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‘The meaning of African Traditional Religion for modern society: Zimbabwe as a case study’

By

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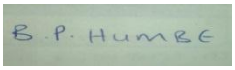

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DEDICATION

I dedicate my dissertation work to my parents, Felix Hamundityi Humbe and Cecelia Humbe, my loving wife Esther Humbe and my three daughters Chelsea, Cheryl and Chesleigh.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AIDS	Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
AIPPA	Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act
AIR	African Indigenous Religion
AR	African Religion
AST	African Systems of Thought
ATR	African Traditional religion
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BSAC	British South African Company
CCJPZ	Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace in Zimbabwe
CIO	Central Intelligence Organisation
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
ESAP	Economic Structural Adjustment Programme
FTLRP	Fast Track Land Reform Programme
GNU	Government of National Unity
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
HZT	Heal Zimbabwe Trust
ID	National Identity
JOC	Joint Operations Command
MDC	Movement for Democratic Change
MP	Member of Parliament
NC	Native Commissioner
NCA	National Constitutional Assembly
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organisations
NLHA	Native Land Husbandry Act

PH	Primal Heritage
POLAD	Political Actors Dialogue
UDI	Unilateral Declaration of Independence
ZANLA	Zimbabwe National Liberation Army
ZANU PF	Zimbabwe National Union Patriotic Front
ZAPU	Zimbabwe African People's Union
ZBC TV	Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation Television
ZCC	Zion Christian Church
ZCTU	Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Union
ZEC	Zimbabwe Electoral Commission
ZINATHA	Zimbabwe National Traditional Healers Association

ABSTRACT

In contemporary times, religion has dominated the African studies. This study is an effort to contribute to the theme of the meaning of religion in African context. Basing on fieldwork in Buhera District, this work provided a qualitative interpretive study of the meaning of African Traditional Religion (ATR) in modern society of Zimbabwe. Afrocentrism and Symbolic Interactionism were the two theoretical frameworks found to be ideal for this study. Using a phenomenological approach, interviews and observations, the research took the functional, substantive and affective meanings as the *modus operandi* in the postulation of the meaning of African traditional religious practices in Zimbabwe. It challenges in a special way the idea of fashioning the meaning of ATR pre-occupied with the indigenous Supreme Being-talk, but also with the praxis of ATR in the modern human society. Inadequacy of studying ATR in the modern society of Zimbabwe with foreign nomenclatures was highlighted since English monikers like ATR are hardly used by the Shona people in their daily language. Rather, they commonly use *Chivanhu,* a vernacular term which is closely equivalent to religion. The thesis creates an awareness to discover rich values of Shona cultural values and belief systems and their place in the meaning of ATR. So in this study ATR and *Chivanhu* are used interchangeably. During the study, it was noted that there are various matrices of forces that determine the meanings of ATR in the modern society of Zimbabwe, which include: transcendental power, architectural power, traditional power, family power and modernity power. Whether the meaning of ATR is substantivist, affective or functionalist, it was found to be never entirely neutral and objective for it holds various hidden assumptions. Sometimes the meanings attached to ATR in the modern society are ideological or tactical designations. In a bid to search for its meaning, it has proved to be debatable whether ATR is essentially a private and individual matter or fundamentally communal and national. In a Zimbabwean multi-religious society, the issue of the meaning of ATR has been characterised by some problems especially when it gives in to the dictates of the country's constitution to avoid clashes. The profundity of the emancipation of women in the modern society has also contributed towards a gendered outlook of ATR in modern Zimbabwe. These kind of imports are often explanations advanced in support of an overriding view of traditional religion, summarised in aphorisms and or epigrams such as: *Chivanhu chedu chinoti* (our *Chivanhu* says) *ichi ndicho Chivanhu chedu* (this is our *Chivanhu*), *musha mukadzi* (the key person in a home is a woman). Thus the use of clichés in modern society has impacted the meaning of ATR in Zimbabwe. To this end, the conceptualisation of ATR in modern society of Zimbabwe is characterised by dynamics of alterisation processes that condition the contemplation between this religion and western religions (especially Christianity). These processes of alterisation are characterised by representing and treating ATR through synecdochisation, exoticisation, undervaluation, overvaluation, misunderstanding and exclusion. Though use of a substantivist, affective and functionalist perspective was handy in construing the meanings of ATR in the modern society of Zimbabwe, the same schemes of meaning for religion in various ways explained away ATR.

CHAPTER ONE

1.0 Introduction and Background

1.1 Introduction

This study is centered on African Traditional Religion in Zimbabwe. A discourse of African traditional religion has been necessitated by a lacuna in construction of this religion in the case of Zimbabwean modern society. The work does not mean falling back, returning to the past in order to discover what was there, but rather, it is a subject of present need (Onyango, 2013:6), to enhance people's understanding of African religiosity in contemporary Zimbabwean context. As this chapter unfolds, various issues will be unpacked which include; background of study, objectives, questions, assumptions, justification and chapter summary.

1.2 Background of Zimbabwe and its historical overview

Religion has been a global phenomenon since time immemorial and that religious ideas, practices and institutions continue to animate many global networks and linkages in contemporary times. It serves as the structure around which all other activities, such as cultural, economic, political and social organizations are built (Adeolu, 2006:1). Today, more than half the world's population practises a major religion or indigenous spiritual tradition (Lugira 2009:6). However, a global view of religion is demurred by Vasquez and Marquardt when they posit that 'global perspectives on religion strongly discourage contextual understanding' and that 'global accounts in general evacuate beliefs, practices and institutions of their specific significance (Adogame, 2010:50). This is well exemplified in Africa, a continent which is home to more than 930 million people, where, religion is literally life and life is religion. Although there are some similarities in the religion practised by most Africans; there are, however, numerous differences in their beliefs and religious activities since most are tribal or clan based (Lugira 2009:10, Adeolu 2006:1). Therefore, there is no single religious tradition in Africa that can be seen as a generalized representation of the religious and cultural beliefs of the Africans especially in 21st century societies. Building on this view, this work has identified Zimbabwe as a specific contextual setting which is ingrained in religious beliefs and practices. This country is situated between the Tropic of Cancer and Tropic of Capricorn. Located in central and southern Africa, it is totally landlocked, lying between the Limpopo and Zambezi rivers. In the north and northwest, Zimbabwe is bounded by Zambia (797km), in the south, by South Africa (225km),

in the east and north-east by Mozambique(1 231km), and by Botswana (813km)in the south-west. The total area covered by Zimbabwe is 390,760 square kilometers (*www.victoriafalls-guide.net/where-is-zimbabwe.html*) with an estimated population of about 16,111,699 people as of 1 January 2017 *countrymeters.info/en/Zimbabwe.*

Africans make up 98% of the total population in Zimbabwe and are mainly related to the two major Bantu-speaking groups, the Shona *(vaShona)* and the Ndebele. The Shona are the dominant group constituting about 82% of the population, followed by the Ndebele who constitute about 14% and other groups like Tonga, Tsonga, Tshangani, Sotho, Venda, and Hlengwe account for 11% of the African populace. Whites make up 1% of the non-African population. Asians and peoples of mixed ancestry make up the remaining 1% (*http://www.nationsencyclopedia.com*).

1.2.1 Gestalt of traditional religious landscape in Zimbabwe

The country of Zimbabwe is complex historically, culturally, religiously, socially and linguistically. It is not only home to many religious traditions, but assorted indigenous religions as well. In view of such complexity, a question posed by Hackett J.I.J when she writes with South Africa in mind can be of much significance in the Zimbabwean context as well; how much do local histories, politics, and demographics continue to influence the balancing of majoritarian and minoritarian religious interest? (https://www.iclrs.org/content/events/28/744.pdf). It is prudent to apprehend African traditional religion in Zimbabwe against the backdrop of various historical epochs of conjoint religious influences. The idea that Africans were a people with no religion was widely accepted in Africa's first contacts with the foreigners. African religious practices became known as fetishism, superstition and magic (Lugira, 2009: 104). This is the reason why Ranger (1991:106) postulates that African religion has been misunderstood, and misunderstood in ways which have made it very difficult to treat historically. A better treatment of the Zimbabwean religious landscape calls for brief historical review starting from the coming of Christianity and western imperialism in the country.

The first phase of Christianity began in the 15th century with the activities of Portuguese Catholics in Mutapa state. The Portuguese were not solely religiously motivated, as there were

distinct economic and political gains inherent in their venture, especially the trade in gold as well as farming exhibited in the *prazo* system (practice of agriculture on farms). But their presence in the Mutapa helped in the implantation of Christianity which contaminated the Mutapa people's cultural and religious values.

The modern phase began with the Christian missionaries who befriended King Mzilikazi in 1858 (Zvobgo, 1996). The mission of the missionaries was summarized in three Cs, which was Christianity, civilisation and commerce. Their failure to make converts as expected led them to join hands with imperialists (Cecil John Rhodes and the British South African Company) who then spearheaded the colonisation of Zimbabwe in the 19th century. After signing the Rudd Concession with King Lobengula, ostensibly for mining purposes, Rhodes brought an army and settled at present- day Harare in 1890. Thereafter, Rhodes declared war on Lobengula, overthrew him and named the country Rhodesia.

With colonialists in control, traditional leaders' powers were stripped off. Africans lost their traditional land, water, cattle and other natural resources all of which were of immense religious significance in their lives. For ninety years, the country was ruled by a white regime of racial discrimination and oppression. They believed that traditional religious beliefs and practices were inferior, and had to be done away with before the acceptance of Christianity (Kazembe, 2009). The missionaries viewed traditional religion as a childish religion of fear, as full of black magic, sorcery and witchcraft, full of superstition and senseless taboos, and a religion which encouraged people to worship their ancestors instead of worshipping God (Chavhunduka, 2001). So it was an evil which had to be eradicated.

With the assistance of colonial administrators, traditional shrines and sacred places were tempered with. The locals were told to shun spirit mediums or religious leaders. These traditional authorities were no longer permitted to organise and conduct religious ceremonies. Those who had embraced Christianity were discouraged from consulting traditional leaders and the converts were vehemently told that participating in any traditional rituals of a religious nature was a sin (Chavhunduka, 2001:3). Missionaries contributed to turning Christianity into an ideology which was used to convince Africans not to resist white domination, using religion to legitimize, sustain, and even promote political tyranny and oppression. Rhodesia was a mirror image of the

apartheid policy which prevailed in South Africa then, where the indigenous religion of the country was also relegated to the periphery.

However, indigenous Africans in Rhodesia were not flaccid receivers. They resisted British rule from the beginning of European settlement. Although King Lobengula was defeated in 1893, Africans in both Mashonaland and Matabeleland took up arms in what is popularly known as the First *Chimurenga* War of 1896-97. Chimurenga is a Shona word which means revolutionary fight or struggle. In its traditional usage, Chimurenga is a fight in which everyone at hand participates. The word's modern interpretation has been extended to describe a struggle for human rights, political dignity and social justice. This war was led by the famous spirit mediums *Mbuya* Nehanda (Grandmother Nehanda), *Sekuru* Kaguvi (Grandfather Kaguvi), Mukwati and Chaminuka. Up to this day, these are iconic names in Zimbabwe's political and cultural discourse (Kaoma, 2016). These spirit mediums used traditional cultural symbols and the *Mwari* (Shona Supreme Being) cult to mobilize, and direct rebellion against colonial authorities. They provided an ideological framework for social revolt.

The uprising was suppressed by the use of unparalleled brutality and torture of the prisoners of war and civilians. Christianity was also instrumental in suppressing African resistance, for example before Kaguvi was hanged in 1898 he was forced to shun his traditional religion and converted to Christianity. After baptism, he received a new name Dismas. Another direct involvement of the spirits in active politics was noted in Mapondera revolt of 1901 as well the 1917 Makombe war against the Portuguese (Chavhunduka, 2001:5).

Following the Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI), the Africans launched the Second Chimurenga with the Chinhoyi Battle in 1966. Up to 1970, freedom fighters fought sporadic battles with Rhodesian security forces. Traditional leaders were playing an increasingly important role through their cooperation with the spirit mediums. Traditional religions boosted cultural identity and pride, which not only gave strength, but also set the majority apart from the ruling minority associated with Christianity. The spirit mediums became symbols of traditional power and knowledge through their association with heroes of the first Chimurenga through resistance to changes introduced by the colonial powers and “white culture” in general, and through their association with *Mwari*.

It is noted by McGuire (2008: 245) in Kaoma (2016) that while certain aspects of religion inhibit change, others challenge the status quo and encourage change. So in the same vein, in *Chimurenga* wars, traditional religion was a profoundly revolutionary force, holding out a vision of how things might or ought to be. It provided motivations for change because of its particular effectiveness in uniting indigenous people's beliefs with their actions, (and) their ideas with their social lives. Through African traditional religion, the locals wanted to repossess their lost resources, especially land which they had inherited from their ancestors. The religious role in the liberation struggle justifies the idea that it was a war between two religions, that is, African traditional religion and Christianity.

According to Kazembe (2009), during the Second Chimurenga the church was criticized for appearing to be on the side of the oppressors, although some churches and missions did support the struggle for independence, particularly the rural missions. The Catholic Church of Zimbabwe voiced strong criticism of the minority rule and oppression of the people, and they have even gone the furthest in "indigenizing" their leadership, church services, and forms of worship. The Rhodesian security forces were largely supported by South African Army. This period was followed by sustained war led by the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) and the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) supported by the independent African states, especially Zambia, Mozambique, Tanzania, Botswana, and also by China and the Soviet Union. The liberation war ended in December 1979, following the Lancaster House Conference, at which the Rhodesian regime and the British government conceded defeat and granted independence under a democratic constitution. Zimbabwe emerged as an independent state on 18th April 1980 with Robert Mugabe as Prime Minister and Canaan Banana as ceremonial President *(www.zimembassy.se/history.html).*

Once the people of Southern Rhodesia became independent from British rule, they dropped the name Rhodesia which was foreign to them and replaced it with an indigenous name, Zimbabwe. Suggestions on the origins of the name Zimbabwe have it that it comes from historical stone structures called *"dzimba-dza-dzamabwe"* translated from the Shona *karanga* dialect. *'Dzimba'* is the plural of *'imba'*, which is house, and *'mabwe'* is plural of *'bwe'* which stone. So, etymologically, Zimbabwe denotes houses of stone. Moreover, there is also an understanding that Zimbabwe is a contracted form of *dzimba-hwe* which means "venerated houses" in the

Zezuru dialect and is usually applied for chiefs' houses or graves. These stone structures popularly known as Great Zimbabwe are found in the country's south-eastern province about 30 km southeast of modern day Masvingo. Great Zimbabwe is estimated to have been built between 1100 and 1450 AD. The central area of ruins extends about 200 acres (80 hectares), making Great Zimbabwe the largest of more than 150 major stone ruins scattered across the countries of Zimbabwe and Mozambique (www.britannica.com).

With artifacts recovered from the site believed to have been brought from as far away as China, Great Zimbabwe is regarded as a once powerful international trade center and the hub of traditional religion in southern Africa. It is the largest ancient ruins south of the Sahara. Today the builders are widely recognized to be ancestors of the Shona people. In the late 19th century numerous indigenous artifacts which include eight large Zimbabwe birds carved from soapstone were found in the ruins. Later Zimbabwe adopted the Bird to become a national symbol which is imprinted on the Zimbabwe flag, currency, and any other places of high honour. Great Zimbabwe became a National Monument and was designated a World Heritage site in 1986 (www.britannica.com).

Unpacking this historical information becomes vital for it provides a trace of how 'religion' was imposed on Africans. It is during the period of colonisation that the concept of religion was introduced in the African worldview. And to be more specific, religion referred to Christianity. Harrison (2006:10) cites W.C. Smith who argues that there was no need for the term "religion" until the various cultures of the world began to have prolonged encounters with one another, particularly during the colonial period. One result of the superimposition of the new concept was that people increasingly viewed themselves as members of ideologically-opposed communities. The ideological opposition was religiously propelled. If Africans were colonised together with their religion, is ATR still existing, if it exists is it a religion on its own? This scenario validates the necessity of a research on ATR in the modern times.

1.3 The Shona People

This study has a special focus on the Shona people to enhance its quest for an exploration of the meaning of African traditional religion for Zimbabwean modern society. There is no precise account of how the term 'Shona' originated, and therefore that only leaves us with suggestions on its etymology and history. Ranger (1985: 4) in Makaudze and Guhlanga (2014: 91) concurs

with this observation and says, "…It seems to me clear that before 1890 no one called themselves Shona at all, if anyone belonged to a Ndebele state they did not think that this was the same thing as belonging to a tribe or ethnicity." Thorpe (1996: 52) conjectures that probably the name 'Shona' was originally a derogatory title given to them by the Ndebele who invaded and occupied the western part of present-day Zimbabwe. This is supported by Bourdillon (1987) who argues that the derivation of the term is uncertain, however, it appears to have been first used by the Ndebele as a derogatory term for the people they defeated, particularly the Rozvi. The Rozvi would hide in the mountains, which is *ukutshona* in Ndebele and ultimately came the term Shona (Bourdillon, 1987). Eventually, the Shona people accepted to use it only as a means of distinguishing themselves from other linguistic groups. It should be borne in mind that the political, social, and economic relations of these groups were complex, dynamic, fluid and always changing. They were characterised by both conflict and co-operation (http://www.zimembassydc.gov.zw).

However, there is a view which espoueses the existence and use of the term Shona prior to the coming of the Ndebele. In this line of thinking, origins of the term Shona can be traced going back to the 12th century as shown by Mufuka (1983). He cites the example of an Arab traveller, Ibu Said, (1214-1286) who recorded about a certain people called Soyouna inhabiting the whole land of Zambezia. The understanding is that the people who were being referred to as the Soyouna are the Shona, for this Zambezi land is part of the current Zimbabwe state. Mufuka gives another example of a traveller and geographer called Janson who recorded on his 1639 map of Zambezia, a certain people living there as 'Sajona'. It is most likely that Sajona was a corrupted version of Shona. Again, Mufuka refers to a 1739 map by De Lisle, in the National Museums of Zimbabwe, which names the whole land of Zambezia as Mwene Mutapa, which is useful in the argument.

Another reconstruction can be done focusing on the Mwene Mutapa state and its mining activities where miners were socially and culturally distinct from the other people in this early state of central and southern Africa. Mwene Mutapa, a state based on spirituality- sanctioned kinship came into existence around 1425AD (Davidson, 1991:115). Davidson goes on further to say that the lords of Mutapa state imposed a single system of rule and revenue across a wide region of production, trade and tribute revenue.

Trade in gold from the Mutapa Kingdom reached as far as India, Persia, China, Arabia, Portugal and eventually other countries in Europe and Asia. This trade was dominated by rich Indian merchants and arms dealers who enjoyed rights to free voyage between Diu and Mozambique and the Rivers. They financed annual voyages to Mozambique supplying beads and textiles from Cambaya and Surat. The Gujarati vessels offered the most reliable and regular passage between India and Mozambique (Chivaura, https://www.thepatriot.co.zw).

Many Portuguese officials and merchants who were trading with the Mutapa complained that it was only India which was the main beneficiary in the gold trade. From the Portuguese officials' perspective, the gold was dug from African soil, only to be transported to India, where the Hindu buried it again (https://www.thepatriot.co.zw). It is this context of how gold was moved from Mutapa to India that derivatives of the name Shona can be drawn. Shona is believed to have been taken from Sona. Sona is a Hindu baby girl. In Hindi the name Sona means 'gold' https://www.kidpaw.com. According to Chivaura, in Gujarati gold is also called 'sona' or 'sonu'. 'Sonu' means 'handsome' in Sanskrit. The term is also said to be deriving from the word 'Sohna' in Punjab, which means beautiful. Because of the strong links between India and the Mutapa state, there was cultural-linguistic exchange. Some Indian terms started to be used by Mutapas. In this case the whole land of Mutapa became known as 'the land of sona', or 'Sonaland'. This might have been reference to the gold deposits which were abundant in the Mutapa state. 'Sona' or 'Sohna' were eventually corrupted to 'Shona'. 'Sonaland' became 'Shonaland'. The people became simply known as 'Shona', collectively. That is how 'Shona' as the name for all the people under Mutapa gained currency throughout the world. Mukfuka in Chivaura cited a Portuguese adventurer Barreto de Rezende who refers to Mwene Mutapa as King of the 'Matshone' meaning all the people in his Kingdom. Matshone can be spelt as mashona in Shona language.

It is noted that the origins of the construction of the term Shona is mainly rooted in its derivatives. The derivatives are associated with trading activities, culture and religion. From what has been presented, the origins are both exotic and indigenous. Suffice to say the word Shona has been in existence way before the coming of the Ndebele people in the present- day Zimbabwe; a common view taught in the history of the Shona in educational institutions. This

challenges the Ndebele origin of the term Shona which conflates linguistic, cultural and political attributes of ethnically related people (http://www.zimembassydc.gov.zw).

It was after about three decades of colonization that the term Shona was officially ascribed to this group of the indigenous people of Zimbabwe by a white South African linguist, Doke, in 1929. He considered dialects with greater mutual intelligibility. The Penn Language Center estimates that Shona is spoken by about 75% of the Zimbabwe population and that the language has multiple dialects (https://amp.livescience.com accessed 02/01/2019). As a result, the term Shona is then meant to embrace five major dialects which are Karanga, Zezuru, Ndau, Manyika and Korekore (Maposa and Humbe, 2012). These dialects are also known as chiShona. The vaShona people are in close cultural contact with the Ndebele, Tonga, Tsonga, Tshangani, Sotho, Venda, Kalanga, and Hlengwe people. Though the government now officially recognises about 16 languages, chiShona remains a principal language, along with Ndebele and the official business language, English.

In Africa, according to Merwe (1957:3), chiShona becomes the third Bantu language most widely spoken as a native language after IsiZulu and Swahili, and the most frequent mother language. Other countries that host Shona language speakers include Botswana and Mozambique. (1957:3) observes that there is a considerable cultural affinity between the VaShona, the Acewa, the Yao and certain other tribes of the Zambezi basin. Among other reasons, this might be because they all hail from a territory in the vicinity of Lake Tanganyika. Merwe goes on further to point out that the VaShona have in the past come in cultural contact with tribes of West and Central Africa. This finds justification on the premise that there are linguistic semblances between Shona, Nyanza in Central Africa and Semi-Bantu language, Tiv, in Northern Nigeria. Merwe gives examples of a dog in Shona which is known as *imbwa*, similar to the Tiv term *Iwa*. Another case is Shona word for meat which is *nyama* similar to *anyama* in Nyanza and *Inyama* in Tiv. Furthermore, it also seems as if the VaShona have been influenced culturally by North Africa and Asia through East Africa. This is evidenced by a belief in the divinity of kings and their powers of rain inducing as is also held by certain Nilotic tribes in North Africa. ChiShona, whilst primarily a linguistic classification in modern day Zimbabwe, it is also a convenient term to designate a particular people who not only share language, but also

have certain cultural, and, to some extent, historical links and experiences (Bourdillon, 1976) in (Humbe, 2017:206).

In the realm of collective existence, minor divergences serve to confirm and consolidate the underlying cohesion of the group as a society obviously relies on a certain common consent (Turner, 2005). This is reflected in their traditional religion just like in any other part of the African continent. So being the biggest ethnic group in Zimbabwe, it is worthy to study the indigenous religion of the Shona people for their demographic dominance has some influence in the general outlook of Zimbabwe traditional religion.

1.3.1 Cartography of the Shona People of Buhera

This thesis presents a detailed study of the lives of a relatively small group of the people of Buhera. But this does not mean that the study has little or no relevance to the general discourse of African traditional religion. This problem of generalization is, of course, inherent in any academic enquiry as the popular saying suggests: 'the academic is somebody who knows a lot about very little' (Anderson, 2002:1) Buhera District is one of Manicaland Province's seven districts situated in the south-eastern part of Zimbabwe, which is home to about 24,072 habitants (geoview.info). The dominant part of the District lies in middle veld with an altitude ranging from 600-1200 meters above sea level, while the south-eastern area is part of the Sabi valley and forms part of the low veld with an altitude below sea level (Lindahl and Matenga, 1995:15). Basing on archaeological information, Lindahl and Matenga (199:517) argue that Buhera provides a wealth of evidence indicating human settlement in prehistoric times from the Stone Age to the advent of late Iron using and Farming Communities. Eleven stone ruins in Buhera are among the three hundred or more Zimbabwe ruins which were built and occupied between the 13^{th} and the 18^{th} centuries AD. But it is notable that the 4^{th} largest Zimbabwe ruins which goes by the name Matendera, is in the Buhera cluster of ruins. The Zimbabwes ruins were built by ancestral Shona communities to serve as venerated courts where rulers and their important vassals lived (Garlake 1973, Sinclair 1987) in (Lindahl and Matenga 1995:18).

The history of Buhera in the last two to three hundred years is dominated by the Hera dynasty of the *Shava Nhuka*, that is, Eland totem upon which the name of the District is derived (Lindahl and Matenga 1995:18). The name Buhera is an Nguni adulteration of the Anglicised version of

the name *uHera*. *Uhera* means territory of the *Hera* Shona ethnic group. According to Beach (1980) in Nhemachena (2014:27), Buhera was an area dominated from the pre-colonial era by people of the *Shava/Hera* totem dynasties in the south centre of the country. The praise totem for males is *Shava Museyamwa* while for females it is *Chihera.* But collectively they are called *vaHera*. Customs distinctive to this ethnic group are known as *uHera hwavaHera*. So the *Museyamwa* totem occupies most of the Buhera territory (under Chief Nyashanu).

The most widely accepted view about the Hera people which was raised by Lindal and Matenga confirms that the founding father of the Hera dynasty was Mbiru-Nyashanu. However, his real name was Mabvuregudo who was nicknamed Nyashanu signifying five male children he had fathered. Five is *shanu* in Shona. So the prefix *nya* means owner of. The names of Mabvuregudo's sons are Murwira, Maringapasi, Gotora, Nechasiya and Maweni. Tradition has it that the headquarters of Mbiru-Nyashanu's dynasty was located at Gombe Mountain, a massive ridge which is found in the north-west end of the *Uhera* territory. The Hera claim to have built the loopholed Zimbabwe on top of Gombe ridge. This elongated hill was also called Mai yaVaHera literally meaning Mother of the Hera (Caton-Thompson, 1931:131) in Lindahl and Matenga (1995:18).

Oral tradition has it that the full name of the mountain and ruins is *Gombe ravaHera* meaning the large gourd of the Hera (Lindahl and Matenga 1995:19). While living on Gombe Mountain the Hera sought recognition as a tributary chieftaincy *Sadunhu* from the Rozvi rulers who were probably based at the Zimbabwe ruins of either Dhlodhlo or Naletale in the west. In later years they were displaced by the Njanja people who had a long standing relationship with the Portuguese as trade intermediaries (Beach 1994, 72, Elllert 1994) in (Lindahl and Matenga 1995:19). Occupying Wedza, the Njanja shared the northern border with the Hera territory. The Njanja threat resulted in the Hera shifting their capital from Gombe Mountain to Bedza hills and later further south-south in the Marabada hills which today constitute the central area (Beach 1980, 1994, Holleman 1949). The Hera dynasty bears the reputation of being one of the most stable in Zimbabwe. In addition, the Hera have retained most of the land they held in pre-colonial times (Beach 1990) in Lindahl and Matenga (1995:19).

Beach goes on say that during the 16th-19th centuries Buhera was especially significant as the last stronghold of Tohwechipi, the last Changamire or King of the Rozvi. The Rozvi are associated with a number of Zimbabwes in south-western Zimbabwe including Dhlodhlo and Naletale. They were the last Shona state before the coming of the Matebele from Zululand, South Africa. In the 1830s the Rozvi were besieged first by Nguni group under a woman general, Nyamazana. In the 1850s the Matebele under Mzilikazi sent the Rozvi state into rapid disintegration, forcing one group led by the last ruler Tohwechipi to retreat to the Mavengwe hills in Buhera (Beach 1980, 269) in Lindahl and Matenga (1995:19). Tohwechipi's grave in the Mavengwe hills is now under the custody of National Monuments of Zimbabwe.

It is important to be cognisant of the fact that the current Zimbabwean districts' boundaries and their people are a result of the influence of colonisation. Mapping people onto a territory was done by colonial administrators in conjunction with anthropologists. The underlying idea was influenced by a vision of territorialized nation state and 'a people' seen as congruent with that territory (Anderson, 2002). By drawing up so- called native reserves, anthropologists were complicit in inextricably linking ethnic identity to place, the latter being considered a pure physical quantity, a surface (Anderson 2002). In terms of demarcation, the northern part of Buhera shares borders with Chikomba and Wedza Districts which are both in Mashonaland East Province. To the south and western part of Buhera lies Gutu District which is in Masvingo Province. To the northeast, is Makoni District while Mutare District lies to the east. The southeastern part shares a border with Chimanimani and Chipinge Districts. Buhera District offices are located approximately 170 kilometers by road, southwest of Mutare which is the provincial capital. Although the District is predominantly populated by the Shona- speaking people, there are some Ndebele speaking people in the far north who were resettled by the colonial government from Matabeleland region in the 1930s following the enactment of the Land Apportionment Act of 1930 which divided land along racial lines (Nhemachena, 2014:29).

Buhera South Constituency falls within Zimbabwe's Agro-ecological zone, region five, with an average annual rainfall of less than 200 millimeters. This is because Buhera south constituency lies in the rain shadow of the south-east trade winds from the Indian Ocean which blow over the eastern border highlands (Lindahl and Matenga, 1995:15). It is a very hot region with maximum temperatures of around 40 degrees Celsius which are very common especially in Ward 29 which

covers areas like Bhegedhe, Chabata, Nechishanye, Gunura and Birchenough Bridge. The average temperature for the district yearly is 34 degrees Celsius. Therefore, Buhera South is a hot and dry region.

Basically, the area has deciduous vegetation which shed their trees in the dry season. The most common trees are Mopane, Acacia and species of comberetum. The people practise subsistence farming, so natural vegetation has been cleared in many parts for crop farming and fuel requirements. Livestock rearing has been one of their major economic activities, especially in Nemadziva and Nechishanye areas where the cattle feed on reeds from the Save river. The pace of modernization in Buhera District in response to the introduction of European civilization has been very gradual for lack of immediate commercial and industrial interests. The phosphate mining village of Dorowa and highway stopover at Birchenough Bridge along the Mutare-Masvingo road are situated on the fringes of the district and can best exert gradual influence on the lifestyles of the indigenous people in Buhera. Hence the Buhera district has retained its "rustic" character (Lindahl and Matenga 1995:18).

There are two mission stations in Buhera owned by the Reformed Church in Zimbabwe, formerly known as Dutch Reformed Church. One is Nyashanu Mission located in Buhera central and the other is Makumbe Misssion in Buhera North. Dominance of the Reformed Church in Buhera even during the colonial period is also found in the Southern Constituency for the church- manned schools like Muchuwa and Barura. These schools have since been taken over by Buhera District Council. Only the Methodist Church in Zimbabwe owns Chapanduka High and Primary Schools. But Chapanduka is not a mission school, so in principle there is no mission station found in Buhera South.

Then after independence there was notable progress in Christianization of some parts of Buhera South. Almost every school is used by Christian denominations as worship centers especially during weekends. However, in terms of numbers, the mainline and Pentecostal churches are outnumbered by Zion and Apostolic churches in Buhera. This might be due to the lack of aggressive missionary endeavors in the district, for there is no evidence of establishment of Christian communities during the colonial era. The intense negative impact of colonization

resulted in the sprouting of African- initiated churches as protest against western colonialism and its western religion.

1.3.2 Motivation for choosing Buhera South

The reason for having a special interest in Buhera South was because there is vitality of Shona traditional religion. The intensive study of the particular lives of Buhera people can indeed provide important general insights about traditional religion. It is a community with traditional values which I am versed with, because I was born and bred in this district, and so I have some appreciation of African traditional religion in modern society of Zimbabwe. It is a community far away from the main urban centers (being about 120 km from the nearest big town) and still practising a degree of cultural norms and values (Gwemende 2006:3). But Buhera is not an isolated district. It has some contacts with urban areas of Zimbabwe, particularly Harare because of migrant-labourers who seek job and economic opportunities. This is also true of migrant labourers who flock to South Africa for job opportunities. Rural-urban migrants as well as Buhera- South Africa migrants make behavioural shifts when moving between these different social situations (Gluckman, 1960), almost as if they had a split personality, living in two worlds.

The multiplicity of dialects points to the diversity of cultures within these different ethnic groups. However, because these people stay in the same vicinity, there is fusion of traditional cultural practices and even language is shared, such that sometimes it is difficult for an outsider to separate the fine thread which ties these indigenous people together. The above pluralism has a bearing on the meaning of traditional religion among the Shona people as well. It is a conglomeration of various ethnic groups who migrated from neighboring districts. So Buhera is a cosmopolitan rural district. The identity of the Shona people in Buhera South is multiple and fluid, notably imposed from outside and self-created depending on the circumstances.

With an interest in contemporary reflections on ‘African traditional religion’ in mind, there is need to explore further what Haardt (2010:163) has called ‘a sense of presence’ or ‘a sense of wonder’, i.e. a kind of sensibility that, according to the French cultural theorist and historian Michel de Certeau, ‘allow[s] people to stay alive’, and which can be found only by looking at the

actual places where people live their lives from day to day (Certeau, Giard and Mayol 1998) in Haardt (2010:163) . This is the context in which focusing on Buhera becomes vital. This does not mean that the understanding of the particular can be generalized, or be considered representative of a wider socio-religious world. Rather, it means that the perspective developed in the study of the Shona people in Buhera enables me to critically reflect on the information I received, and interpret better the nature and constitution of the wider African traditional religious world.

1.4 A watershed of modernity: ATR in Zimbabwe's socio-political and economic crisis

Sine religion does not exist in a vacuum, the following information on Zimbabwe's socio-political and economic situation is relevant in the study of ATR in three ways: Firstly, it helps in the location of the functional meaning of African Traditional Religion in contemporary Zimbabwe. Secondly, it paves way for new perspectives of the intellectual meaning of traditional religion in a modern societal set- up of Zimbabwe. Thirdly, it facilitates the assessment of an affective postulation on the meaning of African traditional religious practices in Zimbabwe which has gone through various socio-political and economic historical epochs. So, Zimbabwe's socio-political and economic crisis has an impact on traditional religion. The coming on of a black majority government in 1980 which replaced the white colonial regime did not mean that the socio-political and economic situation became ideal for traditional religion. For about four decades Zimbabwe has been under a Zimbabwe African National Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) led government.

In the first decade of independent Zimbabwe, the government made huge strides in the expansion of the country's health, education, agriculture sectors, social amenities and infrastructural development. Zimbabwe's consistency in high agricultural production earned the country the name "bread basket of Africa". To that end, the newly independent government's development efforts received praises on the continent and beyond (Kanyenze, Kondo, Chitambira, & Martens, 2011; Vurayai & Muwaniki, 2016) in Humbe and Muwaniki (2017:121).

However, on the part of traditional religion little or no effort was made to recognize or at least elevate it. It was this religion which helped redeem Africans from colonial bondage. Yet, politically, after independence, the black majority rule treated African Traditional Religion as an impediment to modernization and nation-building. The government's lack of will power in

independent Zimbabwe to honor African traditional religion which helped in resisting and dislodging colonial rule became a bone of contention. Four decades after independence, traditional religion remained largely perceived as pre-modern.

In the same decade, politically motivated violence was experienced thus impinging on inalienable human dignity and fundamental human rights. This includes the Midlands-Matabeleland atrocities known as *"Gukurahundi",* meaning the first rains usually received around August/September that clean out grain chaff. *Gukurahundi* was perpetrated by North Korean- trained 5th Brigade which wiped out approximately 20000 civilians. The clamping down of the so-called "dissident 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)* in (Chimhanda, 2014).

This decade of economic boom and prosperity was replaced by doom so that from 1990s onwards the country's economic and fiscal policies heinously resulted into a deep crunch. The introduction of Zimbabwe's Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP), launched in 1990, was meant to herald a new era of modernised, competitive, export-led industrialisation. But the country became firmly lodged in a quagmire of mounting debt and erratic growth in the wake of five years of ESAP-mandated reforms. ESAP contributed to a serious deterioration in the standards of living and had negative effects on the socio economic life of the general populace. These included substantial cuts in expenditure on education, infrastructure degradation and brain drain (Kanyenze *et.al,* 2011; Nyazema 2010). Of particular note was the rapid deterioration in the country's acclaimed health and education sectors. ESAP quickly brought the Zimbabwean working class on the brink of widespread destitution. There was massive retrenchment in Zimbabwe leading to high levels of suffering. The Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU), a labour movement, estimated that by 1995 about 55,000 jobs had been lost. In the rural areas, the majority of the population was often forced to depend on government food aid.

The country's coffers also became overwrought in 1998 after Zimbabwe participated in war in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) as well as payment of gratuities to the veterans of the

Second *Chimurenga*. In September 1999, the country's biggest labor- based opposition party; the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) was formed, headed by the late Dr Morgan Richard Tsvangirai. As outlined by Chimhanda (2014), the complexion of the country's economic woes was worsened by the introduction of the controversial Fast Track Land Reform Programme (FTLRP) of 2000-2002. This came soon after the majority of Zimbabweans in February had voted for a 'No' which was being campaigned for by the MDC in 2000 Referendum elections. In this election the majority of the Zimbabweans rejected the new constitution being proposed by the then President Robert Mugabe and the Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (Zanu-PF) (www.wsws.org>articles>20002>zimb-f22). After the Referendum election, Zimbabweans witnessed 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 application in which offenders linked to the ruling party got away with impunity. This was meant to repress the opposition political parties and their followers.

On the 18th of May 2005, the government launched Operation *Murambatsvina* (clean up, or restore order) that demolished people's houses in cities and towns with Harare having the largest number of victims. According to estimates by the Secretary-General's Special Envoy for Human Settlement Issues in Zimbabwe, Operation *Murambatsvina* resulted in an estimated 700,000 people losing their homes and/or livelihoods, with a further 2, 4 million people indirectly affected by the Operation (https://www.unicef.org). The majority of the displaced victims relocated to rural communities.

Then there was also the discovery of diamond deposits in Marange Chiyadzwa, in Mutare, Eastern Highlands of Zimbabwe in 2006 which is said to have about 25 % of the world's reserves of opencast extractable diamonds (Jamasmie, https://www.mining.com/massive-diamond-fields-discovered-in-zimbabwe-to-save-the-countrys-industry-35693/. During the initial stages, mining was free for all *(bvupfuwe)* with police only serving to maintain law and order and not interfering with the diamond mining. Thousands of civilians flocked to the diamond fields in the hope of finding gems which were believed to have been made available by *Mwari nevadzimu* (God and ancestral spirits) to save the hopeless poor civilians from all parts of the country. A spirit medium had proclaimed that *"siyai ngozha dzangu dzitsvare"* meaning let my quelea birds

scavenge. By passing traditional religious belief systems of the custodians of Marange area, the government officials have been associated with corruption in the looting of this precious resource which has largely not been of benefit to ordinary Zimbabweans. Consequently, there arose an emergent minority black elite and an impoverished black majority. People who flock Marange to illegally pan diamonds have either been brutally killed or injured. So people at grassroots level came up with a code "Operation *Hakudzokwi"* (there is no coming back) which served as a warning to would- be illegal 'blood diamond' panners that the chances of coming back alive were very slim. As indicated in a British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) News Panorama 2011, Zimbabwean soldiers and paramilitary police reported that civilians were massacred in a 2008 operation in which civilians working in the Marange diamond fields. The massacre investigated by the BBC took place in late October 2008 when Zimbabwe was in the depths of an economic crisis. Civilians were encircled, trapped and fired upon with automatic weapons and the massacre was part of a full-scale military operation ordered from the senior levels of Zimbabwe's military. Among the victims were women and children, some working in a makeshift market which had sprung up to sell food and clothes to the miners. When the government banned illegal digging in 2008, it is reported that about twenty to thirty people were being killed every day while some were being severely mauled by trained dog units (BBC Panorama, 2011 at *www.bbc.com/panorama/hi/front).*

In 2008, the Zimbabwean economy took the worst nosedive as a result of the imposition of targeted sanctions on the country after the disputed March 27 General Elections. Results of the elections showed that, collectively, the majority parliamentary seats were won by Morgan Tsvangirai's MDC-T, triumphing over Robert Mugabe in the presidential race although Tsvangirai did not garner the constitutionally-required 50% plus one of the votes according to official results. This called for a presidential election re-run (Chitando and Togarasei, 2010: 155). The announcement of the presidential election results from the March plebiscite had catastrophic repercussions in the country. ZANU-PF implemented new strategies in its campaign for the presidential re-run set for 27 June 2008. In the their campaign, ZANU-PF supporters made frantic efforts to revitalize bitter memories of the armed struggle and even equated the run-up to 27 June elections to the legendary Second Chimurenga. Pre-election violence broke out which led to destruction of human life and property. The political instability led to hyperinflation that had not been experienced in any other country without open warfare (Gukurume, 2015) in

Humbe and Muwaniki (2017:123). According to Gono (2008), former Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe, the hyperinflation was understood as a "Casino Economy". This was related to the unpredictable nature of business which could either bring returns or losses to both corporates and individuals. Five years later, The Ministry of Finance and Economic Development (2013) acknowledged that Zimbabwe had experienced deteriorating economic and social environment since 2000 which led to the decline in Gross Domestic Product by about 50% in 2008.

