



NGENANI

THE ZIMBABWE EZEKIEL GUTI UNIVERSITY JOURNAL
OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND SOCIETAL TRANSFORMATION



ISSN 2957-8558 (Print)

Vol 1 Issues (1&2), 2022

©ZEGU Press 2022

Published by the Zimbabwe Ezekiel Guti University Press
Stand No. 1901 Barrassie Rd,
Off Shamva Road
P.O. Box 350
Bindura, Zimbabwe

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Ngenani - Zimbabwe Ezekiel Guti University Journal of Community Engagement and Societal Transformation Review and Advancement

ISSN 2957-8558(Print)

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PHILOSOPHICAL REFLECTIONS ON THE ENVIRONMENT AND THE IMPACT OF AFRICAN INDIGENOUS RELIGION ON FOOD SECURITY AMONG THE NDAU PEOPLE OF SOUTHEAST ZIMBABWE

ELISHAH MUTIGWE¹ AND FAITH CHIPFAKACHA²

Abstract

This article focuses on the role of the African indigenous religion(s) (AIRs) in compacting environmental degradation and affirming the stability of food security among the Ndau people of Chipinge, south-east Zimbabwe. The study interrogates religious taboos, considering the divine punishment embedded in the essence of the AIR in the protection and preservation of the environment. Drawing examples from Chief Mapungwana's and Chief Musikavanhu's structural organisation in public rituals and mushandirapamwe (working together projects) and doro remakoto (rain-making ceremony) in the Ndau society, the study shows that the religion fosters mutuality, reciprocity, togetherness and positive attitudes towards the environment. Premising the entire argument on the foregoing insights, the study envisages that the tripartite cosmology of the Africans immensely contributes to the conservation of the ecosystem. The study focuses on the perpetual divine food provision through reliable rains, good harvests and ubiquitous existence of both domestic and wild fruits in the vicinity and thereby ensuring food security to the Ndau people. In cognisance of the food abundance, the AIR, through some divine restrictions, ensures equal sharing and shuns the notion of mbau (greed). The study recommends that the recent interface between AIRs and Christianity should not disturb the Ndau people's cosmological stability.

Keywords: ancestors, religious rituals, cosmology, ecosystem, food sustainability

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INTRODUCTION

The African continent is perceived to be the ideal field of play for all sorts of food donors. The land is deprived of its pride of feeding its children, especially under the banners ‘dark continent’, ‘poor continent’, ‘the needy continent’ and ‘black magic infested land’. These and others culminate in challenges surrounding the notion of food security among Africans. The term ‘food security’ can be defined as the everavailability of food with adequate nutritional value. Chirimuuta and Mapolisa (2011) define food security as —a situation where all people at all times have access to nutritionally adequate food and safe water. Nevertheless, this study incorporates the concept of water availability at some stage as a prime factor for sustainable food production and storage, but not as an integral part of the food. To this effect, the article notes that for food security to be attained, a complement of factors interplay. The World Food Forum, as cited in Chirimuuta and Mapolisa (*ibid.*), outlines the factors as the availability of food, access to food, stability of supplies and utilisation of food. Given the possible factors captured by the immediate last proposition, it is important for the article to bring to the fore the fact that these are to be examined in the spirit of religious taboos to maintain the main argument of the research. However, the paradox surrounding all such derogative labelling is the definition of religion by Karl Marx as cited by Pedersen (2015), which perceives religion as the —opium of the oppressed, or —the opium of the mind. Oppressed by whom? Whose mind? These questions rewind the most controversial debate on the study of African indigenous religion(s). The research seeks to unravel the nature of the Ndaou traditional religion. The study explores the existential arguments of the taboos among the Ndaou and their understanding of the environment and its significance to their religious and dietary mindsets.

METHODOLOGY

The study employs the ethnographic approach in obtaining the original data on the religious and environmental coalition in food security. Hoey (2020) avers that ethnography has been equated with virtually any qualitative research project where the intent is to provide a detailed, in-depth description of everyday life and practice. The use of this method helps the research to tap into inner feelings and inclinations from an *emic* perspective, thereby capturing the insiders' point of view. In this regard, the researcher becomes a participant but still maintains the observational role to describe and experience with a degree of detachment. The research also made use of interviews as a research technique to tap into the empathic and pertinent information about the religiosity of the Ndaus. Twenty interviewees across the district were selected through the purposive sampling method. Key informants were chiefs, kraal heads, *nduna dzamambo* (messengers), *mapurisa amambo* (police officers) and other elderly people who are the custodians of cultural and religious values and norms.

