

TOPIC: THE LIBERATION POTENTIAL OF SHONA CULTURE AND THE GOSPEL: A POST-FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE

1. Introduction

The basic presupposition is that the original God-human-cosmos mutual interconnectedness or interrelationship is tarnished and distorted by evil in all its manifestations; that culture and the Gospel have seeds for restoring this intricate plexus of relationships impinging on humanity's creation and baptismal dignity of the *imago Dei/Christi*, the integrity of creation, and the baptismal vocation of sharing in the mission of Christ *ad gentes* (to the nations, cf. Mk 15:16). Challenges and contributions of liberation theology, in general, and feminist, eco-feminist and post-feminist perspectives, in particular, are critically examined in the backdrop of the Shona culture-Gospel creative dialogue. The spotlight is on the quest for a liberating, holistic, inclusive and responsible theanthropocosmic (*theos/thea* [God/ess - *anthropos* [humankind] – cosmos/world) theology sensitive to the signs of the times. Theological methodology highlights the mutual influencing of Inculturation, Evangelisation and Incarnation.

The topic is complex and heavily loaded and calls for a perspectival approach to unpack it. **Potential** is an innate power or capacity that needs to be explored, unravelled, and appropriated in giving concrete expression to the Incarnation as an existential or lived reality. The reverse situation is also true when we consider the dual nature of culture, the Bible and Christian tradition, i.e. depending on how they are interpreted, they have the potential to liberate or oppress, empower and disempower, include and exclude, accommodate and alienate (Jeremy Punt 1991:313). Consequently, a critical and creative engagement with these important theological texts in the light of the Gospel (inculturation), and is imperative. The pertinent question: How can culture and the Gospel be used as authentic resources for structuring transformative emancipatory praxis for a theology sensitive to the signs of the times?

I will begin with a brief background explaining who the Shona people are and what they need to be liberated from today, and then proceed to explore the historical background that

foregrounds the urgency of the Gospel-culture dialogue in Christian Evangelisation; expose the contributions or emphases of various theologies – African and liberation theologies, in particular, feminist, eco-feminist and post-feminist; and finally give recommendations for an Incarnational, liberative, holistic, responsible, and relevant theology.

2. Shona peoples of Zimbabwe

Demographically, Shona people of Zimbabwe make about two thirds of the population and consist of five major ethnic groups *Karanga* (22%), *ZeZuru* (18%), *Manyika* (13%), *Korekore* (12%), *Rozvi* (9%) where the other Bantu ethnic groups (Ndebele, Kalanga, Tonga, Shangan), European and Asian cultures make the other third of the population (Deaney Swaney 1992:58-59).

Shona culture is part of a complex whole (African culture) and also a sub-group of Bantu. Due to cultural mix in a fast evolving techno-scientific and globalising world, it is true to say that there is no pure Shona culture. The Gospel too is clothed in a composite of cultures. Shona culture-gospel dialogue, then, is used to showcase the contribution of the part into the whole, and the local church into the universal church.

3. Liberation from patriarchal, socio-economic and political oppression

Shona culture, like Jewish culture and the Christian Church, in particular, the Roman Catholic Church, is patriarchal. John Mbiti (1991:59), citing a Ghanaian proverb: “A woman is a flower in the garden, her husband is the fence around her” seems to capture Shona patriarchal circumscription of women. In other words, Shona women are valued and also at times devalued. Musimbi Kanyoro explains this dualism as follows:

In some instances, culture is like a creed for the community identity. In some instances, culture is the main justification for difference, oppression and injustices – especially to those whom culture defines as “the other”, “the outsider”.

Thus, in the authentic Gospel-culture dialogue, it is important to see how Shona women: are positioned, position themselves and should be positioned.

Zimbabwe became independent from British colonial oppression in 1980. Unfortunately, 34 years on Zimbabweans are not free. The absence of colonial rule brought new forms of oppression as a trajectory of neo-colonialism (replication of colonial values of the system – they fought against and therefore there is continual oppression weighing heavily on the poor majority). Consequently, Zimbabweans yearn for socio-economic and political independence in a situation characterised by:

- A repressive dictatorship ZANU-PF led government intransigently holding on to power for 34 years. This is made evident by a history of documented alleged election rigging (2002, 2008, 2013) that has compromised the will of the people and disenfranchised millions of people (including economic and political refugees in the Diaspora who were denied dual citizenship and postal votes); and post-election violence, in particular, in the period leading to the “Presidential election run-off” of 27 June 2008. Through Operation **wavhota papi** (who did you vote for?), people were torture, maimed and/or killed (Chimhanda and Dube 2011:268-285).
- Politically motivated violence impinging on inalienable human dignity and fundamental human rights. This includes the Midlands-Matabeleland atrocities known as “Gukurahundi” (“the first rains that clean out grain chaff” [1980-1988]) perpetrated by North Korean trained 5th Brigade which wiped out approximately 20000 civilians. The clamping down of the so-called “dissidents elements” (chaff) was alleged to be synonymous with ethnic cleansing (cf. The Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace in Zimbabwe [CCJPZ] and the Legal Resource Foundation [LRF] document Report, *Breaking the Silence: building true peace* 1997); Fast Track Land Reform Programme (FTLRP) of 2000-2002; Operation **Murambatsvina** (Clean Up) of 2005 that demolished poor people’s homes; Operation **Tagarika** (we are now well off) as a corrective to the latter, was equally offensive by building slum-like match-box houses
- High levels of corruption resulting in high level looting of the country’s resources and consequently, there is an emergent minority black elite and an impoverished black majority. Concerning the diamond deposit (alleged to have 25 % of the world’s diamonds), in Marange, Chiyadzwa, in Mutare, Eastern Highland, people on the grassroots came up with “Operation **Hakudzokwi**” (“There is no come back” as warning to would be illegal diamond panners). This questions about the credibility of the Kimberley Process - how Marange (Chiyadzwa) diamonds were cleared as not

being “blood diamonds”. Another discrepancy exist when comparing Zimbabwe 2012 literacy rate (90.7) with transparency index (35.5) that ranks Zimbabwe economy the 163rd freest out of 176 countries (www.africaglobe.net/Africa/Zimbabwe - accessed 24/06/2014). Ironically, Zimbabwe has the highest literacy rate in Africa in such an environment where education facilities crumble down with socio-economic and political melt down and this raises questions on whether literacy rate is an accurate indicator of quality education.