Poor (in some cases non-existent) service delivery both in rural and urban areas has a direct bearing on maintenance of quality life. For example, in 2008, 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 which took a high death toll on people's hopes for a better society. The situation above exposes gross violation of inalienable human dignity and fundamental human rights. In 2009, there was adoption of a multicurrency system with the coming of a Government of National Unity (GNU) which emanated from a power- sharing pact between President Robert Mugabe's Zimbabwe National Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF), Morgan Tsvangirai's Movement for Democratic Change (MDC-T) and Authur Mutambara's Movement for Democratic (MDC-M). The multicurrency system brought some relief to the ailing economy but after the 2013 harmonised elections won by ZANU-PF, the Zimbabwean economy since 2013 has suffered a major setback characterised by closure of companies, rise of unemployment, job freeze o in the government sector and serious shortages of cash. The government's policy of indigenisation resulted in many Zimbabweans joining the informal sector. The informal sector's employment rate leapt from 84% recorded in 2011 to 94.5% recorded in 2016 statistics released by the Zimbabwe National Statistical Agency (Zimstat) (*https://www.southerneye.co.zw/2015/06/09/informal-sector-employs-most-youths)*.

On Saturday the 18th of November 2017, thousands of Zimbabweans demonstrated in the streets of Harare, urging Mugabe to step down and was sacked by his ZANU- PF party the following day. Two days later Mugabe resigned as president. Then on the 24th of November 2017, Emmerson Munangagwa became the interim President of Zimbabwe, serving the remaining part of Mugabe's term of office. In 2018 on the 30th of July, general elections were held. President Emmerson Mnangagwa became the ruling ZANU-PF party leader while the main opposition party, the MDC-Alliance was also fronted by a new candidate, Nelson Chamisa, who succeeded

the long-standing opposition leader, Morgan Tsvangirai, after his death in February 2018. On 3 August the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) chairperson announced the presidential results with the incumbent, Emmerson D. Mnangagwa, receiving 2,460,463 votes (50.8%), while the opposition candidate Nelson Chamisa received 2,147,436 (44.3%). With a margin of victory of 313,027 votes (around 38,000 votes over the 50% threshold), Mnangagwa was declared President-elect (https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/eu_eom_zimbabwe_2018_-_final_report.pdf). The outcome of these elections was contested and crisis of political legitimacy seriously affected Zimbabwe.

The political crisis badly affected the country leading to the melt-down of the economy. Inflation reached unprecedented levels averaging 25.28 percent from 2009 until 2019, reaching an all-time high of 521.20 percent in December of 2019 from 480.7 percent of the previous month. In 2020 it eased for the first time in five months to 737.3 percent in June from 785.6 percent in the previous months **(**https://tradingeconomics.com/zimbabwe/inflation-cpi**).** In addition these economic challenges, there was the emergence of Covid-19 pandemic which resulted in the lockdown of the country as a measure to contain the spread of the disease.

All these challenges in the Zimbabwean socio-political situation have impacted the religious life of the general populace. Bearing in mind how the modern Zimbabwean came to be what it is, African Traditional Religion should have occupied a center stage in driving the country forward, but this was not the case. Elders of society and traditional religious authorities have maintained that Zimbabwe has been emptied of its African traditional religious verve causing a gap which is weakening the modern society. Soon after independence, the country was not dedicated to the spirits as per the instruction of national spirit of Nehanda, so rituals for the new Zimbabwe were sidelined. In their interpretation, African traditionalists think that sidestepping traditional religion in this modern society is the cause of socio-political and economic problems. The problem becomes more complex when considering the fact that the national spirits who coordinated the war during the war of liberation were Zezurus, yet the former and first President, a Zezuru in independent Zimbabwe failed to honour them. The question is; are the coming Presidents who belong to other ethnic groups endowed with a spiritual mandate to unlock the spiritual realm which was circumvented by the former President? Reflecting on these complexities in Zimbabwe, there is keenness to re-think the once vibrant African cultural values and ethos.

Religiously, Zimbabweans caught up in this death dealing situation pose incisive questions which include: Where is *Mwari* (God) and the ancestors in all this? Do they care? Are *Mwari* and the ancestors punishing us? In brief, the pertinent question is: How does Shona traditional religion and culture speak to this situation?

However, in line with the submission made by Martin (2005) and Greeley (1973) in Vladmir (2014:3), in modernity there has never been a decrease in religious belief but a change in the way people perceive or relate to God. As long as the locals still cherish their culture, heritage, traditions and belief systems, they are professing an existence of traditional religion. Thus, the study analyzes African Traditional Religion's relation to larger political and economic forces of domination and its connectedness to the symbolic economy of a broader cultural nexus (Verter, 2003). In a public space which is not religiously and culturally neutral as evinced by modern Zimbabwe, it is even justifiable to talk of the vitality of traditional religion basing it on the fact that this religion is continuing to shape the country's political, social, cultural and economic world-views and value systems (Modood and Kastoryano (2007) in Vladmir (20014). In this socio-economic and political situation, African traditional religious capital acts as a conservative force. In the modern socio-economic and political environment, ritual symbolization has helped in reducing cognitive tensions. Then gathering for rituals produces social cohesiveness through drumming, dancing and chanting. There are cases where it assuages the conditions in which people are living in, for example, understanding challenges being faced as divine punishment. But in some instances, as a response to the anxiety, there is a rise in cases of magic and acquisition of charms by the indigenous people of Zimbabwe.

So having said this, it is pertinent to pose this question: When studying the meaning of traditional religion in a modern society, who is being studied? Is it a traditional African in a contemporary society or a contemporary African in a traditional society, or a traditional African in a traditional society? Shorter as early as 1978 observed that scholars purport to study the religion of the "traditional African," but the "traditional African" hardly exists any longer, his place has been taken by the contemporary African. Shorter thinks that what they neglect to study is the religion of this contemporary African, a religion which still owes a great deal to past tradition but which is articulated in new ways and which finds new areas of application in the modern world (1978:421).

1.5 Statement of Problem

The central problem researched by this study is the ambivalence of meaning for African traditional religion in Zimbabwe. As a basis for this study, I identified the problem to be threefold:

The first prevailing issue concerns the controversy of African Traditional Religion's existence in Zimbabwe. The influence of the Africa-Europe encounter has caused major socio-political upsets and dislocations in Shona traditional societies, increasingly 'fertilising' the ground for stifling of African Traditional Religion. Four decades after independence, traditional religion is still largely perceived in an ambiguous way as either religion or culture; struggling for public recognition and equal treatment under the law which provides for freedom of worship. Mbiti (1990:9), a reputable African scholar of ATR, argues that African Traditional Religion is a sick baby which is so far the least practiced. ATR was disregarded by the colonial machinery and paralysed; left to die a natural death. The religion then suffered abandonment by the elite and the civilised, the literate and the illiterate. If this is the case, then ATR is just created for the scholar's analytic purposes by his imaginative acts of comparison and generalisation. This understanding is problematic because the existence of religion is testified even outside the world of academia. It exists in the form of various distinct traditions. However, there are some who maintain that ATR exists; recognizing certain traditions as African religion, though there is lack of unanimity on the real essence of this religion which presents an enormous challenge. Thus Chitakure (2017), a Zimbabwean scholar, supports this view in his preface by saying that most scholars of ATR concur that it is impossible to write about Africans and their religions as a homogeneous group. Resultantly, the construction of its meaning becomes a complex exercise.

The second prevailing issue centers on the dominant modes in the portrayal of traditional religion, with some constructions placing it in direct opposition to modernity. The paradoxes have an influence in shaping the discursive frame of the meaning of ATR in Zimbabwe. For example, problems are apparent when there is focus on weaknesses and faults noticeable between the contours of traditional religion and modernity. This is a big challenge because sometimes there is use of powerful language to belittle the adversary. Modern society is awash with controversial stories associated with African traditional religion. The narratives of this religion's practices and belief systems which are crime- oriented, anti-life, unprogressive and retrogressive include; natural deaths, superstitions, ritual murders, abuse of human rights,

witchcraft practices, violence and dictatorship. Yet, ATR interpret modernity as the major cause of the following: loss of humanness, mass murder, social disequilibrium, natural catastrophes like deadly diseases (HIV and Aids, Diabetes, Cancer, Cholera, Covid-19), drought like *el nino*, floods like Cyclone Idai, civil discontentment, and political violence.

The third prevailing issue concerns the endorsement which has been made by generations of African scholars who maintained that African traditional religion is perceived as an all-pervasive phenomenon without which African life cannot be understood and cannot flourish. If all aspects of individual and social life are considered to be expressions of traditional religions, then how is the notion of "religion" interpreted in this instance? To speak of religion as an all-pervasive phenomenon is to extirpate the very concept whose meaning is being sought. According to Kudadjie (1976) in Chitando (1997) "if all life –including sneezing, eating, courting, trading, etc, is a religious activity as such, then nothing remains to be contrasted with religion and it becomes practically useless. So to argue that religion is everything in modern African societies is to say that nothing is religious. This has the effect of making any meaningful discussion of religion in African societies virtually impossible (Chitando, 1997).

The last prevailing issue identified by the researcher is the eagerness by Zimbabweans in contemporary society to appreciate the transformed traditional African religion and cultural values. In interpreting the meaning of ATR, the hurdle that is encountered is to ascertain whether the motive to relive ATR is religious- oriented or driven by, for example political, economic and social persuasions? It is intriguing to explore the real essence of religion reflecting on **what** tradition, **whose** tradition, **when** and **where** was this tradition established, and lastly **how** and **why** was this tradition practiced?

1.6 Objectives of the Study

The principal attempt in this research is to look at the meaning of African traditional religion for a Zimbabwean society. The three main objectives of the thesis are to address the following:

1. Examine the functional meaning of African traditional religion in contemporary Zimbabwe.

2. Open up new perspectives for substantive meaning of traditional religion in a modern societal set- up of Zimbabwe.
3. To assess an affective postulation of the meaning of African traditional religious practices in Zimbabwe.

1.7 Assumptions

When conducting the survey, I assumed that participants answered truthfully and that the sample I chose is representative of the Shona people I made reference to. Basing on the questions and objectives of this study, the following assumptions informed this research:

- African traditional religion is fluid and flexible. It can be embraced by any indigenous person.
- The underlying assumption in this study was that ATR exists and continues to be important in Zimbabwe.
- African traditional religion translates through various forms into social, political, cultural and economic realities and structures.
- African traditional religion is not separate from the everyday experiences of people and therefore assumes the validity of the faith and experience of both researchers and informants.
- African traditional religion at the "grassroots" level has an impact on wider social, economic, cultural, political and environmental issues.

1.8 Major question

The question that therefore arises is; what is the meaning of African traditional religion in today's modern society of Zimbabwe?

1.8.1 Sub-questions

The following sub-questions connect with the central question posed above:

1. In what ways is the functional meaning of African traditional religion's protean nature denoted in contemporary Zimbabwe.

2. How is the substantive meaning of ATR opening up new perspectives of an existing social matrix to meet the needs of the Zimbabwean indigenous people?
3. How do the Shona people's traditional belief systems and practices fit into an affective postulation of the meaning of African traditional religious practices in Zimbabwe?

1.9 Justification

This work made a contribution to the body of literature on traditional religion in Africa. In Africa today, there are multiple forces that impact on African life including globalization, democratization, urbanization, modern technology, language, ethnicity and, indeed, Christianity. These forces profoundly, continuously, and dynamically impact and influence people's worldviews. My contribution aimed at interpreting this traditional religion as a modern Zimbabwean religion to serve as a source of African pride and strength. It is a fresh look at how traditional religion is surviving in changing times of the modern era. This becomes sensible in circumstances whereby there are still those whose knowledge of Africa is grounded in the perceptions and attitudes of missionaries, merchants, and marines who have occupied the continent through foreign religions, trade, or guns. The enormity of African contribution to ideas of religion, spirituality, and ethics has gone unappreciated by religious scholars although at the beginning of human history, Africa makes its case for the origin of religion in an official, formal manner (Kete and Mazama 2009:xxi).

Due to the fact that different religions and their cultures have come into contact with African traditional religion, I was justified to carry out this study exploring expressive forms and performances which emerge from this encounter; embodying the sources that shape them yet constituting new and different entities. Being fluid in its adaptation to changing circumstances and open to multiple meanings, African traditional religion is an expression of culture in transition and transformation. African traditional religion thus liberates readers of this work conceptually from a notion of fixed or 'finished' products in religious culture, whether purportedly 'hybrid' or whole.

Focus was paid on cultures in transition, allowing my research to grasp the 'in-betweens', the ambiguous spaces where cultural boundaries blur and disappear as hierarchical categories collapse into each other. Today in the post-colonial world, traditional religion has become a

powerful marker of identity in Zimbabwe since it is uniquely manifested through local as well as national expressions. As Africans have grappled with the question of identity, they have appropriated religion as a helpful resource. Thus, it is a study which searched for indigenous people's life realities apparent to conventional Africans in matters which have a bearing on African religion.

In Zimbabwe, as elsewhere in Africa, the need for African traditional religion comes to the fore when the indigenous people are faced with life challenges. But bearing in mind that every African life situation is not divorced from the religious realm, there are times when real African remedies are pervasive to African problems. So, this explains why indigenous Africans (Christians and traditionalists) consult traditional religious practitioners and the vitality of their instructions, advices and prescriptions are noticed in their daily life exigencies. It is the idea that traditional religion sustains the African spirituality which justified me to carry out this research study.

The dynamically changing social, political, and economic landscape in Africa means that people are themselves under constant pressure to develop their own spiritual resources. It would be imprudent to ignore African traditional religion which was at my disposal in this study. Given the fact that African traditional religion is an orally transmitted tradition, with the passing away of many of the elders it becomes reasonable to have a change in approach which is interpretive in nature. This work assessed how the Zimbabweans contribute towards the preservation of traditional religion in a modern era

There is a vital need for educational institutions, research centers, as well as theological seminaries to have the kind of information this project unearthed so that they can develop their curricula drawing on the agency, wisdom, practices, and experiences of indigenous people in influencing and shaping religion studies. Findings emerging out of this study might also be helpful for the broader artistic community as it will also find inspiration from the spiritual resources of ordinary people in everyday life. The study provides the reader with new metaphors, tropes, figures of speech, modes of reasoning, etymologies, analogies, and cosmogonies to satiate the intellect. Thus, this work presents richly textured ideas of spirituality, ritual, and initiation while advancing new traditional theological categories, cosmological narratives, and ways to conceptualize ethical behavior (Kete and Mazama 2009: xxii).

1.10 Delimitations of the Research Area

Like any other qualitative research, this study had some delimitations. These are the characteristics that limited the scope and define the boundaries of my study. The first delimitation was the choice of the study problem itself. The problem was mainly centered on the complex nature of ATR which energised this research to explore its meaning specifically in the modern context. In exploring this problem, I dealt with the effective, functional and substantive conjectures of ATR in modern Zimbabwe. To carry out this research study and to overcome purely abstract models of reflection, I studied ATR in concrete places, thus honoring the insight that all knowledge is embodied in religion and context (Haardt, 2010:163). From the topic it is clear that this study is situated in Zimbabwe. As was noted earlier, the vastness of Zimbabwe could not be exhausted within the stipulated three years of study. So, to put this study into context, I chose Buhera District as an amphitheater of my study. I had a bird's eye view of Buhera's rural communities and noted that the rural district had a well-organized traditional life. The same view came from rural cartographers in affirmation of the experiences of those who live in the rural communities and visitors who pass through Buhera communities.

Buhera District is one of Manicaland Province's seven districts situated in the south-eastern part of Zimbabwe and is home to about 24,072 habitants (geoview.info). The dominant part of the District lies in middle veld with an altitude ranging from 600-1200 meters above sea level, while the south-eastern area is part of the Sabi valley and forms part of the low veld with an altitude below sea level (Lindahl and Matenga, 1995:15). The district is divided into four constituencies, namely Buhera North, Buhera West, Buhera Central and Buhera South. Within the district, special focus in this study was paid on Nyashanu and Chamutsa chieftaincies. The study dealt with communities which are in Buhera South. Names of the places include Birchenough Bridge, which happens to be the growth point located on the south about 120 km from Buhera District offices. This southern part of Buhera shares borders with Chipinge and Chimanimani Districts. The area is bordered by two major rivers, that is, in the south-west there is Devure River, and in the south-east there is Save River.

In this study I confined myself to three Wards. I used the purposive sampling technique to recruiting my participants with convenience sampling and site-based sampling procedure. In each Ward I identified 3 villages, and from each village I identified 4 homesteads over a period

of about 5 months from which I recruited my participants. From 36 homesteads I got consent of the 66 participants whom I recruited by considering age, sex, ethnic group, marital status, socio-economic status, religious affiliation and political orientation. All participants were above the age of eighteen.

The study design which is informed by Afrocentrism and Symbolic Interactionism Theories calls for observations of the 66 individuals. Each participant was followed over a one-year period, and interviewed up to four times. Interviews were tape- recorded and transcribed verbatim for analysis. These interviews were largely in-depth, semi- structured in format and observations were also used in gathering data. The observations were both participant and non-participant. These data- gathering tools were used in the context of a phenomenological research method. Analysis of data was done using an Interpretive Approach.

1.11 Chapter Outline

This thesis consists of six chapters. In the first chapter, I give a brief background to the discourse and meaning of traditional religion in Zimbabwe and point out the lacuna which this study addressed. It set the background in which ATR in the Zimbabwean context thrives. The chapter highlighted research objectives, statement of the problem, questions, assumptions and justification. In Chapter Two, I focused on review of related literature. A lot has been written about the Shona people of Zimbabwe and in this chapter I showed the relevance of this literature in my current study. In Chapter Three I framed the theory of my research study. The study was carried out from an Afrocentric perspective showing the need to prioritise the Shona people's cultural values and belief systems. The vitality of African traditional religion in Zimbabwe is meaningfully studied by taking cognizance of symbols, and so symbolic interactionism was key during the research. Chapter Three also served to clarify key concepts underpinning this study. Discussion of methodologies used in the research was done in Chapter Four. Using an interpretive approach, a phenomenological understanding of African traditional religion was seen as vital in coaxing information about the Shona people's traditional life. This was done through use of interviews and observations. The chapter also takes cognisance of the importance of interpreting this traditional religion in the modern set up and therefore uses interpretive phenomenological analysis. Chapter Five centered on presentation of findings and analysis. Traditional kitchen hut, rituals, the power of the dead and witchcraft are dealt with as themes which serve as epitomes of ATR in modern times. Discussion of the research findings is done in

Chapter Six. In the last chapter, I deal with conclusions, summary and recommendations on implications of this study on scholarship in the field of religion studies in Zimbabwe.

CHAPTER TWO

2.0 Literature review

The academic path in the area of religion has been walked by both renowned and unrenowned scholars, students, believers, and non-believers. Religion has been studied from many various angles using different lenses, and for different reasons. This chapter is undertaken in recognition of some studies that have already been done in the area of religion. Similarly, very little has been written specifically on the meaning of traditional religion in modern Shona societies of Zimbabwe. There are, however, many published works on African traditional religion in general, and some of these will be used in this work. So, this chapter revisits some of the literature that has been produced on religion and traditional religion, especially for the Shona religion in Zimbabwe (Chitakure 2016:61).Guided by the research methodology and the study's statement of problem , this chapter reviews literature which is handy in understanding the meaning of African traditional religion in modern society of Zimbabwe. For the purposes of this study, the literature is reviewed having in mind three Zimbabwean historical epochs which is: pre-colonial Zimbabwe, colonial Zimbabwe and postcolonial Zimbabwe. In the review there is an exploration of the theoretical discussions and empirical findings to understand unique perceptions of the meaning of African traditional religion in existing religio-socio Zimbabwean contexts.

In the review of literature written about pre-colonial Zimbabwe, it is important to show that the methodology used to come up with literature was mainly archaeology, anthropology and history. Most writers relied much on old pieces of information from Muslim geographers, Portuguese documents which they used to reconstruct information on great Zimbabwe state and Mutapa state and Rozvi state. For the Ndebele state, according to A. Livneh's (1976) *Pre-Colonial Polities in Southern Zambezia and their Political Communications,* there is a large body of eyewitness accounts which allows for a more detailed study of ATR and the communication patterns of that state. Livneh thinks that while archaeology locates the distribution of population centers and the resources people were exploiting in some periods - it can only hint at the intensity of contact between communities, and the ways in which such contact was carried out. But even for the period when records are available, the southern part of the plateau is hardly mentioned in contemporary sources. Archaeology is relied upon for the reconstruction of this area's past right into the nineteenth century. Oral tradition supplements and aids the interpretation of

archaeological data in this case. Yet, available traditions tend to concentrate on major political events, like successions to positions of power, and on dynastic genealogies in Shona society (Livneh, 1976). A. P. Cheater's (1986) *The Role and Position of Women in Pre-Colonial and Colonial Zimbabwe* looks at women in pre-colonial Zimbabwe and thinks that the problem that is encountered when dealing ATR before colonisation is methodological, and is concerned with cultural perceptions. Most anthropological and historical information that is accessed about women in pre-colonial and colonial Zimbabwe has been produced by men, often of a different culture, and while their major biases are frequently obvious, the subtleties of different cultural and gender perspectives are, by definition, less easy to identify.

In a 2009 publication, entitled *Mapungubwe and Great Zimbabwe: The origin and spread of social complexity in southern Africa;* Huffman's approach, like that of Giddens (1984), maintains that cultural norms are embedded in the social context of daily action. Indeed, human action requires the prior existence of norms– 'conditioned action' in McGuire's (1996) terminology. Furthermore, the tension between ideal norms (the pressure for continuity) and daily action (the potential for change) is an important social dynamic. As with other theoretical entities, cultural norms, values and beliefs can be studied through their effects on material culture. The other school, in contrast, adopts a more post-processual perspective, informed by both Giddens and Bourdieu (1977). Here, daily behavior produces and reproduces structures and meaning which are always in a state of 'becoming'. Among other things, this school emphasises the potential for all societies to change. An extreme position held by some is the assumption that most material deposits are the result of daily behavior uninformed, or only indirectly informed, by values and beliefs.

Who would not feel a 'crisis of soul' when the world around them falls into historical decay with painful discontinuity with the past? It would appear that the African traditional worldview is disintegrating and is increasingly irrelevant in the modern Africa invaded by western forms of education, technology, industry and urbanization. However, African traditional religion was not always in this state of collapse. Before colonialism and missionary activity African religion was lived as an absolute truth and undisputed belief. The wisdom of the elders reigned supreme and the watchful eye of the living dead ensured continuity of customs and the religious beliefs. The world of the ages continued in perpetuity. As early 1967, Bolaji Idowu could argue that African

traditional religion is a living religion which is a contemporary living reality. The political liberation achieved by most of the African has become a recipe for a desire to seek for an African identity. This has been seen in Africans vetoing some of the exotic customs in a bid to re-assert their own traditional religious culture.

African traditional religion literature is written both by outsiders and insiders. It might appear as if the outsiders were not the best-qualified people to be working on the traditions of Africans because they had not been socialized in them. However, as outsiders, their views might have some conceptual advantages based on this social distance. From the literature, it is clear that religion is a major factor in human life and it is likely to remain so for the foreseeable future (Cheater, 1986). But, unlike the pre-colonial works, after colonisation most scholars interrogate religion intending to know what its essential elements are. This means that attention to the problem of defining religion is a fundamental prerequisite to the study of religion (www.academia.edu). Thus, E. Chitando's (2007) *A Curse of the Western Heritage? Imagining Religion in an African Context* thinks that the academic study of religion is characterised by a perennial search for an agreed definition of its subject-matter. That religion is notoriously difficult to define has become something of a truism in Religious Studies. While the identity of the discipline remains controversial, the issue of what constitutes an acceptable definition of religion exacerbates matters (Chitando, 1997). This also ended up negatively upsetting the status of the African belief systems. Debate from Western scholarship was centered on whether ATR was a religion or not.

The African scholars have also used the same approach by the westerners of defining religion usually in the first paragraphs of their works. Omoregbe (1999) in his *Comparative Religion* defines religion as interpersonal relationship between a person and a transcendent personal being believed to exist. To Ekwunife (1990), religion is an awareness and recognition of a dependent relationship on a transcendent Being, the Wholly Other, nameable or un-nameable, personalized or impersonalized expressible in human society through beliefs, worship and ethical or moral behaviour. African traditional religion (ATR) refers to the indigenous religious beliefs and practices of the African people. To J.S. Mbiti (1969), *African Religions and Philosophy* is a systematic study of the attitudes of mind and belief that have evolved in the many societies of Africa and affects the way of life of most African people. Awolalu (1976:1) in *What is African*

Traditional Religion? says that "when we speak of African traditional religion, we mean the indigenous religious beliefs and practices of the Africans. It is the religion which resulted from the sustaining faith held by the forebears of the present Africans". Ebere (2011:481) in *Beating the Masculinity Game: Evidence from African Traditional Religion* opines that "When we speak of ATR, we mean the indigenous beliefs, ceremonies, rituals, customs, and practices of Africans born out of the expression and deep reflection of their forebears. These traditions evolved over many centuries as the people of Africa responded to the situations of their life and reflected upon their experiences".

Omotoye (2015) argues that many African scholars have held differing positions on the actual nomenclature to be given to our traditional religion. Among them include the following; African Traditional Religion (ATR), African Religions (AR), African Indigenous Religion (AIR), African Systems of Thought (AST) and Primal Heritage (PH). It is not surprising to see the same scholar inconsistently using two or more of the captions cited above, like in the case of Parrinder (1976) and Mbiti (1969). African religion and African traditional religion are all common names used to discuss the faith found within Africa. Each name is debated among scholars and some challenge the word "traditional" since the word makes the religion seem outmoded. For example, Asukwo, Adaka and Dimgba (2013:240) see "the clumsy religious practices called the African traditional religion as nothing but a deliberate attempt to ridicule the people of Africa as if they were not created by God like any other race". They further state that the continuous derogatory reference of African religion as a "traditional" should henceforth be seen as 'racism'. However, other African scholars do not see the prejudice in the term traditional. Scholars who advocate the use the word "traditional" contend that the word does not mean the religion is outmoded or ancient; neither does it have derogatory connotations. On this note Awolalu (1976:1) writes: We need to explain the word "traditional". This word means indigenous, that which is aboriginal or foundational, handed down from generation to generation, upheld and practised by Africans today. This is a heritage from the past, but treated not as a thing of the past but as that which connects the past with the present and the present with eternity. This is not a "fossil" religion, a thing of the past or a dead religion. It is a religion that is practised by living men and women. This is because the word "traditional" helps us distinguish the religion from other religions that have existed in Africa for centuries, i.e. Islam and Christianity (Bonsu, 2016).

The problem that African scholars of religion in the period after colonisation encounter is that they are studying a religion which had already been dominantly premeditated by Western scholars who, by virtue of their pioneering contribution, became the first to write about ATR. Asukwo, Adaka & Dimgba (2013) in N. O. Bonsu's (2016) *African Traditional Religion: An Examination of Terminologies Used for Describing the Indigenous Faith of African People, Using an Afrocentric Paradigm* opines that their writings were borne out of prejudice or probably out of the impatience of the researchers to look at the universal meaning of the terms they used to describe the religious life of African people. It should be noted that at a point in time, the Europeans labeled the African continent as a "Dark Continent" devoid of any civilization. The religion itself was described with many racial and misleading terms by missionaries, anthropologists, historians, sociologists and archaeologists in an attempt to belittle ATR. Awolalu (1976) and Bonsu (2016) examined the 'misleading' terms which were used by westerners to misrepresent ATR and its adherents. Such terms include animism, savagery, paganism, magic, fetishism, idolatry, juju, primitiveness heathenism and ancestral worship. In Zimbabwean context, G. Chavhunduka (2001) *Dialogue among Civilisations, the African Traditional Religion To-Day* mentions specific terms like 'witchdoctor' as an improper label for sacred practitioners. B.P Humbe (2017) *African traditional religion in post-colonial Zimbabwe: A sustainable heritage for water resources management* discards the concept 'rain- making ceremony' because the Shona people do not make rain, so it should be called rain inducing ceremony in that the ritual induces rain to fall. It should be noted that these terms are still widely used by both African and non-African writers and researchers. Some African writers have been westernised by Europeans hence they also use these racial and misleading terms, whether knowingly and unknowingly, in describing African traditional religion. African traditional religion as an aspect of African civilisation, also suffered from such inhuman racial treatment meted out to African people (Bonsu, 2016).

Kalu (1985:133) in Okon's (2013:92) *Distortion of Facts in Western Ethnographic Study of African Religion, Culture and Society* has described the decision of the colonialists to study indigenous cultures as "enforced study" which was motivated by "the necessity to base administrative and political policy on a definite knowledge of the people and societies of the region..." (p.134). African scholars also think that what made westerners generate biased conclusions about Africans was because of African-phobia. On this note, Jordan (1982) in Okon

(2013:94) has observed that for the Western mind, the concept of blackness has a direct antonym-whiteness and that the two colors imply opposition even in daily usage: “White and black connoted purity and filthiness, virginity and sin, virtue and baseness, beauty and ugliness, beneficence and evil”. N. Mndende’s (1998) *From Underground Praxis to Recognized Religion: Challenges facing African Religions;* reflecting on South Africa, admits that the country has undergone many changes, from a country afflicted by the worst evils of racism, one in which religion was one of the tools used to dehumanise the indigenous black people of the South Africa. Not only were black people forced to make a total shift from their true humanity and to ape a "white man's" style, they were also forced to adjust like chameleons. Blacks had to call themselves Christians in certain areas which were perceived as white man's "sacred spaces" like the school, work place, parliament, courts, hospitals, etc. This type of behavior was adopted to convince the white bosses that blacks had been brought to a higher level of civilisation. To live like "them" meant that one used a 'Christian' name, which was of course either English, Afrikaans, Jewish, or Italian. As a response to a similar context, in Zimbabwe scholars like W Magwa, K Gondo, S Nyota, and B Mudzanire have written works on the indigenous black people of Zimbabwe. In 2017 they contributed works in a book entitled *Tsika Dzavatema MuZimbabwe.* The contributors explored the relationship between languages, people’s culture, importance of language in the education and development of a country, the meaning and essence of being a black person, origins and history of totems and black people’s traditional practices.

N. O Bonsu (2016) suggested that in order to overcome bias and misrepresentation of facts in the study of African traditional religion, scholars should adopt an Afrocentric paradigm when they study African religion and spirituality. Researchers ought to rely on primary sources, preferably oral sources and first hand observation of African religious practitioners. Second, it is advisable that researchers “bracket” their faith and prejudice they might have about Africa, African people and African religion. This is a phenomenological approach in studying religion as advocated by J.L Cox (2000) in *Expressing the Sacred. An introduction to the Phenomenology of Religion*. In so doing, the researcher(s) would be able to produce compelling facts and conclusions which are not biased or distorted. And third, if African people want the rest of the world to stop describing their religion and indigenous institutions with misleading and derogatory terminologies, then it is only natural that they come up with their own Afrocentric terminologies. The same line of thinking had been emphasised by L. J. Myers’s (1987) *The Deep Structure of Culture: Relevance*

of Traditional African Culture in Contemporary Life, who advocates Afrocentrism as a way of supporting the resurgence of the deep structures of African culture and not for the replication of ancient surface structure culture in modern times. The first phase in implementation of Afrocentrism entails the documentation of evidence verifying the true African historical record. Phase two is emotional and intellectual identification in which researchers conduct their own investigations, raising questions and answering them in terms of research of personal relevance. Phase three is demystification, in which emphasis is placed on defining and clarifying structural elements, form, content, and other devices of the discipline. In phase four, understanding, students focus on integrating, synthesizing, internalizing, and reflecting what they have learned through analysis of western orthodox work. The last phase, mastery, requires that researchers demonstrate their understanding by applying the information in a product of their own creation for future generations of humankind and thereby taking their place in the African legacy continuum. Afrocentricism provided the requisite tools to explore the vibrancy of traditional religion in Zimbabwe, showing that the religion remains alive and well in modern societies.

To complement Bonsu's (2016) sentiment of using indigenous concepts to describe ATR, I find Chitando's (1997:91) view very relevant. He identifies *Chikaranga* as a vernacular term used by ordinary Zimbabweans to stand for everything associated with traditional religious beliefs and practices. As was noted earlier on in Chapter One, *chikaranga* is one of the dialects spoken by one of the five ethnic groups identified by Doke in 1929. The ethnic group is called *vakaranga*. So, in Zimbabwe people use the terms *chizezuru, chikaranga, chindau, chikorekore* and *chimanyika* to designate their various ethnic traditional belief systems at a micro level. In a post-colonial traditional religious set-up in Zimbabwe, in using *chikaranga* the Shona people promote ethnicity which might not have been realised in the pre-colonial milieu. So using the term *chikaranga* to represent the general religion of the Shona people can be branded a knotty term, a concept used by Martí (2015) in *Representing African Reality through Knotty Terms*. The problem with these knotty terms is not only that they may have a contested analytical value, something that after all happens with many concepts in the human and social sciences as shown by Martí (2015). It would be difficult to find unanimity among the Shona traditional religious specialists regarding the application of *chikaranga* to the other four ethnic groups in Zimbabwe. The problem with these ethnic terms given to the Shona subgroups is that they can connote a pejorative dimension, an inheritance and be result of the old evolutionary vision of anthropology

that did not only classify societies that it studied but also arranged them into a hierarchy. In essence *chikaranga* is associated with mystification. And actually, what is worse, we are not only speaking of disparagement but also of the construction of a reality inscribed in a social hierarchical structure. The challenge of using *chikaranga* as a holistic term for Shona people's traditional belief system is not only because of definitional problems but also because there is the trend to employ the term more for the non-Western Other (Martí 2015:86). So *chikaranga* is a contested term which designates a subgroup of the Shona people of Masvingo Province who have a determined shared socio-cultural attributes. To buttress this view, Martí (2015:86) has this to say, "As a matter of fact, it is not relevant at all if this ethnicity is due to endogen factors or has its origins in colonial policies or academic constructs, in a manipulated history or in myths. Important and above all is the fact that today people may experience ethnicity and seek to bring about a concrete social and political articulation according to this idea-force".

Scholars like D.N Beach's (1980) *The Shona and Zimbabwe 900-1850: An Outline of Shona History*, and (1994) *The Shona and their Neighbors* and T. Ranger's (1970) *The African Voice in Southern Rhodesia* (1985), and *The Invention of Tribalism in Zimbabwe* explored the pre-colonial indigenous ethnic groups and tribes. B Raftopoulos and A. S. Mlambo (2009) in *The Hard Road to Becoming National* argue that the pre-colonial history of Zimbabwe is usually explained in terms of the rise and fall of empires – the Great Zimbabwe, the Mutapa, the Torwa, the Rozvi and Ndebele states. A Livneh (1976) thinks that whole of southern Zambezia during this period was most probably a Shona- speaking world, in fact, they were people speaking the language then known as *Karanga*, which is today called Shona. With the nineteenth century came the intrusion of the Zulu- speaking Ndebele into the Shona world and the establishment of a non-Shona state as the dominant force over most of the plateau. According to Brian Raftopoulos and A. S. Mlambo (2009), in the case of the Ndebele who settled in the south-west of the Zimbabwe plateau after 1840, what began as the movement of a small Khumalo clan from the Zulu kingdom as a result of the nineteenth-century *Mfecane* in South Africa, developed into a more heterogeneous nation composed of Rozwi, Kalanga, Birwa, Tonga, Nyubi, Venda and Sotho brought together through a combination of conquest, assimilation and incorporation. Post-colonial scholarship on the indigenous religion of Zimbabwe has devoted its energy on origins and identification of the Shona people. In emphasising the need to move away from the conception of ethnicity as static and primordial, Ranger (2000) in B. Raftopoulos and A. S.

Mlambo (2009) argued about the importance of showing that 'tribal identity is not inevitable, unchanging, given, but a product of human creativity that can be re-invented and refined to become again open, constructive and flexible, subordinate to other loyalties and associations (B. Raftopoulos and A. S. Mlambo (2009). Scholars like Ranger (1985: 4); Makaudze and Guhlanga (2014: 91); Thorpe (1996: 52); and Bourdillon (1987) argue that the derivation of the term Shona is uncertain, however it appears to have been first used by the Ndebele as a derogatory term for the people they defeated, particularly the Rozvi. Drawing on the work of historians like David Beach and Terence Ranger, Mazarire concludes that the 'Shona' – a term signifying linguistic, cultural and political characteristics of a people – did not even know themselves by that name until the late nineteenth century, and even then were variously described as *'vaNyai', 'abeTshabi', 'Karanga'*, or *'Hole'*. ChiShona, whilst primarily a linguistic classification, in modern day Zimbabwe, is also a convenient term to designate a particular people who not only share language, but also have certain cultural, and, to some extent, historical links and experiences (Bourdillon, 1976, Humbe, 2017:206).

A. Livneh (1976) opines that in most pre-colonial literature, the political systems operated within the context of Iron Age cultures. Their population lived in permanent villages subsisting on hoe-farming and livestock keeping supplemented by hunting and gathering of wild fruits and roots. Mining of iron, copper and gold was practised and trade was carried out mainly in ivory and gold with traders related to the international trading of Indian Ocean coasts. Trade created some distinct market-places on which people congregated for bartering minerals, ivory and foodstuffs. Religious practices demanded seasonal congregations of people in certain spots for ancestral worship in most parts of the plateau and for praying directly to the Supreme Being Mwari in the Matopo shrines. In pre-colonial Zimbabwe, religion was probably the one aspect of contact outside trade and building which can be traced with some certainty.

It is evident that religion was an important aspect of elite attributes and activities. Movement to the shrines would have probably been most intense before the rains and after the harvest prior to propitiating the supernatural and then for thanksgiving. In times of calamity like droughts, the congregation for -worship would probably have been even more intense. A. Livneh (Op cit), who deals with the theme of communication in pre-colonial Zimbabwe, argues that the possibility of there being an organised cult officialdom in Great Zimbabwe , functioning like the Mwari cult,

with provincial delegates and messengers, would add an exciting dimension to its communications. The Mwari cult is known as having had special links to the Rozvi. Scholars linking the Mwari cult to Great Zimbabwe did it on the premise that the Rozvi resided there until the early nineteenth century. Description of ceremonies at Great Zimbabwe in the nineteenth century and the potentialities of a cave in the site for magnifying sound became the supporting evidence for the hypothesis (ibid). Unfortunately this does not resemble the Mwari cult practices in the Matopos, while the cave is unlike any cave used by the Mwari cult, and its use is a subject of dispute. The myth relating the movement of the cult from Great Zimbabwe to the Matopos supports the obvious religious significance of the place (Livneh, 1976).

In colonial Zimbabwe, scholars like Beach's (1986) *War and Politics in Zimbabwe 1840-1900*, and Ranger's (1970) *Peasant consciousness and guerrilla war in Zimbabwe: a Comparative study* agree that the Supreme Being of the Shona people is Mwari. For Daneel (1970) in *The God of the Matopo Hills,* the Shona perceive *Mwari* as the God of fertility petitioned at Matonjeni. He is responsible for the fertility of the land and barren women. So, when there is drought or a national catastrophe, traditional leadership is responsible for consultation of this cult through approved special intermediaries called *manyusa.* The Shona people's understanding of Mwari is netted in the names which they give to their Supreme Being. Mewre (1957) in *The Shona Idea of God* provides a comprehensive list of the Shona names for God. *The following are the names provided by Merwe: Mwari, Zame, Nyadenga, Wokumusoro, Runji, Chipindikure, Chirozva-mauya, Chirazamauya, Sagomakoma, Musiki, Muvumbi, Marure, Dzivaguru, Matangakugara, Muwanikwa, Sekuru, Mbuya* and *Soro-re-Zhou.* In post-colonial literature the belief in Mwari is very strong as articulated by various scholars. In post-colonial Zimbabwe, because of the strong influence of this Mwari cult, some writers on ATR use the nomenclature Mwari religion to describe Shona religiosity (Mukonyora 1999, Humbe 2017).

K. J. Kaoma's (2016) *African Religion and Colonial Rebellion: The Contestation of Power in Colonial Zimbabwe's Chimurenga of 1896-1897* examines the unifying roles of the *Mwari* cult, the cultural symbol of land, and the authority of spirit mediums in the first anti-colonial socio-political and religious protest of the *Chimurenga* of 1896-97 in colonial Zimbabwe. Using their spiritually and socially defined authority, spirit mediums served as movement intellectuals to the *Chimurenga*— they crafted strategies and inspiration for social protest. The shared values of the

Mwari cult, the cultural symbol of land, and the office of mediums were further employed to mobilize the masses into a social movement that sought to reverse rapid sociocultural and political changes brought about by colonialism. Kaoma (2016) rejects Eliade's and Durkheim's theory of 'the sacred and the profane'. He argues that this separation is hard to establish in African traditional religions and cosmologies. Spirit mediums, for example, employed African sociology, spiritual beliefs and customs in their attempts to reject the colonial order. Besides, the implementation of 'indirect rule' and land grabs led to the contestation of power between colonial authorities, chiefs, and spirit mediums. Amidst contemporary social injustices, human rights abuses and corruption in post-colonial Africa, and without underestimating the role traditional religions play in African politics, Kaoma challenges Christianity to follow the prophetic example of spirit mediums in the *Chimurengas*.