LITERATURE REVIEW: AFRICAN INDIGENOUS RELIGION AND TABOO

Luyaluka (2017) alludes that defining the AIR has always been a concern in the studies of Africa. He posits that, in general, most African writers subscribe to the recognition of the AIR as a single and collective notion. Thus, despite being incubated in a milieu of different cultures, the AIR is still one, and afrocentricises all dimensions of the notion to pronounce people across the entire continent. Accordingly, Mbiti (1991) states that the African religion comprises five important aspects, with each functioning as a building block to attain the notion. The concept of African religion is construed through the various beliefs, practices, ceremonies, festivals, religious objects and places, values and morals, and religious officials and leaders. Awolalu and Dopamu as cited by Omotoye (2011), defined African indigenous religions as religions that have been handed down from generation to generation of Africans. The two further assert that the AIR is a fossil religion (a thing of the past), but a religion that Africans today have made theirs by living and practising it. The aspects of generically living and practising it entail that there is nothing written about them as is the case with other religions, but still play an integral part in the African conception of ontology. The Ndaus, just like any other African society, have their own systematised set of beliefs in ancestors, rituals, sacrifices, values and norms, among others,

but all culminating into their native religion. These notions all contribute to the well-being of the people in African communities. Drawing from this conceptualisation, the African people have a tripartite understanding of cosmological stratification.

The Ndaу people believe in the ontological existence of spirits/ancestors that are more or less the divinities of each family and clan. Among the Ndaу of Zimbabwe, ancestors or the living dead, as Mbiti (1991) labels them, are the incorporeal spirits of the late morally excelled mature males and females. These should have experienced a 'good' death and not death by suicide or murder in uncalled-for wrangles.

Against this backdrop, the people of Chipinge hold that the ancestry mystery is *axismundi* between the present living and the environment. Thus, the divine efforts by the Ndaу ancestors/gods play an integral role in protecting and fostering the welfare of their brood. This study prefers to term the interconnectedness between the —living timeless (Banana 1991), the physically living humans and the ecosystems the building blocks of the Ndaу people's worldview about participation. The Ndaу participation implies that every component of the cosmos plays an integral role in the up-keep of the members of the society, either as a *homwe* (host/mediums) of a spirit or as a direct source of food or protection. The Ndaу traditional society comprehends the entirety of their world's experience, including the physical surroundings as well as the spirit beings. One of the key informants said, „*Makomo, mifuya, nemakandwa ese amwaningira eshe aya akagarwa ngevadzimu dzemhuri dzemuganga unouyu kuti vantu veshe vangwarirwe nekuhinwa kur^a kwakakwana*“ (The mountains, rivers and dams you are looking at are all infested by both clan and territorial ancestry spirits for the well-being of the community in terms of protection and divine provision of balanced and nutritious food). In response, the Ndaу people respect and care for the environment to the extent of harnessing it in a non-abusive manner for future generations' continued existence and providence. They believe that their ancestors are the dependable link between the physical world, the spiritual world and God. The people of south-east Zimbabwe believe that being the closest link, the living timeless negotiate with God for rains and removal of plagues from the land on behalf of the physically living. To this effect, Ejizu (2013) commends the ancestors as he argues that, „Africans believe that the ancestors are essentially benevolent spirits.“

Within the realm of African religion, the Ndaus hold that divine punishment is unwavering in maintaining a state of equilibrium between natural resources and humanity. Thus, the divinities extrapolate a good measure of punishment to the degree of evil perpetuated on nature significantly to curb the tendency of denigrating the ecosystems. In the same vein of argument, Leonard (1905) as cited by Ejizu says, —Among the Ibo, religion and law are so closely interwoven that many of the most powerful legal sanctions are derived directly from the gods.¶

The most striking idea from the above proposition is that if one breaches religious values and norms, the entirety of the African community suffers the punitive reward. Religious values and norms that should be kept sacred are called taboos. Taboos are social or religious customs exerting some prohibition on a particular object or place. Usually, a breach of such customs warrants punishment to the individual or family or the entire community from which the perpetrator of the evil comes. Taboos are fully explored in a section to follow.

STRUCTURAL ORGANISATION OF THE NDAU SOCIETY

The Ndaus people, like others in different parts of the continent, tend to have some political, social and religious structural organisations for the general good. Deeply embedded in these organisations, is the notion of structural functionalism where each part plays its integral role to see the continued prosperity of the community. However, it is worth mentioning that, unlike the modern state, some offices among the Ndaus serve a plethora of duties and obligations. The variant practitioners sometimes overlap each other's scope of operation as complements for the best results. For purposes of uncovering the secret underlying how the people under study, care and extract the riches of their environment without grossly depleting the levels of food security and sustainability, this article presents a cursory description of its structural organisation. Special mention is accorded to *Ishe* (Chief) who happens to be at the helm of the entire *duntu* (territory). However, it is important to note that the Ndaus do not frequently use the term *Ishe*. Instead, they use the terms *mutape* or *mambo* for chief.

