

The War of the Trees – analysing the rise and fall of an indigenous mass greening movement amongst the Shona in Southern Zimbabwe using Actor Network Theory (ANT).¹

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Abstract: The reforestation initiative under the auspices of Zirrcon (Zimbabwean Institute for Religious Research and Ecological Conservation) in the Masvingo province of Zimbabwe during the eighties, nineties and early 2000, has been acclaimed by some leading scholars in the field as one of the largest movements for environmental reform in Southern Africa and one of the most innovative and successful environmental initiatives of its kind in the so-called “Third World”. The tree planting rituals were innovations based on a eucharist liturgy in African Independent Churches and rain making rituals in Shona Traditional Religion. Actor Network Theory is a tool for social analysis associated with the French scholar Bruno Latour and is based on a definition of agency that includes the entire panoply of forces impinging on a situation. An ANT analysis reveals that the Zirrcon rituals were the result of the assembly of a multiplicity of actors, “entities” or “objects”, that came together from a variety of communities that brought with them a multiplicity of ideas, things, resources, interests, intentions, needs, motivations and expectations, all of which worked together in an “imbroglio” of relationships to bring about the “War of the Trees” with its consequences – both intended and unintended. The Zirrcon project with its rituals were in many ways a classically instructive example of the ecology of indigenous traditions and their potential to assemble a notion of democracy that has become highly desirable in some quarters in the west. It is also instructive of how profoundly western intervention impacts on indigenous movements both for better and worse.

Introduction

ZIRRCO (The Zimbabwean Institute for Religious Research and Ecological Conservation) was the brainchild of Prof Inus Daneel and was inaugurated in 1984 in the Masvingo province of Southern Zimbabwe. It consisted of two main branches – the Association of Zimbabwean Traditional Ecologists (AZTREC) and the Association of African Earthkeeping Churches (AAEC). These two

¹ This paper comes out of a case study associated with an international interdisciplinary research project on ritual and democracy entitled “Reassembling Democracy, ritual as cultural resource (REDO)”, funded by the Norwegian government.

associations represented two of the biggest spiritual movements in Zimbabwe – African Traditional Religion and African Independent Churches.² The AAEC claims a membership of 180 Zionist type churches which in turn have a membership of some two million people.³ ZIRRCO was responsible for the planting of twelve to fifteen million trees in several thousand woodlots. Besides a broad range of conservation activities there were a host of other projects that took place under its auspices, including cloth manufacturing, bakeries, sun flower oil, fruit and production. In its heyday it was riding the tide of global interest in green issues, especially in the Two-Thirds World, and was working with an annual budget that enabled the employment of between 70 and 80 people as well as run a small fleet of vehicles as well as own a small block of offices. It was described by such environmental luminaries as Larry Rasmussen, Mary Ellen Tucker, and John Grim as one of the most innovative indigenous green movements in the Two-Thirds World.⁴ Thus if success is to be measured in purely quantitative terms – that is numbers of people involved, trees planted, woodlots established, people employed, projects initiated, etc. then the Zirrcoco project must surely be described as successful, at least for a period of some twenty years.

In the first part of this essay will involve a brief description of the movement mainly using the material written by its founder Marthinus Daneel.⁵ In the second part of the essay I will attempt a critical analysis by using some ideas from Actor Network Theory (ANT).

“The War of the Trees” – mobilizing an indigenous grass roots movement

The greening initiative in southern Zimbabwe amongst the Karanga ethnic group⁶ of Shona speaking people known as the War of the Trees was a

² I have consciously used the term “spiritual movements” instead of “religions” because of the contested understandings of religion as a domain separate from African culture. Spirituality on the other hand is to do with how people draw on realities that transcend, but inter-penetrate, their material worlds, in order to create, sustain, and equip themselves with resources that enable them to flourish in all dimensions of life. However since the invention by Geoffrey Parrinder of the term “African Traditional Religion” it has become impossible not to use it when discussing the phenomenon of African religion.

³ This figure is quoted by my colleague Sophi Chirongoma in “Karanga-Shona Rural Women’s Agency for Dressing Mother Earth, JTSA March 2012

⁴ Daneel M.L. “Zimbabwean Earthkeepers – when Green Warriors enter the valley of Shadows” in *Nature, Science, and Religion – intersections shaping society and the environment*, Catherine Tucker (ed), SAR Press, Santa Fe, 2012, p191-211, p.193.