In some cases, the ideology of nationalism and Africanism influence the literature of pre-colonial Zimbabwe. So, it is not surprising that politicians contributed immensely to the production of material about pre-colonial Zimbabwe. Raftopoulos and Mlambo (2009:ii) contend that in 1977 Robert Mugabe wrote an article on ZANU's view of pre-colonial Zimbabwe, in which he sought to argue the position of, in Bhebe and Ranger's words: 'A natural "Shona" nation which had always sought to defend its autonomy'. According to Mugabe, drawing on his reading of the empire of Munhumutapa, the distinguishing features of the Zimbabwean nation are its cultural homogeneity, biological and genetic identity, social system, geography, history which together characterise the country's national identity, also combined in producing for its people a national, vigorous and positive spirit which manifests itself in the consistently singular direction of its own preservation.

So information of what transpired during the pre-colonial era was used to envision and create the idea of national belonging and citizenship. For example, N Sithole (1959) posited that Africa is for the Africans. He was following the ideology of Kwame NKrumah who had said that the independence of Ghana in 1957 will not be complete until such a time when the rest of Africa is independent. For D Westerlund (1985) in *African Religion in African Scholarship,* these are extra-religious factors that are built on political convictions. Westerlund (ibid) thinks that the

result will be inaccurate; people who are motivated by political conviction are unreliable scholars of religion because they tend to be too defensive and they also suppress evidence.

Within these broad parameters, B. Raftopoulos and A. S. Mlambo (2009) also set out to explore the nature of state rule, the changing contours of the political economy, and the regional and international dimensions of the country's history. Thus, basing on pre-colonial history of the indigenous people, they analysed the progress, challenges and continuing struggles over 'Becoming Zimbabwe'. A difference in the usage of the term state is noted in pre-colonial and post-colonial literature on ATR. In pre-colonial Zimbabwe African traditional religion literature, the term "state" is used to describe African polities. There is no equivalent term in indigenous languages. In modern Zimbabwe, the term state is used to refer to the country (A Livneh 1976). M. F.C. Bourdillon's (1976) *The Shona People: Ethnography of the Contemporary Shona, with Special Reference to their Religion,*and M.F.C Gelfand's (1962) *Shona Religion* show that in Shona societies, there are terms for the village, the ward or group of villages, the "land of a tribe currently referred to as chiefdom. There is no term for an organization including more than one "land", (*nvika*). The Portuguese named the greatest of the Shona "lands - "empires". Smaller polities they were apt to name "kingdoms". The latter usage was mainly replaced by chiefdom in recent works but "empires" still enjoy wide currency. The Ndebele state was normally called a "kingdom" by foreigners. For the Ndebele themselves, it was a "land", with its basic units, the village, the "chieftainship" and a vague ultra-chieftainship unit named "division" "by foreigners (A. Livneh 1976). Livneh thinks that the term empire is loaded with connotations and while the Portuguese had in mind probably the Holy Roman Empire rather than the Roman Empire, this is not necessarily the main concept readers of scholarly works would associate with the term. The Ndebele were the paramount power on the plateau for decades and held suzerainty over some Shona "lands" outside their own state. Yet, their polity is normally referred to as "kingdom". The term "state" can be applied to both Shona and Ndebele political organisations. It is also less charged with associations than "empire". Thus it is applied to the polities of the Great Zimbabwe, Mutapa, Rozvi and the Ndebele. In their work, A. Lindahl and Matenga E, (1995) *Present and Past: Ceramics and Homesteads.* An ethnoarchaeological project in the Buhera district, Zimbabwe shows that Buhera was part and parcel of Great Zimbabwe State, Mutapa State, Rozvi State and Ndebele State.

As previously statedwith regards to pre-colonial literature on ATR, a heavy reliance on archaeology, anthropology and history has been noted. J. Abbink (2014) in *Religion and Politics in Africa: The Future of "The Secular,* points out that research on religions and religious cultures has been advancing rapidly in African Studies. In fact, the depth and the richness of recent work are remarkable. But comparative study is often lacking. Ethnographic studies of the past 10 to 15 years have underlined the wealth of Christian, Muslim and "traditional" or "ethno-religious" cultures in Africa. They reveal a fascinating complexity and depth of existing religious traditions which signify much more than politics or security issues. Apart from ongoing work on textual traditions and new approaches to ritual, many studies have produced new views on the varieties of everyday religious practice, the materialities of religion, and personal religious experience and changes due to conversion.

M.F.C. Bordillon M (1976, 1977, 1990 and 1993) has done a lot of research on the Shona people using the sociology of religion perspective. He believes that the work he presented concerned religion as a social institution. So, by sociology of religion he meant the study of religion as it affects, and is affected by, other institutions and events in society. Through this kind of study it becomes important to examine religion in its different social contexts. Thus, he argues that in sociological studies; we need to look at the details of religion in a given context, and how they vary as the context changes. However, Bourdillon (1976) admits that most studies on traditional African religions have been made by social anthropologists rather than sociologists, and the useful theoretical ideas come largely from Anthropology rather than Sociology. But, there is no clear theoretical distinction between the two disciplines, so Bourdillon uses 'sociology' to cover both. Though sociology does not evaluate religious systems or belief systems, Bourdillon's approach is that there is need for judgment in the study of religion. So, closely in tandem with Bourdillon's sociological approach, this work used Symbolic Interactionism Theory. It is handy in looking at the symbolisms of the belief systems and practices of the Shona people in the modern society. This is a rich source to interpretively unpack the meaning of how traditional religion is constructed. Another scholar is M.F Gelfand (1962, 1992) who makes an ethnographic study of the Shona people by looking at their culture, philosophy and moral codes of behaviour.

Using observations, interviews and personal experiences, R. J. Mazhinye (2016)'s *Munhu, Midzimu, neChikirisito* is a research on the indigenous people of Zimbabwe, with specific focus

on the Shona people. Empirical findings of Mazhinye's study covered a variety of topics which are contemporary in nature which include: conflict management, exhuming and burying the dead, taboos, bringing back rituals, traditional leadership and sources of misfortunes. These findings are pertinent in having unique perceptions of the meaning of African traditional religion. The gaps worth studying in this research were the following themes; African architecture (traditional kitchen hut), paying bride wealth for dead women, witch- hunting and traditional religion and politics.

Cox James L has written expansively about indigenous religions in Zimbabwe in his 2000a: 1990-207; 2000b: 230-242; 1998a publications. But in his 2016 publication titled *Vitality of indigenous Religions: From Primitive to Indigenous: The Academic Study of Indigenous Religions* he argues that indigenous religions in Zimbabwe persist to this day. Traditional rituals can be observed in virtually every part of the country and appeals to ancestors and various other spirits remain a part of everyday life. As exhibited in this study, these rituals are mostly prevalent in rural communities of Zimbabwe. Although traditions have adapted to changing historical situations, indigenous beliefs and rituals remain ubiquitous throughout the country. Zedek (1999) identifies the following four types of rituals: Firstly, to help us acknowledge what has happened, secondly to help us know what we are when something has happened, thirdly to help us proceed when something happened, fourthly to help us act our way into right thinking. The use of the plural "to help us" by Zedek is a testimony that we need others to do effective rituals. We need others to do rituals well. We need others to model good ritual design and participation. However, Van Gennep (1960) thinks that effective rituals can be done individually depending on the type of rituals.

Building on these views, this work has adopted Phenomenological and Afrocentric approaches to deal with the contemporary nature of traditional religion in Zimbabwe. This has been the approach adopted by various scholars on ATR in Zimbabwe like J.L Cox (2000), T. Shoko T (2007), E. Chitando (2015), F. Sibanda (2013, 2014, 2016, and 2019) and J. Chitakure (2016). However, in a work entitled *When Acceptance Reflects Disrespect: The Methodological Contradictions of Accepting Participant Statements* Ramey (2015) argues that while most researchers today recognize the agency of those whom they study, methodological positions that accept the statements of research subjects on their own terms, thus disallowing critical analysis,

undermine that recognition. Ironically, such methodological positions, which reflect an attempt to respect the assertions of research participants, contradictorily treat those participants as unsophisticated and incapable of representing themselves strategically. This position by Ramey is a critique of the phenomenology of religion. He cites Hans Penner who analyzes related contradictions in phenomenology of religion. His critique argues that phenomenology of religion, which its proponents generally claim has developed out of Edmund Husserl's phenomenology, ignores central epistemological issues that Husserl emphasized. In Penner's account of Husserl's phenomenology, Husserl works to resolve the epistemological problem of the difference between the object and the subject's experience of the object. He further argues that common assertions that the phenomenology of religion describes "the Sacred" are unfounded since the perception, and thus the description, of an object do not necessarily correspond to the existence of that object "since it is not necessarily the case that meaning entails reference" (Penner 1989:60).

Avital Livneh (1976) argues that the Shona are affiliated to exogamous clans. This probably reflects pre-sixteenth century practices. A man had to seek his wife from among people of a different clan. That would imply both going out of the village for that purpose, and encouraging settlement of people of clans different from your own at your village. Kinship ties tend to cut across village and local groups of villages. In post-colonial Africa, the writers on ATR present this religion as existing in an environment different from the pre-colonial one. Gracious Mugovera (2017) in *The Pattriot,* maintains that the western life has a very negative impact on the nature and meaning of the religion. The coming of whites led to the undermining of various traditional practices. One of the most affected was the marriage practice. Long before the coming of whites to Africa, Africans had their ways and systems that ensured communities thrived. Traditionally, the Shona had various forms of marriage that were designed to guarantee social cohesion. Pre-colonial traditions allowed a man to identify a girl of his choice whom he targeted when she went to the river to fetch water or firewood in the forest. He would then 'kidnap' the girl of his choice (Nzenza 2013). This was known as *musengabere.* There would have been no warning signals to the girl. *Musengabere,* which comes from the merging of two words *musengero* and *webere,* means carrying in the manner of a hyena. Thus, the man who gets a woman to marry through this practice is likened to a hyena which snatches its prey and carries it away where it devours it. The snatching is violent as the prey naturally resists. Similarly, the girl

who would have been 'abducted' in this manner makes serious attempts to free herself from the impending marriage. It, therefore, required great physical strength and resilience for a man to conduct *musengabere*. After the 'kidnapping', the marriage would process start (A.C. Hodza, 1974, *Ugo Hwamadzinza AvaShona)*. The woman was encouraged to accept her husband. Post-colonial literature shows that though *musengabere* practice is now defunct, the metaphor is still in use. "Today the term *musengabere* is used to describe forced marriage relationships, specifically when it is done without the consent of a woman, for example, in the case of minors" (Chireshe and Humbe (2020) in *Metaphorical use of mapere (hyenas) in marriage-related practices among the Shona people in Zimbabwe: Lobola implications*). In particular, the writers opine that the criminalisation of the practice must have come as relief to all people who love fairness and justice, particularly to women. Practising *musengabere* violates human rights and is a violation of the Sexual Offences Act of Zimbabwe which criminalizes forced sexual relations. Judging this traditional practice through modern lenses, one would say that the practice nurtured physical and sexual violence in society.

Another pre-colonial type of marriage was *kutema ugariri.* Under this system women were given in marriage not for bride-wealth, but for services rendered by the husband. Such services to the in-laws continued for a number of years until the wife-givers were satisfied. Although the bride-wealth system was the norm in Shona society, *kutema kugarira* seems to have been especially favored by rulers. Its advantage was that it ensured control by the wife-giver over the marriage of at least the first female offspring of the marriage (A.C. Hodza, 1974).

Kutizira and *Kutizisa* (elopement) usually takes place when a man impregnates a girl before marriage or when he has had sex with her. Sometimes this is a unilateral action of the girl without prior knowledge of her suitor, with the intention to force the families to start marriage negotiations. However, in some cases the elopement by a girl or woman is done with the man's full knowledge and consent while most relatives including parents may be in the dark. In line with Meekers' (1993) *The noble custom of roora: The marriage practices of the Shona of Zimbabwe* view of these traditional forms of marriage, there is a distinction between elopement-marriages (*kutizisa*) and elopements *(kutizira).* In an elopement-marriage, there is pre-planning for the steps to be taken till the girl gets to the home of her prospective husband. In an elopement-marriage, the girl leaves her home with her prospective spouse or with one of his

relatives without permission from her own family (Meekers, 1993). In this practice, a girl runs away from her residential home without the company of her lover or the lover's relatives. Holleman's (1969) *Shona Customary Law with Reference to Kinship, Marriage, the Family and the Estate* points out that *kutizira* is usually an act of desperation; hence it is sometimes referred to as flight marriage. Elopement also happens when a girl wants to avoid an arranged marriage with a man she strongly dislikes or when she falls pregnant and the man is not willing to marry her. The high amount of *roora* demanded is sometimes also a cause for elopements. In such cases, a young woman may oppose her father's *roora* demands and elope. When the girl arrives in her lover's village she offers herself as his prospective wife. In modern literature, this type of marriage is still prevalent in Shona societies who are both in rural and urban environments.

In pre-colonial Zimbabwe, marriage was a critical institution of the community. Forms of traditional marriages preserved the African culture and kept families together. A comparison is now made between pre-colonial forms of marriage and the colonial ones. In southern Africa, marriage is a common means for transferring material culture (e.g. Evers and Hammond-Tooke, 1986). A new bride among the *Karanga* people, for example, must take new items from her area to the home of her husband. Included in these items is a specific pot that represents her fertility (H. Aschwanden (1982), *Symbols of Life: An Analysis of the Consciousness of the Karanga*). Because these are traditions which have been passed on from generation to generation, the authors desire to see a continuation between the pre-colonial and contemporary Zimbabwe. Alik Shahadah, writing in the African Holocaust Journal, states that; "Marriage in African culture, from north to south, east to west is hands-down one of the most significant rites of passage. It is the most celebrated ceremony in all African cultures. African weddings are a spiritual and social family affair and involve the combining of two lives, two families, and even two communities. Marriage is that cultural process which ushers in new life. It has been a cherished and most celebrated rite of passage since the dawn of African civilisation.

Colonisation and the advent of modernisation and globalisation corrupted the African way of doing things. According to Shahadah, because of the invasion of western philosophy, there is: "oversexualization and promiscuous nature of societies with people becoming less tolerant and at the first sign of flaw they get out of the marriage. The family structure that make people sit down under peer review is vanishing and the taboos of shame and dignity are also evaporating so a

man or woman can conduct themselves immorally without worry of the society's shame. Also, post-colonial literature now emphasise too much on commercialization of marriage in Zimbabwe (E. Chireshe and R. Chireshe, 2010, "Lobola: The Perceptions of Great Zimbabwe University Students" in *The Journal of Pan African Studies*).

The status of women in traditional religion is dealt with by writers of ATR in all historical epochs. A. Cheater (1986) thinks that the literature on Zimbabwe's different ethnic groupings is notably uneven with respect to its coverage of women in the pre-colonial era. In considering the relations of production in pre-colonial Zimbabwe for Beach (1980), it seems that women were excluded from access to land in their own right, although they could and did invest in livestock (which of course required land on which to graze), the proceeds of their own skilled labour in non-agricultural activities. Although women were economically active in agricultural as well as craft production and had some control over grain stores, they did not control the means of production in agriculture and metallurgy but, instead, provided much of the labor required for these occupations (Beach, 1980; Mackenzie, 1975). One of the major reasons for the exclusion of women from direct control of the means of production and the *family* product lay in the payment of bride wealth which has been cited in the above paragraph. Chireshe and Chireshe (2010); Cheater (1986), Mangena and Ndlovu, (2013) argue that the bride wealth not only transferred rights in a woman's labor and reproductive capacity from her own family to that of her husband, but also indemnified her family for this loss. E. Chireshe's (2012) *The Utility of The Zimbabwean Domestic Violence Act: Christian and Muslim Women's Experiences* thinks that even in contemporary times, the institution is used by some man to oppress and abuse women. For these reasons, it is possible to regard women in pre-colonial society as comprising an equivalent to the class of labor in industrial systems of production. This class equivalence helps to explain other features of women's positions in the pre-colonial system. In face of such a situation, Gelfand (1992) argues that an observer might easily consider that in Shona society a woman is not as highly considered as a man, that she is very much under his thumb and must obey his every behest.

Cheater observes that with reference to all the separate ethnic components of pre-colonial Zimbabwean society, it is true with one or two notable exceptions that the only role from which women were systematically excluded was that of formal politico-jural authority which, among

other functions, controlled the allocation of land. The headwomen in Manicaland and Makonde, and the Nehoreka (Charewa) chiefship in the Mutoko district provide the only recorded exceptions to this rule of female exclusion from political authority.Some of the wives occupied offices in governing the state besides ruling their *dunhus.* The chief wife, called *mazarira* in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, apparently held a semi-sacred position. The Portuguese describe her as the Mutapa's full sister, but according to Shona terminology, this could have meant other members of his own lineage. Traditions of ritual incest at a dynasty's mythical past are common in Shona histories. Portuguese sources mention that both sisters and daughters of the Mutapa were eligible to marry him. Accounts of royal incest in Shona traditions, on the other hand, consistently delegate it to the semi-mythical stage of history. They are always mentioned at the founding generation of dynasties. Details of the participants in the ceremony are specifically mentioned. At later stages of the histories, no ruler is mentioned as having married his sister. The mere emphasizing of the act in the early history is indicative of its unusual nature. The recurrence of names, like Nehanda, in that context in different traditions of different clans, may indicate a common mythical source upon which all these traditions drew (Livneh, 1976).

However, according to Cheater, Shona women did exercise authority in other roles: as mothers, especially over their daughters; as *vatete*, particularly over the education of their brothers' children; as ancestors, over the reproductive capacity of their female descendants (although the degree to which women were able to control their own fecundity is less certain); as producers or service-workers possessing special skills (in pottery or healing, for example), over the proceeds of their own work; as mothers of married daughters for whom *room* had been paid, over property. There are changes in the authority of women as aunties (Cheater, 1986).

Arguably, Cheater (1986) thinks that the most interesting and ambiguous role of authority occupied by women in the pre-colonial period was that of spirit mediumship. Those *spirits* who play a prominent part in the public domain, both autochthonous spirits such as Chaminuka and the *mhondoro* spirits of deceased chiefs are predominantly male. But their *mediums* who relay the spirits' messages to the living were and are as likely to be women as men. The most famous example is, of course, Charwe, the medium of Nehanda, who was executed by the colonial administration in 1898 for her role in the death of a Native Commissioner during the first

chimurenga. Religious roles in traditional belief systems therefore afforded and continue to afford exceptional women who refuse to conform to the standard female 'social personality', an escape route into individualized positions of power as well as authority based on traditional religion. In this study, ATR in the modern society of Zimbabwe enjoys a flourishing female imagery at all levels of the supernatural. In searching for the meaning of ATR, the research has shown that a multiplicity of vestiges of women's religious power and authority is entrenched in African systems of thought (Ebere, 2011).

Huffman (2008) in a study entitled, *Mapungubwe and Great Zimbabwe: The origin and spread of social complexity in southern Africa* has observed that literature in pre-colonial Zimbabwe has a lot symbolism. This is evidenced in the manner the Great Zimbabwe Ruins are understood. The outer residential zone, the domain of women, incorporates the households of individual wives with their private sleeping houses, kitchens and graves. These outer households were arranged according to a system of seniority expressed through left and right locations starting with a 'great hut' built upslope of the court and kraal. At a lower scale, the same dimension applies to the great hut itself: the central fireplace divides the hut into right male/left-female spaces. At right angles is a further distinction between front-secular and back-sacred activities that inform not only behaviour in the great hut but also in the household and whole settlement (Kuper, 1982). This is similar to what postcolonial writers on the kitchen hut do. Scholars like H. Aschwanden (1982) in *Symbols of Life: An Analysis of the Consciousness of the Karanga;* and O.S.Seda (2000) in Some reflections on the essence of the Curvilinear Form in Shona Material Culture in Chiwome E, Mguni Z and Furusa M (edts) *Indigenous Knowledge and Technology in African and Diasporan Communities: Multi-Disciplinary Approaches* give symbolism associated with a kitchen hut and its utensils. It might be that the rich cultural symbolism is derived from the ancient Great Zimbabwe architectural design and ceramic style.

Gottfried Küenzlen (2014:134) argues that the concept of culture has become a thing unknown and incomprehensible to most people. We do, however, witness an almost inflationary use of the term culture in the current intellectual discussions as well as in our every-day language: the culture of leisure, entrepreneurial culture, eating culture, the culture of dialogue and event culture; there is hardly any field in our social lives and behaviors that may not be marked with the tag of culture. Yet, if everything and anything may be termed "culture," the term loses its

diagnostic and analytical power, and the thing so denoted loses its contours and its perceptive depth. This situation calls for renewed reassurance as to what "culture" is supposed to mean, and what a scholarly useful reconstruction of the term and the thing might look like. This study provides a contribution to the reconstruction of the meaning of African traditional religion in modern Zimbabwe, especially from a Shona cultural-sociological point of view. This is premised on the idea that culture is universal because man is the being that depends on culture. So, in looking at the African traditional religion in this study, human action is always linked to purpose orientation, existence concepts and interpretations of reality, interpretations of the world, to ideas or even fully developed world concepts. Thus, man's natural environment is always arched over by the "symbolic universe of culture," which is the universal constituent of man's position in his world. This finding may be summarised by quoting E. Cassirer (1960:39) who says:

> Man lives in a symbolic universe, and no longer in a merely natural universe. Instead of dealing with things themselves, man is in a sense constantly conversing with himself. He has so enveloped himself in linguistic forms, in artistic images, in mythical symbols or religious rites that he cannot see or know anything except by the interposition of this artificial medium.

The above views were relevantly applied in this study of traditional religion among the Shona people since religion could not be readily distinguished from their culture. Seda (2000) talks of 'semiology' which has been given to the study of the way in which objects and events take meaning. A people's worldview maybe determined from a close analysis of their material culture. According to Seda (ibid), any close observation of Shona material culture reveals the preponderance of the circle and the curve above all forms and extrapolates some of the essential meanings embedded in the occurrence of the 'circle' and the 'curve' in this culture. In fact, the occurrence of the curve in Shona material culture is accentuated by a comparative close observation of western material culture as it occurs in Zimbabwe and other African countries where there is the preponderance of the 'square' and the 'rectangle' above all other shapes. These forms are so immanent to the two respective cultures that even the most casual observer will pick out the proliferation of the curve in the countryside as one will equally pick out the proliferation of the square and the rectangle in the urban areas. The two are so ubiquitous to the two cultures that, figuratively speaking, it can be said that the totem of the western material culture is the rectangle or the square while that of Africa is the curve and the circle. The

curvilinear theory is useful in interpreting the material culture of Zimbabwe, thereby unravelling latent indigenous knowledge as it is manifested in architecture, sculpture, eating habits, leisure activities and the performing arts. This knowledge arises from the Shona people's many centuries of relentless efforts to make their social, economic, natural and political environments more habitable. We strive to extrapolate the essence of the circle and the curve in Shona material culture, occasionally using it as a paradigm for the rest of Africa. The round and conical shape of the hut is not an architectural accident, it is an intuitive language, the mimesis or transposition of natural of growth as exemplified by the breast and womb of a woman. S.M. Mutsvairo's (1996:96) *Introduction to Shona Culture* clarifies that material culture can be defined as 'all objects, physical traits, instruments, and tools which are made and used by people in various aspects of their community life'. A people's cultural heritage could be defined as 'all non-biological actions and behavior of man. Before the commoditisation and commercialisation of the Zimbabwean culture, art was an integral part of the occupations and material culture of the Shona people. It reflected the African world through images. It was part of the African people's awareness of their world. It expressed their beliefs, customs values and lifestyle.

Seda brought in the notion of 'circle' and 'curve' in explaining material culture of the Shona people. While Seda's study was confined to material culture of the Shona people, this is a religion studies discourse which will include material which includes material culture as one of its components. In my analysis, the study adopts the circle and curvilinear theory to explicate the nature of Shona traditional religion in modern Zimbabwe.

There are some institutions which were not affected by colonisation. One such practice is totemism (A.C Hodza, 1982, *Mitupo Nedzvidao Zvamadzinza*). Praise poems and history link the Rozvi to a guardian spirit, of whose many names Mwari is the most prominent. Intermediaries of Mwari belonged to families of the Mbire *Soko/mbereka*, the Hera *Shava/museyamwa,* and the Rozvi, *Moyo/mhondizvo* respectively. D.P Abraham (1962) presented a clear model of state-cult parallels. A hierarchy of *mhondoros*, with Mwari at the top, paralleled the hierarchy of provincial rulers with the Rozvi mambo at the top. The presence in the shrine of members of the Shava and Soko groups who preceded the Rozvi in the south, with a Rozvi in a junior role, coincided with a *Soko/Mbire* dynasty preceding the Rozvi in the south, in Abraham's

reconstruction of Shona history. In the contemporary Zimbabwe, these totems are still regarded with high esteem. In the late 19th century, numerous indigenous artifacts which include eight large Zimbabwe birds carved from soapstone were found in the ruins. Later, Zimbabwe adopted the Bird to become a national symbol which is imprinted on the Zimbabwe flag, currency, and any other places of high honor. Great Zimbabwe became a National Monument and was designated a World Heritage site in 1986 (www.britannica.com).

Soon after colonisation the settlers allocated themselves vast tracks of fertile soils which belonged to the indigenous people, pushing them to hot reserves which were not even suitable for human habitation. This dispossession had a direct impact on traditional religion since the land was viewed religiously. It was the abode of the indigenous people's ancestors. In Zimbabwe traditional communities, people are identified and defined by their land. Land is an inalienable birth-right linked to notions of national sovereignty and a search for identity (in Zimbabwe and elsewhere), and in many ways the traditional chiefs are the guardians of the land (Schoefeleers 1979) in Sibanda and Maposa (2014:59) *The Ethic of Economic Engagement in AICs*). This importance of land has been succinctly captured by Moyana (2002) when he writes: Land is vital for the dead, the living and the unborn.

With colonialists in control, traditional leaders' powers were stripped off. Africans lost their traditional land, water, cattle and other natural resources all of which had immense religious significance in their lives. The land grabs and indirect rule, among other grievances, led to contestation of power between colonial authorities and the local people. This led to the First and Second *Chimurengas* risings which eventually gave birth to the independence of Zimbabwe. In fact, traditional religion with its land has always been at the heart of the *Chimurenga* wars in Zimbabwe (Sibanda and Maposa, 2014:59). For ninety years, the country was ruled by a white regime of racial discrimination and oppression of the African people. They believed that traditional religious beliefs and practices were inferior, and had to be done away with before the acceptance of Christianity (Kazembe, 2009 "The Relationship between God and People" in *Shona Traditional Religion*). The colonial regime established a Native Affairs Department in 1894 which ensured that a Native Commissioner's (NC) authority extended over the whole economic and political life of the African people. All the important powers the African chiefs and headmen had traditionally exercised were stripped off and transferred to the Native

Commissioners (Ndawana and Hove 2018, *Traditional Leaders in Zimbabwe's Liberation Struggle in Buhera District*). So chiefs were pacified and became puppets of the colonial regime, resultantly making them alienated from their people.

Bearing in mind that indirect rule had incapacitated the traditional chiefs to instigate an uprising against the white settlers, it was six years after colonisation that unifying roles and or shared values of the Mwari cult, the cultural symbol of land and authority of spirit mediums were employed to mobilize Africans into the first anti-colonial socio-political and religious protest of *Chimurenga* (1896-97) in colonial Zimbabwe. Spirit mediums who used their spiritually and socially defined authority served as intellectuals of the *Chimurenga* (Kaoma 2016:57) They inspired the revolution by providing an ideological framework as well as coordinating strategies for the war. In this regard, traditional religion served a 'pro-active' role in its engagement with colonialism with a goal to regain their ancestral lands though it was not successful (Kaoma 2016:57). But, tribute is paid to the following heroic figures: Mukwati, *Mbuya* Nehanda (Grandmother Kaguvi), Chaminuka and *Sekuru* Kaguvi (Grandfather Kaguvi).

It was because of liberation wars that Zimbabweans became acquainted more with the key role played by spirit mediums in the religious matters. The abundance of religious paraphernalia and adornment even among the so-called western educated youngsters reflected a heightened spiritual sensibility. This revivalism was part of the broad revolutionary cultural nationalism of the 1970s (Chiwome 1990:245). In independent Zimbabwe, Mugabe on several times mentioned Nehanda and Kaguvi, showing the importance of mediums. There is a challenge in Zimbabwe in that while these figures are still lauded by the modern society; they are too limited in their appeal to become national heroes. In the discourse of *vadzimu*, how can the belief in *vadzimu* be nationalized? Within the Shona spirits, it is noted that they belong to the Zezuru dialect, like Nehanda. Although Nehanda, for example still has her praises sung, and has a maternity hospital named after her in Harare, she has no appeal for the Ndebele. The spirits which are viewed as national spirits are simply Shona spirits. Earlier on in the first chapter, I demonstrated the existence of various indigenous ethnic groups in Zimbabwe, so Nehanda cannot represent a spirit of the Tsonga, Vhenda, and Ndebele. Even among the Shona, Nehanda is only confined to the Zezuru, for she hailed from the Korekore people. Maybe nationalizing Nehanda spirit came as a result of the colonial government who regarded Zezuru as the Shona hegemonic group. And she has limited appeal for the new elite who are eager to enjoy the material fruits of taking control of

a relatively developed country (Bourdillon, 1985:45). In a post-colonial Zimbabwe, the revolutionary party has established a new political order which has been firmly in control. In this new order the prophetic role of spirit mediums is sidelined and rendered to the periphery. Those in power are aware that none of the spirit mediums were under any kind of centralized authority and there is no way that the new political elite could be conceived to control them (Bourdillon, 1985:49). Although traditional mediums are not publicly denigrated in Zimbabwe, the education system and controlled state media have shown that many activities of mediums are now seen as relics of a primitive past. M. Machinga (2011) "*Religion, Health, and Healing in the Traditional Shona Culture,* thinks that this is the reason why in Zimbabwe, the association called ZINATHA was established to exercise control of traditional mediums and healers. So all this has a deep impact on the nature of traditional religion in modern Zimbabwe.

In post-colonial Zimbabwe, many writers have worked on the institution of traditional leadership. In his work entitled "*The role of traditional leaders in Zimbabwe: are they still relevant?"* published in 2016, T. Chigwata stresses that historically, and unlike modern state structures, traditional leaders drew their authority and legitimacy from an unwritten body of local customary law and practice. But successive colonial governments, in driving their colonial interests, modified (either limited or enhanced) their role and influence at various stages. Similarly, soon after independence, the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU)-led government, through the Chiefs and Headmen ACT of 1982, limited the role and influence of the institution of traditional leadership by taking away some of its powers and responsibilities. The Act did not recognise the role of village heads despite the fact that their role was widely accepted and had local legitimacy. Then Zimbabwe adopted a new Constitution in 2013 (Constitution of Zimbabwe) which, among other things recognises the role of the institution of traditional leadership which operates alongside modern state structures. While strengthening the role and status of the institution, this new Constitution strictly regulates the conduct of traditional leaders. Despite this upliftment and strict regulation, the role and relevance of the institution of traditional leadership is under significant scrutiny. Traditional leaders are often in conflict with State structures, particularly rural local governments which is largely attributed to competition for power, resources and legitimacy. Then traditional leaders' perceived alignment with the ruling Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) has brought renewed doubt about their relevance in a modern-day society anchored on democratic values.

In my studies of the meaning of African traditional religion in modern Zimbabwe, death and bereavement deserved intense exploration. In Morgan et al (2009) *Death, Value and Meaning Series: Death and Bereavement around the World Vol, 5: Reflective Essays* observe that dying and bereavement are processes in which we engage in a manner in which people have been taught. Using Robert Kastenbaum words, these processes are a 'death system'. Death systems are culture specific, they do not indicate some theoretical views of dying or grieving, but the way that real persons die and grieve at particular moments and with particular family friends. This work is in agreement with Morgan's views of death systems. It looks at how the Shona people's death systems are regarded as a snapshot of the manner in which they understand, feel about, and act in relationship with the dead. This is because, drawing from the pre-colonial era, African traditional religion and culture value communal living whereby sanctity of human life is prioritised. In this communal life setting, the Shona people care for it from conception till the person becomes sick and or aged. So they have personal experience with the end of life.

Kamwendo and Manyeruke (2017) have brought in the idea of various categories of power during funeral rituals. This becomes relevant in the context of paying bride wealth for a dead woman. Funeral and post-funeral ceremonies have to be administered by steps or by stages, where a number of different organisations and people are involved. Bujo (1992: 114) notes that during funerals, neighbors collaborate and bring along whatever they can afford to help in the feeding of mourners present. Thus, relatives and close friends also assist during the funeral. The community is the core of African spirituality where, by community, one will be referring to the living and the dead, the power of the living, and the power of the dead.

Harvey (2005:103) talks of religious specialists in traditional religion, giving a list which includes diviners, witches and sorcerers. The use of such specialists often involves a search for explanations for misfortunes or community disruption. Specialists often possess esoteric knowledge which enables them to perform rituals in a particular way, to reveal the causes of particular problems and to prescribe proper remedies. This work was not in agreement with the idea that witches and sorcerers can be placed in the same category of religious specialists. Witchcraft is very negative in Shona people's lives. Religious specialists in Shona traditional worldview are traditional leaders, midwives, diviners and spirit mediums. Harvey's (ibid)

misperception of witchcraft is widely reflected in Zimbabwe and this gave me a green light to contribute some knowledge in witchcraft discourse. Right from the onset, it is imperative to acknowledge the view of Gordon Chavhunduka, a Zimbabwean sociologist, traditional healer and former president of the Zimbabwe Traditional Healers Association (ZINATHA) that the subject of witchcraft continues to create controversy not only in Zimbabwe but also in many other parts of the world.

For the subject of traditional specialists to be well comprehended, there is need to acknowledge the nature of the Shona people's health and well-being. On this theme T. Shoko's (2007) *Karanga Indigenous Religion in Zimbabwe: Health and Wellbeing* argues that a strong concern for healing is characteristic of African indigenous religions. The *n'anga* are traditional herbalists and diviner-healers who play an important role in discerning the nature of a disease and the way to cure it. Their diagnosis is based on a variety of modes such as ritual possession, mechanical means, dreams, omens or an ordeal. Several rituals are used to maintain or restore the relationship with the ancestors as a guarantee for personal and social health.

F. Duri in his 2017 publication entitled *"The African indigenous belief systems on the crossroads: the Tsikamutanda and witchcraft related Disputes in the 21st century Zimbabwe"* examines the proliferation of witch hunters known as the *tsikamutandas* in politically-torn and crisis-ridden Zimbabwe during the 21st century in the context of the discourses of African indigenous belief systems and related practices in general, and witchcraft in particular. Among the Shona people of Zimbabwe, *tsikamutanda* literally means 'to step on the wooden log', a nickname they earned after the magic sticks they use to identify witches. Duri's work demonstrates how such beliefs and practices have become fiercely contested landscapes in times of crisis when the authenticity of some traditional healers has been questioned by various stakeholders. As socio-economic hardships besieged Zimbabwe from the year 2000, some sections of the population, including many *tsikamutandas*, attributed most of the prevailing 'misfortunes' to witchcraft. The *tsikamutandas* claim to offer solutions by employing African indigenous knowledge systems such as witch-hunting where they can identify witches, exorcise evil spirits and cleanse both the perpetrators and victims of witchcraft. Duri concludes his work by arguing that the authenticity of some African indigenous beliefs- related practices pertaining to witchcraft become compromised by opportunism in times of crisis as tensions rise during struggles over increasingly shrinking resources, while some self-proclaimed traditional healers

capitalize on such dispensations to engage in extortionist tendencies in an effort to salvage sustenance.

Drawing from pre-colonial literature on ATR, contemporary scholars have noted that using ATR in dealing with sexual health matters is problematic. This is because in ATR sex is a taboo. Looking at HIV and AIDS, Maposa and Humbe (2012) in *Indigenous Religion and HIV and AIDS Management in Zimbabwe: An African Perspective* have argued that HIV and AIDS is a disease closely associated with foreign concepts hence making it difficult for most illiterate African people to comprehend the epidemic fully. It is common knowledge that sexuality cannot be discussed openly among the Shona because of the cultural restrictions. Yet, if effective communication has to be done the message must be transmitted in the local Shona language, for the mother tongue is outstanding in terms of sensitivity and intelligibility. No other language can replace it. However, reference to human organs like the penis, the virgina and sexual intercourse itself is done with reservations depending on the audience because it is called *zvitsverudzo* (shameful things). In Shona culture, all shameful things are regarded as taboo. But within the same culture, discourses on human sexuality are possible without offending anyone. For instance, the Shona word for sexual intercourse is very vulgar and cannot be pronounced in public and therefore should be avoided. The same sentiments were echoed by T. Dune and V. Mapedzahama's (2017) *Culture Clash: Shona (Zimbabwean) Migrant Women's Experiences with Communicating about Sexual Health and Wellbeing across Cultures and Generations* where they say that for the Shona people the acceptable ―system of sexuality revolves around marriage with its emphases on reproduction and descent. This is to say, Shona teachings about sexual health and wellbeing occur simultaneously with teachings about the centrality of marriage for VaShona (Shona peoples). Sex is something that should occur only within the boundaries of socially approved heterosexual marriage, and when it does, it should only be for either procreation (especially for women), and or for male gratification (i.e. the good wife provides sex-on-demand to her husband). Women are taught to never express interest in sex, otherwise she risks being labeled as one of loose morals', thus bringing shame upon her family. Moreover, there is what J. Mudavanhu (2010) in T. Dune and V. Mapedzahama (2017:20) calls a "sexual secrecy motif" underpinning VaShona conceptualisations of sex, sexual health and sexuality. In other words, sex is a sacred phenomenon and it is not to be talked about but acted. If talked about, it loses its power. This is why sex will be preferred in darkness. If this is the cultural

context of sexual health that Shona women are brought up in, then there is a clash of ATR and modernity's approach about reproductive health specifically when dealing with HIV and AIDS issues.

Post-colonial Zimbabwe literature on ATR has also covered Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS). IKSs have generated a lot of interest in the academic field as to its relevance in modern-day society. In Religion Studies, particularly ATR, the most appropriate acronym has been IARKS (Indigenous African Religious Knowledge Systems), for the worldview of African indigenous people can be understood in terms of their spirituality or religiosity. Several Zimbabwean scholars who have worked on IKS include: J. Mapara, (2009); F.Sibanda (2013, 2015, 2019); M. Mawere & T. Mubaya (2015); J. Mapara and M. Mazuru (2015); B.P. Humbe (2017, 2016, 2018); S.S. Mugambiwa (2018); A. Nhemachena, & M. Mawere (eds.) (2019). They maintain that AIRKS were and are still a centrifugal force within the formerly colonised societies and communities, for they were used to sustain the formerly colonised peoples in their different environments. These AIRKS are still relevant and used in modern- day societies by the members of the communities from which they emanate. Among other areas which have been explored by post-colonial literature on IRKS are: climate change and adaptation, ethno-veterinary medicine, African traditional medicine, metaphors of Ubuntu, proverbs, taboos, HIV and AIDS, conflict and peace management. So, in the discourse of IARKSs basically the once ignored and condemned religious knowledge and practices of pre-colonial Zimbabwe are revitalized to deal with current problems affecting modern society. For example F. Sibanda's (2013) *Avenging spirits and the vitality of African traditional law, customs and religion in contemporary Zimbabwe* deals with manifestations of *ngozi* among the Shona people from the perspective of ATR, law and customs. Sibanda posits that African traditional law, customs and religious belief in *ngozi* serve as a sanction for good ethical behavior, re-establishment of lost harmony, lost equilibrium and the injured social relations in society, notwithstanding its limitations.

In Buhera where this study was carried out, in a 2018 publication entitled *"The Place Of 'Traditional' Social Security In Modern Era: Lessons From Buhera District"*, Ruparanganda, Linah; Ruparanganda, Beaula & Mabvurira, Vincent worked on social security focusing on Usavi Village in Buhera District of Zimbabwe. From their study, social security has always

existed in Africa. Traditionally, communities had ways of protecting members against resource and social challenges caused by death, sickness, old age, disability or hunger. These were organised around the family, kinship, clan and community. Viewed in the context of western social security, these are referred as traditional social security systems. Findings show that traditional social security was highly valued. The chiefs' granary (Zunde raMambo), remittances, savings and lending schemes, family guardian and burial societies are some of the traditional social security mechanism in existence. Organised around kinship and community ties, these traditional mechanisms function in similar ways as modern social security systems in that they are protective, promotive, preventative and transformative. The social security systems in Buhera are useful in alleviating societal social ills such as death, ill-health, and drought in communities. They are an important part of the modern social security system which encompasses government social assistance, non-government support and private sector support services. However, factors such as urbanisation, industrialisation, westernisation, poor economic performance, epidemics and natural disasters can function either as opportunities or threats to their existence. The authors recommended calling for incorporation of traditional social protection systems in modern social security policy frameworks and programs so as to protect and strengthen them.