- Absence of media freedom undergirded by the existence of repressive laws – in particular, Public Order Security Act (POSA) and Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA), and accompanied with the practice of selective law in which offenders get away with impunity etc. Operation **Bvisai maDhishi** (remove the satellite dishes) targeted TV and short wave transmission of information in a situation where ZBC was reduced to only one channel on which on every 5-15 minutes intervals viewers were flashed with partisan politically indoctrination.
- Bad policies e.g. the Indigenisation black economic empowerment that scares off Foreign Direct Investment (FDI).
- Political polarisation due to partisanship that threatens to destroy peace and unity in families.
- Poor (in some cases non-existent) service delivery that has a direct bearing on maintenance of quality life. For example, in 2008, as people experienced food shortages, post-election violence, drought and poor health services (breakdown in provision of clean water and good sanitation); HIV and AIDS and Cholera took a high death toll.

The situation above exposes gross violation of inalienable human dignity and fundamental human rights. Theologically, Zimbabweans caught up in this death dealing situation, pose incisive questions that shake the foundations of the Christian faith. The questions include: Where is God (and the ancestors) in all this? Does God care? Are God and the ancestors punishing us? In brief, the pertinent question is: How do Shona culture and the Gospel speak into this situation? The Christian *Magna Charta* here is the Great commandment to “love God and neighbour as yourself” (Mt 22:36-39; Mk 12:28-31; Lk10:27). This in turn

highlights the mutual influencing of inculturation and evangelisation, and of love and justice. It is important to note that in contexts of eco-feminism, Shona holistic worldview and the Gospel, neighbour here includes the environment on which the drama of life takes place.

Pope Paul VI accentuates this view by pointing out the indissoluble link between God's plan of creation and the plan of salvation; safeguarding human dignity and human rights; and love and justice. He explains that:

...it is impossible to accept that in evangelization one could or should ignore the importance of the problems so much discussed today, concerning justice, liberation, development and peace in the world. This would be to forget the lesson which comes to us from the Gospel concerning love of our neighbour who is suffering (EN, 30).

4. Post-feminism

Post-feminism has many nuances. On one hand, there are those liberation movements, e.g. womanist which expose the limitation of feminism as Eurocentric (a baby of white middle-class women) in that it fails to respond adequately to the concerns of African women. On the other hand, there are post-feminists who accept the contribution of feminism to discursive authentic and relevant theology. I show leanings to the latter, in advocating post-feminism as going behind and beyond liberation theology, in general, and feminist theology, in particular, in the quest for a mature, holistic and responsible theology of liberation for women and men, and the oppressed and the oppressor – a theology that links liberation and reconciliation. I see this stance as compatible with intersectionality theory.

Intersectionality theory points to recognition of the fact that: at the intersection of gender, race, class etc., women oppression is “social and systemic” and is thus “part of a broad-scale of oppression” (Kimberle Crenshaw (1991:1241;)); “various forms of oppression interact with one another in multiple complex ways” (Ann Garry 2011:826); “race, class gender etc., are social identity structures that can be and often are interdependent” (Ahr Gopaladas 2013:90).

Intersectionality has been used to a limited extent by liberation reformist theologians in highlighting the challenge of difference and as a source of “empowerment and reconstruction” rather than “domination” (Crenshaw 1991:1242). In liberation theologies, intersectionality is a shift from “either/or” ideological and exclusive vision to both/and” conjunctive and inclusive thinking (James Fowler, in Erickson 1991:166-167, cf. James Fowler’s *Black Theology of liberation: A Structural Developmental analysis*, 1981:82). Thus trends to intersectionality are seen in Rosemary Radford Ruether’s (1993:136) conviction that at the intersection of gender and other social marginalisation, women are representative of the “oppressed of the oppressed”. And turning to the Gospel, woman as a category of the oppressed and marginalised is seen to represent the prostitute (Jn 8:3-11), the Gentile (Syro-Phoenician woman) the ritually unclean (Lk 8:43-48), widow (Lk 7:11-17) and the ethnic minority (Jn 4:5-42).

In the context of Shona culture, the motif of women as representing the “oppressed of the oppressed” is seen in situations of crises in relation to contesting values. For example, financial constraints and the education of children; virginity and sexual purity in marriage; sin and reparation of it; famine and food security; barrenness and the love of children, in particular, a male heir; and HIV/AIDS and caring for the sick, orphans and elders. It is found that:

- Preferential option is given to the boy child
- Virginity is strictly imposed on girls while boys go scot free in patriarchal rationalisation premarital sex and begetting children outside for boys, shows sexual potency and is good for promoting the growth of the family and clan.
- Heinous sins like committing murder and in Shona understanding and fear of **ngozi** (whole family can be wiped out by the deceased’s vengeance spirits) – girl child given in substitute marriage to the deceased’s kinsman to raise a male heir. Wife substitution also exists in situations of bareness and death of female relative, respectively.
- Some cultural practices put woman and the girl child at high risk to HIV/AIDS (Chimhanda 2011c:1-27)