⁵ The fact that most of the material documenting this project is written by its founder cannot but raise questions around the issue of bias. However although Daneel is first and foremost a theologian he also has some recognition as an ethnographer.

⁶ “The relationship between the Karanga and the Shona is as follows: the Shona are the most dominant indigenous tribe in Zimbabwe representing over 80% of the country’s population; when one refers to the Shona, they will therefore be referring to a conglomerate of various sub-groups/language groups, which includes the Karanga, Korekore, Manyika, Ndau, and the Zezuru; they share a lot in common in terms of

movement that mobilized the grassroots of a large section of the Zimbabwean peasant population by harnessing the cosmologies, myths, rituals and histories, of two of its largest religious movements, working with the indigenous leadership of these movements, providing a sound organizational infrastructure to ensure its proper working, and securing a strong funding base.

There were two main components in the War of the Trees – African Traditional Religion (ATR) and African Independent Churches (AIC). These religions profoundly shape the structures of meaning for a large section of the population of Zimbabwe.⁷ While 60 to 70% of the population of Zimbabwe adhere to the Christian faith its majority continues to be influenced by African Traditional Religion, the historically inherited religion of all Zimbabweans, in some way. African Independent Churches, in turn, constitute a large section of the Christian population. It has been argued that the AIC's have grown substantially since the collapse of the Zimbabwean economy because people are turning to forms of faith that meet both spiritual and material needs such as Pentecostalism and African Independent Churches.⁸ On the side of ATR the tree planting rituals were crafted in such a way that gave them maximum plausibility within a belief system that was “infused with sacred meanings, in which all things are connected and interdependent”.⁹

All the forces within the seamless continuum that is the life-world of the peasant communities of rural southern Zimbabwe were harnessed – from the trees that were being planted in sacred soil, to the spirit mediums who led the

culture and language but due to the geographical divisions, their dialects are not uniform; there are minor regional variations even in terms of how they practice some cultural traditions. The Karanga people are located in Masvingo, the South Eastern province of the country.” (Chirongoma, personal correspondence, 25/02/2015)

⁷ Marcel Manley's masters thesis “Soil and Blood: Shona Traditional Religion in late 20th century Zimbabwe” , indicates that in spite of the influences of modernity an indigenous worldview continues to be a powerful, if paradoxical, influence throughout the social spectrum, including the middle class of urban Zimbabwe. Similarly Mtata's (as yet unpublished) PhD research indicates that the the Mwari cult of the Matopos continues to thrive with its emphasis on rainmaking rituals mainly for rural people but is also regularly visited by city dwellers who bring supplications for individual, family or communal needs. Active shrines also exist in many other places in Zimbabwe and are frequented by politicians throughout the political spectrum requesting success in their political careers.

⁸ Machoko C.G. “African Initiated Churches and Party Politics: Zimbabwean Experience”, *The International Journal of African Catholicism*, Winter 2013. Volume 4, Number 1

⁹ Tucker C. “Syncretism and Conservation – examining indigenous beliefs and natural resource management in Honduras”, in *Nature, Science, and Religion – intersections shaping society and the environment*, Catherine Tucker (ed), SAR Press, Santa Fe, 2012, p107-128, p110.

tree planting ceremonies and who communicated with the ancestral guardians of the land in order to get their approval, to the headmen and chiefs who consulted the spirit mediums, to the God Mwari who spoke through the oracle in the Matonjeni shrine of the Matopos, to the provision of historical continuity with the age old metanarrative of Chimurenga or liberation struggle that provided the ideological motivation for the War of the Trees.¹⁰ The rituals were therefore crafted in a way that embedded them in an entire system that would give them maximum credibility and legitimation. The natural resources of air, water, land, trees, and animals¹¹ could not be separated from the mystical powers of the supernatural spirit world. This meant that the work of the spirit mediums or *masvikiro* were given a central role in the tree planting ceremonies or *mafukidzanyika*.

