

Convergence of diverse religions at Zimbabwe heritage sites: The case of great Zimbabwe National monument

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Abstract

Cultural heritage sites in Africa have since time immemorial attracted diverse spiritual beliefs, practices, political and socio-economic activities thereby creating cultural remains and settlements now referred to as heritage. The formation and conservation of heritage sites has always been a welcome idea given that they significantly help conserving the African culture and exhibiting the wisdom of Africa that for centuries has been overshadowed and subjugated by western imperialism. Yet due to the legacy of colonialism and the consequences of globalization, heritage sites in many parts of Africa have become centers of rivalry, antagonism and rarely centers for mutual conversations in so far as religion is concerned. In post independence Zimbabwe for instance, religion along with political, socio-economic factors continue to play a pivotal role in the cultural and spiritual realms of societies. However, globalization which has brought about religious independence in the country has resulted in the emergence of multiple religious sects and beliefs with almost antithetical doctrines resulting in serious conflicts at heritage sites. Using stories, written documents and informal interviews, this paper draws from past and current experiences at Great Zimbabwe monument, a heritage site and shrine that was and is still revered for its religious significance. It notes that there is a universal religious connection between heritage sites and the beliefs that followers of different religions such as Christianity and African traditional religion hold. The piece furthers to point out that from this universal connection, conflicts on religious use of heritage sites arise between different religious groups and for heritage sites managers.

Keywords: Africa, Zimbabwe, Cultural heritage sites, religion, Christianity, African traditional religion, apostolic sects, Great Zimbabwe.

INTRODUCTION

Africa is richly endowed with both natural and cultural heritages. Cases in point are Table Mountain (South Africa), Okavango swamps (Botswana), and Great Zimbabwe monument (Zimbabwe), among many others. Taking the instance of the latter which is also the case study adopted in this study, Great Zimbabwe monument is an ancient cultural heritage site that is located 27km south east of Masvingo city, Zimbabwe's oldest town.

According to historians such as Mutswairo and Mudenge (Sibanda and Moyana, 1984), Great Zimbabwe is the largest pre-historic site in southern Africa that

archaeologist, historians, amongst other researchers have proved beyond any reasonable doubt that it was authored by the ancestors of the present day Shona speaking people-an ethnic group that constitutes the majority of the indigenous people of Zimbabwe. This is aptly confirmed by Matenga (1998) who asserts that although there are no absolute dates on the antiquity of Great Zimbabwe, there are reliable indicators that prove beyond reasonable doubt that Great Zimbabwe was a capital of a huge kingdom that flourished between 1200 and 1500 AD. The splendor and grandeur of the majestic edifice speaks volumes of its history and significance. While no one actually ever came into contact with the brains behind the establishment of Great Zimbabwe (people who master-minded the construction of Great

Zimbabwe), there is a very strong conviction that the site could have been used for religious and/or spiritual empowerment among many other purposes. Oral history is replete with myths suggesting that Great Zimbabwe was a renowned and powerful religious center. What remains uncertain however, is how exactly the religious practices were carried out in the past. Such practices could have possibly influenced the people who later settled at Great Zimbabwe after its demise to practice certain rituals and religious ceremonies that were witnessed by Posselt upon his arrival at Great Zimbabwe (Posselt, 1924). According to Posselt (1924) who visited the site in 1889, the site was sacrosanct and could not be approached without African traditional rituals. Supporting the same view, Burke (1969: 65) argues that 'Carl Mauch eye-witnessed how the local people at Great Zimbabwe held the site in respect and paid visits for ancestral worship'.

Great Zimbabwe was declared a national monument in 1937 by the then white Rhodesian Government. It is interesting to note that Great Zimbabwe was adopted by both warring parties during the liberation struggle as a unifying and rallying factor. Also, spirit mediums especially in southern Zimbabwe used Great Zimbabwe (GZ) as their sole source of motivation and inspiration. Upon the attainment of independence in 1980, Great Zimbabwe generously gave its name to the new born nation. Barely six years later (1986), GZ was listed on the prestigious World Heritage List. One of the factors that resulted in GZ being ascribed on the World Heritage List revolves on its religious significance.

In the new millennium, the site has retained its religious significance albeit in a new way that is characterized by conflicts and controversies. Conflicts between Christians and followers of African traditional religion have become order of the day with each claiming full entitlement and authority over the use of the site.

With regard to controversies around Great Zimbabwe monument, recently there has been a new development on the contemporary use of the heritage place that has sparked controversy amongst heritage managers, the general public and scholars alike. Spirit mediums from different parts of the country have on several occasions come to Great Zimbabwe monument for either reviving their spiritual powers or carrying out cleansing rituals. On the 5th of March 2011 about 700 war veterans from Harare Province visited GZ for traditional cleansing, they were accompanied by Nehoreka and Bhasvi. Nehoreka is a popular national spirit medium in Zimbabwe. He was instrumental in carrying and performing traditional rituals during the war of liberation struggle. The main purpose of the visit was to ask for permission from the ancestors to bring home the spirits of heroes and heroines who died while on duty in Mozambique. The same group later returned again at Great Zimbabwe on the 25th of March 2012, the purpose of the visit being to inform the ancestors that they had successfully brought the spirits of

the fallen freedom fighters on their way to Njelele religious shrine where they will be laid to rest.