Women are also the oppressed of the oppressed in cases where in everyday parlance we talk of the abortion of mothers and yet in reality their male counterparts have long aborted (absconded) fatherhood (Ursula Pfafflin 1993)

5. Mutual connectedness of Inculturation, Evangelisation, Incarnation

Historically, in Roman Catholic tradition, inculturation received momentum through Vatican II (1962-1965) impetus to modernise and in the quest for a theology sensitive to the signs of the times. Pope John XXIII (Pobee 1992:35, cf. the Encyclical *Ad Petri Cathedram*, 29 June 1959) was the chief proponent of *aggiornamento* (Italian for updating) – hailed as “the opening of windows to let in breath of fresh air”. This is because Vatican II showed a paradigm shift from the Council of Trent (1545-1563) and Vatican I (1868-1870) advocacy of static eternal truth of faith to historical and cultural conditioning of the truth of faith (www.newadvent.org <Catholic Encyclopaedia> - accessed 10/07/201). In emphasising that inculturation is not an option but rather is a demand for authentic evangelisation, Vatican II also functioned as corrective to early missionaries’ alienation of African (Shona) Christians from traditional religion negating it as fetish idolatry and pagan. Clearly, this was a Eurocentric move tantamount to throwing the baby with the bath water.

Vatican II and Synods of Africa (Rome 1994 and 2009, respectively) affirmed African culture as a *praeparatio evangelica* (preparation for evangelisation) -“providential preparation for the transmission of the Gospel” (Pope John Paul II, in *Ecclesia in Africa* [EA], 42) in that it has fundamental *semina Verbi* (seeds for the Word) which lead people “to open to the full and definitive revelation of God in Jesus Christ” (EA, 67); and that authentic inculturation is a “firm rooting of the Gospel into ... cultures ... and a requirement of evangelisation” (EA, 59). Pope Paul VI, in *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (EN) endorses this fact in saying:

Evangelization loses much of its force and effectiveness if it does not take into consideration the actual people to whom it addresses, if it does not use their language, their signs and symbols, if it does not answer the questions they ask, and if it does not have an impact on their concrete life (1975: par.63).

Pope John Paul II concurs with this in saying:

A faith that does not become culture has not been fully received, not thoroughly thought through, not fully lived out (Letter to Cardinal Agostino Casaroli, Secretary of State, 20 May 1982, in *L'Osservatore*, 28 June 1982, pp.7-8).

Pope John Paul II, subsequently, identified inculturation as a *magna charta* of evangelisation and sealed this orientation by establishing a papal dicastery – *The Pontifical Council for Culture* in 1982 (Cecil McGarry 1986:7).

This awareness led to the African Synods' proposal of "The New Evangelisation of Culture" through a "transforming encounter with the living person of Christ, the incarnate word of God" (AM, 159, 160-161, cf. Jn.1:14). In other words, God in Christ is "*the first and greatest evangelizer*" (Pope Francis, in his Apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* ([EG] 2013: par.12).

The New Evangelisation of culture was an Incarnational liberative resurrection experience in that the mid- 60s onwards saw inculturation transforming liturgy with the shift from Latin to vernacular languages, introducing of local music and liturgical dances – hence Africa is known as the dancing church. Most important of all, the Synods of Africa provided a practical example of inculturation by coming up with the model of the Church in Africa as "family" (EA, 43; Pope Benedict XVI, in *Africae Munus* [AM] 2011, par.7-9). As an African contribution to already existing models of the church, the model emphasises care for others, solidarity, warmth in human relationships, acceptance, dialogue and trust (AM, 63). Furthermore, Vatican II and the two Synods of Africa identified the liberation of women as one of the most important challenges facing church and society today.

Synods of Africa highlighted essential elements of African holistic world view that shows unity between mundane and extra-mundane worlds as:

... something that embraces and includes ancestors, the living and those yet to be born, the whole of creation and all beings: those that speak and those that are mute, those that think and those lacking thought. The visible and invisible universe is regarded as a living-space for human beings, but also as a space of communion where past generations invisibly flank present generations, themselves the mothers of future generations [something that predisposes Africans to]... great openness of heart and spirit in great...to hear and to receive Christ's message, to appreciate the mystery

of the Church, and thus to value human life to the full, along with the conditions in which it is lived (EA 69).

And again that African religious orientation shows:

... a profound religious sense, a sense of the sacred, of the existence of God the Creator and of a spiritual world. The reality of sin in its individual and social forms is very much present in the consciousness of these peoples, as is also the need for rites of purification and expiation" (EA, 42).

According to Pope John Paul II, the above mentioned essential elements of African culture are a "priceless heritage" that can be offered to "Churches and to humanity as a whole" (EA, 42). Consequently, he made a passionate appeal to Africa to:

"Reject ...the so-called 'freedom of the modern way of life' [and rather to]...look inside yourselves. Look to the riches of your own traditions, look to the faith ... Here you will find genuine freedom; here you will find Christ who will lead you to the truth" (EA, 48).

With the above background recommendations, we can turn to Shona culture in the light of the Gospel for pedagogical insights in responding to problems bedevilling Zimbabwe today. But Shona culture gives us oral tradition and not history in the sense of modern historiography. However, according to Mbiti (1991:59), we can turn to mythopoeic language to give us an even better picture of reality in the early stages of human existence. We can engage the Shona Mwari myth ancestral religion, the **Unhu (Ubuntu)** ethic, Shona symbols of life (totemism, womb, soil, blood etc.), proverbs, riddles, and songs. The spotlight is on inclusive God language and the quest for holistic truth of faith; Mwari and ancestral belief and the affirmation of life including the priceless heritage; communal ontology and epistemology and affirmation of differential and uniqueness of an individual etc.

