Communities as Institutions for Resource Management*, (Harare: University of Zimbabwe, Center for Applied Social Sciences CASS, 1991).

relating to the land and its use in CAs. In making this argument, the authors note that in traditional Shona societies, ecological stability was achieved through religio-culture based practices and norms that included rituals, proverbs, myths, legends and taboos.⁴² From the aforementioned studies, I borrow the view that indigenous knowledge systems and technology are needed in the conceptualization of sustainable solutions to the problem of land degradation in Zimbabwe's rural areas. I regard Shona religio-culture based views about the land and its use as critical to the construction of an effective land conservation ethic for CAs. With the exception of Murphree however, these scholars do not examine the broader social, political and religious implications for the effective application of indigenous knowledge for natural resources management. I also borrow from Murphree the important point that cultural systems and the ability to care for land are interrelated.

Literature from church circles on land policies in colonial⁴³ and post-colonial Zimbabwe⁴⁴ focuses on economic justice rather than ecological-justice. The churches value land for its utility. The intrinsic and religio-cultural value of land does not inform the ethical thought of the church on that subject. This study is concerned with both economic justice and ecological-justice in CAs.

⁴²According to these scholars, taboos and sacred phenomena were part of Shona land use ethic which limited access to or stipulated desirable behavior towards nature.

⁴³ The churches challenged the ideology of segregation that was behind the colonial government's land policies. See Rhodesia Catholic Bishops, *The Land Tenure Act and the Church* (Gwelo: Mambo Press, 1970).

⁴⁴ See Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops Conference, *Moral Principles of Land Reform*, Press Statement No. 4, released for publication by Fr. Oskar Wermter, S.J, Social Communications Secretary, ZCB, 3/13/2000. And, *Heads of Denominations Statement on the Church's Position on Land Reform*, issued at Africa Synod House, Harare: (January 19, 2001). The Heads of Denominations in Zimbabwe represents most Christian Churches and Umbrella Organizations in Zimbabwe.

Literature from religiously- based grassroots organizations such as The Association of Zimbabwe Traditional Ecologists (AZTREC) and Association of African Earth Keeping Churches (AAEC) indicates that they focus on the physical symptoms of land degradation which include deforestation.⁴⁵ Their solution involves planting indigenous trees. The organizations do not address the socio-political changes that would be necessary in order for them to meet their conservation goals. However, Daneel's writings, especially the book titled, *African Earth Keepers: Wholistic Interfaith Mission*, are instructive to this discussion because they value insights from both African Christianity and African Traditional Religions and culture on matters relating to land conservation in CAs. I draw from the book, Shona religio-culture based values and norms for land use. However, Daneel's study is limited by the fact that he does not treat women as agents of environmental knowledge in their own right.⁴⁶ Yet, in these organizations, women are numerically in the majority and they perform most of the reforestation activities. In this study, I close this gap in knowledge by drawing upon literature from African women theologians and ethicists.

Not many African women theologians and ethicists have addressed directly the problem of land degradation in their societies. In the anthology, *Women Healing Earth Third World: Women on Ecology, Feminism and Religion*, women theologians and

⁴⁵ AZTREC is made up of chiefs, spirit mediums, headman and ex-combatants and traditional oriented villagers while AAEC is the Christian wing that comprises 150 African Independent Churches and is led by bishops, prophets and women associations. For a detailed account of the activities of these organizations. See M. L. Daneel, *African Earth Keepers: Wholistic Interfaith Mission* (Maryknoll; NY: Orbis, 2001).

⁴⁶ In the book *African Earth Keepers*, Daneel develops a green theology for AZTREC and AAEC that is drawn from the male members of the organizations. I. Mukonyora made similar observations in her book. *Wandering A Gendered Wilderness: Suffering and Healing in An African Initiated Church* (New York: Peter Lang, 2007). Mvududu also observed that women in AZTREC were not treated as agents of environmental knowledge in their own right. See Sarah Mvududu, "Revisiting Traditional Management of Indigenous Woodlands," in *Women Healing Earth: Third World Women on Ecology, Feminism and Religion*, edited by Rosemary Radford Reuther (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1995), 143-161.

ethicists from Asia, Africa and Latin America examine the interplay of religion in the interconnectedness between the domination of women and the domination of nature.⁴⁷ In the anthology, African authors who include Hinga,⁴⁸ Mvududu⁴⁹ and Phiri⁵⁰ argue that Christianity and secularization are responsible for the breakdown of indigenous regulations with regards to natural resources' conservation in Africa.⁵¹ The authors regard women as agents of environmental knowledge in their own right. They argue that the empowerment of women and the recovery of indigenous spirituality are important to recreating a holistic eco-justice worldview.⁵² This study shares that position. Women's input on land conservation is essential to the construction of an effective land conservation ethic for CAs.

Very few Third World⁵³ and Fourth World⁵⁴ male theologians link theological arguments to extreme poverty and environmental degradation in their contexts.⁵⁵

⁴⁷ Rosemary Radford Reuther, ed. *Women Healing Earth: Third World Women on Ecology, Feminism and Religion* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1995).

⁴⁸ T. Hinga, "The Gikuyu Theology of Land and Environmental Justice," in *Women Healing Earth: Third World Women on Ecology, Feminism and Religion*, edited by Rosemary Radford Reuther (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1995), 172-184.

⁴⁹ Mvududu, "Revisiting Traditional Management of Indigenous Woodlands", 143-161

⁵⁰ Isabel Phiri, "The Chisumphu Cult: The Role of Women in Preserving the Environment," in *Women Healing Earth: Third World Women on Ecology, Feminism and Religion*, edited by Rosemary Radford Reuther (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1995), 161-171.

⁵¹ See Chapter five of this study for a detailed discussion of these authors' work.

⁵² For example, Mvududu's study of the traditional systems of woodland management among the Shona calls for the empowerment of women through a combination of renewed traditional culture and the removal of legal and socio-cultural constraints to rural women having access to resources such as land, education and legal rights. See S. Mvududu, "Revisiting Traditional Management of Indigenous Woodlands," 151.

⁵³ L. Boff, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1997); E. Gudynas, "Ecology from the Viewpoint of the Poor", in *Ecology and Poverty: Cry of the Earth Cry of the Poor*, edited by Leonardo Boff, and V. Elizondo (London: SCM Press, 1995), 106-114; E. Martey, *African Theology: Inculturation vs Liberation* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1993).

Emmanuel Martey is one of the few African theologians who link theological arguments about land degradation to poverty. His concern is with poverty that is caused by external factors such as the International Debt, the International Monetary Fund policies and a market economy that treats natural resources as inexhaustible.⁵⁶ This important focus on recent developments in the global economy, though, does not provide an adequate explanation for the problem of land degradation in Zimbabwe that seems to have originated and escalated with the establishment of colonial rule in the country in 1890. However, I borrow from Martey the insight that the problem of land degradation in Africa in general, has a global dimension linked to the global economy.⁵⁷

Sebastian Bakare, a Shona theologian, addresses the problem of landlessness in Zimbabwe. In his book, *My Right to Land in the Bible and in Zimbabwe: A Theology of Land in Zimbabwe*, Bakare argues for land redistribution in Zimbabwe. His concern is economic justice that should be realized by giving back land to its “rightful owners”. For Bakare, “rightful owners” has come to mean indigenous people, especially men, who traditionally have the right to own land in Shona society. This criterion for land redistribution does not transcend discrimination based on gender and race. However, Bakare’s theology is relevant to this discussion because it privileges the perspective of

⁵⁴ G. E. Tinker, "Ecojustice and Justice," in *Theology for an Earth Community: A Field Guide*, edited by Dieter T. Hessel (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1996), 176-186.

⁵⁵ A unique methodological contribution that is made by Boff, Gudynas and Tinker is that social ecology is the starting point in their discourse on poverty, ecology and liberation. Social ecology is the way human beings relate to one another and how they organize their relations with other non-human beings.

⁵⁶ E. Martey, *African Theology: Inculturation vs Liberation.*,

⁵⁷ See Chapter three.

the poor and landlessness is the principal context of application of theology. This study examines in greater detail the issues of gender and landlessness in a qualitative sense.⁵⁸

Leornado Boff, a Latin American liberation ethicists and theologian addresses directly the connection between “the cry of the poor and the cry of the earth”, and at the same time offers the political, social and religious context within which ecological justice is to be realized.⁵⁹ The ‘oppressed of the earth’ occupy the central epistemological place in the ethics of liberation theology espoused by Boff. Boff’s category of the poor as the most threatened or oppressed members of creation is a useful analytical category for the ethics done in this study.⁶⁰ In CAs, the people and the land need liberation.⁶¹ The former needs liberation from oppressive socio-cultural and economic relations while the latter needs liberation from the oppressed poor who degrade the land in order to survive and the rich who degrade the land out of greed. Although Boff’s theological analysis is predominantly Christian, I shall borrow from liberation theology the importance of the viewpoint of the poor and social ecology as the point of departure for my ethics. The experience of the oppressed members of the earth in CAs is the point of departure for this study and it also provides the lenses for reading the ethical and religio-cultural sources used in this study.

⁵⁸ These issues are underemphasized in Bakare’s study.

⁵⁹ Boff suggests that the social and political framework for this kind of integral liberation is an extended and enriched democracy. See L. Boff, *Cry of the Earth Cry of the Poor* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1997),112.

⁶⁰ Boff urges liberation theology to adopt the vision that sees the earth as a living superorganic linked to the entire universe. In this vision, human beings were created for the universe and not vice versa. L. Boff. *Ecology and Liberation: A New Paradigm* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1993).

⁶¹ The Shona in CAs are proximate agents of land degradation and victims of social, economic and ecological injustice.

This study attempts to respond to the challenges left unresolved by articulating from the viewpoint of the Shona, a land conservation ethic that motivates people to promote ecological stability in CAs. In this dissertation I depend on documentary and oral sources to build my argument.⁶² I also approach this research from the position of an insider, being a Shona woman and having lived for over ten years in Mutambara CAs in Chimanimani district located in Manicaland province.

Methodology: The Hermeneutical Circle For Ethics

Ethicists writing from the viewpoint of the poor have adopted the hermeneutical circle as a paradigm by which to do ethics.⁶³ The “hermeneutical circle” is a process that liberation theologians have generally relied on as a guide for their theological reflection. The paradigm begins with lived experiences of oppressive social situations and proceeds by working out a theory and then a course of action that will dismantle the mechanisms that cause oppression. The purpose of the circle is to formulate a system of ethics aimed at changing the oppressive situation faced by the oppressed.

In this study, I adopt the “hermeneutical circle” from liberation theology as a paradigm by which to do ethics for the purpose of formulating an ethic that motivates people in CAs to promote ecological stability. The hermeneutical circle for ethics adopted in this dissertation follows the methodological concepts of liberation theology

⁶² Documentary sources include government documents on land and the environment, conference proceedings and workshops on the state of the environment in Zimbabwe, books, articles, journals, newspapers and dissertations that address directly or indirectly the problem of land degradation and conservation in Zimbabwe and Africa in general. The oral sources include proverbs, taboos, myths and legends.

⁶³ See Miguel De La Torre, *Doing Christian Ethics From the Margin* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2004), 58-69; See also Douglas Hicks, *Inequality and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

especially as Clodovis and Leonardo Boff expound it. Liberation theologians speak of at least three principal mediations: the socio-analytical mediation and the historical-analytical mediation; the hermeneutical mediation and the practical mediation.⁶⁴ The structure of this dissertation follows these three methodological concepts of liberation theology.

The Socio-Analytical Mediation

The socio-analytical mediation seeks to understand why a situation of oppression exists. In this mediation, one examines and articulates the situation of the oppressed in their social and historical context respectively. According to Leonardo and Clodovis Boff, a history of oppression is essential in order for a particular form of oppression to be addressed adequately. In the hermeneutical circle for ethics, the social and historical mediations provide ethics with an informed practical response to oppression. As De La Torre rightly argues, when doing ethics from the margin, the analysis of the social system is an integral component of ethical deliberation because it provides a necessary critique of how the present social structures justify as well as perpetuate the situation of oppression.⁶⁵ The analysis is necessary because ethics can never adequately respond to oppressive structures if it fails to understand fully how these structures are created and preserved through economic, social and political forces. Thus, a thorough understanding of an ethical dilemma must include the historical causes of the dilemma and a study of the way in which the society maintains structures that caused the dilemma.

⁶⁴ Here, mediations refer to the means or instruments of theological process. See Clodovis Boff, "Methodology of the Theology of Liberation," in *Systematic Theology: Perspectives from Liberation Theology*, edited by Jon Sobrino and Ignacio Ellacuria (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1996), 19; Leonardo Boff, and Clodovis Boff. *Introducing Liberation Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1989). Leonardo Boff defines praxis as reflective theory and strategy of action.

⁶⁵ De La Torre, *Doing Ethics from the Margin*, 62.

The social-analytic mediation in liberation theology comes out of the realization that all knowledge is socially situated and serves particular interests. Ethics in liberation theology identifies the oppressed as the key ethical category for assessing all ethical behavior.⁶⁶ It engages ethical debates from the perspective of the oppressed, arguing that in the process it exercises an epistemological privilege in ethical inquiry. The oppressed as an ethical category are viewed as embodying the experience, location and practice which provide the only valid site for transformative action.⁶⁷ As such, the category of the ‘poor’ comprises a key hermeneutical space within which the ethics of liberation theology emerges.⁶⁸ The viewpoint of the oppressed informs how God is understood, religio-cultural sources are read and how society is constructed. The “epistemological privilege”, De La Torre argues, is also given to the oppressed on the basis of their ability to know how to live or survive in both the center and periphery of society.⁶⁹ Consequently, the primary source for doing ethics from the margin is the lived experience of the marginalized people. This means that ethics in liberation theology is contextual in so far as the everyday experience of the oppressed is the subject and source of ethical reflection. Chapters Two, Three and Four belong to this section.

⁶⁶ See also Zolani Ngwane, “Ethics in Liberation Theology,” in *Doing Theology in Context: South African Perspectives*, edited by C. Villa-Vicencio and J. W. de Gruchy, (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1994), 114-124.

⁶⁷ Ibid.,

⁶⁸ Ibid.,

⁶⁹ De La Torre, *Doing Christian Ethics from the Margin*, 62.

The Hermeneutic Mediation

This mediation entails a constructive reading of religious and theological sources within the context of the realities examined through the socio-analytical analysis in the first step. Chapter Five belongs to this section. The main sources include African social ethics informed by African Traditional Religions and culture, African Christian theology articulated by Sebastian Bakare and African women's theology. I also draw from public theology the norms for participating in public life, especially Ronald Thiemann's conditions for publicity.⁷⁰ From the aforementioned sources, I identify values, norms and principles that can serve as guideposts in dealing with the problem of land degradation in CAs.

The Bible is a key source for Bakare's theology and African women's theology. In using the Bible as a source of ethical guidance, the ethicist uses the hermeneutics of liberation. Liberative hermeneutics reads the Bible as a book of life within the framework that arises from the situation of the oppressed. The reading of the bible stresses the social context of the message. It places each text in its historical context in order to construct appropriate translation into our historical context.⁷¹

⁷⁰ In his argument about the role of religion in public life, Thiemann identifies three conditions of publicity: public accessibility, mutual respect, and moral integrity. The conditions provide the moral guidelines for public conversation in a pluralistic democracy. These norms are elaborated in greater detail in Chapter five of this study. Ronald F. Thiemann, *Religion in Public Life* (Washington, D.C: Georgetown University, 1996), 135, 140, 173.

⁷¹ Books in the Bible that are favored in liberation theology include the Exodus, the prophets, for their uncompromising defense of the liberator God, their vigorous denunciation of injustices, vindication of the rights of the poor, and their proclamation of the messianic world, the Gospels, Jesus' liberating actions and proclamation of the kingdom.

Practical Mediation

The practical mediation operates in the sphere of action. It tries to discover the courses of action that need to be followed so as to overcome oppression. Its main task is to move the social analysis and theological reflection to action for justice, to the transformation of society. Chapter six belongs to this section.

In that chapter, I use the norms, principles and values identified in Chapter five to formulate an ethic that is aimed at motivating the promotion of ecological stability in CAs. The question that often arises is, how do ethicists decide what praxis is for the liberation of God's people. Enrique Dussel argues that the criterion is the liberation of the poor while the common good is justice.⁷²

Why The Hermeneutical Circle For Ethics?

Ethics done using the hermeneutical circle model is suitable for this study because it allows the oppressed to speak for themselves. Unlike the dominant ethics of Christian theology, which starts with some ethical truth based on church doctrine or rational deliberation; ethics in liberation theology begins with the daily lived experiences of the oppressed. Ethics in liberation theology attempts to work out truth and theory through reflection and action in solidarity with the oppressed. The method allows us to privilege Shona values and norms, especially as they relate to land.

In liberation theology, poverty is defined in structural terms as a social category. The poor are seen as a "by-product of the system under which human beings live and for

⁷² E. Dussel, *Ethics and Community* (London: Burns and Oates, 1988), 73.

which human beings are responsible.”⁷³ The condition of the poor is identified with the suffering of Christ. The poor are also outside the repressive structures of society. The lives of the poor are a cry against those who benefit at their expense. To be poor is to suffer more than economic deprivation. It often involves cultural deprivation.

Ethics in liberation theology is an ethics of empowerment that seeks to empower the poor.⁷⁴ It gives expression to values that emerge from within the struggle of the poor—a struggle in dialogue with the gospel and other religious traditions as understood by them.⁷⁵ In seeking to transform the situation of oppression, ethics in liberation theology becomes the process by which the marginalized enter into a more humane condition by overcoming oppressive or controlling societal mechanisms.⁷⁶ The situation in CAs requires such transformation.

Rationale

The problem of land degradation in Zimbabwe and Africa in general is not the principal context of application of African theology and African social ethics. Yet, throughout the continent of Africa, soil erosion is an increasingly important problem that is threatening agricultural production. The majority of the people in Africa depend on the land for food production, settlement, energy and other economic activities. Exports of natural resources remain a large factor in the economy of the majority of African

⁷³ Leonardo and Clodovis Boff, *Introducing Liberation Theology*, 28-31.

⁷⁴ Zolani Ngwane, “Ethics in Liberation Theology,” 114-124.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*,

⁷⁶ Ethics done from the margin seeks to determine how people of faith adapt their actions to serve the oppressed in the face of de-humanizing oppressive structures

countries where land degradation is now thought to affect two thirds of the total cropland and one third of pastureland.⁷⁷ Zimbabwe itself depends on agriculture for the greater part of its national income.⁷⁸

In addition, drastic inequalities in land ownership have remained unresolved in Southern Africa. The minority white settlers owned about 50 % of the agricultural land in Zimbabwe, and Namibia, and over 80% in South Africa.⁷⁹ Some Christian churches in Zimbabwe own large tracts of underutilized land while the majority of the churches' members reside in overpopulated CAs.⁸⁰ The inequalities in land allocation contribute to overpopulation that affect the physical environments in ways that threaten the well-being of the people and the land that people depend on for their living.

Significance of Study

In Zimbabwe, indigenous people's perspective has been marginalized in the conception of solutions to the problem of land degradation in CAs. This study makes a contribution to the discourse on land conservation in Zimbabwe by privileging indigenous people's viewpoint on matters relating to land conservation in Zimbabwe's CAs.

⁷⁷ A.G. M. Ahmed and W. Mlay W, "Introduction," 2.

⁷⁸In Zimbabwe, 70% of the population is dependent on agriculture, 45% of export earnings are from agriculture and 60% of industrial raw materials are from agriculture. See Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development. *Government of Zimbabwe 1990/91 Annual Plan* (Harare: Government Printers, 1990).

⁷⁹M. Adams, "Land Reform: New Seeds on Old Ground?" in *Natural Resources Perspectives*, Number 6 (October 1995): 1-9. The situation changed in Zimbabwe after the implementation of the Fast Track Land Reform Program 2000. However, it is important to note that the Land reform program did not alleviate the overpopulation in CAs.

⁸⁰Christian churches participated in land grabbing of enormous proportions during the establishment of colonial rule in the country. See Mutambara, J. G. *Africans Land Policies: British Colonial Policy in Zimbabwe, 1890-1965* (Ph.D. Thesis University of Cincinnati, 1981), 214.

The interdisciplinary approach to the problem of land degradation in Zimbabwe complements technocentric and science based approaches that have dominated research in that area.

This study also makes a contribution towards post-colonial ethics and post-colonial studies in so far as it employs a method that shifts the emphasis from the dominant Eurocentric conception of ethics to a pluralistic one in which the cultures of others, in this case Shona religio-culture, is recognized as contributing to or enriching an understanding of humanity as a whole.

CHAPTER TWO

THE CONCEPT OF LAND IN THE SHONA TRADITIONAL WORLDVIEW

Without an understanding of how land is perceived and valued by the Shona, it is impossible to appreciate the problem of land degradation in CAs and its impact on the Shona. Worldviews contain general assumptions about the ultimate powers that determine existence, our fundamental understandings of the world in which we live and our beliefs about human nature and nature. Clifford Geertz is a western anthropologist who rightly argues that religious beliefs establish powerful moods and motivations that translate into social behavior. Similarly, worldviews (whether mechanical or organic) often shape the moral values of the communities they inform and the community in turn shapes them. This implies that cosmologies or religious beliefs give rise to ethics, especially when they contribute towards human beings' understanding of their relationship to each other and to the rest of the world. In this section I use the Shona traditional worldview to show that land is an integral part of Shona life. Whatever happens to the land has consequences for the people and vice versa. In the process I highlight Shona views and values about land and their relationship to it. This chapter is important to this study because it helps us to understand how land was perceived and valued before the advent of colonialism and Christianity and it also serves as a backdrop for the African Religio-Ethical Approach that is developed in chapter five of this study.

For the purpose of this discussion, the Shona worldview is divided into three categories: The Spirit World, Human Society and the Natural World.

Caution About the Shona Worldview

Shona traditional belief system and spirituality are intertwined with all aspects of life. The social, cultural, political and economic realms are punctuated at every level by traditional beliefs and customs that form part of the daily-lived life in the community. As such, religion is integral to the structures around which Shona life is organized. For example, the concept of politics, economics is ambiguous when applied to Shona social organization. The reason is that in Shona society and in traditional Africa there is generally no specific “political” structure that is distinct from the social and religious structures of society. Political office in African societies often includes religious and social duties because religion is intricately connected to the African way of life.⁸¹ As will become clear in the discussion, chieftainship or political leadership in Shona society is linked with traditional beliefs of the Shona. As a result of this, there is a continuous overlap in the discussion on various aspects of the Shona worldview due to the fact that aspects of Shona life are intertwined and interconnected. It is difficult to compartmentalize them into separable subjects. Domains that are regarded as separate spheres in the Euro-western classification such as economics; politics and social are intertwined and interconnected in the Shona worldview. Thus, while I may employ the western categories such as economics or politics in reference to certain phenomenon in

⁸¹ Laurenti Magesa, *African Religion and the Traditions of Abundant life* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1997).

the Shona worldview, they should nevertheless, be understood as being interconnected in the Shona worldview.

The Spirit World: God, Ancestral Spirits

In the Shona worldview, the spirit world includes a Supreme being (God), ancestral spirits (*midzimu*), professional spirits (*mashave*), avenging spirits (*ngozi*) and mermaid/water spirit (*njuzu*). In this section I shall focus on Shona perceptions about God and the ancestral spirits because they inform Shona people's views about the land and their relationship to it.

The Shona View of God

The Shona believe in a Supreme Being who is the creator and sustainer of all that exists in the universe. All aspects of creation are regarded as sacred because they are grounded and dependent upon God's creative power. The Supreme Being is known by various names which include; *Musiki*-Creator, *Muvumbapasi*-moulder of the earth, *Musikavanhu*-creator of human beings, *Nyadenga*-owner of the heavens, *Mutangikugara*-Eternal One (the first to be), *Dzivaguru*-Huge Pool, *Chirazamauya*-the giver of blessings and *Chirozvamauya* -The One who can withhold blessings.⁸² The various names for God describe Shona people's views about the nature of God and the relational character of God. The widely used name for the Supreme being is *Mwari*. The Shona high God, known as *Mwari* is believed to be the final authority in the spirit world.

⁸² M. W. Murphree, *Christianity and the Shona* (New York: The Athlone Press, 1969).

In Shona traditional belief system, Mwari is first and foremost regarded as the rain-giver. In rain ceremonies conducted by the Shona, Mwari is the one who is ultimately approached to provide rain and good crops. The petition for rain is regarded as the main assignment of the people who visit the main oracular shrine of the Shona high god Mwari which is located in Matonjeni among the Matopo Hills.⁸³ Mwari insists on reciprocity as a condition for social and ecological well-being. For the rains to fall regularly, Mwari requires a show of right mindedness demonstrated each year by the observance of tradition and custom which include the observance of the rest day in honor of the ancestors *chisi*, rain ceremonies and marital customary laws. The violation of tradition has consequences that include ecological disasters such as drought. Mwari also acts not only in the natural realm but also in human history. For example, Mwari is believed to have advised-people to fight the colonialist in a liberation struggle for self-rule in the first Shona uprising against colonialism called the First *Chimurenga*.⁸⁴

The Shona names for God are neither male nor female and yet Mwari is often portrayed using patriarchal categories. Mukonyora, a theologian from Zimbabwe, argues that, Mwari has a female dimension, especially as *Dzivaguru* (the great pool), the fertility goddess behind the annual rain ceremonies that are held by the Shona in Zimbabwe.⁸⁵ At

⁸³ Before the sowing season, some Shona chiefs send messengers to the Mwari shrine with gifts and seeds to be planted that year along with petitions for rain. They ask Mwari to bless the seeds. Lineage and succession are not the main concerns of Mwari's messengers even though candidates for chieftainship are endorsed by them.

⁸⁴ Bhebhe and Ranger make this point. They argue that the first *Chimurenga* was inspired by visits made to the shrine of the high god Mwari which is located in Matonjeni among the Matopo Hills in South –West Zimbabwe. Male and female spirit mediums contributed to the fight for political independence. Prominent spirit mediums who mobilized resistance against colonial rule in the First *Chimurenga* included *Mbuya Nehanda* and *Sekuru Kaguvi*. Terence Ranger and Ngwabi Bhebhe eds. *Soldiers in Zimbabwe's Liberation War* (London: James Currey; Portsmouth, NH.: Heinemann; Harare: University of Zimbabwe Pub., 1995).

⁸⁵ Mukonyora, "Women and Ecology in Shona Religion," 1999.

the main shrine of the Shona high god Mwari which is located in Matonjeni among the Matopo Hills, a female spirit medium (*Mbonga svikiro*) occupied the highest position given to any human being; namely the “Voice of Mwari”. The *Mbonga svikiro* pronounced the voice of God from behind a rock located in the shrine during a ritual. A woman or man who fulfils this role at the Mwari Shrine is known as the “the wife of Mwari”. This situation shows that the message from Mwari is delivered to human beings through the feminine dimension of god (the wife of Mwari).⁸⁶

The Shona view creation as God’s gift to humanity to be shared by all. They also believe that all land belongs to God, Mwari, whose immediate trustees are the clan ancestral spirits (*mhondoro*) and the living chiefs. On the basis of this belief, the Shona view about land ownership is that, land cannot be owned by individuals in the sense of individual proprietorship as is the case with freehold title because it belongs to the departed ancestors and ultimately to God. Land is sacred because it contains the remains of the ancestors. In the Shona traditional belief system, land is sacred and it cannot be sold. This is the norm despite observations by Angela Cheater that people do buy and sell land within CAs.⁸⁷ Matowanyika correctly argues that this is not done on the open market, and in cases where people sell land in CAs, approval of residence must still be done by the traditional local leaders.

⁸⁶ Isabel Mukonyora, *Wandering A Gendered Wilderness: Suffering and Healing in An African Initiated Church* (New York: Peter Lang, 2007), Chapter Two.

⁸⁷ A. Cheater, “The Ideology of ‘Communal’ Land Tenure in Zimbabwe: Mythogenesis Enacted?” in *Africa*, 60, no. 2 (1990): 188-206.

Ancestral Spirits: Midzimu and Mhondoro

The Shona, like many societies in Africa, believe in life in the form of spirit after death. During that time a deceased adult can continue to have influence on his/her living descendants.⁸⁸ As a result of this belief, the Shona concept of family includes the deceased members and the living. Mbiti distinguishes ancestors who are still remembered by name, the “living dead” and those who are not.⁸⁹ According to him, the “living dead” form the immediate object of ancestor cults. They are the ones who are referred to by name in rituals conducted in their honor. In Shona patrilineal society, family members direct their petitions to God through their paternal ancestors.

The two important categories of ancestors in traditional Shona religion are the *vadzimu* (family ancestors)⁹⁰ and the *mhondoro* (clan ancestors).⁹¹ The (family ancestors) *mudzimu* serve their immediate family and immediate extended family while the *mhondoro* are concerned with the well-being of the clan and the territory he/she ruled over when he/she was alive.” Both the *mhondoro* and *mudzimu* possesses human mediums, female or male who become their representatives among their living descendants. Their role is to pass on the message from the spirit world to the mortal

⁸⁸ The dead person acquires the status of ancestor - hood after the family performs the *kurova guva* ritual. This is a ritual that is done in order to bring or welcome the spirit of the dead into the family. It is often conducted after one year. Among the Shona, the status of ancestor is not granted to people who die childless or those who commit suicide. Generally, a close bond exists between the living and the dead in Shona family life.

⁸⁹ J. Mbiti, *African Religion and Philosophy* 1969: 2nd edition (New York: Doubleday, 1990), 88-9.

⁹⁰ *Mudzimu* (singular) and (*vadzimu*) (plural) are spirits of departed fathers and mothers who upon their death continue to be responsible for the well-being of their descendants. While the term *mudzimu* is used to refer to all ancestors, it is often used to refer to family ancestors.

⁹¹ The term is used both in the singular and the plural. The term is also used to describe the founding ancestors of Shona chiefdoms. The clan ancestors are also referred to as *mudzimu mukuru*, the Great Spirit. *Mhondoro* is the spirit of a deceased Shona chief.

human beings.⁹² The clan and family ancestors are part of a spiritual hierarchy that is an extension of Shona lineage that embraces the dead, the living and the yet unborn of the society.⁹³

In the traditional Shona belief system, the *mhondoro* are responsible for the fertility of the land and for the general well-being of the crops in the fields. Due to this fact, land is more than a productive resource. It links past and present, the dead and the living, the chief and his people, and it binds the people together. Since the Shona depend directly upon the land for subsistence, the land owned by the *mhondoro*, emphasizes their need for contact with their deceased ancestors. This contact is often expressed through rain ceremonies.

In the Shona worldview *mhondoro* spirits are also responsible for protecting the territory they ruled. They fight against forces that undermine the life of the people and the well being of the land.⁹⁴ For example, *mhondoro* spirit mediums supported the freedom fighters in the war for the liberation of Zimbabwe that was aimed at recovering the lands expropriated by the colonial rulers.⁹⁵ In different parts of the country, the freedom fighters were given access to “holy places” by *mhondoro* spirit mediums. They were able to use as military bases “holy mountains” and sacred groves that were not

⁹² Some messages are received through dreams or during possession.

⁹³ Daneel, *Old and New in Southern Shona Independent Churches, Vol. I*, 1971.

⁹⁴ In 1896-7 Spirit mediums led the revolt against British occupation of Zimbabwe. Prominent spirit mediums who led the revolt included Mbuya Nehanda and Sekuru Kaguvi. The chiefs' position on the war for liberation varied. There were some who supported the war and some who sold out.

⁹⁵ Some of the authors who have recorded the role played by *Mhondoro* spirit mediums in Zimbabwe's wars of liberation include Charles Pfukwa, “Unwritten Ethics and Moral Values: The Human Face of Chimurenga II,” in *Orality and Cultural Identities in Zimbabwe*, edited by Maurice T. Vambe (Gweru: Mambo Press, 2004), 25-38; David Lan, *Guns and Rain: Guerrillas and Spirit Mediums in Zimbabwe*. (London: James Currey Ltd., 1985) and M.L. Daneel, “Healing the Earth: Traditional and Christian Initiatives in Southern Africa Part 1,” in *Journal for the Study of Religion*, Vol. 6, no.1 (March 1993): 3-30.

accessible to the ordinary people.⁹⁶ The holy mountains were regarded as invincible because of their connection with the founding ancestors who were buried there.

Mhondoro mediums (male and female) serving various ruling lineages incited acts of insubordination during the colonial period. Throughout the history of Zimbabwe, *mhondoro* spirit mediums have voiced criticism against the oppressor in the name of “owners of the land”, the *mhondoro*.⁹⁷

In traditional Shona religio-culture the ground, (*pasi*) is believed to be the place where ancestors and the dead in general reside. When counting family members, the Shona always include the living and those who are in the ground (*vari pasi*). Writing about the Shona of Zimbabwe, Bakare suggests that the burying of the umbilical cord in the ground goes beyond family boundaries to include the clan, village, district province and country or nation. Caleb Dube, a Zulu folklorist, noted that in Zulu society, South Africa, when someone wants to know about your identity and place of origin, they always ask literally, “*Inkaba yakho Iphi*”? Where is your umbilical cord [buried]? He noted that the umbilical cord connects a child to its ancestors in so far as the house, cattle kraal, mountain, river or building in which the umbilical cord is buried is where every member of the family or clan symbolically resides.

Shona people’s view of land is also implicit in their attitude towards ancestors’ graves. In order to understand this relationship we need to understand what constitutes a grave for the Shona? Here, Michael Bollig’s concept of grave that is based on his

⁹⁶ T. Ranger, “*Peasant Consciousness and Guerrilla War in Zimbabwe* (London: James Currey, 1985); Daneel, *African Earth Keepers*, 2001. Some sacred forests were used as bases by the freedom fighters because they were densely forested.

⁹⁷ The influence of senior spirit medium is usually felt during the times of ecological disasters such as drought.

research among the Himba of Namibia is useful and applicable to the Shona. Bollig's view is that ancestors' graves are more than the physical location in which the physical remains of a deceased person rest, they are focal points for practicing religious beliefs and rituals, for defining identity and for expressing relationships with the land".⁹⁸ I shall examine these three aspects as they pertain to the Shona.

In African traditional religions, ancestors' graves are focal points for human contact with the spirit world. Most rituals essential for ensuring the good health of the people and the land are conducted at the founding ancestors' graves.⁹⁹ In keeping with Shona perceptions about the place they call home, it was customary among the Shona to take a very sick individual to his or her "roots" home even at a time when the patient was receiving medical attention from a modern hospital or clinic. The belief is that *kumusha* is the place where ancestors can be appeased especially in the case of ancestrally derived misfortune, and it is the place where one's forces of wellness/life are concentrated.¹⁰⁰ The belief is that the patient's forces of wellness are best reoriented in the place where they are concentrated the most, their home. Shona attitude towards ancestors' graves is not unique. Deborah James noted that in the discourse on land claims in the New South Africa, the account of the Doornkop farm returnees echoed many similar articles, in which the returnees "emphasized their need to be able to communicate with, give

⁹⁸Michael. Bollig, "Whose Graves are Older, Ours or Theirs?" in *Anthropos* 92 (1997): 35.

⁹⁹ Examples include *mukwerere*, rain rituals; *bira*, ancestral thanksgiving ceremonies and *kurova guva*, bringing home the spirit of the deceased. Among the Karanga, *mukwerere* is often held at the graves of the founding ancestors of the clan.

¹⁰⁰ Interview with Dr. Chirevo Kwenda held at the Iliff School of Theology on March 13, 2002.

libations to and tend to the graves of their ancestors in order to secure health and freedom from ancestrally- derived misfortune.”¹⁰¹

The Shona concept of grave informs the Shona view about land as a symbol for cultural and historical continuity. The existence of graves of numerous generations of ancestors in an area is viewed as living proof of long standing family ties that help to “establish the fixity of claims on land--to prove or legitimize ownership, citizenship, ethnic or clan identity.”¹⁰² Parker Shipton argues that in almost any part of agrarian tropical Africa, those who arrive first think themselves superior to latecomers. According to Corbett, the Himba of Namibia will point to the number of their ancestral graves as the major indicator of their right to influence a decision.¹⁰³ What matters is who, among the living, can persuade others to think their ancestors pioneered a place. In the case of the Shona, the ancestors’ claim to establishing a place proves the prior or even exclusive right to it for their descendents. Those who can demonstrate the longest connection with the land will have the strongest say over key - land related matters such as rights of access and control over land based resources.¹⁰⁴ The principle of “pioneer primacy” found practical expression in two examples of nationally publicized cases about conflict over land in colonial and post colonial Zimbabwe that I give below. These cases relate to Chiefs Tangwena, and Svosve.

¹⁰¹ Deborah James, ‘After Years in the Wilderness’: the Discourse on Land Claims in the New South Africa,” in *Journal of Peasant Studies* Vol 27, no. 3 (April 2000): 1-61.

¹⁰² Graves demonstrate a continuity of settlement, they determine the influence of the "owner of the land.” P. Shipton, “Land and Culture in Tropical Africa: Soils, Symbols, and the Metaphysics of the Mundane,” in *Annual Review of Anthropology* Vol. 23 (1994): 361.

¹⁰³ Ibid., See also M. Bollig, “Whose Graves are Older, Ours or Theirs?” in *Anthropos* 92 (1997): 49.

¹⁰⁴ Because graves demonstrate a continuity of settlement, they determine the influence of the "owner of the land.

In colonial Zimbabwe, Chief Rekayi Tangwena was charged with violating the Land Apportionment Act of 1930 because his homestead was inside the boundary line of Gaeresi Ranch which fell under areas designated for European occupation.¹⁰⁵ The chief launched his defense against forced removal in the magistrate's court in Inyanga on May 5, 1967. I quote a part of Tangwena's defense because it highlights cultural assumptions and values about land that are instructive for understanding Shona traditional views about land that are informed by the Shona meaning of the place they call home.

Rekayi Tangwena replied to Hanmer's evidence *by bringing in five elderly men who testified that he was Dzeka Chigumira's son born in the Tangwena village (1915). These men said that they knew Tangwena from childhood.* The chief [Tangwena] concluded the evidence by saying, 'I will not leave this land because it was left for me by my father before he died. He said to me, "This is the land where you will live." I *merely want to live in the land of my ancestors, Sakwa, Chiwahwura, Nyamarihodzo, Kubinha, Tsatse, Gwindo, Dzeka, Chigumira, Mudima and Kinga.* If I were to leave this land, my heart would break and I would die. I want the government to listen to me."¹⁰⁶ (Emphasis mine)

The elderly men's testimony served to show that Rekayi Tangwena had a right of residence in Gaeresi by birth and that he had "roots" in the community. He was connected to the land by ten generations of his agnatic ancestry (his roots) who pioneered the place. According to Shona traditional land tenure, this connection entitled him to sufficient farmland, and it also entitled him to use other natural resources in the area.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ A more detailed discussion of the Land Apportionment Act of 1930 is given in Chapter Three of this study. Tangwena's charge was that he "being an African did wrongfully and unlawfully occupied land in a European area...Gaeresi Range". The plaintiff, Mr. Hanmer, contended that Rekayi Tangwena was living on his ranch illegally because he, [Hanmer] had not given him permission to live on the ranch. Hanmer had moved to Gaeresi Ranch in 1948, land he argued was the property of the Anglo-French Matabeleland Company since the First World War.

¹⁰⁶ H. Moyana, *The Victory of Chief Tangwena* (Harare: Longman, 1987), 14.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 14. Chief Tangwena was convicted twice after he paid the stipulated fine and refused to move. An appeal of the conviction was heard by the Appellate Division of the High Court of Rhodesia in June 1969.

The Svosve farm Occupations in the Marondera district in Mashonaland East Province took place between 1999 -2000. Chief Svosve alleged that in the colonial period his people were displaced and forced to relocate over four times.¹⁰⁸ The chief also alleged that seven Svosve chiefs were buried between two farms, Igava and Imire that were occupied/owned by white commercial farmers, while others were buried at Chipesa farm also occupied by a white commercial farmer. Between 1999-2000 chief Svosve was instrumental in mobilizing his people and spearheading the occupation of Rurenzo, Imire, Igava and Chipesa commercial farms. Nelson Marongwe noted that the existence of numerous graves of generations of Svosve chiefs on the commercial farms was a strong rallying point in the case of the Svosve farm occupations. According to the principle of pioneer primacy, Chief Svosve and his people had a right of residence and land use rights on those farms.¹⁰⁹ The farm occupations can be viewed as one of the ways in which Chief Svosve and his people were redrawing the colonial boundaries along the principle of pioneer primacy. The farm occupations also represent a contest over the cultural meaning of boundaries in post-colonial Zimbabwe and the implications they have for land use rights and practices.

The foregoing examples show that in Shona traditional culture founding ancestors' graves are laden with meaning that informs human beings' relationship to each other and to the land. The key point about the graves is not the physical fact of the graves

The High court squashed the conviction on the grounds that Rekayi Tangwena's occupation of the land probably went back to the days before alienation in 1905. The high court's position was later undermined by a revised Land Apportionment Act of (1969). The struggle to remain on Gaeresi Ranch went on to 1980 when the chief was reinstated in independent Zimbabwe.

¹⁰⁸ See N. Marongwe, *Conflicts over Land and other Natural Resources in Zimbabwe* (Harare: ZERO Regional Environment Organization, 2002), 33.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 37

themselves but the “connection between the graves, the family’s history and the community’s system of land tenure and decision making”.¹¹⁰ This nexus is difficult to preserve when people are physically displaced from their homeland or are relocated.¹¹¹ It is important to emphasize that the land claims in colonial and post colonial Zimbabwe are not just a desire for legal recognition of the use of land. The claims are a declaration of Shona people’s right to access the land that feed them spiritually and culturally.