To date Christian religious groups come to Great Zimbabwe for religious purposes, a situation that has created conflicts and controversy especially with African traditionalists who claim total authority over the site. Wallace (2004) noted that all religions probably have their own archaeology and she cited the tensions of Jerusalem as partially caused by the fact that the same place is contested by different religions. It is also interesting to note that although some Christian groups who are coming to Great Zimbabwe heritage site share some similar doctrines with those who believe in the ancestral worship, the two religious groups find it difficult to share the site for religious purposes.

As noted by Sagiya (2009: 3), at one time or another Christians have been chiefly known for denouncing and condemning heritage sites as temples of evil spirits and this could explain why many early missionary churches were located near major heritage sites for example; the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) was constructed very close to Great Zimbabwe and Jesuit Mission was established just a few meters from King Lobengula's kraal in Matebeleland, one of the national monument in Zimbabwe. In addition, Ranger (1999: 150) notes that:

After many years of unsuccessful mission work in the Matopos, the Christian church at Hope Fountain decided to conduct its services at sacred sites including Silozwane national monument that is also near Old Bulawayo another heritage site in an attempt to discredit their use by the local people.

However, some independent African churches are no longer denouncing the use of heritage sites for religious beliefs and practices. Instead, a number of Christians now come either individually or in small groups to perform their prayers at Great Zimbabwe. Since the National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe (NMMZ) - the organisation mandated by the government to look after heritage in Zimbabwe - do not easily grant permission for prayers and other religious activities, Christians normally come during the night or as pseudo-tourists. It is these secret visits that are leaving behind evidence of fire, small pieces of white clothes and some other miscellaneous apostolic objects behind. Yet some Christian groups feel ancestors have nothing to do with Great Zimbabwe (GZ), to them ancestral worship is an eraser of holiness, while traditionalists regard GZ as a core of African tradition religion (Maduro, 2011).

Drawing on the experiences of two of the authors of this piece as workers at GZ, the paper brings to the fore the politics, controversies and conflicts arising at heritage sites as different religious groups hold sacred and sacrosanct a particular property but which cannot reconcile their own beliefs.

The paper further stresses that the use of heritage sites by different religious groups is not only unique to GZ heritage site but a common phenomenon at other

heritage sites such as Khami World Heritage Site, Nharira National Monument, Matobo World Heritage Site, only to mention but a few (Sagiya, 2009). This is to say that while more focus and attention is given to Great Zimbabwe, discussion on other sites will be meant to provide an extended coverage on why divergent religious groups are flocking to heritage sites to practice their religious rites.

Understanding the concept of religion with emphasis on Zimbabwe

Before colonialism in Zimbabwe as in many other African societies, the major religion revered and worshipped by many was African traditional religion (ATR) whereby people worshipped God through ancestors. With the advent of colonialism alongside globalization, a tide of change whirled across Africa resulting in multi-religious sects formulated throughout the continent.

As a result of the compound factors noted above - colonialism and globalization - Zimbabwe today is shared by diverse populace exposed to different religions and religious ways during their upbringing such as African Traditional Religion, Christianity, Islamic, Rastafarianism, Satanism, among many others. It is out of this observation that Nzenza (The Herald, 23/05/2012) has argued that there is a growing spiritual identity crisis in Zimbabwe between the Christian religion and African traditional religion. For her, Zimbabweans seem to be caught in a massive pendulum in which people swing from one end to the other, in search of a place that can define them in relation to God, ancestors and the world around them. Nzenza's comments on Zimbabwe's religious status holds much water given that the nation has entered a religious schizophrenic where modes of prayers are continually being reproduced, new religious movements and prophets arising each day. On the other hand, foundations of the African traditional religion, a religion which resulted from the sustaining faith held by the forebears of the black 'indigenous' Africans are being eroded. Perhaps, it gives credit to briefly examine the concept of religion along with the experiences at Great Zimbabwe heritage site.

The concept of religion especially in relation to Africa is difficult to pin down with precision. Realizing this tantalizing difficulty, Bourdillon (1998: 13) has noted that 'the definition for religion is rationally difficult to arrive as the term means many things to different people'. Yet scholars such as John Hick, Kufman, Davies and Bourdillon have made attempts to conjure different definitions for the term. Others such as Epstein (2010) have provided a holistic description of the concept of religion. He thus says: 'all the world's major religious were formed on the principle that divine beings or forces can promise a level of justice in a supernatural realm that

can be perceived in this natural one' (Epstein, 2010: 109). For purposes of this study, we will not spell out the definition of all other scholars mentioned above. Instead, we adopt Bourdillon's (1997: 9) definition that 'religion is a social and cultural expression within specific historical, geographical, political and economic contexts'.