6. Mwari and ancestral religion

6.1 Shona Christian Mwari/God

Shona Mwari religion appears well disposed to the feminist challenge that; since God is incomprehensible, God-talk and holistic truths of faith comprise analogical language (images, metaphors, symbols, nouns, pronouns etc.) drawn from the experiences of men and women (Ann Nasimiyu Wasike 1997:73-74; Ruether 1993:136-138). When we turn to the Gospel, Wasike shows that Jesus was an egalitarian teacher who used male and female experiences and images particularly in the parables of the growth of the kingdom of

God. In the same note, Shona Christians have identified God with **Mwari** who in traditional religion has elusive character parallel to the biblical Yahweh “I am who I am” (Exodus 3:14) in defying human comprehension.

Ontological designates posit Mwari as a universal God who is the ultimate giver and sustainers of all life. Consequently, Mwari was assigned ontological names which include **Chidzachepo** (Eternal Being), **Musiki** (Creator) and in particular, **Musikavanhu** (Creator of human beings) and **Dzivaguru** (the Greatest Pool) (Bourdillon 1976:263, 293-327; Schoffeleers 1978:235-338; Chimhanda 2011a:62; Taringa 2004:2). As **Dzivaguru** (Greatest pool) who as such is provider of rain, Mwari is (life affirming) responsible for the fertility of land and humans.

In the language of the Incarnation, and in answer to the Christological question, who Jesus was/is, and what he did/does, Shona Christians have named Jesus **Mununuri** (the go between deliverer) and **Muponesi** (mid-wife – literary meaning that on giving birth, the woman stands on the threshold of giving life or losing her own life). While the former can be assigned to both men and women, the traditional midwife is **Mbuyanyamukuta** where **mbuya** is grandmother or an elderly woman. I find the designate **Mununuri** to be a very powerful depiction of the liberation and salvific work of Christ in that on the cross, Jesus is both the midwife and the one giving birth (Chimhanda 2011b:247).

Shona Christians acknowledge Mwari/ Jesus as a dynamic presence. Shona theophoric names which have the prefix **Ishe** or suffix **she** (Lord or chief) attest to this. These include **(Ishe)Anesu** or **Tinashe** (God is with us), **Munashe** (God is with you), **Simbarashe** (power or strength of God), **Kudakwashe** (will of God).

In the scandal of particularity, where in the past twins were killed at birth as bad omen threatening the well-being of the family; Shona Christians now understand that children are a gift from God through the ancestors. Therefore, many children are called **Chipo** (gift) or **Tapiwa** (we have been given). Children born after the death of a child usually get names like **Munyaradzi** or **Nyaradzo** (comforter) for a boy and girl, respectively. Children born

after the war received names like **Taonanyasha(dzashe)** (we have experienced the mercy of God), **Tadiwanashe** (we have been loved by God).

There are names which show response to God's gratuitousness, e.g. **Tendai**, **Tatenda**, **Tinotenda** (we thank, have thanked are thanking God, respectively), **Rumbidzai** (praise), **Ruramai** (be Holy) etc. **Ruramai** echoes Christ's call to: "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Mt 5:48).

6.2 Mwari, Ancestors and Soil

Ancestral belief, **Unhu** (Ubuntu) values, totemism and symbols of life are the key to understanding the mutual interconnectedness of God-humanity-cosmos relationship. Again, it is the key to understanding why colonial dispossession of land and the strong urge to land acquisition touch the raw nerve of the Shona and also the need to preserve the country's resources as a precious heritage from the past to be used sparingly for the benefit of all (humans and the rest of creation), in the present, and to be passed on to future generations.

From the outset, it is important to point out that in Shona religiosity understood in the backdrop of Bantu migration; ancestors are not God/Mwari. Ancestors are understood to have supernatural powers conferred on them by Mwari. Chiefs too have ex officio supernatural powers (conferred by God through the ancestors they represent). Land is divided according to ancestral area lion spirits (**mhondoro**) traced on the chiefly dynasty, a particular totem (**mutupo**) and praise names (**chidavo**). Mhondoro here is the proto-ancestor and the totem is animal implicated in to the encounter in original occupation and claiming ownership of the land.

Concerning the feminist challenge to include women in all sectors of church life, in particular, participating of women in ministerial leadership, among the Shona, men and women participate on the ancestral mediation ladder to Mwari as spiritual leaders i.e. voice

of Mwari (at the cult in Matonjeni, Matopo Hills, Bulawayo – Daneel 1970), **makombwe** (lion spirits/mediums), **mudzimu masvikiro** (family spirits mediums), and **n'anga** (traditional healers). Consequently, Shona culture poses a big challenge to the Church, in particular, the Roman Catholic Church where important church offices are attached to the priesthood. Furthermore, the question of ordination of women is a closed issue, since Pope John Paul II, in *Ordination Sacerdotalis* (1994) sanctioned the ordination of men only.

Mhondoro Chisi (rest) day (Thursday in Serima my home area) shows openness to understanding of the Christian Sabbath. In rural areas, Shona Christians have two Sabbath days. Chisi observation is a trajectory of sacramentality of land and all that is on it are shot through with the holy and thus reflect the grandeur or glory of God, the Creator. Consequently, human life is sacred, social and sacrosanct (Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace in Zimbabwe [CCJPZ] n.d:28) and the forests, particularly **majiri** (communal forest reserves that give fruits, mushrooms, honey etc. in due season) **anoyera** (are holy). Land is treated as a precious heritage to be preserved and also passed on to future generations. The above gifts, in particular, are to be made available to all and similarly, to be picked with reverence and sparingly. Failure to observe the rule of the forest results in punishment by Mwari through the ancestors (withdrawing their protection).

