Afro Asian Journal of Social Sciences
Volume 3, **No.** 3.2 **Quarter** II 2012
ISSN: 2229 – 5313

'Buried And Forgotten But Not Dead': Reflections On 'Ubuntu' In Environmental Conservation In Southeastern Zimbabwe

Munyaradzi Mawere
Associate Professor, Universidade Pedagogica, Mozambique

Abstract

The subject of ubuntu has taken a central stage in academic research on Africa in recent years. In Zimbabwe as in Africa in general, academics and researchers have tussled with various aspects of this subject, with most research emphasizing the contribution of ubuntu in business, education, healthy, philosophy and legal systems. Ramose (1999), Teffo (1995) and Shutte 2001, for example, explore the importance of ubuntu in African philosophy, especially in areas such as morality/ethics, epistemology, logic and metaphysics. Mbigi and Maree (1995), Goduka and Swadener (1999) and Prinsolo (1995) focus on the value of ubuntu in business, education and healthy fraternity respectively. Still other studies (Cornell ny; Sindane 1995) have exported the concept of ubuntu into legal systems and politics. Surprisingly, insignificant attention has been devoted to exploring the value of ubuntu in environmental conservation. This paper examines how, since time immemorial, ubuntu has been used to conserve the 'natural' environment. The piece marshals the concept of ubuntu and positions it against the southeastern Zimbabwe, in particular, Norumedzo and Mukanganwi landscapes. It argues for the revival of ubuntu to complement efforts by Science in conservation as a potential alternative to foster sustainable development and save the 'natural' environment from further deterioration by human action.

Keywords: Ubuntu, environment, conservation, southeastern Zimbabwe, Africa

Introduction

In Africa and beyond, there have been concentrated discussions [both oral and written] on the 'actual' causes of environmental problems we are facing today. In Zimbabwe, like in many African countries, scientist/researchers have established over-population, deforestation, veld fires, farm invasions and other anthropogenic activities as the causes of environmental degradation and other environmentally related problems the country is suffering (Chaumba *etal* 2003). I admit that this position has enjoyed many disciples and audiences for years now, and while to some extent it is true of Africa and Zimbabwe in particular, I argue that it misses a crucial point underlying all these problems. The researchers ignore ubuntu's undeserving loss of value in conservation since the advent of colonialism through the present time, in many African societies. The insignificant attention to the philosophy of ubuntu in conservation is clearly demonstrated in literature as most scholars and researchers have only applied the concept of ubuntu in areas such as health, education, judiciary systems, religion and politics. Ramose (1999), Teffo (1995) and Shutte 2001, for example, explore the importance of ubuntu in African philosophy especially in areas such as morality/ethics, epistemology, logic and metaphysics. Mbigi and Maree (1995), Goduka and Swadener (1999) and Prinsolo (1995) focus on the value of ubuntu in business, education and healthy fraternity respectively. Still other studies (Cornell n.y; Sindane 1995; Bhengu 1996) have exported the concept of ubuntu into legal systems and politics. Surprisingly, insignificant attention has been devoted to explore the value of ubuntu in environmental conservation. One, therefore, wonders if ubuntu has also never been used in the conservation of the 'natural' environment.

In view of this observation, this paper examines how, since time immemorial, ubuntu has been used to conserve the 'natural' environment. The paper marshals the concept of ubuntu and positions it against the southeastern Zimbabwe, in particular, Norumedzo and Mukanganwi landscapes to unravel the extent to which ubuntu, though has been subverted over the years, captures and informs environmental conservation. It challenges the given causes (by many scientists in Zimbabwe and beyond) for the major reason that they fail to recognize what I shall call 'the cause of causes' which is the disuse of ubuntu in environmental conservation. The philosophy of ubuntu is embedded in taboos,

proverbs and other such traditional systems. Without necessarily dismissing the 'secondary causes' of environmental degradation (those identified by most scientists like deforestation), the paper argues for the revival of ubuntu in environmental conservation; its full recognition, restoration and reinstitution along with science in national environmental conservation projects of the Shona environmental ethics in environmental projects and policy planning.