Summary of the Spirit World of the Shona

Members of the spirit world exercise influence in the course of human and natural events. The relationship between the spirit world and human beings is based on reciprocity. The Shona believe that the spirit world punishes those who violate tradition and custom aimed at promoting the well being of the community and blesses those who follow it. The punishment can be at the individual¹¹² or communal level.¹¹³ The punishment is inescapable and it is not always immediate.

Maintaining the fertility of the land is a moral issue or moral value. The fertility of the land is an important part of the relationship between God, ancestors and the people. In the Shona worldview, *mhondoro* and ultimately Mwari, guarantee the good health of the earth and the people on condition that their descendants meet their moral obligations

¹¹⁰ Mr. Andrew Corbett, “The Epupa Dam Question: Its Impact on the Local Himba Community and the Natural Environment.” Paper presented at the KATU series on Conflict prevention Workshop on "Cooperation or Conflict: Ways of Managing Scarce Natural Resources," held at Hotel Kaya Kwanga, Maputo, Mozambique, 18-23 June 1999. <http://www.katu-network.fi/artikkelit/kirja2/content2.htm>

¹¹¹ Ibid.,

¹¹² In the case of the former, people who break taboos relating to land based resources in the common lands risk losing their sense of direction in the forest or be frightened by snakes or other animals.

¹¹³ Communal punishment includes the withdrawal of rain and the destruction of crops by pests.

towards them. Among the Shona, drought is often attributed to failure by human beings to follow tradition that includes the observance of the day of rest *chisi* and rain ceremonies. Most remedies to ecological disasters include strict observance of *chisi* and rain ceremonies. Edward Antonio's comments about the African worldview shed some light on this aspect. He writes:

Here, a good harvest is not simply a matter of hard work or good fortune, just as the rains on which a good harvest depends are not spiritually neutral; for they point beyond themselves to the fact that both social and natural orders are still morally integrated. At this level, the stability of the society is a function of obedience to the requirements of the sacred order "written into natural processes." These processes offer themselves as a kind of ethical or juridical text containing rules and regulations for behavior.¹¹⁴

The quotation suggests that human action has consequences on the health of the land. The Shona worldview of causes is not unique. In some parts of Central Africa, maintaining the fertility of the land is lived as fidelity to tradition and custom.¹¹⁵

Land is an important medium for societal relationships between the living and the dead. It is a medium of co-operation between the living and the dead from which we can infer a sense of continuity in Shona society. Ownership of the land by the spirits is bound up with the relationship between them (spirits) and the living community. The land forms a close enduring bond between the living and the dead: through their control of the fertility of the land they once cultivated, the spirits are believed to continue to care for

¹¹⁴ E. Antonio, "Letting People decide: Towards an Ethic of Ecological Survival in Africa," in *Ecotheology Voices from the South*, edited by D. G Hallman (Geneva: World Council of Churches Publication, 1995), 227-234.

¹¹⁵ M. Schoffleers's study of territorial cults of Central Africa revealed that social and moral behavior is linked to the health of the earth. See M Schoffleers, *Guardians of the Land*, 1979, "Introduction."

their descendants and the descendants are forced to remember to honor their ancestors or reciprocate accordingly.¹¹⁶

The Natural World: Trees/Forests; Water Points and Animals

The Shona belief that creation has a divine origin is accompanied by a belief in the sacredness of nature and of the physical world as providing locations for Spirit –beings. Hence, plants, animals, hills, mountains, rivers and lakes become associated with divine beings, together with the spirits of the departed human beings, the ancestors. In the Shona worldview, the natural phenomena are believed to be mediums through which the wishes of the spirit world can be made known to the living. Most aspects of nature are perceived as kin, endowed with the power of ancestral spirits. As such they are to be approached with caution and consideration.

The Shona also perceive land as spirit realm. This belief is expressed in Shona practice of giving sacred status to elements of the natural eco-system. The Shona term for this practice is *kuyeresa* (to make holy or to set apart). The object ‘set apart’ is known as *chiereswa* (singular) or *zviereswa* (plural). In this study I shall use the term sacred geography to refer to specific elements of the natural ecosystem that have sacred status in Shona society (*zviereswa*). Examples include certain trees, woodlands or forests, and wetlands. In Shona society, sacred geography is protected by local rules that set the parameters within which human beings can use natural resources without causing harm to both the natural and social ecosystem. In this section Shona attitude to nature

¹¹⁶ See Michael. F. C. Bourdillon, *The Shona People: An Ethnography of the Contemporary Shona, with Special Reference to Their Religion*, 3rd revised edition (Gweru: Mambo Press, 1987).

and the norms that guide Shona people's relationship to trees, forests, waterpoints and wildlife are identified.

Sacred Trees and Forests

In Shona society, trees that are regarded as sacred may not be cut.¹¹⁷ Examples include *muzeze* (*peltoforum africanum*)¹¹⁸, *muchakata* (wild cork tree)¹¹⁹, *muonde* (*ficus sycomorus*), *trichilia dregeana* (*mutsikiri*), *mushuku* (wild loquat) and the *muuyu* (baobab tree (*muuyu*)).¹²⁰ Ken Wilson's field research based study among the Shona also showed that "...nearly all Southern Shona will add that it is a taboo to cut down fruit trees in the field".¹²¹ Fruit trees are an important source of food for human beings and animals in Zimbabwe that is often hit by spells of drought. Fruiting is often particularly heavy in the drought years, and, different species are available at different times of the year. Another rule relating to tree use was that only deadwood was to be collected as firewood.¹²² Most of the sacred trees have ecological, religious and economic and historical value for the Shona.

¹¹⁷ The species of trees regarded as sacred vary among different Shona groups.

¹¹⁸ The branches of the *Muzeze* tree (*peltoforum africanum*) are used for purification after burial rituals.

¹¹⁹ The *mushuku* (wild loquat) is believed to be food for the ancestors.

¹²⁰ *Muuyu* is believed to be the site for communicating with ancestors. These examples are drawn from Daneel's study of the Karanga people of Masvingo Province and Fannie Mutepfa's study of the Manyika in Manicaland Province. See Daneel, *African Earth Keepers* 2001 and F. Mutepfa, *Perceptions and Practices on Land and Natural Resource Management in Zimbabwe* (Harare: ZERO Regional Environmental Organization, 2001).

¹²¹ K. B. Wilson, "Trees in Fields in Southern Zimbabwe," in *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 15. (January 1989): 369-383.

¹²² Exceptions included the cutting of trees for building or furniture making purposes.

Access to and the use of resources in sacred forests is guided by local rules that stipulate desirable behavior in the forests. For example, human beings are not allowed to cut trees in sacred forests or woodlands called *marambatemwa* literally translated as, ‘refusal to have the trees felled’. In Southern Zimbabwe, *marambatemwa* is a popular designation of holy groves that are also burial sites for founding ancestors *mhondoro*.¹²³ The rules for natural resource use in sacred forests require that human beings show respect towards natural resources and other living beings. Derogatory remarks about fruits or animals in the forests are forbidden. In Shona social life, the general attitude of respect for other members of the creation in sacred forests is conveyed and cultivated through proverbs. Examples include *Tendai muchero ugowisa* translated as “Thank the fruit tree so that it may yield more” and *Chakupa sango hachishorwe* translated as “What the forest has given, do not despise”. The violation of rules has consequences that include being frightened by wild animals. The fear of the consequences for breaking the rules is an important motivation for obeying the rules of natural resource use in sacred forests.

The significance and degree of the sacredness of sacred forests differs according to the history of the place. The example of sacred groves among the Duma people (a subgroup of the Shona), cited by Daneel is insightful. Among the Duma, the Vinga shrine is the most important shrine. It contains the graves of Dumbukunyuka (founding ancestor) and several other Duma dignitaries. Second in order of importance is the Vumba shrine. Third in order of importance is the Chiunga grove, the place where Dumbukunyuka lived and died. The fourth shrine is that of Mt. Vunjere, which is named

¹²³ For a detailed discussion of these forests and how they are kept among some Shona groups see M.L. Daneel, *African Earth Keepers*, 2001.

after another ancestor Nehunjere. The implication is that sacred groves are a repository of a people's local history and cultural heritage. They serve as a history book for the clan and local communities that have connections with ancestors buried in the groves.

The motivation to protect sacred groves comes from people's knowledge of the history of the sacred groves that is often tied to tribal identity and aspirations.¹²⁴ In addition, myths and legends associated with sacred places motivate the observation of local regulations through respect and fear.¹²⁵ The norms that guide the use natural resources in sacred forests also protect the history of the Shona and the material base for Shona people's connection with the land.

Waterpoints

Sacred waterpoints are common phenomena among Shona societies. The Shona believe that pythons, catfish and water mermaids are the guardians of sacred waterpoints.¹²⁶ According to Wilson's study conducted among the Karanga of Zvishavane district located in Masvingo province, the criterion used to determine the sacredness of wetlands is that it must never dry up, or unaccountable experiences must occur there.¹²⁷ Using this criterion, Wilson identifies two categories of sacred wetlands;

¹²⁴ Ibid.,

¹²⁵ An example is the Chirikuutsi forest located in Manicaland Province about 75km north of the city of Mutare in Zimbabwe. The forest is famous because several people are known to have disappeared, never to be found in that forest. They include two daughters of a prominent government official in Zimbabwe.

¹²⁶ See F. Mutepe, *Perceptions and Practices on Land and Natural Resource Management in Zimbabwe*, 2001; B. Mukamuri, "Local Environmental Conservation Strategies: Karanga Religion, Politics and Environmental Control," in *Environment and History* 1 (1995):297-311. And M. L. Daneel, *African Earth Keepers*, 2001.

¹²⁷ K. B. Wilson, "Indigenous Perceptions of Wetlands Sacredness and Conservation." Unpublished manuscript, 1988.

the first category is comprised of sacred wells and springs set aside for the *mhondoro* i.e., lions associated with tribal spirits ancestors to drink from. According to him, the perennial wells called *tsime ramapa* translated as “wells of the one who gives” and perennial springs called *zvitubu zvamapa* translated as “springs of the one who gives” are venerated because they do not dry up during drought periods. The second category of sacred wetlands includes marshes (*makawa*), vleis (*makuvi*) and pools (*madziva*). These places are preserved because spirit mediums demand their preservation.

The use of sacred wells and springs is guided by rules that include the use of a gourd (*mukombe*) to fetch water. Soap and utensils that have been used on fire are not allowed in and around the wells.¹²⁸ Snakes and frogs at sacred wetlands should not be killed. The Shona believe that the violation of the rules can cause the well or spring to dry up. Since most waterpoints are located in common lands, their protection depends upon mutual co-operation and respect among the users. The rules that regulate human beings relationship to water resources contribute to the protection of a resource that is valuable to the well-being of both human beings and other beings that depend on the water from the wells and springs.¹²⁹

Summary: Sacred Geography

In Shona society, norms of resource use and protection of sacred geography contribute to the protection of forests, trees and water points that are important for the well-being of the Shona and other living beings. As we mentioned earlier, sacred forests

¹²⁸ Alkaline in soap and soot from items put on fire is not good for the water.

¹²⁹ The sacred springs and other wetlands carry people through drought periods.

called *marambatemwa* are tied with the history and the cultural heritage of the people associated with them. Rules that protect these forests also contribute to the protection of the people's history and cultural heritage. Daneel describes them as the traditional sanctuary where plant life and animal life are protected.¹³⁰

The Animal Community

In traditional Shona culture, soil fertility and rain are believed to be contingent upon the vitality of certain wild animals. The presence of lions in an area is believed to ensure the productivity of the land.¹³¹

Shona clan name system that is based on animals, especially wildlife is the foundation for social relationships in Shona patrilineal society. The origin of this system is debatable and is beyond the limits of this discussion.¹³² Some clan name systems are associated with animals that have their origin in the Great Pool (*Dzivaguru*) while others are associated with animals that have their origin on the land.¹³³ Each clan from the former adopts an aquatic animal as its *mutupo* (totem-

¹³⁰ Despite deforestation in most CAs, sacred groves *marambatemwa* constitute a large proportion of the remaining closed-canopy forests in CAs. M. L. Daneel, *African Earth Keepers*, 95.

¹³¹ The Shona people believe that lions represent the *mhondoro*, the spirit of the founder ancestors who are believed to be responsible for rain.

¹³² In Shona society there are numerous stories about the origin of the Shona clan name system. The common theme is that the totem animals have an aquatic and terrestrial origin. See also Shona Stories of creation recorded among the Karanga by H. Aschwanden, *Karanga Mythology: An Analysis of the Consciousness of the Karanga in Zimbabwe* (Gweru, Zimbabwe: Mambo Press, 1989).

¹³³ In his ethnographic migrationist theory about the Bantu of Zimbabwe, Chigwedere a Shona historian, identifies the Karanga as the first group to arrive in Zimbabwe from the Great Lakes region around the eighth century and the Mbire as the second group that came around the twelfth century. M. I. Chigwedere, *From Mutapa to Rhodes* (London: Mcmillan, 1980). Also quoted in T. Mutasa-Nyajeka, "Shona Women and the Mutupo Principle," in *Women Healing Earth: Third World Women on Ecology, Feminism and Religion*, edited by R. Reuther (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1996, 137), 135-142.

animal)¹³⁴ while clans from the latter adopt a terrestrial species as its *mutupo* (totem-animal).¹³⁵ The animals chosen have qualities the Shona admire and wish to emulate.¹³⁶ Some family names are derived from *mutupo* (totem animal).¹³⁷

Mutupo system defines a community of accountability for the Shona; i.e., among the Shona, *mutupo* system defines a locus of social identity that forms the basis for Shona ethical concern in that society. According to *mutupo* system, the locus of Shona social identity extends from the individual to relatives (living and dead) and to the rest of the created order especially one's *mutupo*. The view of community defined by *mutupo* system is fostered and expressed in Shona social life by daily greetings and praise poems that make reference to one's *mutupo* (totem -animals). The Shona have a custom of greeting people by their *mutupo*. For example, when a member of a clan associated with Shumba (lion) is greeted, the greeter directly addresses them by their *mutupo* "Mangwanani Shumba", translated as "good morning Lion." The greetings foster in the mind of the Shona child or adult the idea that they belong to a community that is larger than the community of living human beings. Nyajeka suggests that the greeting conveys two aspects of Shona thought: (1) taken literally, it is an acknowledgement of the

¹³⁴ Totem animals chosen from this category include *Mvuu* (hippo); *Hove* (fish); *Mheta* (water-python); *Garwe* (crocodile); *Dziva* (great Pool); *Hungwe* (fish-eagle) and *Mbiti* (otter etc). According to Chigwedere, the uniting symbol of these totems is the fish –eagle.

¹³⁵ Examples of Mbire clan totems are *Shava* (antelope); *Beta* (termites); *Humba* (pig); *Nzou* (elephant); *Shumba* (lion) and *Nyati* (buffalo). Chigwedere suggests that the monkey (*Soko*) is the uniting symbol of the Mbire group's understanding of the universe.

¹³⁶ For example, a zebra (*tembo –mbizi*), is admired for its beauty, color and its graceful movement, the python for its wonderful color and strength, the tortoise (*chuma*) lives a long time, For more examples see C. Tobayiwa and P. Jackson, "Shona People, Totems and Wildlife," in *Culture and Conservation: The Human Dimension in Environmental Planning*, edited by J. A. McNeely and D. Peet (London: Croom Helm, 1985), 229-236.

¹³⁷ Examples include *Chivara* (the striped one) derived from *Tembo* (Zebra) and *Ndoro* (symbol of authority) and *Nyandoro* (bearer of symbol of authority) derived from *Nzou* (elephant).

existence of both a human person and their totem animal, and it celebrates the mystery of existence by mutually assuring one another that each has a place in the universe: (2) the salute is an affirmation to the nature of the mystical relationality of nature.¹³⁸ In Shona society, the attributes and qualities (flattering and unflattering) of specific animals associated with Shona clan names are the basis for praise poems that are recited to people who perform socially commendable acts.¹³⁹ For example, the Tembo (Zebra) clan claims solidarity like that of the Zebra herd that moves or stands as one beast.¹⁴⁰ Praise poetry not only communicates social values perceived to be important for the well-being of the clan members and Shona society in general, they provide the Shona with the ritual means for showing proper respect to people with whom they share primary relationships with. The recitation of a praise poem to an individual or group demonstrates the high regard in which one holds his/her addressee.¹⁴¹ In practice, praise poetry and daily greeting that make reference to one's *mutupo* remind the Shona that they belong to a community which includes the individual, the family lineage (living and the dead) and the animal associated with their clan name.

The Shona clan name system places restrictions on Shona people's relationship with specific animals. It is a taboo to kill one's totem animal. One important rule concerning hunting is that people should only hunt what is needed for current

¹³⁸ T. Nyajeka-Mutasa, "Shona Women and the *Mutupo* Principle," 140.

¹³⁹ In the poems, certain attributes associated with the totem animals are used to explain the individual's tendency to perform socially commendable deeds. A. Pongweni, *Shona Praise Poetry as Role Negotiation: The Battle of the Clans and Sexes* (Gweru: Mambo Press, 1996), 16.

¹⁴⁰ A. C. Hodza and G. Fortune, *Shona Praise Poetry* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), 30.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*,

consumption.¹⁴² This approach to hunting is in contrast with the growing situation in the country in which animals are killed for sport or purely commercial purposes. In traditional Shona society, the hunting of royal game, animals that are slow breeders and pregnant female species is forbidden.¹⁴³ These regulations are supported by rules that forbid hunting and religious ceremonies during the month of November that is also known to be the breeding period of animals in general.¹⁴⁴ The rules contribute to the protection of domestic and wild animals at their most vulnerable stage: breeding period. They also contribute to the well-being of the animals and human beings.¹⁴⁵

Wildlife provides the material base of Shona people's social identity that is defined by *mutupo* system (totem system). Among the Shona, the rule that forbids the killing of one's *mutupo* can be viewed as having to do with the well-being of the Shona in so far as protecting the animal is in a way protecting one's identity and one's place in society. Some family names are derived from animals associated with their clan name *mutupo*.¹⁴⁶ The knowledge the Shona

¹⁴²Only animals whose meat could be eaten or could be used for other recognized purposes such as medicinal, could be killed.

¹⁴³ C. Vascsey and Robert W. Venables observed similar rules among native Americans. Human beings could not kill animals at improper times which include times when bears hibernate or an animal is pregnant. C. Vascsey and Robert W. Venables eds., *American Indians Environment Ecological Issues in Native American History* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1980), 21.

¹⁴⁴ November is known by the Shona as the month of the goat (*mwedzi wembudzi*). Marriage rituals are forbidden in November. See also M. Gelfand: *Shona Ritual* (Cape Town: Juta and Company Ltd, 1959).

¹⁴⁵ Among residents of the CAs, wildlife constitutes an important source of protein. Trapping or hunting wild animals is aimed at specifically meeting this dietary need. In addition, Shona people's identity and moral system is also tied with the *mutupo* system that is based on wild life.

¹⁴⁶ Examples include *Chivara* (the striped one) derived from *Tembo* (Zebra) and *Ndoro* meaning a symbol of authority and *Nyandoro* (bearer of symbol of authority) derived from *Nzou* (elephant)

people have about themselves is intertwined with their experiences with wild animals.¹⁴⁷

Human Society: Shona Socio - Political and Economic Organization.¹⁴⁸

In Shona society descent, inheritance and succession is through males. *Nyika* (chiefdom) is the largest political unit in Shona traditional administration under the political control of a chief. The chiefdom (*nyika*) is made up of wards (*matunhu*) that are made up of several villages (*misha*). In the chiefdom, the chief (*mambo or ishe*) is the highest recognized authority. Next in rank are ward heads (*Masadunhu*), followed by village heads and elders (*Masamusha*). Shona traditional administration also includes religious leaders who include the spirit mediums, diviners and healers.¹⁴⁹ The responsibilities of the leaders at each level of political hierarchy are similar differing mainly in the extent of the authority. Disputes and issues at the ward and the chiefdom level are discussed in public at assemblies or palavers (*matare*).¹⁵⁰ Consensus is important. Leaders are accountable to the populace and can only legitimize their role by being accountable to the people.

The village is the smallest political unit of a chiefdom. It has some physical boundary within which the homesteads, fields, grazing areas and other sites for the

¹⁴⁷ C. Tobayiwa and P. Jackson, "Shona People, Totems and Wildlife," 234.

¹⁴⁸ The present tense is used throughout the generalized description of the Shona traditional societies despite the rapid changes that are taking place in Shona society. Several aspects of Shona traditional organization have evolved and still retain features from the past.

¹⁴⁹ These are professional men and women who are simultaneously legal experts, political advisers, social workers, medical specialists as well as leaders in traditional religious affairs.

¹⁵⁰ Assemblies at the family level are not public.

extraction of resources are defined. Each village is made up of a nuclear group of male family heads who are related to the village head (*samusha*) through common descent. The function of the village head (*samusha*) is to allocate land to family heads and other adults in his jurisdiction and to settle domestic disputes. The *samusha* also has religious duties, which include participating in rain ceremonies and enforcing local regulations, which include observing *chisi*, the day of rest in honor of the ancestors.¹⁵¹ Other duties include addressing his ancestors on behalf of the village community in times of crisis or thanksgiving.

Wards (*matunhu*) are made up of several villages. They have a well-defined territory.¹⁵² Physical features such as rivers, streams and hilltops usually mark their boundaries.¹⁵³ Wards are under the political control of a hereditary ward headman (*sadunhu*), who is often a senior member of the chief's lineage.¹⁵⁴ The responsibilities of the ward chief (*sadunhu*) resemble that of the village head but with greater authority. Although kinship is an important element in the composition of a ward, the ward (*dunhu*) functioned primarily as a land unit.¹⁵⁵ Membership in a ward was the qualifying factor for the right to make use of land and other natural resources in a ward. Eligible members

¹⁵¹ Daneel noted that with the establishment of colonial rule, some village heads have assumed more responsibility on these matters. They initiate rain ceremonies at the local level. Daneel, *Old and New in Southern Shona Independent Churches, Vol. 1*, 36.

¹⁵² European land use planning in the reserves and the resettlement of Africans has led to the redesigning of ward boundaries so that some are less clearly defined. B. Floyd. *Changing Patterns of African Land use in Southern Rhodesia* (Ph.D. Dissertation, Syracuse University, 1959), 59.

¹⁵³ J. F. Holleman, *The Shona Customary Law*, 1st edition reprint (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1969), 11.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., On rare occasions the ward headman (*sadunhu*) was the head of a foreign community, who owes allegiance to the chief of the territory.

¹⁵⁵ Daneel, *Old and New in Southern Shona Independent Churches Vol.1*, 36.

of the ward could partake of the natural resources of the ward only with due regard to the rights of their fellow members. The ward (*dunhu*) was home for the Shona.

Ward was home--it was big enough for the man, for a man's children and his children's children to settle in; it was small enough to know everyone who lived in it. Within the *dunhu* boundaries a man could make use of the land for the purposes of his family unit...within a *dunhu* the people felt they belonged so closely together that they would help each other to cultivate their fields or build their villages as a matter of course. They thought of themselves as one big happy old family.¹⁵⁶

Among the Shona ward (*dunhu*) and village (*musha*) represent places that are important for self-definition. The Shona tend to classify themselves by the geographical places they came from rather than by the name Shona. It is also very common for individuals to identify themselves or be identified by others by their dialects, which are also associated with specific geographical locations in the country. This way, places are given meaning by people and people are constituted through place.¹⁵⁷ The Shona concept of *kumusha* is useful for understanding how the aforementioned geographies are used by the Shona to express Shona view of land, in terms of social identification. Bakare describes *kumusha*, as the "place where one's roots are, where one's umbilical cord has been buried, where one's ancestors are deposited, a place of connection and orientation.

The *dunhu*, the land and its people and the invisible spiritual bonds with the ancestors who lived and died there for generations, all these together made the intimacy of home. And even a man who leaves there for generations, settle elsewhere will leave it in such a manner that the door... is never closed to him. For he knows that there will come a day when he

¹⁵⁶ *Report of the Mangwende Reserve Commission* (Salisbury: Government Printers, 1961), 18 quoted by Daneel, *Old and New in Southern Shona Independent Churches, Vol.1*. 36.

¹⁵⁷ People interpret themselves and are also interpreted by others according to the place they live in, belong to or originate from. For a more detailed discussion of this matter see W. Norton, *Cultural Geography: Themes, Concepts, Analyses* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 276.

wants to come back to it, if only to die there and be buried in the soil that contains his ancestors.¹⁵⁸

The concept of *kumusha* expresses Shona view of land, in terms of social identification: the Shona, address the question, who am I? They express the notion that one possesses roots in the land, has a place in the world, or belongs to a community or a neighborhood which is one's home.

At the chiefdom level, the chief's function resembles that of the ward-heads differing mainly in greater authority. He administers land as a political leader who is accountable to spiritual leaders via spirit mediums. As a senior living representative of the great ancestors, the *mhondoro*, the chief is also a religious leader who is expected to perform all the rites and rituals pertaining to the administration of his territory, according to custom. At religious ceremonies, the chief or his representative is seen as the intermediary between the living beings and the supernatural agencies, the *mhondoro*.¹⁵⁹ The chief's court is the final judicial body that handles all cases on appeal from the ward head (*sadunhu*). He deals with cases that threaten tribal community as a whole.

The Shona use the term *nyika* to refer to land. The chiefdom (*nyika*) is looked upon as carrying all the members of the particular chiefdom who include all the dead, living subjects and those still to be born. It is the territory occupied by an entire tribe. The land (*nyika*) is a tangible expression of the tribe as whole. It is a spatial extension of

¹⁵⁸ *Report of the Mangwende Reserve Commission*, 18.

¹⁵⁹ See M. F. C. Bourdillon, *The Shona People: An Ethnography of the Contemporary Shona, with Special Reference to Their Religion* 3rd revised edition (Gweru: Mambo Press, 1987), 87-88; J. F. Holleman, *The Shona Customary Law*, 1969.

Shona kinship. *Nyika* refers to people occupying the land or the land occupied by the people and the rights thereto.¹⁶⁰ The land is the people and vice versa. To date the term *nyika* can also refer to territory that extends beyond the jurisdiction of a chief so that *nyika* can mean a country like Zimbabwe, its people and all that dwells and grows in it. From that perspective, *nyika* represents the physical space i.e., the space where people live and work in the present and an arena for natural eco-systems processes. It is a repository of resources needed by human beings.

The Shona associate chieftaincy (*ushe*), with political control of the land. This association is symbolized in installation ceremonies of Shona chiefs. The soil (*ivhu*) that is placed in the chief's hands during the installment ceremony symbolizes the chief's control of the territory he is to preside over. In Bullock's description of the installment of Karanga Chief Ziki, the new chief, was given two handfuls of soil while he was addressed: "You are now Ziki. We hand you the country to hold. Look after us well." Among the Korekore, the spirit medium appoints a chief by giving the appointee a handful of medicated soil.¹⁶¹ Chief Chirau's installation's ceremony in Chitomborwizi Black Purchase reveals that chiefs are entrusted with the responsibility to look after people and all that lives and grows in his chiefdom. The chief elect had to undergo the following ordeal:

Earth which has been dug out from underneath a bush is given to him and he has to hold it in his clenched left fist. Into his right hand is put some maize-meal, mixed with small seeds grain. Holding both hands tightly, the chief then enters a deep pool, together with his two masters of ceremony,

¹⁶⁰ H. Bucher, *Spirits and Power: An Analysis of Shona Cosmology* (Cape Town; New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 31. Ward membership is the qualifying factor for the right to cultivate land within its boundaries

¹⁶¹ Michael. F. C. Bourdillon, *The Shona People*, 85-86.

who immerses him into the water for some moments, before returning with him to dry land. In this way, it is impressed on the future chief that he is about to assume responsibility for his territory and all that lives and grows on it.¹⁶²

The installation ceremonies indicate that in traditional Shona society, government (political control of the land) and guardianship of the land and its resources is inseparable.

Chiefs are judged by their ability to provide sufficient farmland for their people. Loyalty to the chief and respect due to him depend to a large extent on his ability to maintain control over sufficient land for all the people in his chiefdom. Shona attitude towards chiefs who had been dispossessed of their land by the colonial government supports this point. Bullock observed that some Hera people [a subgroup of the Shona], passed their chief with little or no formal salutation because the chief no longer owned land.¹⁶³ When reproved, they said, “Where is the land?”¹⁶⁴

The chief’s political authority is linked to the land and the spirits that own it. His political control over the land derives from his supposed connection with the *mhondoro*, the founding ancestors of the chiefdom. Bullock describes the human chief among the Shona people as the earthly vicar of spiritual powers, who was recognized as the landlord

¹⁶² J. L. Fowle, “The Tribal Installation of Chief Chirau,” in *NADA* 10, no. 5, (1973): 29-31. Quoted in H. Bucher, *Spirits and Power*, 29. Mutambara noted that similar procedures were applied among the Vashawasha and Korekore. See John G. O. Mutambara, “African and Land Policies: British Colonial Policy in Zimbabwe, 1890-1965,” (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Cincinnati, 1981), 107. Bullock noted that the Waduma of Bikita followed similar procedures with some slight variation. In addition to soil, the chief was also given the weapons from his predecessor. The physical instruments symbolize the fact that the chief was expected to defend the land from external invaders. C. Bullock, *The Mashona*, 290

¹⁶³ Bullock, *The Mashona*, 71.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*,

from whom each village head (*samusha*) derived his right to till the soil.¹⁶⁵ Ordinary people in a chiefdom have the right to use the land they occupy because a chief who is a representative of the mhondoro allocated it to them or to their lineage. The chief is the only one who can grant land use rights to people coming from outside of his territory.

The chief is only a trustee of the land. In traditional Shona society, land is conceived as inalienably attached to those who are linked to it by traditional ties of primordial belonging or politics. An eligible member of the community is not only entitled to sufficient farmland, he is entitled to full use of his fields without interference from others, and he had an indisputable right to the crops he raised.¹⁶⁶ In practice, subjects possess land allocated to them and own the fruits of their labor individually or as family units.¹⁶⁷ The security of tenure is in one's membership in a territorial grouping. Holleman provides an apt description of the traditional land tenure system that is worth quoting in full.

Communal tenure in Shona (and most other African) customary law does not mean that the land is used (let alone) cultivated in common by the community...What...[it] does mean is that, because the land and its resources belong to the community, every full member of this community has an inalienable right to a reasonable share according to his requirements. For this reason this right is as secure as is a person's membership in the community. In customary law, the permanence and inviolability of the land rights of individuals are not conceived, as is ownership in most western law, as a relationship to a specific holding in perpetuity, but as a perpetual relationship with such unencumbered portion of the land of the community as may be available for individualized occupation whenever required from time to time. Herein lies the

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.,

¹⁶⁶ According to Barry Floyd, these use rights, together with the right against dispossession meant that many aspects of the individual tenure existed under the traditional land tenure system.

¹⁶⁷ See, J.G. O. Mutambara, "African and Land Policies: British Colonial Policy in Zimbabwe," 107

individual's security, that is, in his vested right as a member of the community to claim a share.¹⁶⁸

The traditional land tenure system is guided by a basic human needs ethics. Among the Shona, land is regarded as a gift of God to all human beings, without distinction or discrimination. As such, land may only be held in trust for the present and the future generations. Society entrusts pieces of it to individuals or groups for their own use and for society's well-being and growth. While what is grown on a piece of land may be personal, in principle the land cannot be.

In addition, in African religious thought, the right of personal ownership is situated within the context of joint or public right of access to the basic resources necessary for life. The accumulation of wealth by the chief is made on behalf of the tribe. For example, the Shona chief designates a piece of land called *zunde ramambo* that is cultivated collectively by his subjects.¹⁶⁹ The produce from this portion of land is stored in granaries at the chief's compound for future use by people in his community. The *zunde* practice is a food security measure. Its primary aim is to ensure that the community has enough food reserves that can be used in times of food shortages. The produce from the field is also used to feed the messengers, subjects awaiting trial, chiefs' advisors, the destitute, as well as travelers who stop in the village for the night. Similarly, tribute or fine paid to chiefs in the form of grain or cattle is given to them in trust for the entire community. It functions as a system of redistribution of the community's resources because in time of need community members have a claim to the

¹⁶⁸ J. F. Holleman, *The Shona Customary Law*, 62f.

¹⁶⁹ *Zunde* can mean a large gathering of people taking part in a common activity or it can refer to grain stored for future use by people in a particular community. In this case, *Zunde* refers to the common field managed by the chief and worked on collectively by his subjects.

resources.¹⁷⁰ In Shona traditional society, the wealth of the chief benefits everybody. This is captured in the Shona expression, *Panodya ishe varanda vanodyawo* translated as “When the chief eats the subjects eat as well.”

In summary, leaders in Shona traditional administration are entrusted with the responsibility to distribute land fairly and to ensure good stewardship of land. The traditional land tenure system is guided by a basic human needs ethics. It is informed by the belief that resources of the earth exist for the benefit of all. The chief is expected to look after his subjects by providing sufficient farmland to his people, provide grain for common store during times of drought and maintain peace throughout the court and in his territory. His subordinates have the duty to acknowledge their dependency by always seeking his goodwill and blessing.

Women and Land in the Shona Worldview

In Shona patriarchal society, women and men view land differently. In this section I examine how land is perceived and valued by women in traditional Shona society. This is critical because women constitute the largest category of land users in CAs. Towards that end, I examine women’s relationship to land that is explicit in three Shona traditional customs: the custom of *tseu* and customs about marriage and death, especially as they relate to women. I contend that women’s culturally ascribed roles in traditional Shona religio-culture, are the primary framework in which women perceive and interact with the land and other natural resources in CAs. The discussion will also

¹⁷⁰ See G. Dalton, “Traditional Production in Primitive African Economies,” in *Tribal and Peasant Economies: Readings in Economic Anthropology*, edited by G. Dalton (Garden City, New York: The Natural History Press, 1967), 74.

show that in traditional Shona society, women are the foundation of Shona economy and well-being through their agriculture and reproductive efforts.

Women and Land in Shona Traditional Customs

In traditional Shona society, women's access to land is mediated through male members of the family. A married man is expected to give his wife a small portion of the land called *tseu*, while he retains the larger portion of the land and claim its produce.¹⁷¹ The expectations are the same for a polygamous situation. *Tseu* is used to grow nutritious food crops, which include groundnuts, sweet potatoes, pumpkins, beans and other vegetables.¹⁷² From *tseu*, the wife is expected to provide food for herself and her children. The wife is in control of any surplus produced from this portion of the land. The produce from this field together with the gathering of wild vegetables, fruit, mushroom etc., would meet the dietary needs of the family. The wife is expected to help in the husbands' field.

The tradition of *tseu* shows that food production is a cultural expectation for married women in traditional Shona society. The perspective about land that women derive from this cultural framework is that land is a source of food. The woman's self image as a wife who is also a food producer is tied to their relationship to land as a source

¹⁷¹ J. Kazembe, "The Women Issue," in *Zimbabwe, The Political Economy of Transition, 1980-86*, edited by I. Mandaza (Harare: Jongwe Press, 1987), 383.

¹⁷² See O. N. Muchena, "The Changing Perception of Women in Agriculture," 49f; D. Pankhurst and S. Jacobs, "Land Tenure, Gender relations, and Agricultural Production: The case of Zimbabwe' Peasantry," in *Agriculture, Women and Land The African Experience*, edited by J. Davidson (Boulder: Westview Press, 1988), 202-227), 205.

of food. This suggests that land, in this particular case arable land, is an important part of women's cultural identity as wife and food producer in traditional Shona society.¹⁷³

Marriage and death customs especially, as they pertain to women shed light on how women's relationship to land is perceived in traditional Shona society. The discussion will show that a married woman in Shona society is expected to be both a child bearer (mother) and food producer. The former is implicit in the significance the Shona place on the *roora* (the bride token) especially the symbolic meaning of the *mombe yeumai* translated as "cow of motherhood" while the latter is evident in the items a bride was expected to take with her when she got married.

Marriage customs in traditional Shona society involve the paying of *roora* the bride price which includes cattle. The bulk of the *roora* belongs to the father of the bride. The cattle are also used as bride price for wives obtained by sons in the family. An important piece of the bride price is *mombe yeumai* translated as "cow of motherhood". This is a cow that is given to the bride's mother. It belongs to her, and she has control over it. The expectation is that the cow would have a calf. If the cow died before giving birth, the groom is expected to provide another one. *Mombe yeumai* has a symbolic function. The Shona believe that the maternal spirits are responsible for the procreative powers of their female descendents. Tragedy can befall the groom's family if the motherhood cow is not paid.¹⁷⁴ The normative expectation of women that can be deduced from this custom is that married women are child bearers.

¹⁷³ Agriculture was the main social activity in Shona society. Most of the agricultural work was done by women. The discussion on marriage customs shows how in Shona culture women were defined by this relationship to land.

¹⁷⁴ The female ancestors especially the maternal ancestors are believed to cause barrenness if the cow is not paid.

The main purpose of marriage among the Shona is procreation. In traditional Shona society a married woman who failed to conceive was either sent back to her family or her family provided another wife for the groom. Also, when a married woman died while young, a replacement was found from among her sisters in the extended family. The practice of providing a substitute wife is called “*kumutsa mapfihwa*,” translated as reviving the cooking stone. The woman who is a substitute wife on these occasions is called a “*chimutsa mapfihwa*” that is “one who revives cooking stones”.¹⁷⁵ No bride price is charged for her because part of the marriage contract is that the bride’s family had an obligation to provide the groom with a wife who would bear children for his lineage and perform the services expected of her. It is clear that childlessness is not viewed favorably in Shona society. A study conducted by the Zimbabwe Women’s Resource Network Center (ZWRN) showed that prevailing social attitudes continue to cast women in the traditional mould as child bearers, producers of food and other domestic needs in servitude to their husbands as heads of household.¹⁷⁶ Evidence from the Msasa project, a shelter for women who are victims of domestic violence also shows that women are often beaten by their husbands for reasons that include being childless, not bearing enough sons and wanting to use contraception.¹⁷⁷

The concern with fertility in Shona society is applied differently to men and women. The Shona society is concerned with the fertility of women more than it is with

¹⁷⁵ *Mapfihwa* are a symbol of the domestic role of women in Shona society. The implication is that the substitute wife who replaces a deceased relative or barren relative is expected to revive the domestic roles and responsibilities that are expected of a woman in Shona society.

¹⁷⁶ ZWRN, *Beyond Inequalities: Women in Zimbabwe* (Harare: ZWRN/SARDC, 1998), 47.

¹⁷⁷ The Msasa project is located in Harare, Zimbabwe. See excerpt from article by Sue Njanji Matetakufa, PANOS, 4 July 1997. Also quoted in ZWRN, *Beyond Inequalities: Women in Zimbabwe*, 76.

the fertility of men. The cultural indicator for this is the absence in the Shona language of a term for a man who is impotent.¹⁷⁸ There exists however a term for a barren woman *ngomwa*. The Shona metaphor that is used to describe this kind of women is *ruware*, that is a dry rock.¹⁷⁹ The absence of a Shona term for a man who is infertile indicates a cultural reality in which concern for fertility is an issue for women more than it is for men. Women's concern with fertility is also evident in some studies on African Initiated Churches that indicate that the majority of women who join these churches do so in their search for healing in areas that include barrenness, miscarriages and complicated births.¹⁸⁰

In the preceding paragraphs I argued that having children is greatly valued in Shona society. It is important for women's self image in that society. A woman gained respect as soon as she became a mother. In that role as wife and mother, a woman is valued for her reproductive role which increases the husband's kin group through her sons and her daughters.¹⁸¹ Holleman defines the Shona concept of wealth as the capacity

¹⁷⁸ In traditional Shona society, secrecy surrounded men who were impotent. The wives of men who were impotent would be impregnated by a man chosen by the family and this was all done in secret. This was known as *Kupindira mumba* translated as "intervening in the home". The man designated for this task was not supposed to be caught in action by the wife's husband (the impotent man).

¹⁷⁹ This metaphor comes from Shona people's association of women and fertility of the land. The woman is likened to a dry rock because nothing can grow in her womb in the same way nothing can be grown on a dry rock. Mukonyora, "Women and Ecology in Shona Religion," 276-284.

¹⁸⁰ This is especially the case in African Initiated Churches of the Zionist and Apostles type which include, Johane Masowe Apostles, Zion Christian Church of Mutendi, *Guta RaJehovha* that is also called Mai Chaza's church. Daneel's studies carried out in 1965 showed that more than 30% of the healing cases recorded in the Zion City of Mutendi, concerned problems related to women's infertility. While less than 15% were concerned with marriage for men and women. The desire to have sons also motivated some women to seek healing in Samuel Mutendi's Zion Christian Church. See Daneel, *Zionism and Faith Healing* (Mouton: The Hague, 1970), 54-56.

¹⁸¹ A woman's security in marriage is strongly influenced by her fertility, and her ability to feed her children. ZWRCN, *Women and Culture: The Zimbabwe Experience* (ZWRCN, Harare: nd), 47-51.

to maintain and reproduce one's own kin group.¹⁸² This view of wealth is also captured in the Shona saying *Pfuma yekare haionekwi chinoonekwa izita iro munhu akasiya* translated as "Wealth of long ago is not seen, what is seen is the name left by the person". In traditional Shona society children provide security in old age that money cannot buy and children are also important for posterity. The expression "*wabara wamuka*" translated as "One who has children is resurrected" speaks to the latter point. The two Shona sayings I have just cited acknowledge the importance of children for posterity.