If clothing the earth was the key metaphor in AZTREC and the spirit mediums were the main agents, healing was the key theme amongst the AAEC and the prophets were the main agents. The independent churches see themselves as having moved away from the need for mediation of the ancestors (via the spirit mediums) to the mediation of the Holy Spirit, via the prophets. While the holistic worldview substantially remains there seems to be a greater awareness of the need for deliverance from evil and sin. The new Christian identity means a transformation of traditional beliefs and social structures and customs. The establishment of healing colonies in the form of cities modelled on the biblical city of Zion meant that healing is localized in a specific place where people could gather over a period of time and receive individual ministrations. Healers take into account traditional causes of illness in terms of wizardry, vengeful *ngozi* spirits seeking retribution, displeased ancestral spirits, and other demonic spirits. “Once diagnosed, the afflicting power would be exorcised or neutralized through a host of ritual ceremonies including water purification, tying with holy cords, laying of hands, burning of holy papers and proding with holy staves – all symbolically illustrating the protective and liberating powers of God.” (Daneel, 1999:24) While the cause of illness is profoundly spiritual the effect is physical and material. Disease whose source is in the spiritual realm has effects inclusive of all dimensions of the physical – the individual, familial, economic, social, political, and climatic. Healing involved not only the body but all the other activities which involved the body. Thus the healing colonies

¹⁰ Manley, cites the African philosopher Kwame Appiah as saying that the traditional world “celebrates continuity”. She goes further to say that the “‘sacred’ or religious character of Shona religion (as articulated in traditional politics and economics, no less than symbol and ritual) hinges on continuity. It is celebrated in nature, culture and individual human lives alike: the cycle of seasons, sowing and harvesting, the succession of chiefs, kinship and social harmony, the phases of life from birth to marriage, through adulthood to old age and death.” (Manley, p 44,45)

¹¹ These resources are continually named in the frequent gatherings of AZTREC and the AAEC where spirit mediums, chiefs, AIC bishops, and sometimes politicians came together to discuss the progress of the war of the trees.

incorporated a wide range of community development programmes, including vocational training, farming, and small-scale industry.

The tree planting rituals themselves were innovations of two kinds based on the rain making rituals on the traditional side and a green eucharist on the Christian side.

“Afforestation at the behest of guardian ancestors”

True to the traditional African worldview the wellbeing of society is considered to require the participation of all its members, both the living and the living dead. In this case the performance of the living earthkeepers is subject to either the mystical approval or the retaliation of the guardian ancestors of the land, depending on the living role-players dedication and consistency in observing the generally accepted ecological norms.¹²

The tree planting ceremonies in the rural areas were ritual events modelled on the traditional *mukwerere* rain rituals. The AZTREC name for these rituals, *mafukidzanyika*, literally meant “earth-clothing”. They took place at the same stage of the seasonal cycle every year, the rainy season, in order for the seedlings to survive. The tribal elders expected villagers to contribute finger millet or sorghum for beer brewing and elderly women past child bearing age from the lineage of the ruling chief or headman are responsible for brewing the beer. The chief or elders contribute one or more animals to be sacrificed. (Daneel 1998:126) These ceremonies were usually attended not only by local people but also by AZTREC leaders from other parts of the country as well as government and forestry officials. This meant that the ritual ambit of the ceremony has expanded from the regional tribal level to a provincial multi-tribal and even national level which meant the cooperation of regional spirit hierarchies. However the local guardian spirits would be responsible for the watering and caring of the woodlots. While traditional rain making ceremonies frequently have a political dimension to them in that they were performed with a view to gaining local control over natural resources the *mafukidzanyika* ceremonies transcended, even if temporarily, the tribal conflict manifested in the proliferation of immigrant *mukwerere* rituals and thus promoted multi-tribal unity.

The tree planting ceremonies consisted of the presentation of beer and snuff alongside the seedlings and the ritual addressing of the guardian ancestors of the land by spirit mediums. While addressing the ancestors the spirit mediums pour beer from a calabash onto the seedlings and snuff-horns are past around symbolising communication with the spirit world. A typical speech to the

¹² Daneel M.L (1998) *African Earthkeepers vol 1 Interfaith Mission in earth-care*, Unisa, Pretoria, p125.

ancestors would involve a reminder to them that they were identified with the land, that there was a symbiotic relationship between the ancestors, the land, and the people who tilled the land, and that this relationship was ancient and went back to the Creator, *Musikavanhu*.¹³ An appeal for rain would then be made as well as strength to undertake the task of afforestation. There might also be a call to very specific ancestors who are called by name as well as unknown ancestors that might be listening and offended if not addressed. There might also be an appeal to the traditional national lion spirits or *mhondoro*, who were particularly powerful since they were possessed by the spirit of departed chiefs. The trees themselves might also be addressed and thanked for providing shade, fuel, fruit, and clean air.