Understanding ubuntu

The concept of ubuntu though, has gained tremendous prominence in intellectual discourse over the years in Africa and beyond, is peculiarly difficult to define with precision. This is because the concept is elastic and pragmatic, as it is used to inform almost all spheres of the Bantu world-views; it is used in numerous contexts and situations. In linguistic terms, however, the concept is traceable to the so-called Nguni Bantu languages, particularly Ndebele and Zulu. In many other Bantu languages, the concept has equivalent terms. For example, in the Shona of Zimbabwe, ubuntu is equivalent to the concept 'hunhu'. Yet, the central question remains: 'What is it that is referred to as ubuntu?'

According to Ramose (1999), ubuntu is a multi-faceted philosophical system that involves logic, metaphysics, epistemology and ethics; it is a philosophy of life that is concerned with the reinforcement of unity, oneness and solidarity among the Bantu people. It is the distinctive elasticity and practical nature that makes ubuntu applicable in almost all facets of human life. As such, the concept has been wisely exported as an underlying philosophy or code of conduct into business, legal system, education, theology/religion, healthy and disciplines such as African philosophy and ethics.

Historically, the concept of ubuntu the philosophy of ubuntu is passed on from one generation to the other mainly through oral tradition. This is echoed by Ramose (1999) who notes that African law based on Ubuntu is a living law, based on their recognition of the continuous oneness and wholeness of the living, the living-dead and the unborn. It is generally believed that in pre-colonial African societies, the concept of ubuntu was instrumental in maintaining social cohesion, administering peace and order for the good

life of everyone in the society and even strangers. This paper attempts to examine and establish the pragmatic function of ubuntu in conservation in African societies in general and in particular, southeastern Zimbabwe.

Alleged Causes of Environment Degradation in Zimbabwe

While there is adequate evidence that, Zimbabwe, like many other countries in Africa, is experiencing environment conservation problems, there are disagreements on the real causes of the problems. Some scholars (Moyo *etal* 1991; Masaka 2011) argue that environmental problems in Zimbabwe, like in some parts of Africa, were aggravated by the twin project of colonialism and science. Others (Aylen 1941; Bowyer-Bower 1996) argue that overpopulation and indigenous practices triggered environmental degradation and other such environmental conservation problems. Still other scholars (Chenje 2000; Goredema *etal* 2011) argue that the post-independence Zimbabwe government was responsible for the mounting environment conservation with its fast track agrarian reforms. Aylen (1941), for example, claims that during pre-colonial times and the earlier part of the colonial period, there was little detrimental impact on the environment by human land use in Zimbabwe because of the extensive, nomadic and fallow land-use practices that provided well for the relatively low population densities, as well as the practice of indigenous soil conservation measures. For Bowyer-Bower (1996), the western awareness, through science, of the causes and effects of land degradation from inappropriate land use and management, and the need for and use of appropriate monitoring techniques and conservation measures, has been well established in Zimbabwe since the 20th century when land-use guidelines for environmental protection have long been legislated, and a formal management infrastructure for their research, implementation, and support through extension services remains considerable.

On a different note, some scholars argue the twin effect of colonialism and science resulted in environmental degradation in Zimbabwe. Moyo *etal* (1991), for instance, argues that during pre-colonial times and the earlier part of the colonial period, land was neither a scarce resource, nor was it under threat of permanent environmental

degradation, but with increasing colonial settlement and control, inequality of access to the natural resources was dictated. Moyo *etal* (ibid) give example of the Land Apportionment Act of 1930 that took away most of the fertile communal land from the majority and converted it into commercial farms for the minority. With an annual population growth rate in excess of 3.5% (IUCN, 1988) and a shrinking access to land, traditional conservation methods including fallow and extensive grazing became impractical in these communal areas, and land degradation set in. For Masaka (2011:331), "the colonization of Zimbabwe and the rest of the African continent was predicated on a treacherous basis of trying to improve the lives of the people of Africa when in fact it spelt doom to the personhood of Africans and the resource dispossession that impoverished people that had managed to survive within their means prior to the advent of colonialism". Masaka furthers to argue that colonialism in Zimbabwe was predicated on the myth that the locals were not able to sustainably use the natural resources at their disposal.