In Shona patriarchal society, sons are valued because they are inheritors and perpetuators of the family name.¹⁸³ Ensuring posterity is important for preserving the relationship between ancestors and their descendents.¹⁸⁴ Women participate in this process through their biological reproduction in the family system. The significance of a mother in traditional Shona society is captured in the Shona saying *Musha ndimai* translated as "home is mother" meaning the mother is the one who keeps the family together in the Shona social system. The saying also speaks to the role played by the woman in the home through her biological reproduction and productive role.¹⁸⁵ The woman's image in the husband's family is tied to this familial role and her ability to

¹⁸² J. F. Hallman, *The Shona Customary Law*, 11.

¹⁸³ The name of the family is perpetuated by the eldest son who inherits the name of his deceased father. The father's name is officially given to the son at his father's inheritance ritual known among the Shona as *kurova guva*. At the inheritance ritual, the heir is identified with the original bearer of the name (his father) and is lawfully entitled to assume the rights and responsibilities held by his father.

¹⁸⁴ In Shona culture maintaining good relationships with the ancestors is important for the well-being of the family. The woman who has children, especially sons enables the husband to become an ancestor for the family. Her children especially sons help to perpetuate this important relationship in the husband's family when they inherit their father's name. To continue the family lineage is an obligation for both men and women. The burden is often placed on women as has been shown in the discussion.

¹⁸⁵ *Musha*, can mean a nucleus family and it can also mean the extended family that lives in one homestead under a family head. It also refers to clan that shares the same lineage.

sustain her children. The woman was expected to sustain her children through her agricultural efforts.¹⁸⁶ Laziness on the woman's part could result in her being sent back to her home while an industrious woman provided prestige and pride to the husband's family.¹⁸⁷ Angela Cheater noted that, marriage among the Shona was a way of giving continuity to lineages whose prosperity came through women's agriculture efforts and child bearing. Put differently, women are the foundation of men's economic success and proud status in Shona traditional society. Divorce was a threat to the system.

The items a bride brought to the groom's family upon marriage symbolized the social and productive role of women in Shona society. They include implements for agriculture and food processing. Among them were a hoe, carrying basket (*tswanda*) the winnowing basket (*rusero*) the grinding stone, *guyo*, the mortar and pestle (*duri*) the stirring stick (*mugoti*) and a clay pot (*hari*).¹⁸⁸ Other personal items included beads for putting around the waist for musical rhythm during love play and sex. The items assume that a Shona woman is an agriculturist and food producer as well as a procreator. The food processing items such as the grinding stone, mortar and pestle and winnowing basket, point to the domestic responsibilities of women that include cooking, food production and the food processing that goes with it.

¹⁸⁶ According to Muchena, a woman's effort in agriculture can be interpreted in terms of her familial role especially reproduction since agriculture was mainly for subsistence consumption and not necessarily for economic value. O. N. Muchena, "The Changing Perception of Women in Agriculture," in *Zimbabwe's Agricultural Revolution* edited by M. Rukuni and C. K. Eicher (Harare: University of Zimbabwe Publications, 1995), 351.

¹⁸⁷ Rev. H. P. Hatendi describes a worthy bride in traditional society as one who was subordinate, subservient, industrious and loving. The bride's main tasks were housekeeping, food production and child bearing. Hatendi also noted that a woman could be sent back to her family for further training if her work in the aforementioned areas was found to be unsatisfactory. Rev. R. P. Hatendi, "Shona Marriages and the Christian Churches," in *Christianity South of the Zambezi*, Vol. 1. edited by D.A. Dachs (Gweru: Mambo Press, 1973), 137.

¹⁸⁸ The specific gifts differ from one Shona ethnic group to another.

The culturally ascribed roles of women described above are also assumed in the death ceremonies of married women. Among the Manyika, a subgroup of the Shona, the deceased woman's family took back the agricultural and food processing items.¹⁸⁹ It is customary for the husbands' family to present to the deceased's agnatic family, food produce from the woman's granary. On such an occasion, a hoe and a portion of produce (*dura*) from the granary are brought in. The husband is fined if there is no "*dura*" or if the "*dura*" has been tampered with.¹⁹⁰ The lack of a *dura* would be interpreted to mean that the deceased woman had been denied land use rights in her in-law's family. This was culturally unacceptable because it reduced the woman's ability to meet her food producer role in that family. An empty *dura*, also reflected badly on the woman and her family because women were expected to work hard to feed their family. Sadomba argues that the custom of bringing forth in public the deceased's agriculture produce was meant to highlight the woman's achievement in her culturally ascribed role as food producer.¹⁹¹ The custom also reveals that married women are expected to excel in agriculture. The custom of *tseu* ensured that women had the main resource (land) to fulfill their food producer role.

¹⁸⁹ These include items such as pots and hoes. This author has also witnessed first hand several such rituals among the Manyika. In urban areas, the woman's relatives often take most of the kitchen items in the home.

¹⁹⁰ On this occasion, the produce from the granary is called *dura* by the Manyika people. This is the case despite the fact that the term *dura* is used to refer to granary. The *dura* can also be presented to the deceased family by the deceased's sister in-law.

¹⁹¹ W. Z. Sadomba, "Changing Agro-ecological Religion and Changing Agro-economic Practices: Women, Indigenous Knowledge and Western Scientific Experts in Zimbabwe," Paper Presented at the Women and the Environment International Conference, Harare, Monomotapa Hotel, 3-5 August, 1999.

So far we have established that in traditional Shona society, women have a reproductive role that requires them to bear children and a productive role that requires them to produce sufficient food for family consumption and the means to process it. Their contribution through agriculture labor and child bearing is the foundation for the well-being of the kinship group and the success of patriarchy. Women determine the socio-economic status of the family because it rests on the material wealth they produce as mothers and as farmers. As mothers, Shona women give birth to sons that give continuity to the lineage, and daughters that provide the means by which men expanded their herds of cattle through marriage practices involving the groom handing over cattle to the father of the bride.¹⁹² The culturally ascribed roles and the normative expectations of Shona women not only influence women's tasks and activities in traditional Shona society, they motivate the specific relationships women have with the land and its resources.

Women and Land Use Practices in Traditional Shona Society

Women's productive and reproductive role in the Shona family structure informs their attitude towards land and its resources. Women deal with the land in their day-to-day reproductive tasks, which include providing water, wood fuel for cooking and processing food for household consumption.¹⁹³ Women are also responsible for food security in the home. This involves selecting and preserving seeds,¹⁹⁴ storing food and

¹⁹² Isabel Mukonyora, *Wandering A Gendered Wilderness*, 2007.

¹⁹³ Women and children also gathered from the woodlands wild fruits, vegetables and insects that helped to supplement the nutrition of the diet in the home.

preserving food for the dry season.¹⁹⁵ The selection of seeds takes into consideration several factors that include the storage situation in the home, processing, suitability to different soil types and terrain and disease tolerance.¹⁹⁶ These factors determine to some extent the type of grains the Shona could produce. Sorghum and millet that could be stored for relatively longer periods, about two years, were preferred.

In their food producer role, Shona women play a predominant role in agriculture.¹⁹⁷ The main method of farming practiced by the Shona was shifting cultivation or land rotation. This method was common in the tropical parts of the world including Africa. The objects of this farming method were to restore the fertility of the soil by periodic rotation of arable land rather than rotation of crops on the same land.

¹⁹⁴ Seeds were preserved by exposing them to smoke. The kitchen soot *chin'ai* that resulted from the smoke prevented pests from destroying the seeds. Other methods included the smearing of a solution of goat manure on the floors, walls and ceilings of granaries that also acted as a repellent for pests. F. Mutepfa, *Perceptions and Practices on Land and Natural Resource Management in Zimbabwe*, 31-33. W. Z. Sadomba's recorded interview with Mbuya Matunhira, May 1999 cited in Sadomba, "Changing Agro-ecological Religion," 1999.

¹⁹⁵ A typical granary consisted of a small hut sitting on a rock or on big logs supported by big rocks to keep out moisture from the ground and insects. The preservation of food included the drying of leaf vegetables, fruits and the preservation of other tuber fruits such as yams, cassava and sweet potatoes. Tubers were stored in pits that were dug in the ground. Some ashes were spread in the pit. The ashes prevented pests from attacking the tubers.

¹⁹⁶ Although the granaries were fairly air tight, grain could not be stored for lengthy periods. The rise in humidity especially in the rainy period affected the moisture content inside the granary. This affected the grains. See. Ntombie R. Gata, "Indigenous Science and Technologies for Sustainable Agriculture, Food Systems and Natural Resource Management with Special Reference to Zimbabwe," in *Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Natural Resource Management in Southern Africa: Report of the Southern Africa Regional Workshop* held in Harare: Zimbabwe, 20-22 April 1994, edited by Joseph Matowanyika, V. Garibaldi and E. Musimwa, (Harare: IUCN-ROSA, 1994), 85 -104.

¹⁹⁷ Women's role in agriculture in Zimbabwe and Africa in general has caused some researchers to raise the question as to whether in Zimbabwe and Africa in general "... men are the farmers or the farmers' husbands?" J. Hagman, E. Chuma and O. Gundani, "Acknowledging the Role of Gender in Agricultural Research and Extension; Review of Experiences of a Project in Zimbabwe," Paper prepared on behalf of the *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit* (GTZ) GMBH, Section 04, Eschborn, April 1996, 2.

D. M. Chavhunduka's study of African attitudes to cultivation throws some light on the method of shifting cultivation as it was practiced among the Shona.

After a few years of continuous cultivation the land needed to be rested. The old lands (*makwara*) were left to fallow so that the grass could grow again, and nature's cycle re-established. The land was left to lie fallow for as long as possible while the new lands, *gombo* were opened up.¹⁹⁸

In shifting cultivation, the fertility of the land was also increased by the burning of branches and wood in the area cleared for cultivation. The ashes from the burnt material were spread over the land.¹⁹⁹ In shifting cultivation, tree stumps were left in the field. They had the potential to grow into bushes again because their roots were not destroyed. This method did not necessarily result in permanent deforestation. The advantages of this method include sustaining soil fertility, renewing soil texture, pest control and maintaining biodiversity.²⁰⁰ Shifting cultivation was "an adaptation to an environment of relatively sparse population and abundant land, which allowed the soil ample time to recover its fertility and also prevented soil erosion."²⁰¹

Other methods used to deal with marginal lands that are characterized by low fertility and low moisture availability include the spreading of anthill soil onto the land,²⁰² the cultivation of anthills, and leaving trees especially fruit trees standing in the

¹⁹⁸ D. M. Chavhunduka, "African Attitudes to Cultivation," *Rhodesia Agricultural Journal* 75. no. 3(1978): 61.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.,

²⁰⁰ See P. Richard, *Indigenous Agricultural Revolution* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1985); V. Shiva, *Stolen Harvests: The Hijacking of the Global Food Supply* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2000).

²⁰¹ R. Palmer, *Land and Racial Domination in Rhodesia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 6.

²⁰² Anthill soils are known to have a high water-holding capacity and high levels of calcium.

fields to assist in the fertilization of the land.²⁰³ In examining the ecological role of fruit trees in Shona farming systems, Ken Wilson found that among the Karanga, “the association between fruiting and yield improvement is that the fruit litter contributes considerably to the raised organic matter and nutrient status”.²⁰⁴ Ntombie Gata also observed that crop residue, especially from finger millet, was turned over (*kutema chishanga*) to improve soil structure and nutrient levels and also to conserve moisture.²⁰⁵ These land management practices were adaptable to the use of a hand hoe.

The Shona practiced crop rotation known as *kurutsira munda*, translated as “inducing the field to vomit”.²⁰⁶ For instance, peanuts would be grown in the field where finger millet and maize had been grown in the previous season. After peanuts, finger millet was then grown. In the case of virgin lands, the process of inducing the field to vomit included some light hoeing in the cleared land and leaving it to lie idle for a season before planting crops.²⁰⁷

Mixed cropping is a method of farming that was also popular among the Shona. The crops were planted using the method of broadcasting. The combination of upright crops like maize or millet with prostrate crops like *rapoko* or *nyemba* cowpeas in one field helped to reduce the soil surface’s exposure to wind, rain or sun, factors that can cause soil erosion. Other plants that were intercropped with the same ecological benefits

²⁰³ K. B. Wilson, “Trees in Fields in Southern Zimbabwe,” in *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 15. (January 1989): 369-383.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 377. Trees in the field provide shade to the people who work in the fields.

²⁰⁵ Finger millet stover was used because it did not have many pests. Gata, “Indigenous Science and Technologies for Sustainable Agriculture,” 85 -104.

²⁰⁶ Sadomba, “Changing Agro-ecological Religion,” 1999.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*,

are pumpkin and watermelon. Their leaves provide mulch, which also reduced the growth of weeds. Mixed cropping also known as *kamunda kurakurakura* translated as “make the field big” has several advantages from the perspective of women as food producers and agriculturists. The mixing of crops is a good agronomic practice for pest control, soil fertility improvement and water conservation. It was a less demanding method of farming in terms of the labor input. Through this method women were able to grow a variety of food crops on less acreage while maintaining ecological stability in the field. This was important for food security in general.

Mixed cropping was another way the Shona adapted to the climate that was characterized by drought situations. The Shona would plant bulrush millet and finger millet in the same field. The former was more resistant to drought than the latter. This meant that in the event of a severe drought, the farmer could count on harvesting bulrush millet. On the other hand, the finger millet could be stored for a relatively longer period of time. This meant that finger millet was good in times when there was famine caused by other factors other than drought.

In traditional Shona farming systems, soil types determined the specific technique of land preparation and the type of crop that was suitable for the area.²⁰⁸ This was the case with the Shona practice of patch specific farming, *Ngare or mhindu* in dry land farming and *miwundo* in wetlands cultivation. In patch specific farming, the farmer’s choice of agricultural techniques was informed by soil types in the field. Sadomba noted that even in a field where *ngare* ridging was chosen as a technique for land preparation,

²⁰⁸ The Shona possessed knowledge concerning vegetational and soil associations so that crop fields were selected with an eye to the greatest return from the best soil for particular crops. See J. G. O. Mutambara, *African and Land Policies*, 1981. And Barry Floyd, *Changes in African Land Use Patterns*, 1959.

this technique was omitted on areas where dry branches had been burnt in the field. The reason is that burning loosens the soil in ways that would make it difficult if not impossible to construct a ridge structure that would be strong enough to curb soil erosion.²⁰⁹ The implication is that *ngare* is not a suitable technique for loose soils. The tradition is to plant pumpkins in these ashy areas. The pumpkin plant's leaves provide mulch that prevents the exposure of loosened soil to the sun and heavy rain both of which can cause soil erosion. Anthills in the field were also cropped densely due to the fact that their soils are known to be fertile and they have a high moisture retention capacity.

Mhindu or *ngare* is a system of ridging that was used when a single crop was planted. The land was divided into strips in the early part of the rainy season. The construction of the ridges involved molding stretches of earth mounds at intervals across the fields. The ridge was called *ngare*.²¹⁰ The ridges were about one foot wide. The soil in the middle of the ridge was left unturned. Loosened soil from both sides of the ridge was used to create the ridge. Both women and men constructed the ridges. Men would be in the front tearing the raw ground (*kuparura*) and women followed behind, digging the weakened soil and increasing the height of the ridge *kutsiira*. The objective was to prevent the loss of topsoil through run-off. The layers of grass that were covered by the soil rotted and later fertilized the ground. This ground was turned over in the planting season and crops such as maize, millet and sorghum were planted in these areas. The Chief Native Commissioner (CNC) also noted the technical and ecological advantages of *mhindu*.

²⁰⁹ Sadomba, "Changing Agro-ecological Religion," 1999.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*,

....the contour of the ground has been studied, and the ridges made with a view to draining the lands from the heavy floods but still more to prevent erosion, the crop stands high and dry in the heaviest rains, and gets all the benefits of the humus turned between the sods which form the ridge.²¹¹

Mhindu is a farming method that was adapted to the subtropical climate of Zimbabwe that was characterized by heavy storms that often caused the loss of top soil through run-off or water-logging during heavy rains.

Miwundo /mihomba ridges is the main method that is used for agricultural production in wetland areas.²¹² In Shona society the cultivation of wetlands is to a large extent the domain of women. The ecological properties of wetlands which include fertile soils with a high moisture retention capacity made it possible for women to grow food crops in these areas during the dry season and in drought situations.²¹³ Farming techniques in wetlands take into consideration the specific water ventilation requirements of the different crops. In wetlands cultivation, soil analysis that involved determining fertility, moisture retention capacity, vulnerability to erosion, texture and composition was the basis for concentrating certain crops in some areas than others.²¹⁴ For example, when constructing a ridge (*miwundo* or *ngare*), the ground in the center is not dug. A *chifengu* hoe is used to dig the soil that is placed in an unloosened form on the ridge. The

²¹¹ “Annual Report of the Chief Native Commissioner,” 1929. Also quoted in E. Kraemer “Women, Soil Conservation and State Policy in Colonial Zimbabwe,” Paper Presented at the Women and the Environment International Conference, Harare, Zimbabwe, Monomotapa Hotel, 3-5 August, 1999.

²¹² This method is used in Zimbabwe and other parts of Africa. For a detailed discussion see the works of C. Reiji and I. Scoones I., *Sustaining the Soil: Indigenous Soil and Water Conservation in Africa* (London: Earthscan Publications, 1996), 97-106 and Owen R., Veerbeek, and K. Jackson, and T. Steenhuis T eds., *Dambo Farming in Zimbabwe: Water Managemen , Cropping and Soil Potentials for Small Holder farming in the Wetlands* (Harare: University of Zimbabwe Publications, 1995).

²¹³ The crops grown in these areas which include rice and early maize sustain the Shona before the main crops in the fields are ripe.

²¹⁴ Sadomba, “Changing Agro-ecological Religion,” 1999.

hoe has a wide blade that enables the farmer to dig and lift a large portion of the soil in an unloosened form.²¹⁵ The lumps of soil are placed on the ridge with the roots up and grass-side-down. The center of the ridge that is left intact provides stability to the ridge structure while the lumps of unloosened soil help to prevent erosion of the disturbed soils.²¹⁶ Turning the lumps of soil, grass-side-down, increases soil fertility.²¹⁷ The *miwundo* were designed for agricultural production in river and streambeds. They have deep trenches that provide better drainage, and the excavated soils raised the beds high enough to prevent water logging. Crops that are grown on wet areas include rice and yams. These are crops that require minimum soil disturbance after planting. They are also suited to the high moisture content of the areas. Beans and *tseza* (*kaffir* potato) that need well-drained soils were grown in the drier parts of the river or stream banks. The method used in these areas is called *kuseura* or *kunyata* which refers to light digging.

Mateka “pitting” is a system that was used in vlei areas to harvest and conserve rain while at the same time preventing soil erosion.²¹⁸ The big pit (*deka* =singular. *mateka* = plural) that was dug in the wetlands drained at the circumference and retained water in the center. This technique was especially suitable for differentiated cropping. Crops that demanded large amounts of water such as rice were grown near the center

²¹⁵ This author has participated in wetlands cultivation. The main crops included rice, *madhumbe* (yams), *tseza* (kaffir potatoe), sugar cane and early maize. See also Owen, et al eds., *Dambo Farming in Zimbabwe: Water Management, Cropping and Soil Potentials for Small Holder Farming in the Wetlands* (Harare: University of Zimbabwe Publications, 1995). The book gives a detailed analysis of (*dambo*=*matoro*) wetlands cultivation, its benefits and suitability for Zimbabwe.

²¹⁶ W. Z. Sadomba, “Changing Agro-ecological Religion,” 1999.

²¹⁷ Ibid.,

²¹⁸ Ibid., Pitting was done for various environments and purposes. In the drier areas in the main fields, pits were designed to hold rainwater and retain the much needed moisture. The pits differed in size and shapes depending on the purpose.

while those which required enough drainage such as beans were planted on the raised periphery.

Summary: Women's Views and Perceptions of Land.

In traditional Shona society, land is an essential part of women's well-being in a physical and socio-cultural sense. In the former, women regard arable land and the woodlands as a source of their livelihood i.e., as the source of their physical subsistence. Land is the source of food. The main motivation for women tilling the land is subsistence.

Arable land has a socio-cultural value for women in so far as married women's social image and standing in Shona society depend upon their ability to fulfill their food producer role. Put differently, land is an important part of married women's cultural identity. Women's relationship to the land is an important part of what it means to be a mother and wife who is also a farmer in traditional Shona society.

Land is a source of knowledge. Women have intimate knowledge about the land due to their gender-based relationship with the land. The knowledge acquired through this relationship is important for the well-being of the society and the well-being of the land. Shona agriculture practices not only reveal women's knowledge about the land and plants, they also reveal ways in which Shona social life is shaped by their local environment especially their climate, soil types, plants and crops. Shona traditional farming methods took into consideration the ecological diversity of the field, the climate, agriculture technology (hoe) and the needs of the farmer. Agriculture land was used efficiently but with minimum land degradation.

Summary

From the preceding discussion we can establish that among the Shona, land is a multifaceted concept. Land is an integral part of Shona life. It has an important place in the spiritual, moral, political, economic and social life of the Shona. In Shona society, land is a repository of culture and history. Land is also important for social identification. People interpret themselves and are also interpreted by others according to the place they live in, belong to or originate from. Land is linked with Shona spiritual and physical health. It is the space in which rituals that are believed to guarantee health and prosperity in general are performed. Land is an intermediary in social, political and economic relations. The association between chieftaincy and land in Shona society supports this point. Land has a moral value. In Shona society, maintaining the well-being of the land and the people is lived as fidelity to God, the ancestors and the land. Human actions have consequences for the land and the people who reside on the land. To use Butler and Philpott's words, "Land is the "locus of life", the place where life is lived and celebrated, the place that gives life and identity and the point of contact of the spirit and human beings."²¹⁹

²¹⁹ M. Butler and Graham Philpott, "Land in Southern Africa: Gift For all or Commodity for a Few?" in *Studies in World Christianity*, 2006, 216.

CHAPTER THREE

LAND DEGRADATION IN ZIMBABWE'S CAs: A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

The purpose of this chapter is to explain how and why a situation of land degradation exists in CAs. In the process of doing so I lay the basis for the claim I make in this study that the problem of land degradation in CAs is primarily social involving right relationships between human beings and human beings and other non human beings. Towards that end, the problem of land degradation in CAs is explained in its historical and structural context.²²⁰ I contend that the specific problem of land degradation in CAs has a structural context that is linked with the historical legacy of unequal distribution of and access to resources, especially land that is rooted in Zimbabwe's colonial history. I focus on two themes; the development policies of the colonial period, especially the Land Apportionment Act of 1930²²¹ and; macro- economic policies in the post-colonial period which include the International Debt, Global trade and Economic Structural Adjustment Programs (ESAP). The development policies help us to understand the colonial heritage that contributes to the present problems of land degradation in CAs. In the discussion, the Land Apportionment Act of 1930 is given

²²⁰ The structural context refers to political, economic and social structures on a local, national and international level that shape the framework in which human beings in CAs interact with the land.

²²¹ The Land Apportionment Act of 1930 legally sanctioned the creation of CAs. After 1930, land policy could change but only within the framework of the Land Apportionment Act.

prominence because it was the basic law influencing the formulation and implementation of land policies in colonial and post-colonial Zimbabwe until the passing of the Fast Track Land Reform Program in 2000. The macro- economic policies shed light on relationships that prevail in international economic arrangements that contribute directly or indirectly to the present problem of land degradation in CAs especially in post-colonial Zimbabwe.

Colonial Policies and the Problem of Land Degradation in CAs

In colonial Zimbabwe, racism intertwined with gender prejudices was used to rationalize the unequal distribution of resources in the country. Policies and legislations in colonial Zimbabwe were informed by the two-pyramid policy, which was also known as the doctrine of parallel development.²²² The two-pyramid policy envisioned a “colonial Zimbabwe” with two separate societies that were represented by a European pyramid that represented the “European population in all posts and occupations which would be filled by the whites except for the lowest grades of labor which would be open to the natives, until a white artisan class evolved”;²²³ and an African pyramid that represented the African population and African society in which all trades and professions would be open to the Africans except for the ultimate supervision, which

²²² N. H. Wilson was the first to articulate the two pyramid policy in a pamphlet he authored that was titled, “A White Standard of Living for Southern Rhodesia: The Two- Pyramid Policy,” Salisbury, 1933. Indigenous people could be admitted to the pyramid provided they attained certain cultural standards, as standards of living. See N.H. Wilson, *New Rhodesia*, 17th October, 1950. For a detailed discussion of this policy and the changes made over time see G. Arrighi, “The Political Economy of Zimbabwe,” in *Essays on the Political Economy of Zimbabwe*, edited by G. Arrighi and John S. Saul (New York and London: Monthly Review Press, 1973), 336-377. And Malcom F. Rifkind, “Politics and Land in Rhodesia,” (Msc. Thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1969), 106.

²²³ Rifkind, *Politics and Land in Rhodesia*, 57.

would remain permanently in European hands.²²⁴ The Godfrey Huggins led government that was in power from 1933 to 1953 was informed by this. The goal of the policy was to prevent competition between the races and to guarantee the continuation of white supremacy in the colony. This informed the allocation of resources among the races. Government policies and legislation in the colonial period not only conformed to the racist ideology of the government they were formulated and developed with the intended objective of domination. Indigenous women and men as members of an oppressed race were affected differently because of their gender.²²⁵

The most important legislative measures governing land settlement prior to the attainment of political independence in 1980 were the Land Tenure Act of 1969, its predecessor the Land Apportionment Act of 1930 and the Native Land Husbandry Act of 1951. The Native Land Husbandry Act of 1951 will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter. In this section, I shall focus on government policies and legislation relating to land, especially the agriculture sector, and to a limited extent on the wage economy sector.²²⁶ Prominence is given to the agriculture sector because most changes on land based resources and Shona religio–culture in Zimbabwe are effected through agriculture. The specific policies and legislations selected in this section are significant to this study because CAs continue to be structurally disadvantaged by them in ways that affect indigenous people’s pursuit of sustainable land use practices. Most of the examples used in the discussion come from the period between 1920 -1960, especially the Godfrey

²²⁴ Ibid., The African pyramid would be African with European supervisors.

²²⁵ More will be said about this later in this chapter.

²²⁶ The agriculture and wage economy sectors are still the main sources of income and livelihood for the people in CAs. People in CAs earn their livelihood and income by selling surplus agricultural produce or by selling their labor.

Huggins era, 1933-53, because policies and legislations that affect people's relationship to land in Zimbabwe in general were implemented and consolidated in that period.²²⁷ In colonial society, The Land Apportionment Act of 1930 and the Industrial Conciliation Act of 1934 were the pillars of the two-pyramid policy in the agriculture and the industrial sector.

Land Apportionment and the Unequal Distribution of Resources in CAs

The Land Apportionment Act of 1930 (LAA) legalized a system of land segregation in the country.²²⁸ The Act itself was the result of the Morris Carter land commission report of 1925 that recommended the apportionment of land along racial lines.²²⁹ Its main provision was that there should be separate areas in which the European

²²⁷ The Huggins era is important to this study for two main reasons; 1) The successive revisions of the Land Apportionment Act of 1930 in this period laid the foundation of the system of land segregation in the country which is the ultimate cause of land degradation in CAs, and CAs continue to suffer the consequences of discriminatory state policies and legislation that were enacted in that era. 2) The land policies and land use practices that preoccupy a greater part of the discussion in this dissertation were formulated and implemented during the Huggins era.

²²⁸ Land apportionment and segregation existed as a social fact prior to the passing of the Act. The Act made land segregation government policy. It was viewed as a means towards achieving segregation. However, it is important to note that in colonial Zimbabwe, the apportionment of land along the lines of races started in 1894 with the creation of the first two African reserves, Gwaai and Shangani in the north – western part of Zimbabwe. Under article 81, of the Order in Council of 1898, the British South Africa Company BSAC, then governing body of the colony was required by the British government to from time to time assign to the Africans land sufficient for occupation and suitable for agricultural use and pastoral requirements. The Order in Council led to the creation of a series of reserves. A large percentage of the reserves were created between 1894 and 1920. Native Commissioners were responsible for designating reserves. Most of the lands that were demarcated for reserves in that period were located away from the roads and in poor quality soil areas. Although the reserves were for Africans only, mineral rights were open to European prospectors. Africans could also acquire land and dispose of it the same way Europeans could.

²²⁹ In 1923 Zimbabwe became a self-governing colony under the administration of the Responsible Government. Under pressure from European settlers who feared growing competition from African farmers, the Responsible government renewed the request of white settlers to establish territorial segregation based on race. The government responded to this request by setting up the Morris Carter land commission of 1925. The task of the commission was to look into the viability of territorial segregation

only and African only should have the exclusive right to acquire and hold land. According to the LAA (1930) indigenous people could no longer acquire land anywhere they liked in the country. Those residing on area designated for European occupation were given six years to move to CAs. The Act did not recognize the right of urban Africans to permanent homes near the places of their permanent employment and livelihood.²³⁰ This situation meant that African workers moved between their home in CAs and urban areas.²³¹

The Land Apportionment Act of 1930 divided the land unequally between a quarter million Europeans and 21/4 million Africans.²³² The actual division of land was that 49, 149, 174 acres would be the European area, 21, 127, 040 acres would be African area (reserves), 17, 793, 300 acres would be unassigned, Native areas would be 7, 464, 566 acres; Forest area would be 590, 500 acres and 88, 540 acres would be undetermined

based on race in the country. The commission reported that racial tension was increasing in Zimbabwe as a result of contact between the races and that this tension could only be diminished by separation. Its conclusion was that, "however desirable it maybe that members of the two races should live together side by side with equal rights as regards the holding of land, we are convinced that in practice, probably for generations to come, such a policy is not practicable or in the best interest of the two races, and that until the Native has advanced very much further on the path of civilization, it is better that the points of contact in this respect between the races should be reduced...." Rhodesia National Archives, C.S.R.3, 1926 cited in Rifkind, *The Politics of Land in Rhodesia*, 33.

²³⁰ The situation was later amended in the Land Apportionment Act of 1941 in which municipalities were to plan "native urban areas" in which it will be lawful to occupy certain areas of European areas. The living conditions for Africans in urban areas were deplorable as it was much cheaper for employers to provide accommodation for single men than for families. Domestic servants' quarters in the suburbs, and residential areas for Africans in urban areas were a kind of barracks rather than homes. C. Leys, *European Politics in Southern Rhodesia*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1959), 29.

²³¹ The poor housing conditions and low wages created an unstable labor force for both the industrial sector and farming sector in CAs that contributed in part to the problem of land degradation in CAs. See discussion on the Native Land Husbandry Act of 1951 in Chapter Four.

²³² The Act differentiated between "natives" and "non-natives". When applied to the divisions of the land the term European included Asians, "Coloreds" who were legally classified as white.

area.²³³ The unassigned area was for allocation at a later date.²³⁴ The unequal distribution of land among the races was also in terms of its quality. A large portion of the land allocated to the indigenous people was unfit for human settlement due to factors that include poor quality soils, lack of water and tsetse fly.²³⁵ Alvord's survey of the agricultural potential of Reserves in 1929 showed that about half of the reserves were not fit for human living. He wrote,

The statement that 50% of the total area of reserves, or 10, 408, 449 acres is arable is misleading. As a matter of fact, there are several million of these acres which, although they are called arable lands, cannot be tilled under present conditions. Much of the arable land on many of our largest reserves, including the Gwaai, Shangani, Semokwe, Gwanda, Sabi and Maranke reserves, cannot be tilled and must remain unoccupied until artificial water supplies in the way of dams or bore holes are provided²³⁶

The European agricultural sector had, by far the largest share of prime land, and the Africans had a disproportionately large part of the low grade, infertile and sometimes unusable, soils.²³⁷ Because of the inadequacy of reserves and the population increase

²³³ Southern Rhodesia, *Report of the Native Production and Trade Commissioner*, 1944, 11-12.

²³⁴The greater part of the land in this category lay in low, tsetse fly territory in the North West part of the country. Floyd recorded that the unassigned area totaled 17, 793, 300 acres of which 15, 493, 300 acres were later stated to be either infested with tsetse fly or deficient in water. See, B. M. Floyd, *African Patterns of Land Use*, 89.

²³⁵ In the Land Apportionment Act of 1930, 70% of land that is suitable for intensive production in the country was earmarked for European use. M. Yudelman, *Africans on the Land: Economic Problems of African Agricultural Development, in Southern, Central and East Africa, with Special reference to S. Rhodesia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1964), 78.

²³⁶ E. D. Alvord, "Agricultural Demonstration Work on Native Reserves", Department of Native Development Southern Rhodesia, *Occasional Paper*, No. 3. (1929): 9.

²³⁷ Rifkind, *The Politics of Land in Rhodesia*, 20. This situation was not changed by the subsequent amendments of the Act because the land added to African areas came from land originally classified as

among indigenous people, the LAA (1930) was revised several times. The subsequent amendments to the LAA (1930) increased the acreage of land allocated to Africans from land classified as “unassigned” which was the poorest in the country in terms of quality. This was especially the case with the Land Tenure Act of 1969, which replaced the LAA (1930) and divided the land equally among the races.²³⁸

The Land Apportionment Act of 1930 created the national land use system that is in place today. The areas designated for European settlement were primarily restricted to commercial farming. In these areas tenure is individual freehold land ownership. The average farm size is about 2500 hectares per farmer. The land has superior natural endowments. The areas designated Native Purchase Areas (*Matenganyika*) are restricted to small-scale commercial farming.²³⁹ The average farm size is much smaller than that in areas designated for European occupation. In these areas, tenure is individual freehold land ownership. The Native Purchase areas have poor quality soils and they were also remote from railways, main roads and markets.²⁴⁰

CAs are characterized by small farms of approximately 2.5 hectares. Community leaders often allocate the farms.²⁴¹ The tenure is communal. The ultimate ownership of land is invested in the community on behalf of the state. The small farm size in CAs and

‘unassigned’. The greater part of this land was in low, tsetse fly territory in the northwest of the country. Leys, *European Politics in Southern Rhodesia*, 28.

²³⁸ The Europeans had 46.5 percent of the land area while the Africans had exclusive rights to the same.

²³⁹ They were created after the passing of the LAA of 1941.

²⁴⁰ The soil map of these areas reveals that they are situated in poor granite and or poor fine-grained sandstone soils. Brown, Ken, *Land in Southern Rhodesia* (London: The African Bureau 1959), 23.

²⁴¹ This number is much lower in some CAs. According to Nelson Marongwe, in Zimbabwe’s 8 provinces, the average farm size of 11-28% of the households have land holdings of less than one hectare, about 40-50% households have 2.5 hectares while 20-25 % of the households have about 4 hectares. N. Marongwe, *Conflicts Over Land and Other Natural Resources*, 9.

the inferior natural endowments of CAs (poor quality soils) confine African farmers into a largely subsistence economy built on crop production undertaken within the confines of the family labor and other inputs for the purpose of satisfying subsistence needs.²⁴²

The distribution of the transport system, irrigation, agriculture extension services, financial institutions and markets was biased against CAs. CAs are located away from existing main roads and railways, while most of the European areas are adjacent to a main road, a railway or both. As a result, they deal with high costs of production, which contribute towards low agriculture income in CAs.²⁴³ For example, in the late 1980s, the marketing costs in CAs were 25% of the cost of production compared to 5% in the commercial areas, inputs delivery costs were 50% of the ex-factory price while in the commercial areas they represent only 10% of the e-x factory price.²⁴⁴

The Water Act of 1927 and 1976 distributed water resources unequally between CAs and European areas.²⁴⁵ Commercial farmers have monopoly of water rights

²⁴² In CAs, the family is the labor unit. The farms are generally cultivated by ox-plough drawn by family livestock, which are grazed on common land.

²⁴³ Slightly over a third of European areas were within ten miles of a railway station or siding, only five percent of African land is similarly located, International Labor Office (ILO), "Labor conditions and Discrimination in Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe)", Geneva, 1978, 36. cited in M. Bratton, *From Rhodesia to Zimbabwe: Beyond Community Development The Political Economy of Rural Development* (London: Catholic Institute for International Relations (CIIR) 1979), 11-12.

²⁴⁴ Charles Gore, Yemi Katerere and Sam Moyo eds., *The Case for Sustainable Development in Zimbabwe, Conceptual Problems, Conflicts and Contradictions*, A Report Prepared for the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, (UNCED) ENDA and ZERO, 1992), 90.

²⁴⁵ Water rights were based on land ownership. Europeans applied for water rights directly. Indigenous people could apply for water rights through the Chief Native commissioner. Water Boards, which comprised mainly of European settlers, ensured that commercial farmers' control of the distribution of water in the country. The Water act controlled water above and below the surface including the access to *dambos* that is wetlands. It also provides for the regulation of dams. The Priority Date System (PDS) was a system of water rights that meant that those who obtained water rights earliest had the first call upon water and in a river and have rights in perpetuity. According to the Act, "there was to be no abstraction of water from public stream for uses other than watering stock or people without possession of a court recorded right (NAZ, Water Act 1946).

especially for irrigation purposes.²⁴⁶ The unequal access to irrigation water translates into unequal economic opportunities for farmers in CAs and commercial areas because CAs are prone to drought because of their geographical location.

The human and financial resources allocated for agriculture extension services in CAs were marginal.²⁴⁷ The ratio of extension worker to farmer within CAs was much higher than in Commercial areas.²⁴⁸ The high ratio of extension worker to farmer in CAs meant that the majority of the farmers in the CAs were not the beneficiaries of the rural development programs that were aimed at teaching sustainable land use practices in CAs.

Marketing, credit arrangements and financial institutions that served farmers in the country marginalize farmers in CAs. In the colonial period, the government put in place market legislations which undercut African production while securing markets for and high prices for European farmers. This was the case in the areas of beef production²⁴⁹ and Maize production.²⁵⁰ The Maize Control Act of 1931, 1933, 1934 and

²⁴⁶ In 1995, about 85% of the irrigation schemes in the country were located in the commercial areas. The European farmers' access to water in rural areas was facilitated by government incentives which included the establishment of the Farm Irrigation Fund which provided commercial farmers with low interest loans for the construction of small-to medium size dams and financial institutions that provided credit for the necessary equipment such as pumps and canals.²⁴⁶ Commercial farmers were also the main beneficiaries of the Kariba dam that was constructed in 1959 using government funds. The dam resulted in the construction of about 9, 800 private dams and weirs in commercial farming areas in 1978 compared to about 1, 300 that the colonial government constructed in CAs. Campbell, *Reclaiming Zimbabwe, The Exhaustion of the Patriarchal Model of Liberation* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2003), 111-114.

²⁴⁷ In the financial year of 1940-1 about 14 thousand pounds was voted for the development of agriculture in Native areas while about 208 thousand pounds was voted for the development of agriculture in European areas. The discrepancy continued. Between 1945 and 1954, about 2 million pounds was spent on African agriculture while 12 million pounds was voted for the development of Agriculture in European areas. See Yudelman, *Africans on the Land*, 178.

²⁴⁸ For example, in 1961 there was one demonstrator to every 52 farmers in Native Purchase Areas and one demonstrator to 635 farmers in the CAs.

²⁴⁹ The Cattle Levy Act of 1935 and Beef Export Bounty Act 1937 prevented African farmers from competing on even terms with their European counterparts in beef. Under these legislations, a levy was

1937, excluded African farmers from the domestic market for maize²⁵¹ while discriminatory market policies prevented Africans from prospecting and mining.²⁵² For the greater part of the colonial period, the Agricultural Finance Corporation (AFC) served predominantly white farmers and did not offer credit facilities to farmers in CAs.²⁵³ African farmers in CAs continue to be discriminated against by financial institutions in the post-colonial period.²⁵⁴

The unfavorable economic conditions in CAs forced rural households in CAs to rely upon the sale of labor.²⁵⁵ One major consequence of this situation was male labor

charged on cattle sold for domestic consumption by African farmers. For a detailed discussion of the legislations see Leys, *European Politics in Southern Rhodesia*, 33.

²⁵⁰ In the Maize Control Act originally passed in 1931 and amended in 1933, 1934 and 1937, only about 20% of the African producer's crop was allowed on to the profitable domestic market compared with quotas for European producers which varied from 25% of the crop of the largest producers to 80% of the crop of the smallest producers. The reason given for segregating the Africans' produce is that their cost and standard of living are lower than that of the Europeans.

²⁵¹ Although the system was abandoned after the depression passed, it was replaced by the Native Development Fund Act of 1948, the Grain Marketing Act of 1957 and the Grain Marketing (Native Producers' Prices) Order of 1956 that covered maize and other types of farm produce, including cattle. The Acts established a system of differential prices whereby the difference between the prices per bag paid to European growers and the price per bag to African growers was partly credited to a fund (the Native Development Fund) for developing the "native areas" where the African maize was produced. European farmers did not pay a similar levy towards the development services provided in European farming areas. The overall result of the system was that African farmers in CAs got 13 shillings less than the prescribed price paid to European growers. Leys, *European Politics in Southern Rhodesia*, 34-35.

²⁵² Only five out of thirty-seven applications by Africans for prospecting licenses were granted from 1929 to 1939. Traditional alluvial washing by Africans was largely curtailed. See Leys, *European Politics in Southern Rhodesia*, 33.

²⁵³ In 1975, the credit line available to farmers was \$18,000 for whites and \$2.00 for African farmers. See The Whitsun Foundation, "An Appraisal of Rhodesia's Present and Future Development Needs", Whitsun Foundation, Salisbury, no.3, 1976. Also quoted in M. Bratton, *From Rhodesia to Zimbabwe, Beyond Community Development, The Political Economy of Rural Administration in Rhodesia* (Cambridge Terrace, London: Catholic Institute for International Relations CIIR, 1978), 11.