The Green Eucharist

The eco-liturgical eucharist ceremony is a unique innovation of the AAEC churches. The ceremonies are held once a year during the rainy season. The ceremony begins with digging holes in the vicinity of the AIC headquarters or a local congregation. The woodlot is usually fenced and known as “the Lord’s acre”. The people are welcomed and acknowledgement is made of the oneness of all of God’s creation, including the human and non-human. While the communion table is being prepared singing and dancing in praise of Mwari the Earthkeeper is made and the green warriors are encouraged to be vigilant. There is public confession of environmental sins. The trees are presented as compensation for the vengeful *ngozi* spirit who has been provoked by wanton tree felling. Thus appeasement is made between humans and the environment and compassion expressed for the badly abused earth. The communicants each pick up a seedling and move to the communion table where they partake of the sacrament. The homily is given by one of the bishops in poetic form in which the trees are addressed as “brother” and “sister” and praised for what they do for human beings. Words are also given to the trees themselves to speak to the communicants and assure them of their friendship and care.¹⁴ Christ is the one

¹³ This sometimes goes as far as depicting an ontological relationship between the ancestors and the land. At a ceremony in 1988 Vazazira, at one time the leading spirit medium of AZTREC, said the following words in her address to the ancestors: “... the ancestor are the land, the ancestors are the water, the ancestors are the *sadza* (stiff porridge) we eat, and the ancestors are the clothes we wear ... without the ancestors we would be without water, without food, without clothes” (Daneel, 1998:131) This identification of the deity with the ancestors, the people, and the land, reinforces the principle of ontological continuity between all beings, the so-called African ethic of *ubuntu* and Bolaji Odowu’s notion of “diffused monotheism”, defined by Odowu as “a monotheism in which there exist other powers which derive from Deity such being and authority that they can be treated, for practical purposes, almost as ends in themselves”. (Idowu B. ,1962, *Olodumare – God in Yoruba Belief*, Longmans, London , p202)

¹⁴

I the tree ... I am your friend
 I know you want wood for fire,
 To cook your food
 To warm yourself against cold
 Use my branches

who holds the whole creation together (Col 1:17) and who extends salvation to the entire non-human as well as human world. Holy water is sprinkled on the plants and the soil in order to bless them and acts as a foretaste of the rain that will come.¹⁵ The seedlings are then planted with the following words

You, tree, my brother ... my sister
 Today I plant you in this soil.
 I shall give water for your growth.
 Have good roots
 To keep the soil from eroding.
 Have many leaves and branches
 So that we can breathe fresh air
 Sit in your shade,
 And find firewood.¹⁶

The sacraments that represent the broken body and shed blood of Christ takes on environmental significance with the close identification of Christ's body with the broken and abused earth. By partaking of the bread and wine the communicants commit themselves to the responsibility of repairing the cosmic body of Christ (the earth) to which we all belong. The identification of Christ's body with the abused and barren soil is in line with the traditional understanding of the guardian ancestors belonging to the soil.

They are the soil! Their ecological directives issue from the soil, as expressed in the literal saying, *Ivhu yataura* (literally "the soil has spoken"). In a sense Christ in this context is both guardian and the soil itself. New conceptions of Christ's lordship and his salvation of all creation can develop from this essentially African expression of his pervading presence in the cosmos. (Daneel:1999:87)

That I do not need
 You can have.

¹⁵

You soil ...
 I bless you in the name of Christ
 For you to make the trees grow
 And to protect them.
 Provide the trees with sufficient food
 For proper growth.
 Love the trees and keep their roots
 For they are our friends.

¹⁶ Daneel M.L. (1999) *African Earthkeepers vol 2 – Environmental Mission and liberation in Christian perspective*, Unisa, Pretoria. P81.