Still, other scholars (Chenje 2000; Goredema *etal* 2011) argue that the post-independence Zimbabwe through its poor polico-economic policies were responsible for the environmental crisis in the country. Chenje (2000), for example, argues that, besides the dramatic decline in agricultural production, many 'natural' resources have suffered in the newly resettled areas due to lack of expertise on land use by the new farmers. For him, if there is no significant change in farmers' behavior towards the environment both greenhouse gases concentrations and global temperatures would constantly increase. The different activities undertaken by new farmers which have resulted in large tract of forests being indiscriminately cut or burnt, animals habitants being destroyed, scattered dwellings being left to collapse on their own has had varying effects on the environment with negative implications on the climate. These activities have reduced vegetation cover, impacted on the soil conditions, runoff processes and has triggered gully erosion. On the same stroke, Goredema *etal* (2011:147), argue that:

The Fast Track Land Reform Program saw the movement of a number of people into land that was formally occupied by commercial farmers. New areas were cleared to enable cultivation of crops and other associated activities such as hunting, gold panning,..and

settlements. These activities certainly have had implications on environment management and climate change…For example, *there was a great decline in crop between 2001 and 2002 and reports show that nearly one million Zimbabweans faced acute hunger. Maize came down from 800,000 tons to 80,000 tons, wheat from 225,000 tons to 100,000 tones, tobacco 230 mil kg to 70 mil kg.*

When one is confronted with arguments surrounding environment conservation contestations in Zimbabwe, it is somehow difficult to identify the exact root cause responsible for the conservation crisis in the country. Yet, it is important to understand the 'root cause' of conservation crisis in Zimbabwe, before understanding what this research considers as secondary causes that many scholars in environment conservation have identified as the causes. Identifying the root cause is important in order to avoid secondary causes and to suggest possible solutions to the crisis. Trying to look for solutions to the secondary problems would miss the point as it is akin to attempting to cure a disease before understanding its real cause. In what follows, I give a general critique of arguments raised by those in conservation contestations before suggesting what I think is the root cause of the causes of environment conservation crisis in Zimbabwe.

The root cause(s) for the failure of Zimbabwe's environment conservation project

As highlighted in the introduction of this paper, Zimbabwe, like many other countries in Africa and beyond, is experiencing an environmental crisis, in addition to economic and political turmoil the country is experiencing especially since the turn of the new millennium. In the present paper I am not concerned with the latter, but with the former, specifically the question: "What is the real root cause of the failure in Zimbabwe's environmental conservation project?" This, though not an easy task, is the question I will grapple with in this section.

As has been seen in the previous section, contestations on environment conservation in Zimbabwe also reveal a trajectory of land contestations in the country since the colonial period through the present, and the tension between knowledge forms,

particularly Science and indigenous knowledge systems (IKSs). Though scholars sketched in the previous section might be correct in their own right in terms of what they think are the causes of environment conservation crisis in Zimbabwe, I do not buy their arguments. Instead, I proffer the argument that both the colonial and post-independence governments have failed the environment conservation project of Zimbabwe. I will not show where both the colonial government and post-independence deserve merit (as I have done this elsewhere), except to point out how both governments have failed Zimbabwe's environment conservation project.

To start with, the colonial government, the latter instead of seeking ways to merge the local people's ubuntu embedded in their IKSs with expert science in the national conservation project, it despised and castigated to the dustbin of oblivion all conservation practices embedded in IKSs. By default or otherwise, it failed to realize that, ubuntu, as a philosophy of life of the local people-the Shona, was a rich system that the bearers had used successfully for centuries now in conserving their 'natural' environment. It is clear, therefore, that the colonialists and some anthropologists' description of Africa as a virgin land was a total failure to understand and interpret the locals' philosophy of life, in this case, their 'philosophy' of the environment. Seeing 'nature' in its beautiful state, they were made to believe that the locals were not 'real' people like themselves, but part of nature. It was far from their conviction to think that the 'nature' was good looking simply because of the way the locals interacted with their environment. As such, with the advent of colonialism along with science in Africa, and Zimbabwe in particular, nature/culture dichotomies were created thereby disrupting the harmonious relations between the locals and their 'natural' environment. The ubuntu and other such indigenous knowledge systems (IKSs) that regulated the people's way of life and perpetuated the harmonious relationships of humans with all other entities in the natural environment were pejoratively labeled speculations and unscientific. Because of this, ubuntu could not flourish except under the provisions of Customary Law, for as long as it did not clash with Western Civil Law under the secular processes of modernization and commercialization, a framework of a policy of separate development that ultimately led to the destruction black family ties and the 'natural' environment. The locals were made