The district of Chipinge is divided into five chieftainships, namely *Mutape* Mapungwana, *Mutape* Mutema, *Mutape* Musikavanhu, *Mutape* Garahwa and *Mutape* Mahenye. As heeded earlier, the name *mutape*

denotes a chief. However, first three chiefs of the district are looked at because they have beliefs and practices almost divorced from the other two. The Mahenye and Garahwa chieftainship share the southern boundaries and other religious aspects with the Tshangani people of Chiredzi District. The chief performs both traditional roles and religious obligations. In that respect, he acts as the rainmaker or —asker for the rainll, to use Mbiti's terminology, but at a higher level. Chief Mutema controls the lower north and part of the north-east of the district, while Chiefe Mapungwana reigns the north-eastern part. Chief Musikavanhu is the man in charge of the lower south territory of Chipinge and he too serves as both religious and political social arbitrator in case of social injustices. Chiefs also preside over court cases involving the trial of environmental denigration perpetrators in their respective territories but, in full consultation with the living dead'. To this end, it is evident that ancestors are constantly in touch with the living as the life-givers and moral prescribers. Just below the *mutape* there is a *mambo* (local kraal heads responsible for reigning over a small area but in full consultation with the chief. Bourdillon (1982) argues that:

Sometimes the chiefdom is divided into wards each of which is ruled by a branch of the chiefly family, in which case the chiefship is likely to alternate between the wards. Wards may also be assigned to branches of the chiefly family excluded from succession to the chiefship....

In this regard, those in charge of the wards are lower-level *mambos*. The *mambo* reigns with the aid of a council of *ndunas*, and these are the watchdogs of the kraal head as well as advisors. At the bottom, there are *mapurisa amambo* (chief's police officers), mostly responsible for arrests and summoning the culprits to *dare* (court). Notably, all these assume religious roles.

DORO REMAKOTO (RAIN-MAKING CEREMONY)

Across the African continent, it is widely held that only the gods are the owners and providers of rain. In the same context, the Ndaue people venerate their ancestors within their main African indigenous religion via a rain-making ceremony referred to as *doro remakoto*. *Doro remakoto* is a simple game of semantics with no direct translation into literal meaning. The underlying fact is, the ceremony does not entail the pure magical making of some rains by the —rain-makersll. Rather, it is a mere mode of communication by the living to the departed forefathers who subsequently inform *Mwari/Musikavanhu* (God) who is the sole and

ultimate divine responsible for the rains. The study notes that the ceremony usually takes place before the commencement of the rainy season. It was also unravelled in this study that such gatherings are held at different levels. Thus, *mambo/mutape* (kraal head) may preside over a small one while the *ishe* (chief) does that at a higher level with full consultation with the *magwasha endau* (territorial spirits).

Before the beer brewing, the *mutape* or *ishe* who acts as the presiding officer over *makoto*, *anohamba kuti we zvinodiwa ngevaripashi* (consults the *n"anga* to get instructions from the divinities). After the consultation with *vadzimu* (ancestors), the preliminary preparations for beer brewing commence with malt making. One of the key informants said that only *zvikosha/chembere* (very old women who are past menstruation) and virgin girls from the royal family are tasked to make malt for the beer, using either *magwere/mabonere* (maize) or *mafunde* (sorghum). Mapuranga (2010), describes women as occupants of very vital offices in the Ndaou religion as *zendere* (virgin girls) and *mbonga* (old women who have reached menopause) participate in religious ceremonies. After the beer has matured, *mutape* or *ishe* sends an invitation to the *makoto* ceremony to his subjects via his *nduna* or *purisa ramambo*. For the success of the ritual, every family is compelled to bring one or two *huku* (chicken) to braai on the eve of the day in a sacred forest called *marombo*. Culturally, chicken is a valuable type of meat so much that it is used to appease the ancestors for a quick answer for the coming of rains.