The ZIRRCOON rituals – an analysis using some ideas from Actor Network Theory (ANT) ¹⁷

In the foregoing analysis I will attempt to use some ideas from Actor Network Theory (ANT). There are many things about ANT that make it an appropriate framework for analysing the War of the Trees. These include:

- The assembling of a multiplicity of actors
- The importance of the role of non-human as well as human actors
- The equality of importance of the agentive power of all the actors
- The valorising of the relationship between actors rather than the actors themselves
- The transformative power of the relationships between the actors – agents derive power in the relationships that they have rather than in their individual capacity
- The notion that the agency of actors is not so much a matter of individual intentionality as the capacity to engender a relational dynamic
- The continuous generation of hybrids as a result of the transforming power of the relationships between actors¹⁸

In ANTian terms the Zirrcon phenomenon involved the assembling of a multiplicity of players from the natural and social worlds, both human and not human, present and not present, seen and not seen, material and semiotic, transforming themselves and the environment around them through their interactions with each other. The fact that the project was known as the “War of the Trees” denotes the centrality of the trees as one of the main actors in the assembly and the agentive power of the non-human world. But such power was not inherent in the trees themselves but in the relationship between the trees and the community of entities of which it was a part – the soil, the air, and the animals, and their human and their more-than-human¹⁹ (as in humans that had become ancestral spirits) friends, guardians, and benefactors with whom they interacted and whom they transformed. Present also in the assembly were the spirit mediums and guardian ancestors, bread and wine transformed into the

¹⁷ See Latour B. (2007) *Reassembling the Social – an Introduction to Actor Network Theory*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, for an initial overview of the theory and Farzana Dudhwala “What is Actor Network Theory” www.academia.edu for a brief summary of the theory.

¹⁸ Hybridity in ANT is to do with the engendering of new entities through the interaction that takes place in the relationship between entities

¹⁹ The term “more-than-human” refers to the same entities to those described in ANT as “non-human”. In this case it is a more appropriate term than “non-human” when referring to ancestors, for example, who are clearly human, albeit “translated” into the spirit world. It is arguably also more appropriate in the sense that it allows one to conceive better the possibility of the intentionality of non-human entities such as (famously in the case of one of Ingold’s informants) rocks. (See Ingold *Being Alive – essays in Movement, Knowledge, and Description*, New York, Routledge, 2011)

body and blood of Christ by virtue of their relationship with the eucharist, representatives of the community of the people whose lives were intimately connected to the trees, and who would conduct the tree planting. Absent from the actual performances but very much present in terms of its influence was the international community of observers and funders that provided the financial means for the War of the Trees.

Identifying the actors

The actors that I will discuss are: the “founder” Marthinus (“Inus”) Daneel, the community of indigenous people in rural Masvingo province with its attendant spiritual network of ancestors, spirits, soil, trees, and animals, and the international community of funders and onlookers. Each one of these actors brought a range of resources, expectations, interests, and agendas, the mixture of which brought about the extraordinary phenomenon which was the birth, rise, and fall, of the War of the Trees.

Inus Daneel, a.k.a “Bishop Moses”

Although ANT strongly advocates a non-hierarchical, “flat” ontology which puts all actors and entities on an even plane it nevertheless, thankfully, allows for “macro” actors and “micro” actors. My understanding of macro actors is that they are able to make so many associations within the network that their roles become ubiquitous. They are there as a matter of fact. Their ideas (if they are human) are considered normative throughout the entire network and are therefore acted on rather than scrutinized. This rather nicely sums up Daneel’s role in the War of the Trees. His presence was so ubiquitous, his associations throughout the network so extensive, his ideas so normative and his style of leadership so empathetic with the condition of the indigenous peasant communities that he worked with, that he had little need to adopt a posture that was anything but that of simply being “part of the furniture”. The following description of the role of Daneel by one of the chiefs involved is telling.

Professor Daneel is the nerve centre of the programme. In fact, if we could look at him from an African perspective, we would consider him to be a spirit medium, *svikiro*, inspired from above. We are all left wondering how he managed to bring chiefs and bishops to work together for the environment – despite the fundamental inherent differences between the two religious groups. In fact, from what he has achieved, one is tempted to think that he is an inspired prophet. In fact, there are those among us chiefs who think that he is at times possessed by his own ancestral spirits. We think this because the way in which he works sometimes makes us wonder what his source of inspiration is. At the end

of the day we conclude that he is inspired by his own ancestral spirits who told him that he should work hand in hand with African communities and live happily among African people. He was very receptive to this advice and is assisting us to implement our environmental projects. As you will appreciate, those whites who did not realise this need for mutual respect and love have left the country. And those who are not inspired by Professor Daneel's life experiences do not spend a single day with us.²⁰