to abandon or leave ubuntu to lie dormant and learn the colonial's science as the only reality and appropriate way to conserve the environment. This way, ubuntu, as other IKSs, was buried and forgotten since it no longer received priority in the conservation agenda.

As part of its promise to the long subjugated people, at independence, the Zimbabwean government vowed to commit itself to rectify all the problems that the colonial government created. The post-independence government pledged to reverse the ongoing land degradation and promote sustainable land management by publishing Zimbabwe's National Conservation Strategy through the Natural Resource Board, now the Environmental Management Agency (EMA) in 1980 as requested for all nations by the World Conservation Strategy report of (IUCN-UNEP-WWF, 1980). This was indeed a positive gesture towards sustainable conservation as it appeared to resuscitate both threatened species and those (species) that the colonial government did not consider important enough to be included in the national conservation project. Yet, the post-colonial government's national conservation project, like its predecessor's, was heading towards a dismal failure. The major reason which led to the failure was that the post-colonial Zimbabwean government, just like the colonial government, adopted formal science as its sole tool for environmental conservation. By so doing, Zimbabwe was perpetuating the colonial legacy of despising and relegating ubuntu and other environmentally related IKSs to the backseat of national conservation projects. As such, the strained relations between humans and nonhumans and the nature/culture, Science/IK dichotomies that the colonial government created remained unchallenged. Yet, this was the number one enemy of sustainable environment conservation. This is because some species, especially those species such as forest insets whose value and rights were not pronounced in the colonial government's environmental conservation project remained alienated. Zimbabwe's most recent National Environmental Policy and Strategies (ZNEPS) of 2009 clearly shows this precarious stance with its silence on the moral value and rights of other fauna and flora species in the 'natural' environment. The policy is largely discriminatory and exclusionary of other entities in the 'natural' environment and scientifically informed. As a way of elucidating the point I make here, I cite the 2009

ZNEPS which says: "….at species level, the country supports an estimated 4,440 vascular plant species, 196 mammal species, 672 bird species, 156 reptile species, 57 species of amphibians, 132 fish species and uncounted numbers of species in other groups. The diversity of microorganisms in particular is extremely poorly known…" (ZNEPS 2009:7).

As can be seen in the quotation above, one can see that insect species and many other small species are not well recognized in Zimbabwe's environmental policy despite the contribution that most of these insects make to human livelihood and the ecosystem as a whole. We can only assume that insects, together with other small organisms are those being referred to as "uncounted species in other groups" (Ibid). The truth remains that Zimbabwe's current environment policy (2009) has no specific clause that provides for the protection of forest insects and many other small organisms. It is clear, therefore, that some fauna and flora species are made by the ZNEPS to be more equal than others. This is contrary to the philosophy of ubuntu which seek peace and harmony with everyone in the society and with the 'natural' environment. Though might have its own flaws, ubuntu as embedded in environmentally related traditional knowledge systems, since time immemorial, acknowledged the moral value and rights of all entities in the 'natural' environment. Thus, while traditional management of the environment by the local Bantus was informed by ubuntu, the experience that Zimbabweans went through since the colonial period have led them to despise their own traditional knowledge systems. Thus, the post-independence Zimbabwe through its national environment policy is not an exception to the unsustainable conservation in the country.

Ubuntu in environment conservation in southeastern Zimbabwe: What has gone wrong with ubuntu over the years in some parts of southeastern Zimbabwe?