Participants at the *makoto* ceremonies are dressed traditionally (Ndlovu, 2011:92). Depending on one's choice, both females and males can be dressed in *nhembe neshashiko* (animal skin pieces covering the front and back). Also, some women wear *zvichakati/zvikisa* (heavily plotted skirts in traditional colours of are red, black and white). Contextually, the attire is meant to enable the people to partake in some traditional dance in the ritual's procedures. The dances performed during the ceremony will be in line with some vulgar rich songs. Only the elderly are sanctioned to attend. To that effect, *zvikosha/chembere* takes up the duty of singing vulgar songs. Coupled with vulgar lyrics are poetic utterances by the *mutape* or *nduna yamambo* or the rain-maker to provoke the ancestors and *Mwari* to trigger the rains instantly for the good of their families. In concurrence with this view, Bourdillon (1982) says the ancestors are responsible for providing the rain and caring for

their crops. Invariably, the ceremony normally comes to an end graced by plenty of rainfall – an event which is anticipated by the Ndaus as evidence that the gods have responded to their plea. Thus, the ubiquitous prevalence of food for the Ndaus is guaranteed.

ZUNDE RAMAMBO

Zunderamambo (chief's field or granary) is very important among all African people, especially the Ndaus. It is where and when almost every family sends a representative to practise what the Ndaus call *mushandirapamwe* (working together) in a communally-owned field under the custodian of the kraal head or the chief himself. The proceeds of such a field are kept in the chief's granary to feed the disadvantaged of the society or *vaini* (travellers/visitors). As argued by Gudhlanga and Makaudze (2012), the produce is meant to help the poor or the generality of the population in times of drought, famine or war. *Zunderamambo* signifies one of the fundamental properties of *untu/Ubuntu/unhu* (ethics); sharing. It has been discovered that this sort of *mushandirapamwe* takes different forms and has a diversified course of activities depending on the times of the season within which it is performed. The *zunde* activities usually commence one or two weeks after the reception of the first rains of the season. This is to capacitate the villagers to sow their fields first. If it is the summer season when the villagers are supposed to sow in the field, some family representative may take *chipani chem"ombe negeja* (an ox-drawn plough) or *tsvanda yekuisa mbeu yekosima* (a weaved container for carrying the seed to the field), *badza rekunoparadzira munxuba* (hoe for spreading manure), while some would donate the seed according to the families' capability. The seed would be the staple food of the area which is *mafunde* or *mabonere/magwere*, especially in the *gowa* (low veld) area. In a bid to further the spirit of sharing, women of the village prepare common food and traditional beer for the workers. After the germination of the *mbeu dzakasimwa* (the sown seeds), another activity-centred ceremony follows, this time for weeding. The end of the season is marked by two more *mushandirapamwe* at *zunde ramambo* activities, the first one meant for *kukukura* (harvesting), then the other for *kupura, kurudza zviyo zvacho nekuzvibeka mumatura* (shelling and winnowing and storing). Closely related to this concept is the notion of *humwe*, where members of society help each other in weeding or ploughing the fields. In this regard, several *zvipani nemageja* (several teams using ox-drawn ploughs) flood the targeted fields and in no time the job would be accomplished. The *humwe* organiser simply

provides food. The concept of *humwe* also ensures that families assist each other with food sustenance. According to one of the informants, *Mbuya* (grandmother) Donono from Manzvire Village, all these ceremonies are graced with a beer-drinking party designed to “*kutambisa kana kutontodza pahuro pevadzimu vedu, asi chikurusa kuri kuvabonga ngemvura yavanotihina*” (—the beer is for pleasing the thirsty ancestors and thanking them for the rains). The study, therefore, avers that the Ndaу place their faith and hope in the spiritual world for welfare, with all the necessities; chiefly, food, being divinely provided

FOOD SECURITY: EQUITY AT PLAY

The heavy rains given to the Ndaу people via the *doro remakoto* discussed above, nature provides abundantly. The variant agricultural activities prosper under these rains to meet the food sustainability for the Ndaу. These range from crop production to animal rearing. They grow cereal crops like *mafunde*, *emutode*, *muchayane nechimukadzi usaenda* (different cultivars of sorghum), *mhunga* (millet), *mungoza* (rapoko), *magwere/mabonere* (maize). These are usually meant for their staple food *sadza* (thick porridge). Apart from cereals, they grow *matikiti* (pumpkins), *bhochisi* (beans), *manduwi* (groundnuts), *magaka* (cucumbers), *matanga* (squash), *ife* (native sugarcane), *mujumbuya* (cassava), *madima* (sweet potatoes), *makebe* (watermelons), *mashamba* (sour watermelons), *nyimo* (round nuts), *nyemba* (runner beans) and *madhumbe* (yams). These crops can be grown in separate fields but they are mostly intercropped with the cereals to save space and labour. Intercropping also helps in weed, pest and insect control and nutrient fixing. The article also found out that these crops are not just grown, but there are some religious restrictions placed on certain crops like *mhunga* and *mungoza* from place to place, depending on the territorial spirits’ decrees. For instance, the Ndaу people under the reign of *Ishe Musikavanhu* of the Mafuse/Muyambo/Dziya (crocodile) totem, are not allowed to grow *mhunga* since it is believed to be taboo in their ancestral cosmology. On the other hand, those under *Ishe Mutema* of the Chirandu/Sithole/M’ombe (heart of cow) are restricted to grow *mungoza* for mysterious religious reasons.