In view of this understanding, it can be noted that religion is of particular importance to all human beings given its fundamental role in expressing and sustaining the faiths that gives spiritual identity, meaning and purpose to their lives. Bearing in mind the fundamental role of religion to all human societies, Harvey (2000:6) has divided religion into three broad categories namely;

- a) World religions – a term which refers to transcultural or international faiths.
- b) Indigenous religions – which refers to smaller, culture – specific or nation – specific religious groups.
- c) New religious movements – which refers to recently developed faiths.

For purposes of this paper, categories (a) and (b) to which Christianity and African traditional religion fall respectively are adopted. The choice of the two aforementioned categories is not accidental but premised on the fact that both Christian religious groups and those that belong to the African traditional religions are converging at Great Zimbabwe heritage site to worship. It is this situation that has created conflicts, controversies and challenges around GZ heritage site. Also, Christianity and African traditional religion are the major prevalent religions operating in Zimbabwean society.

It is curious to note that the management of many heritage sites in Zimbabwe have over-emphasized on the monumentality of the resources at the expense of the spiritual values, which are the cornerstone of African belief systems and integral to the heritage sites. It is out of this realization including those adumbrated in the introduction of this paper that the researchers attempt to provide a clear understanding of the spiritual value embedded at Great Zimbabwe heritage site, and to explore the potential risks to the Zimbabwean heritage sites that may emanate from religious conflicts and misunderstanding associated with them.

Interactions and activities at Great Zimbabwe heritage site: A historical overview

Before and after independence through the present time in Zimbabwe "Great Zimbabwe served many people from across the nation as a centre of religious worship during and after its occupation as a town site" (Matenga, 1998: 16). He further noted that the cultural heritage site was where the worship of the Mwari cult was being practiced in most parts of the central plateau whilst in around early 20th century the religion was more active in south-western side in the Matopo Hills near Bulawayo. The 'architecture (ritual enclosure, recess enclosure, sacred cave), and archaeological remains such as the soapstone curved birds of Great Zimbabwe have been

attributed to the religious status of the site' (Matenga, 1998: 19). However, interaction with the heritage site has been dramatically affected by different prevailing socio-political and economic situations at different times of the country's history. In the ensuing paragraphs, we look at the interactions and activities at Great Zimbabwe heritage sites before, during and after colonialism in Zimbabwe.

Pre-colonial period

There are a number of cases that were recorded by early people who made attempts to write the history of Great Zimbabwe heritage site. A case in point is that of 'Carl Mauch who recorded an annual ritual occasion held at Great Zimbabwe around 1871 that involved slaughtering of two oxen and a heifer' (Matenga, 1998: 19). They are also unrecorded myths and legends that reveal the pre-colonial era religious prowess of the site. It is said people used to hear voices from God from Great Zimbabwe as with the case now with the Njelele shrines in Matobo world heritage area. Naturally people expect rain fall, but for those who believe in African traditional religion, the ancestors for particular reasons may withhold it. As a result, Murimbika (2006: 85) argues that 'it was of importance therefore for local communities to maintain a good relationship with their ancestors through performing a number of rituals and ceremonies at heritage sites'. It is during this period were many if not all heritage sites had traditional custodians mostly spirit mediums who controlled access amongst commoners, foreigners and women (Sinamai, 2006). African traditional religion enjoyed monopoly in terms of using cultural heritage sites for religious purpose which is no longer the case today where we find Christian religious groups also claiming a stake on heritage sites as far as their religious beliefs and practices are concerned.

Colonial period

The religious practices were adversely affected as from 1890 when the Zimbabwean plateau was occupied by the British South Africa Company (BSACo) that was under Cecil John Rhodes. Due to colonialism, Great Zimbabwe was alienated from its traditional custodians that is, the Mugabe and Nemanwa clans. According to Fontein (2006) 'the site was appropriated to provide historical and moral justification for the imperial projects' (p. 213). It is important to note that many of these cultural heritage sites were turned into tourist destinations. Various developments took place at these previously regarded as shrines by the local people. At Great Zimbabwe 'the site was fenced; a museum was constructed within the site as well as a golf course around 1950s' (Fontein, 2006: 103). Those who held the site as a religious center were obviously unhappy with these developments as for them

these developments were interfering with the genius loci of Great Zimbabwe. As a result, 'a lot of communication and interaction that existed between heritage sites and local communities stopped due to activities of the colonial government that wanted to assert its power' (Ndoro, 2005: 41).

Christianity was one of the tools used by the colonialists to stop the use of heritage sites by the local people. According to Maradze (2003: 2) 'traditional cultural activities, including ceremonies, rituals and taboos were denounced by the new Christian churches and considered as pagan activities'. Ndoro (2001) also concur with Maradze's point of view that the condemnation of ancestral worship by the Christian churches suppressed cultural activities and it is no coincidence that the main Christian churches were located near major sites, for example Dutch Reformed Church was at the foot of Great Zimbabwe. However, regardless of these efforts, the use of Great Zimbabwe by African traditional religion adherents, with the site continued by way of clandestine visits, usually made at night (Sinamai, 2006; Ndoro, 2001; Fontein, 2006). During the rise of African nationalism and the liberation struggle, 'Great Zimbabwe was frequently visited as there was a widely belief that ancestral legitimacy for liberating the country was obtained from the site' (Fontein, 2006: 107). When independence came in 1980, many of believers of African traditional religion expected that freedom had finally come to practice their religious rituals and ceremonies at places where the colonial government was denial them access.