There are no comprehensive and systematic researches on ubuntu in conservation in southeastern Zimbabwe. However, my preliminary ethnographic studies in this part of the country have shown that in some parts of southeastern Zimbabwe the philosophy of ubuntu is still used in small-scale environment conservation projects and with visible

consequences to the environment. Where the philosophy of ubuntu still prevails, the consequences are positive and otherwise in those areas where the philosophy has lost its grip. In what follows I present two communal areas in southeastern Zimbabwe-Mukanganwi and Norumedzo, the latter of which is still using ubuntu in its environment conservation project.

Starting with the latter, Norumedzo is a mountainous communal area found in southeastern Zimbabwe, particularly the Bikita district in Masvingo province. It is about 100km from Masvingo urban. The area is occupied by various Bantu groups, mainly the VaDuma of *moyo* (heart) totem, who share the same culture and is generally referred to as the Shona. Though the traditional way of life of these people has been affected in a number of ways by the Western contacts, it is still largely regulated by their long lasting ubuntu philosophy. This philosophy is still visible in the way the VaNorumedzo conserve their 'natural' environment which is also their major source of livelihood.

Norumedzo communal area which comprises 24 villages is ruled by Chief Norumedzo. The area is rich in edible stinkbugs (*encosternum delegorguei* Spinola) locally named *harurwa* [in Shona language] and loquats (*mazhanje*) which exist in the thicket forest (*jiri)* that was set aside for its natural resources-*harurwa* and *mazhanje*- to flourish. The *jiri* which is about some hundred square kilometers is the 'natural' environment that is sustainably conserved by the locals, and is believed to be sacred. Both the locals and strangers are constantly advised by the chief through headmen and village policemen not to tamper with it as tampering with the *jiri* is believed to anger ancestors who in return might cause *harurwa's* extinction and the *mizhanje* trees not to produce fruit. It is during the exploitation of resources from the *jiri* that the exploiters should demonstrate their highest level of ubuntu to the environment, locally known as '*hunhu'* (humanness). As such, to ensure sustainable exploitation of resources from the *jiri*, anyone who wants to exploit resources from the *jiri* would have to first of all seek permission from the village authorities. Villains (those who tamper with the *jiri*) are tried and convicted by Chief Norumedzo's traditional court.

To ensure that beliefs associated with the *jiri* are not put to test, the Chief has organized the villages in such a way that they take turns to safeguard the *jiri* from

overexploitation, especially during the season of *harurwa* and *mazhanje*. The Chief is well connected to the surrounding Chiefs and the District Police Chief who, in a way, help him fostering and perpetuating the philosophy of ubuntu in the *jiri*. Once the season for *harurwa* and *mazhanje* comes, the Chief pays tribute to both the Police Chief and the surrounding Chiefs. This way of doing is possibly drawn on the deep-seated philosophy of ubuntu which through the Shona (like other traditional Bantu groups) philosophy of neighborhood (*chigarisano*) and friendship (*usahwira*) emphasizes practices of respect, sharing and mutuality. The philosophy bridges the divides and tensions amongst the people as it encourages neighbors to help each other and share the resources they have in their respective communities. As the philosophy of ubuntu is always wisely applied to foster social cohesion, sharing with outsiders is not only an expression of love, but discourages potential thieves and invaders from stealing the neighbors' belongings. Through ubuntu, even outsiders are made to feel that the neighbor's property is also theirs. Thus, using the philosophy of ubuntu embedded in all the above explained mechanisms, chief Norumedzo and his people are managing to conserve the 'natural' environment while at the same time maintain good relations with those outside their community. And, given that the *jiri* is a source of livelihood for the Norumedzo and outside communities, the philosophy of natural conservation-ubuntu- they are using have managed to survive for centuries now. Even the 2008 Zimbabwean politico-economical crises have left the philosophy intact and the *jiri* flourishing (Mawere *forthcoming*).

Contrary to the Norumedzo scenario is the mountainous Mukanganwi communal area, also in the southeastern Zimbabwe. It is about 85km from Masvingo urban and about 20km before Norumedzo. My contact with the locals in Mukanganwi during my preliminary ethnographic studies revealed that, in this area, *harurwa* and *mazhanje* used to exist in abundance as in Norumedzo today. This was indeed evident from the look of *mizhanje* trees I observed in the area most of which had been debarked and others at the verge of falling. I was curious to know the possible cause of the increasing deterioration of *mazhanje* and *harurwa* harvests in the area. I was told by one of the old headman, Gore, that the cause was nothing, but abandonment of ubuntu. This was echoed by

another headman, Mushinyi. It was from this response that I became curious and sought to examine the influence of ubuntu in environment conservation.