²⁵⁴ Charles Gore, Yemi Kateerere and Sam Moyo eds. *The Case for Sustainable Development in Zimbabwe*, 91. See article by Tsitsi Matope, "Farmers Cry foul Over Loans." in *The Herald*, January 5, 2006 [internet] Accessed January 5, 2006. Available at <http://www.allafrica.com>.

²⁵⁵ For a detailed discussion of the social, political and economic factors that contributed to male labor migration to mines and towns in the colonial period see G. Arrighi, "Labor Supplies in Historical

migration to mines, farms and towns. The Industrial Conciliation Act of 1934 and indigenous people's lack of access to education and training reduced the income earning opportunities of Africans who sought employment in the wage economy sector.²⁵⁶ The Industrial Conciliation Act of 1934 excluded Africans in the wage economy sector from available skilled employment that offered higher wages.²⁵⁷

The income differences between the races were also reinforced by education policies that channeled Europeans to industries with higher wages and Africans to industries that paid lower wages.²⁵⁸ This was achieved through an education curriculum that emphasized academic education for Europeans and industrial education for Africans. The official position was that "Africans should not be academic, but given the kind of education that would guarantee the existence of a large pool of cheap labor".²⁵⁹ The importance of academic education for European children in the colonial division of labor was articulated by Godfrey Huggins who said, "This [academic education] is essential if all our children are to be given equal opportunity for progress and to keep their position of influence and power. It will prevent the creation of a poor white class. Constant

Perspective: A Study of the Proletarianization of the African Peasantry in Rhodesia," 180-236. In March 1972 approximately 60% of the adult male African population was employed in the wage sector. F. P. Sithole, then President of the African Trade Union of Congress, estimated that in 1972, there were 824, 000 workers in the wage sector and 331, 900 of these were working on the farms in the European areas. He also identifies low wages, poor housing conditions, lack of pensions and social security as the reasons for the unstable labor force in rural areas and in the industrial sector. F. P. Sithole, "Labor Problems in Rhodesia: A Trade Union Perspective," in *Rhodesia Journal of Economics*, Vol. VI, No. 4, December 1972. The article is also quoted in Elaine Windrich, *The Rhodesia Problem: A Documentary Record 1923-1973* (London and Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd. 1975), 153.

²⁵⁷This Act defined an employee as "any person engaged by an employer to perform work... but shall not include a native". Leys, *European Politics in Southern Rhodesia*, 30.

²⁵⁸ In the civil service out of 40,000 employees in 1980, 29,000 were black, mainly clerical work and teachers. There were no black people above the senior administrative level. See The World Bank, *Zimbabwe- A Strategy for Sustained Growth* Vol. 1. (Washington DC: The World Bank, 1987), 23.

²⁵⁹ R. Zvobgo, "Education and the Challenge of Independence," in *The Political Economy of Transition, 1980-86*, ed. I. Mandaza (Harare: Jongwe Press, 1987), 320.

adjustment will take place and the result would be a system of education Rhodesia in character, and especially suited to our own requirements.”²⁶⁰

The male labor migration to mines, farms and towns resulted in a “split family strategy” whereby the wife and children remained in CAs while the husband worked for wages in mines, farms and towns.²⁶¹ The split family strategy had the effect of reducing the manpower in reserves. Kingsley Garbett reported that in 1956, 63.8 percent of African males aged between 15 - 45 years were employed outside the reserves.²⁶² A sample survey conducted in Harare in 1958 also revealed that 53% of the workers did not have their families with them.²⁶³ The implication for demographics was that women, children and old men constituted the larger population in the CAs.²⁶⁴ The split family strategy continues to be the norm today.

Colonial Policies and Women

Indigenous women and men as members of an oppressed race were affected differently by colonial policies because of their gender. The colonizers who came from Britain brought with them their own views of women’s nature and place based on 19th

²⁶⁰ Godfrey Huggins, “Education in Southern Rhodesia: Notes on Certain Features,” (Zimbabwe National Archives, 1939). Quoted in D. A. Mungazi, *In the Footsteps of the Masters: Desmond M. Tutu and Abel T. Muzorewa* (Praeger: Westport, CT: 1995), 115.

²⁶¹ The low agriculture income in CAs and low wages earned by Africans meant that, a family’s income is low, if the family as a whole farms, or if they all move into the wage sector. The income was high if the family split. In the “split family strategy” the wife and children remained in CAs while the husband worked for wages in mines, farms and towns. See Yudelman, *Africans on the Land*, 131. See also G. L. Chavhunduka, “Social Change in Shona Ward”, *Occasional Paper No. 4* (Salisbury: Mardon Printers, 1970).

²⁶² K. Garbett, “The Doomed Revolution,” in *The Central African Examiner*, December (1961): 19-20.

²⁶³ K. Garbett, “The Doomed Revolution,” 20.

²⁶⁴ About 80% of the populations in CAs are women.

century British society.²⁶⁵ This was a view that regarded women as inferior to men. One state official aptly summarized the colonizers' view of indigenous women when he said, "to any observer of the native, it is immediately apparent that their women are extraordinary inferior to the men".²⁶⁶ Christian missionaries expressed similar prejudices.²⁶⁷ In the colonizers' gender ideology, the reproductive role of women and the productive role of men were emphasized. This ideology informed the way colonial society allocated resources to indigenous people in ways that differed for women and men.²⁶⁸

Women's access to cash through wage employment was restricted by several factors chief of which was a system of passes and permits that restricted women's migration to urban areas.²⁶⁹ As a result, women formed the bulk of the population in CAs that is dependent on land as the primary means of support. Their sources of income in traditional Shona society which included beer brewing, midwifery and healing were undermined by Christian churches' ban on spirit mediums and traditional healers.²⁷⁰ The

²⁶⁵ G. W. Seidman, "Women in Zimbabwe Post Independence Struggles," in *Social Change and Development*, Vol. 1. No. 9 (1984): 2

²⁶⁶ See Elizabeth Schmidt, "Patriarchy, Capitalism and Colonial State in Zimbabwe," in *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, Vol. 16. No. 4 (Summer 1991): 735

²⁶⁷ Ibid., At Chishawasha college, a Jesuit priest opposed the employment of women as teachers and catechists because they were "ignorant and too feather-headed: to be entrusted with such a charge".

²⁶⁸ Ibid., 735f. The gender impact of colonial policies was affected by pre-existing socio-economic inequalities in pre-colonial Shona society. Indigenous and European structures of patriarchal control reinforced one another, evolving into new structures and forms of domination. This is especially the case with land policies in colonial and post independent Zimbabwe as will be shown later in the discussion.

²⁶⁹ Urban housing that catered for single men and, the colonial practice of hiring men as domestic servants restricted women's migration to urban areas.

²⁷⁰ Missionaries also forbade a lot of African ceremonies that involved beer drinking. The role of midwives was taken over by the introduction of hospitals. Also, government rules and laws that prohibited the sale of beer to compounds 1909, 1911, 1915 were put into effect at the recommendation of missionaries. E.

economic situation of women in CAs was also affected negatively by low agriculture output, which is a result of the poor quality soils in CAs.

In the colonial period, women lacked primary access to land. Land was usually distributed to men, and women have use rights through their relationship to their husbands or other family members. Although there were some provisions in irrigation policy that allowed some women to register for land in their own names, women heads of households were allocated less land than their male counterparts.²⁷¹ The situation has not changed much in post-colonial Zimbabwe.²⁷² Women still acquire access to land through their husbands or male relatives. Women divorcees have to vacate the land with no guarantees that they will have access to land in their own natal homes while widows may be evicted from the land they have tilled, sometimes for decades.²⁷³ The “head of family concept” continues to inform contemporary land reform programs. A government official explained, “This was the unwritten policy because traditionally only men were allocated land by (chiefs) because the husband is the head of household, and because he is the bread winner and the wife is dependent.”²⁷⁴ However, Gwaunza rightly argues that

Schmidt, *Peasants, and Traders and Wives: Shona Women in the History of Zimbabwe, 1870-1939* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1992), 86-92.

²⁷¹ In irrigation policy, widows and spinsters were allocated land in their own right.

²⁷² The Communal Land Act of 1982 vests ownership of communal land in the President. Allocation of land is through the Rural District Councils, which grants consent according to customary law.

²⁷³ In some cases widows who are childless or who have daughters only are evicted from the land they have tilled, sometimes for decades. In a survey conducted by the ZWRN among the widows in Njelele Ward, in Gokwe district, two widows, one was childless and the other one had female children only reported that they had been displaced from their homes and lands because of this situation. See ZWRCN, *The Gender Dimension of Access and Land Use Rights in Zimbabwe: Evidence to the Land Commission*, January 1994, 31.

²⁷⁴ F. Gwaunza, et al eds., *Women and Land Rights in Resettlement Areas in Zimbabwe* (Harare: Women and Law in Southern Africa Research Trust (WILSA), 1995).

in Zimbabwe, rural women have never been dependent in the sense that the husband provides for the family and the wife does only household and child rearing work.

The economic deprivation of women was also exacerbated by their lack of formal education.²⁷⁵ Because traditional culture maintains that it is more beneficial to the family to educate a boy rather than a girl, girl children are often the ones withdrawn from school in times of economic hardships.²⁷⁶ As a result, women have lower educational standards that make it more difficult for them to obtain employment outside of CAs.

Women's access to agriculture skills and technology was limited by gender bias in the curricula and the content of colonial education that ignored the productive role of women in society.²⁷⁷ Girls were channeled towards domestic science while men were taught agriculture and other vocational jobs such as carpentry.²⁷⁸ This situation reduced women's chances for learning new agricultural skills and technology that were necessary for them to participate effectively in agriculture that was based on western scientific methods of farming and technology.

²⁷⁵ Education statistics show that women are on the whole the least formally educated in Zimbabwe. The reasons are cultural and economic. Parents prefer to send boys rather than girls to school because girls leave the home after they marry. Educating sons is seen as an investment. G. W. Seidman noted that in 1980 over 60% of Zimbabwe's illiterate population were women. In 1980, African women comprised only 16.8% of the total non-agriculture wage-labor force and 16.7 % of these women were domestic workers. See G. W. Seidman, "Women in Zimbabwe Post Independence Struggles," 2.

²⁷⁶ In post-colonial Zimbabwe, female enrollment in schools decreased with the introduction of school fees after the introduction of ESAP. See various statistics table in ZWRCN, *Beyond Inequalities, Women in Zimbabwe* (Harare: ZWRCN, SARDC, 1998), 49-54.

²⁷⁷ In Shona society, women played a predominant role in agriculture.

²⁷⁸ G. W. Seidman also observed that girls who finished school also went into nursing and teaching, fields that were traditionally reserved for women in 19th century British society. The gender bias in was also reflected in the fact that up until 1984, women were not allowed to enroll in the only two agricultural colleges below university level that were open to Africans, Chibero and Mlezi.

Male labor migration to towns changed the gender division of labor in Shona society in ways that placed a greater burden on women.²⁷⁹ Women have had to assume tasks previously performed by men in addition to the day to day running of the farm and family. Although Chavhunduka observed that men to a very large extent continue to be involved in farming, women are still the ones who are left in the CAs to deal with the challenges of poor quality soils and land degradation. The increased workload cut into the time and energy that women need to spend on growing food crops or to engage in land conservation.

The legacy of the gender discrimination of women in Zimbabwe's CAs is that, women constitute the majority of the poor who depend directly on the land for their domestic needs. The imperative of daily life forces them to exploit scarce natural resources especially firewood and land for agriculture even though they are aware of the dangers of deforestation and soil erosion.²⁸⁰

The Impact of Colonial Policies on the Land in CAs

CAs have scarce and inferior natural endowments, which include poor quality soils and poor rainfall. The poor quality soils and poor rainfall in CAs are a constraint to agriculture productivity that depends upon the rain.²⁸¹ Agriculture

²⁷⁹ The extent to which CAs were deprived of their manpower is apparent in the figures provided by Chavhunduka who recorded that "whereas in 1948, only 24, 13 % of man between the ages of 15-55 were absent, the percentage rose in 1956 to 46% (Salisbury: Department of Sociology, University of Rhodesia, 1970), 8. This percentage continues to be high in post-colonial Zimbabwe. Moyo recorded that in some districts of Mashonaland and Manicaland, the percentages were 47% and 39% respectively. Moyo, *Zimbabwe's Environmental Dilemma*, 67.

²⁸⁰ Ibid.,

productivity is low in CAs. Farmers adjust to this by increasing the area under cultivation, which involves encroaching on grazing lands and the cultivation of steep slopes, watercourses and other fragile lands that are susceptible to erosion. The incomes in CAs are generally low due to the high cost of production that is associated with the poor agriculture infrastructure in CAs.

CAs have high population densities (human and stock) that contribute to the over-utilization of natural resources in CAs. The LAA (1930) created artificial land pressure in CA when it confined indigenous people to marginal lands that could not accommodate them from a qualitative and quantitative standpoint. Various reports given by government officials concerning difficulties surrounding the implementation of the LAA (1930) indicate that the population (human and stock) in CAs was not compatible with the available natural resources in terms of quality and quantity.”²⁸² The confinement of a growing human and stock population to a fixed amount of land with scarce and inferior natural resources put pressure on land, water and energy resources.

The survival strategies adopted by the residents of CAs have a negative impact on natural resources. CAs have overused natural resources. The lack of economic development in CAs forces the majority of the people to depend directly on the land for income generation and for their basic needs. Income generation for the majority of the (women) residents in CAs depends on the exploitation of natural resources which include

²⁸¹In agriculture, physical features such as rainfall and soil quality set the productivity (biological) limit for any given environment. About 52% of the CAs are in the worst agro-ecological region in the country. See D. Nkala, “Tackling Agricultural Development with Land Dearth,” 57.

²⁸² In 1944 the Chief Native Commissioner(CNC) stated that “...Not only are some Native reserves overstocked, but some are over-populated, and until it is possible to find and develop water resources in a number of reserves... the overflow of the population will continue and removal of natives from European area will not be possible. See Chief Native Commissioner (CNC) Report for 1944.

the cultivation of fragile soils, gold panning, the sale of firewood, the use of land for cash cropping and beer brewing which also involves using wood fuel.²⁸³ The lack of alternative sources of energy such as electricity, forces the majority of the people in CAs to depend on wood fuel as the primary source of energy for cooking.²⁸⁴ For the majority of women whose domestic responsibilities include cooking, the imperative of daily life forces them to exploit scarce natural resources, especially trees, with little consideration of future consequences. The people's over dependence on land, coupled with poor soils that are easily eroded contributes to the serious state of land degradation in CAs.

CAs have high fertility and child mortality rates that are attributed to a variety of reasons which include low educational levels, lack of good basic health and social services and the regard for children as a source of labor where agriculture is labor extensive due to poor quality soils and the lack of agriculture technology.²⁸⁵ One way in which parents adjust to the high infant mortality rate caused by the lack of good basic health and social services in CAs is to have large family sizes. The rapid population growth in CAs is not compatible with the available natural resources in CAs.

CAs experience labor shortages. Male labor migration to towns has the effect of reducing the manpower in CAs during peak labor time in the agriculture season i.e.,

²⁸³ M. Chenje et al eds. *The State of Zimbabwe's Environment 1998*, (Harare: Government of the Republic of Zimbabwe, Ministry of Mines, Environment and Tourism Zimbabwe, 1998), 92-94.

²⁸⁴ In 1982 about 77% of wood consumption (6.9 million tonnes) was for fuel and (1.7 million tones) 19% was for poles. S. Moyo, *Zimbabwe Environmental Dilemma, Balancing Resource Iniquities*, 1991. See also Y. Katerere, "Fuel wood Consumption and Supply Patterns: Tree planting Practices and Farm Forestry in Zimbabwe," in *Energy for Rural Development in Zimbabwe: Energy, Environment and Development in Africa 11*, edited by R. Hosier (Uppsala: Beijer Institute, Stockholm, and SIAS, 1988).

²⁸⁵ Gibson Mandishona, a demographer in the Central Statistics office of Zimbabwe argues that early marriages of both females and males in rural areas combined with low educational levels contribute to the high birth rates in CAs. See Gibson Mandishona, "Population Growth Impact in a Sparse Resource Environment" in *Balancing Rocks: Environment and Development in Zimbabwe*, S. Lopez ed., (Harare: SAPES Books, 1996, 31-50), and 33.

during the ground preparation season and harvest. This situation undermines agricultural productivity.

The Global Dimension of the Problem of Land Degradation in Zimbabwe

In this section I examine global factors that contribute directly or indirectly to land degradation in CAs. The post-colonial period in Zimbabwe can be divided into two parts; the 1980s that were characterized by a development policy that was guided towards “national economic growth with equity” which was also known as the socialist policy²⁸⁶ and; the free market era which started in the 1990s with the introduction of Economic Structural Adjustment Policies (ESAP).²⁸⁷

In this section I focus on the international debt, global trade and Economic Structural Adjustment Programs (ESAP) especially as they pertain to Zimbabwe. These take place within the framework of sustainable development informed by a neo-classical worldview. In sustainable development paradigm, economic growth is regarded as a necessary condition for development, which is understood primarily as economic growth and efficiency.²⁸⁸ The economic principle which informs economic growth in sustainable

²⁸⁶ In the former period, the government’s main objectives included addressing inequalities in the areas of land distribution, education, health services and wages for workers that were inherited from the colonial period. The socialist policies were aimed at addressing racial and gender inequalities in the country. A detailed discussion of these policies is given in the Government of Zimbabwe, Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development, *Socio-Economic Review of Zimbabwe 1980-85* (Harare: Government Printers, 1986).

²⁸⁷ The government committed to the latter under pressure from the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. The World Bank made the liberalization of Zimbabwe’s economy a precondition for receiving loans from the Bank. Economic Structural Adjustment Programs (ESAPs) are economic reform programs designed by the World Bank WB and the International Monetary Fund IMF for developing countries. The purpose of ESAP was to facilitate debt management by developing countries through the promotion of an export led economic growth model.

development is informed by the neo-liberal theory which is based on the fundamental assumption that human beings are self interested, they know best what they want, and they also know best how to get it and that, in the pursuit of their goals, people act rationally and efficiently.²⁸⁹ This view of the human being has its roots in the Enlightenment's emphasis on the autonomy of the individual. In that worldview, to be human is to be self-oriented and driven to maximize one's own satisfaction. From this assumption, it follows that the most appropriate economic system and productive economy is one in which individuals are allowed the greatest freedom to enter into contracts as they choose, and to reap the full benefits of their labors. In this value system, the economy must be free of government regulations in order to allow for the reallocation of resources through the market. Trade and global economic integration are regarded as engines for economic growth and efficiency in developing countries. The assumption is that access to markets and cash will improve the economic and social conditions for people. This value system is supported by a distributive justice that resists limits to inequality. The goal is the satisfaction of the desires of individuals through constant economic growth. In this value system, the issue of who benefits from an economic system and whether the earth can bear the system's burden are not considered.

²⁸⁸In sustainable development, development continues to be viewed as economic growth despite the fact that indicators of development have been replaced with a human development index which includes equality, dignity, human rights and freedom from poverty, i.e., development is now being re-conceptualized as increased capabilities. According to Amartya Sen, capability means the opportunities that exist for one to achieve what they value most.

²⁸⁹ J. Rapley, *Understanding Development: Theory and Practice in the Third World* (Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienne Publishers, 1996), 56. This economic theory has roots in Adam Smith's theory of the invisible hand. According to Smith, individuals pursuing their self-interest could serve the interest of all. The invisible hand (self interest) can allocate resources in ways that produce the greatest benefit.

The ensuing discussion will show that in post-colonial Zimbabwe, unjust global trade relations, the country's need for foreign exchange for debt servicing and the attendant efforts to achieve economic growth through a neo-liberal model of development promoted by ESAPs influence land use decisions and land use practices that contribute directly or indirectly to environmental degradation. It is crucial to note that the environment in which the macro-economic policies operate in post-colonial Zimbabwe is shaped by the legacy of colonial policies discussed in the previous section.

International Debt and Global Trade

The international debt forces Zimbabwe to accept increasing poverty while exporting growing amounts of scarce natural resources. Between 2001-2003 Zimbabwe's total external debt was 50% of the Gross National Income (GNI).²⁹⁰ The country's ability to raise the revenue it needs to purchase imports and to pay the international debt itself is affected by the fact that the Zimbabwe dollar has been dramatically depreciating against the United States dollar at the same time the price for agriculture based commodities that Zimbabwe relies on for foreign exchange has gone down significantly on the world market.²⁹¹ Since Zimbabwe's economy relies on exports

²⁹⁰ The inability of indebted nations to pay forces them to take new loans at higher interest rate to the interest of the old. See *Global Development Finance* 2005. Statistics Appendix Table A. 49.

²⁹¹ The world market is the major source of the foreign currency that developing countries need to pay their international debt. Trade on the world market is generally carried on in the industrialized countries' currencies such as the United States dollar or the British pound. Devaluation of local currency increases foreign debt in local currency terms. In 1990 the exchange rate of the United States dollar US\$ to the Zimbabwe dollar averaged US\$1: 2.45 and by 1999 it had depreciated to US\$1: Z\$38.3. The depreciation of local currencies especially in sub Saharan Africa is attributed in part to the declining economies of Sub Sahara Africa (Zimbabwe is included in this category), which is attributed in part to frequent droughts in the area. This was especially the case in 1982-83 and early 1990-1992s. Other factors include the fact that the prices of primary commodities (gold and tobacco) that the countries depend upon for foreign exchange

from natural resources for foreign currency, the increased debt forces indebted Zimbabwe to increase the extraction of non renewable land based resources for export purposes with little consideration of the consequences on the physical condition of the land and the needs of the future generation.²⁹² The result is that “the external debt becomes an environmental debt”.²⁹³ The pressure to exploit the country’s natural resources is also exacerbated by the low cost of primary commodities on the global market.²⁹⁴ This situation puts more pressure on the land as the country seeks to achieve economic growth by increasing the volume of natural resource based exports.

The diversion of a large percentage of the funds in Zimbabwe to pay debt undermines the financial capacity of the government to fund adequately relevant ministries such as the Ministry of Environment and Tourism that deal with the problem of environmental degradation in the country²⁹⁵ and to sponsor land reform programs that

has been declining on the world market. *The Human Development Report 1997* reported that in the 1990s the real commodity prices were 45% lower for commercial agriculture than in the 1980s.

²⁹² The international debt is US dollar denominated. Tobacco is the main export product in the country. Other agricultural products include cotton, maize, coffee, beef, and sugar cane and related manufacturing products such as the textile industry. In addition to this are minerals for export, which include platinum, chrome, nickel, asbestos, gold and coal which are exported mainly to South Africa, Europe and Japan, Botswana and Italy.

²⁹³ P. Balleis, “An Ethical Approach Towards Creation,” in *Waste or Want? ‘Environment and Poverty’ Seminar Papers*, edited by B. McGarry (Gweru: Mambo Press in association with Silveira House, 1995), 41.

²⁹⁴ In 1989/90, the value of coffee and cotton exports in the country decreased despite a higher export volume of these products. See The Government of the Republic of Zimbabwe, Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development, *Government of Zimbabwe 1990/91 Annual Plan*, 20.

²⁹⁵ The Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment is one of the least funded ministries in the country. Dr. F. Nhema, the Minister of Environment and Tourism in Zimbabwe stated that his ministry lacked the financial resources to implement fully the Zimbabwe Environmental Management Act of 2002 that was enacted in 2003. The act is the principal legislation for conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity in the country. See Dr. F. Nhema ‘s speech given in Curitiba, Brazil at the 8th conference of parties for the convention of Biological Diversity quoted in, “Zimbabwe taking action on Bio-diversity” in *The Herald*, April 4, 2006. [Internet] <http://www.allafrica.com/stories>. See also Southern African Community Development (SADC) regional response to Agenda 21 contained in the document: *Southern African*

address meaningfully existing imbalances in land ownership that are the root cause of the problem of land degradation.²⁹⁶ Debt payment in general results in economic poverty in indebted countries because a great deal of the wealth from developing countries is transferred to industrialized countries.²⁹⁷ The high debt service payments mean that a significant proportion of the national budget is used to pay the debt instead of being channeled to social programs that reduce poverty, which is a proximate cause of land degradation in most African countries.²⁹⁸

Trade barriers in industrialized countries make it difficult for Zimbabwe and African countries in general to sell their goods at reasonable returns. The concentration of market power in industrialized countries²⁹⁹ and trade barriers imposed on goods from developing countries by industrialized countries make it difficult for African countries to

Community Development (SADC) Policy and Strategy for Environment and Sustainable Development: Toward Equity-led Growth and Sustainable Development, 1996. The document revealed that none of SADC's environment and resource management agencies had enough funding.

²⁹⁶ The lack of funds also slows down government efforts directed at land redistribution in the country. This was the case for Zimbabwe and still is the case for South Africa and Namibia. For a detailed discussion on this matter see N. Marongwe, "Globalization and the Control over Natural Resources: The Land Question in Africa," in *ZERO Case studies: Zimbabwe and other African Countries*. [Internet] Available at <http://www.ucip.ch/zw/ma>. See also N. Marongwe, "Land Reforms and Food Security in Southern Africa: An Exploration of Functional Linkages," Paper Presented at a Conference on Food Security, University College, Cork, April 13-15, 2000.

²⁹⁷ Between 1986-1990 African countries paid back more (a total of US\$ 1.8 billion) to the IMF than they gained in new borrowing. The debt owed by African countries undermines the ability of African countries to recover from the economic crisis that they are in and it also renders them vulnerable to external political control by industrialized countries and International financial institutions that give them loans. B. Tsie, "States and Markets in the Southern African Development Community (SADC): Beyond the Neo-Liberal Paradigm," in *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol.22, NO.1, Special Issue: State and Development (March, 1996), 76.

²⁹⁸ See Thomas Callaghy, "Globalization and Marginalization: Debt and the International Underclass," in *Current History*, 96 no. 613 (1997): 392-396; and *Africa's Debt*, Background Paper, African Policy Information Center, Washington DC, December 1998.

²⁹⁹ J. Rapley, *Understanding Development: Theory and Practice in the Third World* (Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1996), 153. The World Bank and the IMF require that production in developing countries be concentrated on commodity exports. The expansion of export production has led to oversupply of primary commodities on the world market, which leads to low prices for commodities.

compete on the world market.³⁰⁰ For example, a field based study conducted by P. Nyatanga and E. Tekere on the “Export challenges of the manufacturing sector in Zimbabwe” revealed that, the country’s manufacturing products were severely discriminated against by the production requirements in industrialized countries.³⁰¹ The result was that most of the textile and garment industry in the country reduced production or ended up closing. The high tariffs placed by industrialized countries on manufactured goods from Zimbabwe and other developing countries discourage developing countries like Zimbabwe from investing in the manufacturing industries which would add local value to exports as well as reduce the country’s dependence on land based resources for exports.³⁰²

Zimbabwe has a comparative advantage in the production of natural resources.³⁰³ A trade theory, which stipulates that countries specialize in the production of goods in which they have comparative advantage in, reinforces the country’s dependence on natural resources as the chief source of income.³⁰⁴ As a result of this situation,

³⁰⁰ According to the *Human Development Report (HDR) 1997*, developing countries lose about US \$60 billion a year from agriculture subsidies and barriers to textile exports to industrialized countries. Average tariffs on industrial country imports from developing countries are 30% higher than global average. See *Human Development Report (HDR) 1997*: 9.

³⁰¹ The study indicated that most local firms lacked exporting infrastructure (institutional links with wholesalers or retailers in the industrialized countries). It went on to note that local firms that were already exporting to markets in industrialized countries observed growing protectionism against their products. The study also revealed that the European market introduced higher production standard requirements on garment exporters in the country, making production costly and profits lower for the company’s concerned, thus discouraging investment in the manufacturing industry. Cited in P. Nyatanga, “Trade Policy and Development in Zimbabwe,” (MA thesis, University of Denver, 2005), 79.

³⁰² The World Bank, *Integrating Society, Ecology and the Economy: Responsible Growth for The New Millennium* (Washington, DC: The World Bank, 2004), 23. The authors argue that those high subsidies and other forms of trade protection in the markets of the industrial world limit the growth of the agriculture trade in developing countries.

³⁰³ The IMF classifies Zimbabwe under countries whose main source of export earnings are primary products. See also IMF, “World Economic Financial Surveys,” in *World Economic Outlook*, Spring 2000,

Zimbabwe is trapped into economic poverty and environmental degradation because of low commodity prices and the environmental damages that result from the unsustainable extraction of natural resources.

*Economic Structural Adjustment Programs ESAPs*³⁰⁵

ESAPs are economic development strategies designed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB) for developing countries.³⁰⁶ The purpose of ESAP was to alleviate economic poverty in developing countries by promoting an export-led economic growth that generates foreign currency for debt servicing and purchasing imports while at the same time maintaining ecological sustainability. ESAPs are important to this study because they are regarded as economic

³⁰⁴ The international trade is based on the view that global trade is beneficial to all countries. One aspect of the mainstream global trade theory holds that production and specialization according to each nation's comparative advantage leads to more efficient allocation of resources in the world economy and higher levels of growth in all countries.

³⁰⁵ ESAP was to be implemented in two phases. The first phase of ESAP, which included trade liberalization, was implemented in 1990-95. After 1995 there were policy reversals because of the government's standoffs with the IMF and the World Bank. Despite these setbacks, Zimbabwe continues to deal with the residual effects of ESAP discussed in this section. The main goal is to earn foreign currency to pay the international debt and to buy imports especially fuel.

³⁰⁶ The neo-liberal theory is based on the fundamental assumption that human beings are self interested, they know best what they want, and they also know best how to get it and that, in the pursuit of their goals, people act rationally and efficiently. J. Rapley, *Understanding Development: Theory and Practice in the Third World* 56. This economic theory has roots in Adam Smith's theory of the invisible hand. According to Smith, individuals pursuing their self-interest could serve the interest of all. The invisible hand (self interest) can allocate resources in ways that produce the greatest benefit. From this assumption, it follows that the most appropriate economic system and productive economy is one in which individuals are allowed the greatest freedom to enter into contracts as they choose, and to reap the full benefits of their labors. When applied to economics, the theory assumes that "free" market economies enable individuals to pursue their self-interest to the benefit of society and that trade can be relied upon for economic growth. The policy prescription derived from this is that the government must desist from regulating the economy in order to give way to the market as the means for regulating the country's economy in other words; the economy must be free of government regulations in order to allow for the reallocation of resources through the market. Trade and global economic integration are regarded as engines for economic growth and efficiency in developing countries. The assumption is that access to markets and cash will improve the economic and social conditions for people.

strategies aimed at achieving economic growth, which is regarded as necessary for achieving sustainable development in developing countries. After 1990, land use decisions and land use practices that have physical consequences on the land and its resources, were profoundly influenced by ESAP and the residual effects of its policy instruments which include reduced government spending, labor market deregulations, trade liberalization and currency devaluation.

In Zimbabwe, reduced government spending and the downsizing of the workforce prescribed by ESAP had an indirect effect on the environment through increased overall hardships faced by the poor, especially indigenous people in CAs. The removal of government subsidies on basic commodities and social services worsened the plight of the majority of the indigenous people in CAs who are already disadvantaged economically by the legacy of the colonial policies. The economic poverty induced by this situation combined with the lack of alternative sources of income in CAs increased the number of people who depend primarily on the scarce and inferior natural resources in CAs. The downsizing of the labor workforce added to the already existing human pressure on the land in CAs because the unemployed returned to their homes in CAs where they turned to land as the chief source of income.³⁰⁷ Oni's study of the impact of ESAP on communal lands revealed that the growth of the tourism industry resulted in tree cutting for wood carvings sold to tourists by the indigenous people while some

³⁰⁷ The unemployment caused by ESAP affected the income of households in CAs that depended on high remittances from wages. The situation of the pensioners is made worse by high inflation. Alternative survival activities in CAs involved the use of natural resources. They include gold panning, tourist carvings, and pottery products. See M. Chenje et al eds. *The State of Zimbabwe's Environment 1998* (Harare: Government of the Republic of Zimbabwe, Ministry of Mines, Environment and Tourism Zimbabwe, 1998), 92-94.

indigenous farmers in CAs increased the area cropped with cash crops by extending their fields into fragile ecological zones and grazing areas.³⁰⁸

In Zimbabwe, weak environmental regulations aimed at attracting foreign investors with foreign currency, facilitate the unsustainable extraction of natural resources in the country. A case in point is the Mines and Minerals Act in Zimbabwe, which overrode most other Acts because of the capacity of minerals to earn foreign currency.³⁰⁹ This Act has very few restrictions attached to the exploitation of mining rights.³¹⁰

The need to earn foreign currency often takes precedence over ecological integrity. Companies and private corporations are interested in profit rather than the welfare of the citizens and the environment. In connection with this, D.G. McNeal argues that in Southern Africa, multinationals who embarked on forestry programs concentrated on growing commercially profitable species rather than species that help to alleviate soil degradation.³¹¹ He goes further to suggest that the deterioration of the hydrology of Southern Africa is a result of the introduction of paper mills and lumber companies that had vast farms of imported pines and eucalyptus, which sucked underground aquifers dry. Horace Campbell also attributes the deterioration of the

³⁰⁸ S. A. Oni, *The Impact of ESAP on Communal Areas of Zimbabwe* (Harare, Zimbabwe: Friedrich-Ebert, Stiftung, 1997).

³⁰⁹ According to the Act once a mining permit has been obtained all other acts cannot be considered. About 50% of Zimbabwe's foreign exchange comes from minerals.

³¹⁰ Those with mining rights could engage in timber felling without reforestation. The few restrictions attached to mining rights were meant to attract foreign investors by reducing the cost of production. See S. Moyo, *Zimbabwe's Environmental Dilemma: Balancing Resource Iniquities*, 95.

³¹¹ D. G. McNeal, "Heavy Floods Can't Cure Southern Africa's Drought," in *The New York Times*, February 17 (1996): 6.

hydrology of Zimbabwe to the monopoly of water rights by commercial farmers engaged in cash crop production.³¹²

In Zimbabwe, the government often justifies the uneven distribution of land in terms of quality and quantity on the grounds that commercial farms generate foreign exchange that is essential to the economy of the country.³¹³ The government allows foreign owned or some elite members of the society to acquire large pieces of prime land for growing cash crops. Up until the implementation of the Fast Track Land Reform in 2000, a large portion of prime land in Zimbabwe remained in the hands of foreign owned corporations and a few individuals for commercial production while the poor in CAs were left to subsist on poor quality soils that are prone to land degradation.³¹⁴ Under ESAP, on some commercial farms, large amounts of prime land were allocated to wildlife use despite the fact that there is a shortage of prime land especially in CAs.³¹⁵

³¹² See H. Campbell, *Reclaiming Zimbabwe*, 2003.

³¹³ Prior to the introduction of ESAP era, LSCF benefited from government policy in which foreign exchange was allocated mainly to farmers with a history of given scales of output to purchase imported large scale commercial farm machinery. H. Campbell, *Reclaiming Zimbabwe*, 100. Under ESAP, LSCF enjoyed financial support from the government in the form of “export incentives” which included foreign exchange allocations and accounts, which encouraged the farmers’ responsiveness to land use diversification, intensification and export orientation. See S. Moyo, *Land Reform Under Structural Adjustment* (Uppsala, Sweden: Africa Institute, 2000), 52. The new export oriented land use practices were consistent with the macro-level objectives of increasing foreign currency, income growth and environmental integrity.

³¹⁴ In Zimbabwe, Lonhro and Anglo American Corporation were big landowners, owning large tracts of land consisting of mining areas, sugar estates, farms and cattle ranches. Campbell recorded that The Oppenheimer family alone owned about 960, 000 hectares (about 2 million acres of land and over 400, 000 hectares of this land were lying idle). See H. Campbell, *Reclaiming Zimbabwe*, 2003.

³¹⁵ Under ESAP some commercial farmers in Zimbabwe turned to horticulture, ostrich farming and wild life and tourism, which promised, increased foreign currency, income growth and environmental integrity. S. Moyo, *Land Reform Under Structural Adjustment*, 51. Moyo also noted that land use that was based on the agriculture potential of the land is changing as poor quality lands are now valued because of the potential they have to develop into tourist sites that can bring in foreign currency.

In CAs, cash crop production is supported by continuous cultivation, intensive monoculture forms of production and row planting which are not suitable from an ecological and social standpoint.³¹⁶ In addition, the increased use of industrial products such as artificial fertilizer and pesticides adversely affect the quality of agriculture land.³¹⁷ In Zimbabwe, the liberalization of foreign trade witnessed the increased dependence of agriculture on industrial products and the penetration of the country by big food trans-nationals such as Cargill and Monsanto that introduced genetically modified seeds in the country. The Catholic Institute of International Relations (CIIR) study on *The Effects of International Trade on food Security* is insightful on this matter. The CIIR recorded that,

“Increasing dependence on expensive F1 hybrid maize seeds, sold by multinationals such as Monsanto, has severely affected the traditional system of storage and reuse of maize seeds the following season. The implications are that sustainable low-input agriculture is rapidly being replaced by unsustainable high-input production system.”³¹⁸

The genetically modified seeds are replacing indigenous seeds, traditional land use practices and cropping techniques (intercropping), which are known to be socially and ecologically sustainable.³¹⁹

³¹⁶ The ecological disadvantages of monocropping are that it reduces resistance to pests, soil fertility and biodiversity. Given the land shortages experienced in CAs and Zimbabwe’s erratic climate, the new agronomic techniques are inefficient in so far as “each acre of a monoculture provides a single output and farmers are forced to depend on technocrats and professionals in their agriculture. See P. Balleis, “An Ethical Approach Towards Creation,” 41

³¹⁷ According to *The State of Environment Reporting (SOER) 1998* the most polluted areas are in Commercial farms. The pollution from fertilizer and pesticides affects rivers that CAs depend upon for water. See *State of Environment Reporting (SOER) 1998*, 157.

³¹⁸ CIIR, “The Effects of International Trade on Food Security. A Zimbabwe Case Study Report,” paper presented at the Global Water Partnership, Hague, March 2000 cited in H. Campbell, *Reclaiming Zimbabwe*, 107.

ESAP introduced the market as the main means for distributing resources fairly in a society. In Zimbabwe, the introduction of ESAP shifted the discourse about land reform in Zimbabwe from its concern with justice i.e., distributing land to the landless and redressing inequalities in land ownership inherited from the colonial period, to a concern with efficiency and productivity.³²⁰ Cde. Kumbirai Kangai, then minister of Lands and Water Resources, articulated this shift in policy when he stated that in selecting beneficiaries of the government's resettlement program "*productivity will now be emphasized to the extent that only those with required expertise will be allocated land in resettlement schemes. This will thus go a long way in ensuring growth and sustainable development of the rural areas*".³²¹[Emphasis mine] The market based criteria for land redistribution benefits the minority rich but excludes the poor who constitute the largest category of proximate agents of land degradation in CAs. Economic poverty continues to be the single most important phenomenon determining human pressure on the land and other land based resources in CAs.

³¹⁹ H. Campbell, *Reclaiming Zimbabwe*, 106. The seeds are produced through the "terminator gene" technology which means that they can only be planted once.

³²⁰ In 1980, land was to be distributed to refugees and the landless. See Government of Zimbabwe, *Socio-Economic Review of Zimbabwe* (Harare: Government Printers, 1985). The values of efficiency and maximum productivity rather than justice were the dominant criterion for land redistribution policies in post independent Zimbabwe prior to the implementation of the Zimbabwe's Fast Track land reform program in 2000. The government's position has not changed much as the elite of Zimbabwe has acquired most of the prime land under the Fast Track Land Reform Program on the grounds that they have the means to produce efficiently. The position of the government in the free market era is articulated by S. Moyo, *The Interaction of Market and Compulsory Land Acquisition Processes with Social Action in Zimbabwe's Land Reform*, 2000

³²¹ "Speech by the Honorable K. M. Kangai: Minister of Land and Water Resources," in *Setting the Basis for Dialogue on Land in Zimbabwe: Report of the NGO Consultative Land Conference Harare*, Zimbabwe 27-28 May 1997 (ZERO-Regional Environment Organization, Harare: J& B. Print Platform (Pvt) Ltd, 1998), 26-29.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed how and why CAs have a problem of land degradation. In the discussion, international and national factors that affect land use decisions and land use practices in Zimbabwe were identified. At the international level, ESAP integrated Zimbabwe and developing countries into a global economy in which they produce raw materials and industrialized countries produce manufacturing products. This international division of labor reinforced colonial patterns of production that were constructed as an exercise of political and economic power by the colonizers during the colonial period but have since been adapted to suit the demands of the global market.³²²

Zimbabwe is caught within the trap of environmental degradation and economic poverty in which increased international debt means that the country has to extract more of the land based resources for export purposes for less economic returns. ESAP prescribed development policies that were purely extractive, involving the exploitation rather than the sustainable management of resources. The need to earn foreign currency often takes precedence over the ecological integrity and the well-being of the people in general. In Zimbabwe, prime land is allocated for cash crop production that brings in

³²² The pattern of trade on the world market continues to freeze countries in patterns of production, which are on the whole the ones left over from colonialism. S. George and F. Sabelli, *Faith and Credit: The World Bank's Secular Empire* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994), 66. In the colonial period, colonies specialized in the production of raw materials and primary products that were unavailable in Europe. In return, European manufacturing grew on the basis of these products, as they became industrial inputs and foodstuffs for its industrial labor force. This international division of labor stimulated European industrialization and it forced colonies into primary commodity producers. The result was that exports from colonies provide raw materials for European capitalist civilization. See P. McMichael, *Development and Social Change: a Global Perspective* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press, 1996), 18-20. and A. Hoogvelt, *Globalization and the Post Colonial World: The New Political Economy of Development*, 2nd ed., (Baltimore, Maryland: The John Hopkins Press, 2001), 184.

foreign currency while the under production of food crops in the country has resulted in frequent famine and the problem of malnutrition.³²³

Cash crops reallocate natural resources meant for sustenance to the market. In CAs, cash crop production alienates land users from the land. Physically, the land ceases to produce for the people who work on it when it is transformed ecologically through monocultures and chemical fertilizers to produce for external markets. People work on land that has been physically transformed by the use of fertilizers and monocultures to meet the needs of the market. The natural interconnection between people, the land and what they produce is destroyed. In physical terms, the tendency is to reduce the diversity of nature and transform it into a nature that is full of high –yielding monocultures.³²⁴ In social terms, the transformation is generally away from a nature that has traditionally come to support household and community needs and towards a nature that is geared to meet urban and industrial needs, a nature that is essentially cash generating.³²⁵

Multinational companies and private local companies that own as well as control access to artificial fertilizers and commercial seed undermine the self-sufficiency of the indigenous farmers in CAs. The majority of the farmers in CAs lack the economic means

³²³ Various studies sponsored by United Nations Children Education Fund UNICEF in Zimbabwe indicate that the serious problem of malnutrition is caused by the shortage of land in CAs and cash crop production that has resulted in loss of land for growing food crops, *tseu* . In that context, women do not need training in nutrition; instead they need land to grow food crops. E. Batezat and M. Mwalo, *Women in Zimbabwe* (Harare: SAPES Trust, 1989), 144. In 1962 maize production declined 36% in CAs while commercial areas provision of domestic staple food rose from 30% to 70% from the mid 1960s to mid 1970. According to Bratton, this situation indicated the dependence of CAs on staple food imports from commercial farms. E. G. Cross, “The Tribal Trustlands in Transition: The National Implications,” in *The Rhodesia Science News*, 11, no. 8 (August 1977): 6. Also cited in M. Bratton, *Beyond Community Development*, 9-10.