Ancestral belief is environmental friendly in that land/soil is conceptualised sacramentally in anthropomorphic terms. Thus, the ancestors are **ivhu** (the soil) and their living descendants are **vana vevhu** - where Children are understood to be gifts from Mwari through the ancestors. Therefore, in Shona patriarchal society, women cannot be denied land ownership and access to means of livelihood because they too, together with men are children of the soil (**vana vevhu**). This echoes Jesus' reference to Zacchaeus as "he too is the son of Abraham" (Lk 19:1-10), in as much as the woman who as "a daughter of Abraham", was entitled to be freed from "eighteen long years" of bondage by Satan (Luke 13:10-17).

Emmanuel Manzungu (2004:66-67) shows the Zimbabwe FTLRP as admitting to cultural imperialism in that land claims were justified as authentic appropriation of ancestral land

and this implicitly meant people would be resettled on their ancestral land and yet this proved not to be the case. I observe that the FTLRP system of individual ownership diametrically opposes the traditional communal ownership of land. Furthermore, and, in a twist of irony, the FTLRP has destroyed communal **majiri** that although they were part of white farms, never-the-less, communal people had access to them. In my area, our Chief Serima has reinforced keeping **Chisi** and reduced indiscriminate cutting down of trees. But this effort is frustrated by surrounding new farmers who sell firewood to people in the communal area and also because they are not productive enough, animals like wild pigs and monkeys move to communal areas in search of food. In this context, Taringa and Sipeyiye (2013:51-62) confirms the FTLRP has fast tracked traditional attitudes and values.

6.2.1 Womb (Chibereko)

Although Shona lineage is patriarchal, women are accorded the role of ancestors. Using maternal symbols of **chibereko** (womb), **mbereko** (back-sling), reinforced by Shona proverbs and Shona affirmation of “mother” in everyday parlance, it can be said that land is father, and much more, that it is mother, the great womb from which we are born and to which we return at death; biggest breast that nourishes us; and the back-sling that carries all flora and fauna on it. Shona proverbs attesting to this include: **Baba ndimupa kamwe** (father gives once), **mai ndimupa kaviri** (mother gives twice); **Zamuguru nderamai** (mother has the bigger breast). Among the Manyika, land is **musana** (back) and as denoting “mother’s back” (Nisbert Taringa in personal communication). When explaining siblingship relationship, the Shona say **mwana wamai vangu** (my mother’s child), **womudumbu rimwe** (from the same womb), **buda ndibudewo** (come out so that I follow suite).

Symbolic understanding of land as mother is a powerful tool in combating environment degradation. For the Shona the most heinous sin is that against the mother. This is accentuated by the Shona understanding of **Kutanda botso** (a situation, in which the offender is attached by a psychosomatic disorder, wears sackcloth and goes begging). In order to avoid such punishment, the Shona always advise the offender to reconcile with the

mother in her life time. In the Gospel, sin against the mother and the environment is almost equivalent to the sin against the Holy Spirit (Lk.10).

This portrayal of land as mother, combined with developments in modern science (genetic inheritance and sex determination), is liberating in that women can no longer be treated as passive recipients of the male seed; accused of *barrenness* and/or failure to produce a male heir. And when we turn to the Gospel, Christ's teaching of "symmetry of responsibility" (Erickson 1991:584) for relational sins like adultery, fornication, and divorce was liberating for women and men (Mt 5:27-32; 19:1-9).

6.2.2 Totemism

It can be said that totemism is the moral conscience of Shona people and is also the key to understanding of the mutual relationship of human beings with other created reality. The **mutupo** (totem) is an animal such as lion, monkey, elephant, buffalo, zebra or part of an animal (heart, leg) or an entity (e.g. river pool whose sub-totem is fish). The **chidavo** (praise names) exposes good and bad characteristics of the animal in subtle humour. While the former are to be emulated, the latter are to be avoided as tendencies of people of that family and clan.

In Shona communal ontology and epistemology, totem and the first line of the praise name are used in greeting, thanking, and the whole praise names are recited, particularly at burial. It is important to note that it is the whole group (ancestors, and living descendants) that are thanked, greeted and praised. For example, totem and praise names are a requirement for correct burial and in rite-de-passage. For this reason, the Shona show a kind of xenophobia because they are afraid of **ngozi** (vengeance spirits) – that is, the stranger's ancestral spirits visiting and punishing them for incorrect burial. Similarly, the fear of **ngozi** is a big deterrence to violence and killing.

For the Shona, and parallel to Roman Catholic social teaching, human life is participated life, i.e. it is social, sacred and sacrosanct. The Shona believe that the giving or taking of life is a prerogative of God. In cases of an individual engaging in murder, the Shona believe that **ngozi** can wipe out the whole family ending with the culprit. Hence, they say **mushonga wengozi kuripa** (the only panacea for **ngozi** if reparation). Therefore, the killing of innocent lives e.g. through abortion and working the land on **Chisi** day can be major causes of punishment by God through calamities like drought. Ancestors are understood to punish through withdrawal of their protection.

For the Shona, it is taboo to eat one's totem and this is linked to incest taboo. Furthermore, marriage within the totem group is strictly forbidden. In modern science, this practice is sound for increasing the gene pool and avoiding abnormalities and hence, promoting quality life.