2.1 Summary

Since ATR is a religion which has been in existence since time immemorial, literature on this discipline covers all the three epochs of Zimbabwean history. Basing on this understanding, this chapter made a comparative analysis of ATR literature on the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial Zimbabwe. Writers of pre-colonial Zimbabwean literature on ATR relied mostly on historical, anthropological and archaeological methodological approaches. Mostly, it was history of the elite and this has continued well after colonisation. Oral traditions have been the major sources of the belief systems and their practices. But the literature has also covered quite detailed material on the belief systems and practices of the pre-colonial indigenous people in Zimbabwe. This information was predominantly generated basing on oral traditions. These traditions have been passed on from generation to generation orally and through deeds. This is the reason why some of ATR myths and rituals still have relevance in the modern society. Colonisation, to a greater extent, disturbed the traditional religious landscape in Zimbabwe but the religion did not become extinct. Outsiders, especially the westerners, gave an impression that the pre-colonial era depicts an ATR which is pre-modern in its outlook. Research shows that there some situations

and practices in pre-colonial Zimbabwe which have extended into colonial and post-colonial times. So, modern literature on ATR has showed the conflation of ATR and modernity. In this study, I regard ATR as a lived religion where scholars take note of the ordinary people's life experiences in constructing the meaning of ATR in modern Zimbabwe. The nature of religious experiences in Zimbabwe has been shown by various scholars to be quite varied; they have researched on the Shona people, the Shona Supreme Being, traditional healing practices, health and well-being, healing practise, traditional leadership, mediums, marriage customs, death rituals, women and IKS as focal points of local traditional religious practice. But no literature has dealt with the meaning of ATR as a topic on its own, which has become the task of this study. Its renewed presence in public spheres has also led to new understandings of what ATR means and how it figures into "world-making" in the modern society.

CHAPTER THREE

3.0 Framing the Theory and Concepts of Study

3.1 Introduction

This chapter is going to show the theoretical frameworks which steered and informed this study. Theorizing the meaning of African traditional religion in this research was vital because everything that can be seen or thought about takes on meaning or position with a signifying system (Chiome, 2000:161). As stipulated by Walsham (1995), this interpretive study on the meaning of African traditional religion in the modern society of Zimbabwe used theories for the following purposes: guiding the design, collection of data, iterative process of data collection and analysis. The interpretation of the 'meaning' was guided by following theoretical frameworks; Afrocentrism and Symbolic Interactionism. The chapter unpacked these two theories showing their relevance to this study. After an exposition of the challenges encountered in defining religion, which have led scholars like W.C. Smith (1978:19) in V. Harrison (2006:140) to think that defining religion is a futile exercise, the chapter put forward three theories to guide the construction of the meaning of African traditional religion in Zimbabwe. They are the following: functional theories of the definition of religion, affective definition of religion and intellectual definition of religion. The chapter also did a conceptual analysis of key terms which inform this study which include: religion, African, traditional and *Chivanhu*. To avoid presenting a clueless thesis, in line with the dictates of the nature of language and linguistic expression, generally there should be a starting point due to the fact that everything cannot be said at once. The starting point is to unpack the theories which guided this study.

3.2 Afrocentric Perspective

The Afrocentric perspective bears monikers like Afrocentrism and Africanity which all stand for an identity transmitted in customs, traditions, and traits of the people of Africa. Afrocentrism and its origins can be closely linked to enslavement experiences of Africans who were in America due to the transatlantic slave trade. According to Chawame (2016:79), the denial of education to slaves once they landed in the Americas, and the double cultures of Africanisms and Americanisms stimulated Afro-American hypersensitivity to culture and its relativity. The experience of double cultures resulted in some Afro-Americans rejecting Americanisation and

starting to long embracing African cultural practices. So, enslavement and racism created conditions for the emergence of the Afrocentric theory. Afrocentrism has been adopted by various disciplines such as history, sociology, anthropology, management, African studies, English, communication as well as social work. This theory is critical in in the current study which looks at the meaning of African traditional religion in Zimbabwe.

Among others, it is Molefi Kete Asante who is credited with coining and popularizing this theoretical framework as an academic concept in the 1970s. Asante defined Afrocentricity as a manner of thought and action in which the centrality of African interests, values, and perspectives predominate (2003:2). He further stated that Afrocentricity is an exercise in knowledge and a new historical perspective. This buttresses Karenga's (1988:404) definition which depicts Afrocentricity as a quality of perspective or approach which is rooted in the cultural image and human interest of African people. Another definition of Afrocentricity is that it is a transformation of attitudes, beliefs, values, and behavior results (Chawane, 2016:79). The above stated definitions are very important in this study of the meaning of traditional religion in Zimbabwe. They all raise a plea for an adjustment in the way that the African traditional world has been viewed, a change that should embrace all attributes of human existence, with emphasis on the centrality of African experiences.

So, it can be said that the Afrocentric approach emerged on the scene to resist the dominant modernist, usually positivist approaches, which were Eurocentric in nature. The initial academic study of traditional religion in colonial Africa, Zimbabwe included, was dominated by western contributions from travellers, missionaries, anthropologists, which were prejudicial and reductionist. Basing on anthropology, psycho-social theories and theology, the writers lacked appreciation of traditional religion because they were outsiders. Afrocentrism seemed to offer a response to the problem of Eurocentrism. This study was done in Zimbabwe's postcolonial era and notably the post-colonial discourse on religion in Africa has been characterised by persistent questioning of the predominant Western categories (Chitando, 1998:101). There was need to employ an approach which respects traditional religion and its adherents. To that end, there is no doubt; a methodological shift has been pursued by scholars who have been studying traditional religion after the first phase of western contribution. The impetus in using this approach lies from Traore's (2007:64) argument that Afrocentricity is a response to the stereotypes, misperceptions and misinformation from western scholarship on Africa, Africans and their cultural heritage.

3.2.1 Germaneness of Afrocentrism in the interpretation of the meaning of ATR

The Afrocentric theoretical framework gives precedence to the cultural and historical experiences of indigenous African people. The relevance of this theoretical paradigm for this study is anchored on its primacy on African ideals at the center of any analysis that involves indigenous African people in Zimbabwe's culture, belief systems, symbols, behavior and experiences. It encourages and motivates indigenous Africans to go back to their traditions and practices, showing that in matters related to traditional religion, they were never an inept, abnormal and dysfunctional race before colonisation (Dhlamini et al: 2015:61).

Not every scholarly work by westerners was prejudicial, but there are moments when the western writers displayed a contemptuous perspective about African culture and religion which they described in misleading terminologies. This created a philosophy of binary opposites through which lenses they viewed western culture as the model, characterised by sophistication, light, civilisation, progress and salvation whilst the other lenses beheld African culture as backward, dark, plain, devilish and condemned. These terms, although not necessarily inaccurate from an outsider's point of view, misconstrue the perceptions of the religious communities themselves (Cox, 2000:33). Therefore, Afrocentrism served as a corrective theory in face of the above-mentioned misconceptions and distortions. It scratched where the problem of alienation of traditional religion is itching. As a revisionist way of deconstructing the Eurocentric version of the history of African people, Afrocentric theory was justified in studying the meaning of traditional religion in modern Zimbabwe. This is because Afrocentrism is generally opposed to theories that dislocate Africans to the periphery of human thought and experience (van Wyk, 2014). Generally, Zimbabweans in rural communities lead a traditional life. The theory was handy in understanding their architecture, especially the traditional kitchen hut and its multi-religious purposes. Because of this, it becomes the hub of traditional religion's modern- day sacred space at a micro level. Afrocentric approach was very important in enunciating the notion of rituals which are a crucial religious cog in the Shona society of a once colonised country. One of the effective theories to understand this traditional religious life is application of symbolic interactionism.

3.3 Symbolic Interactionism

Symbolic Interactionism is a micro-level theoretical framework and perspective in sociology that addresses how society is created and maintained through repeated interactions among individuals

(Carter and Fuller, 2015:1). The perspective emerged in the mid-twentieth century from a variety of influences, in particular American philosopher George Herbert Mead (1934) and his theories about the relationship between self and society. Herbert Blumer is credited with coining the term 'symbolic interactionism' in the 1950s. He is the one who brought Mead's philosophically-based social behaviorism to sociology. Blumer laid the groundwork for a new theoretical paradigm which in many ways challenged sociology's accepted forms of epistemology and methodology (Carter and Fuller, 2015:1). Symbolic interactionism arose as a response to the mainstream positivist perspectives such as that of Talcott Parsons' structural functionalism which dominated sociology at the time. These perspectives tended to examine society from the 'top down,' focusing on the impact of macro-level institutions and social structures and how they impose on and constrain individuals. For symbolic interactionists, the prevailing structuralist perspectives reified society as a constraining entity that ultimately defines an individual. Contrarily, symbolic interactionism aimed at dealing with operation of the society from the 'bottom up,' shifting the focus to micro-level processes that emerge during face-to-face encounters. Blumer emphasized how the self emerges from an interactive process of joint action (Denzin, 1992) in (Carter and Fuller 2015:1).

The most important conceptual building block on which symbolic interactionists have based their analysis of human conduct is the concept of the symbol, or, as Mead called it, the significant symbol. A significant symbol is a vocal or other kind of gesture that arouses in the one using it the same response as it arouses in those to whom it is directed (Hewitt, 2002:1). The ability to employ significant symbols enables human beings to interact with one another on the basis of meanings. To use Hewitt's (ibid) words "Their responses to one another depend on the interpretation of symbols rather than merely on the enactment of responses they have been conditioned to make. Thus, they engage in symbolic interaction", and this simply means 'the peculiar and distinctive character of interaction as it takes place between human beings' (Blumer, 1962:179) in Carter and Fuller (2015:1). Following Mead, Blumer's symbolic interactionism conceives social institutions as 'social habits' that occur within specific situations that are common to those involved in the situation. For Blumer (ibid), meanings are inter-subjective and perceived, and constantly reinterpreted among individuals.

There are no meanings inherent in the people or objects which an actor confronts, actors rather place meanings upon such entities which are perceived as unique (House, 1977) in (Carter and Fuller 2015:1). In this view, humans give meaning to their behavior through reflection and interpret the meaning of behaviors, events, and things. Behavior is simply an actor's idiosyncratic way of reacting to an interpretation of a situation. Understanding social behavior requires an interpretive perspective that examines how behavior is changing, unpredictable, and unique to each and every social encounter Carter and Fuller (2015:1).

Symbolic interactionists study society through the interpretation of objects, events, and behaviors by the members of that society. Human beings are viewed as 'living in a world of meaningful objects which include material things, actions, people, relationships and even symbols. The meanings of these objects are continuously being negotiated and defined, presented to people and dramatically enacted (Schaefer, 1989:36). So, individuals use language and significant symbols in their communication with others. Language is a culturally fashioned and socially recognised system of standardised and conventionalised symbols, which have a specific and randomly determined meaning and common usage for purpose of socially meaningful expression and for communication in a given society. Furthermore, language is made up of words, each one having meaning alone and also having meaning when combined with others in a standardized way according to certain established rules (Hewitt, 2002:3).

According to Carter and Fuller (2015:1) symbolic interactionists are often less concerned with objective structure than with subjective meaning, how repeated, meaningful interactions among individuals come to define the makeup of 'society.' The symbolic interactionist perspective assumes that social order is constantly being negotiated and recreated through the interpretations of the people who give it meaning. This is a helpful construct to better understand differences that arise in interpretation of religious tenets or writings and other difficulties encountered in religious circles.

Carter and Fuller (2015:1) give a summary of Blumer's theoretical orientation toward symbolic interactionism through three premises (Blumer, 1969): (1) human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them; (2) the meaning of things is derived from, or

arises out of, the social interaction that one has with others; (3) meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretive process used by a person in dealing with the things they encounter. Carter and Fuller (2015:1) go on to say that while these three premises remain for many the core tenets of symbolic interactionist thought, some have noted a need for their expansion. One scholar who has argued for an addition to Blumer's three premises is Snow (2001) who believes that symbolic interactionism is better conceived around four principles: the principle of interactive determination, the principle of symbolization, the principle of emergence, and the principle of human agency (Snow, 2001: 375).

3.3.1 Relevance of Symbolic Interactionism in constructing meaning of ATR

The relevance of this theoretical perspective in this study hinges on its emphasis on an interpretive meaning construction. In this study, Symbolic interactionism was handy in giving explications of the conundrums that show uniqueness of traditional religion in Zimbabwe, especially as to how the same belief systems and practices can be differently interpreted either by different Shona cultural ethnic groups in different places or at different times within the same Shona cultural ethnic group. According to Alexander (2003: 12) in Stef et al (2018), meaning-making is the essence of culture and is, as such, a legitimate subject of study in itself—it should not be seen as a "dependent" variable determined by social-economic position, but as an "independent variable" motivating social action. The question is then: How do Shona adherents of traditional religion think and feel about themselves, the other, and the world that surrounds them? What different ideas do they have about the modern world? And indeed, how do they act on the basis of their beliefs?

For understanding the meaning of ATR among the Shona people of Zimbabwe, attention was paid on the notion of gender and sexuality in Buhera traditional communities. What symbolic interactionism simply did was to demonstrate the socially constructed nature of masculinity and femininity as developing out of repeated, patterned interaction and socialization processes. So gender emerges through interaction, directly contradicting the normative perspective of gender as an innate state of being or individual quality.

The construction of the meaning of African traditional religion in this study was done using language subjectively depending on context. From the symbolic interactionist perspective,

chiShona is a religious language seen and perceived to be one religious meaning system. When rituals are performed, the only way of doing proper communication with the spiritual world is using this revered language. It has metaphors which carry hidden religious meaning. Religious injunctions are communicated through language. It is through proper use of Shona language that the elders assess if the young generation has manners. Among the Shona, it is very common to hear them saying *vakuru vakati* meaning "the elders have said". Among the Shona people, *chiShona* is a repository of the objects that have proved important in their lives. Language is creative of reality and not merely reproductive because new words can be coined and defined especially in the modern set- up. Through the interactionist perspective, language is understood as the most powerful reality- shaping set of symbols employed in the Shona cosmology.

Symbolic interactionists believe that various religious beliefs and practices arise out of different social or historical contexts, especially as this study considers modernity. The perspective takes into account these contexts in order to better understand the framework in which religious behavior occurs. There is a fluid view of African traditional practices because meanings to the practices can be assigned at community or family level. Meaning is triadic; when an individual acts (by making a verbal exchange or gesture) he or she: firstly, indicates to the other what he or she plans to do, secondly, what the other is expected to do in return and lastly what social object they are creating (Hewitt, 2002:4).

In times of crises, people have used traditional religion to proffer meanings. A good example are the calamities encountered in Zimbabwe like road carnages, drought, fire o and diseases outbreaks are understood as a result of the country and its leadership neglecting ancestors. So religion is seen as a socially constructed reality in which the sacred provides security and permanence for society. So performing rituals is the only surest way of returning to normalcy. This is because from the traditional perspective of the Shona people; rituals can fulfill religious obligations or ideals, satisfy spiritual or emotional needs of the practitioners, strengthen of social bonds, provide social and moral education, demonstrate respect or submission, allow one to state one's affiliation, obtain social acceptance and or approval for some event.

From this sociological view of religion, religious practices and rituals are viewed as symbolic activities that help foster and define the identities of individuals and groups. Because of the

wealth of symbol and ritual in Africa, traditional religion in Zimbabwe is a fertile area of study for the application of symbolic interactionism. Religious symbolism looks at archetypes, acts, artwork, events, and natural phenomena. It views religious language, rituals and works of art as symbols of compelling ideas or ideals. Symbols help create a resonant mythos expressing the moral values of the society or the teachings of the religion, foster solidarity among adherents, and bring adherents closer to their object of ultimate concern. In an endeavor to assign meaning to African tradition religion, the symbolic interactionist approach tries to answer the question of how action and belief are socially constructed and how these help the traditional Shona people form a collective religious identity. Symbols transform the environment by expanding its scope both spatially and temporally. Symbols also transform the human environment by making it a *named* environment. Unlike natural signs that are inherently private, symbols, however, are by their nature public; they have meaning only because a community of speakers shares them. Symbols make it possible for the individual to be part of the very environment to which he or she responds and thus make possible the development of *Self* (Hewittt, 2002:2). An interactionist framework helped to understand the Shona 'self' and 'identity' processes.

Traditional religion cannot be fully conceptualized outside its environment. So, symbolic interactionism recognizes the mutual influence of physical environments, especially the rural environment and the development of the self. The theoretical framework allows researchers to study the symbolic meanings of designed environments, a traditional kitchen hut being one example. In that way, symbolic interactionism reveals the influence of designed environments and buildings on our actions and reflexivity (Smith and Bugni, 2006: 124).

Since in traditional religion there societal expectations, symbolic interactionism allows one to predict what individuals will do when others violate expectations in social situations or, specifically, how individuals act to restore identities when they have been discredited, based on an individual's definition of events and the emotional reaction they have to such events. The application of symbolic interactionism helped me to understand better the alcoholic life, sickness, health, witchcraft and death among the Shona.

3.4 Framing a meaning for African Traditional Religion Theory

This study is situated in religion studies. Zimbabwe is home to various religions, ATR included. However, the term 'religion' is highly contestable. It is an ambiguously created term by Western scholars. It has been argued by some that there is no such thing as 'religion' per se, only culture and the various cultural manifestations, and that some aspects of culture have been arbitrarily singled out and grouped together, and given the label 'religion'. It was the impetus of this study to come up with a framework of study which is handy in constructing a meaning, particularly of ATR in a modern society of Zimbabwe. Framing a theory of religion in this study was centered on the following three goals: First, was locating the functional system of the meaning of African traditional religion in contemporary Zimbabwe. Second, examining new perspectives of the substantive meaning of traditional religion in a modern societal set- up of Zimbabwe. Third, assessing an affective postulation on the meaning of African traditional religious practices in Zimbabwe, a country which has gone through various historical-socio-political and economic epochs.

The complexity of defining the term religion is strong because there are no easy answers as to what does and does not qualify as 'religion'. Ninian Smart in (Karuvachira,www.academia.edu) argues that: 1) every definition of religion involves a particular theory about a religion, which will consequently rule out some phenomena as not really religious. This implies an implicit theory of what really religion is, and it means begging the question; 2) there can be as many definitions of religion as there are disciplines, and the term 'religion' can have a variety of connotations in the minds of those who employ the concept; 3) an insiders' view of religion can differ from an outsiders'; 4) the study of religion is without clear boundaries and so it is not possible to provide a clear-cut definition of religion that would distinguish it from secular ideologies which may not be normally placed at par with traditional religions.

Right from the onset, the contestations associated with the notion of religion revolve on its existence. According to Harrison (2006:10), in the early 1960s Wilfred Cantwell Smith argued that the attempt to define religion was misguided and could not succeed because the term "religion" does not pick out phenomena that are naturally grouped together. In Smith's view, "religion" is a concept created by modern western scholars and superimposed upon a variety of phenomena starting in the eighteen century when westerners advanced an imperialist ideology.

The superimposition of this concept was also done to the African cosmology by these westerners after they had developed an interest in other cultures. The above argument is further stressed by Jonathan Z Smith in Cline (https://www.learnreligions.com/what-is-religion-250672) who thinks that religion is solely the creation of the scholar's study. It is fashioned for the scholar's analytic tenacities by his creative acts of comparison and generalization. Religion has no existence apart from the academy. Because of this, Wilfred C Smith counsels that the concept of religion be abandoned since, throughout history and throughout the world, people have been able to be religious without the assistance of a special term, without the intellectual analysis that the term implies (Harrison, 2006: 11).

However, there is need to appreciate the fact that a qualitative study of religion in the Zimbabwean context shows its existence in reality because adherents acknowledge various forms of religious traditions in their modern society. A persistent problem then is that though religion can be noticed, still there is a discord as to what really constitutes its real essence. For example, the idea that its creation had some imperialist insinuations shows lack of genuineness in its application, especially to non-western societies like the Zimbabwean situation. Resultantly, for Zimbabweans, a discourse on the development of ATR cannot be fully exhausted without mentioning rival religious traditions such as Christianity.

Perhaps we should, therefore, interpret him as denying that the concept "religion" appropriately latches onto ATR. Since the term religion is western- oriented; there is a big challenge in the applicability of this term to African life due to the absence of equivalent vernacular words. This is buttressed by Shaw (1990) who argues that 'invention' critiques such as Mudimbe would seem to apply with particular force to the study of religion given that the term 'religion' itself is absent from the languages of many of the peoples whose practices and understandings we describe as their 'religion'. This observation sounds plausible considering that Shona does not have an equivalent word for religion. So, using religion to discuss the meaning of traditional religion of the Shona seriously misrepresents what participants adhere to. In light of such problems, scholars like Fitzgerald see it befitting to withdraw the concept "religion" and its cognates from circulation.

But if Smith's concerns are merely centered on the limitations of the present conception of "religion", then surely they can be alleviated by refining the concept. And the attempt to refine

the concept better to reflect what religion actually is stands to be what prompts scholars to seek definitions of religion (Harrison, 2006:11). This is imperative because a meaningful discourse on ATR remains futile if the concept "religion" is not clarified.

Abandoning the term religion is problematic, for it displays a defeatist propensity. Is it not always the case, however, that terms which lack clear meaning should be eliminated from religion studies. Natural languages contain a large number of vague concepts, many of which are mundane (Harrison, 2006:16). Perhaps, then, "religion" is "open textured" or an example of a vague concept. A vague concept typically has a range of applications that are undisputed alongside other possible applications in which there is no clear answer to the question of whether or not the concept is appropriately applied. While such concepts are philosophically interesting, they are by no means rare. If it is accepted that the world's various natural languages have concepts like this and that their vagueness does not make them unduly problematic, then why not regard "religion" as such a concept? Harrison argues that that religion lacks clear meaning generates questions which fuel research as a discipline of study (Harrison, 2006:16). Lack of a clear undisputed meaning for religion may be what contributes to its ability to stimulate research for its gist in religion studies, specifically focusing on ATR. For example, the Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment (No. 20) Act of 2013provides for freedom of worship as espoused by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) which states that:

> [E]veryone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change their religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or in private, to manifest their religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance. This Universal Declaration of Human Rights gives citizens the right to interpret their religion and live according to their religion.

So, an appropriate meaning would enable the society to determine what can legitimately count as being covered by the term "religion" (Harrison, 2006:17). A hard-won right to religious freedom will not elicit much respect if the existence of religion is seriously questioned.

3.4.1 An Alternative Approach

It should be borne in mind that the concept religion can be seen as a product of the modern impulse to separate "religion" from the rest of cultural life in order to underwrite the independent autonomy of the "secular" realm of the social and political world (Harrison, 2006:18). So the search for a meaning of religion, ATR included, can be seen as quintessentially modern insofar as modernity was the first era in which a firm distinction between religion and the rest of human activity was presupposed (Harrison, 2006:18).

This study advocated the possibility of exploring the meaning of religion though it admitted the corrigibility of definitions of religion and its plurality. Definitions are meant to be tools for bringing order and discipline and for providing scope and precision to our conceptual world of experiences. Hence, religion can be defined by taking into consideration certain common characteristics or essential elements. In addition, although defining religion is difficult, the methodology of the study of religion presupposes a formulation of at least a *tentative definition* precisely because one should know, at least in some degree, the nature of the subject under investigation or what counts as religion. Therefore, we need to define 'religion' for the purpose of clarity and to guide those who study religion. Besides, the fact that scholars have attempted definitions of religion in the past only shows that it is possible to define it, though with different degrees of acceptance. Clearly, though, any assessment of the adequacy of a meaning of religion is likely to be influenced by the kind of theory of religion one presupposes (Harrison, 2006:7). In Harrison's view, definitions are, it might be claimed, miniature versions of the theories which inspire them. They usually presuppose a religious interpretation of people and their world, and they attempt to justify that interpretation by providing an account of the divine origin of the religion in question. A religious theory might, for example, appeal to the role of certain figures as sacred people instrumental in the formation of a particular historical religious tradition (Harrison, 2006:7).

3.4.2 Meaning as a concept

Since the research was done within the context of modernity, I admit that in religious discourse coming up with a meaning is not an easy task because the exercise requires subjectivity. Meanings are the cognitive categories that make up one's view of reality and with which actions are defined. A person draws meanings from, or gives meanings to, events and experiences. That

is, experiencing starts to make sense as the person performs his or her psychological function of translating it into how he or she thinks and feels. It is individuals' subjectivity or phenomenological world that forms the very core for meaning origination and evolvement (Krauss, 2005:763). Nevertheless, this does not entail that meaning is always 'subjective' in the pejorative sense; it is always also in a field and only 'meaningful' in reference to this field (Smith, 2010). Life experience generates and enriches meanings, while meanings provide explanation and guidance for the experience (Chen, 2001) in (Krauss, 2005:763). Guided by Taylor in Smith (2010), the following is an outline of three points that must be incorporated in a conjecture of meaning. The concept which is used to refer to the 'meaning' of a given predicament in African Traditional Religion had the following articulation. Firstly, meaning is for a subject or a group of subjects; for they are instituted in and by subjects and thus constitute, in part, the social fields of meaning. So, the meaning of the situation in ATR is not in vacuum. This study made sense of the problem of meaning of ATR through understanding the participants who make and interpret meanings. From the research findings, the meaning of 'meaning' changes depending on both its context and the perspective taken both by the subjects and the researcher. This implies that the question of meaning of African traditional religion is not really a single demand but instead represents a cypher for a vast number of extra queries. This, in a way, can be also known as situational meaning of African traditional religion. Frankl (1985) in Leontiev (2005) argues that it is meaning that can be experienced from moment to moment in daily life. Here, meaning of ATR is about the researcher's relationship with participants or objects, not about the phenomenon of ATR itself. It is closely related to 'personal meaning' whereby meaning is the form in which the subject knows and sees his living meanings, i.e. his interpretation of the situation. Secondly, meaning is of something; that is, we can distinguish between a given element and its meaning. People have the freedom to choose meaning (McArthur, 1958) through their interactive experiencing with various internal and external contexts (Chen, 2001) in (Krauss, 2005:763). Lastly, things only have meaning in a field in relation to the meanings of other things. So, in a research of African traditional religion or *Chivanhu* in contemporary times, there is no such thing as a single, unrelated meaningful element.

Changes in the other meanings in the field, in this case in the rural communities, can involve changes in the given traditional religious element. In light of this, an interpretive approach is

handy to re-interpret meaningful experience in such a way as to arrive at a 'best account' of it. Such an approach leaves each and every account open to further interpretation. Predominantly, the interviews in this study were carried out in Shona. It is also widely understood as *chiShona*. During the research, it was easy to note the transmission of ideas orally among the Shona people of Buhera. There is no doubt that the Shona language of the Buhera people often influences how people experience and describe a religious event. In this vein, *chiShona* has contributed so much in framing the notion of ATR in Zimbabwean modern society.

3.4.3 Theory of religion

According to Ukuekpeyetan-Agbikimi (2014:28), by theories of religion one means a body of explanations, rules, ideas, principles, and techniques that are systematically arranged to guide and guard religious practices for comprehension. Their usefulness to the scholars is realised in the sense that they evaluate and unravel the underlying principles of the study, of why religion exists, how it developed, what needs religion serves among the people or group, especially when seen as distinct from actual practice.

Indeed, every theory presupposes some account of what data will be relevant and what must be explained (Ukuekpeyetan-Agbikimi, 2014:28). But each theory of the meaning of religion considered above has its own peculiar biases. This study adopted a religious framework which was incorporated into a comprehensive meaning: one that would gave due weight to the intellectual, the affective and the functional components of religion. But it is important to point out that typically, religious theories are developed by thinkers who belong to some particular religious tradition. Mostly, the theories of religion have some western religious connotations. So, there is need for contextualization. One way to be sure that ATR is fairly dealt with in framing its theory of meaning is to take onboard the aspect of African culture. It is clear that many African societies do not draw a clear line between their culture and what scholars call religion.

The theories adopted by this study are categorised into functional, substantive and affective meanings of religion. Each represents a very distinct perspective on the nature of religion. It is also imperative to highlight that the study accepted a tripartite theoretical view or religion as valid.

3.4.4 Substantive theoretical meaning of religion

They are also called essentialist meanings of religion. For those who focus upon substantive or essentialist definitions, religion is all about content: if a person believes certain types of things then he/she has a religion while if he/she does not believe them, he/she does not have a religion (http://www.learnreligions.com/what-is-religion-250672). So, the definition tries to capture the essence of reality. It is a belief about a particular sort of object or meanings that refer to 'transcendent entities in the conventional sense' such as God and supernatural beings and things. In a substantive approach to religion, it is the content and "essence" that characterize a religion.

3.4.5 Affective meanings

These regard faith, and the emotions that characteristically accompany it as the defining or essential features of religion. Lindbeck (1984:16) in (Harrison, 2006:3) refers to this type of definition as "experiential-expressive" because definitions of this type focus on "the 'experiential-expressive' dimension of religion", and interpret "doctrines as non-informative and non-discursive symbols of inner feelings, attitudes, or existential orientations".

3.4.6 Functional designations

The theory of functional definitions concentrates on the function of religion as its defining or essential feature. Functional meanings of religion, which are sometimes subjective, help in specifying how a given term or expression is used in a restricted context. In the context of this study, the implication carried by a functional meaning is that the emphasis is on the instrumental role of ATR. This can pertain to the social function of religion for group coherence, social order and defense of group interests (van Gaalen, 2015:1). It can also pertain to the psychological functions of religion by providing stories, symbols and rituals that help individuals to identify with role models, be motivated, find consolation, provide answers to existential questions, etc. Religion is all about what it does: if a person's belief system plays some particular role either in his/her social life, in his/her society, or in his/her psychological life, then it is a religion. So, the definition deals with what religion *does* for a person or society or both. In it, the ultimate truth claims that are central to religion are left out. The functional definitions are nominal in character, and since they are nominal, they also lack truth-value. Since it is a decision to use a word in certain way, one cannot ask if the definition is true or false, nor is it appropriate to test

its truth by examining data. But, functional definitions lend precision to a study by removing ambiguity in words (Karuvachira,www.academia.edu).

In a functionalist approach the focus is on how, through its symbols, rituals, beliefs and practices, religion provides 'tools' for believers to act upon and interpret the world.

In his work, Durkheim placed emphasis on the sacred instead of the supernatural or transcendent in religion, meaning that anything deemed highly valuable by a group can be considered sacred, and it is exactly this sacredness that can take on a religious character without necessarily being related to supernatural phenomena (van Gaalen, 2015:1).

3.4.7 Conditions for a good meaning of ATR

In order to arrive at a good meaning of ATR, one needs to keep in mind certain conditions. ATR, being an existential reality, implies that the meaning has to take into consideration the parameters of *context and plurality*. Context here implies knowledge about the religion in its concrete, historical manifestations. Plurality signifies considering the religion cross-culturally. Therefore, the conditions for a plausible meaning of ATR are that they should be *narrow* enough to afford a clear distinction between what is 'religion' and 'non-religion' and *broad* enough to be applicable to any culture so that no religion, recognised as such, is left out. The meaning should be made in a state of freedom from prior constraints, be it ideological or personal. A respectable gist of ATR should indicate how this religion affects the life of individual persons and society and gives them meaning. Finally, the meaning should deal with those fundamentals of religion that remain stable in the midst of the changes that religions undergo (Karuvachira,www.academia.edu).

3.5. Conceptualizing the African and the Traditional

Having dealt with the notion of "religion", it is ideal to consider the other two key terms in ATR, which are "African" and "Traditional". For quite a long time, scholars of religion have been grappling with the idea of having a suitable caption of the religion which Africans adhere to. According to Omotoye (2015), many African scholars have held differing positions on the actual nomenclature to be given to our traditional religion. Among them include the following; African Traditional Religion (ATR), African Religions (AR), African Indigenous Religion (AIR), African Systems of Thought (AST) and Primal Heritage (PH). It is not surprising to see the same

scholar inconsistently using two or more of the captions cited above, like in the case of Parrinder and Mbiti. The caption used in the bulk of literature on religion in Africa is 'ATR'. The rest stipulated above were formulated as a response to some connotations associated with the term 'ATR'. I also resort to African traditional religion (ATR) as captured by the topic of this study. The supposition is that this religion propels "African" oriented practices. Also, the middle term "traditional" is key in distinguishing this religion from other religions that have existed in Africa for centuries, like Islam and Christianity which are now widely accepted as African religions.

However, contestations associated with the term ATR have been pushed into the public domain as exemplified by views of scholars like, Asukwo, Adaka and Dimgba (2013:240) who see "the clumsy religious practices called the African traditional religion as nothing but a deliberate attempt to ridicule the people of Africa as if they were not created by God like any other race". So, there is a growing concern over the way these nomenclatures are used. It seems as if the manner in which these monikers were coined was racially induced. So, it would be presumptuous to gloss over the current discourses surrounding the use of the terms Africa or African, tradition or traditional without clarifying the context in which they are used (Amatenga-Etogo R.M, 2014:254). Thus, Pinn (2009:2) observes that while serving a useful purpose within contemporary scholarship, the concept ATR has been far from problem free; rather, it has been debated and interrogated in terms of the geographical arrangements envisioned, the cultural cartography developed, and the time- frame of concern it suggests.

It is observed that in the study of African traditional religion, reference is consistently made to Africa and Africans. There is an assumption that those participating in the debate usually refer to the same thing and that the audience equally has a uniform understanding of the concepts, yet this is not the case because the religion under discussion has a seriously contested nomenclature. The debate starts with the notion of Africa. The arguments raised interrogate what it really stands for, whether it is for the general or a particular geographical location on the continent, or it refers to a particular race of people. Either way, what is connoted by the term Africa is that it is an imagined construction. The construction rests with the western world which fashioned images of this 'Africa' and its deep past in various disciplinary studies which include literature, philosophy, history, museums of art and theology. In these studies, there is creation of certain aspects of 'Africanisms' (Robin, 2011).

In this vein, often the term Africa or its equivalent in earlier societies, has been restricted to describe a 'them', that is the other, which was not part of 'the western world'. Various European groups which came to Africa, for example, travellers, pleasure- seekers, traders, hunters, missionaries and colonial officials fashioned a continent which was 'dark' with its people who were 'savages', 'barbaric', primitive or child-like. What is subsumed in this kind of thinking is that the term Africa has some racial connotations. It brings the image of someone who is black with certain distinguishing features like the wide nose and short kinky hair. This enhanced the white superiority ideology over black people, vindicated by projects such as slave trade, implantation of Christianity, and colonial domination. If race alone is used to delineate who is and who is not an African, a legitimate question is posed about non-Blacks with African citizenship. An example of this is White South Africans or Zimbabweans, then Egyptians or even Ethiopians. So, the setting in which this term Africa/African is used has a specific contextual issue or experiences of communities of indigenous people at continental level. If Africa is portrayed as an imaginary construction, there is no doubt that many African scholars reject the existence of Africa, among them being Mudimbe (1998), who argues that Africa is just an invented idea, and a construction that does not exist outside the discourses that produced it.

In this modern era, there is fluidity in the notion of the boundaries of 'Africa'. According to Robin (2011:3), this is illuminated in dialogues about African society or identity, African development or underdevelopment, political relations with Africa, African literature, culture and religion. Robin (2011:4) further argues that politicians, journalists and scholars alike sometimes apply the term 'African' to mean the area to the south of the countries that border the Mediterranean which are considered part of the Middle East; Africa as shorthand for sub-Saharan Africa. But this tendency to separate a supposed real, black, African sub-Saharan Africa from a northern, less black, more Mediterranean or Middle Eastern Africa is contrary not only to political realities past and present, but also to genetics (Robin, 2011:4).

The boundary which demarcates Africa from western Asia has been described by Robin as flexible and less significant than internal environmental boundaries (2011:8). He argues that politically, Sinai belongs today with Egypt, an African country; though for fifteen years from 1967 to 1982 it was part of Israel, an Asian country. In the distant past Sinai represented a border zone, not a border, between continental land masses. The water boundary that today separates

Africa from Asia dates, of course, only from the completion of the Suez Canal in 1869 (Robin, 2011:7). So, as suggested by Ali Mazrui the great scholar of contemporary Africa, on cultural and historical grounds the Arabian Peninsula could more logically be classed as part of Africa than as part of Asia (Robin, 2011:8).

Mazrui in Robin (2011) argues that, 'It took European conceptualisation and cartography to turn Africa into a continent.' And the settlement of Africa by humans has not always occupied the whole area we describe today (Robin 2011). The designation of the term Africa has been bendable in modern times for there is inclusion of a number of Atlantic and Indian Ocean islands to the continent in different political definitions. Of these, Madagascar, one of the largest islands in the world, is the most significant. Other smaller islands include the Seychelles, Socotra, and other islands to the east; the Comoros, Mauritius, Réunion, and other islands to the southeast; Ascension, St. Helena, and Tristan da Cunha to the southwest; Cape Verde, the Bijagós Islands, Bioko, and São Tomé and Príncipe to the west; and the Azores and the Madeira and Canary islands to the northwest (Kroner, et al https://www.britannica.com/place/Africa). So, geographically, some of these islands have long been part of the African cultural zone; others like Madagascar as much part of the Asian (or Indian Ocean) cultural zone, while some Atlantic islands can be considered effectively part of Europe.

So the preceding paragraphs are advocating the idea that there has never been a single Africa with consistent boundaries through time. Africa has been perceived from different geographical limits, a different concept, both by past and recent societies. But it should be noted that though the idea of Africa has come as a result of western creation, what these westerners have said about Africa can be useful to construct an African traditional religious identity, in this case, the Shona to be more specific. This is because identities of adherents are determined, biologically and socially, by some assumed homogeneous characteristics which they share with other members of the group to which they belong.

So, Mazrui (1986) in Robin (2011) makes a distinction between Africans of the blood and Africans of the soil. For him, Africans of the blood are defined in racial and genealogical terms, in Shona it is called *mwana weropa/wedzinza*. These are those who are known as the black race, *munhu weganda dema*. On the other hand, Africans of the soil are defined in geographical terms.

In Shona, they say *mwana wevhu* (children of the soil). But, it does not mean that the distinction made by Mazrui means 'blood' and 'soil' cannot be used concurrently to delineate an African. Mazrui implicitly states that territoriality and race should be used in chorus in identifying who an African is. The challenge that is encountered when implementing Mazrui's insightful perspective is that it seems only those with both 'blood' and 'soil' credentials can have an uncontested African identity as opposed to those with just one attribute of either 'blood' or 'soil'. In modern times, Africa is now inhabited by various peoples from other continents. Some might be Africans but not necessarily black. Then some might be black but not of the African soil. There is no more a homogenous African population as people from other continents have become naturalized Africans because of mixed marriages.

3.5.1 Tradition

The above construction of Africa irradiates the idea of 'traditional religion'. Similarly, the concept 'traditional religion' is met with contention (Amatenga-Etogo, 2014:254). To overcome purely abstract models of reflection of this religion, this study honors the insight that all knowledge is embodied in religion and context (Haardt, 2010:163). As presumed by the nomenclature, it is a broad context for Africa though the destined place and people are contestable. In this vein, even the religiosity ascribed to this continent and its people is arguable. There is an understanding that in the deep past, before contact with people from other continents, Africans had their own distinct belief systems and cultural practices. Basing on an understanding that Africa is a place and or space, the everyday of Africans' life is the center and starting point to understand their traditional religion where place and space are central in their thinking. What determines or influences the African space/spatiality of the sacred?

In studies of African religion, there is a belief that African societies are dominated by traditions which is directly opposed to western societies which are dominated by rational modernity. In the African set- up, tradition and religion are intertwined, so traditional religion is life. In this line of thinking, there is a dualist application of these concepts to Africans and Europeans, where traditions of the Africans place them in a rift far away from the modern Europe. The result is that traditional equals something inferior, irrelevant, backward, unfitting, archaic, ancient, static, old fashioned and outdated, to be replaced by a civilized modern religion, which was Christianity.

This African is also traditional either in the sense of being shielded from Western influence or in the sense of rejecting such influence.

Because of this prejudice, it took some three hundred years for some western scholars to recognize African religion as a true religion (Gathogo 2007). Thus, scholars in the person of Awolalu (1976) retort to the above westerners' views on the meaning of 'traditional' by explaining that the word "traditional" means indigenous, that which is aboriginal or foundational, handed down from generation to generation, upheld and practised by Africans today. This is a heritage from the past, but treated not as a thing of the past but as that which connects the past with the present and the present with eternity. This is also supported by Amatenga-Etogo (2014:225) who posits that recent scholars are of the view that the term should not be seen as an indicator of stagnation. Rather, it should carry with it the dynamism with which the continent and its individual communities are currently imbued with. Although some of these conceptualizations arise from the use of language, the crux of the matter, for example among the Shona in Zimbabwe, is to 'follow traditions'. Their traditions can be posited as certain thoughts, sayings, songs and deeds which have been handed down from one generation to the next orally or and by visible demonstration.