³²⁴ A. Agrawal, “Beyond Pretty Trees and Tigers in India,” in *The Future of the Environment: The Social Dimensions of Conservation and Ecological Alternatives*, edited by David C. Pitt (London and New York: Routledge, 1988), 93-125.

³²⁵ *Ibid.*,

to procure these products (commercial seed, fertilizer and pesticides) without which they have very little use of the land as a source of livelihood. This situation raises the question about indigenous people's ownership of the land. In post-colonial Zimbabwe, do indigenous people in CAs own the land when they lack the material resources to connect with the land in ways that they value? Put differently, do the farmers in CAs really "own" the land when they lack access to seeds, water, fertilizer and the material necessary to sustain the productivity of the land? In reference to this matter, Thomas Shopo argues that "even if all the landless (in a quantitative) sense were to be resettled, the land would still not be theirs (indigenous people) given the addiction of the country's soils to fossil-based fertilizers".³²⁶

The demands of an export-based economic growth model on Zimbabwe's agriculture based economy put pressure on the land and its resources. In CAs, indigenous women and men remain disadvantaged economically and ecologically by the legacy of colonial land and social policies and a model of distributing resources that excludes concerns about justice.

³²⁶ T. D. Shopo, "The Political Economy of Hunger" in *The Political Economy of Transition, 1980-86*, ed by I. Mandaza (Harare: Jongwe Press, 1987), 227.

CHAPTER FOUR

CHANGES IN LAND TENURE AND LAND USE PRACTICES AFTER THE INTRODUCTION OF COLONIALISM

In Zimbabwe, land policies introduced in the colonial period undermined and almost replaced attitudes and land use practices that contributed to the well-being of the people and the environment. The Native Land Husbandry Act of 1951 (NLHA) is a case in point.³²⁷ In this chapter, I examine the changes in land tenure and land use practices introduced by the Native Land Husbandry Act NLHA (1951) and their impact on Shona men and women's relationship to the land, followed by an examination of the religious aspects of land conservation policies in CAs, especially as they were perceived and articulated by E. D. Alvord.³²⁸ The NLHA is of interest to this discussion because contemporary land conservation policies and land use patterns in CAs are still structured by it.³²⁹ I contend that Shona people's capacity to take care of the land was significantly weakened by colonial land policies that undermined Shona religio-culture on which Shona traditional environmental ethics rested.

³²⁷ The NLHA was the first major effort by the colonial government to change traditional land tenure into a western type of free hold tenure system and it was also intended to enforce land conservation measures, which included the destocking of cattle and soil conservation measures in CAs.

³²⁸ More is said about Alvord in the next paragraph.

³²⁹ See M. Drinkwater, "Technical Development and Peasant Impoverishment: Land Use Policy in Zimbabwe's Midlands," in *Journal of Southern Africa*, Vol. 15, No. 2 (January 1989): 287-305.

It is crucial at this point to note that the models of land conservation that have remained central to the Zimbabwe government's approaches to the problem of land degradation in CAs were initially introduced and developed by missionaries who viewed agriculture practices as a means for religious and social transformation of the indigenous people. Emory Delmont Alvord was one of the prominent architects of land conservation policies in CAs. Alvord served as a missionary for agriculture for the American Foreign Board of Missions from 1919-1926 at Mt. Selinda which is located on the Eastern part of Zimbabwe and; as a technocrat from 1926 to 1945/7 in the Native Affairs Department (NAD) that was responsible for the implementation of land conservation policies in CAs until 1962. He was appointed 'Agriculturist for Native Instruction' in 1926. His chief duty was to organize agricultural instruction in Christian mission schools throughout the country and to direct the agricultural education of adult Africans. In his capacity as the Chief Native Agriculturist in 1930, a position that was later renamed Director for Native Agriculture in 1944, Alvord made recommendations that provided the groundwork for the Native Land Husbandry Act of 1951 (NLHA).³³⁰ Alvord's role as an agriculture missionary and a technocrat in the Native Affairs Department (NAD) make it possible to examine the technical and religious aspects of land conservation policies in colonial Zimbabwe and their impact on Shona peoples' relationship with the land.

³³⁰ Alvord also made recommendations that provided the groundwork for the Natural Resources Act of 1941 (1945 revised). In addition to this, he introduced and implemented in CAs, agriculture extension work/demonstration policy and centralization policy and irrigation policy that are presupposed by the Native Land Husbandry Act of 1951.

The Technical Dimension of the Native Land Husbandry Act of 1951³³¹

The Native Land Husbandry Act of 1951 (NLHA) was introduced in 1948 and became law in 1951. Its implementation was delayed until 1955.³³² The NLHA (1951) was abandoned in 1962 due to several factors chief of which was indigenous people's strong opposition and resistance to it after many people had been left landless. The NLHA (1951) presupposed several land conservation policies and practices that were already in place prior to its passing in 1951. They include Agricultural demonstration policy, irrigation policy, centralization, the construction of mechanical contours and destocking. These policies became compulsory after the passing of the NLHA (1951). In Zimbabwe, most of the changes that affect the quality of the land are effected through agriculture, mainly through the effects of technologies used in production, land management practices, inputs to increase land productivity and livestock management practices.³³³ The purpose of this section is to analyze the impact of land conservation policies and practices on the land and Shona women and men's relationship with the land.

³³¹ The Southern Rhodesia government printed a pamphlet about this act called *What The Native Land Husbandry Act Means to the Rural African and to Southern Rhodesia*. I focus on the main objects of the act as they are given in the pamphlet.

³³² The "Report of the Natural Resources Board 1954" highlights the urgent need to address the problem of land degradation in CAs. It says, "The time for plain speaking has now arrived, and it is no exaggeration to say that at the moment we are heading for disaster. We have on the one hand a rapid increase taking place in the African population and on the other a rapid deterioration of the very land on which these people depend for their existence and upon which so much of the future prosperity of the country depends. ...It is fruitless to say that steps will be taken when the exchequer permits, when even at the moment thousands of tons of irreplaceable top soil are being washed down our rivers to the sea." See "The Report of the Natural Resources Board 1954," quoted in Southern Rhodesia, *What the Native Land Husbandry Act means to the Rural African and to Southern Rhodesia* (Salisbury: Government Printers, 1955), vi.

³³³ M. Chenje et al eds, *The State of Zimbabwe's Environment 1998*.

Centralization policy allocated a fixed amount of arable acres of land to Shona individual households.³³⁴ The fixed amount of land per household curbed the traditional patterns of land use, which included the practice of shifting cultivation.³³⁵ Appropriate government officials rather than chiefs determined the location of residential areas, fields (arable land), and grazing areas in a village. In some places, people had to relocate their homes in accordance with the surveys. Under the NLHA, persons eligible for farming and grazing rights included males over the age of 21, married males, widows and spinsters over the age of 25. Although 6 acres was the standard land holding for each farmer, the land holdings were adjusted according to rainfall conditions.³³⁶ Widows with no dependents and spinsters were given one third of the standard area. A polygamist was allocated one third of the standard area for each additional wife provided that the land allocated does not exceed three times the standard area of 6 acres.³³⁷ The farmer was also allowed a maximum of 4 cattle. However, due to the shortage of farmland in CAs, the size of land allocated to the farmers was often less than the stipulated 6 acres.³³⁸ The

³³⁴ Centralization policy was first implemented in 1929 in the Shurugwi communal area but became government policy in 1933. It was compulsory after the passing of the Native Land Husbandry Act of 1951.

³³⁵ Centralization was regarded as a solution to the problem of overpopulation and overstocking in CAs. By 1955 it was claimed that about 40% of the CAs had been centralized.

³³⁶ The Native Land Husbandry Act did not establish the size of individual holdings, but section 24 of the act stated that “The minister...may from time to time by notice in the [government] Gazette determine the area of arable land in respect of which a farming right maybe granted to a native who is a married man – with one wife.” See Yudelman, *Africans on the Land*, 120f. Table 6 has various sizes of individual land holdings based on rainfall conditions.

³³⁷ The standard land holding stipulated by the NLHA was based on the assumption that it would provide the farmers with enough land to sustain themselves on the land without seeking supplementary employment.

³³⁸ Infact, the full holdings of about six acres that were stipulated by the NLHA could only be created for about two thirds of those deemed eligible for them. In 1960 it was estimated that there were 324, 000 families who were entitled to land. If these were to be given the ideal land holdings, they would occupy 3.1

result was that there was considerable variation in the size of land holdings in different CAs due to shortages of land and other factors which include the fact that indigenous farmers were not evenly distributed throughout reserves and there was variation in livestock population between and within areas.

Centralization contributed to land degradation in Zimbabwe's CAs through deforestation that resulted from clearing land for settlement, cultivation, and the use of firewood for burning bricks for houses.³³⁹ The new layout of centralized villages concentrated the movement of people and cattle along paths that later turned into gulleys during the rain season.³⁴⁰ F. Gillward, Senior Inspector of Lands in 1938 had this to say about centralization:

Overstocking was largely caused by the practice of fencing farm boundaries, which merely restricted the movement of cattle. Where formerly cattle were permitted to roam the countryside, today they are confined to their own areas whether the carrying capacity of their land is capable or otherwise of supporting these numbers.³⁴¹

million acres of arable land. This was more than the land that was designated for Africans in the LAA (1930). There was about 2.8 million acres of arable land available in the African areas, so that at best 212,000 families or about 70% of the total number could receive full-size arable holdings. See Yudelman, *Africans on the land*, 123.

³³⁹ Implementing centralization in CAs meant that trees were cut to make way for human settlement and to make way for the cultivation of arable land. In arable land, trees and their roots were removed completely because the demonstrators regarded them as an obstacle to efficient plowing. Trees also provided the firewood that was needed to burn bricks that were used to build new houses. The immediate drawback of this policy as a measure aimed at dealing with land degradation was that there was soil erosion that was caused by deforestation.³³⁹

³⁴⁰ In this article, Wilson recorded some interviewees who recalled that prior to the introduction of centralization there were no erosion problems related to paths because paths used to zig-zag.

³⁴¹ F. Gillward Jr, "Senior Inspector of Lands Report to the Department of Lands," 20th October, 1938. Gillward also observed that, in Matabeleland in particular where herds are generally larger than in Mashonaland, "the concentration of cattle in areas which are poorly grassed and watered resulted in continuous movement in certain directions, namely to the drinking troughs or water holes, to the dipping tanks and to favorite grazing areas which result in countless footpaths which soon become barren and *donga* ridden."

Centralization also necessitated continuous cultivation that could not be sustained by the quality of the soils in most CAs. According to Ken Brown a former agriculture officer in the department of Native Agriculture, continuous cultivation was not suitable for the CAs because “the soil types in most of the reserve area i.e., sand veld soils have a soil structure, subsoil and depth that is subject to severe erosion hazards so that it is suitable for cropping only if intensive conservation and other special measures, which normally include long ley – rotations with short cropping periods, are practiced”.³⁴²

Demonstration policy aimed to teach peasant farmers principles of farming and land conservation based on western science. The aim was to help peasant farmers to subsist on the small acreage and poor quality soils in CAs.³⁴³ In this teaching scheme, the piece of land used for demonstration called “the demonstration plot” was properly cleared and stumped, heavily fertilized with well-rotted cattle manure, plowed and harrowed, and the crops row-planted rather than broadcast, for easy tillage.³⁴⁴ Soil fertility on the plot was maintained through a four-year crop rotation.³⁴⁵ The plow was the main instrument

³⁴² Brown also made the point that extension officers of the department of extension and conservation working in European areas would never dream of advising continuous cultivation on sandveld soils. The implication is that there was little concern about implementing appropriate land conservation measures in CAs. Brown, *Land in Southern Africa*, 9.

³⁴³ Alvord was the architect/founder of agriculture extension work in Zimbabwe’s CAs. Agricultural demonstrators were trained at Domboshawa and Tjolutjo. Men were targeted for recruitment for this job. The first women demonstrators were trained in 1984.

³⁴⁴ E. D. Alvord, *The Development of Native Agriculture and Land tenure in Southern Rhodesia*, Manuscript, 1959, 7.

³⁴⁵ The rotation was as follows, maize with manure, maize, groundnuts, beans or other legume crop and elusine or other legume close growing millet. The crops followed one another in systematic order on the same land and from land to land, completing the cycle in four years, then repeating indefinitely. The legume crop assured a continuance of nitrogen-fixation and provided the necessary change of crops for a healthy soil. The heavy leaflet millet crop after the legume smothered all weeds and filled the soil with a dense growth of fibrous roots and gave all the benefits of a grass ley without interfering with the continuous cropping of the lands. The thorough cultivation gave the soil proper aeration. E. D. Alvord, *The Development of Native Agriculture and Land tenure in Southern Rhodesia*, 10.

of agriculture in the new farming system.³⁴⁶ Demonstrators deployed into CAs were expected to teach by demonstration and example, intensive farming methods in dry land farming and on irrigation schemes in CAs.³⁴⁷ There were four classifications of African farmers in colonial Zimbabwe. The master farmer,³⁴⁸ plot holder,³⁴⁹ cooperator³⁵⁰ and ordinary farmer.³⁵¹ Farmers who applied successfully the new methods of farming were given the Master farmer Certificate.

Irrigation policy provides useful insights on changing land use practices among the Shona, especially as they were promoted and implemented in CAs by the department of Native affairs (DNA) through agriculture demonstration workers.³⁵² The colonial government viewed irrigation schemes as drought relief projects and as resettlements

³⁴⁶ Before harvest, Alvord invited indigenous people to a meeting that was held at the demonstration plot. The purpose of the “before harvest meeting” was to encourage the surrounding community to emulate a model of successful intensive farming production. According to Alvord, the crop yields from the demonstration plots were often higher than the crop yields from ordinary plots. The belief was that indigenous people will emulate the new methods of farming after seeing *with their own eyes* the results of the new methods of farming

³⁴⁷ The first demonstrators were sent out in 1927.

³⁴⁸ These are farmers who had demonstrated their ability to farm well using intensive farming methods prescribed by the extension workers. They did not need the supervision of extension workers. They would have also passed examinations given to them as part of the Master Farmer Certificate program. Alvord introduced the Master Farmer Certificate program in 1934. The certificate was important because in the colonial period, a Master Farmer certificate became a prerequisite for the purchase of land in Native Purchase Areas. In post independent Zimbabwe, the certificate was one of the criteria used by the government to determine people who qualified for land allocation in resettlement areas, Southern Rhodesia, *What the Native Land Husbandry Act Means to the Africans*, 18.

³⁴⁹ Plottolders farmed under the supervision and guidance of demonstrators or extension workers. They followed farming methods prescribed by the demonstrators and if they performed satisfactorily could qualify as Master Farmers.

³⁵⁰ Co-operators were those who followed the demonstrators farming methods at least to the point where they rotate some crops, use manure and fertilizer, and plant crops in rows.

³⁵¹ The ordinary farmers are those who made no effort to follow intensive farming methods.

³⁵² The “intensive methods of farming” was compulsory for all farmers in CAs after the passing of the Land Husbandry Act.

designed to alleviate population pressure in CAs through the introduction of intensive modern methods of farming.³⁵³ Farmers on irrigation schemes were plot holders. Under the irrigation policy designed by Alvord in 1947, plot holders could keep their land on condition that they follow stipulated methods of farming and land conservation practices. They were also expected to pay water rates at the end of every month. Failure to follow these rules would result in eviction from the plot of land.

Farmers were expected to remove trees (including their roots) and anthills from the field before cultivating the land.³⁵⁴ Tree roots and stumps in the field were regarded as obstacles to the efficient use of the plough. For the farmers in irrigation schemes, anthills had to be destroyed completely in order to facilitate the smooth flow of water in the field.

Soil fertility on the plots was enhanced by the use of organic manure in the form of compost or kraal manure. People who did not have cattle turned to compost manure.³⁵⁵ The stipulated amount of compost/manure for each acre was seven tonnes of

³⁵³ The majority of the smallholder irrigation schemes in Manicaland were constructed at the advice of Alvord in the 1930s and 1940s when the Land Apportionment Act was being implemented and during times of famine. The aim of the irrigation projects in CAs was to make possible the accommodation of a large number of people in CAs by increasing the carrying capacity of the land through intensive farming. Zimbabwe depends on rain fed agriculture and irrigation technology was going to reduce the effects of famine caused by drought.

³⁵⁴ Mrs. Mukoko a plotholder in Nyanyadzi irrigation scheme had this to say about this process “They (the demonstrator) would peg and burn the land before we started stumping (removing trees and their roots) and clearing the land. After demarcating and allocating the plot we would then stump and stump and stump. The agriculture demonstrator would come around and ask, ‘Are you done with stumping?’ We would respond, ‘yes we are done,’ yet we would not have done a thorough job especially removing the roots. We would be exhausted and then say, ‘I am tired let me cover the roots with soil and move fast because I want to plant.’ The demonstrator would inspect our work and see that the roots are covered with soil. He would say, ‘you did not dig, you did not remove the roots,’ and ask us to redo the job.” Musiiwa’s recorded interview with Mrs. Mukoko of Nyanayadzi dated 1/12/02 cited in T. E. Musiiwa, “Sustainability, Indigenous Agricultural Knowledge and Gender on Smallholder Irrigation Schemes in Manicaland, 1928-1997: Rethinking Peasant Agrarian History in Zimbabwe,” (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Minnesota, 2002), 150.

manure that would be applied twice every two years.³⁵⁶ The demonstrators counted and measured the size of the heaps of manure in each plot before the manure was spread out and mixed with soil.³⁵⁷ According to one interviewee based in Nyanyadzi, demonstrators often kicked the small heaps of manure in the field in order to make sure that they were all manure and not a mixture of soil and manure.³⁵⁸ An alternative to organic manure was artificial fertilizer that was introduced in 1944. Most farmers could not afford artificial fertilizer.

Farmers had access to land on irrigation schemes on condition that they provided the necessary labor and followed the prescribed methods of farming. The implementation process was prescriptive and authoritarian. The efficient management of irrigation technology was supported by rigid regulations. This was especially the case with the watering schedule in which water was distributed to farmers in turns. Farmers who missed their turn for whatever reason had to wait for their next turn and this meant that their crops could go for a week or two without water.

Landholders were required to construct mechanical soil conservation in the form of storm drains and contour ridges as part of the government's program to curb soil erosion in the fields. The model used in the country was designed in America but

³⁵⁵ Building a compost (pit or open stake compost) involved collecting material that included rubbish, such as stalks of maize, ash and humus. Musiiwa noted that after the introduction of compost, the indigenous people were able to identify plants that would decompose much faster than the compost material that was introduced to them. Examples of these materials included banana leaves and dead baobab trees. They also discovered that the heat from kraal manure expedited the decomposition process.

³⁵⁶ Musiiwa, "Sustainability, Indigenous Agricultural Knowledge," 155.

³⁵⁷ Ibid., 158.

³⁵⁸ Ibid., Musiiwa's recorded interview conducted with Mr. Gonorenda (senior) on 12/19/2001. Cheating was often prompted by the fact that not all plot holders had access to organic manure especially kraal manure. Plot holders resorted to these tactics out of fear of losing their plots.

adopted wholesale in Zimbabwe.³⁵⁹ The contours focused on the control of moving water. It was the duty of the farmer to construct the contours that were one meter wide and half a meter deep.³⁶⁰ The contours and drains were applied uniformly in the country.³⁶¹

The model of mechanical contours used in Zimbabwe is not suitable for CAs from an ecological, social and economic standpoint of the farmer.³⁶² The application of the model did not take into consideration the ecological diversity of the country: the contours focused on water control which is unsuitable for the majority of CAs that receive very little rainfall but is appropriate for European areas that receive heavy rainfall. The CAs would have benefited from a model that focused on moisture retention. J. Hagmann also recorded that in CAs, contour ridges did not stop erosion but often accelerated it.³⁶³ Mechanical contours take a lot of potential land for cultivation in the fields in a situation where there is land shortage. In addition, the construction and maintenance of contours

³⁵⁹ J. Elliott, "Environmental Degradation, Soil Conservation and the Colonial and Post-Colonial State in Rhodesia /Zimbabwe", in *Colonialism and Development in the Contemporary World*, edited by C. Dixon & M. Hefferman (London: Mansell, 1991), 74.

³⁶⁰ Ibid., This was accomplished by the use of a series of parallel contour banks and associated storm drains aimed at minimizing rill and gulley formation on cultivated soils.

³⁶¹ The implementation of the program involved the demonstrators who would peg the place where the contours were to be laid out in the fields. The system worked like this; there was a storm drain at the foot of the mountain to curb the flow of water from mountains. In the middle of the field were contours which were spaced systematically. At the end of the field was a water drain that was not cultivated but was heavily vegetated. Water from the contours would spill into the water chain averting soil erosion.

³⁶² See Elliott, "Environmental Degradation," 74. The model was designed in America but adopted wholesale in colonial and post independent Zimbabwe.

³⁶³ J. Hagmann, "Mechanical Soil Conservation with Contour Ridges: Cure for, or Cause of, Rill Erosion," in *Land Degradation and Development* 7 (1995) : 145-60. See also B. Floyd, *Changing Patterns of African Land Use in Southern Rhodesia*, 326-329 and K. B. Wilson, "'Water used to be Scattered in the Landscape' Local Understandings of Soil Erosion and Land Use Planning in Southern Rhodesia," in *Environment and History* 1 (1995): 281-296.

requires a great deal of labor that is not available in CAs due to the migration of men to towns in search of wage employment.

Destocking is an approach that is used to address the problem of land degradation attributed to overstocking. The Natural Resources Act of 1941 provided the legal basis for compulsory destocking in CAs.³⁶⁴ Livestock carrying capacities were decided on the basis of climatic conditions of the CAs, especially the rainfall received in the area.³⁶⁵

The maximum number of cattle a farmer could own was four.³⁶⁶ Other measures that

³⁶⁴The Natural Resources Act (NRA) was passed after the report prepared by the Natural Resources Commission of 1939 identified overpopulation and overstocking as the main cause of land degradation in the country. The commission which is also known as the McIlwaine Commission because it was led by Robert McIlwaine was set up to inquire about the preservation of the natural resources in the country. Prior to 1939 several warnings from agronomists and district commissioners about the deterioration of the soil and agricultural potential in CAs had been recorded. The commission's conclusion was that it would take 250 years to repair the damage that had been done to the soil especially in CAs. The Natural Resources Act was of limited use as an instrument for natural resource management in CAs because most of its provisions applied to people who had legal title to land. Here I shall focus on Section Four of the Act which applied to CAs. The main objective of the Natural Resources Act (NRA) 1941 was to control the use of natural resources in the country. The Act led to the establishment of the Natural Resources Board which was charged with overseeing the proper use of natural resources in the country. The Board's primary duty was to guide public opinion in the conservation and preservation of natural resources throughout the country. In the NRA (1941) s provision for conservation in CAs referred mainly to taking degraded land out of use and destocking overgrazed pastures. The Act authorized the Natural Resources Board (NRB) to remove in CAs stock and humans from areas that are degraded by overstocking or overpopulation and to provide suitable alternatives. Section 38 empowered Native Commissioners to give orders to land users on matters relating to destocking, methods of cultivation, the prohibition of the cultivation of certain land and the conservation of natural resources and the prevention of their injury. Section 36 allowed the governor, on the advice of the Minister or the Natural Resource Board to authorize destocking of cattle if needed. Under this Act, the officials had the legal power to force indigenous people to provide labor in soil conservation works. Failure to comply with this was to be an offense. Southern Rhodesia, *Report of the Commission to Enquire into the Preservation of the Natural Resources of the Colony*, CSR 40 (1939) para.97 quoted in G. Passmore, *Hidden Conflict: A Documentary Record of Administrative policy in Colonial Zimbabwe, 1950-1980* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 2002), 121-122.

³⁶⁵ Livestock carrying capacities were decided on the basis of climatic conditions of the CAs, especially the rainfall received in the area. For example, areas that received above 28 inches of rainfall were allowed 10 acres per animal; 20-24 inches allowed 13.5 acres per animal and areas that received less than 20 inches of rainfall were allowed 16.67 acres per animal. J. A. Elliott, "Soil Erosion and Conservation in Zimbabwe: Political Economy and the Environment," 76.

³⁶⁶ According to E. Punt, about 1 million cattle in CAs were disposed of between 1946 and the end of 1948. E. Punt, "The Development of African Agriculture in Southern Rhodesia with Particular Reference to the Interwar years," (MA Thesis, University of Natal, 1979), 142. Also Quoted in I. Phimister, "Discourse and the Discipline of Historical Context: Conservationism and Ideas About Development in Southern Rhodesia 1930-1950," in *Journal of Southern African Studies* 12, no. 2 (April 1996): 273.

reinforced the destocking policy included the introduction of compulsory weekly dipping of cattle against tick-borne diseases.³⁶⁷ The system put in place for the compulsory weekly dipping helped government officials to keep track of the number of stock that peasant farmers owned.³⁶⁸ “Excess stock/cattle as well as stock belonging to people without arable rights in the area had to be got rid off either by slaughter or by sale. The colonial government viewed stock control in communal areas very seriously to the extent that donkeys, for which no market existed, were bought by the government at nominal prices at de-stocking markets, slaughtered and buried.”³⁶⁹

Destocking in CAs undermined continuous cultivation that depended on plow-based farming methods and the use of organic manure in the form of kraal manure. It reduced the farmer’s chance of meeting the required amount of cattle manure that was required per acre.³⁷⁰ By 1965 it was estimated that 48% of African farming families had no cattle.³⁷¹ The shortage of draught power and manure continues to be a problem in CAs.³⁷² P. D. Tanner and L. Mugwira have noted that in cases where cattle are available,

³⁶⁷The introduction of exotic breeds made necessary the institution of dipping. Animals new to Zimbabwe were susceptible to tick-born infections. Indigenous cattle had a natural immunity to these infections which has since been lost. See Floyd, *African Patterns of Land Use*, 125.

³⁶⁸ Every stock holder had a dip card and at each dipping, the card had to be entered upon by the dip attendant (*Mudhibhisi*), and the stock holder had to explain the reason for any increase or decrease.

³⁶⁹ V. E. Mashingaidze, “Land Reform in Colonial Zimbabwe: The Southern Rhodesia Land Husbandry Act and African Response,” in *Eastern Africa Social Science Research Review*, EASSRR, Vol. VI, No. 2 and Vol. VII, No.1 (June 1990 and January 1991): 19.

³⁷⁰ See Floyd, *African Land Use Patterns*, 303. Floyd argues that destocking under the Native Land Husbandry Act reduced the chances of producing the required 10-15 tonnes of kraal compost per acre that was prescribed for African farmers by the extension workers.

³⁷¹ G. Kay, *Rhodesia: A Human Geography* (New York, 1970), 91. Also cited in V. E. Machingaidze, “Land Reform in Colonial Zimbabwe, 29.

sometimes the nutritional value of the pasture is so low that the cattle produce poor quality manure.³⁷³ On the other hand, the majority of the farmers cannot afford artificial fertilizer.³⁷⁴ Studies have shown that the application of artificial fertilizer in conjunction with kraal manure gives better results than the application of chemical fertilizer alone.³⁷⁵ This situation implies that the majority of farmers without cattle and money to buy artificial fertilizer lack the means to maintain sustainable levels of soil fertility in CAs.³⁷⁶

Men and Changes in Land Tenure and Land Use Practices in CAs

Changes in land tenure and land use practices affected women and men differently because of their gender. The (NLHA) 1951 created legally landless indigenous men in traditional Shona society. Under the Act, land was allocated to eligible persons who were present at the time of land allocation for the specific area i.e., the right to land was related to the actual occupation of land (lawful cultivation) and an arbitrarily appointed date line.³⁷⁷ This meant that the right to sufficient farmland was no

³⁷² See B. M. Campbell, R. F. Du Toit and C. A. M. Attwell, *The Save Study: Relationships Between the Environment and Basic Needs Satisfaction in the Save Catchment* (Harare: University of Zimbabwe Publishers, 1985), 28-29.

³⁷³ P. D. Tanner and L. Mugwira, "Effectiveness of Communal Area Manures as Source of Nutrients for Young Maize Plants," in *Zimbabwe Agricultural Journal*, 81, 3 (1984). Cf. K.W. Nyamapfene, "Adaptation to Marginal Lands Amongst the Peasant Farmers of Zimbabwe," in *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 15. No.21, (January 1989): 386.

³⁷⁴ Artificial fertilizer is not very suitable for CAs because its use requires the use of a lot of water which is scarce in CAs.

³⁷⁵ Floyd, *Changing African Land Use Patterns*, 306.

³⁷⁶ B. Sithole and B. Edziwa, "Ignorance or Ignorant Extension?" in *The Zimbabwe Science News*, Vol. 32 No.2/3 (April/September 1998): 39.

³⁷⁷ The Mangwende Reserve Commission pointed out that a number of people had not been allocated land during the implementation of the NLHA because they were in town or away on the day of land allocation. Sample surveys in two wards in Mangwende Reserves revealed that 40% of the adult males who were

longer inalienable for men in Shona society. The Act deprived a considerable number of men of their basic right to land. Men in town at the time land was allocated, had no claims to land in CAs, yet the prevailing socio-economic conditions in towns did not allow indigenous people permanent urban residence. This meant that indigenous people who lost their jobs in towns or retired were likely to find themselves without land in CAs.

The introduction of the market rather than inheritance and custom as the means of transferring land in society undermined the Shona traditional concept of land as a resource under the trusteeship of a chief that was available to community members on a needs basis. Under the Act, farmers were allowed to sell their land when they saw it fit to do so.³⁷⁸ The commodification of land empowered individuals with capital to own and dispose of land without considering the needs of the other members of the community. As a result, land ceased to be a resource for all and became a resource for those who can afford it.

The introduction of individual land tenure was based on the colonial government's assumption that the lack of Shona co-operation in land conservation programs was due to the lack of "security of land tenure". In legal terms, the land acquired a commercial value, thereby undermining the Shona traditional view of land that did not place monetary value on the land. The Secretary for Native Affairs described the Act as the "most important Bill affecting native communal life ever passed in Southern Rhodesia and possibly in Africa "because it introduced individual land tenure in CAs."

registered as taxpayers had been registered landless by the land allocation made under the Act. See "Mangwende Reserve Commission Report," 1961 paragraph 141. Also cited in Drinkwater, Technical Development and Peasant Impoverishment," 302-303.

³⁷⁸ Individual tenure applied to arable land only while grazing areas remained communal.

According to him,

The reason for the compulsion made possible by this new act is the increasing problem on the land caused by the rapidly growing native population. The provisions of this Act give us the opportunity of changing for the good of themselves, and the colony of Africa as a whole, the social and economic structure of the Africans of Southern Rhodesia.³⁷⁹

The NLHA undermined the traditional basis of loyalty and political allegiance in traditional Shona society by transferring control of land from the chief to the state.³⁸⁰ In traditional Shona society respect and loyalty to the chief depended on his ability to provide sufficient farmland to his people. The NLHA stripped the chiefs of such powers. Worse still, sufficient farmland could no longer be the basis for allocating land because of the restrictions of the LAA (1930).³⁸¹ The new changes undermined the political control of the chiefs and their capacity to be trustees and custodians of the land on behalf of the people and the ancestors.

Land dispossession undermined the community bonds that make life possible in Shona religio-culture. The forced removal of the Shona from original homelands that had religio-culture significance deprived them of their right to practice their religio-culture they regard as important for the well-being of both the people and the land.

The forced removal of the Shona by the colonial government to totally different ecological and social zones reduced the migrant's capacity to make the best use of the land. The migrants had to adjust to different environments requiring different land use

³⁷⁹ "Secretary for Native affairs Annual Report," 1951, 4.

³⁸⁰ Traditional leadership plays an important role in land conservation in Zimbabwe's rural areas. The Traditional Leaders Act of 1998 (Chapter 29:17) recognizes this role.

³⁸¹ In 1959 the Chief Native Commissioner acknowledged that only 212, 000 of the eligible 313, 931 cultivators could be allocated full economic holdings. See Chief Native Commissioner Annual Report for 1959, 11.

strategies. Their use of the land was limited by unfamiliarity with the new ecological situation and inadequate agriculture services in CAs.³⁸² In addition, population pressure in CAs and the imposition of alien conservation techniques that were not ecologically suitable for CAs added to the problem of land degradation in CAs.

Women and Changes in Land Tenure and Land Use Practices

Land conservation policies and technology in colonial and post-colonial Zimbabwe overlooked the productive role of women in Shona traditional society. As a result, Shona traditional economy that rested on women's agriculture efforts was significantly weakened by centralization policy, extension work, irrigation policy and agriculture technology. Women's ability to meet their food producer role was also undermined by the same.

Centralization created land shortages that affected women's food producer role in Shona society. The size of the family was not a factor for consideration in land allocation that took place under centralization policy. The land shortages resulting from centralization policy reduce women's access to good quality land.³⁸³ Centralization

³⁸² See Matowanyika, "Indigenous Resource Management and Sustainability in Rural Zimbabwe," 1991. The forced removal of the Shona by the colonial government took them away from the herbs, plants, hunting grounds and other places, which they knew in great detail. Some people were moved from cool and wet parts of Nyanga to hot and dry parts of the district where there were also cultural differences.

³⁸³ In response to the land shortages, some married men reduce the size and quality of land they allocate as *tseu*. In a national survey of 173 households, conducted by the Zimbabwe Institute of Development (ZIDS), 23% of the wives had access to this special allotment (*tseu*). S. Sunga et al eds., *Farm Extension Base-line Survey Results* (Harare: Zimbabwe Institute of Development Studies (ZIDS), 1990). Also cited in ZWRCN, *The Gender Dimension of Access and Land Use Rights in Zimbabwe: Evidence to the Land Commission*, 2-3. In the survey, centralization policy was cited as one of the reasons for the decline of the cultural tradition of *tseu* which recognized women's productive role in Shona society. Cash crop production geared towards profit was also identified as one of the causes of the decline of the custom of *tseu*. The loss of land on which to grow food crops has been a major grievance among women in CAs. See O. N. Muchena, *Report on the Situation of Women in Zimbabwe* (Harare: Ministry of Community Development and Women's affairs, Government of Zimbabwe, 1982); D. Pankhurst and S. Jacobs, "Land

restricted wetlands cultivation, which had the effect of limiting women's use of wetlands they depended upon for food in time of drought.³⁸⁴

Centralization resulted in deforestation and soil erosion that increased women's workload in the home and in the field.³⁸⁵ Increased soil erosion meant more work for women who were expected to construct mechanical contours to curb soil erosion in the field. Deforestation in CAs forces women to travel long distances to get firewood.

The introduction of continuous cultivation increased women's workload. Women had the task of collecting manure from kraals and grazing areas that were located in a separate area and placing it on arable lands that were located in another area.³⁸⁶ This is a labor-intensive process from the viewpoint of women farmers like Mrs. Tarugarira who had this to say about it:

Now with the demonstrator's gospel it was advisable that we use manure and fertilizer from the stores. We used cow dung because it was easily available...but cheaper than artificial fertilizer. We would collect it during the dry season from the cattle pens. Women and children would dig using hoes, pile up the manure and shovel it out of the pens. We would then use scotch carts to move the manure to the fields. And then

Tenure, Gender Relations, and Agricultural Production: The case of Zimbabwe's Peasantry," in *Agriculture, Women and Land The African Experience*, edited by J. Davidson (Boulder: Westview Press, 1988) 205-222; Zimbabwe Women's Bureau ZWB, *We carry a Heavy Load: Rural Women in Zimbabwe Speak Out* (Harare: Zimbabwe Women's Bureau, 1982).

³⁸⁴ J. McGregor, "Conservation, Control and Ecological Change: The Politics and Ecology of Colonial Conservation in Shurugwi, Zimbabwe," in *Environment and History*, 1 (1995): 267.

³⁸⁵ Under centralization, trees were cut to make way for land for human settlement and in some areas trees were cut in order to make way for fields. The preparation of agriculture land under centralization policy included removing the root systems (stumping) of trees. This was an arduous task for female headed households. Stumping was also a recipe for soil erosion that was caused by the loosening of soil around the roots and deforestation. In traditional Shona methods of farming, tree stumps were left in the field. They had the potential to grow into bushes again because their roots were not destroyed. This method did not necessarily result in permanent deforestation.

³⁸⁶ Instead of picking up cow dung from the grazing areas, women who did not have cattle were able to build their own compost from which they got manure for their fields. Although the resources from which a compost could be made were accessible to women, the process of making a compost was time consuming.

spread it over and do the winter plough. That's mixing the soil and the manure...this was very labor intensive.³⁸⁷

The use of manure also increased the presence of weeds in arable land and hence increased the task of weeding. This affected women the most because the task of weeding is "traditionally a woman's task" and men are unwilling to undertake this task.³⁸⁸

The demonstrators required that farmers remove all the wild species in the fields. This was a setback for women because they used some of the wild species that grew in the field as relish.³⁸⁹ The wild species include; *teketera* (*galisoga tarvislora*), *runi*, *mutsemuramhutu* (spindlepod-cleome *momophylla*) *derere/nyenje* (cute-corchrus *olitoruius*) and *bowa* (semapiweed-amaranthus hybridus).³⁹⁰ The wild species classified as weeds by the demonstrators played a vital role in sustaining ecological balance. Vandana Shiva's observations on weeds and crops are insightful on this matter. She argues that,

There is intimate relationship between "weeds" and crops, especially in the tropics where weeds and cultivated varieties have genetically interacted over centuries and hybridize freely to produce new varieties. Genes for herbicides tolerance, that genetic engineering are striving to

³⁸⁷ Oliver Masakure's Interview with Mrs Tarugarira conducted in Mutare on 3/20/99. Also cited in Kraemar in , "Women, Soil Conservation and State Policy in Colonial Zimbabwe," 1999.

³⁸⁸ A. H. Weinrich noted that among the Shona, women and children are expected to do most of the weeding. Weeding is a task men shy from. According to Weinrich some men even go off to seek urban employment, and if their wives need additional help, they are encouraged to call work parties (*nhimbe*). A. K. H. Weinrich, *African Farmers in Rhodesia* (London: OUP, 1975), 92; O. N. Muchena, *Women and Agriculture, and Extension Services in the Tribal Trustlands of Zimbabwe 1977*, 82- 83.

³⁸⁹ Some of the wild species classified as weeds by extension workers were used as relish by women. The requirement to rid the field of wild species meant that women whose food resources from the field had already been reduced by the introduction of monocropping and the banning of wetland cultivation could not leave in the field, wild species they used as relish.

³⁹⁰ W. Z. Sadomba, *Changing Agro-ecological Religion and Changing Agro-economic Practices*, 1999.

introduce into crops plants may be transferred to neighboring weeds as a result of naturally, occurring gene transfer.³⁹¹

The regulations that require the cutting of trees in the field, especially fruit trees overlook the gender needs of the woman farmer. Fruit trees in the field are an important source of food for the farmer. Trees in the field provide shade for the farmer (men and women). As Kraemer rightly noted, most female farmers are of childbearing age and consequently have small children and infants who would accompany them to the fields. Trees left standing in the fields, as Kraemer rightly observed provide shade for the children at a distance close enough for their mothers to attend to them when there was need to.