Concerning animal husbandry, the Ndaу keep many animal types. They keep the animals for two main reasons, ornamental, and for meat. However, for the rationale of this study, meat production is of vital relevance. The palatable vegetation grows very well under the heavy

dependable rains to sustain the rearing of animals like *mbudzi* (goats), *mombe* (cattle), *hochilnguruwe* (pigs), *makwai* (sheep), *mbira* and *tsuro* (rabbits). Also, birds such as *huku* (chickens), *hanga* (guinea fowl) and *njiya* (pigeons) are kept for human consumption. Meat is a source of protein that balances the dietary equation for the people of south-east Zimbabwe. It is important, however, to state that a few animals are usually harnessed for draught power, say for ploughing and pulling farm carts. Normally, donkeys and some cattle assume the duty. To this effect, the study notes that donkeys occupy a special space in the puzzle to meet the food demands of the Ndaou people. Further, the research also established that animals like *m"ombe yekusvipa* (black beast) and *jongwe rokusvipa* (black cock) are integral parts of the religious mystery since they are often used in rituals and sometimes assume the position of a *zitateguru* (a forefather). Therefore, the religious personification of nonhuman life shows that the environment, spiritual realm and living together make up the worldview of the Ndaou.

There are immense types of both domestic and wild fruits found in the vast forests due to reliable rains in the eastern part of Chipinge. However, the entire territory benefits from these fruits because they have a strong spirit of sharing inculcated in them by the ethics of *untu/Ubuntu/unhu*. Domestic or exotic fruits include the likes of oranges, bananas, guavas, avocado pears and mangoes. Forests are endowed with the wild fruits, *maongororo*, *nhengeni*, *makwakwa*, *matokorotyiyu*, *nzvinda*, *matamba*, *hubvu*, *nzvuru*, *hacha* and *mazhanje emushango*, among others. In the middle of such richness, some unscrupulous members of the community tend to knowingly or unwittingly cut down such trees for timber, firewood or just deforest with no apparent motive. Confronted with such a lack of a modicum of virtue, the gods/ancestors impose arbitrate fines on such ethical-religious flouters. In some cases, a deforester might face or witness the enigma of snakes, a swarm of bees, or the disappearance of an axe, machete, or any tool in use. As a harsher punitive measure, the culprit may disappear forever. In a case resembling these forms of punishment, Matambanadzo (2014) reported in the *The Herald* that a white tourist disappeared in Nyanga Mountains. *The Herald* (2014) also reported that a young boy was beaten to death by a mysterious troop of baboons following his over-harvesting of mushrooms from the Bindura Mountains for sale. Following the Ndaou religion, such mysteries have reprisal effects as well as fostering a culture of respecting nature in resemblance of a symbol and

embodiment of the cosmological essence of the people in that the trees are imbued with spiritual realities. As such, religious taboos have a daunting task in inculcating non-malicious behaviour towards food resources, thereby ensuring food security for the people of south-east Zimbabwe.

In a quest to fully deal with the interface between the Ndau religion and the environment in an argumentation seeking to ensure food security, this study uses the environment in a generic logic, pointing to both animate and inanimate furniture of the universe. In this regard, water bodies in the form of seas, oceans, rivers, lakes, pools and dams also make an integral part of the tripartite orderliness of Ndau existentialism. Muyambo and Maposa (2014) lament that,

the Ndau link water bodies with the concept of *kuyera* (sacredness) and the people should approach them with a sense of awe and unquestioned homage.

Water does not only meet the equilibrium of gaseous water molecules in the atmosphere for rain making but is also a source of fish; a protein-rich aquatic life. For dietary specification and requirements, the Ndau do fishing in the vast water bodies dotted all over the geographical boundaries of their territory, namely Save, Musirizwi, Nyagadza, Tanganda, and Changazi rivers. However, as a remedy to *mbau*, fishers overfishing using *mambure* (nets), a religious punishment would befall them, say, through a mysterious catch of an army of frogs or snakes or tortoises. Only a catch enough for family consumption and a bit of a surplus for sale to meet other basic needs would be allowed by the spirits. To substantiate this claim, Taringa (2010), explains that, —the water bodies/wetlands are sacred because they are the abode of animals associated with spirits. Apart from the divine wrath, greedy fishers, if caught by the *mapurisa amambo*, pay expiation tokens like a *m^oombe nemwana wayo* (a cow and its calf) or face social banishment to *umbwa* community (a concept to be explored below). It is against this backdrop that the article values and venerates the role played by water bodies by accommodating the divinities and supplementing the food needs of the people.