The traditions have become a recognized corpus of material which provides injunctions for people's behavior and thinking practices for a significant portion of individuals in a contemporary society. This material is both tangible and intangible. But transmission of these traditions across generations has made them to change, so they are never static. In Africa, Zimbabwe included, modifications of traditions can happen deliberately or spontaneously as determined by the contextual situation. Often such shifts occur due to contact with the Western and Asian world through colonialism, missionary activities, trading, warfare, education, migrant labour, scientific technological advancement and tourism. These foreigners have their own religio-cultural dispositions which impact heavily the African traditions. Then due to globalization, a lot of Africans are now leading a diasporic life. The end result is a change of traditions in the following spheres: information communication, language, ownership of religious heritage sites, dress code, eating habits, traditional law, traditional leadership and gender issues.

3.5.2 The classical dilemma in defining ATR

Since this study looks at the meaning of ATR, the classical dilemma that one faces is centered on this question: should the definition of the nomenclature *precede* the analysis of the data about ATR, or should it *follow* the analysis? Some scholars assert that unless we start out with a definition of religion and specify what we are looking for, there is no way to separate religion from non-religion (Karuvachira,www.academia.edu). Therefore, we must have some preliminary concept of 'ATR' at the start, or we might end up studying something other than religion, like culture, or theology, or psychology or sociology or anthropology or something else (Karuvachira,www.academia.edu). Others retort that if one defines the subject beforehand, he or she might distort the data owing to preconceptions, or at very least he or she might miss some data which are really relevant, but which have been mistakenly excluded from the outset. Hence, they maintain that after having studied the data about religion, one can define what religion is (Karuvachira,www.academia.edu). An attempt to come up with meaning of religion cannot be done at the conclusion of the study. But the most plausible position is to explore preliminary definitions and final definitions.

3.5.3 Preliminary definition of ATR

According to Platvoet, these definitions do not claim universal applicability because the research interest of the scholar should not be overlooked in the formulation of definitions. This results in active interaction between the researcher and the data (Platvoet 1990:182). Having said this, I am persuaded to adopt the following comprehensible preliminary definitions of ATR. According to Beyers (2010:2), a preliminary definition influenced by an African understanding of religion would be to describe religion as the continual participation in traditions passed on from one generation to the next. Another scholar is Ebere (2011:480) who opines that "When we speak of ATR, we mean the indigenous beliefs, ceremonies, rituals, customs, and practices of Africans born out of the expression and deep reflection of their forebears. These traditions evolved over many centuries as the people of Africa responded to the situations of their life and reflected upon their experiences". However, the problem with these two scholar's conjectures is that they gave a diluted conception of ATR, it is so broad as to include almost everything in the field of

religion, yet ATR is a distinct religion on its own. But, these functional definitions will form the working definition in this study. The reason for my accepting their views as the operational definition of ATR in this study is based on the following underpinnings: First, what they have put forward is the generic source of the conception and reality of African Traditional Religion. Second, they have committed themselves to bring out the ideological underpinnings within traditional definitions of religion. This is important since definitions are necessarily contextual (Platvoet, 1990:188) in (Chitando, 1997).

3.6 Modernity

Zimbabwe, like any other African nation, is a modern state though this term is multivalent in its usage. It is impossible to come up with a precise definition of the term 'modern' given the fact that the definition should capture all diverse realities of various historical contexts, especially the Zimbabweans ones, as they are represented from pre-modernity to post-modernity. According to Mukundi (2010), modernity, which in this case stems from colonisation, is likewise intertwined with culture, especially if it considered centering on the period during which formerly colonised people reassert themselves and reject the place assigned to them by erstwhile colonial powers. Modernity has been accompanied by the rise of capitalism, industrialisation, secularisation, rationalisation, globalisation, consumerism, individualism, materialism, bureaucracy, disenchantment of the world, alienation, commodification, decontextualisation, nationalism, urbanisation, subjectivism, objectivism, mass society, homogenisation, democratisation, mechanisation, totalitarianism, indigenisation, and these have brought both benefits and non-benefits to humankind. In light of this characterisation, modernity was expected to lead to an exorable decline of religion and a marginalisation of religion to a privatised sphere. Tensions between the positive and negative forces of modernity created a vacuum, which can be called 'a crisis of modernity' (Vladmir 2014:3). The ideal understanding of the term modernity as was depicted above in Shona is *chizvino-zvino.*

Zimbabwe can be said to be in a transitional period, experiencing multiple crises associated with modernity. Framing the meaning of ATR in the modern context (*chizvino-zvino*) is imperative because the study was carried out in a milieu where there are almost four decades after the country became independent from British rule. Chitando (1999) also brings in the idea of the

impact of modernity on ATR. He thinks that the coming of colonialism and the subsequent urbanisation of sections of African space had a marked impact on African religio-cultural practices. He cites the Zimbabwean philosopher, David Kaulemu, who observes that: "In Southern Africa, the general modernising tendencies have helped to create an enhanced conscious ness of the self. With the reorganisation of space and time, the old face of the spiritual is challenged" (Kaulemu 1997: 3). In Zimbabwe, the interface between "modernity" and "pre-modernity" produced and continues to produce interesting paradigms of contestation and reaction. Yet, members of ATR who practise their religion live in the modern world. So, either their beliefs or lives persist as anomalies in this modern world, or else the understanding of modernity by some commentators is faulty. As a religious tradition, ATR, for better or worse, does provide a variety of rich cognitive accounts of the contemporary world and the human place within it. This is one reason they persist. Fasolt in Cladis (2006) juxtaposes religion to modernity as if they are two discrete, mono-lithic worldviews in competition with each other. Yet, religion is as much a part of modernity as modernity is a part of religion. ATR today generates an indigenous community.

3.7 The nature of Shona Theism

Chivanhu constitutes the spiritual world, earthly/human world as well as the underground world and the three worlds are in constant interaction. But, the communication is very procedural because its tendentiousness is grounded on their fundamental belief in hierarchy of sources of power and being. The Shona do not approach seniors directly, for traditional culture prescribes adherence to a conciliator protocol. The same is done in their interaction with the spiritual world whereby an intermediary is used. Before one becomes an accredited intermediary between humanity and the spiritual world, he/she undergoes numerous tests approved and conducted by senior mediums. Accreditation of the novice spirit medium is marked by performance of a ritual at which the spirit is accepted and honored and the possessed individual begins his/her practice. At the head of each clan is a senior spirit medium/national medium.

The Supreme Being in Shona traditional religion is called Mwari and the Shona's strong belief in Mwari is widely understood as Mwari religion. The Shona people's understanding of Mwari is netted in the names which they give to their Supreme Being. Mewre (1957) provides a comprehensive list of the Shona names of God. Firstly, is a look at the possible origins of the

most common name which is Mwari, and in this quest, three religious traditions will be considered to have influenced the possible etymology of this term. From the 19th century, most of the East coast African countries were dominated by Islam. As we have already noted that the VaShona had cultural contacts with people from various regions of the world, the name Mwari might have Islamic origins. Considering the interchangeability of "r" and "l" in Central African languages and the possibility of "Mu" becoming "Mw" as in the case of "Mwana", we have to concede that Mwari may have come from Muari or Muali. At the same time, it should be noted that the VaShona conceive of Mwari as intimately related to major and minor spiritual beings. This conception of the Supreme Being is far removed from the unadulterated monotheistic Islamic idea of God. There is also a Christian flair in the origins of the term Mwari when it is treated to have derived from *Muari* or *Muali* (He who he is) as shown in God's response 'I am who I am' referenced in Exodus 3:14.

Traditional religion also explains that the term was in use since time immemorial. Missionaries adopted and adapted the Shona term *Mwari* during the translation of the Bible at Morgenster (Shoko 2007: 38). Mwari was used in linguistic expressions like *kumwararika* (scatter all over, omnipresence). The basic idea then would be that Mwari could be present at a number of places at the same time as bits of a broken article are present at various places at the same time. There might be a relationship between Mwari and *Muwari* (The Strong One) of the Congo. Apparently the Shona think of Mwari as above and different to all earthly powers. They would say of a person who is indifferent to the reactions of other people: *"wangova Mwari"* (He is simply Mwari). In Manicaland the words Mwari and *"mhandara"* (a girl who has reached puberty age) may be used interchangeably. This Manica use of the word "Mwari" is similar to the use of "Muali" (a grown up girl) at Sena and in Malawi.

Tradition has it that *Mwari* cult was associated with the origin of the Shona people at a place called Guruuswa in the North of the Zambezi River. A voice believed to be that of *Mwari* beckoned the elders and implored them to leave Guruuswa for another 'promised land'. The voice spoke through natural phenomena like animals, trees and grass. On their great trek from Guruuswa, food was mysteriously provided by nature on wooden plates. When these indigenous people migrated to this country, it was at the ancient State of Great Zimbabwe in Masvingo

where they settled, that the *Mwari* cult was first established before its transfer to Matonjeni at Matopo Hills in Matabeleland region of the Ndebele people.

Mwari cult comprises a number of shrines like Njelele, Wirirani and others but Matonjeni is the most powerful and popular cult which is also known by the cult of *Zame*. It explains why *Zame* is another personal name for *Mwari*. The cult is manned by Mbire lineage of vaShona, consisting of a high priest and priestess, a voice and keeper of the shrine. Mediums who communicate directly with *Mwari* at Matonjeni shrine are some boys known as *hosanna* and virgin girls known as *mbonga.* For Daneel (1970), the Shona perceive *Mwari* as the God of fertility petitioned at Matonjeni. He is responsible for the fertility of the land and barren women. So when there is drought or a national catastrophe, traditional leadership is responsible for consultation with this cult through approved special intermediaries called *manyusa.*

The *manyusa* observed certain traditional compliances like travelling to Matonjeni on foot and bare- footed with no food, drink or money. But now they have access to some of the resources. Kraal heads and chiefs mobilise resources like finance, food and transport which are handed over to the *manyusa* for a convenient trip to Matonjeni. When they get there, *Mwari* is also given money as a token when the *manyusa* ask for rain. At the shrine they kneel outside the cave in which the voice is enclosed. They keep their eyes closed with their backs facing the mouth of the cave. They plead for rain through the priestly intermediaries. They also present calamities troubling their chiefdoms. A thunderous voice speaks from the cave in an incomprehensible dialect interpreted by the intermediaries. The delegates present the money collected in a plate and preceded through their back into the cave. If they turn back they risk sand thrown into their eyes or blindness. Rain falls immediately with thunder and lightning. People ululate in praise of *Mwari* with the expression *'Dziva, Dzivaguru'*. They break into singing and dance. Millet beer and a black ox slaughtered for the ritual are served. Furthermore, the *Mwari* cult is consulted on wider issues which affect the whole country. The Shona use the totem *Dziva* (pool) or *Dzivaguru* (big pool) and also *chidziva chepo* (perennial pool) as the praise names for God, meaning he is the giver of rain. Apart from rain and drought, people visit the cult on the appointment of a chief, new spirit mediums and moral issues. The cult has also been involved in national politics particularly in the 1896-7 rebellion and the war of liberation.

Some more names for Mwari are *Musiki/Marure* (creator), and *Musikavanhu* (creator of human beings). *Kusika* is a process which makes fire by rubbing two sticks which has connotations of creation (Merwe 1957: 37-63). *Muumbi* (Mwari is a moulder or fashioner of things), *Mutangakugara/ Muwanikwa* (first to exist) is similar to *Muwanikwa* (God was the one who was just found to exist). *Samasimba/ Chipindikure* (powerful), *Chirozvamavinamauya* (give and take), *Chikara* (one inspiring awe); *Dedza* (lord of the sky), *Nyadenga/ Wedenga* (owner of the sky) and *Wokumusoro/Wekumakore* (one of the above) who reveals himself in lightning, *Runjirusingapfuminguo.* God is also referred to as *Mbuya/Sekuru* (grandmother and grandfather. Vahera people of Buhera use it when they refer to God's powers of creation and fertility), and *Zendere* (young woman) who originated from *Mwari* and portray God as female. He is also called *Sororezhou* (head of elephant) which means Father. God has the power to destroy completely good things and persons or turning things upside-down, that is, he can completely change things, and thus he is called *Chipindukire/Chirozva-mauya.* Closely related to these two is *Chirazamauya,* which describes Mwari as the one who provides for good and bad. The vaShona seem to believe that God could also be the author of evil.

Though there is a general belief that *Mwari* is too remote and cannot be involved in everyday life of the Shona, people can still complain to *Mwari* to an extent of even scolding him when something unexpected happens. Gelfand (1970) argues that in times of bereavement the Shona approach *Mwari* directly complaining to him saying: *Mwarindaitasei*? (God what have I done to deserve this?) Direct interaction with God is also expressed even in their appreciation of God given gifts. So, in certain situations do not require involvement of mediums between Mwari and humanity.

3.8 Other Shona Religious Topographies

Although omnipotent, *Mwari* is not approached directly but rather through ancestral spirits *midzimu/vadzimu.* In fact, Mwari is *Mudzimumukru,* the greatest ancestor. This suffices to say the basis of the Shona religion is the ancestor cult. According to Chavhunduka (2001:4), ancestors occupy a central position in our African religion largely because of their ownership of land and to their relationship to God. Ownership of land forms the main link between politics, religion and spirituality in Zimbabwe. Each geographical area or territory belongs to the ancestors, that is, ancestors of early settlers or founders of the territory.

As noted above, VaShona believe that Mwari is not a daily guide for humanity; rather, their lives are controlled by *midzimu* (ancestors) in practice which are not worshipped but venerated as intermediaries. In fact, in Shona traditional religion, worship does not exist, it is alien to the indigenous religion. The interaction between the living and the ancestors in Shona culture is not worship, but an everyday social and economic communal business. These ancestors are spirits of dead family elders like fathers, mothers, grandfathers, grandmothers, uncles, cousins, aunts, who still exist in a spiritual form dealing with their progenies' family affairs.So, the ancestors are human, not gods. They are referred to as *varipasi* (those below) and dwell in a spirit world called *nyikadzimu.* They are guardian spirits who are influential in the people's lives (Bourdillon 1976: 263). Both the ancestors and the living form the human community. The ancestors need the living. The living needs the ancestors. What affects the living affects the ancestors. What affects the ancestors affects the living. The ancestors cannot do without the living and the living cannot do without the ancestors. The relationship between the living and the ancestors is symbiotic. The Shona carry their ancestors wherever they go. The Shona people are in the presence of their ancestral spirits wherever they are and whatever they do. Expressions like *vadzimundiringe,* (ancestors take care of me) *vadzimu vandirasa* (ancestors have forsaken me), *vadzimu vadambura mbereko* (ancestors have broken their back sling), *vadzimu vandinzwa* (ancestors have heard me) are very common to confirm how the Shona worldview is dominated by ancestral spirits. The active existence of the ancestral spirits are their controlling thought, whether that means for the living relative a constant source of superstitious dread, or a sense of security which fills the progenies with inward peace. In all undertakings, however trivial or vital, they put their ancestral spirits first and call upon them for blessing, support, and succor (Idowu 1994:108).

When the Shona greet each other, they also greet their ancestors at the same time. They say *makadini henyu* depicting plurality "How 'are' you," not *wakadii hako*, the singular "How 'is' you." When the person answers, the response also shows plurality, that *tinofara makadiniwo,* we are fine and how are? This persuades Chivaura to assert that a Shona does not walk or live alone without his or her ancestors (2015). This shows that the spiritual world, specifically the ancestral spirits, are in charge of human affairs. The Shona people address ancestral spirits through libations, invocations, offerings and incantations. These ancestral spirits are contemporaneous to

the traditional people of Zimbabwe in that they exist in human beings, animals and manifest through natural phenomena.

All ancestors, that is, family, clan, provincial and national, are interested in good governance, social order and stability. But ultimate dominion over the whole world is in the hands of Mwari. *Midzimu* also include important spirits of chiefs called *mhondoro* (lion spirits). But, the Zezuru often use this term. These are important ancestors symbolized by a lion which is powerful and inspires fear but is guardian of the people. They originate from spirits of chiefly founder of the dynasty and his sister. They deal with matters at the territorial level. The Shona believe that the *mhondoro* bring rain, bumper harvests, and are deciders of those who succeed to chieftainship. *Mhondoro* also see to it that communities set aside one day for rest when no work on the land is done, this is known as *chisi*. Depending on guidance of *mhondoro,* in some other areas observance of *chisi* is done weekly, while in some regions it is monthly.

There are qualifications which must be met in order to become a *mudzimu*. First, the deceased must be elderly people who are mature. Secondly, the dead must leave children behind who will remember the departed spirit through performances of rituals. Those who die childless can become *midzimu* if they are buried accompanied by a rat. Third, the deceased should have led a morally upright life. Witches and murderers who are guilty of destroying lineages might be accepted as *midzimudoro rekuchenura,* cleansing appeasement is enacted. Those who died of deadly diseases like tuberculosis and leprosy could not become ancestors. But, these seriously diseased people can have the cleansing rituals done for them so they can be integrated as *midzimu.* Death is a prerequisite for one to become an ancestor, accompanied by pre-burial, burial rituals and post- burial rituals. It is against this view that black color is used for *midzimu,* to symbolise death. These rituals include *doro remvura* (beer of water) which is performed after a month to cleanse the participants of evil transmitted through contact with the dead body. The ritual is also an occasion to thank the people who participated at the burial of the deceased relative.

The most important ritual is *kurova guva* (bringing back home ceremony). Some alternative names used by the *Karanga* for the ritual are *kugadzira* (to repair) and *bira.* They believe that when a person dies the spirit roams around for a specific period of one year. During this period,

it is a taboo for the spouse of the deceased to have sexual intercourse, this is known as *kupisira guva*. The spirit is then given permission to return to the living to guard its children through ritual action. The family takes the initiative to prepare the ritual (Shoko 2007: 34). The ritual also involves inheritance and distribution of property of the deceased. In case of males, this is the day when the elder son inherits his father's name, *kugadzwa zita.*

Some rituals are held after every two years in commemoration of the deceased. The rituals may continue until the deceased fades out of the memory of the living. The rituals are known by various names called *doro renyota* (beer of thirst), *doro remusha* (home beer), *doro reChiKaranga* (traditional beer) and *doro remidzimu* (beer for ancestors) (Shoko 2007: 37). The above criteria and rituals performed show that the state of the spiritual world for the dead is a result of the efforts of the living community. This transformation of the dead into *midzimu* is rendered possible by indigenous medical and sacred practitioners who preside over rituals that bring them into being. Without these practitioners' roles the realm of antecessors is compromised to the point of acknowledging their extinction, which causes African societies becoming socially dysfunctional.

Now that it has been brought home, *mudzimu* performs various positive roles which include the following; protection of its progenies from danger, misfortunes and witches, success in agricultural enterprise, hunting, employment and job security, education, sport and business. A successful and productive marriage attributed to ancestral spirits is marked by bearing of children. *Vadzimu* insist on strict observance of moral values, thus incest and adultery are tabooed. Respect for elders is inculcated in the family by the belief that an unkind act towards elders, for example one's mother, would be remembered after death by her angered spirit which would descend as *ngozi,* that is, avenging spirit on the guilty child and so punish him/her or his/her children (Gelfand,1970). It can be argued that rejection of *vadzimu* implies rejection of *unhu* as well as acceptance of being subhuman in terms of the Shona worldview.

The living invite spiritual wrath through blunders, negligence and omission of rituals. Serious crimes including breaking of *chisi* (holiday), incest, stealing and adultery are some of the violations involved. *Midzimu* can bring illness, diseases, impotence or any misfortune like drought, plague, pestilence, floods and misfortune. They can also allow witches to bring in evil

and disturb the state of the living's health. In the Shona's own statements, they 'open the door' and allow evil.

The Shona believe in *shavi/mashavi* (alien spirits) which influence their lives both positively and negatively. S*havi* derives from *kushava* which is a hunting expedition carried in distant forests far away from home. Any operation carried out in distant lands, especially meant for the survival of the family, is known as *kushava*. Also in their color condrum, the Shona also understand red color as *shava*. It is a color which was mostly associated with the hunters because more often than not, they shed blood of their prey. In their day- to-day language, murderers are identified as having *maoko akatsvuka ropa*, meaning their hands are red with blood. Generally, blood is a symbol of danger. The vaShona who have died in places far away from their homes with no decent burial and proper rituals like bringing- back ceremonies performed for them are believed to be the ones who become *shavi* spirits. *Shavi* are also spirits of relatives, neighbors, white people, animals and objects (Bourdillon 1976: 283). As wondering spirits, sometimes they are dangerous, and they search for hosts to possess who are not even their relatives.

When *shave* finds a host it reveals itself by making the host fall sick. The next step is that relatives of the sick person consult a traditional practitioner who diagnoses an alien spirit as the cause of sickness. The spirit is induced to come out openly; it is interrogated by the traditional practitioner demanding it to identify itself. If the host is comfortable with the spirit, he/she accepts it through performance of acceptance rituals. But if he/she doesn't want it, the traditional practitioner exorcises it. When a medium accepts its particular *shave* spirit, he becomes endowed with the talent once possessed by the foreigner. This spirit remains with the family and when its possessor dies the alien spirit passes to his/her offspring (Gelfand 1970). *Shavi* spirits occupy a very important position in the Shona cosmology, for through them humanity is enabled to excel in their day- to- day endeavours, be it in business, health, medicine, sports, agriculture, sexuality, driving, mining, hunting, education, entertainment etc. All the *shavi* requires is that the host remembers it from time to time through libations and during ritual ceremonies when the host wears special garments of red color and decorations.

There are several types of *shavi* spirits which confer different types of talents/ benefits to the hosts. Through *Shavi roudzimba*, the host is a specialist in hunting. Then there are *jukwa* spirits whose hosts are also called *manyusa*. They are responsible for rain- making rituals and dance in honor of spirits at *Mwari* cult of Matonjeni (Dahlin 2002: 75). People with n*juzu* (mermaid) spirits are associated with water. They are skilled *n'anga* called *godobori*. They are renowned for using medicine from the underworld. *Njuzu* are 'ambiguous'. They transform a person from captivity to a traditional medical practitioner who provides important service to the community (Dahlin 2002: 75). Another *shavi* associated with healing is *chipunha*. *Chipunha* is the spirit of a child which is playful. The host cries and laughs like a child, eating mucus and kidding. *Shavi dzviti* originates from the Ndebele. *Dzviti* is a warrior and the spirit is a fighting spirit which recalls the intertribal wars between the Shona and Ndebele. Though the host is Shona, when he is possessed he/she speaks in Ndebele and is associated with divination. There are also foreign alien spirits amongst the Shona. In areas where white people died, for example in Mberengwa, there are people with s*havi rechizungu* which is a white person's spirit. The host imitates a European way of life, like speaking in English even though the host is illiterate, nodding and moving hair backwards. The spirit is associated with business ventures.

But certain *shavi* spirits have negative qualities. *Shavi regudo* is the spirit of a baboon involved mostly in stealing and bullying. *Shavi rouroyi* is involved in witchcraft. The Shona say the host '*Haabvaruri machira'* (does not tear the blankets). *Shavi rezungura* confers stealing. This refers to notorious thief who breaks into people's homes and steals livestock and household property. *Shavi rechihure* is involved in prostitution. *Shavi rekudya* also explain extra ordinary behavior in eating food.

Shona traditional religion recognizes the importance of the institution of traditional medical and sacred practitioners known as *n'anga. N'anga* is used interchangeably with *chiremba, murapi, godobori, sekuru*. They have the ability to access the spiritual world; hence can serve as conveyor belts between the human world and the spiritual world. Beach (1994) describes them as true doctors, psychiatrists and political scientists. Despite their being the reservoirs of indigenous knowledge systems, databases and vicars to cultural motifs, they are double- faced in as far as they police relations between and among human beings and the patrons of the spirit world (Ranger 1967:18).

Sources of Shona traditional religion include sacred places. The spiritual world interacts with the human in specific places like individual homes, perennial pools, big trees, mountains, hills, rivers, rocks, forests, caves and graves as places of abode. Then during performances of rituals and ceremonies and festivals like rites of passage, installation of chiefs, rain- making ceremonies, harvest festivals just to mention a few, sacred objects are used. They include wooden stools, lots, bones, snuff, beef, cloth, calabashes, sticks, clay pots, wooden plates and domestic animals. The Shona also have dances, music, proverbs, riddles, names of people and places, poems and myths which contain some traditional religious values.

Conduct in Shona traditional religion is regulated by totemism. It is a cultural practice that has been upheld by locals since pre-colonial Zimbabwe and has survived extinction during the century of colonisation and in post-colonial era. Totemism is a system of belief in which human beings have kinship or a mystical relationship with a spirit-being, such as an animal (Bozongwana 2000:11).The animal is regarded as the totem, that is, *mutupo*. The totem is thought to interact with a given kin group, clan or an individual and to serve as their emblem or symbol. Members of the clan regard themselves as related to one another, and to the totem animal, toward which they usually observe a form of ritual attitude, refusing to kill or eat it, or making it the center of organised ceremonies on which the life of the totem and of the tribe is believed to depend. This relationship, which is expressed in totemism, may be based on what are regarded as blood-ties, on membership of a common horde-locality or, primarily, on a mythological and "spiritual" ancestry (Middleton, 1981:166).

Commonly noted during my fieldwork was the centrality of relationality/kinship (*ukama*), where related families live in adjacent homesteads, with categorization of kin basing on sex, generation, and seniority by age. But, kinship is also viewed in the context totemism, for example, sharing the same *mutupo* (totem) or bond existing because of the relatedness of various totems established in the clan histories. Kinship is also determined by deep friendship between individuals *(chisahwira)*. There is a saying which values the supremacy of friendship over kindred, *usahwira hunokunda ukama*. Hailing from the same neighborhood could also mean a better relationship than that of blood relationship separated by physical distance. This is understood as *chigarisano mumusha umwe*. The notion of *ukama* in this context imposes mutual

obligations of hospitality, generosity, material assistance, and funeral attendance. Even if an individual has a bad character, he has to prioritise neighborliness.

In a rural set up, the Shona people lead a communal life which heavily orbits around *ukama*, that is, relationality. Patriarchy is dominant, so every homestead is managed by a male family head, *Samusha, and* this applies both in urban and rural set- ups. *Samusha* can also be referred to as elder of the family or *sorojena.* Usually, it is the family head who prescribes ethos and values to be embraced by the family at large. If a child misbehaves regularly, the fault is attributed to his parents for their failure to train him. It is believed too that the *vadzimu* who are next to God would be disappointed if a man or woman did not obey the laws of a human being (*munhu*). If a child lacks *unhu* his parents are blamed. The Shona mother accepts the responsibility in the up-bringing of her child, therefore she should receive special consideration; her family must try to help her and appease her whenever they can because she has suffered most in bringing up the children (Gelfand 1970).

A cluster of these homesteads form a village, which is under a village head (*Sabhuku).* A conglomeration of villages form a territory (*dunhu)* manned by a kraal head in Shona known as *Sadunhu*. Next in authority is *Ishe* who is the Headman. From Headman the highest authority in Buhera is *Mambo/Changamire,* a term equivalent to King, who is in charge of various chiefdoms which, when combined become a kingdom. But, because of the colonial legacy, the office of a King was scrapped off. So, in theory, there are no kings among the Shona people yet in praxis the term exists and is used in Shona equivalence to refer to the highest traditional office. All these traditional offices are religious in nature. In the context of this study, I use traditional authorities and traditional leaders synonymously. Their bearers partake and preside over human world affairs. They are closely tied to land and its sacredness. They are custodians of the land which is owned by ancestral spirits. Together with spiritual leaders, traditional leaders perform a variety of important functions regulated by customary law, including dispute settlement, natural resource management, local development and traditional tasks. Recently, it has been noted that traditional authorities have a role to play in local and national politics and, in many ways,are linked to state structures (Ubink, 2008:8).

3.9 Summary

This chapter provided a framework which is vital in searching for a meaning of African Traditional Religion. Two theoretical frameworks were found ideal for the study, and they are: Afrocentrism, and Symbolic Interactionism. As Schiele (2000) argues, there no one theory is robust enough to explain all human functioning. Theories of the meaning of religion and key concepts and in the exploration of the meaning of African Traditional Religion were dealt with and the chapter admitted that the nomenclature African traditional religion is very difficult to define. Is Africa the axis mundi of this religion? Later, the chapter showed that for a detailed analysis of ATR, the traditional Shona people of Zimbabwe are used as the referent group which adheres to Shona traditional religion, a local chapter of the broader ATR. Then the general picture of this Shona traditional religion was also highlighted.

CHAPTER FOUR

4.0 Research Methodology and Instruments

4.1 Introduction

This chapter gives an exposition of the research methodology and research methods that were used during the study about the meaning of African traditional religion in modern society of Zimbabwe. Qualitative research methods were the most suitable to the research I undertook and the research questions I pursued. An outline of the key factors that influenced the adoptation of the qualitative research methodology was done demonstrating issues that are relevant to the decision-making process for methodological choices (Mukherjee et al, 2002:2). The work adopted phenomenology of religion, interviews and observations. The research method that was the actual data collection and data analysis method is described and justification is provided on why the research methods were chosen. The chapter explores the various steps adopted to deal with the study research problem along with the logic behind them. Intepretivism was the research paradigm of this work. Insights from the phenomenological method, semi structured interviews, and non-participant observations were useful in generating information about Zimbabwe's traditional culture, belief systems, symbols, behavior and experiences. The research was carried out in rural communities of Buhera District in Manicaland Province. Justification of the method selection translated to placing the Zimbabwean people within their own traditional framework. For data analysis, the chapter considered use of a qualitative interpretative approach. Having said this, to understand how the study of a small group of Buhera people led to such an interpretative framework, it is first necessary to elaborate on the specific methodological approach adopted.

4.1 Research Paradigm

A research paradigm is the sagacity of a research that planned on how the study was to be conducted to address issues to do with the nature of knowledge being generated, the methodology used in gathering data as well as the parameters used to test the validity of the research as shall be shown below. The gurus of qualitative research, Denzin and Lincoln (2000), define paradigms as human constructions which deal with first principles or ultimates indicating where the researcher is coming from so as to construct meaning embedded in data (Kivunja,

2017:26). In this vein, Kivunja et al (2017:26) argue that a paradigm constitutes the abstract beliefs and principles that shape how a researcher sees the world and how s/he interprets and acts within that world. In this study, a paradigm became the window through which I perceived the world. It is the conceptual lens through which I examined the methodological aspects of this research project to determine the research methods that were used and how the data was analysed. The interdependence of the methodological aspects can be demonstrated as follows: the style of data- gathering influenced the analysis which was performed, the relationship established with early participants influenced the recruitment of later participants, and ethical considerations influenced the kind of data which was gathered. This research's paradigm demonstrated the connectedness of the research work and how they operated in unison to respond to the research questions. In religion studies, the significance of a paradigm is appreciated in the sense that it provides beliefs and dictates which give a stimulus with regards to what should be studied, how it should be studied, and how the results of the study should be interpreted. And so a paradigm facilitates how meaning is constructed from the gathered data, basing on individual experiences (Kivunja, 2017:26).

4.2 Qualitative Approach

In selecting a research methodology, Guba (1981:76) suggests that "it is proper to select that paradigm whose assumptions are best met by phenomenon being investigated". The researcher of this thesis subscribes to the qualitative research design. The qualitative approach in this research was descriptive, it applied reasoning and used words. It involved an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter; it attempted to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meaning people bring to them (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003). During the research, qualitative method was useful to assess knowledge, attitudes, behaviors, and opinions of the Shona people in describing the situational meaning of African traditional religion in Zimbabwe in depth and in detail with greater openings. Qualitative research facilitates for an understanding of the people being studied from their perspective immersed in it and to move into the culture being studied and experience what it is like to be a part of it (Krauss, 2005:759). This included studying the everyday life of different groups of Shona people and communities in their natural setting; particularly African traditional religious settings and processes.

In qualitative research, different knowledge claims, enquiry strategies, and data collection methods and analysis are employed (Creswell, 2003). Using observations and interviews as well as the researcher's impressions and reactions, it made this researcher experience a different reality in studying the meaning of African traditional religion. So, the qualitative method of enquiry is evidence-based, since data arises in the form of what people say and do. Subjects of the research participate actively in the design and in the interpretation of the results. This subjective stance stems from the belief that multiple truths for meanings generated are always context- dependent and therefore can only be understood from a social, cultural and historical perspective (Creswell, 2003) in Shayne (2017:44). In line with interactionist perspective, the understanding of an event is a function of personal interaction and perception of those in that event, and the description of the processes that characterise the event. Qualitative approaches also provide the insight necessary to understand the participants' role in the event, and their perceptions of the experience.

Since "meaning" is of essential concern to the qualitative approach (Bogdan and Biklen, 2003), the participant's perspectives on their own conceptions of practice were the focus. The most fundamental aspect of a human social setting is that of meanings. These are the linguistic categories that make up a participant's view of reality and with which actions are defined. Meanings are also referred to by social analysts as culture, norms, understandings, social reality, and definitions of the situation, typifications, ideology, beliefs, worldview, perspective or stereotypes (Lofland & Lofland, 1996) in Krauss (2005:763). Hence, the framework developed in this thesis supports evaluating participant perspectives. Findings were discussed in relation to existing knowledge with the aim of demonstrating how the present study has contributed to expanding the knowledge base. According to Krauss (2005:763), qualitative research has the unique goal of facilitating the meaning-making process. The complexity of meaning in the lives of people has much to do with how meaning is attributed to different objects, people and life events. Thus, understanding unique meanings has to do with the construction of the meaning process and the many different factors that influence it.

4.3.1 Intepretivism

The qualitative paradigm of this work is grounded on intepretivism to decipher the 'meaning' of African traditional religion in modern society. The central endeavor of the interpretivist paradigm is to understand the subjective world of human experience (Guba & Lincoln, 1989) in (Kivunja, 2017:33). Intepretivism is an all-encompassing system of interrelated practice and thinking that define the nature of enquiry along the following three dimensions which consist of ontology, epistemology and methodology. Ontologically speaking, there are multiple realities or multiple truths based on one's construction of reality. Reality is socially constructed and is constantly changing. So, in research it is concerned with the assumptions researchers make in order to believe that something makes sense or is real, or the very nature or essence of the social phenomenon they investigate (Scotland, 2012) in Kivunja (2017:27). This approach makes an effort to 'get into the head of the subjects being studied' so to speak, and to understand and interpret what the subject is thinking or the meaning s/he is making of the context. Emphasis is placed on understanding the individual and their interpretation of the world around them. Hence, the key tenet of the interpretivist paradigm is that reality is socially constructed (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998) in (Kivunja, 2017:33). It explains why sometimes this paradigm has been called the Constructivist paradigm. In understanding a particular context, the conviction in interpretivism is that reality is socially constructed. The interpretivists attempt to derive their constructs from the field by an in-depth examination of the phenomenon of interest. This research was done in traditional African communities in the rural areas of Zimbabwe with the purpose of uncovering Zimbabwean traditional religious experiences in a contemporary set- up. The interpretive paradigm allowed the researcher to view African traditional world through the perceptions and experiences of the participants. In seeking answers for research questions, this investigator used experiences of participants to construct and interpret his understanding of African traditional religion from gathered data. After conducting interviews and making observations of the phenomena under research, knowledge of this traditional religion was generated through interpretation. The whole process of interpretation required contextualization and subjectivity. Thus, the interpretive approach explains the subjective reasons and meanings that lie behind social action. The contemporary situation in Zimbabwe requires a style of interpretive reflection that is firmly rooted in everyday traditional religious life and practice. To

interpret is to make meaning of that information by drawing inferences, and this was done qualitatively.

Ontology served to examine my underlying belief system as the researcher about the nature of the meaning of African traditional religion in Zimbabwe. It helped me to conceptualise the form and nature of reality and what I believe could be known about that reality. This was very crucial to understand how I made meaning of the data I gathered. Kivunja (2017:27) argues that these assumptions, concepts or propositions help to familiarise a person's thinking about the research problem, its significance, and how he/she might approach it so as to contribute to its solution. Ontology is so essential to a paradigm because it helps to provide an understanding of the things that constitute the world as it is known (Scott & Usher, 2004). It seeks to determine the real nature, or the foundational concepts which constitute themes that we analyse to make sense of the meaning embedded in research data (Kivunja, 2017:27). Just like epistemology, ontology makes the researcher to ask important questions such as: Is there reality out there in the social world or is it a construction created by one's own mind? What is the nature of reality? In other words, is reality of an objective nature, or the result of individual cognition? What is the nature of the situation being studied? (Kivunja, 2017:128). Such kinds of questions as they were used in this study point towards a relativist ontology.

On an epistemological level, there is no access to reality independent of our minds, no external referent by which to compare claims of truth. The investigator and the object of study are interactively linked so that findings are mutually created within the context of the situation which shapes the inquiry. Epistemology is concerned with the very bases of knowledge; its nature, forms and how it can be acquired, and how it can be communicated to other human beings. It focuses on the nature of human knowledge and comprehension that, as the researcher or knower, one can possibly acquire so as to be able to extend, broaden and deepen understanding in his field of research (Kivunja, 2017:2017). And so, in considering the epistemology of this research, it was vital to consider questions like: Is knowledge of African traditional religion something which can be acquired on the one hand, or, is it something which has to be personally experienced? What is the nature of the knowledge and the relationship between the knower and the would-be known? How does the researcher know what he knows? What counts as knowledge? (Krauss, 2005:758). In line with Kivunja's (2017:27) argument, these questions were important in this study because they helped this researcher to position himself in the

research context for him to discover what else was new, given what was known. This study relied on data gathered from the Shona people of Buhera have knowledge of traditional religion so the epistemology is grounded on what Kivunja calls 'authoritative knowledge', so it is basically a subjective epistemology.

Lastly is methodology. To decide on the research methodology to use in this research, two critical questions were required to be considered: 1) What type of data was going to be collected for the research? 2) The format in which the research findings were going to analysed and reported? , which is the broad term used to refer to the research design, methods, approaches and procedures used in an investigation that is well- planned to find out something (Keeves, 1997) in (Kivunja, 2017:28). For example, data gathering, participants, instruments used, and data analysis are all parts of the broad field of methodology. So the methodology articulates the logic and flow of the systematic processes followed in conducting a research project so as to gain knowledge about a research problem (Kivunja, 2017:27). It is through the guidance of the methodology that I managed to gain knowledge which was valuable as a contribution to the meaning of African traditional religion in modern society of Zimbabwe.

Gaining such insight into the hearts and minds of the people was best acquired through the use of smaller, highly targeted samples. Interviews are lengthy, oftentimes as long as two hours, allowing the interviewer to elicit extremely candid, highly complex responses. The result is rich, in-depth data laden with insight unobtainable from quantitative research techniques.

4.3.2 Qualitative research strengths

This study acknowledges some strengths associated with the use of qualitative research. It was very flexible; it allowed those who were studied to speak for themselves, to provide their perspectives in words and other actions. Therefore, qualitative research is an interactive process in which the persons studied teach the researcher about their lives. Because of close researcher involvement, I gained an insider's view of the field. Implementation of *epoche*, empathetic interpolation, interviews and observations allowed this researcher to find issues that are often missed by the scientific, more positivistic enquires. Qualitative descriptions, especially in the interpretation, played the important role of suggesting possible relationships, causes, effects and dynamic processes in African traditional religion. Since statistics were not used, there was instead use of a more descriptive style. This then made this research to be of particular benefit to

practitioners and participants of African traditional religion as they could turn to the study's qualitative reports in order to examine forms of knowledge that might not have been available to them, thereby gaining new insight.

4.3.3 Qualitative Research Limitations

Qualitative research is not without its weaknesses and limitations. Contexts, situations, events, conditions and interactions could not be replicated to any extent nor could generalization be made with any confidence to encompass a wider context than the one studied. The time spent in data collection, analysis and interpretation was lengthy. The interviews resulted in voluminous pages accumulated during transcription. Some of the pages were also generated from research observation detailed notes. Besides, all this information called for critical analysis, careful interpretation, and thought-provoking synthesis.

4.3.4 Reasons for employing qualitative research methodology

Though there are some weaknesses associated with qualitative research, overally strengths outweighed loopholes. The following are reasons why I proceeded in choosing qualitative research methodology. My choice of this research paradigm dovetails with the nature of the topic and study's research questions because the meaning of ATR in modern society of Zimbabwe has been neglected in the religion studies literature. The phenomenon needed to be explored and understood because the theme under study had never been addressed with the Shona people of Buhera. The research questions demanded observations and interviews dovetailed with a qualitative direction style. To answer research questions, percentages and statistics could not be used as research was asking "how" "what" and "why" questions which needed descriptive answer in word-based format, and thus the use qualitative research methodology was required. So, the qualitative paradigm was essential in exploring the substantive**,** affective and functional definitions of African traditional religion in a contemporary society of Zimbabwe.