Women are marginalized by agriculture extension services in Zimbabwe. The services are often directed at men despite the fact that the majority of men who are the target of extension work in CAs are not around due to male exodus to urban areas and mines for wage labor. This situation affects the effective communication of agriculture information to the women farmers because in Shona traditional culture, contact between men and women is limited so that it is not always easy for women to approach a male extension worker, especially in the absence of their husbands.³⁹² The situation is also

³⁹¹ See V. Shiva, *Monocultures of the Mind* (London and New Jersey: ZED books, 1993)

³⁹² D.S. Moore noted that in the Kaerezi area, located in Nyanga district, many wage laborers absent from home for most of the year forbade their wives from participating in public meetings for fear of adultery. D. S. Moore, "Contesting Terrain in Zimbabwe's Eastern highlands: Political Ecology, Ethnography, and Peasant Resource Struggles," in *Economic Geography*, Vol. 69: No. 4 (October 1993): 394. In connection with this, Muchena makes the point that the limited contact between men and women due to cultural factors means that women rely on second hand information from kinsmen or from informal social networks. See also N. Muchena, *Women and Agriculture, and Extension Services in the Tribal Trustlands of Zimbabwe*, (Master's Thesis, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York, 1977).

made worse by the fact that most of the extension workers are men although great strides have been made to include women extension workers.³⁹³

Women's concerns as food producers are marginalized by extension work that is oriented toward cash crop production rather than food crop production. The result is that agricultural training that is often given to women in CAs is aimed at cash crop production that is the domain of men and is not relevant to the gender needs of women who are food producers in that context. According to Muchena, readiness to learn depends on the relevance of what is being learned to the subject's immediate problems.³⁹⁴ If we apply this insight to extension work in CAs, one can reasonably suggest that women farmers are less likely to accept readily the training given by extension workers because it fails to take into consideration women's practical gender needs namely food crop production. Women's concerns as food producers are also marginalized at the level of research. The selection of crop species for research is determined by economic and commercial value. Extension work lacks training for efficient and increased production in food crops such as groundnuts and millet. Godswill Makombe also noted that not much research is devoted to studying the viability of vleis, which provide supplementary food especially in times of drought.³⁹⁵

Extension work in CAs is often directed at a few progressive cash crop master farmers who receive instructions in the use of fertilizers, pesticides and the operation of modern equipment such as tractors, the plow and the cultivators. Women often lack the

³⁹³ See B. Sithole and B. Edziwa, "Ignorance or Ignorant Extension?" 35-41.

³⁹⁴ Muchena, "Women and Agriculture", 127.

³⁹⁵ G. Makombe, "The Economic Impact and Performance of Irrigation in Zimbabwe," (Ph.D. Dissertation, Colorado State University, 2000) Chapter 6.

formal education required to obtain the master farmer certificate.³⁹⁶ As a result, women are excluded in the training they need to effectively apply new methods of farming.

The agriculture techniques and technology introduced in CAs, undermined women's roles as farmers and mothers. Monocropping is a farming technique that has ecological and social disadvantages for Shona women as food producers. The ecological disadvantages are that it reduces resistance to pests, soil fertility and biodiversity. The social disadvantages especially in Zimbabwe's climate are that it reduces food security because the farmer risks losing all her crops in a bad year of drought or too much rain. The technique of monocropping is also prone to weeds, a situation that necessitates a considerable amount of weeding. Kraemer noted that women in a polygamous situation resisted row planting which is associated with monocropping because they resent the idea that their husband would be able to determine the woman who was slow in the field.³⁹⁷ Being slow in the field would damage the woman's social image in her husband's family because in traditional Shona society, women were expected to excel in agriculture.

Agriculture technology displaces women as the farmers in traditional Shona society. The increased use of agriculture technology such as the plow which relies on cattle draft power, and the increased use of cattle manure in the fields (organic farming) necessitated by continuous cultivation means that cattle which are largely owned by men in Shona society have become a valued asset in the culture of Shona agriculture.³⁹⁸

³⁹⁶ The Master Farmer Certificate is often issued to men (head of the family) despite the fact that women do the agricultural work that qualifies in part the husband this type of certificate.

³⁹⁷ Row planting made it easy to see who worked slower than others because he or she will remain behind in their assigned row. E. Kraemer, "Women, Soil Conservation and State Policy in Colonial Zimbabwe", 1999.

³⁹⁸ See. Musiiwa, "Sustainability, Indigenous Agricultural Knowledge," 2002.

Additionally, in traditional Shona society, cattle rearing and herding is the responsibility of men and the drafting of oxen for the purpose of plowing or drawing a scotch cart of manure or harrow is viewed as men's task. Not many women own cattle. The shift in Shona agriculture to technology that depends on cattle owned by men means that women farmers are now more dependent on their husbands or male relatives who own cattle when it comes to cultivating the land. This situation undermines women's food producer role because in rain-fed agriculture, "the inability to do one's own plowing at the right time, due to non availability of oxen, plow or male labor reduces women's agricultural output."³⁹⁹ In Zimbabwe's climate that is characterized by erratic rainfall, early planting and weeding are critical activities that determine agricultural output.

Women are marginalized in the field of genetic engineering of seeds. This marks a shift in the gender division of labor in Shona traditional society in which women were guardians of food security through responsibilities that included food storage, seed selection and food production. Women's involvement in seed selection and preservation helped them to determine the appropriate seeds from the point of view of food security. Ensuring food security also involved the consideration of appropriate seeds and crops from the point of view of the storage situation in the home. For example, finger millet was a suitable staple food because it was drought resistant and it could be stored for a long period, and it was easy to process and grind, unlike maize. For a long time, most of the hybrid maize seeds used require a lot of water which makes them vulnerable to drought situations that often plague Zimbabwe and most parts of the continent of Africa. The hybrid seeds take in a lot of water, which causes them to be soft and less resistant to

³⁹⁹ Zimbabwe's rainfall is not always reliable. See O. N. Muchena, "Women and Agriculture," 83; And Yudelman, *Africans On The Land*, 1964.

pests. Because of that, they are not suitable from the perspective of women whose task is to ensure that there is enough food to carry the family throughout the year.⁴⁰⁰

The production of hybrid seeds has been in the area of cash crops and not necessarily in the area of food crops. This situation marginalizes the food crops that are important to women and their familial dietary needs. Women lack direct access to hybrid seeds. Women in CAs have come to depend on money from their husbands for seed purchases and other agricultural products such as fertilizers and pesticides that go with the production of hybrid crops. The increased use of industrial products in agriculture reduces further women's access to land because the majority of women lack the cash that is needed to purchase the seeds and the fertilizer they need to relate to land in the ways that they value.

The irrigation policy gave female plotters direct access to land and water and control over their produce.⁴⁰¹ This was a departure from Shona tradition in which women have land use rights only. The situation of married women was different in the sense that they did not have direct access to land. Widowhood is one of the criteria used by the colonial and post independence government to create space for women on irrigation schemes or resettlement schemes.⁴⁰² Widows were able to register the land allocated to them in their own names. This provided them with secure land tenure. Some widows registered in their names the land they inherited from their husbands. Musiiwa's

⁴⁰⁰ For instance, the change after 1910 from millet as a staple food to maize a crop that is monocropped is a challenge to ensuring food security because maize are prone to drought and less resistant to pests

⁴⁰¹T. E. Musiiwa, "Sustainability, Indigenous Agricultural Knowledge," 2002.

⁴⁰² Ibid., See Musiiwa's recorded interview with Mr. Nhachi conducted on 12/18/2001.

interview with Regina Gudyanga, a widow, throws some light on how the process worked for widows.

My husband had four wives. He died in 1992. All the four acres were registered in his name, but now that we are widows, each one of us is entitled to an acre and we are going to have those acres registered in our respective names as widows. One of my children will inherit the plot when I die.⁴⁰³

Some married women who had husbands who were not keen to take up a plot in the irrigation scheme were able to get a plot with their husband's approval by registering themselves as spinsters or widows.⁴⁰⁴ Plots acquired by women under irrigation policy were also transferred successfully from one woman to the other. A case in point was that of Mrs. Mugebe.

I inherited the plot from my mother. She had inherited it from her mother too. My grandmother became a plot holder when my grandfather died. My grandfather only had five daughters. Being the eldest daughter, my mother inherited the plot when my grandmother died. It was not passed to her brother in-law as is our custom. My brothers did not show interest in irrigation farming, so I took over the plot from my mother when she was too old to cultivate the land. I am married, yes, but my husband and my-in-laws know that the plot belongs to me.⁴⁰⁵

The efficient management of irrigation technology was supported by rigid regulations that did not accommodate the health and social concerns of women. This was especially the case with the watering schedule in which water was distributed to farmers in turns. Farmers who missed their turn for whatever reason had to wait for their next turn and this meant that their crops could go for a week or two without water. The rigid

⁴⁰³ Ibid., See Musiiwa's recorded Interview with Regina Gudyanga conducted on 12/20/2001.

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid., See Musiiwa's recorded interview with Mrs. Matura of Nyanyadzi conducted on 12/21/2001.

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid., See Musiiwa's recorded interview with Mrs. Mugebe conducted on 12/20/2001

schedule that was guided by the norm of efficiency meant that farmers who were sick had little choice but to go and water their fields when it was their turn to do so. Women in traditional Shona society had participated in the cultivation of wetlands, and their experience differed from their experience with irrigation technology in that they had a choice to go or not to go to work in the wetlands if one was sick. Here, the goal to produce efficiently superseded the health of the farmers in general.

The preceding discussion showed that land conservation policies and practices in colonial and post-colonial Zimbabwe constructed men as the farmer and women as the farmer's wives. This was achieved through land allocation strategies in which land is distributed to men as head of the household; and agriculture technology and extension services that target men as the farmer. The gender inequalities, which existed in pre-colonial Shona society, are reinforced by these policies in ways that not only disadvantage women, but in ways that cause women to be proximate agents of land degradation. The majority of men no longer allocate *tseu* to their wives due to land shortages resulting from the legacy of the LAA (1930) and the NLHA (1951) and; the majority of women cannot afford hybrid seeds, fertilizers and pesticides that are necessary for them to use the land in ways that they value.⁴⁰⁶

The Religio-cultural Dimension of Land Policies in CAs

Alvord regarded his government appointments as an opportunity to extend his agriculture missionary work of spreading “the Gospel of the plow” to a much larger

⁴⁰⁶ Women have come to depend more on the remittances of their husbands for fertilizer and genetically modified seeds while their role as stewards of seeds which also implied their control of the source of future plants is undermined by the introduction of genetically modified seeds.

constituency.⁴⁰⁷ The Christian influence in the department was enhanced by the fact that the majority of the indigenous men who served as demonstrators in the early part of Alvord's administration came from mission church schools.⁴⁰⁸ The mission church school trained men became the propagators of "progressive agriculture" known as the "Gospel of the plow" in Zimbabwe's CAs.⁴⁰⁹ The Christian mission influence on land conservation policies and practices in Zimbabwe is eloquently articulated by Leedy: "Alvord's demonstration scheme which was developed on a Christian mission station – Mt. Selinda, became official government policy for CAs in 1924, it was then frequently disseminated by staff with a Christian mission education, and made many of its inroads among mission adherents."⁴¹⁰

The Gospel of the Plow and Shona Religio-culture

Alvord's approach to the problem of land degradation in Zimbabwe's CAs was influenced by his realization that, agriculture was a way of life as well as a religio-cultural activity for the Shona. He described the Shona as, "... essentially agriculturists.

⁴⁰⁷ He described his appointment to the position of Agriculturist for Native Instruction in 1926 as an appointment that increased "his scope as an agricultural missionary to the nth degree" meaning that "instead of serving a few hundred natives on the mission farms, he would be in a position to serve hundreds of thousands". E. D. Alvord, *The Development of Native Agriculture*, 13.

⁴⁰⁸ Mission church schools were established by Christian missionaries from Europe and North America. This situation is explained by the fact that mission schools were the main providers of education for indigenous people in colonial Zimbabwe. In 1930, 36 out of a total of 54 men enrolled for training as demonstrators were from mission schools. 25 of the men came from Mt. Selinda. These were Alvord's former students. See E. D. Alvord, *Agricultural Demonstration Work on Native Reserves*, Department of Native Development Southern Rhodesia, *Occasional Paper*, No. 3. 1929, 13.

⁴⁰⁹ The Gospel of the plow involved teaching peasants sound principles of farming that were based on western science and used the plough as the main technology

⁴¹⁰ Most demonstrators started work with people they knew. Leedy, "The Soil of Salvation: African Agriculture and the American Methodist Episcopal Methodism in Colonial Zimbabwe 1939-62," (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Florida, 2000), 67.

They are of the earth, earthy. Agriculture to the Native, is not trade or an occupation. It is a mode of life."⁴¹¹ [Emphasis is mine]. He also commented that Shona agriculture was a religio-cultural activity, "every operation connected with tilling the soil and caring for livestock was tied up with spirit worship, superstition and fear of the unknown..."⁴¹²

Alvord regarded the interrelatedness of religion and agriculture in Shona society as a hindrance to the successful planting of Christianity among the Shona and their adoption of new methods of farming that were based on western science. At Mt. Selinda, Alvord observed that some indigenous people (including his students) attributed high crop yields resulting from intensive methods of farming based on western science to witchcraft and magic.⁴¹³ He recorded one such incident that led him to an important "discovery" that shaped his approach to agriculture in CAs.⁴¹⁴

⁴¹¹ E. Alvord, *Agricultural Demonstration Work on Native Reserves*, 5.

⁴¹² E. D. Alvord, *The Development of Native Agriculture*, 2. It is most probable that the beer drinking and ancestral worship that Alvord makes reference to in this quotation are rain ceremonies that are an important part of Shona traditional beliefs. Alvord also stated that his mission among the "natives" was not meant to "prepare the native for competition with the Whiteman, "we aim to elevate him in his own environment." This view was consistent with parallel development in colonial Zimbabwe. See discussion in Emory Delmont Alvord, *Helping the Heathen to Help Himself* (Boston: American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, 1925), 9.

⁴¹³ Alvord set up a training school for indigenous people aimed at teaching by example and demonstration, intensive farming methods based on western science. The demonstration scheme that was developed at Mt. Selinda became official government policy for CAs in 1924.

⁴¹⁴ E. D. Alvord, *The Development of Native Agriculture*, 5-6. Alvord's discovery was shaped by this particular experience at Mt. Selinda. In 1922, Alvord used the opportunity created by drought to explain to the indigenous people ways in which the new methods of farming based on western science had made it possible for the crops on the school's demonstration plot to survive at a time when crops on ordinary fields were failing. In order to show that kraal manure serves as mulch for the crops and that it helps to retain moisture when applied to the field, Alvord took a group of men into a cattle kraal. The group of men who included Alvord's students found that the soil beneath the loose mulch in the kraal was saturated with moisture despite the fact that it had not rained in eight weeks. When the men went to the demonstration plot where mulch had been used and where crops were thriving, they found out that there was moisture in the field. The men attributed the moisture in the soil to Alvord's magic and proceeded to call Alvord a "rainmaker". Alvord was disappointed that his own students who had worked on the plot believed that he had used magic.

...He deduced *that it was useless to try to Christianize the Africans without first of all intellectualizing their agricultural practices, so filled with superstition, ignorance, witchcraft and worship of ancestral spirits.* No boy or girl could be converted in the mission school, then go back to the home environment and hope to remain a staunch Christian. ...He concluded that the African must see good farming methods demonstrated on his own level, within his reach, by demonstrators of his own black skin.... *That, before missions could hope to succeed in preaching the Gospel of Christ, they must preach the 'Gospel of the plough'*⁴¹⁵
[Emphasis is mine]

Alvord was convinced that any spiritual conversion to Christianity by the Shona would remain temporary without accompanying change in farming methods.⁴¹⁶ Alvord regarded African Traditional Religions and cultures as a constraint to indigenous people's pursuit of intensive farming methods in CAs. He was convinced that agriculture informed by western science was needed to counter the superstition and religious beliefs that informed Shona traditional methods of farming. Alvord regarded agriculture based on western science as an agent for the religio-cultural transformation of the Shona people. According to him, successful methods of farming based on western science taught by demonstration would; (1) publicly challenge or undermine Shona traditional beliefs about land and; (2) they would improve the material well-being of the Shona by improving agriculture productivity. From his perspective, agriculture demonstration (extension services) work informed by western science served to teach indigenous people methods of improving agriculture productivity and land conservation and to recruit the Shona to "modernity." The latter was accomplished by demonstrating to the indigenous people the

⁴¹⁵Ibid., The Gospel of the plow referred to the new intensive methods of farming that were plow based. The western based methods of farming were regarded as the material salvation of the indigenous people who were regarded as poverty stricken because of poor methods of farming.

⁴¹⁶ Leedy, *The Soil of Salvation*, 219- 224.

superiority of western science over indigenous people's land use practices that were religio-culture based.

Demonstration plots offered Alvord an opportunity to counter aspects of Shona religio-culture and beliefs about land. The cases of the "Belingwe [now Mberengwa] chief" and "Mr. Vambe" recorded in Alvord's autobiographical accounts support this point.⁴¹⁷ In the former case, Alvord used demonstration plots to undermine the Shona traditional belief that a good harvest depended on the support of the ancestors.⁴¹⁸ The high crop yield from the chief's once infertile field demonstrated the superiority of farming methods based on western science but it undermined the cultural base of Shona chiefs' political power that rested on the chief's ancestors' ability to provide rain and the fertility of the land. The comparison between the efficacy of the methods of farming based on western science and traditional methods of farming was often made in drought situations.⁴¹⁹ In connection with this Alvord writes, "as was to be expected, the difference in yield between *intelligent, good farming methods* and the *ordinary witchcraft, spirit -worship farming methods* was greatest under adverse conditions." [Emphasis is mine]. Agriculture was an arena for contesting religious idioms, 'one in

⁴¹⁷ The autobiographical accounts contain numerous examples that show the superiority of western science over Shona traditional beliefs and the superiority of Christian faith over Shona traditional beliefs. Alvord, *The Development of Native Agriculture*, 29.

⁴¹⁸ In 1932, Alvord used land belonging to a Mberengwa chief as a demonstration plot. The chief's request was stated thus, "you show me how to grow a good crop on that land and I will believe." Alvord describes this as a trick by the chief. See Alvord, *The Development of Native Agriculture*, 29.

⁴¹⁹ Alvord's description of the famine of 1922 that was experienced throws some light on this. He wrote, "In 1922, during the severest famine in history, heathen native crops were failures, Christian natives had fair crops, and on the mission farm we had an excellent crop." He attributed the survival of mission crops to good methods of farming and the failure of crops in CAs to poor farming methods. In Alvord, *Helping the Heathen to help himself*, 6.

which superiority in the interpretation of environmental processes became a symbol or a test of the superiority or truth of the Christian religion'.⁴²⁰

Alvord, like many of his contemporary agriculture missionaries working in Southern Africa, was convinced of agriculture's potential as a powerful agent for social transformation.⁴²¹ The story of Mr. Vambe illuminates how changes in agriculture methods were expected to bring about the socio-economic transformation of the indigenous people. Prior to adopting the new methods of farming, Mr. Vambe is described as "a poor man, dressed in ragged, tattered clothes and living in a primitive pole and mud hut which he and his family shared with the goats and fowls...."⁴²²

Vambe's situation changed after adopting the new methods of farming. In 1934 Alvord described Vambe as,

A progressive and prosperous farmer, an outstanding member of his community, who dressed as well as a white man. He has acquired during the years, a total of four wives and many well fed children, all living in brick houses. He owns fine herds of cattle, goats and pigs, a large wagon, a cart, ploughs, harrows, cultivators and planters....⁴²³

Mr. Vambe's material success is attributed to the fact that he adopted the methods of farming taught by the demonstrators. In Zimbabwe, Vambe was the first indigenous person to be issued a master farmer certificate in 1934.⁴²⁴ His new social identity as master farmer corresponded with his material success and his ability to manage the land

⁴²⁰ See R. Grove, "Scottish Missionaries, Evangelical Discourses and the Origins of Conservation Thinking in Southern Africa 1820-1900," in *Journal of Southern African Studies* 15, No. 2 (1989): 168.

⁴²¹ Ibid., 163-187. This article provides a detailed discussion of missionaries' accounts in Southern Africa.

⁴²² Alvord, *The Development of Native Agriculture*, 35. Here Mr. Vambe is judged by a set of criteria that is overwhelmingly western.

⁴²³ Alvord, Ibid., 35.

⁴²⁴ Ibid.

using western science based methods. In Vambe's story, farming methods based on western science are regarded as the salvation of indigenous people and their land, i.e., indigenous people are saved from a "primitive life" to a "modern life" and the "unproductive land" is transformed into productive land by the use of western based science methods of farming.

The agriculture technology used was not without certain western cultural values. The plow that was the key implement in Alvord's intensive methods of farming was not devoid of cultural values. In Zimbabwe, agriculture missionaries such as George Roberts of the Methodist Episcopal Church promoted the "Gospel of the plow" because of the anticipated cultural impact of the plow on the Shona. In his book, *Let me Tell You a Story*, Roberts described the plow as the iron that struck a blow against hunger and polygamy.⁴²⁵ Like Alvord, Roberts attributed hunger and poverty in CAs to Shona farming practices that included shallow digging of soils with hoes. The plow was seen as the means for improving Shona farming methods because it allowed for greater depth of the digging of soils.⁴²⁶ The plow which reduced the amount of labor needed for

⁴²⁵ G.A. Roberts, *Let Me Tell You a Story* (Bulawayo: The Rhodesia Christian Press (Pvt.) nd.), 18.

⁴²⁶ Roberts attributed the plight of the Shona to poor methods of farming and inferior technology. He writes "Usually people [meaning indigenous people] were hungry before harvest and sufficient crops could not always be grown digging by hand with hoes...they worked very hard-often from dawn till dark but the shallow digging of the soil with little hoes, and planting with no fertilizer, meant that the corn and grain was poor. It was evident that we had to find a way of getting greater depth of digging. The cattle were available for pulling the ploughs and there were European stores where ploughs could be purchased. We missionaries talked much about ploughs and hoped that some African could be persuaded to buy one. Some thought I preached too much about the plough, cattle and food, but at every opportunity I stated that God had placed the cattle upon the earth to help man and that there were trees from which the yokes could be made...Most of the digging was done by women. Almost all of them with children strapped on their backs as they bent over with their short-handed hoes. I wanted to help those women." Later on Roberts went on to mention that the "way of the plough was the better way." See Roberts, *Let Me Tell You a Story*, 18.

cultivating a field was also viewed as a means for ending the practice of polygamy⁴²⁷ and *nhimbe* (community work parties)⁴²⁸ which were the main sources of agriculture labor in Shona society. However, the plow did not have the anticipated effect on these practices because it increased the acreage that was plowed and planted for the season. This situation increased women's workload in particular because their domestic responsibilities include weeding and harvesting the field. The success of *nhimbe* rested on the concept of reciprocal obligation, which is a well-established tradition in Shona culture that is based on the communal principle. Reciprocity is an important part of Shona communal ethos.⁴²⁹ People participate in *nhimbe* with the expectation that the invitee and other members of the community would return the favor in times of need.

Alvord's attitude towards indigenous people's agriculture constituted what Floyd terms, a "theme of rejection" meaning a general denial that there was anything good in indigenous people's systems of cultivation and resultant ways of life'.⁴³⁰ His attitude towards African people's agriculture practices was one of replacement rather than reciprocity. In dealing with indigenous people, Alvord like most missionaries of his time eliminated the need for reciprocity of values, ideas and practices. The "Gospel of the plow" was aimed at replacing African traditional methods of farming with intensive methods of farming that were based on western science, the same way the "Gospel of

⁴²⁷ Roberts anticipated that the reduced agriculture labor would eliminate polygamous households since wives and children provided most of the labor that was needed in the home especially in agriculture. Leedy, *The Soil of Salvation*, 53. In his missionary accounts, Roberts recorded that Abraham Kawadza, the first Shona to purchase a plow sent away three of his wives because there was no longer need for them. The plow could do all the digging in the field. Roberts, *Let Me Tell You a Story*, 19.

⁴²⁸ Missionaries regarded the beer drinking that took place at *nhimbe* (work parties) as immoral and a waste of grain.

⁴²⁹ Leedy, *The Soil of Salvation*, 54.

⁴³⁰ Floyd, *Changing Patterns of African Land Use*, 290.

Jesus Christ” as it was preached by the missionary then was aimed at replacing traditional beliefs and practices of indigenous people with Christian beliefs.

Alvord’s denigration of indigenous people’s farming practices was not justified. He regarded Shona agricultural practices as inferior and an impediment to the material well-being of the Shona. He described Shona methods of farming as “wasteful, slovenly and unnecessarily ineffective.”⁴³¹ He also attributed poverty and famine in Shona society to agricultural methods that were steeped in superstition and Shona religious beliefs. He says, “Because of their farming methods, the lives of the great mass of our Rhodesian Natives are filled with poverty. They have worn out lands, poverty stricken cattle, poorly constructed huts and undernourished children”.⁴³² Alvord went on to argue that, the Shona “cannot be raised to a higher plane unless their agriculture is improved....”⁴³³ Alvord’s analysis of the situation of the Shona in CAs implied that economic poverty in CAs was a technical problem that required solutions which involved changing Shona methods of farming that were religio-culture based. Although Alvord regarded the Shona farmer as a victim of superstition, tradition and ignorance, he believed that with guidance and some direction, “the native” would become “an excellent agriculturist.”⁴³⁴

Alvord’s explanation of the situation of poverty in CAs overlooked the natural constraints to productive agriculture in CAs which include poor quality soils and the

⁴³¹ E. Alvord, *Agricultural Demonstration Work on Native Reserves*, 5.

⁴³² *Ibid.*, 6.

⁴³³ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁴³⁴ He said, “Every native farming practice has at the back of it a definite, and to the native a sensible, reason. These reasons are based on tradition, superstition, worship of the departed dead and fear of the unknown. They are governed primarily by custom, without thought for cause and effect. In spite of this, however, the native sometimes displays considerable wisdom, and, when guided in the right direction, shows promise as an excellent agriculturist.” See E. Alvord, *Ibid.*

climate of Zimbabwe. His survey of the agricultural potential of CAs in 1929 showed that about half of the CAs are not fit for human living.⁴³⁵ Yet, his reports on agriculture in CAs continued to blame the Shona farmer for the poverty and famine in CAs. Here, literature on environmental and development discourse in Africa offers some useful insights to the situation. Fiona Mackenzie argued that in environmental discourse in colonial Africa, indigenous people's knowledge of the local environment is often disqualified as "pre-modern and unscientific" by the technocrats.⁴³⁶ In that situation, the indigenous farmer is also "established as the object in need of exogenous agricultural science and expertise."⁴³⁷ Traditional farming systems as practiced by the Shona were denigrated and regarded as irrelevant. Alvord's criticism of Shona farming methods also overlooks the fact that Shona traditional methods of farming which included mixed farming and shifting cultivation were ecologically sound and they were suited to the physical climate of Zimbabwe and the technological limitations of Shona farmers.⁴³⁸ The advantages of mixed cropping are well established.⁴³⁹

⁴³⁵ Alvord's survey stated the following, "The statement that 50% of the total area of reserves, or 10, 408, 449 acres is arable is misleading. As a matter of fact, there are several million of these acres which, although they are called arable lands, cannot be tilled under present conditions. Much of the arable land on many of our largest reserves, including the Gwaii, Shangani, Semokwe, Gwanda, Sabi and Maranke reserves, cannot be tilled and must remain unoccupied until artificial water supplies in the way of dams or bore holes are provided." Alvord, *Agricultural Demonstration Work on Native Reserves*, 9.

⁴³⁶ Fiona Mckenzie, "Selective Silence: A Feminist Encounter with Environmental Discourse in Colonial Africa" in *The Power of Development* edited by J. Crush (New York: Routledge, 1995), 110-114.

⁴³⁷ *Ibid.*,

⁴³⁸ See W. Roder, *The Sabi Valley Irrigation Projects* (Chicago: University of Chicago: Dept of Geography, Research Paper No. 99, 1965), 57. In the 1960s W. Roder commented thus, "under the conditions of thin soils and a tropical ecology, the Shona were in many ways, excellent agriculturists. Their practices avoided the main problem that plague Southern Rhodesia: soil erosion and declining fertility of the soil. Soil erosion was reduced by thick, mixed plantings of low leafy crops which leave no bare ground between grain stems, while roots of the trees and stumps and pollarded trees held the soil together. By shifting fields and letting land return to bush, they avoided prolonged periods of baring soil to erosion."

In the discourse on land conservation in Zimbabwe's CA, the view that indigenous people were superstitious and ignorant farmers was later used to justify and sanction state intervention in African agriculture. The intervention was justified on the grounds that, indigenous people's agriculture methods and techniques had to be modernized where modernization meant the adoption of "progressive farming" that was plow-based. Since Shona agriculture is tied to the Shona way of life, intervention in Shona agriculture has religio-cultural consequences that have implications for Shona relationship with the land.

Land Policies and Shona Traditional Environmental Ethics

In practice, there are strong continuities between land conservation policies and practices in the colonial period and post-colonial Zimbabwe despite the shift to the sustainable development approach in the latter period. Extension services and advice continue to be cash crop oriented and privilege western science and technology. In addition, continuous cultivation and mechanical contours are accepted land use practices in CAs while individual land tenure that is oriented towards men continues to be viewed as a solution to the problem of low productivity and unsustainable use of natural resources in CAs.

In CAs, both the colonizers and the missionaries participated in the tearing down of African traditional religio-culture and values on which African environmental ethics rested. In practice, agriculture that depends upon industrial outputs undermines Shona traditional beliefs and values that support sustainable land use practices in traditional

⁴³⁹ D. A. Robinson, "Land Use and Planning in Native Reserves in Southern Rhodesia," in *Rhodesia Agricultural Journal*, Vol. 50 (1953), 328.

Shona society. Multinational and private companies that control access to artificial fertilizers and commercial seed challenge Shona traditional belief in the *mhondoro* as the owners of the land responsible for the fertility of the land and the source of life for future plants. The *mhondoro*'s role as the source of new life and plants is undermined further by genetically modified seeds produced using the 'terminator gene technology. From a traditional Shona standpoint, the multinational companies now qualify as owners of the land.

Extension services weaken the role of traditional leaders as trustees of the land and the people. Solutions to the problem of land degradation are sought for in technology and western science rather than in the realm of social relationships where traditional leaders play an important role. Extension services do not deal with the social causes of the problem of land degradation in CAs. In addition, farmers have come to rely more on technocrats (the new guardians of the land) on matters relating to the use of commercial seed, fertilizer and pesticides.⁴⁴⁰

Extension services continue to exalt western scientific based knowledge over Shona indigenous people's agriculture knowledge. Traditional land use practices and cropping techniques (intercropping), which are socially and ecologically sound, are often replaced with techniques, which are not ideal from an ecological and social standpoint of the farmer.⁴⁴¹ Nyamapfene noted that Farming Systems Research of Zimbabwe paid little attention to traditional methods of farming used by Shona peasants that had a sound

⁴⁴⁰ The genetically modified seeds undermine the material bases for indigenous people's local knowledge of soils, climate, and agricultural techniques produced over time that are critical to maintaining a distinct cultural landscape and survival of the people and the land.

⁴⁴¹ Monocropping and row planting have replaced intercropping largely because they are suited to the use of the plow and the cultivator.

scientific basis.⁴⁴² He writes, "...while the farmers' participation has been achieved, this has largely been in the context of trying to get peasant farmers to adopt and understand the usefulness of carefully selected "modern" techniques."⁴⁴³ The approach implies the superiority of modern techniques, which makes it impossible for government agents to learn from traditional farming systems. The overall result is that agriculture extension in post-colonial Zimbabwe continues to be for the most part, the dissemination and utilization of western scientific knowledge only.

Extension services created new social identities that changed Shona women and men's attitude to the land. Plot holders or master farmers came to view land as a commodity. Their relationship with the land was guided by the norms of efficiency and exploitation. This was especially the case when artificial fertilizers were introduced to boost cash crop production in the mid 1940s. The commercialization of water in irrigation schemes runs counter to Shona belief that natural resources especially land and water, belong to God and are to be used to the benefit of all, human and non human.

⁴⁴² For a detailed account of some of the techniques used see, K. Nyamapfene, "Adaptation to Marginal Land Amongst the Peasant Farmers of Zimbabwe," 384-389.

⁴⁴³ *Ibid.*, 389.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONSTRUCTING AN AFRICAN RELIGIO-ETHICAL APPROACH TO LAND DEGRADATION IN CAS

Chapters Three and Four revealed that land degradation in CAs is primarily a relational problem involving distorted inter-human relationships at the local, national and international level. Indigenous people in CAs, especially women, are impoverished people who are exploiting all available natural resources in order to meet human need. It is inevitable that in Zimbabwe's CAs, the issue of what ought to be the relationship between human beings and the land is involved in what ought to be the relationship between human beings. In this chapter, I turn to public theology, African social ethics informed by African Traditional Religions and cultures, African Christian theology as articulated by Sebastian Bakare and African Women's theology for values, principles and norms that can serve as guideposts in dealing with the problem of land degradation in CAs.

Public Theology and the Challenges of Land Degradation in Zimbabwe

The purpose of this section is to identify norms that can serve as moral guidelines for public conversation on matters relating to the problem of land degradation in

Zimbabwe's CAs.⁴⁴⁴ Ronald Thiemann's conditions for publicity are insightful on this matter. Thiemann is a public theologian who argues that theologically informed and other moral perspectives can participate in public life. In his argument about the role of religion in public life, Thiemann identifies three conditions of publicity that serve as moral guidelines for public conversation in a pluralistic democracy. These are: public accessibility, mutual respect, and moral integrity.⁴⁴⁵

Public Accessibility

Thiemann argues that the fundamental orienting convictions of religious worldviews can be made "accessible to public inquiry and critique."⁴⁴⁶ In addition to this, Thiemann argues that theological ideas must be understood with attention to the communities, traditions, and narratives in which those ideas have arisen. The reason is that theological concepts take on distinct meaning in different contexts. To support this point, Thiemann employs the example of how the "neighbor-love" modeled in the parable of the Good Samaritan (from the New Testament) must be constructively appropriated as "fairness and concern for the vulnerable" if it is to have public value in contemporary debates about social issues like universal healthcare.⁴⁴⁷ Thiemann's point

⁴⁴⁴ In Zimbabwe, an effective land conservation ethic that is informed by Shona religio-culture, must address how its views are to be understood in the public realm that is characterized by multiple value systems that are secular and religion based. For example, in Zimbabwe, Sustainable Development, African Traditional Religions and cultures and Christianity represent competing value systems that have implications for how people relate to one another and to the land.

⁴⁴⁵ Thiemann stresses the point that "conditions of publicity should function as norms of plausability, that is, as criteria that democratic citizens should employ to evaluate arguments whether religiously based or not in the public domain." See Ronald F. Thiemann, *Religion in Public*, 135, 140, 173.

⁴⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 135-136.

⁴⁴⁷ *Ibid.*,

is that if sufficient attention is paid to the narratives and communities out of which concepts arise, constructive work can apply these concepts into wider public discussions. The main assumption of this position is that it is possible to make publicly accessible the premises, warrants, and sources for theologically informed moral arguments. Perspectives can be public even though the sources of authority invoked are not universally shared as authoritative. Put differently, accessibility does not require shared sources of authority, but it requires that these sources be identified and described publicly.

The norm of public accessibility suggests that, people outside the communities in which the steps of reasoning are fully comprehensible, should be able to view those steps by which “insiders” arrive at the conclusions they do.⁴⁴⁸ This means that the resources used in ethical or theological reflection should be accessible. In this study, African Traditional Religions and cultures and African Christian theology are examined in their historical and social context with the aim to identify values and norms that inform the right relationship between human beings, and human beings and non human beings.

Mutual Respect

Thiemann emphasizes mutual respect as a virtue required in a pluralistic society in which moral and policy-based disagreements are inevitable. Mutual respect requires an open attitude and disposition towards citizens from different world-views: “Citizens who manifest the virtue of mutual respect acknowledge the moral agency of those with whom they disagree and thereby treat their arguments as grounded not simply in personal

⁴⁴⁸ Douglas Hicks, *Inequality and Christian Ethics*, 109.
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preference or self-interest but in genuine moral conviction.”⁴⁴⁹ Another requirement of mutual respect is the refusal to employ methods of coercion in the public sphere. The norm of mutual respect, then, enables people to draw upon the moral resources at their disposal, religious and otherwise, in order to address social and policy issues. At the same time, all persons are called upon to respect the agency of all other participants to do likewise. This view suggests that inviting a wide range of moral perspectives into a discourse guided by mutual respect will be more likely to produce positive outcomes.

Mutual respect calls for openness towards other normative approaches and insights – and more important, it requires respect for the agency of all people making arguments. The norm of mutual respect is required in Zimbabwe’s situation of land degradation because government solutions to the problem of land degradation in CAs tend to exclude the wisdom of indigenous people, especially women.

In Zimbabwe’s CAs, the norm of mutual respect is required not merely among people from distinct religious communities or worldviews, but is required in relations among co-religionists on matters of public concern. Different people holding similar theological doctrines can –and often do arrive at very different public policy (political, social, and /or economic) conclusions.⁴⁵⁰ For example, the weight given to the Bible and African Traditional Religions in African theology differs among theologians.⁴⁵¹ African theologians (male and female) tend to privilege Christian based sources at the expense of African Traditional Religions and cultures.

⁴⁴⁹ Ibid., 136.

⁴⁵⁰ Ibid., 169f.

⁴⁵¹ See discussion in Ezra Chitando. “The (Mis?) Appropriation of African Traditional Religions in African Christian Theology.” In *Inculturation and Post Colonial Discourse in African Theology*, edited by Edward Antonio (New York: Peter Lang, 2006), 97-116.

Emphasis on the norm of mutual respect seeks to ensure that public discourse is enriched by a wide variety of perspectives. This norm is also valued in traditional Shona society; especially in traditional courts where disputes are solved in public and consensus is important.

Moral Integrity

The norm of moral integrity describes a number of qualities about persons and groups who communicate their perspectives in public discourse. Drawing from the work of Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson,⁴⁵² Thiemann labels these qualities as consistency of speech, consistency between speech and action, and integrity of principle. People (whether citizens or officials) advocating a particular position should do so on consistent moral grounds, without altering their view or justification according to the audience or constituency. Consistency between speech and action requires that persons or groups who articulate a moral position should act accordingly. Persons and institutions that draw on theological resources to advocate social justice should embody those practices in their personal and institutional lives. Integrity of principle calls persons and groups articulating a moral position to apply those principles consistently across a variety of issues. To illustrate this point, Thiemann quotes the Gutmann and Thompson example: “Those who oppose abortion out of respect for fetal life should be equally strong advocates of policies to ensure that children are properly fed.”⁴⁵³ Thus, “moral

⁴⁵² Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson, “Moral Conflict and Political Consensus,” in R. Bruce Douglas, Gerald M. Mara, and Henry R. Richardson eds., *Liberalism and the Good* (New York and London: Routledge, 1992).

⁴⁵³ Thiemann, *Religion in Public Life*, 137 quoting Gutmann and Thompson, “Moral Conflict and Political Consensus”, 137.

integrity asks that citizens seek consistency in their speech, action, and application of principles.⁴⁵⁴

The norm of moral integrity suggests that public arguments will be more effectively communicated if they are attached to communities and individuals engaged in exemplary practice. For example, the preferential option for the poor which is endorsed by mainline churches in Zimbabwe and African theologians (male and female) will receive better hearing if practicing Christians and communities of faith are engaged in activities that express this preference.

The situation of land degradation in CA requires that communities of faith, especially mainline churches, hold themselves to the norm of moral integrity. In Zimbabwe, the mainline Christian churches have to deal with the fact that the church owns underutilized land in a situation of landlessness. In CAs, a church that preaches the equality of all human beings would also promote gender equality, especially in the distribution of land and other resources. Shona traditional society informed by African Traditional Religions and culture has to deal with the fact that in that society, women lack primary access to land despite the belief that land is God's gift to be used to the benefit of all.

In sum, the norms of public accessibility, mutual respect, and moral integrity together serve to help to order a public sphere in which moral discourse, including disagreement, can yield just and compassionate public policies.

⁴⁵⁴ Ibid., 137.

African Social Ethics and the Challenges of Land Degradation in CAs

African ethicists, African theologians and even politicians concur that the community ethic of African societies is encapsulated in the principle, “I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am.”⁴⁵⁵ This principle has not been examined in light of what it means to be in a community comprising of human beings and non human beings in a situation of scarce and inferior natural resources.

The purpose of this section is to examine what African social ethics teaches about the right relationship between human beings and human beings and other non human beings? Distributive justice is an important theme of the discussion because the nature of resource distribution and access is at the core of the problem of land degradation in Zimbabwe’s CAs.

In the discussion I shall rely on insights from African communitarianism, especially as Kwame Gyekye and Laurenti Magesa expound it.⁴⁵⁶ The authors’ writings are relevant to this discussion because they articulate a traditional African worldview and value system from which values and norms that inform human beings’ relationship to each other and to other beings can be identified. In addition, the traditional African worldview that informs Magesa and Gyekye’s ethics is consistent with the traditional

⁴⁵⁵ This is a statement made famous by the African theologian John Mbiti. Cf. John Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (London: Heinemann, 1969), 118f.

⁴⁵⁶ See K. Gyekye, *Tradition and Modernity*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997; Kwame Gyekye, *An Essay on African Philosophical Thought, the Akan Conceptual Scheme* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987). And Laurenti Magesa, *African Religion: The Traditions of Abundant Life*, 1997. Gyekye argues that human social existence is the foundation for African communitarian ethics, while Magesa’s approach is that African cosmologies, especially the fact of creation mandate a value system that is realized in communal existence.

Shona worldview discussed in Chapter two.⁴⁵⁷ Gyekye is a good point of departure for analyzing African communitarian ethics because he has analyzed in detail, the status of the community in various notions of African communitarianism espoused by important African scholars.⁴⁵⁸

Communitarianism suggests a society-oriented morality that is necessarily grounded in human beings' experiences of living together. The starting point of this value system is the belief that men and women are by their very nature social beings. A distinct feature of African communitarianism is that the notion of community in the African moral universe includes the living, the dead and those yet to be born. Ancestors are part of the intergenerational relationships among the Africans.⁴⁵⁹ Being ethical would also demand encouraging intergenerational solidarity in the sense of respecting the future of those yet to be born and those who passed. The moral responsibility of every individual is the obligation to contribute to the common good. The common good is defined differently by exponents of African social ethics. Some define it as the "promotion of life,"⁴⁶⁰ survival of the [human] community,⁴⁶¹ the well-being of society⁴⁶² or the preservation of [human] community.⁴⁶³

⁴⁵⁷ Although Gyekye is speaking primarily of the Akan of Ghana, he expresses a view of communitarianism that applies equally well to the Shona. See Chapter two of this study.