Closely related to the issue of wild fruits bestowed by nature to the Ndau people is *bvipfa* (an underground tuber). It has some broad leaves but does not grow more than 30 centimetres in height. The tuber is cream in colour, watery and very sweet. This tuber is usually found in mountains.

Mostly, it serves as food for cattle herders. The mystery around this plant is that it is usually harvested by digging, but not using any iron-made tool. It is believed that when iron-made tools such as a machete, digging bar or hoe are used, it mysteriously disappears or turns into a stone. The awe about the *bvipfa* turning into something else is based on the belief that the rust associated with any iron-made tool would upset the gods of fertility. However, such a taboo is very important in the sense that the use of a digging stick is an arduous process resulting in few tubers being harvested at a time. By so doing, a portion would have been saved and conserved for future utilisation, thereby ensuring the presence of food all the time for a people. The study observes that this religious taboo functions as a measure to curb the notion of *mbau* among the Ndaou herd boys, because it prohibits the extraction of more than necessary at any given time.

Another mode of guaranteeing the availability of food to the Ndaou people is the concept of *nhiya* (underground storage). *Nhiya* is a pit dug, grooved laterally, and traditionally plastered using cow dung. On top of the cow dung plastering, some ashes are sprinkled as a traditional insecticide. It is used to preserve farm produce such as *makebe* (watermelons), *madima* (sweet potatoes) and *mashamba* (sour watermelons) for future utilisation during their off-season. After the placing of these products in, it is covered with some small pieces of wood and mud to make sure that all air spaces are closed. However, for the sake of aeration, a breather is left strategically, big enough for the purpose but small enough to avoid any rain water from leaking in. The construction of *hiya* is done strictly by *chambere dzaguma ura* (very old women whose menstruating cycles have ceased) and *ndombi dzechidoko dzisati dange* (young girls who are not yet menstruating and are sexually inactive). The research has established that only these people are allowed to partake in such an exercise for some religious reasons. It has been noted that the Ndaou religiously believe that these old and spent women and tender girls are clean before the divinities and ancestors since they are said to be watching over the stored food stuffs to avoid any decay or any malicious activity meant to poison or steal. Despite the centrality of religion in this method of preservation, the Ndaou prove to be well-versed in resources recycling and sustainable utilisation of the environment, thereby augmenting the idea of ecological justice.

Closely linked to the notion of resource recycling is the making of *mufushwa* (boiled and dried or merely dried vegetables such as rape, *mutikiti* (leaves of a pumpkin plant), *munyemba* (leaves of runner-bean), *gugu* (black jack), *chowa chakaomeswa*, (mushroom), *bangarara*, and *linda* (a runner plant with thorny fruits, but only the leaves are taken as food) mostly eaten around Madhuku area under Chief Musikavanhu. The article notes that these make a delicious option for relish during some spells of drought and famine. To enrich the nutritional value of the aforesaid, the Ndaou roast the dried seeds of *makebe*, *matikiti* (pumpkins), and *matanga* (squash), grind and boil them to make a thick porridge almost similar to peanut butter called *mata*. *Mata* can be added to any type of *mufushwa* or served separately as a relish seasoned with salt. The study also observed that these people preserve some wild fruits like *makwakwa* (a round yellow fruit with small sweet seeds). Just like in the pre-colonial community, women are responsible for fruit gathering also taking part in the preservation duties to ensure that their children are well-fed all year round. It was established that they dry the fruit in the sun, and then remove the flesh coating from the seeds through *kutswamuduri* (pounding). The flesh coating is further dried and ground into a powder called *hakwa*. The *hakwa* is even sweeter than the fresh fruit, which makes it delicious especially for young children when the elderly are busy working in the fields. The ability to recycle and preserve these divine provisions glues the Ndaou to their religious practices and beliefs, thereby inculcating in them that the tripartite co-existence of the living dead, the living and the environment are a complete unity.