Another factor which drove me to adopt qualitative research approach was that there is existing similar literature: though there was not much research that existed on the similar topic to this research, other researchers on the Shona people had done qualitative research as well. There is comprehensive literature on African traditional religion and Shona people that suggests the use of qualitative research methodology. For example, Hollenman, J.F. (1952); Merwe, W.J. Van der, (1957); Gelfand, M. (1962, 1992); Holleman (1969); Daneel M. I. (1970); Ranger T.O (1970,

1985); Hodza, (1974); Bourdillon, M.F.C (1976, 1987, 1990, 1991); Beach, D. N. (1980, 1990, 1994); Hodza, A. C. (1982); Aschwanden, H., (1989);; Gelfand M (1992); Chavunduka, G. (1994); G. Chavhunduka (2001);Dahlin, O. (2002); Gundani, P.H (2004); Shoko, T. (2007); Mazhinye R.J (2016) Magwa W (2017). It is against this backdrop that I wished to align my study with standard approaches to the topic.

The researcher is intimately involved in research on ATR with the following works having been published:

- (2012), *Indigenous Religion and HIV and AIDS Management in Zimbabwe: An African Cultural Perspective*; Saarbrucken: Lampert Academic Publishing,
- (2013) 'Revisiting the Christian concept of resurrection in the light of Indigenous Shona notion of the afterlife in Zimbabwe: A Metaphysical Theological Reflection', *Asian Academic Research Journal of Social Sciences & Humanities,* www.asianacademicresearch.org
- (2016), Spirituality in the Shona Christian Naming System, in Oliver Nyambi, Tendai Mangena and Charles Pfukwa (Eds.). *The Postcolonial Condition of Names and Naming Practices in Southern Africa*. Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing. pp106-119.
- (2017) African traditional religion in post-colonial Zimbabwe: A sustainable heritage for water resources management; in Green M.C, Hackett R.I.J, Hansen L, and Venter F, eds. Religious Pluralism, Heritage and Social Development; Stellenbosch: SUN MeDIA.
- (2018) *Divisi (*witchcraft) in contemporary Zimbabwe: Contest between two legal systems as incubator of social tensions among the Shona people; in Green M.C, Gunn T.J & Hill M (eds). *Religion, Law and Security in Africa*; Stellenbosch: African Sun Media.
- (2018) Indigenous African Crusaders of Environmental Keeping: a Phenomenological Reflection on the Power of AICs' Practices in Zimbabwe in Masitera E and Sibanda F (eds); *Power in contemporary Zimbabwe*; New York: Rutledge Taylor and Francis Group.

In these studies, I have conducted personal interviews or made observations which gravitated to the qualitative approach. So the qualitative approach allows room for me to be innovative and to work more within researcher-designed frameworks. Having already started researching on ATR,

I got intrigued by the complexity of the nature of this religion and so I found a knowledge gap and narrowed it down to the substantive**,** affective and functional meaning of traditional religion in Zimbabwe which is the focus of this research. The goal of the research is to deepen knowledge in my understanding of African traditional religion.

Then there were some practical considerations which led me to adopt the qualitative research paradigm. This is a study which was carried out in a space of three years. What "exactly" I was trying to find out could be best answered with qualitative data in the form of research interviews and observations with the qualitative research methodology. These proved to be faster and fairly cheap than administering questionnaires. To fill the knowledge gap understudy, information needed to be collated and analysed. The knowledge gap required me to know the "why" and "how", oft ATR so that I would acquire as much knowledge as possible about the theme under study. Qualitative research is the key to know as much as possible. So, there was knowledge payoff because the approach produced much knowledge since it allowed the study to be carried in a natural setting, allowing the participants to contribute knowledge which was useful in responding to the research questions. Thus the data was descriptive and could be analysed using the qualitative research methodology.

The availability of samples and data to be used in research was another issue to consider. This was necessitated by familiarity with the place where the research was done. As this research looked at the meaning of ATR in Zimbabwe, being a Zimbabwean citizen residing in Buhera where the research was done, primary data in qualitative format was readily available and could be easily accessed through interviews and observations. I was born and bred in Buhera, and have made use of my experiences to interpret the data I collected during the study. This also helped me in gaining access to situations which needed my presence since I was not a stranger in the places where the research was done. Being known by community leaders and villagers, it was easy to gain their co-operation.

Given the above, qualitative research methodology seemed the most appropriate research methodology to use in this research. The logic behind using this research methodology is as above and the justification is as follows:

4.4 Phenomenological Approach

One of the examples of qualitative research method is phenomenology. The term phenomenology is a derivative Greek word *phainomai* which means 'that which manifests itself. Phenomenology may therefore be regarded as a methodological study of 'appearances'. It emerged as a protest against the positivist paradigm. According to Reiners (2012:1), the positivist paradigm asserted that reality was ordered, rational, and logical. Subsequently, positivists presumed that objectivity was measured knowledge and was independent of human interaction. This was in line with quantitative research paradigm which negated human subjectivity through strictly controlled collection and data analysis methods. In light of this, a counter movement to the positivist paradigm emerged, the naturalistic paradigm, which presumed that reality was not fixed but based on individual and subjective realities. This naturalistic paradigm created conditions which paved the way for the sprouting of phenomenology.

Phenomenology is an inductive qualitative research tradition rooted in the 20th century philosophical traditions of Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), a German mathematician. Though he did not invent the term phenomenology, the way in which he interpreted philosophical questions underlies almost all later phenomenologies, including Martin Heidegger's. For Husserl phenomenology suspends all suppositions and was based on the meaning of the individual's experience, what is known as *epoche*.*Epoche* is a Greek work which means 'to stop' or 'to hold back' (Sharpe, 1986:224.). The experience of perception, thought, memory, imagination, and emotion, involve what Husserl called "intentionality" which is one's directed awareness or consciousness of an object or event. Husserl also raised the notion of eidetic intuition whereby only the essential structure of the phenomena is seen. The eidetic intuition (from the Greek word *eidos* meaning form, idea or essence) allows the researcher to see into the very structure or meaning of the phenomena. Intuition suggests that the bracketed consciousness of one who has performed *epoche* is able to apprehend not just particular entities or even universal classes of entities, but their essential meanings as entities and classes of entities. This can occur only when one's preconceived notions are suspended thereby enabling the researcher to intuit the meaning of what actually manifests itself in the world. Consequently, this amounts to what is known as

descriptive phenomenology. Therefore, phenomenological research was considered subjective, inductive, and dynamic.

4.4.1 Phenomenology of Religion and ATR in Zimbabwe

According to Taringa (2010), the term 'phenomenology of religion' is credited to the Dutch scholar Pierre Daniel Chantepie de la Saussaye (1848-1920). The question of the meaning of phenomenology of religion is a perennial one. However, for purposes of this study, I settle for a view which is in tandem with traditional religion in Zimbabwe. Phenomenology of religion is an approach that seeks to uncover covert meaning from the noticeable meaning. It uses more inductive reasoning which begins with a study of the sources and aims to build theory from the data. As a method of inquiry, it adapts the procedures of *epoche* and eidetic intuition to the study of varied symbolic expressions of that which people appropriately respond to as being of unrestricted value of them. The method, therefore, presupposes both the subjectivity of observers as well as their ability to identify with the experiences and meanings of the people they study. Some key figures in the phenomenology of religion are Gerardus van der Leeuw, Rudolf Otto, Mircea Eliade, Brede Kristensen and Ninian Smart (Streng, 1985:226-233). Accordingly, the reality of traditional religion can only be understood and made sense of by exploring people's lived experience of traditional religion and the meaning that such people have attributed to it through their experience. Phenomenology of religion is more closely linked with a qualitative research method.

Through its constitution, the Zimbabwe is host to so many religious traditions. This work purported to show that in contemporary Zimbabwe, African traditional religion is *sui generis* especially in a religious landscape characterised by Christianity's dominance. It places the African people at the center of any analysis of African phenomena in terms of action and behavior (Chawane, 2016:80). The descriptive nature of phenomenology of religion was vital to unpack the uniqueness of Zimbabwe's traditional belief practices to avoid reductionism in the process of study. This idea of its uniqueness precipitated me to adopt a method which facilitated phenomena to manifest itself. Indigenous Africans were entitled to give their own perspective on the Zimbabwean experience, making this study an exercise in self-knowledge (Chawame, 2016:83). This is in line with the ideals of Afrocentrism.

According to Cox (2000:27), the phenomenologist wants to observe the phenomena of religion as they appear rather than as they are understood through opinions formed prior to observation. To understand the lives of Buherans required travelling through widely different landscapes. It meant travelling in a rural district where homesteads are scattered in the landscape, only connected by sandy tracks and footpaths that are difficult to negotiate with any motorized vehicle.

So, I appreciated the meaning of religion in the believers' own terms because I suspended my own personal or academic presuppositions by temporarily placing them within brackets *(epoche),* thus allowing myself to cultivate a feeling for the believer's own faith position (empathy). Empathy simply means attempting to put oneself in the participant's shoes so that one can see what the world looks like from there. This arises from the fact that I was not studying inanimate objects but fellow human beings with feelings and emotions of their own. So, it was imperative to cultivate a 'feeling for' the traditional Shona people under investigation.

4.4.2 Challenges associated with Phenomenology in Zimbabwean context

Phenomenology of religion has some flaws which are worth pointing out. The notion of *epoche* was problematic to implement practically, especially the idea of faithfully bracketing my ideas and viewpoints when looking for the meaning of traditional religion in modern Zimbabwe. All approaches on the study of religion, including phenomenology, come with certain assumptions and biases about the subject- matter of enquiry. This work acknowledges Chitando's (1998:109) insightful critique of a phenomenological study of traditional religion. Starting with the notion that the believer is always right, it is important to point out that phenomenology contradicts itself because that is a position it is taking. While it enables the researcher to perfect the art of listening and respecting other people's points of view, the long-term effects might be detrimental. As was noted during the research, not all adherents have a critical knowledge of their religion. In African traditional religion, elders and sacred practitioners are regarded as reservoirs of knowledge (Chitando, 1998:109). Chitando goes on to explain that in such systems the usual response to questions like 'why' is that *ndicho chinyakare chedu* meaning 'things have always been so since time immemorial', yet the researcher needs to go beyond the obvious.

Though the elders and sacred practitioners are the reservoirs of traditional religious knowledge, the experience of age does not necessarily provide answers to the application of symbols to new

situations. This becomes a challenge especially since this study is situated in modern societies of Zimbabwe. In a study of indigenous religion, it is folly to limit oneself only to that which appears, because what is left out is equally important, for example, that which is covert and spiritual. This makes sense in the context that African traditional religion is highly spiritualized. It would therefore be naive to assume that the phenomena will always manifest themselves to the researcher. Chitando gives an example of a burial, it becomes clear that gathering at the grave-yard and laying down the corpse is a culmination of a series of rituals. It is crucial that the researcher should investigate these. However, giving primacy to the conscious meaning of religion for the believer remains an important injunction because it gives voice to those for whom others have acted as spokespersons in the past. In this instance, 'The believer is always right' liberates indigenous religions from the clutches of external interpreters.

There was also the challenge of inseparability between politics and traditional religion. It was vital for the researcher to be aware of the political influence on traditional religion since participants might have been unaware of the range to which the traditional religion may be manipulated for political or economic ends in modern Zimbabwe. This is the case with traditional leadership in Zimbabwe. Instead of merely cataloguing believers' responses, there is necessity to examine how, for example, traditional religious figures such as Nehanda and Kaguvi have been used by the nationalists to invent and solidify nationalist identities in the face of potentially crippling tribal loyalties. Respondents might be unaware of how politicians might appeal to African culture to further their own agendas, as was the case in the one-party state debate in the mid-eighties (Chitando, 1998:108).

I do subscribe to Martin Prozesky's suggestion that scholars of religion are justified in the reformulation of religion (Chitando, 1998:108). Although his position is contentious, as maintained by Chitando, in the context of this study, part of my obligation is to make an evaluation of the contemporary face of traditional religion in Zimbabwe. Evading the responsibility of the evaluation of religion results in the marginalisation of scholars from the phenomena. Researchers in religious studies could actually contribute to the transformation of traditional religion and in making that contribution, these people would move from being critics to creators of religious meaning. This would result in the researcher moving from being an observer into an engaged reformer.

After deciding to use the qualitative research methodology for this research, it was obvious from the onset that phenomenology of religion research method would best answer the research question to solve the research problem. It prescribed the data collection technique and the instruments that were to be used to analyse the data collected for reaching a conclusion to the problem.

Bourdillon in Chitando (1998:112) argues that there is need for judgment in the study of religion. This is supported by Olupona (1991) who suggests that a phenomenological hermeneutical interpretation of African religions should be encouraged. So, one possible way forward is to attempt an African cultural hermeneutics in which African cultural realities are given prominence. Applying this questioning spirit to the phenomenology of religion and the study of African religions has relevantly worked well with intepretivism.

4.5 Purposive Sampling

This study adopted a purposive sampling frame. In purposive sampling one sees sampling as a series of strategic choices about with whom, where, and how one does one's research. So, participants were selected to serve a specific purpose of finding the meaning of ATR in modern society of Zimbabwe. Purposive sampling is virtually synonymous with qualitative research (Palys, 2008:697). Entrenched in this is the notion that the study placed great importance on who a person is and where that person is located within a group (Arcury and Quandt, 1999:129).

The purpose of this sampling plan was to maximize the value of data from the participants for development of meaning by gathering data rich enough to uncover conceptual relationships. Each sampling unit (person, traditional kitchen hut, grave, sacred space) may be distinctive by deliberate selection (e.g., two people who are adherents to ATR: one conservative, the second with a Christian-ATR dual affiliation other one liberal). Or, they may be selected because they share a common characteristic (e.g., sacred practitioners); perhaps one participant's data will help develop a meaning, the second will refine it, and the third will evaluate it. Perhaps only one school is selected because it defies prediction (e.g., the youth shun ATR, yet they consistently follow Chivanhu—why?).

So the nature of my study's objectives persuaded me to use a site-based approach designed to generate a representative or stratified sample for qualitative research in large community-based

studies. It is efficient for use in complex societies and avoids the problems of bias inherent in other sampling plans (Arcury and Quandt, 1999:129).

4.5.1 Locating and Recruiting of Study Participants: Site-Based Procedure

This study looked at the meaning of traditional religion in a modern society of Zimbabwe over a period of three years qualitatively. Objectives of the study were: To examine the functional meaning of African traditional religion in contemporary Zimbabwe, to open up new perspectives for the intellectual meaning of traditional religion in a modern societal set- up of Zimbabwe and to assess an affective postulation on the meaning of African traditional religious practices in Zimbabwe. This study was conducted in three Wards of Buhera rural district in southern part of Zimbabwe. Buhera district is home to about 24,6462 inhabitants. The female population is 132231 while the male population is 114231. There are 57126 households.

The following is total population of the three Wards that were selected for this research's participants. In the context of this study, a Ward is a legally defined political subdivision of a District. I use the pseudonyms Gomo, Rwizi and Churu for the selected three Wards.

Table 1. Total populations by sex in Wards and total number of households

Ward	Males	Females	Totals	Households
Gomo	3829	4244	8073	1774
Rwizi	4792	5604	10396	2313
Churu	4262	5192	9554	2146

A site-based approach was used to identify Wards where data collection through observations and interviews were carried out. The first step in the sampling procedure was to specify the characteristics relevant to sampling. Stipulating these features facilitated in setting the confines of the study sample, restricting it, for example, by demographic characteristics (e.g., gender or age), sociocultural factors (e.g. religious affiliation, ethnicity, education, or area of residence) or occupation characteristics (e.g. religious experts, working, retired, or unemployed). The following characteristic features were used to identify and compile the research sites: proximity and accessibility of the villages, availability of traditional religious experts, vitality of Shona traditions and custom practices. For study participants' recruitment, I considered age, gender, religious affiliation, religious expertise, marital status and employment status to be important

correlates of variation in the meaning of traditional religion in modern society of Zimbabwe. These were the characteristics of interest in compiling the list of sites. Examples of sites included Shona people homesteads, shopping centers, market places, sacred places and sacred objects. To generate the list of sites, I contacted the gatekeepers who were the traditional leaders, specifically village heads. I was conscious to be respectful of and responsive to the guidance and advice of local traditional religious experts, community elders and traditional leaders. This is because they are the figures on the ground who have a strong attachment with the people in communities under study, so they want to maintain this rapport even after completion of the study. I asked the village heads to recommend the names of others in their villages who had direct responsibility for African traditional religious "sites". For example, the village head would direct me to traditional healers, spirit mediums, and headmen. Any of these individuals would refer me to the adherents of traditional religion. That was an application of purposive sampling. As I became more familiar with the community, I enlarged the initial list of sites.

The second step was to generate a list of sites. The sampling design was based on the judgment of the researcher as to who would provide the best information that would make the objectives of the study succeed. I focused on those people well- versed with the required knowledge of African traditional religion and desired to share it (Etikan and Bala, 2017). So, particular settings, persons and events were selected deliberately in order to provide important information that could nott be obtained from other choices (Maxwell, 1996) in (Taherdoost, 2016). When the participants reached sixty- six, there were no new participants being recommended and so I stopped adding any new sample. Through interviews which lasted for approximately one hour, each gatekeeper helped me in site description, detailing the number and characteristics of participants in their villages who were aged between eighteen and eighty five. The characteristics on the form matched those identified initially as important sampling characteristics: gender, economic and social status, marital status, religious affiliation and religious expertise. After a number of these site description forms were completed, I identified three Wards, from each Ward I identified 3 villages, and from each village I identified 4 homesteads over a period of about 5 months from which I recruited my participants. All the identified Wards and villages produced participants.

The third step in the sampling procedure was to estimate the composition of the participants at each site. This was accomplished by contacting the "gatekeeper" for each site who was village

head. I met with the gatekeepers, explained the nature of my study, and asked for help in recruiting study participants from their villages. The gatekeeper provided the number of village members and the proportion with those characteristics that were specified in the first step of the procedure as relevant sampling characteristics. At most homesteads, the village heads introduced me to potential participants. In a few situations when we met villagers at *Mushandira* (Cooperative) garden projects and *Bheria* (burial) meetings, after introductions by the village head, I gave a short presentation on my research study venture and asked for volunteers or approached potential participants. In some sites, a combination of these methods was used.

The fourth step of the procedure was participant recruitment. I decided on a list of sites from which to begin recruiting study participants and approximately how many participants to be recruited from each site. Concerns about final sample size, the distribution of the target population across sites, and the heterogeneity of participants within sites all played a role in these decisions. Two procedures were used to recruit specific individuals from each site. First, the site gatekeeper contacted individual members whom the gatekeeper and I thought would be appropriate for the study (i.e., meet the inclusion criteria and have the ability to complete an in-depth interview) and asked each individual for consent to supply me with the individual's name and physical residential address; then I visited the individual. Second, I addressed a gathering of site members, explained the study, and then approached site members who met the study inclusion criteria to request their participation.

Use of snowball sampling among individual participants to recruit new participants, particularly when it appeared that my site-based approach might not achieve target numbers of some participants was not successful. For example, I asked some elderly participants in one of the Wards to suggest others to become involved in the study. The participants were either hesitant to contact their acquaintances or their acquaintances were hesitant to become involved. These elders had experienced enough discrimination and exploitation to produce a protective attitude toward divulging information on their colleagues. So, I had to re-contact the village heads who expedited the process of recruiting those who were discriminated in villages which were dominated by Christianity.

The fifth and final step of the procedure was accomplished as individuals from sites were recruited. Information in Table 1 shows number of the study participants.

Table 2. Number of study participants

AGE RANGE	GENDER		MARITAL STATUS				EMPLOYMENT STATUS		
	Male	Female	Single	Married	Divorced	Widowed	Employed	Retired	Unemployed
18-25	3	3	3	2	1	0	2	-	4
26-35	4	8	0	6	3	3	3	0	9
36-45	7	3	2	5	1	2	4	0	6
46-55	4	7	0	4	4	3	3	0	8
56-65	4	5	0	5	3	1	4	0	5
66-75	5	5	0	3	2	5	0	6	4
76-85	3	5	0	2	0	6	0	4	4
Total	**66**								

4.5.2 Profile of Participants

The study participants were requested to provide personal details, presented in Appendix B. The rationale behind the request for personal details was that the perception that every participant has on ATR is a product of many factors including her/his age, education, religious background, and employment status (Carlson 1991:473).

The participants spoke Shona and were aged between 20 and 85. All were adults, according to the Legal Age of Majority Act of Zimbabwe (1982), which stipulates that anyone becomes an adult upon attaining 18 years. As such, voluntary consent to participate was made by the participants themselves. In ATR, 'old age' status personifies wisdom and maturity. Religious affiliation plays a role in defining one's conceptualisation of ATR. In terms of religious affiliation, the 66 participants belonged to ATR (see Table 3 below)

Table 3. Religious Affiliation

African Traditional Religion Participants Affiliation

Category	Number of participants
A	25
B	26
C	15
Total	66

All participants had at least some basic primary education. 43 reached Ordinary Level but of these 10 had not obtained the requisite five subjects, including Mathematics and English that would make them eligible for admission into professional training programmes. 14 participants had tertiary education qualifications (1-PhD; 2- Masters Degree; 4-Bachelors' Degree; 3-Diploma in Education; 2- Diploma in Nursing; Certificate in Building; Certificate in Welding). 8 had passed Advanced Level but did not proceed to tertiary education. 11 participants had participants passed at least five Ordinary Level subjects including Mathematics, English and Science. 16 of these only attended primary education and did not proceed to secondary education. 7 participants did not go to school. Participants who finished Advanced Level and did not proceed to tertiary education were incapacitated by scarcity of financial resources. It was the same with those who passed Ordinary Level but did not continue with education due to lack of financial resources. 16 participants were employed, 10 had retired and 40 were unemployed. The unemployed had the biggest number for the following reasons: firstly, it might be because of their limited educational levels. Secondly, it might be that employment is a gendered practice, so some women are denied the opportunity to be formally employed. Thirdly, there are no employment opportunities in Zimbabwe, even tertiary education graduate have no job opportunities.

Based on what is shown on the above table, from 36 homesteads I got the consent of the sixty-six participants whom I recruited and were aged between 18 and 85, their marital status ranged from single, married, divorced and widowed. Selecting both males and females was handy in that ideas about religion are shaped by a person's background and experience which include how gender provides a filter for a participant's understanding of the situation under study. Occupation was another key factor considered, so in terms of their socio-economic status, the participants were employed, unemployed or retired. There is a general view that ATR is more easily embraced by people of a low socio-economic status. But, if someone wants to amass wealth, then ATR is used to change his/her economic fortunes. The number sixty six was determined by the time available to recruit the participants, arrange and gather data and analyse the data. So, it can be said that it was convenience sampling, using a site-based procedure prioritising working with the most accessible participants (Marshall 1996) in Blandford (2013). In line with Rodgers et al's (2011:224) reasoning, my relationship with the participants was "clear and professional".

Table 4. Number of experts recruited from each ward by professional category

Categories of Experts	**Number of Experts in Gomo Ward**	**Number of Experts in Rwizi Ward**	**Number of Experts in Churu Ward**
Traditional leaders	4	4	4
Traditional healers	1	1	1
Midwives	1	2	-
Witch hunter	-	1	1
Lawyer	1	-	-
Kitchen builder	-	-	1
Spirit mediums	1	1	1
A Christian Man/Woman of God	1	-	-
Teacher	-	1	1

Potter	-	1	1
Total	11	11	10

Table 4 presents knowledgeability of the participants I recruited. The ideal target audience for the research had what Bourdieu (1986:105) calls 'cultural competence' to understand the traditional religious narratives in Zimbabwe's rural communities. Cultural competence included the 'forms of skill and knowledge which enabled participants to make sense' of the African traditional religion in their modern rural societies. From the table it can be seen that there were traditional religious experts who consisted of traditional leaders, spirit mediums, traditional healers, traditional midwives, witch hunters and potters. These constituted my key informers during g the study. There was a legal practitioner who helped to clarify the dictates of the current Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment Act of 2013. The teachers contributed very much in how the education sector has accommodated ATR. Then there was a retired academic whom was a university lecturer in ATR and African Culture. His knowledge and research experiences contributed much to this study. It is in the light of such required skills that the participants were selected for the research.When participants were recruited for this study, it was important to take cognisance of their motivations for participation, and this was partly managed by having ethical considerations in mind, and partly incentivising those who participated. There are several advantages that were associated with the use of this sampling procedure. Firstly, it helped me to achieve entry into the research community and gather considerable information about the community that was invaluable in understanding the data from study participants (Arcury and Quandt, 1999:132). It is a method that can be carried out by a solo researcher. By making explicit the steps in the sampling process, a solo researcher can prevent "drift" in sampling over the relatively long period of time involved in recruiting study participants.

4.6 Ethical considerations

Since this research study was dealing with human participants, it was imperative to follow ethical considerations. Thorough consideration was required of ethical issues related to topic reliance and design, recruitment, collection of data and portrayal of participants in the data presentation. Using qualitative methodology and multiple research methods (participant

observation, interviews and document analysis), I explored, over the course of three years, a single purposively selected sample in which I worked with sixty- six participants who, with their consent, are well- versed with traditional life. The consent was given freely or voluntarily. An interpretivist stance placed me, an African traditional religion researcher, centrally in the research where I constructed findings jointly with participants as 'interpreter and gatherer of interpretations' (Stake, 2008:135).

As interviews and observations are considered an intrusion into respondents' private lives; a high standard of ethical considerations should be maintained Cohen *et al* (2007) in Alshenqeeti (2014:44). To participate in this study, participants were adequately informed about the research, comprehended the information and had the power and freedom of choice to allow them to decide whether to participate or decline Arifin (2018:30). So the participants' agreement to participate in this study was obtained only after a thorough explanation of the nature of my study and its research process; implying that ethical issues had to be considered at all stages of the interview and observation process. So participants provided their informed consent before they were interviewed and observed. I provided them with a consent written information sheet which outlined the purpose of the study, what is expected of participants, how their data would be stored and used, and how findings would be reported. The consent documents are kept securely and separately from data gathered from the field.Depending on the level of literacy of the participants, those who could not read and write gave me verbal informed consent. This points to the key issue of respecting privacy and confidentiality in gathering and analyzing data.

All the participants were competent to give consent and understood what was being asked of them. Regarding consent as always provisional (Simons, 2009) in (Haines, 2017), I adopted the rolling, or process consent, model (Dewing, 2007) in (Haines, 2017) of on-going and repeated informed consent. This meant regularly checking and re-checking a continued wish to remain involved as observations and interviews proceeded and the realities of being a participant (what it felt like to be observed; the amount of time involved) became apparent. At funerals, the performances were public, so no formal permissions were required. However, in situations were more detailed, personal information was to be shared publicly, I sought permission from the elders or community leaders. I quoted actual words of participants, but took care that

combinations of incidental details (occupation, location, age, gender and ethnicity) would not inadvertently lead to identification. Where necessary, some details were changed to avoid this. As suggested by Bassey (1999) in (Haines, 2017), I tried to research from a position of respect for all participants, including motivations attributed to what was observed and their portrayal.

During the research anonymity and confidentiality were well-kept by not revealing names and the identities of participants in the data collection, analysis and reporting of the study findings. In this study, I transcribed and analysed the data independently. But it should be pointed out that data analysis was conducted simultaneously with the data collection (Arifin, 2018:30). Data was stored in encrypted devices and password protected. The information storage on the personal laptop, hard disk and memory sticks were protected by using passwords that were only held by me. Hard copies or written materials of the data were kept in cabinet in a locked room to which no other person had access to ensure adherence to legal requirements and ethical guidelines. Both written and electronic data from this study will be stored for five years. However, the interview recordings will be disposed once they are no longer needed (Arifin, 2018:30).I was aware that any unexpected adverse event which was caused by this study should be reported to the Office of the Dean, Faculty of Theology and Religion, University of Free State, P.O.Box 339, Bloemfontein, 9300, South Africa. However, no such event occurred throughout the study period. The results of the study are reported and disseminated through thesis.

4.7 Data Collection Tools

4.7.1 Observations

According to Blandford (2013:18), studies that take place within the context of work, home or other natural setting are sometimes referred to as ‘situated’ or ‘in the wild’. Observational studies most commonly take place ‘in the wild’, where the ‘wild’ may be a workplace, the home, or some other location where the activity of interest takes place. Observation means noting proceedings and recording them as they transpire. I adopted the following two stances by Gold (1958) in Kawulich (2012) which I combined when I was collecting data through observations. I was an *observer who worked as a participant.* In this position, I participated in the religio-social setting under study though I was not a group member of those who adhere to African traditional religion. Group members of my targeted population were aware of the purpose of the research

and became more open to me yet I was not a member of their group. By participating in group activities of traditional religion, I was in a position to be able to understand what the research questions compelled me to observe. Lastly, I was a *complete observer* during the research. By adopting this stance, I was able to observe the setting and group under study without participating, but participants were unaware of being observed. This is typical in situations where I observed public events like conferment of a name to the elder son in full view of the public. I built trust and developed empathy with participants whilst simultaneously making sure I avoided over-empathising with participants. Non-participant observation was both overt and covert. Appropriateness of ordinary observation was realized in the fact that I got information about some of the cultural practices by the Shona people whilst they were unaware they were shedding information. On the other hand, there were instances where being involved in the activity (participant observation) enabled me to better understand what was going on, for example, during funeral ceremonies. In any case, systematically observing my surroundings, paying attention to the activities taking place, and writing down what I would have learnt in the setting was an important piece of the data collection process Gold (1958) in Kawulich (2012).

4.7.2 Steps taken in observation

I took heed of the phases provided by Flick (2009: 223) to plan for my observational study: selection of setting for observation, determining what is to be documented in each observation, descriptive observations to gain an overview of the context, focused observations on the aspects of the context that are of interest, selective observations of central aspects of context, stopping when nothing further is to be learned about the context. According Liu and Maitlis (2010), observation should end when theoretical saturation is reached, which occurs when further observations begin to add little or nothing to researcher's understanding. In situations where I intended to make individual and identified reference to a person's religious behavior, I informed the participant in advance and then the participant freely chose to participate. Public expressions of behavior and unidentified observations did not have the same requirements. The collection of detailed field notes was key to successful non-participant observation. An audio recorder was used to aid capturing raw data. This non-participant observation was used in tandem with interviews. During the study I made sure that the observations did not solely involve watching subjects and objects of study, they also involved asking questions to ensure that my interpretation of what I observed was what really transpired.

4.7.3 Reasons for adopting observations

Observations aided in this study in the following ways: (a). identifying and guiding relationships with my informants, (b). I learnt how people in the study setting interact and how things are organized and prioritized in that setting, (c). I acquired information about what is important to the people in the social setting under study, (d). I became known to participants, and learnt what constitutes appropriate questions, how to ask them, and which questions best helped me to answer the research questions (Schensul, Schensul and LeCompte, 1990). (e). Observations are very suitable in qualitative studies as a data- collecting method, (f). Participant observations were helpful to understand the participants' world by actively engaging in activities in which participants typically were involved. (g). Observations were useful in triangulating data, that is, verifying the findings derived from one source of data with those from another source or another method of collecting data. I used observations to verify what I coaxed from participants in interviews. (h). Observations further helped me learn what was important to the participants. They helped to determine how much time was spent on activities, to verify nonverbal expressions of feelings, and determine who interacted with whom (Schmuck, 1997) in Kawulich (2012). Lastly, through observations, I learnt about activities that participants had difficulties talking about in interviews, because the topics are considered sensitive for participants to discuss (Marshall and Rossman, 1995).

4.7.4 Strengths of observations

Observations enable the researcher to access those aspects of a social setting that may not be visible to the general public. The researcher is provided with rich, detailed descriptions of the social setting in his/her field notes. There is also an opportunity to view unscheduled events, improve interpretation, and develop new questions to be asked of informants (DeMunck and Sobo, 1998) in Kawulich (2012).

Weaknesses of observations

However, there were some limitations associated with this data collection tool. Firstly, was the observer effect; where my presence may have influenced the participants' actions. Nonetheless, as time progressed the observer effect reduced and participants were free to participate in their traditional life activities. Secondly, the objectivity of the observer; here I took steps to ensure systematic and rigorous approaches to sampling, field notes, and data collection to increase transparency. The third concerned selectivity: The observation process could not capture everything. However, this was addressed by observing as many different circumstances as was possible so as to have a good mastery of the situation under study. The fourth issue had to do ethical concerns: Should my voice be viewed with greater authority than those of the participants? This was addressed by drawing on participant accounts, as well as that of mine.

4.7.5 Writing field notes

During the field work, I described the setting where the observations are made and recorded what I saw, paying attention to those aspects of the social setting that provided information related to my topic. This included various activities and interactions that occurred in the indigenous Shona home setting, for example, at ritual performances, during funerals and at traditional court sessions. The information I was concerned with during the observations included 'what' happened, 'when', for 'how' long, and with 'whom' or by' whom'? Of note, were participants' nonverbal behaviors as well. I paid close attention to conversations between participants, recording as much of the conversations as I could. A good example was when I attended *kuroora guva* rites. I noticed who spoke to whom, where the pauses were in the conversation, the degree to which participants touched each other, and how close participants stood to each other. Further, I took notice of what happened in the social setting that I did not expect, as well as what did not happen that I expected to see (Merriam, 1998).

4.8 Interviews

In the field of religion studies, the usefulness of interviews has long been recognised. According to Schostak (2006:54), an interview is an extendable conversation between partners that aims at having 'in-depth information' about a certain topic or subject, and through which a phenomenon could be interpreted in terms of the meanings interviews bring to it. So, as qualitative researchers tend to provide detailed descriptions of individuals and events in their natural settings,

interviewing has usually been thought of as a key factor in research design (Weiss, 1994) in (Alshenqeeti, 2014:39). They enabled face- to- face discussions with participants of this study. In some situations the interviews were preceded by observations. In a similar vein, as interviews are interactive, they pressed for complete, clear answers and probed emerging topics. Hence, interviewing helped to broaden the scope of understanding the meaning of ATR in modern society, as it is a more naturalistic and less structured data collection tool (Alshenqeeti, 2014:40).

4.8.1 Semi-Structured Interviews

In my research, I used the semi-structured interview which is a more flexible version of the structured interview as "it allowed depth to be achieved by providing the opportunity on the part of the interviewer to probe and expand the interviewee's responses" (Rubin and Rubin, 2008:88). I developed and used an interview guide which involved loosely planned open-ended questions in relation to religious narratives as a whole, with special focus on the Shona traditional religion. The guide helped in covering all relevant areas (i.e. research questions). When I asked open questions such as "what do think about changes in African Traditional Religion in modern times?", I could elicit a huge amount of endless responses. This created a good platform for coaxing a variety of ideas and feelings the respondents had. Open questions enabled participants to think and talk for a longer time, expressing their views more freely. However, because I was using a guide, it "allowed for in-depth probing while permitting interviewer and myself to keep the interview within the parameters traced out by the aim of the study" (Alshenqeeti 2014:39). After transcribing I had to read everything, followed by categorization of the interviewees' responses. In the chapter of data presentation some of the participants' views were reported in their diversity and then supported by general statements which I made on the diversity of the views. But, I did not present everything I got from my participants, so I had to pick out particular responses that dovetailed with my theme of study. Interviews in this study were best suited for understanding the Shona people's traditional religious and cultural perceptions and experiences. During interviews, I took notes of what came out of the discussions. I also recorded the interviews using a tape recorder. Using a tape recorder proved to be accurate but it was very time- consuming, especially in transcribing.

Though I followed the guide, I was also flexible to follow topical trajectories in the conversation that strayed from the guide when I felt this was appropriate. For analytical purposes, the questions were designed bearing in mind the characteristics of my target population such as age, gender, marital status, occupation, education, physical location, religious and political affiliation. I acknowledged Blandford's (2013:21) six stages when I carried out my interviews:

1. Arrival, my first meeting with the interviewee had a crucial effect on the success of the interview, it was important to put participants at their ease.
2. Introducing the research ensured that the participant became aware of the purpose of the interview held, and the participant understood that they had the right to withdraw.
3. Beginning the interview, the early stages were about giving the interviewee confidence and gathering background facts to contextualize the rest of the interview.
4. During the interview, the body of the interview was shaped by the themes of interest for the research. Participants thought in in a focused way about topics that they did not normally consider in such depth in their everyday lives.
5. Ending the interview, there was need to signal the end so that the participant could prepare for it and ensure there were no loose ends (Legard et al 2003:143).
6. Obviously, the answer to this is based on the research questions, sources available, and amount of data needed. Furthermore, Talmy (2010) stresses that interviewees should be given a chance at the end of the interview, to bring up questions or ask questions. Additionally, researchers should, at this point, re-express their gratitude to the interviewees and discuss ways of future contact. After the interview, I thanked my participants for taking part in the interviews, and told them what would happen next with data.

Legard et al (2003:143) emphasise the importance of building a relationship, noting that the interviewer is a "research instrument", but also that researchers need a degree of humility, the ability to be recipients of the participant's wisdom without needing to compete by demonstrating their own. Some of the responses from the semi-structured interview questions augmented the study by exposing issues which compelled the researcher to do further cross-examination. In line with ethical principles, I sought permission to record the interviews as well as taking down notes of responses that were given by interviewees. The tape- recording device was very useful in helping to obtain the accurate responses provided by the subjects. The tape- recording also

helped in the preservation of the data and facilitated cross-checking of most important information. In addition to the tape-recording, hand written notes were taken to augment the tape-recoding which also helped to ensure the exact information provided by the informants were gathered. In order to ensure the precise opinions expressed by the participants were obtained, I relied on the tape-recordings and the hand written notes in transcribing the data. Each interview section took at least thirty minutes to unravel the investigated phenomenon. Apart from copies of the consent forms and the semi structured questions guide, all research materials including the recorded gadgets were securely kept. I uploaded the raw data on my computer and secured it with a password. I personally did all the transcriptions to make sure that the views articulated by the participants are properly accounted for in the analysis. By the time I finished my field work, I had amassed voluminous material made up of interview transcripts and notes taken during the observation process which needed organization for understanding of the data to be made. Coding was resorted to in order to organize the data into meaningful patterns.

4.8.2 Strengths of interviews

The value of the interviewing method in this study was that it built a holistic picture, analysed words, reported detailed views of informants and enabled interviewees to "speak in their own voice and express their own thoughts and feelings" (Berg, 2007:96) in (Alshenqeeti, 2014:39). So, it offered me the opportunity to uncover information that was "probably not accessible using observations" (ibid). Mutual understanding during interviews is ensured because questions which were not well understood by the interviewees were rephrased or simplified. As a result, more appropriate answers and, subsequently more accurate data was extracted. Several times, I listened to the audio responses of my interviewees to help produce an accurate description of their views on ATR. Then, economically interviews were a cheaper data- gathering tool.

4.8.3 Weaknesses of interviews

Interviewing has its own demerits. There is no doubt the interviewees only gave what they were prepared to reveal about their perceptions of ATR events and opinions. These perceptions, however, might have been subjective and therefore would change over time, according to circumstances. Interviewing, transcribing and coding were time- consuming.

4.9 Data Analysis

The focus remained the participant's attempt to make sense of their experience and the analysis progressed from the particular to the shared and from the descriptive to the interpretative (Smith, Flowers, and Larkin, 2009). In this qualitative analysis, I transcribed tapes of all my interviews. This was necessary because I managed to pick up the detail, including all of those points that I had forgotten. I gave back the transcripts to the interviewees to check that it was what they had said and that they were happy for it to remain unchanged. This helped in ensuring validity of the data and interpretations made by the interviewer. Once I got all my transcripts together, I read and reread the scripts followed by carrying out some form of thematic analysis. This was a systematic way of identifying all the main concepts which arose in the interviews, and then I categorised and developed these into common themes. During this process I was making notes on points of interest. Note- taking included key descriptive comments and phrases or linguistic characteristics (e.g., hesitancy, metaphor, and repetition) as well as more interpretive conceptual comments where I began to ask questions of the text (e.g., what does this description illustrate about the participant's understanding of this phenomenon?). The next stage involved a move away from working directly with the transcripts to working with the initial notes to develop emergent themes.

As a Zimbabwean with a traditional background, I used my life experiences to interpret various facets of the Shona indigenous life. The analysis involved asking critical questions of the texts from participants, such as the following: What is the person trying to achieve here? Is something leaking out here that was not intended? Do I have a sense of something going on here that maybe the participants themselves are less aware of?

Analysis of the data I gathered was supplemented by other sources of information to satisfy the principle of triangulation and increase trust in the validity of the study's conclusions. I analysed and transcribed interviews along with observational field notes and documents authored by authorities in the field of ATR. The purpose of multiple sources of data was corroboration and converging evidence. The data analysis eventually reached saturation, signaling completion of the study when there was a judgment of *diminishing returns* and little was needed for more sampling. This was the point where new data and its sorting only confirmed the categories, themes, and conclusions already reached.

4.10 Summary

The methodological approach adopted in this chapter is a critical and yet cautious one. It was presented in such a way that it depicts a strategy of enquiry which moves from the underlying research paradigm to data collection on meaning of African Traditional Religion in the modern society as a distinctive area of human expression. In this vein, the chapter focused specifically on the application of a qualitative research paradigm. The chapter then also showed the various data collection methods that were utilized by the researcher, including a phenomenological approach which advocated use of observations and interviews. The descriptive phenomenology was further complemented by interpretive analysis of the gathered data.