Daneel's centrality in the movement is not, of course, without its problems. The involvement of whites in liberation movements in general in postcolonial Africa is never without controversy as they are seen as oppressors. In this particular case study, as has already been suggested, the central role of a white Afrikaner male in a country where the white settler community was especially viewed with profound suspicion because of its attempt to establish its political hegemony through the barrel of a gun will inevitably invite criticism. The question of the movement's indigenous authenticity may also be raised because of his involvement. However this raises the issue of indigeneity which is also highly contested.²¹ One of the severest critics of white male involvement in researching Black African initiatives is Tinyiko Sam Maluleke. In an essay which critically interrogates a number of interventions made by white scholars into African initiatives he makes the following remarkable statement concerning Inus Daneel.

Except for Inus Daneel, few grassroots theologians have genuinely fallen in love with the researched. As Daneel has demonstrated with his lifelong commitment to Zimbabwean AICs, our research can ultimately only be truly empowering to the community if we make lifelong commitment to being perpetual students with those communities.²²

The indigenous community and its spiritual network

Snakes, lions, people, *njuzu*, cattle and everything on earth are from God. We cannot judge who is nearer God ... God never said who is the greatest

²⁰ Interview with chief Chivi recorded in a chapter entitled "Muchakata and the war of the trees", in *Frontiers of African Christianity – essays in honour of Inus Daneel*, Unisa, 2003, p49-50.

²¹ See, for example, Teresia Teaiwa (2005) "Native Thoughts: A Pacific Studies Take on Cultural Studies and Diaspora" in *Indigenous Diasporas and Dislocations*, Graham Harvey (ed) p 16-33, Ashgate, Aldershot.

²² Maluleke T. "Interpreting the interpreters of AICs and other grassroots Christian communities in South Africa" in *Frontiers of African Christianity*, Cuthbertson G (ed), 173-209, p 202.

and the youngest on earth, nor who is closest to him. We are all creatures of God.²³

Karanga ontology is characterized by an interconnectedness of being throughout the entire human and non-human worlds. One cannot speak of the indigenous community as an actor in the rituals under discussion without speaking of the entire panoply of its spiritual constituents. These include the deity who is manifest in a multiplicity of ways with a multiplicity of names, the hierarchy of ancestral spirits, the plethora of other spirits, the chiefs and spirit mediums, the people, the soil, the trees and the animals. God's names include, amongst others, Nyadenga (owner of the sky), Musikavanhu (creator of people), Dzivaguru (Great Pool), and Mwari, which is the most commonly used and which has a distinctive female connotation. Referring to the Matonjeni cave where the oracle of Mwari resides Aschwanden asserts that the name literally means "to be in the jar". "In the same way as the uterus (jar) of the woman is a giver of life so God is .. in the jar of the woman (*muhari*) there is the amniotic fluid (pool) where the embryo (also called Mwari) lives."²⁴ But the person of the deity is intimately connected with the ancestors, the land, the people, and the entire creation in a kind of "diffused monotheism" (see footnote 15). The physical community consisting of chiefs, spirit mediums, people, soil, trees, and animals cannot and does not exist without the spiritual community and its hierarchy of beings. The absence of the sacred/profane divide and the religious character of Shona tradition is based on a continuity which is "celebrated in nature, culture and the individual human lives alike: the cycle of seasons, sowing and harvesting, the succession of chiefs, kinship and social harmony, the phases of life from birth to marriage, through adulthood to old age and death". (Manley, p44-45). But the continuity is by no means monochromatic and uniform. It is varied and complex. There are as many different kinds of spirits in the spiritual world as there are individuals in the physical community because they derive ontologically from this physical community. Such spirits, due to their intimate connection with the physical community, can be as troublesome as they are helpful. If the correct rituals (effectively the *rites de passage* for the dead) have not been performed at their departure into the spiritual world effecting their "home-bringing" (*kugadzira*) and giving them their proper place as *mudzimu* (ancestors) then, in terms of the hierarchical structure of the Shona cosmos, a rung in the ladder through metaphysical space has been skipped or

²³ Manley M. "Soil and Blood: Shona Traditional Religion in late 20th century Zimbabwe", unpublished Masters Thesis, pg 11. Manley's 1995 study will be by main source in this section. Her main interest was to interrogate the status of the traditional world view amongst the Shona and the extent to which it had been eroded, adapted and transformed by modernity. Her methodology was to conduct interviews with a wide range of informants, both urban and rural, through a questionnaire interrogating a range of issues, from views about God, to the extent to which ancestors are consulted, to views on the power of chiefs and spirit mediums. She then summarized a spectrum of samples of the respondents' views to show the various perspectives on the issues in question.