Post colonial period

In the post colonial era many of those who believed in ancestral worship were shocked to realize that what seems to have changed from the colonial administrators of many heritage places was the name whilst retuning the same systems of management. A good example is that of 'Ambuya Sophia Muchini affectionally known as Nehanda (Zimbabwe's well known spirit medium) occupied the site soon after independence' (Garlake, 1983: 61). She was however, evicted from the site by the department of National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe which felt her stay at the sight may do more harm than good. While at one time or another some efforts were made to revive the religious status of the site through engaging two local clans that have been traditionally claiming custodianship of the site, the measures seem to have added more problems than solutions. This is aptly captured by Matenga who observes that:

In 1984 a bira was held at the site which ended in a fiasco with elders trading blows and hot words. The question of course was "who is who" between the two communities. After the fracas it was deemed practical not to hold such ceremonies; certainly not the best thing to

do but some kind of "modus vivendi" (Matenga, 2000: 13)

Recently around early 2000s, new or modernized rituals at Great Zimbabwe in the form of music and dance performances known as 'Unity Galas', (Sinamai, 2006:38) have once again started prevailing with the hope to revive the sacredness of the cultural heritage site. The local communities however labeled the rituals as blasphemous. Traditional leaders also complained about the sexual behavior of the youth and the music during these gatherings which they strongly believe disturb the ancestral soundscape as the latter never 'relate with modern guitars or saxophones' (Fontein, 2006: 106). Due to these complains, these galas are now being done in stadiums and other open places in the country.

Contemporary religious usage and convergence at Great Zimbabwe

In the recent years, there has been an increase of Christian religious groups who are visiting not only Great Zimbabwe, but other heritage sites for religious purposes. The case of Great Zimbabwe has been of interest as two of the co-authors work at the site and has been observing these Christian groups with some coming from far-away places and claiming to be following certain instructions they claim to have been told by the Holy Spirit. Some are claiming that the Holy Spirit had instructed them to come and pray at the site so that the country could receive rain that will then lead to bumper harvest. On the other hand, followers of African traditional religion (ATR) are visiting the site for religious rituals and ceremonies. Many times, members of the two religions (Christianity and ATR) have expressed their discontentment whenever they meet each other or hear of the visits of the other group to the site. As noted by Mupira (2003), the activities of some churches are criticized as they infringe taboos associated with cultural sites particularly those located on the hills and mountains. Yet despite all these criticisms against each other by members of different religious groups, religious activities and religions continue converging at the place with the same objective(s) of wanting to reinvigorate, sanctify, and revive their religious powers. It is worth noting that the major religions which converge at GZ are ATR, Christianity and the so-called independent churches. In the ensuing paragraphs, we look at the current usage of GZ heritage by each of these different religions.

African Traditional Religion

Generally speaking, African Traditional Religion (ATR) is any religion that existed and has continually been practiced in Africa before the arrival of Islam, Christianity and any other non- African religion. It is worth noting that ATR share basic similarities across the continent. This is

aptly captured by Awolalu (1976: 2) who had this to say of ATR: 'In the religious systems of ATR, everywhere there is the concept of God (called by different names), concept of divinities and spirits as well as beliefs in the ancestral cult'. It is however unfortunate that the bulk of the literature of African Traditional Religion has been produced by foreign researchers, most of whom have come up with very misleading terms in describing the African people's beliefs. Such terms that have been used include heathenism, paganism, idolatry, primitive and 'juju'. Henceforth, Africa was regarded as 'a dark continent' and it was the burden of the men of white clothes from the civilized world to bring light into this part of the globe. These speculative and baseless conceptions about Africa and its religion have been refuted by a number of African scholars. Mbiti (1990; 268-9), for instance, notes that 'Africa's belief in God existed before the arrival of missionaries and the same people did not bring God to Africa, rather it is God who brought the missionaries to Africa'. Similarly, Asante (in Mengara, 2001) argues that 'Europe's intervention in Africa [was] the beginning of the most nefarious images. An African invention, for European purposes, could no longer serve the interests of its own people' as 'Europeans despised all African traditions, customs, and knowledge systems' (Mawere, 2010: 209).