6.2.3 Unhu (personhood)

Shona **Unhu** (Ubuntu) values are axiomatic to life affirmation and diametrically opposed to western type individualism and consumerism. These are **unhu** (personhood), **umwe** (togetherness), **kugamuchira vayeni** (hospitality) and **ushamwari** (friendship) that are a trajectory of the Bantu ethic *cognatus ergo, sum ergo* (I am related, therefore we are) emphasises communal ontology (ways of being) and epistemology, i.e. being a person (Shona: munhu chaiye, "a real person") with and for others. This parallels Christian understanding of being Church with and for others. Liberation is translated to "being fully human" (Luke Lungile Pato 1997:96-97 that take place from before birth to life after death. Thus one is always at the threshold of conscious becoming with others. On the one hand, good or bad behaviour enhances or decreases **unhu**. On the other hand, ontological relationships make the individual engaging in bad acts a liability to the extended family especially through what Gordon Chavhunduka (1977:145) "calls "extended patients". The latter concept undergirds Shona understanding of **ngozi** (vengeance spirits).

Shona culture affirms the unique individuality and autonomy of women. The proverb, **nhaka mbuya ndeye mombe, yemunhu inozvionera** (only cattle can automatically be inherited, a person can choose for him/herself) undergirds the practice that a widow can choose to accept or reject levirate marriage. In the modern context where westernisation has eroded the extended family, Christianity has outlawed polygamy, and HIV/AIDS pandemic has put women at high risk of contracting the virus, women reject levirate marriage – they resort to the traditionally accepted way of giving ritual water to their sons (See, Oliver Mutukudzi film *Neria*). This is to say although she will not marry any of the deceased husband's kinsmen, however, she chooses to stay in the marital group and look after her children.

In the Gospels we read of the mission of Christ to poor and marginalised of society (Lk 4:18-21) and of the sacramental encounter of Christ in distressing disguise of the “hungry”, “stranger”, “naked”, “sick”, and prisoner (Mt 25:35 ff.). Liberation theology portrays God in and through Christ as having “a very fresh and memory for of the smallest and most forgotten” (Gutiérrez 1992:194; cf. Bartolomé de Las Casas). To the biblical trilogy of widow, stranger and orphan – *anawim*, “poor of Yahweh”), the Shona add the physically and mentally challenged as **vanhu vaMwari** (people of God). A preferential option for **vanhu vaMwari** was/is in the practice of **Zunde ramambo** (community worked in the chief's field and the proceeds are given to the needy).

6.2.4 Umwe (Togetherness)

Shona proverbs, e.g. **Rume rimwe harikombi churu** (One man cannot surround an anthill) highlight Shona communal solidarity in hard tasks like thatching, working the field, harvesting and threshing grain. Traditionally, **humwe** (Zezuru: **Nhimbe**) (the host prepared beer - soft and strong and festal meal called the whole village and even neighbouring villages to help in a specific task) was the mechanism for doing this. Tasks like threshing (men's work) and pounding (for women) were done in unison accompanied by rhythmic songs. As shown above, such rhythms have enriched the Shona Christian liturgies.

6.2.5 Ushamwari (Friendship)

The Shona adage: **Ushamwari hunokunda ukama** (Friendship is greater than consanguine relationship) highlights how the Shona put a high stake on friendship. Among the Zezuru, **Shamwari** (Karanga) synonym is **Sahwira**. The latter takes the place of the Karanga muzukuru (grand-child) one's the eyes and ears. Like the **Karanga Muzukuru**, the **Sahwira** officiates at the burial of the deceased and mediation in reconciliation and harmonious co-existence in family and community.

On the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5:21-26; 6:7-14) and in the Our Father, Christ taught that forgiveness and reconciliation from sin are conditional. Shona communal ontology and epistemology, shows openness to this liberating Christian value in that well-being is conditional. For example, when greeting, the Shona say I am well, had a good night, or a good day "if you had a good night ..." And again, after burial, early in the morning, like the women in the Gospel (Lk 24:1-12; Jn 20:1-10), the extended family visit the *grave* (understood as **imba** – *house*) to ask the deceased's "well-being" in the new abode. They recite the totem and praise names. I have noticed this ritual is being Christianized in that prayers are said to accompany the deceased to reach the presence of God and union with the ancestors are also said.

6.2.6 Kugamuchira vayeni (Hospitality)

Shona hospitality also includes openness to the needy, synonymous with the biblical *anawim* (poor of Yahweh) – the widow, stranger and orphan. (see **Zunde ramambo** above). Proverbs: **Zhara shura mweni** (Pangs of hunger are a good omen for an oncoming visitor); **Mweni haapedzi dura** (A visitor does not deplete the granary) accentuate Shona hospitality – anticipation of- generosity to visitors or strangers. There is stress on giving "a good measure, pressed down, shaken over, running over" (Lk 6:38). Furthermore, the Shona traditionally, had crops said to be **zvinhu zvinodyiwa nevapfuuri** (things that can be eaten by passersby - watermelons, sugarcane and groundnuts – but to be eaten in the field). There is also the time of day **Ruvhunzavayeni** vayeni – denoting **dusk** as a time when visitors begin to come and ask to put up for the night. This echoes the resurrection appearance of Jesus to the disciples on the road to Emmaus when the latter beckoned Jesus to "stay with us, because for it is almost evening..." (Lk 24:28). The whole

Emmaus story (Lk 24:13-35) lays emphasis on Jesus' sacramental presencing in strangers and the needy.

6.2.7 Holistic Healing

Among the Shona, healing includes all aspects of life, including the environment. Here Shona holistic religious world view accounts for supernatural and natural causes of illness (Bourdillon 1977:131, cf. Gordon Chavhunduka Shona mediation mechanism through elders and friends allows for diffusion of tension. God and the ancestors are said to heal without medicine. Ancestors can empower a living descendant to become healer (n'anga). Shona holistic healing echoes the healing ministry of Jesus – where he took all our infirmities.