On examining why ubuntu was fast losing its grip in Mukanganwi, unlike in Norumedzo, I was informed that Chief Mukanganwi rules from a distant as he is a full time lecturer at the University of Zimbabwe. And because the Chief is away most of the time and is believed to have been seriously affected by Western tradition, the philosophy of ubuntu has been badly eroded in his chiefdom, and with negative consequences. It was further revealed by headman Gore that traditional practices such as the philosophy of ubuntu functions well when the chief is always available to support headmen in punishing violators. In the next section, I examine the negative consequences of abandoning ubuntu in environment conservation projects in Mukanganwi communal area.

Consequences of abandoning ubuntu in environmental conservation

As previously highlighted, the abandonment of ubuntu in conservation projects in Mukanganwi communal area has its negative consequences on the locals' livelihood. The consequences are many and lacking the space to explore them all in depth, I will simply focus on those that the locals revealed during the present research.

First, *harurwa* and *mazhanje* which used to exist in abundance during the old days have drastically diminished. Many people now travel to Norumedzo, about 20km away for *harurwa* and *mazhanje*-once ubiquitous resources. This means suffering to the Mukanganwi people as they now travel longer distance in order obtain resources that used to be ubiquitous in their area. More so, their livelihood has been greatly compromised as it was from *harurwa* and *mazhanje* that they sustained their families and now that the resource is further from their locality there are inconveniences in obtaining the resources.

Second, the rainfall pattern in Mukanganwi area has dramatically changed in the recent past. Unfortunately, there are no systematic researches, prior to the present research, carried out so far in this area to establish the real cause of the diminishing amounts of rainfall in this mountainous area. The present research, however, noted that

while natural phenomena can be partly blamed for the erratic rainfall in Mukanganwi over the past few decades, human causes like deforestation and veld fires seem to be significantly contributing to the climatic changes in the area. In fact, it can be inferred using the logic of comparison (with Norumedzo *jiri*) that reluctance on the deployment of ubuntu in people's relations with the 'natural' environment has compromised the rainfall pattern over the years. This is quite visible in Mukanganwi communal area which is now characterized by loss of forests that is going on annually. This indiscriminate cutting down of trees, for settlements, extension of farmlands and during *harurwa* and *mazhanje* harvesting, is a good reason to explain why rainfall is now erratic in the area. So are diminished harvests of *mazhanje* and *harurwa*. This is because forest clearance poses the greatest threat to insect diversity and negatively influences climate change. As echoed by FAO (2001), loss of tropical forests is the greatest threat to insect diversity globally, as tropical forests harbor the majority of all insect species and the destruction of tropical forests continues at the high annual rate of 0.5–1%. In line with climate change, UNFCCC (2006) and Bambaige (2008) noted that the main sectors likely to be impacted by climate change include: Agriculture and food security, water resources, costal resources, biodiversity, human health and infrastructure, loss of life, erosion, land degradation, sea level rise, natural disasters, salt intrusion, crops, ecosystems, property, human and animal habitats, outbreaks of pests and diseases, displacement of people, and destruction of infrastructure (communication network, schools, hospitals and houses). And as reported by locals in the area, the impact of drought which was a rare phenomenon in Mukanganwi, badly ravaged the area in the recent years, especially in 2001/2002; 2005/2006 and 2008/2009 seasons.

Third, veld fires have become more frequent in the past few decades, especially during the absence of the chief. As previously highlighted, one of the functions of a chief is to enforce and promote the use of traditional practices and to administer peace among his people and their relations with the 'natural' environment. Veld fires are "blazes that get out of control and devastate extensive tracts of forest, grassland, wildlife and other natural resources as well as injure and kill people and destroy their properties" (Natural Resources, Agricultural Development and Food Security, 2009; Mawere, 2010:92).