⁴⁵⁸ Kwame Gyekye has examined various interpretations of communitarianism for the purpose of determining the type that can be upheld in an African moral philosophy. An extended discussion is given in Gyekye, *Tradition and Modernity*, Chapter 2. See also Gyekye, *An Essay on African Philosophical Thought*, 1987.

⁴⁵⁹ Belief in life after death promotes intergenerational duties in which the dead become benevolent guardian spirits for the living.

⁴⁶⁰ Magesa, *African Religion*, 1997.

⁴⁶¹ Michael Gelfand, *The Genuine Shona: Survival Values of an African Culture* (Salisbury: Mambo Press, 1973).

There is a distinction between radical communitarianism and moderate communitarianism. The former is associated with scholars who include John Mbiti, Kwesi Dickson, Ifeanyi Menkiti and advocates of African socialism who include Julius Nyerere, Leopold Senghor and Kwame Nkrumah. Radical communitarianism obliterates individuality in African moral philosophy. John Mbiti writes, “In African societies, whatever happens to the individual happens to the whole group, and whatever happens to the whole group happens to the individual. The individual can only say “I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am.”⁴⁶⁴ From the statement “I am because we are; and since we are, therefore I am,” Ifeanyi Menkiti an African philosopher from Nigeria infers that the African view asserts the ontological primacy of the community, that “as far as Africans are concerned, the reality of the communal world takes precedence over the reality of the individual life histories whatever these may be.”⁴⁶⁵ This view is problematic because it does not give due recognition to individuality.

Gyekye is an exponent of moderate communitarianism. He argues that the principle of solidarity in communitarianism does not mean that the individual loses his/her identity in and because of the community. Benezet Bujo, an African ethicist echoes this point. He argues that the belief underlying the principle, “I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am,” is that “the human person acts more effectively to

⁴⁶² See Gyekye, *Tradition and Modernity*, 1997.

⁴⁶³ See Peter Paris, *The Spirituality of African Peoples* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995). According to Paris, the goal of African ethics is the preservation of the community achieved through good moral character.

⁴⁶⁴ John Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (New York, Doubleday; 1970), 141.

⁴⁶⁵ Ifeanyi Menkiti, “Person and Community in African Traditional Thought,” in *African Philosophy an Introduction*, 3rd edition, edited by Richard A. Wright (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1984), 173. Also quoted in Gyekye, *Traditions and Modernity*, 37.

the extent that he holds fast to solidarity with those like himself; for thus he raises the quality of the vital force not only for himself, but rather for the entire community, indeed the whole of humanity.”⁴⁶⁶ Moderate communitarianism suggests an understanding of communalism as a doctrine that emphasizes the activity and success of the wider society rather than, though not necessarily at the expense of, or to the detriment of, the individual.⁴⁶⁷ In this type of communitarianism, individuality is not obliterated by membership in a human community so that communal values do not involve the rejection of individual values.⁴⁶⁸ In other words, the group does not dissolve the moral identity of the individual.

According to Gyekye, individuality in moderate communitarianism has a rational and religious basis. In connection with the former, Gyekye argues that apart from being social by nature, the human individual is also “other things” i.e., the individual has mental features that enable them to make moral judgments.⁴⁶⁹ Human beings are rational beings. In the latter, he argues that the dignity or worth of the individual cannot be diminished by natural membership in his/her community because human beings have an intrinsic value because they are God’s creatures. He writes, “The dignity of the individual is a natural endowment by some supernatural creator-God”.⁴⁷⁰ Creatures or

⁴⁶⁶ Benezet Bujo, *Foundations of An African Ethic: Beyond the Universal Claims of Western Morality* (New York: Crossroad Publishers, 2001), 5.

⁴⁶⁷ Gyekye, *An Essay in African Philosophy*, 155.

⁴⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 40.

⁴⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 53. According to Gyekye, ‘other things’ refers to essential attributes of the person which include rationality, having a moral sense capacity for virtue and hence for evaluating moral judgments.”

⁴⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 53.

human beings have intrinsic value by reason of their being created by God.⁴⁷¹ The moral identity of the individual in African social ethics implies that individual human beings are moral agents. It also means that character and identity are shaped by tradition but not constituted by it completely. When applied to the Zimbabwe situation of environmental degradation, the moral identity of the individual makes it possible to conceptualize the discrepancy in received rules and teaching about land conservation and the practical commitment towards the same. Gyekye does not explain the moral significance of the intrinsic value attached to other members of creation and human beings' relationship to them.

The value attached to humanity in African moral thought is derived from the belief that humanity is a creation of God. The moral significance of this is that human beings have an intrinsic value, worthy of dignity and respect. For example, in the traditional Shona worldview, people are valued differently from other animals or other beings. The common expressions *Murombo munhu haaenzani nembwa* translated as "A person is a person s/he cannot be compared to a dog", and *Murombo munhu* translated as "Even the poor is a person too," seem to indicate that human beings are regarded as superior to other animals. Drawing from Akan culture, Gyekye argues that a human being is held as possessing a speck of God in her. This is what is called the soul. He argues that this "theomorphic perception of community of humanity constitutes all human beings into one universal family of humankind—a family that, however, is fragmented into a multiplicity of peoples and cultures." For Gyekye, the common membership of one universal family constitutes a legitimate basis for the idea of

⁴⁷¹ Ibid., 66.

universal human brotherhood (or unity). Part of the African view of humanity, as Gyekye rightly argues, is to recognize the dignity of all persons, irrespective of their racial, ethnic and gender background, as brothers/sisters. Moral value is determined in terms of its consequence for humankind and society.

In moderate communitarianism, the emphasis is on the individual's sensitivity to the interests and well-being of other members of the human community, though not necessarily to the detriment of individual rights. Fundamental to the moral responsibility of every individual is the obligation to contribute to the common good. Here, the notion of the common good is defined by the goal to promote the well-being of the community. Gyekye defines the common good in terms of what is basic to human life and well-being.

“The common good literally and seriously means a good that is common to individual human beings—at least those embraced within a community, a good that can be said to be commonly, universally, shared by all human individuals, *a good the possession of which is essential for the ordinary or basic functioning of the individual in a human society, it is linked to our concept of common humanity. The notion of the common good is a notion of what set of goods is essentially good for human beings as such; it may, in fact, be characterized as human good....*”⁴⁷² [Emphasis mine].

The common good is defined in part by meeting the essential needs of all. The effort to promote the common good requires focusing on those whose needs are not being adequately addressed because the individual and the community need and thrive on one another. The well-being of the community in which both the individual and community are valued is the determinative measure of the value for all human activities.

Maintaining the physical well-being of the community is possible if all members have the use of its resources or access to basic essential needs (distributive justice). This means that in the communitarian value system, the society has an obligation to ensure

⁴⁷² Ibid., 45f.

that everyone has the essentials of life with dignity and, the responsibility to see to it that wise stewardship is exercised over the limited available resources. This means that the government is looked upon as one very important part of the mechanism necessary to give guidance and direction to economic behavior and to the distribution of wealth. The task of the government and other social institutions is to ensure the well-being of the community by ensuring that the essential needs of the community are met. This situation implies that the economic and political institutions of society must be structured with the intent to meet the goal of promoting the well-being of the community.

In the communitarian value system, a just society is one in which wealth, the resources of the community is distributed in such a way that everyone's essential needs are met. The basis for decisions about the allocation of resources is human need. In the communitarian value system, private ownership is subordinate to common use. Private ownership means stewardship or trusteeship, not the right to do whatever one wants. For example, in most African societies (Shona included) that depend upon the land for their livelihood, the right to use land is communal rather than individual. The community owns the land in order to provide a reasonable living to all its members. Ensuring the welfare and interest of the community assumes a model of distributive justice that incorporates fairness and equality. This does not mean that everyone is to be exactly equal economically. It simply means that there is a minimum level under which no one should be allowed to fall. The well-being of the community comprising of human beings is the ultimate goal of justice.

African communitarianism is human oriented. The well-being of the community of human beings is regarded as paramount. The “community economics” privileges the well-being of the human community that depends directly upon the land for its well-being. For example, in traditional Shona society, land distribution was informed by the criterion of sufficient farmland. This criterion was part of an overall scheme derived from ethical considerations to meet basic human needs and hence to preserve human life that depends directly upon the land for survival.

Magesa provides in more detail the religious basis of the communitarian ethic expounded by Gyekye. Here I shall focus on what African moral cosmology has to say about non human beings and human beings’ relationship to it. Magesa’s ethics is based on the assumption that religious beliefs and worldviews inform the moral values of the communities that believe them. He argues that African people’s perceptions and beliefs about God the creator who endows life and respect to all of creation is the foundation of African ethics. Based on this “fact of creation” Magesa argues that the goal of African ethics is the promotion of human life which started with God sharing life at creation. He writes, “for all African religion, all principles of morality and ethics are to be sought within the context of preserving human life and its “power” or “force”.⁴⁷³ The paramount goal is the preservation of the community because life is made possible in community.

Magesa proceeds to argue that to be in a community of created beings is to participate in life-giving processes that started with God, Creator, the divine life and the giver of life.⁴⁷⁴ Against this background, Magesa identifies hospitality as a “central

⁴⁷³ Magesa, *African Religion*, 32.

principle for human existence in African religion, the quintessence of authentic humanity”.⁴⁷⁵ For him, “hospitality in the sense of sociability and open hearted sharing best describes the demands of the ethics of African religion.” The purpose of hospitality is to enhance life in all its dimensions through sharing. He writes; “Hospitality, means readiness and availability to form community. ...It means that one remembers and honors God and the ancestors and is ready to share with them through sharing the gift and power of life with other members of the family lineage or clan form.”⁴⁷⁶ In this connection, marriage and procreation are regarded as duties to promote life (vitality). In Magesa’s life ethic, hospitality is an obligation that aims at promoting the life of the community that is made possible through relationships of sharing that started with God at creation. Implicitly, greed constitutes grievous wrong because it destroys community and stops the flow of life made possible through sharing that started with God at creation. Greed constitutes the misuse of the universe in so far as it is guided by self-interest, which destroys the interrelatedness that is essential for human existence.⁴⁷⁷ Thus for Magesa, the promotion of human life is the determinative measure of the value for all human activities. Any action, which promotes life, is right and whatever decreases or takes away life is wrong.

In African moral cosmology, creation (human and non human) is regarded as sacred because it originates from God. Creation has divinity because

⁴⁷⁴ Through the act of creation God is related in an unbreakable way to the entire universe. In African cosmology, life is made possible through relationships of sharing that started with God sharing life with all beings and now includes “people, other creatures and the earth so that “the life of the individual [can only be] grasped as it is shared.

⁴⁷⁵ Magesa, *African Religion*, 66.

⁴⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 62.

⁴⁷⁷ *Ibid.*,

they “exist by the will and through the power of the Divinity”.⁴⁷⁸ Magesa also adds that the created order other than humanity must be approached with care and awe as well, not only because of its communion with God, but also because of its own vital forces and its mystical connection with ancestors and other spirits. The reverence of creation is also based on the fact that human life directly depends upon it and its vital forces.⁴⁷⁹

Human love and fertility, for example, are not simply symbolized by the fertility of the earth; instead, they are deeply imbedded in the earth as it receives the rain and the seed and produces vegetation and crops for human consumption. Thus they offer up their vital power for the life and fertility of human beings. It follows, then, that in a real and immediate sense, sterility or fertility of the earth affects the fertility of the human community. So also, water and air are not symbolic of, but are, in fact, the purity of the Divine. Polluting water or air in any manner is tampering with God’s power and vital force.⁴⁸⁰

The reverence and respect for creation has a theistic and a utility basis. Land is valued because it is God’s creation and because human life and well-being is inextricably tied to it. The latter is informed by the ecological insight that human beings form an integral part of the ecosystem and therefore cannot escape dependence on it. This insight, one can argue, places limits on what human beings can do to the land because what destroys the land is bound to destroy the people that depend on it for life.

How are human beings to relate to other non human beings in the universe when the promotion of human life is the determinative measure of the value for all human activities? Is the mandate to respect creation compatible with the goal to promote human

⁴⁷⁸ Ibid., 59.

⁴⁷⁹ Ibid., 53.

⁴⁸⁰ Ibid., 73.

life? Magesa argues that all creation are intended to serve and enhance the life force of the human person and society. In African moral cosmology human beings are at the center of the universe. In connection with this Mbiti writes, “the universal order exists for the sake of human life, humanity is its most important element.”⁴⁸¹ What are the implications for human beings’ relationship to other non human beings?

African ethicists concur that the centrality of human beings in the order of the universe does not imply the superiority of human beings over all existence or human license to treat the non-visible sphere or other creatures in the visible sphere of the universe without reverence and respect. Instead, it merely means that human beings are at the center of a sacred cosmos in which they are expected to assume immense responsibilities for the preservation of its unity. Human beings’ sense of responsibility for maintaining the balance of nature can be inferred in the religious responses to ecological disturbances and disasters.⁴⁸² For example, when there is a drought, the leaders of the community seek solutions in the social realm with the aim to find out where they have neglected their moral obligations to God, to each other and to nature.⁴⁸³ The general belief is that in the universe, “Man is not the master of the universe; he is only the center, the friend, the beneficiary, the user. For that reason, he has to live in harmony with the universe, obeying the laws of natural, moral and mystical order. If these are unduly disturbed it is man who suffers”.⁴⁸⁴

⁴⁸¹ Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion* 1975, 37-9.

⁴⁸² Hinga, “The Gikuyu Theology of Land,” 174.

⁴⁸³ *Ibid.*,

⁴⁸⁴ Magesa, *African Religion*, 37f.

To callously disturb created order by abusing it disrespectfully means nothing else, ultimately, than to tamper dangerously with human life. This is very serious. The implication often goes further than this. If the world is disturbed, God, the spirits and the ancestors-or in other words, their powerful, invisible, but diffused life forces throughout the universe-are likewise unsettled. There is no telling what calamity might befall a community as a result of such behavior.⁴⁸⁵

In the African worldview of causes, there is a causal relationship between the moral condition of the people and the condition of the physical environment. The reasoning is that the interrelatedness that exists in the universe suggests that what befalls one member of the community falls on all. Thus, African Traditional Religions emphasize the need to maintain harmonious relationships in a community of spirit beings, human beings and other non human beings. As far as human beings are concerned, this harmony is achieved through conducting one's life and that of the entire community in a manner that is consistent with the order of the universe as preserved in that community's tradition.⁴⁸⁶

In African traditional beliefs, the earth is given to humanity as a gratuitous gift and all human beings possess an equal claim to it and the resources it offers. The attitude toward land is that land cannot be alienated from the clan or ethnic group. It also means that an individual person can only hold land in trust for oneself and one's descendants on behalf of the clan or ethnic group.⁴⁸⁷ Thus, in African religious thought, resources such as land or water may not be privately owned because they are God's gift to humanity.

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid., 61.

⁴⁸⁶ In most African societies, the harmony between the living human beings and the rest of the created order is maintained by the traditional leadership in their capacity as enforcers of rules and regulation that are aimed at ensuring the stability of the society and the rest of the created order. In Shona society, the chiefs were responsible for enforcing the observance of the day of rest in honor of ancestors and rain ceremonies.

⁴⁸⁷ Ibid.,

They may only be held in trust for the present and the future. Since resources of the earth are intended for the benefit of humanity, no one has a right to hoard the wealth of creation and so impoverish others.

Defining African Eco-justice

African societies emphasize interdependence and an individual's obligations to the community. Moderate communitarianism, is supported by the view of a human being who is both a communal and an autonomous being with a capacity for evaluation and choice. The motivation for human action is an individual's sensitivity to the interests and well-being of other members of the community, though not necessarily to the detriment of individual rights. An individual is required to work for the promotion of the community's welfare. From the principle of community are derived other values which include co-operation, mutual respect and solidarity. These are important values aimed at promoting the well-being of the community.

Sharing with others is an important characteristic of African communitarianism. The communitarian ethic assures that sharing takes place when necessary. In African society, a scale of priorities is also established based on the relationship of the individual to the community. The physical well-being of the community is dependent upon their ability to access resources necessary for them to survive or flourish. In the communitarian ethic, the allocation of resources is a decision made on the basis of what it takes to achieve the well-being or the preservation of the community. Since the well-being of an individual can be assured only in the context of the well-being of the community, it is in the interest of each member of the community that the corporate body

be strong and healthy; at the same time, the health and strength of the corporate body has as its primary purpose, the assurance of the welfare of each of its members.⁴⁸⁸

Hospitality involves relationships of reciprocal giving. According to Denis Goulet, the principle of reciprocity states that social life is made possible by a three fold obligation-the obligation to give, the obligation to receive, and the obligation to reciprocate. The refusal to give or reciprocate (greed) on the part of members of the community undermines reciprocity which makes social life possible. Greed is unacceptable because it undermines the flow of life of the community and it destroys human beings' ability to form a community which is necessary for existence. Human beings are called to live life as a grateful response to God who has given them life. Response to God is to be based on the gratitude for life and leads to the ethic of hospitality. Dehumanizing economic practices are inconsistent with the life ethic and communitarian ethic in which the well-being of the people and human life are normative.

African moral cosmology recognizes that human beings are an integral part of the ecosystem and therefore cannot escape dependence on it. This means that there are limits on what human beings can do to the land since whatever destroys the land is likely to destroy the well-being of human beings that depend on it for life.

In African moral cosmology maintaining ecological stability is a relational matter involving the relationship between human beings, God and nature. Human action that demeans creation can provoke punishment from the spirit world. In most African societies, the harmony between the living human beings and the rest of the created order is maintained by the traditional leadership in their capacity as enforcers of rules and

⁴⁸⁸ Ibid., 279.

regulation that are aimed at ensuring the stability of the society and the rest of the created order.⁴⁸⁹

In African religious ethics, the respect for all creation including human beings is comprehensible in the context of God as the creator of all things. Human beings are accountable to God and the ancestors for the way they treat the rest of creation. The land is a gift to be used wisely by human beings. It is a responsibility to take care of since it ultimately belongs to God. The belief is that the living leaders use the land on the condition that it must be kept in good order and used by all for the promotion of good life, good relationships, peace, at least within the clan or ethnic group.⁴⁹⁰

In African traditional beliefs, the resources of the earth exist for the benefit of all. This view implies that ownership of land or other natural resources that exclude others or leave other people dispossessed is wrong because the resources of earth are regarded as God's gift to all human beings, without distinction or discrimination.

African Christian Theology and the Challenges of Land Degradation in CAs

Bakare, seeks to bring the issue of unequal distribution of land in Zimbabwe and the related socio-economic injustices into the arena of theological concerns.⁴⁹¹ His main concern is that land issues have not been a major concern for the majority of the mission churches,⁴⁹² despite the fact that the majority of the churches' members are landless in a

⁴⁸⁹ Ibid., In Shona society, the chiefs were responsible for enforcing the observance of the day of rest in honor of ancestors and rain ceremonies.

⁴⁹⁰ Ibid.,

⁴⁹¹ Bakare, *My Right to Land*, 1993.

qualitative and quantitative sense.⁴⁹³ In addressing the aforementioned concern, Bakare is critical of the theology of the mission church in Zimbabwe which is divorced from social justice as far as land is concerned. Against this background, Bakare challenges the church in Zimbabwe to adopt a contextual theology that comes out of indigenous people's experience of landlessness that has roots in the colonial period. The starting point for the church's contextual theology, Bakare argues, is the land reform which seeks to address inequalities in land ownership. The contextual model of doing theology is not new as Bakare rightly points out. It was applied by Jesus and the eighth century prophets. The message of the prophets was not timeless and the Kingdom of God preached by Jesus was not a world detached from his listeners, but the very world in which they lived and had their being.⁴⁹⁴

Bakare's work is important to this study because it helps us to understand why unequal distribution of land in Zimbabwe matters morally and why the church and public response is needed. In addition, Bakare identifies justice, equality and interdependence as the norms that present a moral vision for structuring society in which land is distributed equally. The ensuing discussion is guided by the following questions: What is the prophetic mission of the church in view of the unequal distribution of land in Zimbabwe? How and why should the church respond to the situation of the unequal

⁴⁹² Mission churches or historic churches have evolved directly from the outreach of Christian churches in Europe and North America and still represent the traditions of the churches concerned.

⁴⁹³ Mission churches set out to help peasants adjust to the situation of landlessness by providing land management skills that would help them improve their agriculture productivity on the small pieces of land allocated to them by the government. Examples include Silveira House a Roman Catholic Church adult training center located in Harare; St. Faith Mission of The Anglican Church located near Rusape; and the Butcher Shop in the Backyard Project of the United Methodist Church that was located at Old Mutare Mission near Mutare. The issue of land was also marginal among African Theologians in Zimbabwe. See Ezra Chitando, "Rewrapping the Christian Faith Indigenously: A Preliminary Study of African Theology In Zimbabwe," in *Journal of Theology For Southern Africa*, 112 (March 2002): 3-21.

⁴⁹⁴ Jesus condemned socio-economic disparities contextually (Matthew. 19:21; Luke 16: 19-30).

distribution of land in Zimbabwe? What ought to be the relationship between human beings and the land? I contend that Bakare's theology of land for Zimbabwe does not pursue far enough the issues raised by the context of landlessness in a qualitative sense. A brief background of the mission church and land in Zimbabwe is necessary for understanding African theologians' position on the land situation in Zimbabwe.

Mission Churches and Land in Zimbabwe: A historical Overview.

Mission churches or historic churches have evolved directly from the outreach of Christian churches in Europe and North America and still represent the traditions of the churches concerned.⁴⁹⁵ The founders of these churches had a negative attitude towards African culture and thought forms so that African converts were expected to give up their African way of life and customs.⁴⁹⁶ The establishment of mission churches in Zimbabwe coincided with the establishment of colonial rule in the country in the last decade of the nineteenth century.⁴⁹⁷ The majority of the churches received land grants from Cecil Rhodes, then director of the British South Africa country that administered Zimbabwe from 1890 to 1922. According to P. S. Hassing, Rhodes not only gave out land liberally to the missionaries, in some instances Rhodes himself even suggested on a map where mission farms ought to be located.⁴⁹⁸ Some missionaries negotiated with African chiefs

⁴⁹⁵ They tend to have the same ecclesiastical structures and doctrines as their mother churches in Europe and North America. Daneel, *African Earth Keepers*, ix.

⁴⁹⁶ See S. Bakare, *Jubilee in an African Context: The Drumbeat of Life* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1997), 15. See also J. W. Z. Kurewa, *The Church in Mission: A Short History of the United Methodist Church in Zimbabwe, 1897-1997* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997) Chapter 3.

⁴⁹⁷ Examples of churches established around this period include Anglicans, British Methodists, American Methodists, The Salvation Army and the Dutch Reformed church.

for the use of land for missionary work.⁴⁹⁹ The problem with these cases as Ezra Chitando rightly pointed out is that, “the long term settlement plans of the missionaries were not always clear to the African chiefs and their subjects”.⁵⁰⁰ Most of the land alienated to missionaries was classified European under the Land Apportionment legislations. This meant that indigenous people occupying land alienated to missionaries were legally “squatters” or leasers on church lands.⁵⁰¹ Symbolic gestures of the return of land by some churches include the Methodist church in relation to Epworth, the Catholics and Triashill, Monte Casino and Empandeni missions as well as the Church of Christ with Dadaya.⁵⁰² Overall the mission church continues to be a landowner in the midst of landlessness in post colonial Zimbabwe.⁵⁰³

Land Dispossession in the Bible: An Overview.

The problem of land distribution and land ownership existed in both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament in the time of Jesus’ ministry in Roman Palestine. As such,

⁴⁹⁸ This was the case with the Wesleyan Missionary Society, the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, the Seventh Day Adventist, the Methodist Episcopal Church, and the Brethren in Christ. See Per. S. Hassing, *The Christian Missions and the British Expansion in Southern Rhodesia* (Ph. D. Thesis, The American University, 1960), 233.

⁴⁹⁹ In 1891, Mr. A. A. Louw of the Dutch Reformed church established Morgenster mission after negotiating with chief Mugabe. See I. Daneel, *Old and New in Southern Shona Independent Churches* Vol. 1, 205.

⁵⁰⁰ E. Chitando, *The Sacred Remnant? Church Land in Zimbabwe’s Fast Track Resettlement Program*,” Department of Religious Studies, University of Zimbabwe, Working Paper, 2004.

⁵⁰¹ J. G. Mutambara, “Africans and Land Policies”, 203.

⁵⁰² P. Gundani, “The Land Crisis in Zimbabwe and the Role of the Churches Towards its Resolution,” in *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 28, no. 2 (2002): 122-169. Also quoted in E. Chitando, “The Sacred Remnant”, 2004.

⁵⁰³ For an insightful discussion about how church lands survived compulsory acquisition by the Zimbabwe government in 2000 see E. Chitando, “The Sacred Remnant,” 2004.

the concern of the poor and the landless is a theme well represented in both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament. Bakare's theology of land is informed by selected texts from the New Testament and the eighth century prophets who include Amos, Hosea, Isaiah and Micah from the Hebrew Bible and African traditional religions and cultures, especially the Shona traditional view about land. He argues that the church in Zimbabwe needs to read the Bible from the experience of the poor who are landless. He uses a liberation hermeneutics which emphasizes the historical context of a text and the social context of its message. Bakare regards the Bible as a book of life that is relevant to the present situation of landlessness in Zimbabwe. According to him, the teaching of the Bible cannot be explicated without consideration of the context in which it is meant to communicate the message of salvation. To do otherwise is to make it irrelevant."⁵⁰⁴ The Biblical texts selected illustrate how the elite, the kings and ruling classes and those with political power used their privileged positions to perpetuate the socio-economic inequalities in their dealings with the poor. They also show clearly the insensitivity of the ruling class to the plight of the poor/ the dispossessed.

The society in which Amos was called to prophesy suffered from economic imbalances between the rich (propertied ruling class) and the poor (landless peasantry). According to Coote, the minority rich owned about between 50-70% of the land.⁵⁰⁵ Against this background, Amos pronounced judgment against the ruling class who oppressed and exploited the poor, while enjoying luxuries (Amos 2:6-16; 5:7). The prophet also observed that justice was denied to the helpless and the poor by those who

⁵⁰⁴ Bakare, *My Right to Land*, 79.

⁵⁰⁵ Robert Coote, *Amos among the Prophets* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1990), 26. Also quoted in Bakare, *My Right to Land*, 8.

administered it (Amos 4: 1; 5:11 and 8:6). The poor who needed food were cheated by those who control the scales at the market so that the very institutions of justice had become the instruments of oppression. Amos's message is that Yahweh wants justice in the courts and in the market places Amos 5: 21-24, "I hate, I despise your religious feasts; I cannot stand your assemblies. Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will have no regard for them.... But let justice roll down like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream."

Hosea's time was characterized by an unjust agriculture system that gave the ruling class economic advantages over the poor. According to Bakare, one of the major sins against the poor was that the court officials in collaboration with the ruling elite were removing boundary land marks in order to increase their property. Hosea's prophecy is to make Israel become aware that God is displeased with her unfaithfulness to the covenant. Yet God still loves her. A prerequisite for reconciliation include Israel's repentance (Hosea 2:2). The call to repentance is a call to justice. "But you must return to your God: maintain love,... and practice justice." (Hosea 12:6). Micah's mission was to make everybody know that God will intervene in the history of his people's injustices (Micah 1:5-10; 2: 1-5). In other words, God will always vindicate the poor.⁵⁰⁶ Micah envisions a new beginning for Israel that is characterized by a type of land distribution which was guided by a communal principle. A remnant will survive (Micah 4: 1-5).

The three parables: The Laborers in the Vineyard (Matthew 20: 1-6); The Tenants (Mark 12: 1-12); and The Shrewd Manager (Luke 12: 1-16) focused on some aspects of

⁵⁰⁶ The prophet Micah (750-686 BC) regarded the fall of the Northern Kingdom as an indictment and judgment against the unjust political and economic systems used by the ruling classes against the poor. After this, Yahweh will restore the stolen land to its original holders and the ruling class will have no part in the distribution of it among the peasants from whom they took it away.

agrarian life reflecting the socio-economic realities of Roman Palestine of Jesus' time which included land tenure, rent, unemployment, day laborers, tenant farmers, and absentee landlords. Discernible in these aspects of agrarian life are socio-economic injustice, oppression and exploitation. The values of the Kingdom of God projected in the parables are: justice, generosity and equality.

Bakare argues that in the parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard (Matthew 20: 1-6), justice has to be seen in the manner in which the needs of the poor are met regardless of their productivity or output.⁵⁰⁷ He points out that in the parable, the landowner is not acting according to self-interest but responding to the needs of the peasantry.⁵⁰⁸ Drawing upon insights from Scott and Oakman, Bakare argues that in the parable, a *denarius* for an hour's work is generous in comparison with a *denarius* for a full day's labor.⁵⁰⁹ He concludes that the story mirrors God's justice as generous, non – calculative and unproportional. The generosity of the landlord is based on his concern for all. In the parable, the master takes the initiative to meet human need. From the parable of the Tenants (Mark 12: 1-12), Bakare derives the view that justice is the sharing of resources given to humanity by God.⁵¹⁰ In the parable, those who dispossessed the heir of the

⁵⁰⁷ The land owner at the end of the day paid all the laborers the same amount regardless of how long they had worked.

⁵⁰⁸ Bakare argues that if the landlord was typical of his time, he would pay each laborer according to the number of hours worked, in order to gain the maximum profit from the exchange value of their labor. But he does not do that.

⁵⁰⁹ Bernard Brandon Scott, *Hear Then the Parable* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 283. See also D. E. Oakman, *Jesus and The Economic Questions of His Day* (Lewiston/Queenston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1986), 36. Cited in Bakare, *My Right to Land*, 33. Oakman argues that the *denarius* was a standard day's wage of the era so that in and of itself, it is not generous. A peasant earning a *denarius* a day will live in the shadow of poverty. Under ideal circumstances, the money would be able to feed a family of two adults with a minimum of four children (Mark 6:3).

vineyard are dispossessed in turn and the vineyard is given to others. Informed by Waejen's analysis, Bakare argues that as the ruling elite have dispossessed the poor, so they too will be dispossessed.⁵¹¹ In the parable of the Shrewd Manager (Luke 12: 1-16), justice is mirrored in the steward's reduction of the exorbitant rent owed by the tenants.⁵¹² The steward identified himself with the peasants and not the ruling class. He made changes to the economic system in ways that favored the poor. According to Crossan, the parable breaks the bond between power and justice.⁵¹³

Summary of Biblical Viewpoints on Land Dispossession

Both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament teach that God cares about dehumanizing economic structures, and unjust systems, because they destroy humanity. In the Hebrew Bible God is the living God, the author and sustainer of Life. When people's lives are threatened, they can count on God's presence and intervention on their behalf. "I have seen the miserable state of my people in Egypt. I have heard their appeal to be free of their slave-drivers. Yes, I am well aware of their sufferings... And now the

⁵¹⁰ The parable revolves around the rich who have land. Waejen's analysis of the political and economic situation of Galilee at the time of Jesus is that the land was awarded to state officials, who derived their income from it by leasing it to peasantry for a stipulated rent to be paid in the form of agricultural produce, money or labor. See H. C. Waejen, "Another Look at the Parable of the Wicked Tenant," Unpublished Paper. Quoted by Bakare, *My Right to Land*, 34.

⁵¹¹ Ibid., Waejen's interpretation of the parable is that it conveys Jesus' challenge to the ruling elite (absent landlords) who have failed to be guardians of the society because of their exploitation of the peasantry.

⁵¹² Ibid., 39. In this parable, an estate steward about to be fired because of inefficiency and irregularities reduced the debt owed by his master's tenants by changing their contracts. The master praised the steward for acting wisely by securing a place for himself among the peasants. Different views have been given about the estate steward's action.

⁵¹³ J. D. Crossan. *The Dark Interval: Towards a Theology of Story* (Sonoma, California: Polebridge Press, 1989). And J. D. Crossan, *Parables: The Challenging of the Historical Jesus* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973).

cry of the sons of Israel has come to me, and I have witnessed the way in which the Egyptians oppress them.” (Exodus 3: 7, 9). God inspired the prophets to speak against economic ills because they dehumanize people. The prophets were God’s spokespeople who defended the cause of the poor and the powerless. They challenged both civil and religious authorities for failing to respond to the needs of the poor and to practice justice. Their major criticism of the ruling class was their inability to practice justice. They reminded those in power that God desired justice rolling like a river and righteousness like a never-failing stream (Amos 5:24). According to (Amos 2:7) to do justice to the poor is to defend their cause.

The basis for the prophetic judgments is Israel’s covenant with God that contains laws of justice and mercy (Exodus 23: 6-9).⁵¹⁴ The social critique of the prophets reminded Israel of their true identity as God’s community that is guided by a covenant that required the practice of just inter-human relationships. In the Hebrew Bible, the prophets are God’s advocates calling the political and religious leadership to account and warning them of God’s judgment. They convey God’s message of justice in a world characterized by the exploitation of the weak by the strong. The common message delivered by the eighth century prophets is that Gods’ judgment is upon those who exploit the poor and the rights of the under privileged. The prophets regard greed and the

⁵¹⁴ The Israelites had a Mosaic covenant (Exodus 19-24) through which justice was realized and consolidated. The primary requirement of the covenant was a complete, unqualified, and unconditional obedience to God’s will as expressed in the law such as the Decalogue (Exodus 20:1-17) and the Book of the Covenant (Exodus 22:22-33). It includes generosity to the poor at harvest time, justice for workers, integrity in judicial processes, considerate behavior to other people, equality before the law for immigrants, honest trading and other very earthly social matters. These codes made life in the community possible.

exercise of power and influence as acts of infidelity to Yahweh.⁵¹⁵ In the new kingdom preached by Jesus, justice is experienced as generosity and equality.

In the Hebrew Bible, land is given to Israel by Yahweh to be used for the benefit of all. The deprivation of the land of the poor by the rich through unjust means on the one hand and the agglomeration of lands in the hands of the rich land owning class on the other, is a transgression against both the creator and the neighbor. The prophets pronounced judgment against the king and his officials for not distributing land to the people in a just way because God is the owner and creator of the earth. Theft occurs when God is not recognized as the creator and owner of the earth. The concentration of property, especially land in the hands of the minority rich is therefore a theological issue and ethical question as well as a socio-economic issue. Unequal distribution of land is unjust because it is not sensitive to the needs of the landless poor who depend upon land for their livelihood and it dehumanizes the poor by denying them their dignity.

The prophetic tradition, especially insist that fidelity to the covenant join obedience to God with reverence and concern for the neighbor. The Biblical terms which best summarize this double dimension of Israel's faith are *sedeqa*, (righteousness) and *mishpat* (right judgement). God is described in the Hebrew Bible as one who loves justice, demands justice for the whole people, and executes justice for the needy (Isaiah 6:8). Central to the Biblical presentation of justice is that the justice of a community is measured by its treatment of the powerless in society, most often described as the widow, orphan, the poor and the stranger in the land (Deuteronomy 10:17-19). The quest for

⁵¹⁵ See Isaiah 5: 8, Micah 2:2; 7: 3-7.

justice arises from a loving gratitude for the saving acts of God, and manifests itself in a wholehearted love for God and neighbor.

The Church and Unjust Distribution of Land

Bakare contends that the conditions of injustice and gross inequality in access to land, against which prophets of Israel prophesied against, are discernible today in many parts of the world including Zimbabwe. He correctly observes that in Zimbabwe, “the elite have become blind to the plight of the landless peasants some of which have no place to call home”.⁵¹⁶ In addition to this situation are land-leasing schemes that benefit high ranking officials.⁵¹⁷ The “current” land reform program informed by values of the market favors the landed and the rich at the expense of the landless. Yet, landlessness is life threatening to the majority of the people in CAs who depend directly on the land for their livelihood. What ought to be the church’s response to the situation of unequal distribution of land in Zimbabwe and why?

The Christian church must be involved in the situation of land dispossession because God cares about unjust systems that destroy humanity. Since the majority of the people in Zimbabwe depend on the land for their well-being, dispossession of the land that results in landlessness (quantitative and qualitative) denies people the conditions necessary for life and thus undermines their human dignity. By pointing to the unjust structures in society, Bakare argues, the church will be touching the experience of the

⁵¹⁶ Bakare, *My Right to Land* 53.

⁵¹⁷ Isaac Maphosa, *Land reform in Zimbabwe: An Inquiry into the Land Acquisition Act (1992) Combined with a Case Study Analysis of the Resettlement Program* (Harare: Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace in Zimbabwe, 1995), 96-98.

landless in so far as God's love and justice are concerned.⁵¹⁸ Where the prophets are silent, they indirectly support the status quo of the evil system in power.

The mandate to engage on the issue of land dispossession comes from the eighth century prophets and Jesus who show personal commitment to justice. Most of the eighth century prophets responded to the situation of dispossession of peasants' land and the agglomeration of lands in the hands of the rich by calling on the people and the leaders to re-establish just and respectful relationship with God, society and nature (Amos 5:24). Commitment to justice and righteousness meant giving to each and everyone their due, in a manner that does not dehumanize them. In Galilee, the main agriculture province in Palestine, Jesus preached good news which includes meeting the needs of the poor (Luke 4: 18). Bakare argues that a church that is following in the footsteps of Jesus has to be involved in the experiences of the landless poor and oppressed of society in order to give them hope (Luke 4: 18-19). In a situation characterized by inequalities, the prophet's task is to point out that a relationship with God is an ongoing one that requires justice for the poor and dispossessed.⁵¹⁹ According to (Amos 2:7) to do justice to the poor is to defend their cause. Bakare argues that the prophet's task in Zimbabwe is to remind the ruling class that God demands justice. What does this mean for the Zimbabwe situation?

Bakare identifies a radical land reform as the starting point for the removal of inherited inequalities in the country which disadvantage the majority of the rural people whose lives depend upon agriculture. According to him, land distribution is to be the

⁵¹⁸ Bakare, *My Right to Land*, 69.

⁵¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 68.

primary objective of the land reform. Other important but secondary aspects to be considered in land distribution include giving land to those who can make the best use of it. However, Bakare insists that in a situation where the majority of the people are landless, a land reform should aim at reducing poverty among the landless poor. The primary aim of land reform should be to reduce inequalities in the distribution of land and other assets. Deep inequalities are harmful to both persons and society since those who suffer directly from inequality are devalued and denied conditions necessary for their human dignity.

Bakare suggests that the communal land tenure as it was practiced in traditional Shona society and in the Hebrew Bible during the time of Joshua could provide insights to the land reform program in the country. Basic human need was the criterion for land distribution to eligible members of the society. He argues that all human beings have a right to land. According to him, land distribution in Zimbabwe ought to be guided by the following principle.

“The land is to be shared between brothers and sisters, and not to be hoarded for self security. It is not a monopoly or property of one generation living at a particular time in history. It belongs to the community, and beyond this communal ownership of land the Zimbabwe community recognizes the *Musiki*, creator as the ultimate owner of his creation”.⁵²⁰

Bakare’s criterion for land redistribution is informed by the view that land belongs to God for the benefit of us all. Both African Traditional Religions and cultures and Biblical prophetic voices indicate that human beings are never the absolute owners of land: the real and absolute owner of land is God, the Creator, who demands that justice is done in the distribution and use of the land for the benefit of all. The accumulation of

⁵²⁰ Ibid., 53.

wealth at the expense of others is regarded as wrong because the resources of the earth belong to God to be used for the benefit of all. What ought to be the relationship between human beings and the land?

Right Relationship Between Human Beings and the Land.

Bakare uses the image of mother/child to illustrate what he considers to be the right relationship between human beings and the land. The image characterizes the interdependent relationship between human beings and land. Drawing upon this imagery, Bakare argues that the relationships between human beings and the land ought to be characterized by interdependence and genuine respect and love for each other. He argues that land is a source of life the way a mother is to her child.⁵²¹ He also likens the land to a mother who nurtures all her children. He argues that the land was already there to provide for human needs in the creation story (Genesis 1: 24-26).

From the mother/child imagery, Bakare draws the insight that the land belongs to all in the same way a mother belongs to all her children. No child has monopoly over the mother, “every child has access to her, and that is its birthright”. So land here belongs to the entire community. According to Bakare, everyone should have access to land the same way children have access to her/his mother. Also, the children take care of their mother in old age.

The imagery of mother/child is useful but inadequate for understanding the problem of landlessness in Zimbabwe. The majority of the people depend directly on the land for their livelihood. Land has the ability to be a source of life just as a mother’s milk

⁵²¹ Ibid., 71.

gives life. In addition, a mother is respected and not abused by her children. In traditional Shona culture it is a taboo for a child to physically abuse his/her mother. The consequences for the violation of this taboo include begging and public humiliation at the hands of the members of the community. In traditional Shona society, land was to be nurtured and not plundered. Everybody who had land use rights had an obligation to take good care of the land.

Challenges to Bakare's Theology of Land for Zimbabwe

The mother /child imagery used by Bakare does not adequately speak to the situation in CAs where landlessness in a qualitative sense is a threat to human life. For the majority of the people in CAs, the imperative of daily life in a situation of scarce and inferior natural resources makes it difficult if not impossible to maintain a relationship of interdependence and respect for land. The question that arises is, in CAs, how can land be a source of life to the people who depend on it for their sustenance? What will motivate relationships of respect between human beings and the land in CAs? What actions are needed to motivate relationships of respect and interdependence between human beings and the land?