ATR is based on oral transmission, that is, it is not written on paper but in people's minds, oral history, shrines, cultural practices and rituals. It remains vague that the religion has no founders or reformers as with other religions such as Gantama the Buddha or Christ in the case of Buddhism and Christianity respectively. In view of this observation, Awolalu (1976: 2) notes that 'the declared adherents of the indigenous religion (another term that has been used to define ATR) are very conservative, resisting the influence of modernism heralded by the colonial era, western education and including the introduction of Islam or Christianity'. In Southern Africa, ATR is said to have flourished during the rise of what archaeologists have termed 'complex state system,' (Summers 1963, Huffman 1987, Matenga 1998 and Fontein 2006). This period witnessed the establishments of early states such as Mapungubwe (South Africa), Great Zimbabwe (Zimbabwe), Manyikeni (Mozambique) and Domboshaba (Botswana). For this reason, African Traditional Religion has been attributed as one of the key factors that led to the rise and flourishing of ancient African states such as those mentioned above.

One major trait that distinguishes African traditional religion from other religions such as Christianity is that the former is based on an 'unwritten or undocumented philosophy' while the latter is strongly informed by literary traditions. This is confirmed by Awolalu (1976: 2) who notes that:

ATR has no founders or reformers and as such it is not a religion of one hero as with Christianity were they

are founders who always influence religious practices or doctrines. The ancestors represent the backbone of African traditional religion as they are considered as part of the community as the living and occupy an important role in the affairs of the community.

As can be seen from the quotation above by Awolalu, in Christianity ancestors play a far lesser role. Possibly the closest equivalent to ancestors in ATR (in terms of fundamental significance) is Jesus Christ in Christian tradition.

In Zimbabwe, Great Zimbabwe has been described as a religious center where ATR was (and is still) practiced before it spread throughout the plateau. There are religious objects and architecture that shows evidence of ATR. As such, the site has been used by those who believe in African traditional religion from the pre-colonial era to the present. This is similar to what is prevailing at other heritage sites in Zimbabwe such as Matopo World Heritage Site, Khami World Heritage Site, Domboshava National Monument, Nharirira Hills, only to mention but a few.

Christianity

Christianity has been identified as one of the world's largest religious group along with Islam, Buddhism and Hinduism (Tomoko, 2007). This religion like ATR discussed above is also rampant at Great Zimbabwe heritage site. It is based on the life and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth. As presented in the Bible's New Testament, 'Christianity has been propagated throughout the world and the main divisions of Christianity are according to the number of adherents' (Tomoko, 2007: 34). Christianity is one such religion that has been adversely affected by seeds of division that has led to splits that have given rise to innumerable denominations. Origins of some Christian churches remain unknown and also there is no room to question their origins. Basing on this observation, scholars such as Nolte – Schamn (2006: 9) thus have argued that 'what people mean by Christianity can be vastly different depending on their various contexts and backgrounds'. Nonetheless it cannot be denied that despite its ambivalence and diversity, Christianity has become a strong influence in many communities and individuals in Africa and Zimbabwe in particular.

In Zimbabwe, Christianity was pioneered by missionaries who came and establish missions in different parts of the country. The works of missionaries were mixed with success and failures as the missionaries found Zimbabweans with their own religion; missionaries found Africans and in particular Zimbabweans worshipping God through the Mwari religion (ATR). The London Missionary Society came to Matabeleland in 1859 and after 20 years of fasting and praying, they made no converts other than a handful of their domestic

workers (Nzenza, 2012). This was vivid evidence that shows the challenge missionaries faced in converting Zimbabweans to Christianity. As such, claims that the missionaries introduced God to Zimbabwe are misleading.

Some of the early missions to be established in Zimbabwe include: Inyati, Morgenster, Hope Fountain, Chibi, only to mention but a few (Sibanda and Moyana, 1984). However, if the same missionaries were to come to Zimbabwe now, they will praise the Lord for the number of churches mushrooming everywhere. These churches like Christian churches and ATR often visit GZ heritage site to revive and reinvigorate their religious powers. It is worth emphasizing that Christianity's religious activities and practices at GZ cultural heritage site have not been well received by those who believe in ATR, that is, those who strongly believe to be closer to GZ heritage site than any other religion. In fact, a place like Great Zimbabwe has been venerated as a residing place of ancestral spirits of the forefathers of Zimbabwe. Yet among the ever increasing churches that often visit GZ heritage site and that have become a common face of Zimbabwe's religious landscape are the Independent African Churches also referred to as African Indigenous Churches; hence the need to discuss the latter's in relation to their religious use of GZ heritage site.

Independent African Churches

Many of the so called Independent African Churches come as a break away from the missionary churches. As noted by Sagiya (2009: 19) 'in Zimbabwe, Independent African Churches have emerged around the 1930s though they were not very active during the colonial period'. The reason for them being less active was that they could be accused by some Africans as worshipping the ancestors of the whites (Mackay, 1998). As a result, 'the apostolic churches that strongly opposed traditional religious practice were forced to drink millet beer and to take snuff in connection with the ancestral cult during the liberation struggle' (Mackay, 1998: 361). Thus, after independence the Zimbabwe's constitution passed freedom of religion and worship that guarantees the freedom of worship that was welcomed by those religious groups who were finding it difficult to do so during the colonial era.