When I asked headman Mushinyi whether the use of veld fires was used in the past, he conceded, but emphasized that people had to seek permission first from village authorities. It was not a 'willy-nilly' exercise as nowadays. Violators were tried and convicted by the headman's court or the chief's court if the area destroyed is vast. This confirms Mkwanazi's (2007) observation that human beings are responsible for 95% of forest and veld fires, as natural fires (not influenced directly by human beings) have become rare. Mukanganwi like many other Zimbabwe's communal areas is suffering constant veld fires. While in Mukanganwi, this has aggravated in the recent times due to constant absence of the chief, in many other parts of the country, this has been worsened by the chaotic Fast Track Agrarian Reform since the turn of the new millennium. The Agrarian Reform has had serious negative impact on the physical environment- both fauna and flora- as most of the new farmers in the newly resettled areas lack implements and so resort to fires as means to clear their land. This is echoed by Mawere (2011: 880) who argues that "veld fires contribute to a significant proportion of land degradation and the release of green house gases to the atmosphere and destroy property and resources needed for immediate use over the dry season, crops, firewood, biological diversity, water sources and grazing land".

Finally, I consider deforestation. Deforestation in Mukanganwi communal area has dramatically increased over the years. In passing through a small path down the Hozvi Mountain in Mukanganwi's chiefdom, I was perplexed when I suddenly entered a vast cleared area down slope. It was in June and the trunks of the cleared trees were still lying on land. Down slope is where the homestead of my aunt, Mrs Gambe is found. It was here I was also told that people in Mukanganwi no longer respect the 'natural' environment as they did in the past when the philosophy of ubuntu still flourished in this chiefdom. When I suggested that perhaps the cause was increase in the number of people who are now in need of firewood and farmland, she strongly disagreed. Like headmen Gore and Mushinyi, she cited the abandonment of the philosophy as the root cause of deforestation they are suffering today. She indeed longed for the old days when people used to cut down only branches of trees they would use, and when fruit trees like *mizhanje* where respected like elderly people.

The way forward

In light of the foregoing, it is clear that if we are to go by the two models explained above-Norumedzo and Mukanganwi- we easily agree that the philosophy of ubuntu is a worthwhile traditional strategy that has proven its utility in some societies. It is one of IKSs that can be used to complement science in national environment conservation projects. Yet there are asymmetrical relations between Science and traditional practices like ubuntu and other such IKSs and, between humans and other entities in the 'natural' environment. The problem, however, remains: 'How can we move beyond these asymmetrical relations? Or does breaking the boundaries and dichotomies between nature/culture, Science/IKS entails reframing debates in environment conservation?' Such critical questions are akin to those that Mignolo (n.y) raises around modernity when he asks: "how can 'critical theory' be subsumed into the project of modernity/coloniality and decolonization? Or would this assumption perhaps suggest the need to abandon the twentieth century formulations of a critical theory project? Or, would it suggest the exhaustion of the project of modernity?"

In view of the questions raised above I submit that debates in conservation should be reframed. Yet, the problem on how the debates in conservation should be reframed persists as reframing necessitates a deconstruction process and possibly a reconstruction one. This is because reframing implies a thoroughgoing reevaluation of the existing approaches in environment conservation and challenging them (where necessary) by suggesting new ones to respond to the problems in conservation. I have already argued for the revival of some traditional practices such as ubuntu in areas where the philosophy has lost its grip in conservation. But to do so would require a 'holistic' comprehensive approach-an approach that reconciles understandings of contending approaches in the Science/IK, Scientist/traditionalist debate (Mawere, *forthcoming*). Thus, a post-humanities approach is suggested as a possibility to constructively address and reconcile the asymmetrical relations in conservations and anthropology of knowledge in general.