Since medicinal shrubs, herbs, trees are holy and intricately linked to the sick person, the Shona believe the whole process of finding, picking and taking **muti** is part of the healing process. Consequently, **muti** should be collected with gratitude to God and the ancestors. Furthermore, it should be collected sparingly, to allow for growth and propagation and access to others in similar need (including future generations). For example, in collecting tree bark, one is advised to collect a little from the east – **kumabvazuva** (direction, sunrise) and a little from the west – **kumadokero** (direction, sunset). And it is believed that as the tree heals, the patient is also healed (Chimhanda 2011:75; Paul Gundani – personal communication).

7. Metanoia (conversion)

Metanoia deals with liberation from sin in all its expressions and as shown above post-independent Zimbabwe shows “*concrete situations of injustice to be combated and of justice to be restored*” (EA, 30). The situation calls for multidisciplinary cutting edge academic forums and research. As shown above, authentic conversion aimed at restoring the distorted God-human-cosmos relationality has to take note of the pervasiveness of sin in relation to God's salvific concern for the oppressed and the oppressor and also of the link

between liberation and reconciliation. For example, in the Shona mother's **Round Hut Kitchen** School, women participate in their own oppression.

The Shona **Round Hut Kitchen**, unlike the traditional **Chivara/Dare** (place where men and boys recreated over an open fire and even ate there), is woman space and inclusive of all people. This is where the family prayer alter is found, i.e. the **Chikuva** where the woman stores her cooking utensils and storage clay pots. Where the (initiation) teachers are the **sekuru** (grandfather and uncle), and **mbuya** (grandmother) mother and **vatete** (father's sister), women are the primary teachers for all children. In a situation where the extended family relationships have been watered down through geographical mobilisation, especially through urbanisation, the Roman Catholic Church has integrated these traditional roles into Christian praxis in that men and women in church guilds act as advisors for children and youths guilds.

But in this context women are sometimes their own worst enemy in that they socialise children, in particular, the girl-child to patriarchal obligations (Dana Rudo Mbuwayesango 1997:27-36; Chimhanda 2012:173). Metanoia in this case, aims at raising awareness of Shona women to the level that they will not be caught up in patriarchal pot without finding a way to crawl out (Mercy Amba Oduyoye 1985:11; Chimhanda 2008:309-331). In this case, feminist theology is not an armchair theology, but should be mediate reading culture and the Bible to facilitate conscious appropriation of their

For Shona Christians, there is need for capacity building in multisectorial prophetic engagement of all stakeholders in response to faith. Shona culture and the Gospel, then, become beacons for structuring emancipatory praxis. Since justice and peace are at the heart of the Church's mission (Vatican II decree *Ad Gentes* [AG], 3, 5, 8, 35-36), this orientation demands revamping existing structures and creatively building new ones, in particular for grassroots mobilisation (Chimhanda 2009:111-112, cf. Jonah Gokova in personal communication). Furthermore, since the justice and peace issues transcend denominational and religion boundaries, a multisectorial approach calls for ecumenical and inter-faith initiatives.

The Roman Catholic Church (RCC) has a strong power house especially in religious men and women, to act as pace-setter, provide prophetic witness and guardian of the moral order (Chimhanda 2009) Furthermore, the RCC has a robust Justice and Peace Commission that began- and was very active during colonial Rhodesia. To meet the challenges of post-independent Zimbabwe outlined above, The RCC has revamped the structure into what is now known as the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace in Zimbabwe (CCJPZ). Furthermore, the latter been decentralised and by establishing Justice and Peace Commissions in each of the 7 dioceses (Chimhanda and Dube 2011:268). One of its main tasks was to educate people from the grassroots and lobby for a people driven constitution, for people to meet the Members of Parliament who represent them and demand accountability for good service delivery. CCJPZ in Harare has a News Letter **Pachivara**. The recent most recent structure of the Roman Catholic Church aimed at widening media freedom is Radio **Chiedza (light)**. The Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops' Conference acts both as pace-setter e.g. in the Pastoral letter *Zimbabwe elections 2013* and as prophetic and reactive, e.g. in the Pastoral Letters: *Tolerance and hope* (2001, responding to the 2000 violent elections and land grabs by War Veterans; *God hears the cry of the oppressed* (2007 - responding to the crisis in Zimbabwe, in particular, to 2005 Operation Murambatsvina); *National healing and reconciliation* in the aftermath of the 2008 violent Presidential run-off and at the onset of the Government of National Unity (GNU).

Multisectorial approach saw the Roman Catholic Church and the Legal Resource Foundation engage in a survey to investigate the **Gukurahundi** atrocities as shown above. Ecumenical engagement saw the Roman Catholic Church in alliance with Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe (EFZ) and the Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC) in expressing dissent and dreaming dreams for the "Zimbabwe we want" (2006).

In the context of the above, various initiatives appropriate that tap out the liberation potential essential elements of Shona culture and the Gospel. These include, **Padare**, and **Mother's Round Hut** kitchen and **Zunde Ramambo**, and **Humwe/Nhimbe** concepts treated above. To these we can add **Mashambanzou** (denoting dawn as a time of day when "elephants go to bath" and **Pachivara** (forum for all people to gather and discuss on life issues affecting them) and **Musasa** (indigenous tree providing strong sisal and trusses

from **mhanda**, “slender, straight and pliable tree branches [singular: **chimhanda**]) initiatives. **Chimhanda** (Notice etymology of my surname) also denotes a small tender branch, many of which make tassels for **mhanda** used in threshing grain.