The Independent African churches as the name suggests were started independently in Africa by Africans and not directly by missionaries from another continent. As such, they are found throughout the continent. In Zimbabwe as in many other African countries:

Independent African Churches were founded by groups that were breaking off from the European denominations and they became a fusion of imported parent church doctrines with African traditional religion that was being practiced before the coming of

Christianity (Ibrahim, 1989: 67).

In Zimbabwe, Independent African Churches are many and include: the Zion Christian Church (ZCC), Zimbabwe Assemblies of God (Zaoga), and Apostolic Sects (Johane Masowe, Johane Marange, Mugodhi, and Africa Apostolic Church etc). These churches at most share similar practices and beliefs with the African Traditional Religion. Like ATR and Christianity discussed above, Independent African Churches are among those who frequently use GZ cultural heritage site as a worship center - a center to renew and revive their spiritual and religious powers.

Religious conflicts and reasons for convergence at Great Zimbabwe heritage site

In many cases African traditional religion and Christianity as well as Independent African Churches are found to clash and disagree because of their differences and discontinuities between them. As such, there was an outcry by the representatives of those who believe in the African value systems concerning the use of Great Zimbabwe by independent African churches. Ambuya Zvitii (2009; pers.comm), for instance argued that the activities of Christians are the ones causing the loss of spiritual power and desecration of Great Zimbabwe. She further pointed out that those who know the African value systems (like followers of ATR and unlike followers of religions such as Christianity) possess the knowledge on how to use the place and space of heritage sites such as GZ heritage site. This agrees with Shumba (2003: 23) who argues that 'several unregistered independent African churches belonging to the Johane Masowe ministries are being ignorant to the cultural significance of Nyanga cultural landscape'. On another occasion, Sekuru Mushore of Nharira hills lamented that apostolic sects having prayers in the hills are leading to loss of spiritual power and desecration of the place. He argues that the practices of apostolic sects contradict with the values of the ancestral spirits (Nharira hills; report 2005).

As has been seen from the arguments above, conflicts between religions converging at heritage sites are not only limited to Great Zimbabwe heritage site. Other examples of the conflicts include the recent Domboshava National Monument conflict. As paraded by Chara (2012):

At Domboshava National Monument which is located near Harare the capital city of Zimbabwe, the establishment of the apostolic sect shrine within the cultural landscape has sparked a spiritual warfare. According to headman Simon Kaparamura the mountain [Domboshava] is a no-go area for Christians. He further narrated that their ancestors were buried in that mountain and they must be left alone (The Sunday Mail, 27-2/07/2012).

Moreso, since those who believe in ATR conduct rain making ceremonies rituals within the site, holding of

prayer sessions around the heritage site is believed to upset ancestors. As with Great Zimbabwe, Christian groups coming to the Domboshava for prayers are from as far as Bulawayo, Kadoma, Chegutu, Bindura, among other places.

In a different incident, a 21 year old man from high density suburbs of Kuwadzana fell off a mountain regarded as sacred by traditionalist when he was praying atop Bvopfo Hills (The Sunday Mail, 27-02/06/2012). Headman Albert Madzongo, under whose jurisdiction Bvopfo hills falls, linked the death to superstition, alleging that the man's death was caused by the 'upset' ancestors that are buried in the mountains. Other traditionalists concurred with Headman Madzongo that in many heritage sites 'lay' ancestors and the religious people (Christians) that are coming there to worship day and night are disturbing their peace. To the traditionalists, the use of heritage sites by Christians is to a larger extent, a contributing factor to the natural disasters like perennial droughts that communities succumb to at times.

Contrary to this kind of thinking, John Mukwembi, a member of the apostolic sect argues that their [Christian groups] presence at heritage sites had nothing to do with droughts before vowing that nothing will stop them from worshipping at these places (The Sunday Mail, 27-02/06/2012). Mukwembi further argues that these heritage sites consist of mountains, caves and trees that were created by God and every human being has a right to use them. As traditionalist are free to use sites like Great Zimbabwe for whatever religious purposes and likewise many Christian members interviewed argued that they have the right also to pray at these places of cultural significance (see The Sunday Mail, 27-2/06/2012).

Yet both religions (ATR and Christianity) share a spiritual approach to life and believe in the existence and power of the sacred. It is therefore sensible to argue that it is this sacredness that is attracting them to cultural heritage sites. Bourdillion (1998:303) alluded that healing has a central place in traditional religion, most rituals in this religion are done in response to trouble. This also applies to apostolic sects, that is, the reason why they draw large congregations is that they seem to have solutions to the social and even economic problems. Nolte – Schamn (2006: 80) also made an important observation that ATR and Christians both belief in God or Supreme Being such that reconciling of the two religions could not be impossible. Some Christian groups particular the apostolic sects (Johane Masowe) share common characteristic with ATR. For instance, followers of Johane Masowe do not use the bible because they claim of spiritual guidance and as such their religion is based on oral transmission similarly to ATR practices. In addition, many Christian groups coming to heritage sites seems to be against modernity in the way they worship that is, they all take off shoes, watches, bangles, cell phones and if they have cars they are left at a

distance that is also the same with the Mwari cult of ATR.