²⁴ Quoted in Manley p.28.

damaged and a potentially calamitous breach of the continuity of God's order has taken place. (See Manley p45) ²⁵

Manley gives a fascinating account of the connection between the authority of the chief and the soil which is worthy of emphasis as it is directly relevant to this discussion.

Chief means soil .. These people follow traditional ways. It doesn't matter how young or old he is, how educated or ignorant, the soil will help him to lead. (Manley informant p.70)

The cosmology described above applies to the traditionalists but not to the Indigenous Christians amongst whom there has been a distinctive shift in religious belief if not in world view. Ancestral veneration is not accepted amongst the AIC's (of the "Spirit" variety) although it might continue to be exercised in some form or other by individuals. The power of the ancestors is replaced by the power of the Holy Spirit; the influence of the *masvikiro* is replaced by the influence of the prophets; the authority of the chief is replaced by the authority of the bishop. The ritual that has been innovated in this scenario is an adaptation of the Eucharistic ritual and not the adaptation of the rainmaking ritual.

The international community of observers and funders

The War of the Trees took place at a time when the issue of global warming, climate change, and all the attendant problems around these were on the rise. Consciousness of the West's own culpability as well as the awareness that its

²⁵ This was graphically illustrated for me on two occasions during the course of my research in the Masvingo district. When Professor Daneel went to see the governor of the district to seek permission for me to gain access to the rural areas and speak with the spirit mediums and other members of the community that had been involved in the rituals he was greeted by the governor with an unusual intensity of aggression which deeply shocked Daneel. Without even the slightest courtesy usually so characteristic of Shona culture, especially to someone of the stature of Daneel, he accused him, as a member of the white community, of being responsible for the death of his father whose body had never been recovered and who therefore had not been buried correctly. The governor's father had died in the bush war, long since passed and in which Daneel had not taken part, but which clearly continued to deeply trouble this man. The incident was reflective of the deep schisms that continue to exist in Zimbabwean society between the races and the blight that was put on the entire nation by the decision of the white minority to go to war against the black nationalists and thus initiate the second *chimurenga* (war of liberation) in Zimbabwe's history. Needless to say I was refused permission to enter the area and had to consult with my informants at Daneel's home in Masvingo. The second occasion was when I met Vazazira, the erstwhile president of AZTREC and the leading spirit medium in the tree planting rituals since the passing of Lydia Chabata, the first spirit medium who was in charge of the tree planting operations. (Chabata was also a leading spirit medium in the bush war, working alongside the guerrilla's, communicating through trance with the ancestors who spoke to her about the movements of the enemy which she in turn passed on to the bush fighters). Vazazira began our meeting by invoking the ancestors and expressing her continuing perturbation at the fact that the departed spirits of so many of the bush fighters had still not been granted rest and who were therefore still troublesome to the people and the land.

promethean tendencies to dominate the environment rather than work with it placed it in a continuously compromised position and gave rise to a growing interest in alternative ways of relating with the environment.²⁶ Soon after its launch a series of conferences on religions of the world and ecology took place under the auspices of the Harvard University Center for the study of World Religions which resulted in a major publication on the subject edited by John Grim who himself visited Masvingo to witness what was happening in the War of the Trees.²⁷ Funding became available through the good offices of Inus Daneel and large amounts of money were made available for the project.²⁸ Between seventy and eighty full time workers were involved as well as numbers of vehicles and property. The project became a significant money spinner for the local economy and soon attracted the attention of the government who sought to exploit it. In the context of an economy that had all but collapsed the influx of significant amounts of foreign currency into the country, particularly into the poverty stricken rural areas, made the project vulnerable to exploitation both from within and without. The interests, and indeed livelihoods, of a whole range of people were now involved, running into the hundreds if not thousands, when considering the families of the full time employees. Competition for limited resources amongst interested parties locally added another particularly dangerous dimension.