Bakare's proposal for land redistribution is uncritical of the patriarchal values in traditional Shona society and the Hebrew Bible that exclude women from inheriting the land.⁵²² He echoes other African male theologians when he advocates for land redistribution that is based on the communal principle of traditional African communities and the Hebrew Bible. Chitando a Shona theologian expresses a similar view when he

⁵²² In the Hebrew Bible, Ruth 4 is insightful about the problems that widows faced as a result of customary land laws that excluded women.

argues that a radical theology of land for Zimbabwe can be formulated by infusing African spirituality and its vision of the land as communally owned and biblical ideas on land as God's gift to humanity.⁵²³ In Zimbabwe, Shona women have access to land through male relatives despite the passing of the Legal Age of Majority Act (LAMA) of 1982 which allows women to acquire property in their own right. This situation is dehumanizing to women who cannot make decisions regarding the use of the land they depend upon for their livelihood.

The mission church participated in land dispossession which is at the root of the problem of land degradation in the country. Yet, Bakare's contextual theology of land is unclear about the structural elements for reconciliation and repentance in both church and in the government. If we accept his view of reconciliation, the mission church must compensate the indigenous people they dispossessed for the land they took. The Shona concept of land indicates that land is more than just a means of production. How does one determine the amount of compensation for land which has value that cannot be quantified?

African theologians in Zimbabwe correctly point out that the mission church cannot critique with credibility, the government's policy on land reform because it owns vast tracts of underutilized land. The late Rev. Canaan Banana expresses the mission churches' credibility problem on this issue when he writes, "Though the church has been an active champion in ensuring social justice in civic affairs, when it comes to its own land holdings, the church has not done much for the landless.... It is a known fact that a

⁵²³ Ezra Chitando, "Church and Land in Zimbabwe: A Phenomenological Investigation," in *International Congregational Journal* 2, no. 2 (2002): 148. See also Emmanuel Asante, "Land and its Relationship to the People's Spirituality," in *Indigenous Peoples Land, Environment and Racism*, ed. Lucy Mullenkei, (Nairobi: Indigenous Information Network, 2001), 27-36.

number of churches that own farms have not been able to come up with viable land policy for their tenants.”⁵²⁴ Gundani a Shona Catholic theologian, challenges churches that own land to follow Jesus’ kenotic practice by relinquishing large portions of land it owns and is underutilized. He argues that, “The church in Zimbabwe needs to make an unequivocal commitment to bringing freedom to the tenants through relinquishing the farms to their possession”.⁵²⁵

Chitando expands the church’s discourse on land redistribution by suggesting that in Zimbabwe, a contextual theology of land has to problematize private property relations and environmental responsibility.⁵²⁶ He convincingly argues that in Zimbabwe, the post- colonial state inherited a constitution with a liberal notion of private property rights that hindered efforts to address historical imbalances in the allocation of resources in the country, especially land.⁵²⁷ In post-colonial Zimbabwe, the rule of law which is based on private property rights became the legal protection of colonial property relations.⁵²⁸

⁵²⁴ C. Banana, *Politics of Repression and Resistance: Face to Face with Combat Theology* (Gweru: Mambo Press, 1996), 239.

⁵²⁵ Paul H. Gundani, “The Land Question and its Missiological Implications for the Church in Zimbabwe,” in *Missionalia*, Vol. 31. No. 3. (November 2003): 467-502.

⁵²⁶ Chitando approaches matters relating to church and land in Zimbabwe from a phenomenological perspective.

⁵²⁷ According to Rukuni, those who argued against land redistribution did so on the ideological basis that says that private property is a near- sacred right. In that argument, private property was elevated to the status of a foundation of a just and civilized society. However, opponents of the arguments argued that, “if this premise holds, then it must likewise be accepted that private property cannot perform this noble function if most people are without it.” For a detailed discussion of this issue see R. M. Rukuni, “Land Reform in Zimbabwe: Dimensions of a Reformed Land Structure,” in *Land Reform in Zimbabwe, Constraints and Prospects*, eds. T. A. S. Bowyer-Bower and Colin Stoneman Aldershot (England: Ashgate, 2000), 1-188; And Lawrence Tshuma, *A Matter of (In) Justice: Law, State and the Agrarian Question in Zimbabwe* (Harare: SAPES Books, 1997), 147-148.

⁵²⁸ Shadreck Gutto has argued that in 1893, the Pioneer forces, under the leadership of Cecil Rhodes, took all suitable land in the colony and gave it away free of charge to the settlers. According to Gutto, “the invading forces that had had initially employed extortion, fraud and trickery (Rudd Concession) later turned

Gutto echoes this point. He correctly argues that as soon as the settlers were established on expropriated land, they resorted to the ‘normal’ property acquisition methods of contract, using state powers. Thereafter, Gutto argues, “the demand for repossession by the dispossessed indigenous people was then, of course criminalized so that the thieves were now the owners, and their victims were the criminals to be guarded against.”⁵²⁹

The mission churches in Zimbabwe cannot critique with credibility, the ideology of private property rights inherited from the colonial period that continues to undermine the rights of the majority of the poor in post colonial Zimbabwe and most Southern African countries because they have a legacy of owning land in Europe.

In Europe the church owned vast tracts of land, and the church authorities were part of the dominant class which dispossessed the poor peasants. So too, the missionaries joined with the colonial settlers to grab land from their converts. According to African traditions, this land was considered a gift from God to be shared equally by all members of the community. It was the missionaries and the settlers who turned it into private property which could belong in perpetuity to one individual or one family.”⁵³⁰

In light of the above, Bakare contends that the church’s economic self-interest in property holding, including land undermines its prophetic role in the area of land distribution in Zimbabwe. He argues that Jesus’ teaching about the new order, the new kingdom did not encourage individual property holding (Matthew 19: 21). In the Jerusalem community

to military conquest through which land was acquired without compensation paid to the dispossessed.” See Shardreck Gutto, “The Political Economy and History of Laws on Land Acquisition in Zimbabwe”, Unpublished Paper Presented at the University of Zimbabwe, 2-3 September 1983, 4ff. Also quoted in Bakare, *My Right to Land*, 59. CF. *Land Acquisition Act 1992*, Chapter 144.

⁵²⁹ Shardreck Gutto, “The Political Economy and History of Laws on Land Acquisition in Zimbabwe”, 1983.

⁵³⁰ S. Bakare, *The Drumbeat of Life*, 28.

that followed Jesus' approach to property and ownership, individual needs were never overlooked by the community of faith (Acts 6: 3-5).

Bakare's contextual reading of the Bible fails to link the social injustices in the Bible with the ecological injustices reported in the same. In the Hebrew Bible, the problem of land degradation is located in the realm of relationships, that is relationships between God and the people and inter-human relationships. In some instances, the Hebrew Bible makes it explicit that sin corrupts both humanity and the very earth upon which humanity dwells. The well-being of the land and the people was a consequence of obeying tradition that required the practice of social justice and respect for the poor members of that society as stipulated in the Mosaic covenant. For example, the prophet Hosea views ecological disasters in Israel as a consequence of violating the covenant. In (Hosea 4:1-3), the violations cited by the prophet describe how Israel violated God and good healthy inter-human relationships.⁵³¹ In verse 3, the consequences are that the land mourns and various species are threatened with extinction or are already extinct. This theme is also present in Isaiah 24: 5 which says, "The earth lies polluted under its inhabitants, for they have transgressed the laws, violated the statutes, ...therefore a curse devours the earth, and the inhabitants suffer for their guilt." In (Amos 4:9-11) God's anger at wrongdoing is expressed through signs that include wars and ecological disasters. In Hosea 2:18, the security of a new covenant with Yahweh envisages not only the end of war, but also a covenant with the beast of the field, the birds of the heavens, and the creatures that move on the earth. The vision of human restoration entails the removal of both threats of war and threats from the natural world.

⁵³¹ Verse 2 lists crimes that are commonly held to be a violation of the Torah. These are swearing (Exodus 20:7), lying (Exodus 20: 16), killing (Exodus 20: 15) and committing adultery (Exodus 20:14).

African Women's Theology⁵³² and the Challenges of Land Degradation in CAs

African women's theology is important to this study because African women theologians critique religio-culture based factors that legitimize roles, attitudes and perceptions that contribute to gender inequalities that have implications for women and men's relationship to the land. In Zimbabwe and most South African countries, laws and institutions designed to improve the status of women are often undermined by entrenched patriarchal beliefs and attitudes.⁵³³ In that context, it would be inadequate to change the socio-economic and political structures that denigrate or oppress women without changing the societal and mental attitudes of the people concerned.

In this section, I examine what African women theologians teach about the right relationship between women and men and, human beings' relationship to non human beings, especially land. I contend that African women theologians address the problem of land degradation implicitly when they deconstruct and reconstruct the religio-culture sources used to legitimate the gender inequalities in African religio-culture that have implications for women and men's relationship to the land.⁵³⁴ In addition, African women theologians articulate a theological and ethical basis for the opposition to gender

⁵³² In this section I refer to the writings of African women theologians who are members of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians that was inaugurated in 1989. The Circle facilitates research, writing and publication by pan- African multi-religious and multiracial network of women with a concern for the impact of religion and culture on African women.

⁵³³ The laws of inheritance have implications for married women's relationship to the land. Married women do not own land in their own right. See ZWRCN, *The Gender Dimension of Access and Land Use Rights in Zimbabwe: Evidence to the Land Commission*, Harare: ZWRCN, January 1994.

⁵³⁴ Gender relations are the medium through which African religio-culture allocate power and even resources such as land unequally between men and women. In Shona society, decisions about land use on a household level, access to and control of resources such as land are informed by gender. They implicate traditional customs and laws, the social relations of production and resource use regulations in Shona society.

inequality and the transformation of human relationships in which it is assumed that the men take precedence over the women.

African Women's Theology and Religio-Culture Sources

African women theologians grapple with the fact that Western Christian culture and patriarchal ideology embody values about gender relations that endow men with power while suppressing aspects of African culture that are empowering to women.⁵³⁵ They apply their critique to both Western Christian culture and African-religio-culture.

The starting point of African women's theology is the concrete experience of women within the framework of the religion-based cultures of Africa. African women theologians see their task as that of not only critiquing Western Christian culture and African Traditional Religions and culture but reclaiming the liberative aspects of African Traditional Religion and culture and Christianity that promote the betterment of all human beings. According to Sr. Marie Benadette Mbuy Beya, the African women return to tradition only to the extent that it can contribute to the liberation of women today.⁵³⁶ The assumption is that, culture is a social construction that can be deconstructed and reconstructed based on new foundations and criteria.

⁵³⁵ In some African societies religious leadership and sometimes secular, was in the hands of women as spirit mediums or prophetesses at rain shrines. Mvududu and Mukonyora note that among the Shona, women's spirit mediums were involved in the struggle against colonialism. Nehanda is a case in point. Her involvement in the struggle is an indication of the spaces that existed for women in pre-colonial Shona society in the religious-political reality at a time when the distinction between political, religion and production were not pronounced. See Mukonyora, *Wandering A Gendered Wilderness*, 2007; Mvududu, "Revisiting Traditional Management of Indigenous Woodlands," 1995.

⁵³⁶ Sr. Marie Bernadette Mbuy Beya, "Doing Theology as African Women" in *Voices* 13. No.1 (June 1990): 153. Also quoted in M. E Mutambara, "African Women Theologies Critique Inculturation," 173-192.

The concrete experience of women and the historical Jesus provide the basis for African women's critique of aspects of culture that denigrate women and human beings in general. Jesus' encounter with women was a radical departure from the Jewish patriarchal culture.⁵³⁷ Jesus valued human life rather than obedience to the patriarchal laws of his culture. Through his exemplary life, African women theologians argue, Jesus shows that human beings can transcend cultural barriers in order to meet human need. For African women theologians, Jesus is the Jesus of Nazareth who transcends and transforms culture. Jesus of Nazareth by the "counter-cultural relations he established with women, has become for African women, the Christ who liberates, the companion, the friend".⁵³⁸ As a fighter for justice, a healer and a teacher, Jesus is regarded as a good role model for African women.⁵³⁹ Put differently, African women theologians view Jesus of Nazareth as the model of humanity as God intended.⁵⁴⁰

The principles of human dignity and the sacredness of life are the criteria African women theologians use to interpret their main religio-cultural sources which include the Bible, church tradition and African Traditional Religions and cultures.⁵⁴¹ The basis for the principles is the life and work of Jesus, especially Jesus' relationship to women as well as the inclusive texts in the Bible such as (Galatians 3: 26-28) and (Genesis 1:27). In affirming that women are made in the image of God, African women theologians

⁵³⁷ Mwaura, "Gender Mainstreaming in African Theology: An African Woman's Perspective," in *Voices From the Third World: EATWOT*, Vol. 24, no. 1 (June 2001): 176.

⁵³⁸ *Ibid.*, 173.

⁵³⁹ *Ibid.*, 176.

⁵⁴⁰ M. A. Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women's Theology* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2001), 32.

⁵⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 29. Women have been treated as inferior or as minors. It is therefore impressive for the ethics of women theologies to affirm that women are fully able to make decisions as autonomous moral agents.

regard their well-being as a primary concern in moral decision making. This means that anything that denigrates women and human beings in general is regarded as being against God's will for humanity and the rest of creation.

African women theologians critically engage the Bible, Christian tradition and aspects of African Traditional Religions and cultures, for the purpose of identifying what enhances, transforms or promotes life-giving and life-enhancing relationships for women and men.⁵⁴² They approach the Bible from a critical point on the assumption that the Bible depicts other people's cultures. They recognize the fact that the Bible depicts a patriarchal Jewish culture that cannot be regarded as absolute. According to Theresa Okure, re-reading the Bible as a patriarchal book demands that a sustaining effort be made to discern between the divine and human elements in it.⁵⁴³ She goes on to suggest that the former embodies timeless truths for salvation and the latter inculcates practices that are socio-culturally conditioned and hence inapplicable universally.⁵⁴⁴ There is an overlap of cultural and Biblical hermeneutics as African women theologians read the Bible in its context from the standpoint of their daily lived experiences in African religio-culture. From African religio-culture and the Bible, African women theologians seek to extract life-giving principles while at the same time deploring those aspects that denigrate human beings, especially women.

African women theologians find it problematic when scripture is regarded as absolute where it denigrates women but fail to provide the same absolute standard to

⁵⁴² Ibid., 16.

⁵⁴³ T. Okure, "Women Reading the Bible," in *With Passion and Compassion* edited by V. Fabella and A. Oduyoye (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1988), 56.

⁵⁴⁴ Ibid.,

other texts.⁵⁴⁵ Oduyoye noted that Biblical sayings that have parallels with African Traditional customs are universalized, especially those that deal with family and women. For example, the teaching of social relations based on anti-women texts in the Bible e.g., Genesis 3 and the Pauline texts (Ephesians 5: 22-23) are used by some Christian churches to sanction the subordinate role of women in the church and in African societies.⁵⁴⁶ These teachings have been accepted as the norm, in spite of other teachings to the contrary that should have directed attention to the worthiness of all before God and so to mutuality in man-woman relations.⁵⁴⁷

African women theologians critique the image of God as male in both African Traditional Religions and cultures and Christianity because it is used to justify the domination of women in church and society in general. For example, Mukonyora argues that in traditional Shona society, the male image of Mwari, the Shona God, is used to legitimate the allocation of land based on patrilineal lines.⁵⁴⁸ In that society, women lack primary access to land as men claim possession of the land in the name of their male ancestors. Yet, Mwari in Shona traditional religion is feminine when viewed from the perspective of women who spend most of the time working on the land.⁵⁴⁹ Mwaura also noted that among the Gikuyu of Kenya and the Cewa of Malawi, God is neither male nor female. Her gender analysis of the African Christian church's work also revealed that the

⁵⁴⁵ There is no Gentile or Jew is not seen as referring to people's ethnicity.

⁵⁴⁶ M. Oduyoye, *Daughters of Anowa, African Women and Patriarchy* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995), 81.

⁵⁴⁷ Ibid.,

⁵⁴⁸ See discussion in Chapter two of this study. An extensive treatment of this subject is also given in Mukonyora, *Wandering A Gendered Wilderness*, 2007; And I. Mukonyora, "Women and Ecology in Shona Religion," 1999, 276-284.

⁵⁴⁹ Ibid.,

image of God as male is a social construction by patriarchal societies. Mwaura's conclusion is that, the patriarchal image of God that has been upheld in the institutional churches in Africa is attributed to human creation in its development of culture. Marianne Katapo⁵⁵⁰ echoes this view. According to her, texts that have come to us are "products of a society driven to choose male metaphors by virtue of patriarchal structures predicated upon sexual inequality."⁵⁵¹ Against this background, African women theologians argue that male and female metaphors of God are important to achieve inclusiveness in a society in which the humanity of women and man is valued equally.

Female and Male Humanity in African Women's Theology

Much of African religio-culture is patriarchal. As such, African women theologians are concerned about the equality of the humanity of the woman and the man. They re-examine what it means to be human in order to find a basis for the transformation of the human relations in which it is assumed that the men take precedence over the women. Mercy Amba Oduyoye describes African women's theology as a two-winged theology that seeks to express that male humanity is a partner with female humanity, and that both expressions of humanity are needed to shape a balanced community within which each will experience fullness of being.⁵⁵²

⁵⁵⁰ Marianne Katapo, "Perspectives For a Woman's Theology," in *Voices*, Vol. 8 (September 1983):29 Cited in Mwaura, "Gender Mainstreaming in African Theology," 175-176.

⁵⁵¹ Mukonyora, "Women and Ecology in Shona Religion," 1999. In the article Mukonyora is trying to recover a female imagery of Mwari in Shona Religion.

⁵⁵² Oduyoye uses the image of the flying bird to make this point. According to her, a theology that excludes the reflections of women is like a bird with only one wing, disabled and unable to take to the air. See also M. A. Oduyoye, *Hearing and Knowing* (New York: Maryknoll, 1986), 121. And Musimbi

The ethical basis for the equality of male and female humanity is the view that all creation in relation to the creator is of equal status and worth. Human beings are equal in origin, created in God's image. No one is excluded from God's valuing. Both African Traditional Religions and cultures and Christianity affirm that all human beings originate from the express will of God, be they male or female.⁵⁵³ For African women theologians, Genesis 1:26, Psalm 8 and the Christ-event affirm the equal value of all human beings before God. From Genesis 1: 26, African women theologians draw the view that "humanity in all its variety exists in the very image of the Divine".⁵⁵⁴ Each human being (male or female) is to reflect the divine and be related to God the source of human beings. The ethical ground for the opposition to gender inequality is that all human beings are equally entitled to dignity and respect.

In sum, African women theologians embrace a view of humanity that makes women and men co-responsible for the well-being of the community.⁵⁵⁵ Their view of humanity underscores the fact that disrespect to female humanity is disrespect to total humanity and indeed disrespect to God who made females and males.⁵⁵⁶ The dignity of women is integral to that of humanity. True humanity, as Oduyoye argues, requires that women and men resist dehumanization, what undermines the well-being of humanity.

Kanyoro, "Beads and Strands: Threading More Beads in the Story of the Circle," in *Her Stories: Hidden Histories of Women of Faith in Africa*, edited by Isabel Phiri (South Africa: Cluster Publications, 2002), 1.

⁵⁵³ Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women's Theology*, 69.

⁵⁵⁴ Ibid.,

⁵⁵⁵ Ibid.,

⁵⁵⁶ *ibid.*,

Human Beings and Land in African Women's Theology

Mvududu⁵⁵⁷ and Hinga⁵⁵⁸ have noted that in the discourse on environmental degradation in Africa, women are not only victims but unwilling agents of environmental degradation. Images of women as victims, villains, and as fixers are often used to describe women's roles in the process of environmental degradation.⁵⁵⁹ Women as farmers, as fuelwood cutters and consumers, as forest invaders, as mothers, are seen as acting against the national and global environment.⁵⁶⁰ Women bear the heaviest burden of environmental degradation because of the sexual division of labor and the feminization of poverty. Women's health and well-being is affected by this. This happens as the decline in soil fertility and firewood supplies make women's workload grow heavier and heavier.

Hinga, an African ethicist and theologian from Kenya analyzes the problem of landlessness and land degradation in Kenya from a social justice perspective. She is critical of the subjugation of the values and environmental ethics of the Gikuyu of Kenya by the colonizers and the Christian church.⁵⁶¹ She argues that, prior to the introduction of colonialism, Agikuyu ethical and social ideals made it possible for them to have a balanced relationship with nature and other human beings. For example, in Gikuyu traditional beliefs about land, nature cannot be exploited but utilized with care and a sense of responsibility, because it ultimately belongs to God, who also demands that

⁵⁵⁷ Mvududu, "Revisiting Traditional Woodland Management," 1995.

⁵⁵⁸ Hinga, "Gikuyu Theology of Land," 1995.

⁵⁵⁹ Mvududu, "Revisiting Traditional Woodland Management," 153.

⁵⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 154.

⁵⁶¹ Hinga uses the example of the Gikuyu society. See Hinga, "Gikuyu Theology of Land," 176.

human beings establish and sustain the created equilibrium. The view that God is the creator recognized that no individual human being has absolute right to land ownership. Land is a gift to be shared by all. Against this background, Hinga calls for the reclamation of traditional values and ethics that will lead to the rediscovery of the “fundamental ethical ideal that nature is given to us on trust to be used responsibly.”⁵⁶²

Mvududu’s study of the traditional systems of woodland management⁵⁶³ among the Shona concludes that Christianity and secularization contribute to the breakdown of indigenous regulations with regards to natural resources conservation.⁵⁶⁴ Another challenge to the traditional systems of woodland management among the Shona is that at the household level, women are not able to make decisions about land use including woodland management.⁵⁶⁵ Against this background, Mvududu calls for the empowerment of women through a combination of renewed traditional culture and the removal of legal and socio-cultural constraints to rural women having access to resources such as land, education and legal rights. She also argues for a deeper respect for rural women’s knowledge of the environment.

The radical patriarchalization of the African society after colonialism exacerbated the problem of landlessness in a qualitative and quantitative sense.⁵⁶⁶ Both Mvududu and

⁵⁶² Ibid.,

⁵⁶³ This type of management focuses on the norms of tree use and protection based on folk or traditional religious beliefs that are enforced by individuals’ internalization of the norms, community sanction and by religious or traditional leaders. She noted that in the past, values that maintained biodiversity were often woven into the fabric of inherited traditions of the people.

⁵⁶⁴ See Mvududu, “Revisiting Traditional Woodland Management,” 151. This point is also echoed in Matowanyika’s study of the Shona in the Nyanga area. See Matowanyika, “Indigenous Resource Management and Sustainability in Rural Zimbabwe,” 1991.

⁵⁶⁵ In CAs, women still get their land through male relatives.

Hinga contend that prior to the introduction of colonization; the Shona and Gikuyu societies were based on mutuality between the sexes.⁵⁶⁷ This was applied in both the running of the affairs of the group and in working to produce goods and services for the community.⁵⁶⁸ As agriculturist, the Gikuyu and the Shona had a division of labor that was complementary, without valuing one gender over the other. Yet, land policies informed by the colonial patriarchal understanding of the family ignore the rights of women.⁵⁶⁹ Hinga and Mvududu criticize the individualization of land tenure because it undermines women's rights to land. They correctly observe that wives fall victims of husbands who unilaterally sell land and leave them and their children destitute.

In Zimbabwe and Kenya, women have participated in the wars for the physical reclamation of the land from colonial powers. In Zimbabwe, women spirit mediums, especially, were active in the Chimurenga wars.⁵⁷⁰ They told guerrillas what food to eat and the general rules that contributed to their safety. Among the Gikuyu, women were active in the Mau Mau war and supplied guerrillas with food and weapons. These wars, as Hinga rightly argues, were also women's war for ecological-justice to gain access to land.

⁵⁶⁶ See discussion in Chapters four and three of this study.

⁵⁶⁷ Hinga, "Gikuyu Theology of Land," 179.

⁵⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 179.

⁵⁶⁹ Colonization changed the dynamics at the household level in ways that affect women negatively. Where women had traditional land use rights from husband, fathers or brothers, land reforms have transferred land to an almost exclusively male-oriented tenure system, and relegated women to landless agriculture laborers dependent for subsistence on men. See Mukonyora, *Wandering A Gendered Wilderness*, 2007.

⁵⁷⁰ Chimurenga wars refer to Zimbabwe wars of liberation.

In post colonial Kenya and Zimbabwe, the moral agency of women has manifested itself in the form of the Green Belt Movement⁵⁷¹ and The Association of Zimbabwe Traditional Ecologist (AZTREC)⁵⁷² respectively. In these organizations, women engage in land reclamation in the qualitative sense. The Green Belt Movement aims to reclaim the quality of the land through tree planting and, women's self confidence by helping women meet their domestic responsibilities. The movement promotes traditional agro-forestry techniques, the planting of indigenous trees and the need to protect local biological diversity. In (AZTREC), Shona women are involved in tree planting efforts directed at addressing the problem of land degradation in CAs.⁵⁷³ A woman spirit medium, Lydia Chabata, is in charge of the Women and Environment Education and Activities in this organization.⁵⁷⁴ Women are not treated as agents of knowledge in their own right. As Mvududu correctly noted, the ordinary woman has no

⁵⁷¹ The movement was founded by Professor Wangari Maathai who is also its director. The movement grew as a response to women's lack of access to fuelwood and water for subsistence due to human induced deforestation. The core activity is tree planting that is aimed at addressing the problems of soil erosion, shortage of water and wood fuel shortages that directly affect women because of their gender. In addition to planting trees throughout the country, the movement also generates income from the sale of seedlings.

⁵⁷² AZTREC is based in Masvingo province which is located on the south eastern part of the country. Its nucleus comprised Shona traditional leaders who include traditional chiefs, headman and spirit mediums in Masvingo Province. The goal of the organization is to address the problem of land degradation, especially deforestation. The organization evolved from the Zimbabwe Institute of Religious Research and Ecological Conservation ZIRRCO. This is an umbrella organization which evolved from Prof. Daneel's research.

⁵⁷³ See also Sophie Chirongoma, "Women Curbing Ecological Degradation: Hope for Transformed Lives Inspired Through Inter-faith Dialogue Between Shona Religion and the Christian Faith in Masvingo, Zimbabwe," in *Voices From the Third World EATWOT* 27, no. 2 (December 2005): 39-60. Chirongoma's discussion relies heavily on Daneel's writings that are written from the perspective of the male leaders of the organizations.

⁵⁷⁴ She supervises tree planting in the nurseries and the integration of women's activities. She also oversees sacred places (*marambatemwa*) protected as part of woodland management. Ordinary people have access to the sacred places through the political and religious leaders.

say in the management of the sacred forests except to provide labor in the planting of nurseries and trees.⁵⁷⁵

Defining African Women's Eco-justice

African women theologians seek to transform the unequal relationships between women and men in African society and in the Christian church by critically engaging the religio-cultural factors that contribute to the subordination of women in general. Their theology rejects non-egalitarian social structures as incompatible with the view of equality before God. A common theme in African women's theology is that the various spheres of life in society should operate in a way that allows all people to be treated as equal before God and amongst each other. In African women's theology, the land belongs to God. It is a gift to be used wisely by human beings. Against this background, African women theologians contend that the distribution of the land must recognize the dignity of all beings. All people (female and male) are to receive the resources necessary for life.

⁵⁷⁵ Mvududu, "Revisiting Traditional Woodland Management," 156.

CHAPTER SIX

TOWARDS A LAND CONSERVATION ETHIC IN ZIMBABWE'S CAS

The African religio-ethical approach developed in the previous chapter may not have a blue print for an alternative development model or environmental policy for CAs, but it does have ideas about the elements, values and principles that ought to inform such a policy, or model. In Zimbabwe, land has been used to dominate and exclude others. In CAs, local people's ability to pursue sustainable land use practices is also limited by unjust international and national policies. This situation implies that efforts to address the problem of land degradation in CAs must analyze ways in which the local and the global factors interact to create a situation of environmental degradation in that context. An effective land conservation ethic for CAs is a liberative ethic that seeks to transform land from being an agent for oppression to a source of life and liberation.

The Content and Scope of a Land Conservation Ethic for CAs

In Zimbabwe, land is a scarce resource that is central to the country's economy and the livelihood of the majority of the people in CAs in particular. Drastic inequalities in the allocation of resources, especially land, are a major cause of land degradation in CAs. A land conservation ethic for CAs must be concerned with distributive justice since the nature of resource distribution and access is at the core of the problem of land degradation in Zimbabwe's CAs. Access to the earth's resources upon which survival

depends is critical in order for human beings and various plant forms of life to succeed and thrive. In light of this, it is imperative that a land conservation ethic for CAs be concerned with what ought to be the proper way of distributing scarce resources in CAs and the basis for that allocation. The Shona view of land ownership is insightful on what ought to be the best and most fair way of distributing the benefits and burdens of society among the members of that society and the basis for that allocation.

African Traditional Religions and African Christianity maintain the view that land belongs to the creator. They also believe that resources of the earth are God's gifts that exist for the benefit of all. Based on this belief, African Traditional Religions and African Christianity regard as wrong the ownership of land and other natural resources that exclude others or leave other people dispossessed. If we accept this position, the concentration of prime land in the hands of a minority few in Zimbabwe is regarded as wrong. In addition, a distributive justice that resists limits to inequality and an economy that distributes its benefits in ways that exclude many is unjust for the same reason.

From the African Traditional Religions standpoint, the goal of distributive justice is the maintenance of a healthy community so that all its members may flourish. The best way for the community to survive is to ensure that all members have the basics to survive and flourish. Since the majority of the people in CAs earn their living from the land, the criterion for land distribution and other resources is basic human need that takes into consideration the well-being of the community comprising of human beings and non human beings. Because the sustainability or the preservation of the community is the goal, sharing is necessary but there must be limits of inequality in terms of resource allocation and also in terms of how much of nature's resources human beings can use

now versus the future. The goal of distributive justice means that each should not be subject to conditions that prevent them from living or flourishing.

Misuse of the land and other resources by a minority betrays the gift of God's creation since whatever belongs to God belongs to all. A land conservation ethic for CAs must be critical of the development policies that are informed by a worldview that views nature as a resource to be plundered and used entirely for the well-being of human beings only. In African Traditional Religions and cultures, human beings are only trustees of the earth and its resources with an obligation to use what they possess for the well-being of the society as a whole. They have the responsibility to take care of the land and leave it in a healthy state for the sake of the ancestors and for the benefit of future generations to come.

An ecological perspective must guide a land conservation ethic for CAs. African Traditional Religions and African Christianity view all of God's creation as an interconnected and interdependent system. Human sociality is located within the ecosystem. Human beings are an integral part of nature or the natural ecosystem so that unrestricted exploitation of resources amounts to self-destruction. Both African Christianity and African Traditional Religions teach that ecological instability is a relational issue involving the relationships between human beings, the spirit world and the natural ecosystems. The communitarian ethic sees the world that survives and thrives through the interrelationships and interdependence of its members, human and non human beings. Solutions to the problem of ecological instability are located in the realm of relationships. The implication for addressing the problem of land degradation in CAs

is that solutions to the problem involve restoring damaged social and ecological relationships at the aforementioned levels.

A land conservation ethic for CAs must be informed by ecological economics. Zimbabwe's economy is based on natural resources. This situation raises the question of how to maximize growth in agriculture production for poverty reduction while minimizing the damage to the natural resource base. In African Traditional Religions, the status of non-human life and human beings is that they are sacred. Human beings cannot deliberately abuse creation. An ecological perspective is to view natural resources as having value that should not just be determined in monetary terms alone. This means that development policies must be pursued within an ecological framework. Agriculture must be pursued in ways that does not destroy the fertility of the land and the well-being of the people. In other words, a land conservation ethic must critique the dominant view of development in which economic growth is the goal for distributive justice.

Poverty reduction ought to be a target of land conservation policies in CAs. The welfare of the human community in Zimbabwe's CAs and the welfare of the land are reciprocally related. In the situation of the present social and ecological injustices, the majority of the residents of CAs are unwilling agents of land degradation. As Moyo correctly noted, in CAs "the imperative of daily life, the need to prepare one cooked meal a day is more immediate than the threat of future deforestation."⁵⁷⁶ Positive steps to address the injustices relating to the allocation of resources in the country, especially land, are needed in order to curb land degradation. Achieving ecological stability in that situation would require that technical programs directed at addressing the problem of land

⁵⁷⁶ Sam Moyo, *Zimbabwe Environmental Dilemma: Balancing Resource Inequities*, 67.

degradation be complemented by social programs that address the immediate material and social needs of the people. For example, meeting the people's basic needs such as sufficient farmland is an important step towards motivating the residence of CAs to achieve other needs such as the preservation of the land.

A land conservation ethic for CAs must be informed by the principle of human dignity and equality. In the Hebrew Bible and in African Traditional Religions and culture, respect for life and the equality of all human beings are values based on the belief that God is the author of life and the belief that human beings are created equal before God. All of God's children are of equal moral worth. All human beings bear the image of God and therefore have equal right to the earth's resources and a sustainable lifestyle. The present inequalities in the allocation of resources especially land and economic benefits are a violation of the creator's mandate to share equitably the resources of the earth.

The global economic system in place is structurally unjust. Accepting the principle of human dignity and the principle of equality means that the people in CAs must resist economic practices that dehumanize them and destroy their means of livelihood. Examples include the international debt and the unfair trade barriers that contribute to economic poverty and ecological degradation that are life threatening to the majority of the people in the country and CAs in particular.⁵⁷⁷

The international debt is an assault to the dignity of the people of Zimbabwe because it makes it impossible for the people of Zimbabwe to define themselves in ways

⁵⁷⁷ In order to raise money to pay debt and to make up for low commodity prices, Zimbabwe like most *developing countries* increase the exploitation of the scarce natural resources. The unfair trade policies also contribute to the country's increased dependence on the land based resources at a time when commodity prices are low.

that empower them. The scarce resources necessary for life are channeled to pay debt thus compromising the well-being of the community comprising of both human beings and the land. In addition, the international debt undermines the country's agency. Zimbabwe depends on loans from the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. This financial dependency undermines the country's policy autonomy. In order to get loans to pay debt, indebted countries like Zimbabwe are bullied into accepting policies that are not very relevant to their needs. ESAPs are a case in point. There is need to institute just and fair trade relations on an international level.

A land conservation ethic for CAs critically evaluates sustainable development policies in light of the value systems of the land users/the Shona. In post-colonial Zimbabwe, land conservation policies and agriculture technology constitute a locus of Euro-Western domination of the people and their land. Land conservation policies in Zimbabwe are informed by a development discourse that has roots in the European Enlightenment and the fundamental Cartesian dualism between human beings and nature.⁵⁷⁸ Indigenous people's knowledge systems that have a sound scientific basis are denigrated by extension services and development experts who privilege modern science and technology. The denigration of indigenous people's agriculture knowledge systems is an assault to the dignity of the indigenous people. A land conservation ethic for CAs must challenge the superiority of western-based knowledge systems and build on the religio-cultural roots of the people. This does not mean that the Shona accept aspects of

⁵⁷⁸ Some scholars who argue that environmental management in Africa is suffering from colonial mentality express this view. See Michael Drinkwater, "Technical Development and Peasant Impoverishment: Land Use Policy in Zimbabwe's Midlands," In *Journal of Southern Africa*, Vol. 15, no. 2 (January 1989): 287-305; M. Drinkwater, *The State of Agrarian Change in Zimbabwe's Communal Areas* (New York: Martin Press, 1991).

African religio-culture uncritically. The basis for this challenge is the view that all human beings are equal before God. In this case, the equality of all human beings before God implies respect for the dignity of all beings, which in this case requires the recognition of Shona religio-cultural systems, and the contribution they can make towards solving the problem of land degradation in the country.⁵⁷⁹ A land conservation ethic for CAs recognizes as valid indigenous knowledge systems and technology. Respect for indigenous knowledge systems and technology ought to include reciprocity of ideas and values between indigenous farmers and development experts involved in the formulation of solutions to the problem of land degradation in Zimbabwe.

An effective land conservation ethic for CAs must articulate questions of gender justice. Women have been treated as inferior or as minors. Individual land tenure that is oriented towards men undermines women's land use rights and ultimately their dignity. Women are not decision makers on matters relating to land use. In addition, agriculture technological innovation favors men and it reduces women, especially married women to unpaid laborers for their husbands. It is therefore impressive for a land conservation ethic to affirm the human worth and dignity of women. This involves recognizing that women are fully able to make decisions as autonomous moral agents.

A land conservation ethic for CAs cannot afford to ignore issues of social justice in which the women issue is a concern. The situation of women and land in CAs indicates that there is need to transform inhuman structures and institutions both indigenous and those newly acquired that restrict women's capacity to relate to land in sustainable ways. There is need to reform and liberate African religio-culture in areas

⁵⁷⁹ Indigenous people's views and values about land are often neglected in the government's conception of appropriate land conservation measures in CAs.

where it has been used as an oppressive tool to dominate women. The customary land law in post-colonial Zimbabwe is a case in point.⁵⁸⁰ The law excludes women who are the “farmers” of the land.⁵⁸¹ Men continue to be the beneficiaries of male ancestors who own land in traditional Shona worldview. The rights of inheritance of land are not accorded to women.⁵⁸² To accept the customary land law without transformation is to maintain the structure of gender inequality that disadvantages women.⁵⁸³ Women are the backbone of Shona agriculture economy in CAs. The customary land law that does not recognize women’s right to land in their own right undermines the dignity of women and the principle of the equality of all before God.

The customary land law also has the potential to exclude people of other ethnic groups and immigrants who need land. This practice is inconsistent with the view that the land is God’s gift to humanity to be used for the benefit all. The basis for the transformation of such laws is the belief that women and men are made in God’s image and therefore ought to be respected.

A land conservation ethic in CAs must take into consideration women’s gender based needs for land. In Shona society, the normative expectation of women as food producer means that food production is the dominant need for the women. A starting

⁵⁸⁰ In post-colonial Zimbabwe, land in CAs continues to be distributed according to customary law (by chiefs and district councils) but the criterion is no longer basic human needs.

⁵⁸¹ See Mukonyora 2007, 8.

⁵⁸² Patriarchal societies have several reasons for denying ownership of rights to women, which include that, land, must be inherited by the male who own the land on behalf of the family. Secondly ancestral rights cannot be transferred through marriage. Women are not accorded the right to own land because it may impoverish their family of origin. Women are considered temporary members in the family because of the possibility of divorce and marriage. Aquiline Tarimo, “The Second Scramble For Land in Africa,” in *African Christian Studies* Vol. 19, No. 2 (June 2003): 38-65.

⁵⁸³ A.Tarimo, “The Second Scramble for Land in Africa.”

point could be women's access to good quality land, extension services that take into consideration the gender needs of women and the recognition of women as agents of knowledge in their own right. Shift orientation of extension work from cash crop production to food crop production. Agricultural training must be relevant to the basic needs of women who are the food producers in that context.

The dignity of women can be expressed by developing an infrastructure that is relevant to their gender needs. Such a program can be guided by the need to reduce women's workload and hence improve women's health and the health of their children. The program can also include the use of technology that reduces women's use of natural resources such as wood-fuel.

Technology is not culture-free. A land conservation ethic for CAs must be critical of the values embodied in technology. Technology imposed on people can be ill-suited to local needs. The starting point for the introduction of technology must be to recognize, as Vandana Shiva has noted, that all societies have 'ways of knowing' and 'ways of doing' and that "All societies, in all their diversities, have had science and technology systems on which a distinct and diverse development has been based. Technologies or systems of technologies bridge the gap between nature's resources and human needs. Systems of knowledge and culture provide the framework for the perception and utilization of natural resources."⁵⁸⁴ Technology as Shiva argues, constitutes ways of doing, it is one of the principal elements of a people's identity.

⁵⁸⁴ Vandana Shiva, "Biotechnology development and conservation of biodiversity," in *Economics and Political Weekly*, 30 November 1991.

Technology must be simple and accessible to the majority of the people.⁵⁸⁵

The following characteristics of traditional technology are worth retaining in developing modern technology in Africa. Traditional technology is simple. This means that large numbers of people can use and participate in the application or use of that technology as well as contribute to its development. This will also increase indigenous awareness. Traditional technologies are developed to deal with specific problems of material survival. They are appropriate to meeting basic needs. Modern technologies that incorporate some of the characteristics of traditional technology will have greater relevance and impact on the social and economic life of the people.

A land conservation ethic must establish the principles that are needed to guide the choice of technology created in another cultural environment for use in a different environment. First, the pursuit of basic human needs should guide the choice and appropriation of technology.⁵⁸⁶ Technology must be seen as a means for the realization of basic human needs (food, shelter, clothing, and good health). Second, technological products must be adaptable to local circumstances and objectives. Third, technology must be ecological and gender sensitive. The well-being of the community comprising of human beings and the land should serve as a guide in the selection of appropriate technology.

Technology is not neutral. As Gyekye rightly argues, “technology emerges in, and is fashioned by, a culture; thus, right from the outset, technology is driven or directed

⁵⁸⁵ The ensuing discussion is informed to a very large extent by Gyekye’s discussion on technology. See Gyekye, *Modernity and Tradition*, 286f.

⁵⁸⁶ *Ibid.*,

by human purposes, values, and goals. It can transform human society. These changes can also be in our values and way of living. There is need to determine whether the values spewed out by technology are the kinds of values we need and would want to cherish. And, if this historical relation between technology and values is maintained, what will be produced for us by technology will have to be in consonance with those purposes, values and goals.”⁵⁸⁷

⁵⁸⁷ Ibid.,

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