CHAPTER FIVE

5.0 Data Presentation and Analysis

5.1 Introduction

With some thematic issues in mind, this chapter presents data and analyses the major themes that emerged from the research participants and observations. The chapter also showed how the thematic findings relate to literature in a bid to construct the meaning of ATR among the Shona people of modern Zimbabwe. Analysis of data was done using a qualitative interpretive approach. The analysis was done through recurrent and emergent themes. Recurrent themes were generated from ideas expressed in several stories provided by the participants, while emergent themes were unique perspectives. The study acquired data from participants who were purposefully sampled among residents of Buhera District, Manicaland Province, Zimbabwe. The participants chosen were both males and females who spoke Shona and had knowledge about ATR. In the analysis of data the research assigned numbers as codes to represent participants, with numbers 1-22 being used to identify participants in Category A, numbers 23-44 for participants in Category B and numbers 45-66 for participants in Category C. In this Chapter, mention of specific participants is done using participant number to uphold anonymity. A discussion of findings was done steered by the interview schedule guide (Appendix A). So, the meaning of traditional religion in modern Zimbabwean society results from an interpretive act. The meaning is integral to the understanding that follows from the interpretation.

5.2 ATR and the Shona People of Buhera Thematic Findings

The participants of Shona people of Buhera were asked to articulate their general beliefs about ATR which I already said is also understood as *Chivanhu* in Shona. Specifically, the interview questions were guided by the aim to understand the overarching nature of the meaning participants make of *Chivanhu* in the modern society of Zimbabwe. The thematic findings indicate a dynamic construction of these beliefs and the ways in which cultural tradition and modern developments have influenced conceptualizations of ATR.

The responses were analysed using both this study's theoretical frameworks which are Afrocentrism and Symbolic interactionism. Afrocentrism is a manner of thought and action in which the centrality of African interests, values, and perspectives predominate (Asante, 2003:2).

In this study, this theoretical paradigm places African ideals at the center of any analysis that involves indigenous African people in Zimbabwe's culture, belief systems, symbols, behavior and experiences. Symbolic interactionists study society through the interpretation of objects, events, and behaviors by the members of that society. Human beings are viewed as 'living in a world of meaningful objects which include material things, actions, people, relationships and even symbols. The meanings of these objects are continuously being negotiated and defined, presented to people and dramatically enacted (Schaefer, 1989:36). So, individuals use language and significant symbols in their communication with others.

Within the perspective of these two theoretical underpinnings, responses from participants and observations made during the research were used to analyse the substantive, affective and functionalist meanings of ATR in the modern society of Zimbabwe. A substantive delineation entails describing religion 'in terms of its believed contents.' This includes meanings that refer to 'transcendent entities in the conventional sense' such as God and supernatural beings and things. Affective meanings regard faith, and the emotions that characteristically accompany it as the defining, or essential, features of religion. Lastly, for functional designations, the meanings deal with what religion *does* for a person or society or both.

5.2.1 Affiliation to ATR

In this part, I analysed the responses provided by the participants and observations I made. In the three Wards I studied, there are individuals and families who adhere to ATR. So the first task during the fieldwork was to know how and why the participants became affiliated to *Chivanhu.* Basically, I have found that there are three different categories on the ATR religious affiliation in the Wards I studied which I have labeled Category A, B and C.

5.2.1.1 Category A

On how and why the participants became affiliated to *Chivanhu* various responses were given. One participant (P13) said "*ndakabarirwa muchivanhu, saka takangokura mhuri yese tichiita zvechinyakare"* (I was born of *Chivanhu,* grew up in Chivanhu, so as a family we all practice traditional religion of the past). So, believing in *chivanhu* in this case was done collectively as a family. Response from participant (P4) was that "*ini nditotevedzere tsika dzaiitwa ngemadzibaba edu achiri kurarama, vaiite Chivanhu"* (I follow the traditional life practiced by my departed

fathers when they were still alive, they used to do *Chivanhu*). The key word here is 'following' the traditions, which is more of an obligation on the part of the adherents. Then there was a response from (P17) who claimed that "*ini ndinotendere mune zvevadzimu nokuti ndivo vanondichengeta. Saka upenyu hwangu ndinoita zvekupira varikumhepo* (I believe in my ancestral spirits because they are the ones who guard and protect me. So my whole life I do libations to appease those in the spiritual realm).

Some of the responses had a sense of quest for identity as was espoused in the following reaction from a participant (P1), "*semunhunu mutema uye mwana wevhu, ndinoziva kuti kuna Mwari nevadzimu. Ndivo vandinotendera kana pane zvandinoda nemhuri yangu"* (as a black person, child of the soil, I know that there is God and ancestral spirits together with my family we believe in them. We offer our petitions to them). Two participants (P9 and P6) responded tracing how they became active *Chivanhu* adherents in the following statements respectively saying; "*ndakatokurawo ndichiende kuchurch, asi pandakaroorwa ndakasvika murume wangu uchiite zvechivanhu saka ndozvandave kuita* (I grew up as a Christian, I started practicing *Chivanhu* after marrying my husband), "*ndakatanga kunyatsooita zvechivanhu ndatokura mushure mekunge baba vangu vauya kuhope kuti ndiite zvekurapa sezvo ivo vaive chiremba"* (I started doing *Chivanhu* when I was grown up after my deceased father came to me in a dream compelling me to continue with his traditional healing career).

All the responses served as affirmation of the existence of ATR. When probed further about the nomenclature of their religion, their responses confirmed the idea that the synonym for ATR is *Chivanhu*. However, some respondents professed ignorance about adhering to ATR, rather for them the proper term is *Chivanhu*. But what the respondents aired was a substantive meaning of ATR, for there is inclusion of meanings that refer to 'transcendent entities in the conventional sense' such as God and supernatural beings and things. In this context, the believed contents are Mwari (The Shona Supreme Being) and *vadzimu* (ancestral spirits). In Shona indigenous cosmology, Mwari (God) and *vadzimu* (ancestors) are regarded as the *causal nexus* (centrality) of Shona humanity and well-being in Zimbabwe (Maposa and Humbe, 2012). This cements what Platvoet in Thorpe (1996: 52) says: 'Religion is a process of communication by means of the exchange of messages between a human being or a group of human beings and one or more of the meta-empirical beings whom they believe to exist and to affect their lives...". From this articulation, ATR in modern society of Zimbabwe is therefore a means where the indigenous

people place their lives concerning those areas beyond their control. In African worldview, particularly among the Shona, the belief orientation is part of existence, and to exist is to be religious. What is discerned here in constructing the meaning of ATR is a deep religiosity of the indigenous Shona people. Their reason for belief in *Mwari* (Supreme Being) and *vadzimu* (ancestral spirits) culminates into a feeling of an irresistible religious imperative.

In *Chivanhu,* there are also conservatives such as the above respondents who find churches stifling. Many go as far as viewing churches as the major enemy of authentic *Chivanhu*. They strongly believe that people have *Mwari* and *vadzimu* with them always, so churches are not really necessary. In this group of participants, there is total denunciation of "Christianity and other modern forces change" (Höschele (2007:129). These traditionalists regard Christianity as a hammer that destroys whatever is opposed to the new culture brought by its representatives. ATR is branded "satanic" or "barbaric", so it should be rejected (ibid). Rejection of African tradition constitutes one way of "modernization," an option for a "modern culture" which was conceptualized as diametrically opposed to the culture of the past. In the light of such a threat and antagonism, the indigenous Shona people view *Chivanhu* as an agent of African traditional religious and cultural preservation. In their cosmology, *Chivanhu* is either regarded as *superior* to "modern culture" and therefore deemed as worthy of being defended or as *more appropriate* to the Shona people and therefore a candidate for protection (Höschele, 2007:132).

5.2.1.1 Category B

In this category, respondents admitted that they have a dual religious affiliation. This is a group of people which believes that ATR exists side by side with other religious traditions like Christianity. One participant (P26) confirmed that "*ndinotenda munezve chikristu nechivanhu*" meaning he believed in both Christianity and *Chivanhu.* It is what is known as Christianity and African culture. Another participant (P33) said "*hongu ndinoenda kuchurch asi pane zvisingakwanisi kupedzwa nechechi saka ndoenda kuchivanhu kuti zvigadzirisike*" (while I go to church, its power is limited, so I go to *Chivanhu* to have my problem solved). A certain respondent (24) declared saying *"handizofi ndakarasa vadzimu vangu nekuti ndoenda kuchechi. Makuva ndinotorova uye doro ndinomwa"* (though I go to church, I will never abandon my ancestral spirits, I participate in bringing- back ceremonies and I also consume alcohol). The

fourth respondent (P38) on this issue revealed that before he goes to church or he embarks on a journey, he performs some entreaty rituals.

In Buheran contemporary communities, religious affiliation is not a mutually exclusive affair. These participants have a dual religious identity: at once a traditional religion adherent and a Christian adherent. They are double- legged. Being double- legged is testimony of the flexibility of ATR and its adherents in embracing cultural change, modernity and new ideologies. This is supported by Höschele (2007:127) saying, "The Christianization of whole African societies in the 20th century is not only one of the major shifts in the history of religions, it also constitutes a phenomenon of cultural change that deserves a thorough analysis in its own right". On the African side, many African Instituted Churches (AICs) are to be counted as representatives of "African traditional religion and culture" protection. They may be viewed as results of attempts at protecting tradition in periods of overwhelming cultural change (Höschele, 2007:132). These AICs use symbolic objects, adopt taboos, tolerate polygamy, use indigenous names in their type of worship. Thus, they may be considered a religious mode of rejecting modernity and shielding tradition. So, use of terms such as; Africanisation of Christianity, adoption, absorption, enculturation, acculturation and incorporation fit into the binary religious affiliation. In this context, when fashioning the meaning of ATR, the indigenous Shona people often found themselves to be citizens of two worlds; that is, traditional life with its religious values on the one side and Christianity with its western realities. Being representatives of a new way of life and yet members of the old world, they have the unique ability to buffer the impact of societal changes and to adapt them carefully according to their own needs. By embracing Christianity, these participants showed that modernity was not rejected as such, but its elements were carefully screened (Höschele, 2007:133).

In Buhera and Zimbabwe at large, religious pluralism is not merely tolerated, but it is a fundamental feature of the Zimbabwean religious environment. The Shona people in Buhera once a week observe a *chisi* day (a holy day). But they also do their family rituals and celebrations on days set aside by the state calendar whether they are secular days like (Independence Day (18 April) Heroes and Defence Forces Days (11-12 August) or Christian holidays like Easter and Christmas (25 December). The idea of adopting these Christian and state secular days for ritual celebrations is that these are the days when family members who are

staying in faraway places travel and meet in their rural homes. In Zimbabwe, *kurova guva* (bringing back) ceremonies are now commonly done on Heroes and Defence Forces Days (11-12 August) yearly. These two days have become adopted as traditional religious holidays with August being now regarded as a 'month of graves'. It is dry and conducive to conduct rituals associated with graves. But the tempo to perform these rituals is set by the state which has reserved a day in this month to commemorate the country's fallen heroes whose blood brought independence to this country. However, when it comes to work, people do not rest on these days unless they coincide with *chisi* days. Surprisingly, besides just visiting the National Shrine in Harare and Provincial Heroes Acres, commemoration proceedings of the Heroes Day lack a traditional religious complexion. Rather, it is a day which is begun by a Christian prayer followed by the President's national address. Commemorating fallen heroes in modern Zimbabwe has become a tradition which is in tandem with *Chivanhu*. In this domestic co-existence of Christian and traditional burial rites, participants who were asked about their experiences of Heroes Day celebrations, framed their participation not in terms of beliefs or religious devotion, but instead talked about their respect for traditions, social connections and obligations. The state's approach here in such national traditional ceremonies has the resultant effect of conjuring discord thereby fanning irreconcilable paradoxical situations due to the state's prioritization of a single religion (Christianity) in an environment of abundant religious institutions. But, the meaning of African traditional religion can be learnt by examining what remains constant and what changes over time, what it is thought necessary to maintain in a new situation, and what can be compromised upon. Continuity is often stressed or implied by an appeal to 'tradition', but tradition is not the unambiguous edifice it is frequently made to appear, and is not constant. Indeed, it can be repeatedly asked: what tradition, whose tradition, when and where was this tradition established? When reflecting on these questions, one has to consider the complementary 'division of religion' between ATR and Christianity.

5.2.1.2 Category C

On their religious affiliation, participants in this category solidly declared using these words: *ini handinamati* (I do not pray) or *ndakamira kunamata* (I have stopped praying). They were very autonomous in their religious dispositions. But, what persuaded me to put these respondents in

this group is their sympathy with ATR, being known for attending some functions which are inclined towards ATR. One male participant (P46) candidly responded saying:

> "Some of the people in our generation have never gone to church, then some went but have stopped going from the moment they became independent. They have married and some of them spend most of their time working as well as drinking beer. But their worldview seems to have an inclination towards traditional religion, for a large number acknowledge the existence *Mwari* and their ancestors, *'sic"*".

From the above findings, it can be said that the impact of Christianity in the lives of many Zimbabweans has lasting impressions. These responses have some Christian connotations because in *Chivanhu* there is no use of expressions like *handinamati* (I do not pray). *Chivanhu* does not have an equivalent word for prayer. The implication is that the religiosity of a person is measured by praying or at least going to church. It sounded as if those who do not go to church are irreligious, a confirmation of what was put across by evolutionary anthropologists on their initial encounter with Africans in Africa. But, a deep surgery of these people's religiosity shows that they had stopped going to church to have a more profound immersion in *Chivanhu.* The question then which arises is; how does one make sense of people who self-identify as non-religious and yet are also recorded as believing in their ancestors? I found the idea of the term unchurch used by Robert (2001:3) as being contextually relevant. So, the study labeled these people as the unchurched group. For Robert it is an unchurched institution which does not deserve any meaningful status in a contemporary world. In this study, the complexity of this group is grounded on the fact that the people, especially the young generation, has adopted the modernity brought by Christianity yet they do not go to church, they have also acknowledged the existence of *Chivanhu* yet they are not active participants of it. So, they are not Christians, but their relationship with traditional religion is ambiguous.

The above is reinforced by what I observed during the research. The group includes those who at one point belonged to a church but have completely dissociated themselves from Christianity. Some of them have Christian names and Christian amulets tied around their wrists, waists and necks but they remain unchurched. They got these names and amulets from their parents or guardians when they were still young. They have grown up and do not want to be counted among

the churched, they no longer believe in the church's teachings. But, they continue to have such marginal connection with a church (through names, amulets etc) due to their family background or out of concern for their social standing. So, in the modern world there is impartial adoption of both the ATR and Christianity. An eclectic approach to tradition and modernity is chosen. The largest group of the unchurched, then, is concerned with spiritual issues but choose to pursue them outside the context of the church.

Given this scenario, sometimes it is difficult to openly identify adherents of traditional religion, for to be unchurched is synonymous to traditionalism yet it is not always the case. Each time the issue of affiliation was raised, the respondents gave their views making reference to Christianity instead of just confining themselves to ATR as a unique religious entity. Thus, when looking at the meaning of traditional religion in modern Zimbabwe, one is not compelled to pay too much attention to religious membership as an indicator of religion. This is because religious affiliation in Zimbabwe is a separate issue from holding various supernatural beliefs and that traditional community beliefs are not taken into consideration by the official statistics on membership. But, what is interesting is that the demarcation of religions is not well depicted when it comes to the Shona people's places of abode.

This category really depicts the complex nature of ATR in Zimbabwe. This is the dominant view coming from Christians that anyone who has stopped going to church becomes an adherent of ATR. Only two religious traditions dominate their worldview. If one is not a Christian, then he is a traditionalist. Yet, there is another position; that of not being explicitly aligned to any religious traditions. Then how valid is the dominant view of treating Africans as "notoriously religious" which has become now a classical niche by John S. Mbiti (1969:4). Since they have sympathy with ATR they can be appropriately regarded as nominal traditionalists who want to be independent religiously. He/she had been suffocated by Christian belief systems, thus stopping going to church makes him/her an independent religious person. The idea of independence comes to exonerate the person from being involved in various religious expectations. For example, ATR has its own demands which enhance an adherent or a practitioner's religious standing which include: brewing beer, sprinkling snuff, libations, wearing traditional religion regalia and anything which can be regarded as traditional religion identity marker.

In line with the objectives of this study, the responses from participants of the above three categories reflect a substantivist theoretical understanding of the meaning of ATR or Chivanhu. Specifically categories A and B are explicit in that they are in *Chivanhu* because of its "believed content". According to van Gaalen (2014:3), this includes meanings that refer to 'transcendent entities in the conventional sense' such as God and supernatural beings and things. In this substantive approach to religion, views of the respondents were clear in explaining their affiliation to *Chivanhu* basing their views on the content and "essence" that characterise *Chivanhu*. Though category C was not explicit, but implicitly it is because of the content or essence of *Chivanhu* that these indigenous Shona people hang on to it and believe in it. Category C persuades me to argue that when searching for the meaning of religion in an African traditional worldview, there are no atheists.

5.2 Significance of *Chivanhu* for the modern Shona people

During the research, what emerged were views on why these three groups of adherents want to be associated with ATR. The participants maintained that a better understanding of the meaning of ATR is made when attention is paid to the role played by *Chivanhu* in the life of the indigenous Shona people. Below are some of the representatives' opinions on the good depiction of *Chivanhu.* One participant (P20) responded saying *"Chivanhu* is good for our lives as indigenous people, to the contemporary outside world; it defines who we are as Zimbabweans". This is supported by (Nhemachena, 2017) when he says that *Chivanhu* is the term from which the vernacular word *vanhu* (people) originates. Correspondingly, *Chivanhu* denotes a way of life of the Shona people, which is *tsika nemagariro.* In this way of life, the indigenous Shona people believe in a spiritual world which comprises the Supreme Being (Mwari) and ancestral spirits as well as some cultural values which include the societal rules and norms an individual is expected to follow. Participant (P52) elaborates further the significant nature of *Chivanhu* by saying ways of engagement and of thought in Shona communities are enshrined in what is called *hunhu/unhu* (humanness). She went on to emphasise that *unhu* is the source of distinctive virtues, patience, hospitality, loyalty, respect, conviviality, sociality, endurance, sympathy and munificence. So, this *hunhu/unhu* has been understood as the benchmark of the spiritual content of one's personality or the moral and ethical aspects which if one is lacking he/she is labeled *haana hunhu* (they do not have which marks a person).

These responses came from participants drawn from the three different categories. Respondents viewed ATR positively, for it inculcates what a modern religious society regards as a preferred cultured worldview. Its injunctions have positively impacted on Zimbabweans in these modern times. It discourages prevalence of vices through instigations of consequences which have a lasting effect on offenders' lives. Participant (65) said *Chivanhu* is against murder, adultery, incest and theft. Breaking these rules has serious consequences. (P36) thought that *"Chivanhu* is known for providing home-made solutions to all kinds of problems bedeviling indigenous people". Participants agreed that *Chivanhu* prescribes rituals which help to restore normalcy. For example, a murderer should pay retribution and incest is dealt with when it is ritually cleansed by a white beast known as *mombe yecheka ukama* (a beast of cutting relationship). The question is why do the participants perceive *Chivanhu* this way? The reason is largely down to the belief that the modern society of Zimbabwe needs religion. The society benefits from its people's collective traditional religious beliefs. The views given by the participants show a functional understanding of *Chivanhu*. In this functional theoretical meaning, *Chivanhu* has rituals that provide answers to existential problems. Psychologically, the indigenous people are afraid of these punishments so they avoid breaking the social rules. In a way, the functional meaning given to *Chivanhu* is based on the role it plays in the mental and emotional lives of believers while sociologically the meaning of *Chivanhu* is centered on the way it influences adherents' communities in the modern society. For Africans, *Chivanhu* is an important yardstick for the interpretation of their traditional life that embraces the world beyond, the concept of Mwari and ancestral spirits, relationship with these transcendental beings and fellow human beings in the modern society. This is well expressed by Onwumere (2005:14) when he says that the African's view of reality does not only have vertical, but also horizontal dimensions. Onwumere contends that the religious ideas and life of the African are not oriented in the Platonic world of ideas (the world of idealism), but have concrete consequences in the life in the society: how one fulfills his/her religious obligations, sacrificial offerings to god; one's relationship with fellow human beings, and the observance of the moral norms. Therefore, one can surmise that African Traditional Religion is not primarily for the individual, but for the community of which one is an integral part.

5.3 A Shona traditional communal set up in the morden world

This section presents the observations made during the research and responses of interviewees. It explores the principles, fundamentals and features of African Traditional Religion's meaning in contemporary Zimbabwean society. Basically, the the principle, fundamentals and features of ATR will be reflected focusing on the traditional kitchen hut, *kuroora guva* (paying brideprice for a deceased wife) and witchcraft activities. To be more specific, the interview questions and observations made were determined to consider whether, and in what ways, African Traditional Religion is found in the very fabric of the Shona people's organisational locality. Whilst it is self-evident that traditional religion resides in various "spiritual" beliefs and practices, it was not clear how the traditional religion illumines a Shona homestead *(musha)*. Using Afrocentric and Symbolic Interactionist theoretical perspectives, analysis was done considering how the functionalist meaning of *musha* serves both as space and place for Shona traditional religion in rural communities. This research understands "space" and "place" following Christian Norberg-Schulz (1980:32), an architectural theorist and historian, who posits that spatial qualities of the natural environment are determined by the variations in its surface relief – how the landscape extends, depending on the physical configuration of the ground – and that space embraces both how a building relates to its surroundings and the building's interior plan. In a modern set up, ATR's meaning is also associated with places which have a distinct character.

Some of the characteristic details of the Shona's sense of owning space where provided by participant (P22):

> "In contemporary Zimbabwe, the Shona have a sense of owning space especially the idea of possessing a *musha* and land for farming. It is also on this land that they keep domestic animals. Here in Buhera, this is a homestead where a man, his wife (wives) and their children reside. The *musha* which is man-made is a source of traditional religious 'space'".

From the findings, a "man-made place" gathers meaning from the owners who are in *Chivanhu.* Describing how the ownership of *musha* starts, participant (P43) said that an adult married man is allocated land by his village head or father where he establishes his *musha* or homestead. Usually, the identified place for the residential stand is marked by driving a *hoko*, that is, a wooden peg into the ground. The other piece of the *hoko* is left visible to anyone who passes

through the newly allocated residential stand. During the discussions with my participants, they said when communicating, the place is acknowledged as 'someone's *hoko*', symbolically laying claims of ownership of the stand. What would be left is for the owner to develop and defend it. According to Mudenge (2011:9), the smallest social unit and production unit throughout the period of known Shona history seems to have been the nuclear family or *musha* with dormitory huts. When the owner erects elaborate structures, the general set up of a traditional Shona *musha* comprises some huts that serve diverse commitments. Giving examples, participants explained that the dormitory huts such as *sikiro* is reserved for parents and it is understood to be a bedroom space for procreation. Parents share their *sikiro* with young children, after which they sleep in separate huts which are the bedrooms for boys and girls. A young man (P45) expounded that the name of his accommodation room was called *gota*, which houses the Shona male offspring. He clarified by saying that the name itself suggested that in future he will warm himself with the heat which is provided by the woman he would marrying. Another hut is *nhanga*. It is the residence of the girl- child. According to (P20), from its name, the girl one day would leave her natal family and start her own *musha* with her husband. For the crops, the Shona have a *hozi,* which is the granary where grain and other harvested crops are stored. Lastly, is the kitchen hut. Interviewees echoed the same sentiments as they pointed out that the kitchen is an object of utility. It serves the purpose of family sitting, dining, learning and, at times, family courtroom. Food for the family is prepared and served in the kitchen hut. But one participant (P41) was blunt when she said that a traditional kitchen hut is a religious house. Modern homes of the Shona people have main houses and separate kitchens. I observed that the above- mentioned building structures sit on a circular yard which surrounds all the huts known as *chivanze*. So *musha* is a physical place where a Shona family resides.

Some elders had an affective disposition towards Chivanhu when they emphasised that the established physical *musha* is also understood spiritually. Indigenous African people, the Shona to be more specific, believe that on this earth there is *mhepo*, a powerful evil spirit which brings hardships, sickness, sorrow and death upon people inhabiting the earth. In line with this submission, Kamwendo argues that in order to save societies from anxieties that are experienced from bad luck and malevolent spirits, tradition has designed various protective rites and rituals whose function is to immunise potential victims against evil spirits(Kamwendo 2017:155). Just erecting a homestead and starting to occupy the buildings is not enough, as was posited by (P41).

She explained that "in a *musha*, the family head solicits the service of a traditional specialist to carry a ritual known as *kutsigisa musha* (to strengthen the homestead) in which medical tokens are planted around the homestead to protect it from enemies and ward off evil spirits". Using Idowu's view of categorization of rituals, this is typical of a preventive ritual (Idowu 1994:125). Preventive rituals are either public or private. They are often a precautionary measure to ward off evil or misfortune. They are also performed when there is definite knowledge of an impending disaster. They are meant to appease the spirits of the earth in order that all may be well with the new home that is founded (Idowu 1994:125). From an affective perspective of the meaning of ATR in the modern society, the Shona encounter the sacred world at their homes. The faith of the adherents and their emotions in having their homestead spiritually ritualised characteristically accompany Chivanhu as the defining, or essential, features of this religion (Harrison, 2006:3).

A group of these family homesteads constitute a village. Since prehistoric times, Shona villages have been created from necessity, especially as depicted in their architecture. The architecture expresses the Shona people's way of life, paying particular attention to the practical and spiritual needs, and tastes. This is more particularly associated with the traditional kitchen hut.

5.4 Traditional Kitchen Hut: its architectural design

Contemperaneousness is closely associated with infrastructure like architecture. Focusing on architecture, this section presents and analyses the findings of different interviewees and observations made in different sampled study areas on how man made buildings aid in constructing the meaning of ATR in modern society. Observations included looking at the materials used in the construction of the huts as well as artifacts collected and displayed in them and writing copious notes on them. In examining its architectural design, this study learnt that the traditional kitchen hut contributes towards an affective meaning of ATR in the modern society of Zimbabwe. Through the traditional kitchen hut, an 'experiential-expressive' dimension of ATR in the modern society was interpreted. Construed were also non-informative and non-discursive symbols of the Shona people's inner feelings, attitudes, or existential orientations (Harrison, 2006:3). During the fieldwork, I observed that almost every homestead *(musha)* had a traditional kitchen hut. The following is a description of what I observed to be the common design of Shona traditional kitchen hut.

In Zimbabwe, a traditional kitchen hut, just like in other places in Africa, a kitchen is archetypally a round construction made of straight wood posts of about the same length and thickness (which is on average 200mm thick and 250 cm long). In Buhera the villagers prefer *mopane* poles to any other type of wood because they are strong and resistant to termites. Roofs are assembled with poles about 100mm in diameter with forked top ends which are arranged in a cone form. The bark of roof poles is burnt off to secure them from termites harm. The pointed top ends meet in a center ring, producing inward and outward pressure which holds the roof in a state of compression. The roof is usually thatched using narrow-leaved turpentine *(Cymbopogon excavatus)* grass. The thatching is intricately woven using sisal and the bark of trees. In some situations, the owners of the kitchen hut play more than a double role in constructing and maintaining the kitchen hut. They are the designers, builders, artists and crafts persons. To grasp these roles, a participatory approach opened up new avenues of exploration (Saif-Ul-Haq 1994:61). Walls of the kitchen are mud plastered. Mud walls are constructed out of soil from termite mounds, which has a near cement-like hardness when dry. The finishing step in house building is to spread cow dung mixture over the floor. Because of its fibrous properties, cow dung acts as a sealant that helps keep the premises clean (Saif-Ul-Haq 1994:31). The floor is left absolutely natural, hard and simply smooth when sweeping.

5.4.1 Traditional kitchen hut as religious resource in ATR

In line with participants' responses which emanated from the semi-structured questions on the status of the traditional kitchen hut as a religious resource in the contemporary world of the Shona people, the expression, or idea that was common among research participants was that the traditional kitchen hut is a sacred dwelling which is owned by women. This was well articulated by a male participant (P10) saying: *kubvira kare nakare, zvinotozikanwa kuti pamusha pega pegakitchen ngeyemukadzi.* (Since time immemorial, it is known that a traditional kitchen hut belongs to a woman and it is sacred because of its uses). Another view came from a certain couple (P60 and P61) which underscored that although the kitchen is a result of a man's expertise in terms of its construction, it is solely owned by women and is very sacred in that family rituals are done in the kitchen. The couple concluded by saying *"saka kitchen imba yechivanhu"* meaning the kitchen hut is meant for *Chivanhu*. It was clear from the participants that their familiarity with the everyday religious experiences in the kitchen hut drives them to associate it with sacredness and femininity. From the last response, it could be learnt that a

kitchen's architectural design results from men's expertise. In line with what the participants' views, a modern interpretation of ATR should have a gendered outlook. Just like their male counterparts, women have so much to offer in the vitality of ATR in modern society of Zimbabwe.

Having the traditional kitchen hut as a *Chivanhu* building among the Shona people, it could be noted that *Chivanhu* is a 'lived religion'. The idea of 'lived religions' in (Ramey 2015) was promoted in the 1990s by Robert Orsi and David Hall, among others, who who emphasize everyday practice of 'ordinary' people. This helped in understanding how the indigenous religious life sustained by Shona people's continuing strength is attributed to their attachment to the traditional kitchen huts in contemporary Zimbabwe. In terms of architecture, the problem becomes more pronounced particularly when one takes into cognisance the verve in the current tendency of modern Zimbabwean society to slavishly mimic Western models. This was addressed by taking on board the everyday life experiences of the ordinary people. To avoid neglecting the importance of the experience of common people in Shona villages, I brought myself to their plane of mind and understood *Chivanhu* concepts in their terms. This is the reason why, out of the numerous types of dormitory huts mentioned earlier on, I picked out the traditional kitchen hut as an epitome of Shona traditional religious belief systems.

5.4.2 A cluster of sacred symbols in the modern world: interpreting a traditional kitchen hut

Participants were asked to share what they know about symbolisms associated with the traditional kitchen hut. In the process, the symbolisms were handy in constructing the meaning of ATR. One participant (P21) observed that in the modern world, the traditional kitchen has experienced a number of transformations through the importation of outside concepts, yet certain attitudes deep within the psyche of the people have remained unchanged. The social dimension of the architecture and the user's religious worldview are very important in this regard. The user's worldview in this regard is objectified by some portions of the kitchen hut and its utensils.

One elderly participant (P63) believed that the symbolism of the kitchen hut can be drawn from the idea that in so many ways the building reflects an embodied space. The same idea was put across by (42) who said that: "*denga remba rinofanira kunyatsobuda zvakanaka, harifaniri kutiva, rinofanira kuti twii, kuti kitchen inzi yakanaka kunge denga rabuda zvakanaka"* (roofing

a traditional hut requires artisanal expertise, the cone design should not lie low, it should be upwardly steep, the beauty of a kitchen is measured by the appearance of the roof). He found the roof as the focus of analogy when constructing symbolisms for the kitchen hut. This resonates with what Mary Keller has suggested (writing of George Lakoff) that the body "determines the conditions for the possibility of experience which prefigures the structures of knowledge" (2002:67).

Associating the traditional kitchen hut with a human body illuminates the reality in the existence of ATR since the kitchen is a traditional and sacred house. Anchored in this understanding, Umezinwa, cited by Seda (2000:163) draws a fascinating analogy between the architectural structure of the Shona hut and the female breast. In the analogy, the round and peaked roof of the hut is not an architectural accident, it is an intuitive language, mimesis or transportation of natural growth as exemplified by the breast and womb of a woman. The nipple that is sucked by a new-born baby on the female breast may be compared to the apex or *chiruvi* of the traditional Shona hut.

I found this analogy plausible. The breast is a central matter (materia) in the mammalian evolution of the human species which is a powerfully saturated "cultural imaginary" (Dawson, 1994) in Gripsrud (2018:210). The following women had this to say about the women breast:

(P59) said "A woman's breast is shrouded with sacrality. Being a Shona woman, usually when I am suckling my babies, I do not expose my breasts".

(P58) admitted that it was because of the breast that her infidelity was exposed by saying "In 2018 when I was still married, after giving birth to my first child, the newly- born baby refused to suckle, I had to confess in front of my mother, aunties and sisters that my former boyfriend had fondled my breast while I was pregnant. Soon after the confession the baby started suckling". She wrapped up her response by saying "*Chivanhu chinotyisa*" meaning *Chivanhu* is so terrifying.

The above findings are evidence that, for the Buhera Shona people, *Chivanhu* is an awesome religious tradition. Its meaning lies in the observance of traditions which are expected of individuals by the community. Following taboos helps to restore the broken relationship between the offender and the spiritual world. The act of fondling a pregnant married woman's breast is an

out- of- bounds act which angers the spirits of the fetus in the womb. The milk was dirtied or corrupted as a result of the fondling. So, confession is a rite of purifying spoiled milk. The breast serves to sustain the life of a baby who is an innocent creature which is strongly connected to the ancestral world. Thus, the importance of the breast is articulated by Seda (2000:163) when he says that "at birth the female breast is a person's first source of nourishment". So, in this line of thinking, the spiritual world sets some taboos which are meant to keep such body parts revered because of their roles.

However, an emergent view from the research was that the potency of a woman's breast can be also superficially devastating. None of the young adult participants perceived the breasts from this angle. But, the devastating characteristic feature of the breast was highlighted by elders. This view was hammered by a male participant (P3) who stressed that if a mother is angry with her children, she may get into the kitchen hut. According to him, she takes out her breast and points it to heathen fire place uttering her words of discontentment against her children, and the act brings a curse to the children. The persistence of the breast/kitchen hut motif in participants' responses suggests a symbiotic interplay between Shona cultural forms and African traditional religion. Basing on the information attained during interviews, the breast is marked by paradoxical ambiguity in contemporary Shona society: on the one hand fetishized; on the other, exposed to moral censorship of women's bodies in everyday life. It is a life nourishing organ yet it can also inversely bring misfortunes to a child who offends their mother. Symbolic knowledge about the sacredness of the traditional kitchen hut as an embodied space is sometimes determined by age. From the findings, the Shona elderly in Buhera appeared to be more knowledgeable than the young people.

Using a free-associative, image-led, and phenomenological analysis, it can be said that in a patriarchal society of the Shona, the traditional kitchen hut is closely associated with femininity. The shape of the roof's symbolic feminine representation addresses a gap in this highly gendered trope. Both male and female participants' tacit knowledge of the breast shows that it is a sacred organ. It is a " defended organ" in that embodied experiences may arouse conflict and anxiety due to gendered and sexed investments in the breast as a religio-cultural trope (Gripsrud 2018:210). In the same vein, participant (P44) illuminated that the Shona regard the roof of a kitchen hut as sacred. For him, it is a sphere where magical tokens like impala horns are kept. He

claimed that he had seen the kitchen roofs frequented by witch hunters whenever they carry out their cleansing rituals of a *musha.* He went on to say that "torching the roof of a kitchen hut is an abominable crime which is settled by payment of a fine to the Chief or Headman. In the Rusape area, the offender pays a fine of not less than one herd of cattle".

Given this scenario in the modern society, ATR draws its meaning from man-made huts with a female symbolism. Since the concept of symbolic interaction theory included the interaction between designed environment as physical object and a self as a socio-cultural entity, such a perspective regarding the kitchen as an embodied space seems to better meet the task of researching on the meaning of ATR. Symbolism of the traditional kitchen hut has the function of transmitting knowledge of the meaning of African Traditional Religion. Thus according to Onwumere (2205:46) use of a symbol witnessed a transformation ranging from giving it an essential role – one that deals with reality, to a functional one. In the modern period, a traditional kitchen hut refers to that which symbolises, expresses, represents, reveals and indicates African Traditional Religion.

5.4.3 Sacred spaces associated with the kitchen hut

Through interviews and observations, information which emerged was that in the kitchen hut there are sacred spaces which can illuminate the meaning of ATR in the modern society. So I gathered information on specific spaces and objects which are endowed with sacredness in the kitchen hut. The findings showed that the sacredness of the traditional kitchen hut is actualized in various substantive and functional religious denotations: doorway, fire place, *chikuva* (raised earthen bench), *mutsvairo* (traditional broom), *mugoti* (cooking stick), *hari* (clay pot) and *bonde* (reed mat).

5.4.4 Supplications and libations at the door way

Through interviews and observations, the study discovered that in exploring the meaning of ATR in modern- day society of Zimbabwe, rituals for the Shona begin, control and end all the affairs of life. Responding to the question on the link between supplications and the doorway, (P8) said that:

> "The heart of supplications *(kupira)* in *Chivanhu* is petition. When a Shona family makes supplications, the doorway is chosen as the ideal venue where the audience seat or stand. This place is associated with *Chivanhu.* It is a venue usually co-jointly used with *chikuva* (raised platform in the kitchen hut)".

All participants, despite their differences in age, agreed that when old members of the family die, after about one year, the living relatives perform a ritual called *magadziro.* In this ritual the spirit of the deceased is brought back home. This is also known as bringing back ceremony. In the three Wards I researched on, among other considerations, the bringing back home ritual is performed only to those who were married and had children. The communities are so much moulded by the notion: *wafa wanaka,* meaning the deceased has become good. Based on the participants' responses, considering issues to do with moral uprightness of the deceased is not a priority for the ritual. The same applies to the issue of the cause of the death; during the research I did not see this being implemented practically. The ritual lasts between two to three days. It is important tonote that on the day the spirit of the deceased was brought home, there were beer pots stocked in the kitchen hut and people who were gathered at the door way.

In Rwizi Ward I attended a bringing back ceremony for a deceased man. His son (P57) pointed out that: "If beer is not consumed in the real essence of Chivanhu at the bringing- back functions *the* whole exercise becomes null and void. There is *Chivanhu* in beer." His sentiment was complemented by observations. I observed about five beer pots reserved for different groups of consumers. First, was a beer pot for the libations which was the most revered pot where the main celebrant knelt before it while addressing the spirit of the deceased who was being brought home. Secondly, was the pot of *murandu* (communiqué pot). It served as a token of communication within the ranks of their family hierarchy in partnership with the sacred specialists who were present. Thirdly, was a beer pot reserved for the ritual spirit medium who was the one who gave instructions, guiding people on the proceedings of the ritual. He was wearing a red scapula cloth around his neck. Fourth, was a pot set aside for traditional leaders who were custodians of the land where the deceased was laid to rest. The fifth pot was for the in-laws of the deceased. Sixth, was a pot for *vazukuru* (nephews and nieces) who were very active from the funeral times till the great day of bringing the deceased's spirit home. For the whole period before the bringing- back ceremony, one of them was appointed a caretaker of the

deceased family *(samarinda).* I even saw the *vazukuru* tying one of the big beer pots with a tree bark strap. Then the rest of the participants were given beer which was stored in several undesignated pots in the kitchen. (P57) stressed that if the one presiding over the ritual is a teetotaler, he delegates some senior family member to take over. To confirm (P57)'s remarks, the success of the ritual in bringing back home the spirit of the deceased is determined by the availability of beer. Thus, effectiveness of rituals of such magnitude requires beer.

For the supplications, a wooden plate with some *rapoko* (traditional small grain) in it was used. I observed the celebrant (P47) as the oldest male family member kneeling at the *chikuva* in the kitchen hut where there was the ritual beer pot. Clapping hands, he addressed the spirit by uttering the following words loudly : *Mukoma nhasi wapinde mumusha, tinokugamuchira, chiona mhuri yako iyi yawakasiya, ichengete kubve kumatenda ese nemhepo dzerufu, kune varikuzvikoro ngavapase, pane varikumabasa, vachengetedzei pavanoshanda, ita kuti vanasikana vakaroorwa vagare zvakanaka nevarume vavo* (My brother, today you have come back home, we welcome you, look after your family which you left, protect it from all types of sickness and bad spirits which cause deaths, protect those who are going to school so that they prosper, look after family members who are working so that they are safe at their work places, lastly ensure that our married daughters stay well with their families).

From the above, it is clear that the heart and center of supplications *(kupira)* in *chivanhu* is petition. More often than not, as pointed out by Idowu, the petitions are inclined to earthly prosperity (Idowu, 1994:116). After (P47) ended his incantations, the people gathered clapped hands and women ululated. He then went out of the kitchen hut and poured beer at the door way from the ritual pot. People gathered outside also clapped hands ululating. When he came back into the kitchen, he left the wooden plate with *rapoko* on the *chikuva*, and the contents were emptied by one of the nephews. This was followed by consumption of roasted meat without salt from wooden plates and winnowing baskets. One of the ritual participants (P56) explained to me thus "what (P47) did is what we call *Chivanhu*, and the ritual meat is consumed without salt to avoid weakening the spirit of the deceased person who is brought back home." This was followed by singing and dancing as people rejoiced at the coming back of the deceased man.