With regards to the question on why some churches or their members are leaving their respective places of worship and coming particularly to heritage sites and not other places, Brian Mutembedza (Interview, 2012) of the Zimbabwe Assemblies of God (Zaoga) gave two main reasons. First, Christians are following the example that was set by Jesus who prayed wherever he wanted despite there being synagogues. Second, it is believed that secluded places like mountains bring with it a peaceful environment. Third, by abandoning the comforts of church buildings and praying in the open, Christians will be demonstrating their commitment (Interview with Mutedza, 2012).

One important thing to note in relation with GZ is that the heritage site (GZ) presents a complicated scenario given that conflicts do not only exist between different religions, but between members of the same religions. For example, serious conflicts exist among traditionalists themselves particularly between the Nemanwa and Mugabe clans on the legitimate traditional custodianship of GZ heritage site. Thus these two clans always contradict each other when it comes to the legitimate traditional custodianship and religious practices in the heritage site. On the other hand, the different Christian groups using the site do not agree on certain matters concerning religious doctrines and practices.

Although there has not been a recorded case in Zimbabwe where a heritage site has so far been destroyed as a result of religious conflicts, the current situation at Great Zimbabwe heritage site, as at many other heritage sites in the country, is building momentum of a timing bomb that can explode any time. It therefore warrants conscientious perception when matters of conflicts arise with other religions as is currently happening at GZ heritage site.

Impact of religious conflicts on the management of intangible heritage at GZ heritage site

As has been highlighted in the preceding paragraphs, religious groups flocking to Great Zimbabwe come for various reasons. The ATR come to worship Mwari through the ancestors attached to the site. Some Independent African Churches come to the site to suppress or cleanse the ancestral spirits that oppose with their holy spirit. Still, other Christian groups visit the site because they believe that the place is a source of spiritual powers that they need to tap so as to spiritually empower themselves. Curious to note is the fact that other Christian groups and members of ATR come to worship for the welfare of the country at Great Zimbabwe which they believe to be the source of all bone fide Zimbabweans. Such a convergence of members of religions which in most cases have conflicting ideologies, doctrines and worshipping practices has reinforced what

is often said metaphorically of African Christians that 'they go to church during the day and then to the traditional healer at night' (Nolte-Schamn, 2006: 45). Besides, it has created a complex problem for heritage managers who are known to be anti-spiritual advocates.

In view of this problem, some heritage professionals have argued that the use of heritage sites should be compatible with culture of the people in which the site is located, that is, the use of the sites should respect the cultural significance of a place (Chauke, 2009: pers.comm.) Such utterances by heritage professionals imply that if the Christians are cleansing the ancestral spirit attached to Great Zimbabwe they are not compatibly using the site; hence their activities need to be stopped. According to Gutu (2009: pers.comm.) if the Christian groups want to suppress what heritage managers are trying to curate then certain measures have to be taken to avoid further loss of this valuable intangible heritage. Thus for Gutu, the activities of Christian groups that do not respect cultural significance of the site are uncalled for. Supporting the same line of thinking, Sagiya (2009: 40) has argued that: 'If a traditional healer wearing his/her regalia attend a Christian church service, s/he is most likely to be chased away, and this is the same case that should happen to prophets when they visit Great Zimbabwe'. Such views are a clear testimony that religious conflicts are seriously impacting on the management of heritage sites. In fact, the conflicts are creating a dilemma on the part of heritage managers on what exactly should they do to resolve the conflicts. Serious questions thus arise: 'Should heritage managers stop the religious activities by Christian and Independent African Churches in favor of ATR in order to sustainably use and manage the spiritual values/intangible values of heritage sites?'

Towards a 'generative dialogue' between religions at GZ: Some recommendations

The current prevailing uncertainty on the rightful use of heritage sites for religious purposes need to be looked at in order to unpack the impact of the situation to the management of 'heritage properties' in Zimbabwe. In fact confronted with the tensions and situations elaborated above, there is no doubt that heritage managers of heritage sites as GZ may find themselves in a dilemma on what exactly should they do. Having meticulously ponder through the experiences and situations prevailing at GZ and other such heritage sites in the country, we argue for a 'generative dialogue' (Verran, 2011) between all religions converging at heritage sites. By generative dialogue, we mean 'a democratic and sustainable dialogue between conservation models from various knowledge forms' (Mawere, forthcoming). In fact, 'the present study seeks to criticize the unbalanced relationship between diverse religions' (Mawere,

forthcoming) and promote 'symmetrical anthropology' (Latour 1993, 2007) - an anthropology that moves beyond the nature/culture divides and is capable of representing both the modern and pre-modern perspectives. This is what Stengers (2005) calls 'cosmopolitics'- a politics constituted by multiple, divergent worlds whereby indigenous movements may meet scientists and environmentalists of different stripes. As Mawere (forthcoming) argues:

Such an approach has the merit that it enhances the interactions/relations between plants, humans and non-humans that moves beyond the nature/culture divide in promoting holistic sustainable productive systems and in a strict sense humans' freedom of choice and free-will (in a productive sense). It also allows the interface of Science with other knowledge forms such as indigenous knowledge systems (p. 3).