Padare/Enkundleni, founded by Jonah Gokova in 1995, is a men's forum on gender issues in Zimbabwe that seeks to:

- *Create a forum for men to question and reject gender stereotypes and roles*
- *Create support group for men who are committed to change*
- *Enable men to identify and challenge structures promoting gender inequalities in our society*

Mother's Round Hut concept was used by the *Women of Zimbabwe Arise (WOZA)* as a logo in lobbying for a people driven constitution. The brick walls shows the essentials for a New liberating constitution, i.e. promoting “equality, separation of powers, participation of the people, rule of law, elections, opposition, civil rights, transparency and accountable”. As a movement, WOZA was established by Jenni Williams (supported by Amnesty International in 2003 to:

- *Provide women from all walks of life with a united voice to speak out on issues affecting their day to day lives*
- *Empower female leadership that will lead community involvement*
- *Enable women to stand up for their rights and freedoms*

WOZA initiated the founding of a similar men's forum *Men of Zimbabwe Arise (MOZA)* in 2006. WOZA women show that women are force to reckon with in that they defied all odds (police crackdown, incarceration and torture) in lobbying against corruption, poor service delivery etc (<http://www.amnesty.org.uk/women-zimbabwe-arise...> Accessed 2014/06/23)

Zunde Ramambo aims to restore the traditional orientation to provide for the marginalised. In some areas (e.g. Serima) chiefs are committing themselves to this process. Kaseke (2006) talks of the revival of Zunde ramambo in Murewa, Harare East (cf. http://vosesa.org.za/focus/vol2_no1/index.html?article_3.html~content) Zimbabweans in Diaspora the diaspora have establishing a new Party – **Zunde** with the aim to form a united front in working for democracy and political change (http://www.zimbabwesituation.com/news/zimsit_zimbabweans-united-for-democracy/... Accessed 2014/07/07).

Mutyambizi, M. “[Shungudzevana Trust Zimbabwe | Inspire Magazine](http://queenofspadez.wordpress.com/2011/03/07/45)”,
queenofspadez.wordpress.com/2011/03/07/45

Humwe/Nhimbe concept is used by Shungu Dzevana Trust in soliciting solidarity with society in looking after “our children”. Zimbabwe **Nhimbe** for Progress started by a master mbira player, Cosmas Magaya in 1998 in a cultural exchange with North Americans to improve:

- *Limited access to health care*
- *The impoverished educational opportunities*
- *Essential extra-curricular ‘well-being’ opportunities for the youth*
- *Nutritional availability to preschool children*
- *Sub-standard living conditions*
- *Self-sufficiency and sustainability approaches* (<http://www.ancient-ways.org/projects/nhimbe-for-progress/>...Accessed 2014/06/24)

Musasa Project was founded in 1988 by two women to provide:

- *Counselling, legal support and refuge to women experiencing violence*
- *Education to raise awareness about domestic and sexual violence*
- *[Collaborate] with key target groups (including health workers, the police, social welfare and education) to strengthen the services they provide to women and children experiencing violence.*
- *Empowerment of women to deal with and prevent further exposure to HIV/AIDS* (<http://www.refworld.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/rwmain>... Accessed 2014/06/23)

Musasa project, as a drop-in centre, is inspired by the traditional men’s forum where, at a funeral, men construct a temporary shelter where sleep and guard the grave.

Zimbabwe Women Lawyers’ Association (ZWLA) was established in 1992 to:

Develop, defend, and pursue women’s human rights at local, regional and international level, through lobbying and advocacy provision of legal service, legal education, professional and capacity development for the primary development of women as well as children (<http://www.hrforumzim.org/members/women-of-zimbabwe-arise/> - Accessed 2014/07/14)

It is important to note that **Padare/ Enkundleni** is among ZWLA’s partners. Metanoia conversion here includes making women aware of the laws that protect them. Awareness of education is power that liberates, and in a fast changing techno-scientific and globalising world, poses the urgency of mainstreaming cultural studies into curricula at all levels of education – primary, secondary and tertiary.

Mashambanzou Care Trust: Sr. Noreen Nolan of the Little Company of Mary (LCM) founded the **Mashambanzou Hospice** in Harare (1989) and this has developed into Mashambanzou Care Trust in Waterfalls today. Nolan saw dawn, in the context of HIV and AIDS scourge as giving people suffering from AIDS opportunistic diseases hope at least to die with dignity (Sr Ivy in personal communication). This echoes the work of Mother Theresa of Kolkata.

9. Conclusion

Liberation in Zimbabwe today is concerned with injustices to be combated and justice to be restored. For a creative engagement with culture in sharing in the mission of Christ, it was shown that issues of peace and justice are at the very heart of the church's mission. It cannot be overemphasised that the Greatest Commandment to love God and neighbour as oneself is axiomatic for a theology of liberation. Capacity building to revamp existing structures in the church was explored and it was shown that Shona culture has authentic essential elements to be used as a starting point in addressing critical issues that haunt Zimbabwe today. The above interventions show Shona culture as a powerful resource for Zimbabwe Christians engaging in creative love for the neighbour. Inspired by the Gospel example of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:29-37), the Zimbabwe context shows that neighbour includes maintaining a sustainable environment.

The mutual link between Inculturation, Evangelisation and the Incarnation showed that inculturation is not a demand for authentic evangelisation. But noting the importance of culture in providing seeds for evangelisation, never-the-less the Gospel has primacy in that the Incarnation posits God in Christ as the Good News and the first and foremost evangelizer. Historical conditioning and the dual nature of both Shona culture and Bible necessitate critical engagement of the texts for a theanthropocosmic theology that strives for relevance and inclusion. Liberation was understood as the affirmation of the creation and baptismal dignity and vocation of all people. Since all creation reveals the Glory of God, liberation means the attainment of fullness of life or well-being in this life and in eternity.

Post-feminist perspective appraised Shona culture's patriarchal stamp. Aware that at the intersection of gender, class, race, ethnicity, etc., women represent the "oppressed of the oppressed", the post-feminist approach adopted, allowed for going behind and beyond feminism for a both/and conjunctive and inclusive liberation theology. Over and above all, the meta

10. Bibliography

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