Mbiti (1969), noted that —Africans are notoriously religious, and by extension, implied the Ndaou. To that effect, they harness their religious and ethical norms, values and standards to safeguard their food security for the well-being of the community. Within the circumstances of religiosity and ethos, the Ndaou denoted, profaned and labelled one certain mountain *Umbwa*. The mountain and its surrounding areas have since been used to settle some social misfits who would have breached the *zviyerara* (religious and ethical restrictions/taboo) as a punitive measure. These social outcasts would be guilty of *makunakuna* (incest), *uroyi* (witchcraft), *kuhura* (prostitution), and *umhondi* (murder), leading to their banishment from the community to curb some divine atonement from the Musikavanhu (God). Generally speaking, the area of *Umbwa* is infested with morally repugnant people. Therefore, the name of the area,

Umbwa, is a term derived from the native noun *imbwa* (dog) depicting bad behaviour likened to that of a female dog, a bitch.

To meet all the vitality of a balanced diet, the Ndaу territory is blessed with the prevalence of *munyuwebare* (natural salt) deposits dotted around Masimbe and Mutema, along the Save Valley. The people from these two communities make sure that the whole village is fed with salt through barter trade for other commodities. This type of salt is cheaply available to both the rich and the poor. The Ndaу women are the experts in the extraction of this salt. Usually, they dig and collect salty samples of soil found around the deposits referred to as *zvurumu*. The soil is mixed with water to produce a suspension from which the salty water is obtained through the process of infiltration. Through evaporation, crystallisation of the salt is achieved. The salt is brown in colour and is rich in other minerals needed by the human body. It is also used in traditional rituals such as *kufumura mabvuri* (cleansing evil spirits). To this end, the study appropriates the naturalistic providence of the ecosystems to augment their life and religious artefacts.

A TRAGEDY: AIR 'MARRIES' CHRISTIANITY

Villagisation through modernity and the Christianisation of Africa have seen the uniqueness of the ecological balances within the Ndaу community dwindling with each day that passes. Much of the Chipinge enclosure was imperialistically stratified by American patronisation. To that effect, the then American Board of Foreign Missions, now United Church of Christ in Zimbabwe (UCCZ) established major mission stations at Mount Selinda and Chikore in 1893 and 1895, respectively. The establishments saw the profaning of sacred places and objects among the Ndaу. For instance, Muyambo and Maposa (2013) argue that:

the Ndaу were told to observe the social don'ts like drinking beer, polygamy, smoking, consulting *na'ngas* (traditional healers) and venerating *vadzimu* (ancestors).

Mutumukuru (a sacred big tree) in the Chikore area was struck by lightning; a mystery believed to be a punishment from the African gods in respect of the intrusion of western religion, culture and practices. To some measure, the tragedy was followed by years of drought, thereby negatively affecting the food security of the Ndaу people.

The coming of Christianity also welcomed cash crops like cotton and sugarcane in the Sabi Valley, and tea, coffee, macadamia nuts and sunflower, at the expense of staple food crops. The new dawn did not make it easy for the Ndaу people to be well nourished again. In addition, cash crops heightened the rate of industrialisation with emission of toxic gases into the atmosphere, causing global warming. The advent of global warming instigated some sporadic and cyclonic rainfalls like the 2000 *Cyclone El Nino* which drastically resulted in floods. To this end, the topsoil containing the allimportant fertility was swept away. Droughts have proved to be the norm of the climate to this day though traditional technologies of preserving food stuffs still have a hand in mitigating the catastrophe of hunger among the Ndaу. Coupled with the effects of global warming, religious breaches also saw the drying up of vital natural wells and pools. Overpowered by emotions, the locals of Manzvire Village under Chief Musikavanhu lamented the drying up of *zvekwa Tombe* (natural wells found in Tombe Mountain). Muyambo and Maposa (*ibid.*) concur with this observation as they argue that the Chisurudza Pool in the same village dried up following the artificial fencing of the sacred source of water.

The establishment of white Christian-owned farms in the highlands of Chipinge District led the the forceful removals of the natives down into the Sabi (Save) Valley, resulting in the overpopulation of area . Resultantly, the over-population brought with it the construction of *maeka* (portions of irrigated lands) in Mutema and Masimbe areas in a bid to ease the high demand for agricultural land. However, the *maeka* project neutralised the natural deposits of *bare* salt through the application of lime. As evidence of disapproval of the modern agricultural mode of operations, workers in the companies responsible for *maeka* construction witnessed a multifarious of mysterious obstacles like being chased by too-long snakes or attacked by swarms of bees. In line with this, Maposa and Mhaka (2013) put it that no major project is allowed to take place without full authorisation by the traditional leader of the area to curtail the risk of provoking the territorial spirits. The study was also informed by the local people that the use of chemical sprays and artificial fertilizers damaged other components of the environment like certain insects which would be consumed during some hard times of drought. The fertilizers also nitrified the water bodies only to destroy aquatic life and led to the disappearance of *njuzu* (mermaid spirits) responsible for safeguarding the natural resources.