An initiation and effort such as this should be taken by the National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe (NMMZ)-the board in charge of all heritage sites in the country- which should facilitate inter-religious dialogue or inter-faith interactions that will fruitfully benefit proper presentation and conservation of heritage sites. As the facilitator, NMMZ should clearly define categories that different partners in dialogue are, what they stand for, and what differentiates them. Differences of the religious groups need to be identified and investigated. More so, NMMZ should come up with 'game rules' for religious interaction under the rubric of mutual growth in which partners are not in the dialogue in order to sway, convince or convert another. The dialogue should therefore be conducted in a spirit of faith, hope and love. The task of dialogical interaction between Christians and ATR should be targeted at promoting unity in diversity with regards to the use of heritage sites for religious purposes. The religious communities that are interacting with heritage sites should be informed that it's now high time their adherents and practitioners of both ATR and Christianity be acknowledged as equal dialogue partners in the quest for spiritual enhancement at heritage sites.

Bourdillion (1997: 79) seems to have advocated a similar approach to religious conflict solving when he had this to say: 'All streams run to the ocean meaning that all religions return to God. As such no religion can be said to be evil (all religions promote righteousness) as a result they have to come to an interface'. Put differently, the basic affinities between ATR and Christianity should enable sharing of religious shrines such as GZ achievable. Emphasizing on Mawere's approach elaborated in the preceding paragraphs and Bourdillon's argument here above, it can be argued that the points of agreement and connection between the two religions (ATR and Christianity), especially that they believe in the same God, need to be manipulated by those in charge of cultural heritage sites to enhance sustainable religious dialogues and usage of the intangible properties and/or values at heritage sites like GZ.

Yet, it is not an easy thing to promote a 'generative dialogue' between different religions given their different ideologies. In view of this difficulty, heritage managers need to clearly understand why religious groups are coming to heritage sites (such as Great Zimbabwe) and why they conflict more often than not. These important data can be obtained through a thorough research with members of all religious groups who often converge at the heritage site. Such a measure should be urgent as the wait and see attitude that heritage managers seems to have adopted as a strategy to deal with conflicts of religious interests at heritage sites is counterproductive and potentially dangerous.

Another possible way of dealing with the conflicts and issues of convergence at heritage sites like GZ is similar to what Katsamudanga argues. Katsamudanga (2003) argued that:

Indigenous communities view the safeguarding of spiritual purity of sites as their duty and responsibility and they would want to recommend the appropriate behavior for the monument and its vicinity (p.6).

If we are to go by Katsamudanga's argument above, one can suggest that the case of Christian groups who are using heritage sites for religious purposes should be left in the hands of traditional leadership and communities utilizing the values attached to these places. The traditional leadership knows what is important to them and their ancestors who established the places that are now regarded as heritage sites. In the case of Great Zimbabwe, the issue should be solved by the respective chiefs and local communities of Nemanwa and Mugabe communal lands. The two clans have a strong cultural link with the site that dates back to the pre-colonial era.

Enculturation is possibly another alternative to bring harmony in the religious usage of heritage properties. Nolte- Schamn (2006: 31) defines enculturation as 'a process to which Christian gospel becomes Africanized and African traditional religion being Christianized'. However, it is important to note that the process cannot be forced. The argument is that since ATR and Christianity are living traditions, their interaction with one another inevitably brings out change in both. It is this change that is mostly likely to benefit and enriches tolerance amongst the religious community. Such thinking is strongly supported by one prominent Anthropologist cum traditionalist, Gordon Chavhunduka (Daily News, 27-2/06/2012), who has argued that 'there was nothing wrong with religious people sharing the same shrines with traditionalists in the spiritually fact, the two religions can co-exist'. Other scholars supporting the same line of thinking have argued that 'without ATR, Christianity would not have made impact on religious landscape of Africa' (Awolalu, 1976: 1).

CONCLUSION

This study has shown the political-religious tensions

amongst diverse religions converging at Zimbabwe's heritage sites, especially Great Zimbabwe shrine and cultural heritage site. In view of these conflicts, it has been argued that there is need for heritage managers to understand the complex religious beliefs and practices of the religious community that are using heritage sites for worshipping in order to be able to unlock the religions' points of conflict and disagreement.

More importantly, we have argued for a 'generative dialogue', that is, a democratic, mutual and sustainable interaction of diverse religions as exclusion might result in even more fatal consequences for both the heritage sites and heritage managers. Such an approach is one among many that this study has advanced as paradigms that can possibly help to promote tolerance in sharing the genius loci of heritage sites, reconciliation and mutual understanding between different religions especially ATR and Christianity- major religions which are currently converging at most of Zimbabwe's heritage sites.

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