However, one among the most complex concepts to define with precision in the humanities today concerns post-humanities. The complexity of the concept derives from

its different interpretations by different scholars. It is worth noting, however, that what most scholars do not dispute about post-humanities is that it "situates itself at a crossroads: the intersection of the disciplinary formation we call 'the humanities' in its current configuration, and the challenges posed to it by work (much of it interdisciplinary) in a range of fields that is associated with the emergent orientation known as 'post-humanism', work that in some fundamental sense challenges the humanities as we now know it to move beyond its current parameters and practices" (Wolfe 2010; http://www.carywolfe.com/online.html). From this common understanding and for purposes of this work, the post-humanities approach I advocate herein seeks to move beyond Science/IK and nature/culture dualisms to establish forms and methods of disciplinary knowledge by way of rethinking 'productively' how changes in societies challenge scholars to reconsider their understanding of 'reality' and relations between different entities in the society basing on experience. My post-humanities approach is therefore one that: 1) Seeks to promote a dialogue between Science and other forms of knowledge like IKS in environment conservation practices. Such an approach is worth considering as there some traditional conservation strategies that have proven beyond doubt that they are efficient in conserving the 'natural' environment. The strategies being deployed by the Norumedzo people of southeastern Zimbabwe are among the list. Another case in point is that of Kissidougou and Ziama in Guinea cited by Fairhead and Leach. According to Fairhead and Leach's (1995: 1028), ethnographic study "there has been a broadly positive relationship between the peopling of Kissidougou and Ziama and their forest cover. As settlements are associated with the formation of forest islands, more villages mean more forest cover". From their research, the duo argue that "recent approaches by state agencies [and foreign organizations], which focus on decentralizing resource control by establishing village-level organization and environmental management plans, actually risk undermining the existing flexible, diverse constellation of resource management relations" (Fairhead and Leach: *ibid*). Fairhead and Leach thus argue for a 'sustainable' dialogue between Science (and the state) and IK in designing and implementing national environment conservation projects.

2) Seeks to reconsider, in conservation projects, and revive some traditional practices that were despised and relegated as speculations and unscientific as long as these have proven their utility. The reconsideration of ubuntu and other forms of knowledge as complements to science could be cases in points. This is what Lien and Law (2010: 5) allude to when they argue that "through attention to practices and performativity, we may contribute to an anthropology which is more sensitive to relations between humans and other living beings than is possible in a more anthropocentric approach".

3) is practically responsive of humans' changing understanding of themselves and the world in terms of their relations with other entities in the 'natural' environment. Such an approach is critical as it moves beyond dualisms by considering humans, non-humans and the state as a collective and as interdependent members of the universe they share. The creation of dichotomies/dualisms is undesirable as "this anthropocentric approach emphasizes particular qualities of the human-animal phenomena on the basis of relations of asymmetry marked by animal subordination. In other words, it separates 'culture' (human) and 'nature' (non-human) on the basis of unequal distribution of agency" (Lien and Law 2010:10).

Conclusion

This study has been shown that some parts of Zimbabwe are facing mounting environment conservation mismanagement related phenomena and others which result from climate change. It has been emphasized that while it is partly true that the natural phenomena and secondary causes discussed cited by some researchers on Zimbabwe can be blamed for environmental degradation in the country, my research in Mukanganwi and Norumedzo communal areas, revealed that causes such as veld fires and deforestation are among the secondary causes. They have their own root cause which researchers on Zimbabwe and beyond, by default or otherwise, leave undocumented. I have argued that this cause is the subversion and relegation of the philosophy of 'ubuntu' in environment conservation projects. Thus due to the effects of colonialism and modernity's

preoccupation with scientism, 'ubuntu' and other such IKSs that were used to conserve the environment have suffered relegation as speculations and unscientific to the extent that they were buried and forgotten, but indeed not dead.

More importantly, the paper has argued that the problems and challenges encountered in Mukanganwi communal area are not new or unique to the area, but are resonant of those encountered in other projects elsewhere, in Zimbabwe and beyond. Yet to overcome such environment conservation there is need for a post-humanities approach that encourages scholars to rethink conservation projects, particularly the possibility of moving beyond the nature/culture, Science/IK dualisms and considering the revival of 'buried' philosophies such as 'ubuntu' and other such knowledge forms as IKSs. This is what scholars like Abrams (1996) protested for when he argued that in community-based projects the community should control the project and make important decisions, although professionals such as engineers may provide expertise and finance may be provided by external financial sources. In this sense, I have argued for 'productive' rethinking of conservation projects at all levels -from grassroots to national level.

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