The mushrooming of African-initiated churches like *Masowe Echishanu*, *Masowe Enyenyedzi* and pentecostal churches has deeply eroded the pride of the Ndaу people in their environment through massive deforestation. The *masowe* churches randomly clear the forest to erect their religious shrines. They hold services throughout the night, during which they use firewood for lighting and warmth. The research noted with great dismay that these activities have greatly robbed the locals of their sources of food in the form of wild fruits and tubers, and the sacred trees which play an integral aspect in their religion. In complement, pentecostal churches alter the face of the environment as they construct huge artificial church buildings. These spiritual churches have gone too far in breaching the sacred places, objects and pools, and further disfranchising the native religious beliefs and practices generally kept for the well-being of the Ndaу. They heavily harvest the firewood for their annual conferences like ZAOGA FIF and AFM Easter conferences and the popular Johanne Marange annual conference known as *Gungano* (gathering) normally held at Tanganda Township.

CONCLUSION

The study has noted that indigenous religions among the Ndaу bear the most powerful and instrumental significance in shaping and road mapping the route to the Ndaу pleasure and prosperity. Thus, the interconnectedness of the departed forefathers, the ecosystem and the living define their peoplehood, livelihood and worldview. According to the article, a people is when religion promotes their livelihood. In this matter, the livelihood is entrenched in the religious providence guaranteed by the timeless veneration and strict observance of religious restrictions, meant to avoid ecological injustices. As noted by Maposa and Mhaka (*ibid.*), the Ndaу —people depend on flora and fauna in their environment for economic, artistic, medical and religious practice and survival. Against such a backdrop, environmental equilibrium is the vitality to the ubiquitous prevalence of food among the Ndaу; not just food, but enough food, and nutritionally-laden food; ideal for upbringing healthy Ndaу people.

It is sad to note that the interface between AIRs and Christianity has a lot bad to offer to the people in south-east Zimbabwe. For example, the naturalistic environment for abundant food production to meet the demand of the Ndaу has been negated.

In as much as the study has observed that Christianity is a menace regarding the traditional way of living, traditional leaders are encouraged to revert and remain focused on the religious nitty gritty of the indigenous religion for the mitigation of these environmental catastrophes. It must be noted that adhering to one's own religious and cultural dictates, yields good as depicted in a song by the prolific musician Oliver Mutukudzi (1999), *Pembedza rurimi rwako, chimiro nedzinza rako, pwere dzigotevera* (Be proud of your language, structure and clan so that the young ones can follow suit). The musician goes on to remind fellow Africans about their traditional vegetables, which have since faced extinction due to climate change as he says, "Nyevhe yedu iya yakaendepiko?" (Where will we get our now-extinct traditional relishes?).

The problem of hunger is fast growing in the Ndaу society due to the damage to the ecosystem. In an attempt to circumvent this, the Ndaу people now have donor syndrome and heavily rely on Western Christian donors. It is, therefore, worth noting that the donor strategy is being instrumental in manipulating the locals and destroy their self-reliance motives, thereby putting a seal on the supremacy of religious acculturation. Zvarevashe (1978) reviles the wave of modernity for creating a new *gonawapotera* (a mysterious pool where the sons and daughters of the Mhazi could disappear forever); the urban settlement swallowing all the young and energetic youth who were formerly valued as the task force for the agrarian economy of the native Ndaу people. The researcher noted that the young no longer value or cherish the traditions observed in farming, especially in the countryside due to the effects of modernity.

Nevertheless, the Ndaу people are encouraged to consider the following remedies to the already evident threat to their food security:

- The Ndaу should stick to their indigenous knowledge systems in full interplay with the AIR to restore resources through the recycling ; that is, all the traditional vegetables and wild fruits should be preserved, the same way it was done in the past.
- The indigenous religious ceremonies involving ancestor veneration and observance of the taboos ought to be upheld for the good of the people. The ceremonies and rituals include the consultation of the

territorial ancestors (*mhondoro*), the first fruit festival, rain-making ceremony, bringing back ceremony for the traditional leaders and rain-makers (*makoto*), *kurova guwa remadzishe*). Such observance would invoke the divinities to feel and cherish their unquestioned vitality in the fertility productivity of the land. Hence adequate rains, protection of the farm products from diseases, pests, insects and thieves or any bad premonition by the enemies of the community will be guaranteed.

- Due to the fact that global villagisation is wheeled by technological advancements, acculturation and religious pluralism are enviable; a warm welcome to these is mandatory, just for the sake of a hybrid society with the ability to feed its people. So, the Ndaou people need to blend their farming techniques with those from the west and the east such as the green revolution to improve the yields and sustainability of the environment.

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