In situations of affluence the presence of money becomes ubiquitous. Its translation into goods and retranslation back into cash a matter of continuous, if mysterious, course. In situations of poverty it takes on wholly new, totally absorbing, proportions. Nothing is negotiated without the consciousness of its immediate absence and the possibility of its pending presence. It becomes, as Marx, expounding Shakespeare and Goethe, said, “omnipotent” – “the object of eminent possession”, the “mediation of my existence”, “the visible divinity – the transformation of all human and natural properties into their contraries, the universal confounding and distorting of things – impossibilities are soldered together by it”, “the common whore”. But the following elaboration of the mediating influence of money is most apposite in the context of this discussion because it highlights its agentive power in the language and discourse of ANT. Money, says Marx, is “that which mediates my life for me and also mediates the

²⁶ I have been reflecting on this phenomenon on and off over the past ten years or so. See Balcomb A. *Journey into the African Sun – soundings in search of another way of being in the world*, Unisa, 2012.

²⁷ See Grim J.A. (Ed) (2007) *Indigenous Traditions and Ecology – the Interbeing of Cosmology and Community*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge Mass.

²⁸ At the point of writing this article I only have the figures for the year 2002. The total expenditure from 2 Jan 2002 to 27 Sept 2002 was 613,550 Euro. Of this 205,284 Euro is designated “personal salaries” and 83,852 Euro as “programme personnel” which I assume must also have amounted to some sort of income for employees. If these sorts of figures only approximately applied to the project’s lifespan then it is clear that it had become a multi-million dollar operation.

existence of other people for me ... For me it is the *other* person.” (www.marxists.org.power) In ANTian terms it carries massive potential to mediate and transform relations. And this it did in a profound way in the Masvingo province of Zimbabwe during the latter part of the War of the Trees. The fact that the rituals were being practised on a small scale before the interest of European donors was raised and the project adopted an international profile means that there was a point at which the introduction of a powerful external actor with all its resources profoundly transformed the dynamics of the project.²⁹ It was now an economic force to be reckoned with in the local, economically deprived community. Money had become a major actor in the network, the stakes had been drastically raised, and the War of the Trees was about to collapse.

Space does not allow for a description of the mechanics of the demise of Zirron.³⁰ However it seems clear that the intervention of the international community bringing large amounts of funding made it a crucial macro actor that had a profoundly material impact on the relationships throughout the network. The rituals were now being performed not just in front of an indigenous audience but on a world stage. The notion of “ritual performance” took on a whole new dimension.

Conclusion.

The mass greening movement amongst the Shona in Southern Zimbabwe known as the War of the Trees cannot be understood without taking into account the roles played by the entire panoply of actors in the field. The project, though it had small beginnings, ended up being enacted on a world stage. And the level of its vulnerability to collapse increased in direct proportion to the number and complexity of the actors in the field. Such cases are usually analysed from a purely ethical or purely economic point of view. If analysed from a sociological point of view in such a way that takes seriously the agency of all the actors in the field a different picture emerges. I have attempted to do this in a very perfunctory manner because space does not allow a more detailed analysis. Actor Network Theory is a revolutionary tool because it takes into account what is usually perceived as the inanimate environment where the other than human is completely overshadowed by the human. In ANT these entities, whether trees, soil, spirits, ancestors, money or audiences, are all beings that bring their influences to the field of activity and contribute to its flourishing. It

²⁹ I do not at the point of writing this essay have the details concerning the exact date of intervention by the international funders.

³⁰ For a fuller account of its demise see Daneel “Zimbabwe’s Earthkeepers: When Green Warriors enter the Valley of Shadows” in *Nature, Science, and Religion – Intersections shaping Society and the Environment*, Catherine Tucker (ed) School for Advanced Research Press, 2012, p170-191. Lest there be misunderstanding, and for the purposes of clarity in this paper it must also be said that it was the successor of Daneel as leader of the movement who was chiefly responsible for its collapse through misappropriation of funds.

asserts the impossibility of understanding such a thing as the War of the Trees in any way other than one that proposes the interconnectedness of all being. But such a story cannot either ignore the theological and tragic dimensions. Indeed the story of the War of the Trees is reminiscent of a Greek tragedy. The imminent flourishing of an entire community of beings came to an end because of the element of hamartia. But it also has a theological dimension. The slaughter of the innocents – of trees and soil – is a consequence of none other than the age old reality of sin.