Another practice which is common among the Shona is *kugadza zita*, meaning conferment of the deceased's name to his elder son. As was pointed out earlier, after the burial of the deceased, a

muzukuru is appointed *samarinda*. Respondents were very clear on the sex of one to be *samarinda* saying "any sex can serve as *samarinda*". A young participant (P23) said he was taking care of his uncle's family during the deceased's transitional period. He was getting guidance from elders whenever there was an issue to be dealt with at family level.

Maybe this is where the term *samarinda* derives from since *kurindira* is to wait for something coming. But *'sama'* in Manyika dialect also means 'owner', meaning here he/she is owner of the grave *(rinda)*. So, the *muzukuru* is the custodian of the deceased's grave. It sounds figurative but the thrust of his/her job is to superintend the deceased family. I was invited to attend a *kugadza zita* ceremony in Gomo Ward. An elderly female participant (P40) informed me before the ceremony commenced that the appointed person to be *samarinda* provides emotional, moral, and spiritual support to the family left behind by the deceased. Just like in the above- mentioned bringing back ceremony, *rapoko* and millet beer was used to facilitate the name transfer. The pot with *rapoko* beer was the one which was used for the libations. The conferment of the deceased's name was done with two key people involved in the ritual drama sitting on a reed mat. That is, the *muzukuru* (P48) acting as *samarinda* and the elder son (P25) to inherit the deceased's name.

The *muzukuru* (P48) was the first to stand up and address the audience "*vana sekuru nhasi ndirikukuture zita ramakanga makandipa richienda pana sekuru mwana wavo mukuru".* (Uncles, today I handover the name you had given when I was the acting caretaker to the elder son of my deceased uncle). These words were accompanied by some money token so as to spiritually activate the transfer process. Then (P48) left the reed mat but (P25) remained seated. People came in turns welcoming the father incarnate, addressing (P25) in these words *wauya uriwe Mudzi. Chengeta mhuri yako yawakasiya*. ('P25', you are now here, we welcome you, protect your family). The greetings and welcoming messages were made as people gave some tokens to the elder son. After the ritual, the family of the deceased gave the *samarinda* a token of appreciation in form of a cow.

This ritual is very symbolic in the lives of the Shona people such that several meanings can be constructed about the nature of ATR in Zimbabwe. *Kugadza zita* is an assurance to the departed members that they will always be remembered by the living relatives and the community at large in the modern society. The fact that the departed people are remembered by their names is an indication that they are not really dead. Accordingly, Mbiti (1969: 25) found it worthy to coin the

phrase the ‘living dead’. The caption ‘living dead’ represents people who are physically dead but still alive in the memory of those who knew them in their life, as well as being alive in the world of the spirits. So long as the living dead are remembered, they are perceived to dwell in a state of immortality (Maposa and Humbe, 2016:116). The majority of surnames used by the Shona people in the modern world belong to the departed fathers and are inherited through the ritual of name conferment. So the ritual ensures l perpetuation of these names.

The ritual transforms the family into a new status; it becomes a family with a patron figure again. This is how traditional metaphysics expresses itself in the modern Shona society. This personal immortality is externalised in the physical continuation of the individual through procreation. Unless a person has close relatives to remember them when they physically die, then they are nobody and simply vanish from human existence like a flame when it is extinguished (Mbiti, 1969, p. 25) in (Maposa and Humbe, 2016:116). Therefore, it is a duty, religious and ontological, for everyone to get married, and if a man has no children or only daughters, he finds another wife so that through her, children may be born who would survive him and keep him (along with the other living dead of the family) in personal immortality. This means the same name will be now shared by two people, one in the physical world and the other in the spiritual world *(the nyikadzimu)* (Maposa and Humbe, 2016:116).

5.4.5 Fire Place

Participants mentioned the fireplace as one area which was worth exploring. So, both interviews and observations were used to coax information about the significance of fire in the traditional kitchen hut among the Shona people. During the research it could be discerned that as one enters the kitchen, it was easy to notice the open earthen fire place located at the center of the hut. The fireplace is characterized by presence of three stones *(maphwiwa* or *choto)* on which to rest earthenware or cooking utensils. Because of modernity, some families use a steel framed tripod where cooking pots rest when cooking. But, still the steel tripod is known as *mapfwiwa* or *choto.*

Discussing the significance of fire in the kitchen hut with participants, an elderly participant (P49) retorted “one thing which makes the traditional kitchen hut sacredly unique is this fire place because the fire place has *Chivanhu*”. This is well supported by Kriel who argues that it is fire which makes the kitchen hut a ‘fundamental sacred space’; it leads an African into the

profoundest treasures of Shona culture and the most secret rites (Kriel 1989:14). Participant (P39) informed me that important family and personal rituals are successfully carried at the fire place. She went on to say that the fire place provides a bond between a person and his roots. Other women respondents told me that underneath the *choto* is one of the places where a newly born baby's umbilical cord is buried. However, on this practice some differences were noted because some women said the ideal place used to bury the umbilical code of their young ones was the door way. Though there were differences, the essence was that both places have a special way of rendering a spiritual connection between the owner of the buried piece of umbilical cord and the spiritual world. The buried flesh is a foretaste of what will happen to the owner when he/she is dead.

Participants were asked to give their views on women and fire in *Chivanhu.* The information from the informants showed a symbiotic relationship between *Chivanhu* and the woman's kitchen hut. They reasoned that fire is used as the culmination of the apprenticeship that a newly married woman gets from her mother-in-law on the day she is set free to start her own kitchen hut. The following are the views from participants on this apprenticeship of a newly married woman *(muroora)*:

A male participant's (P50) response was that when a newly married woman *(muroora*) joins her husband's family, the norm is that she stays with her *vamwene* (mother-in-law). A female participant (P11) staying with a daughter-in-law in her kitchen hut explained that a daughter-in-law is like someone who is under apprenticeship where she is taught about the particular way of life led by the family of her husband ranging from belief systems, totemism, food and family culture in general.

(P58) acknowledged that her mother-in-law helped her to know more about the personality of her son since she is the one who brought him up. She concluded by saying "depending on the situation, my mother-in-law also shares with me some family secrets."

These responses assert the value or necessity of the apprenticeship. This is because the newly married woman is coming from a different family altogether, which had its own belief systems, customs and practices. It explains why Amatenga-Etogo (2014) describes her as an insider – outsider. So, because of this the *muroora* remains under the tutelage of her mother-in-law till

that time when she is winnowed and establishes her own homestead. This is symbolized by owning her kitchen hut.

I witnessed *kubikiswa* (made to cook) ritual being done in all three Wards. On the day the *muroora* was commissioned to her new kitchen hut, the ritual was marked by kindling a new fire at the new homestead. The aunties fetched fire from the mother-in-law's kitchen. They set the fire on their *muroora'*s open fire place. They also brought cooking utensils, plates and foodstuffs which were all presented to the *muroora*. A peculiar thing in the ritual was that the aunties cooked food which was served to the *muroora.* They informed the *muroora* that she was now ripe to run her own kitchen. Neighbors also came to collect fire from the *muroora*'s fire place.

There are several things that deserve attention in this ritual. The idea of the apprenticeship itself is well captured in Amatenga-Etogo's (2014) concept of a girl who is regarded as an insider-outsider. Upon joining a new family, initiation is required to make her a full member of her marital family. During the initiation period the mentor, who is the mother-in-law's authority, is derived from the idea that the *muroora* is using her *choto* in cooking. The *muroora*'s autonomy is attained when she starts using her own *choto*. Depending on the situation, *choto* can signify initiation of a new wife and the same *choto* can be used to signify her autonomous new life as a married woman. *Choto* signifies communal living among the Shona people as exhibited by neighbours exchanging fire with her. It is *moto* (fire) which binds villagers together.

According to (P16), in *Chivanhu*, *choto* is so central in the life of married woman. In the event that the couple divorces, before the wife vacates the homestead she digs up the *choto* to show that the family unit has been destroyed completely. On death and *choto* participant (P18) explains that if the wife passes on her belongings, including kitchen utensils, are distributed among her relatives, with some being inherited by her children. But *choto* is taken by her natal family a sign that death has struck their daughter who cannot use the *choto* anymore. She emphasised that the *choto* of the deceased cannot be used by an alien, only relatives of the deceased woman can utilise it. The same with the kitchen hut, an alien cannot inherit a deceased woman's kitchen.

Fire (*moto*) is very significant in *Chivanhu.* In some of the Shona cosmogonic myths, fire is linked to the first ancestors. Creation *kusika* was done as a result of generating fire. The kindling of fire with two sticks has some sexual connotations. In marriages where there is no conception,

and also where there is reduction in erectile sexual sensitivity, the Shona say the fire is not flaming up. But this fire is masculine so it is the man who is supposed to be flaming. It is his flame which ignites conception. If this lacks, then the man is viewed as *haana moto,* (he does not have fire) or simply *mumba mavo hamuna moto* (there is no fire in their house). So when a woman becomes pregnant, she is carrying some fire in her womb, she has a strong desire for sex so as to quench the fire inside her body. Fire is a symbol of sex, thus posterity of the man is like fire in family and clan. So fire, potency and lordship are inextricably linked (Kriel 1989:19).

However, *moto* is also associated with death. As was seen earlier on, *moto* is used metaphorically in that when a husband dies the widow is not allowed to have sexual relationships till after the bringing back -ceremony has been conducted. If she does not abstain it is called *kupisa guva* (burning the grave) and has serious consequences.

Though the recurrent view was that a kitchen hut is owned by women, an emergent view during the research was that the traditional kitchen hut is also masculine. Men use it as a sacred place for family and personal ritual purposes. One male participant (P51) had this to say:

> "When a child leaves the rural home to work either in the city, farm or mine and never comes back *(kuchona),* the father has a way of making the child come back home using *choto.* He stands beside the *choto* and takes out his erect penis, points it to the *choto* uttering words of calling his child to come back home where his/her mother awaits his/her return . When this is done, usually the results are realized within a few days".

Participant (P22) confirmed that he performed the above narrated rite for his son (P48) who had gone to Botswana in 2000 to seek for job opportunities and stayed there for about twelve years without communication. In his response (P48) acknowledged the above by saying "I had never thought of coming back home, but one day I just had a serious consideration of going back to Zimbabwe to rejoin my family here in our rural home when I had a vision of my father calling me." My male informants were in agreement with use of reproductive organs in calling back children who had abandoned their parents. They reiterated that a father can simply call the name of his child while holding his testicles in full. The effectiveness of the rite is determined by the child's return. In addition to this, they emphasised the efficacy of the testis though in a different

context saying, the same male organs are also used to perform rituals which suppress vengeance spirits *(kutsipika ngozi).*

5.4.6 Chikuva (earthen flat shelf)

In Chivanhu, *chikuva* is one of most important places in the traditional kitchen hut. Its significance is important in exploring the meaning of ATR in the modern society of Zimbabwe. The following description is generally a common feature of *chikuva (*raised earthen platform bench) from what I observed during the research. Along the wall of the hut directly opposite to the door, is a raised earthen platform bench which is about 2 meters in length with a height of 50 cm. Stressing the sacredness of *chikuva* (P27) said that normally people are not allowed to sit on the *chikuva.* He was quick to reiterate that "*chikuva* is believed to be the abode of the family spirits hence making it the most sacred place in the kitchen hut. It is the altar of the family were family rituals are performed". So basing on this view combined with what I observed from its appearance, it can be said that its raised position symbolizes the sublimity and dignity of the ancestral spirits. Since the ancestors are higher than anyone else, they are honoured at the highest position in the house. Earlier on participants had associated the kitchen with femaleness, yet the nature and function of *chikuva* shows the dominance of men in traditional religious matters as expressed in the following two statements from female participants:

(P52) was apt to say that "usually family rituals are conducted by the husband father or eldest male member for the wife is an alien who cannot address family ancestral spirits. So *chikuva* is an expression of the husband's authority to his family". The same opinion was shared by participant (P29) saying "since there is only one *chikuva* in the kitchen hut it means there is only one husband in the *musha*. That one husband is like is one *chikuva* with so many clay pots on it".

The findings revealed the ambivalence of the meaning and nature of *Chivanhu*. As noted earlier on, both male and female participants concurred that a traditional kitchen huts with its utensils belongs to the women. That helped in bringing out a feminine perception of *Chivanhu* to counter the traditional endorsed masculine nature of *Chivanhu*. However in the above paragraph women who are owners of the kitchen gave a different gendered picture of *Chivanhu.* Using the observable *chikuva,* it is the only male members who have a password to access the housed family ancestral spirits in the *chikuva.* So here a woman is a mere keeper of her marital ancestral

spirits. I am persuaded to bring in a postulation which came from one male participant (P32) during a court session of divorce in Churu Ward, telling a young man divorcing his wife, he said; *"kuramba mwana wemunhu haisi nyore, usatamba nekugara naye makore gumi achikushandira, saka ipapa panotoda muripo"* meaning, it is not easy to divorce someone's daughter, staying with her for ten years is not a joke, so you ought to compensate her. The reading I got from these words was that the compensation is inclusive of the role she played in keeping the family ancestral spirits. She manned the house which resided her marital family's spirits. To appease her spirits, the court ordered the man to pay three cattle beasts. The view of participant (29) in the above paragraph cements the vacillating nature of gendered ownership of the traditional kitchen hut in *Chivanhu.* She used *chikuva* to analogize male dormancy in marriage practices. Maybe this is because she was drawing her perceptions from her polygamous marriage set up. It seems as if the man is the main actor in *Chivanhu* as represented by the supremacy of *chikuva*. The end result is that leaving their natal families, women come to edify their husbands' traditional belief systems and practices. This line of thinking is well articulated by Falana's (2019:134) concept of dominance. She argues that it is a kind of supremacy and authority portrayed by an individual over others. Within the context of marriage and gender studies, dominance here refers to the supremacy of a particular gender, especially the male one over the female gender in marriage.

Clay pots in the kitchen hut are neatly arranged on the *chikuva* one sitting on top of the other, beginning with the largest at the bottom and ending with the smallest ones at the top. One man married to so many wives (Aschwanden 1982:203). *Chikuva* has various traditional religious functions in the family life of the Shona people in the modern society. One participant (P55) informed me that when he once mysteriously fell sick, elder family members placed him on the *chikuva*, and then his father knelt at *there* with a wooden plate containing snuff reciting incantations to the ancestral spirits whilst clapping hands. Though the participant did not clarify why he was placed on *chikuva* during the performance of the ritual, it seems *Chivanhu* is fascinated with the notion of sacred places. It is the sacredness enshrined in the space where *chikuva* occupies which is believed to be having some healing and salvific powers. The presence of ancestral spirits in the *chikuva* was going to act as anti-disease spirits. However, when the same participant responded to the question on the link between the dead and *chikuva* he elucidated that it is where the body is placed whilst waiting for burial. My observation conformed to what he said though in some cases I observed that the corpses were laid on the

floor but making sure that the head was near the *chikuva*. This is done for the reason that the deceased is on a journey to the world of the ancestors, so placing the corpse at *chikuva* is a way of conferring a spiritual status to the dead body before burial. This is buttressed by Kamwendo (2017:155) who explains that; "If one looks closely at the words *chikuva rukuva, huva* and *guva* (grave) there are similarities of word formation meaning and rhyme i.e. *chi-kuva* can be taken to mean a small *guva* (grave)". So, one can safely say that *Chikuva* is a symbol of the grave of the ancestral spirits. All these words derive from *kukuva*, to gather or to assemble. In the grave the remains of the dead person man are lumped together. Both *guva* and *chikuva* places are similar in shape too, they are long and narrow. So, laying a dead body at the *chikuva* is symbolic, it shows that one is already with the spirits/ ancestors. However, not every corpse is placed on the *chikuva*. It a reserved place for married people, meaning at a homestead, it will be the parents only. Children and others are housed there, but not at the *Chikuva* (Kamwendo 2017:155). This means that the soteriological belief system among the Shona people is selective, because *chikuva* is reserved for fathers and mothers.

Aschwanden (1982:204) gives essential information on the historical development of the connection between grave and *chikuva*. He thinks that in the past the dead were buried in caves in the hills, but for the indigenous people lived in places far away from the hills, interment of their dead ones was done in their houses beneath the place of the jars, that is *chikuv*a. In such a case, the house represented the hill, and the *chikuva* stood for the cave (Aschwanden1982:204). Though Aschwanden did not specify the real tribes which were involved in this practice, there is some semblance with what used to happen among the Zezuru people in Mhondoro near Mubaira. There is a Gora Clan which belongs to the Sheep totem with the praise name *Mukuruvambwa.* So, in 2012 a traditional leader, Headman Gora, died and was interred in one of the huts at his residence. The terrain of the area is just plain, there are no hills. Seven years after his demise, the bringing back ceremony has not yet been conducted because the relatives were waiting for the walls of the hut to develop cracks first. It could be observed that the hut where his remains were interred is now a disused structure which is always locked. The grave of Headman Gora is a house.

5.4.7 Reed mat (bonde)

Respondents gave their views on questions related to a reed mat *(bonde)*. It is one of the most important properties in a Shona homestead which respects *Chivanhu*. It was observed that it is spread on the floor to provide comfort for people to on it. It also protects their clothes from contracting dust. A reed mat is also used for bedding purposes both in the rural and urban areas. In some modern houses and shops, especially in towns, it is used as a roof ceiling. But more importantly, reed mats among the Shona in the modern society have a spiritual significance which is shown in the following views:

Describing how a reed mat is used in marriage rituals (P30) said "when the son-in-law comes to pay *roora* (bride wealth) to the parents of his wife, before the official introductions have been made, he sits on a reed mat behind the door. This is the same with a newly married wife, she sits on a reed mat during the traditional wedding ceremony". Then (P21) reflected on the use of reed mats in death and burial rites in the modern society saying:

> "Before commoditisation of the dead, a corpse was buried wrapped in a reed mat. In rural areas the practice is still very common because of scarcity of resources. Though coffins are used to encase the dead bodies, in the kitchen the coffin is placed on a reed mat. The procedure of burying a corpse is that a reed mat is spread in the grave before the coffin is lowered. In a post burial ritual of the conferment of the deceased's name, the ritual is done whilst the elder son is seated on a reed mat".

Perhaps, it is imperative to look at the nature of the reed mat to understand why it is given such spiritual priority in *Chivanhu.* A reed mat is made of reeds which normally grow in rivers. Participant (P51) simplified that reeds are used to ward off evil spirits. For him, they protect people from spiritual harm. This was supported by another male respondent who said the Shona plant reeds at the edges of their home yards to spiritually secure their homes. He added by saying reeds also protect indigenous homesteads from lightning. From the above responses, use of reed mats in death, burial and other rituals is meant to repel evil. For purposes of burying the dead, aside from warding off evil spirits, a reed mat in the grave is believed to symbolise life since it is a plant associated with water. Its potency ensures life after death for the deceased. It is in the

context of the use of a reed mat that I deduced the attributes of the Shona Supreme God (Mwari). It is the mother of the home who spreads the reed mat for children and visitors to use as a seat or bed. This process is called, *kuwarira*. So, the woman becomes *muwariri* because she provides comfort in terms of a seat and a bed. By the same token, Mwari is *muwariri.* He gives life and its comfort provisions. The same mother removes the reed mat after use and folds it. So, she assumes a new name *muwaruri*. The same name *muwaruri* is applicable to the Shona Supreme Being, for he is understood as the one who removes life from humanity.

5.4.8*Mutsvairo* (traditional broom)

In all Shona homesteads I visited during the research, I found a *mutsvairo*. It is a simple domestically -produced hand cleaning apparatus consisting of a bunch of stiffens which range from twigs, palm leaves, grass to sorghum husks. They are bound together either with bark straps, strings or rubber straps. The brooms are divided into two categories which are floor or indoor brooms and yard or outdoor brooms. Indoor brooms are usually made of fine material like grass, so they can specifically be called grass brooms. They are used for scrubbing dirt on the floors, clearing cobwebs and for removing ashes from the fireplace. While others use the fine grass broom for outdoor cleaning, there are brooms designed for hard tasks which are made of twigs and shrubs.

In their cleaning schedule, attention is given first to the outdoor duties. One participant (P9) said that the Shona have an understanding that before sunrise, a woman should be already up sweeping the yard. I observed that on daily basis, it is a norm to sweep the yard in the early hours of a new day, making it the leading chore of the new day. This is confirmed by Andreucci (2017) who argues that from time immemorial, the swishing of brooms in African villages announced the break of a new dawn. For Andreucci, it is one of the simplest rites of our Zimbabwean belief system that we often take for granted. In the social politics of the *muroora*, her affiliation with the broom was an integral part of the Shona woman's protocol; a symbol of her existence, responsibility, co-operation and desirability; a trait which lingers in the culture, despite all Western feminist propaganda (Andreucci, 2017).

Answering questions on the symbolism of *mutsvairo* in modern society of Zimbabwe, (P33) retorts that "*mutsvairo* is an integral part of Shona heritage. It is when using *mutsvairo* that

something about African womanhood is again deciphered". Her view was also echoed by Andreucci who thinks that in the Shona worldview, the broom is an indication of a well-brought up woman *(mukadzi ane hunhu)* which is the cornerstone of our cultural etiquette (Andreucci 2017). In the villages I visited, an indigenous Shona woman is almost always clad in a wraparound and head wrap. Participant (P62) pointed out that this has been presumed to be the general attire in *Chivanhu*, appreciated in most Zimbabwean rural communities for every woman. He went on to say that besides serving as protective clothing against the dust erupting from the sweeping, it transmits an image of a dignified woman, who is respectful of the ancestral spirits who have been on night duty guarding the homestead. So, physical environmental and spiritual cleanliness marks the beginning of every new day.

Participants responded that a *mutsvairo* was endowed with some religious symbolisms. All responses came from women. One woman (P64) said "While physically, the women will be removing dirt on the yard, they will be symbolically sweeping away the evil of the night". So, in this line of thinking in a Shona homestead, it is a woman is who is the first person to partake a cleansing ritual of the homestead before the rest of the family members get into contact with the home yard. Given this scenario, the impression that one gets is that women are the leading figures in this morning homestead cleansing ritual. Participant (12) described how she uses a *mutsvairo* in performing rituals saying "I use brooms to sprinkle, douse and symbolically remove malevolent spirits which visit homesteads or attach themselves to various movable properties in the home. This process is known as *'kupumha mweya yetsvina'*." When removal of malevolent spirits is done at a family level, for better results, participant (P52) suggested that the *mutsvairo* should be handled by a *muroora* (daughter-in-law) since she is still new to the spiritual entanglements of her husband's family.

In their religious belief systems and practices, the Shona have mutsvairo as one of *Chivanhu* paraphernalia, whether it is used by sacred practitioners of just ordinary people. In this modern society, *mutsvairo* is used in the whole life of a Shona person from birth to death. During the research, a special focus was made on *mutsvairo*'s use in death rituals. The information provided by the participants was that when a family member passes on, the relatives sweep out the dirty in the kitchen before rituals of folding the corpse are done. In Andreucci's (2017) view, the

sweeping is done to remove bad spirits which might have been in the house. This implies that sweeping is one of the last rites performed when burying a deceased relative. Both male and female participants agreed in saying that *varoora* (daughters-in-law) sweeps the way to the grave to ensure that the deceased's way to the spiritual world is clean of all evil. After the body is removed from the kitchen, *varoora* sweep the kitchen hut and the dirt on the floor is thrown in the grave and buried together with the corpse. When mourners come back home from burial, they will occupy a ritually clean hut without the defilement of the corpse. So, *mutsvairo* is the archetypal symbol of purity. Then the last thing done at the grave on the day the deceased is buried is that relatives sweep around the new grave using *mutsvairo* made of stems and leaves of *lippia javanica(zumbani)*. Early in the morning, elder members of the family visit the grave in a ritual known as *kumutsa mudzimu* (morning greeting to the spirit of the deceased). They check if there are nocturnal footprints around the grave. They keep on maintaining the grave as sacred house of their dead relative *(imba yemufi)*.

Since *mutsvairo* has already been regarded by participants as a sacred object, there are certain injunctions which are taken cognisance of in its use and handling. The participants responded by pointing out that *mutsvairo* should not spend the whole night outside. Placing the *mutsvairo* indoors during the night ensures security of the family against witches. Participant (8) explained that a witch uses *mutsvairo* to unlock the entrance of his/her targeted victim(s). He declared; "once a *mutsvairo* is used, no sacred practitioner can reverse the witchcraft act". It is a taboo to beat a fellow person using *mutsvairo* as was claimed by participant (P39). She pointed out that failure to observe this prohibition pointed to some serious misfortunes in the life of the one who has been beaten. Another prohibition which came from participant (P60) was that *mutsvairo* should not be shared by neighbors for fear of witchcraft. If the neighbor pulls out a single grass from the *mutsvairo,* it would be used to destroy the family of the *mutsvairo* owners. The above responses are linked to witchery. The Shona people have a strong belief in witchcraft practices. So, they strongly believe in all practices which keep them safe from witches. Earlier on, women's welcome messages to a newly married woman on her traditional wedding ceremony depicted a feminine tendency associated with *mutsvairo*. However, the broom is also thought of as masculine in nature due to its phallic shape and symbolism. A prescription of how it should be

rested when not in use has some semblance to the penis. It should always lean against the interior walls of the kitchen, with the handle resting on the floor.

5.4.9*Mugoti* (cooking stick)

Another kitchen utensil which was studied during the research was a *mugoti* (cooking stick). It is a cooking stick for *sadza* (stiff porridge prepared from mealie meal, sorghum, millet and *rapoko*. It is the staple food of the Shona people). Through interviews and observations, the research found out that like *mutsvairo*, *mugoti* is endowed with some mystical powers. Participant (P14) revealed that *mugoti* has *Chivanhu*,she uses *mugoti* to deal with social problems in marriage, impotency, and unemployment just to mention a few. Her reason for using *mugoti* to deal with these problems was that it has some mystic powers. She reiterated that a bewitched person can be cured either by jumping over a *mugoti* or beaten by a *mugoti*. Another female participant (P58) who also uses *mugoti* responded by saying secret incisions cut by witches can be removed if *mugoti* is dipped into bathing water to be used by the victim. On marital problems, the participant was clear on the instructions she gave to her clients, "When women who have been abandoned by their husbands consult me, I tell them to bring the *mugoti* which they used in cooking *sadza* for their husbands before they left". What this means is that the mystical powers of *mugoti* will aid in bringing back the husband who has gone astray. The Shona belief is that the husband would abandon his family whenever there are witchcraft entanglements.

All respondents were in agreement in mentioning some restrictions over the use of *mugoti*. More importantly, the emphasis from participants was that it should be kept clean always. Once it is left with some *sadza* smeared on it overnight, witches would capitalise on its dirtiness and bewitch the targeted members. They also claimed that goblins feed on the *sadza* left smeared on *mugoti.* So, it becomes difficult to do away with evil spirits affecting a family where *mugoti* is always left unclean. A male participant (P36) underlined that because of its sacredness, it is not easy to find a disused *mugoti* dumped at family rubbish sites.

Aschwanden (1982:187) raises a sexual symbolism of *mugoti.* He argues that it is a phallic symbol which symbolizes the penis of the husband (Aschwanden 1982:187) while cooking pots represents the sexual organs of a woman. Cooking *sadza* has some sexual connotations. The Shona teaching has been always that after sexual intercourse, dirt should be well disposed, for

example improper disposition of condoms can lead to bewitchment. This dovetails with the notion that *mugoti* should always be kept clean after use.

5.4.10 *Hari* (clay pots)

My last kitchen utensil in the research was *hari* (clay pots). Again, a combination of observations and interviews was used to get information about clay pots. I observed that they are round-bottomed utensils made of clay, usually found on *chikuva* in the kitchen hut. In the villages I visited, participants acknowledged that clay pots have some ritual significance. The material used to mould a clay pot is taken from the earth, it is a round object manufactured with circular movements, hardened in the fire and used afterwards for diverse purposes which range from cooking to storage. My study participants emphasised that men are not allowed to be present during the process of hardening the clay pots to pouring of water in a finished newly made clay pot. So, pottery is a gendered enterprise. It is well connected to women in symbolism. It represents a womb. A woman who moulds clay is actually imitating the work of God when he moulded the earth and the first human couple (Kriel 1989:50). A female respondent (P34) opines that pottery provides the Shona with attributes of the Supreme Being, Mwari, who is understood as *Muumbi* (Moulder) of humanity. So, Mwari in this context is said to be possessing female attributes. Understanding human beings as creatures fashioned by Mwari points to the strong link which exists between human beings and the earth. The same idea was put across by Seda (2000:164) who thinks that the Shona people have a strong dependence on the soil for their sustenance in a predominantly agricultural and pastoral economy. As was seen in rituals which were performed at the doorway, a connection is often recognised between the pot and ancestors. So according to Kriel (1989:49), the presence of a deceased ancestor may be symbolised by a beer pot which is actually sometimes addressed as if it were the deceased old one in person.

Responding to wide use of clay pots in the modern society, a young male participant said the use of this traditional utensil in cooking is in decline due to availability of modern durable vessels and containers. Contrary to what he said, information from some women participants as well as observations showed that at almost every household, there are clay pots in the kitchen. Though there are so many types, the following are some of the most common ones in the three Wards I worked with. There is a *pfuko,* used for serving and drinking traditional beer, or the sweet unfermented sweet beer known as *mahewu. Gate* is a large pot with some examples standing as

high as a meter or more, used in the fermentation process of traditional brewing. It is also used for storage of fermented beer grains *(chimera)* (Ellert 2002:52). One of my informants (P49) who is experienced in pottery explained that the *gate* has ulterior functions which have nothing to do with food storage or cooking. She pointed out that this type of clay pot is sometimes used by witches to store witchcraft familiars like snakes.

For cooking of relish, the Shona use *hadyana*. It is a small pot used in the contemporary world when women want to cook the best traditional relish. *Hadyana* has some sexual overtones considering the derivativeness of the term, that is, *kudyanana* (to eat one another) meaning intercourse. One of my young participants described his wife-to-be as a *hadyana yangu.* In this discourse, Aschwanden (1982:191) argues along the same lines by saying that the greatest pleasure for man and wife is to eat one another. The Shona staple food, *sadza,* is cooked in a pot called s*hambakodzi*. The word derives from *kushamba* (to wash). It does not have a neck to enable the cooks to stir the *sadza*. Lastly, is *mbia* which is shaped more like a dish and has no neck. Mostly, it is used to cover these other clay pots as a lead.

5.4.11 *Chivanhu* and abuse in traditional kitchen hut

The functions of the traditional kitchen hut persuaded respondents to view it positively. It promotes a positive meaning of ATR. In fact, they regard it is a source of African soteriology. As has been demonstrated with the analysis of the data, there were subtle differences in views on the efficacy of the traditional kitchen hut, especially when it is used to bring curses or misfortunes to people. This study treats an experience of one respondent as an example of how participants differently view the traditional kitchen hut. What emerged about its utility depicts the oppressive nature of ATR among the Shona people of Zimbabwe. Participant (P41) recounted her experiences, confirming the sacrality of the traditional kitchen hut:

> "I was married in Mashonaland West Province, divorced and got married again, I reside in Gomo Ward. I want to narrate my ordeal which I encountered in my first marriage. When my marital family got to know that I was not initiated sexually, myself and three other daughters-in-law in my husbands' lineage got informed that we were going to have the training at home. My mother-in-law had a huge traditional kitchen hut which was then used for sexual training. In the kitchen hut, the four of us were asked to strip off our clothes and told to climb up the roof, ordered to cling onto the roof poles with both hands

and our bodies firmly stuck to the roof pole. We were instructed to move our waists in a twisting or spiralling pattern rhythmically following some music which was played by our trainers. The music also determined the speed at which the waist movements were to be made. Failing to perform resulted in thorough beating till there was improvement".

Some insights could be discerned from (P41)'s experience. Her situation showed that within the traditional religious discourse, a traditional kitchen hut was multi-purposeful. The rationale behind the post marital sexual initiation rite was to improve her performance in bed with her husband. So satisfaction of a partner's conjugal interests is a women's obligation. Sex is very key in African traditional religious worldview. The traditional kitchen hut served as a forum where adult women pass on their family-held attitudes and beliefs about sexuality and womanhood. Such a traditional practice makes the kitchen a sacral structure whose reverence is premised on the transformational role it played to (P41) making her a complete married woman.

Sex initiation camps which used to be established in bushes seemingly had lost their value due to modernity's promotion of girl rights. But, in this modern society certain families still see the need for these initiations, so in this case it was a family sex initiation camp site. Women who have skipped this rite of passage when they were girls have to do it belatedly. So when analysing the meaning of ATR, one has to take cognisance of the significance of sex among the indigenous Africans particularly the Shona. Whilst sex is possible without marriage, it would be sex without meaning (Kimathi 1994:44) in Baloyi (2010). Sex and marriage in an African context are inseperable. The sole purpose of a woman is to be there for the man, for the purpose of sexual intercourse. This makes it clear that women are dehumanised the sake of sexual intercourse. Women are seen as sexual objects and prepare them to save the sexual interests of their husbands. It is meant to make the woman not a passive recipient during sexual intercourse. Her role is to please her husband sexually. Sexual act is for the enjoyment and satisfaction of the husband (Baloyi 2010).

However, the worrisome thing in (P41) sexual initiation training was the treatment she got from other women trainers. Her use of the term 'ordeal' signifies a high level of abuse she suffered at hands of fellow married women. Though there was the invisible hand of her husband in the motive for the initiation, the execution of the training procedures till completion was femininely abusive. The abuse was expressed in three various ways: firstly, the training was done without

her consent. Secondly, she was trained while nude. Thirdly, suspending her body in the air during training was emotionally dangerous. Lastly, she was thoroughly beaten. Having said this, when constructing the meaning of ATR in a modern society, it is imperative to challenge the persistent dominance of the patriarchal ideology where abuse and oppression of married women is seen as perpetrated by males only. So, (P41) is a representative of women who face a double gendered oppression in marriage. On the one hand, they are oppressed by their fellow women, while on the other by their husbands. This emanates from the idea that on arrival at her husband's family, the newly married woman starts cooking in her mother-in-law's hut as shown by Gelfand (1992) who talks of household coordination and subordination. Gelfand further argues that; "The mother-in-law usually decides on how long she wishes to have the young wife, but the latter can indicate to her that she wants her own house" (1992:33). This practice of having the bride cooking in her mother-in-law's kitchen is a recipe of woman abuse.

5.4.12 Conflation of modernity and ATR: the kitchen hut outside the Shona homestead

An emergent issue explicated by participants in studying the meaning of ATR was that in the modern society of Zimbabwe, there is a linkage between educational institutions and ATR. This is as a result of the revision which was done to the Zimbabwean educational curriculum which now accommodates indigenous religion. During the research, I noted that Primary and Secondary Schools in Zimbabwe have a traditional kitchen hut on their campuses. It is understood as a culture hut according to (P33). Maybe it is imperative to emphasise that the secular government of Zimbabwe wants to use a neutral term culture for the kitchen. However, Nyoni and Nyoni (2010:146) think that characterising them "as 'culture huts' is misleading since we feel that culture cannot be 'bottled' or 'containerized' and therefore the term 'culture huts' may be seen as a misnomer. Instead, the term 'mini-cultural museum' could be closer to what the so-called 'culture huts' are doing". It seems this is a reflection of the problems encountered when defining the concept of ATR. For the Shona people, there is no separation of culture from *Chivanhu*. The two are intertwined. So one can safely say that African culture and ATR are one and the same thing. Meaning to say the culture huts are also traditional religious huts. Thus Onwumere (2005) says that in African world, relationship exists between religion and culture. Religion is inextricably linked to culture, exerting enormous influence on human beings; and at the same time, animating both his/her personal and communal activities in the society.

Participant (P29) highlighted the impact of westernisation on ATR in Zimbabwe such that its hegemony has resulted in the disappearance of *Chivanhu.* So the government of Zimbabwe, through its Policy of Education of 2004, promulgated the establishment of these traditional kitchen huts as part of curriculum innovation promoting teaching and learning of culture within the country's formal educational system. This is well reasoned by Zazu (2017) who argues that the establishment of culture huts in schools is seen as aiming to recover the indigenous culture and protect traditional languages. The culture huts are pivotal in the preservation of national heritage, as such they enrich the perpetuation of customs and traditions.

The presence of these kitchen huts at schools is very influential. Participant (P35) opines that outwardly for an onlooker, the design promotes the notion of Afrocentricity because they are structures built in institutions which have a western architectural model. In the same vein, Viriri (2004) thinks that establishment of a culture hut can be viewed as a pan-African idea of change which provides the proper education of children and the essence of African cultural revival and survival. From this finding, the study learnt that that ATR is sometimes moulded by national ideological concerns of pan-Africanism, something which is an ultra-religious factor. For the interior part of the kitchen, (P61) said there is a fire place and raised earthen bench. For utensils, there are tangible objects like; grinding stones, clay pots, shakers, cooking sticks, sweeping broom, wooden plates, gourds and reed mats. She further explained that these artifacts and objects found in the culture huts carry different meanings and their use is connected to the long existence of Shona traditions. According to Churu (2002), the culture hut reconnects learners with African traditional religion by bringing back life to some of the traditions of our ancestors. The leaners are able to learn how objects of the past acquire value as objects of the present.

Participant (P35) said that they teach learners how to design the traditional kitchen hut in Art and Technical Graphics subjects. He went on to say same model of a traditional kitchen hut established at schools is also being exhibited at the National Gallery as an important component of the Zimbabwean homestead, associating it with inheritance and national spiritual beliefs. He stressed that most of the Art and Design companies draw their inspiration from traditional architecture and design to produce quality products that get to fit in a setup that ranges from an African décor to a Western décor. In (P35)'s view, right from outset, learners should be introduced to an education which values the importance of traditional designs. Once this is

inculcated in our nation, it becomes easy to indigenise businesses as well as the public's taste and cultural orientations follow the mind-set shift to local design. Here, ATR is being brought to the limelight by business. To be more specific, this religious tourism has consolidated the survival of ATR in the modern world. The promotion of the traditional kitchen hut's architectural design has infiltrated several spheres of the Zimbabwean socio-economy. ATR is helping the Design and Art industry to boost economically while the same industry is also uplifting the status of ATR. Unlike other religious traditions in Zimbabwe, ATR does not have a religious symbol which marks its existence in the national religious landscape. But, because of the wide adoption of the kitchen huts as a representation of ATR, there is a possibility of regularizing the kitchen hut as the newly discovered symbol of ATR.

The significance of the traditional kitchen hut and its religious associations in searching for the meaning of ATR is that this religion is not immune to changes taking place in the modern society. The woman who is understood as the owner of the kitchen is apprenticed into her marital belief systems and practices. A fusion of her natal and marital religious worldviews provides for blended traditional bedrock upon which her kitchen is manned. So, belief systems are family-based. They are continuously modified to suit the existing environment. Women prove to be agents of ATR proselytisation though the proselytisation process is not aggressive. With her kitchen hut as the epicenter of family traditional religion, the final product of the religion they propagate is a hybrid of their natal and marital belief systems. Traditional kitchen huts are places where we can find (*chinyakare*) the traditional religion of the past. But, they are also the same places where we can find religion in the modem age.

5.5 Landscapes of *roora* and death in modern society of Zimbabwe

This section looked at landscapes of *roora* and death in modern society of Zimbabwe. Studying the landscapes of *roora* and death aided in dealing with the complexities that are inherent in the understanding of some rituals found in ATR as practised in Zimbabwe, and specifically focusing on the Shona people of Buhera was quite handy in searching for the meaning of ATR in modern society of Zimbabwe. Interviews and observations were used as data collection techniques to fully engage with the interpretive meaning and embodiment of the *roora* and death rituals within the contemporary society of Zimbabwe. For deep analysis, the fieldwork considered *kuroora*

guva, a ritualistic component of the ATR, which literally means marrying the grave or being involved in the practice of paying *roora* (bride price) for a dead wife.

In Zimbabwe, the interface between "modernity" and ATR produced and continues to produce interesting affective, functional and substantive paradigms of contestation and reaction. The arena where this encounter radiates tension is Shona traditional religious practices, especially those associated with *roora* and death. This has been noticed in various ethnic groups in Zimbabwe which have developed means of dealing with loss in their own style depending on the traditional beliefs surrounding death and bereavement (Swift, 1989).

5.5.1 Death of a married woman: Complexities in focus

Detailed attention in this study was not given to the whole range of death rituals but rather the focus was on *kuroora guva* ritual. Literally, among the Shona people, *kuroora guva* is marrying a grave but in practice it is paying *roora* for a dead wife. So, this section explores the death of a Shona married woman. In Zimbabwean communities, burial of a dead woman cannot be done without their paternal relatives' presence and approval. Participant (11) contended that "the spiritual belief is that no one is given a 'house' by a stranger. Relatives of the deceased woman cannot give their deceased daughter this 'house' if they had not received *roora* for her". In addition the paternal relatives may refuse to take their daughter's belongings before *roora* is paid. It is believed to be taboo for a man to keep his dead wife's property.

5.5.2 Roora (bride-price/bride wealth): the marrow of Shona marriage

Chiefly, this study looked at heterosexual marriage which is supported by the Zimbabwean Constitution Amendment (No.20) Act 2013, section 78 which says that "Persons of the same sex are prohibited from marrying each other". The following are the types of marital unions that can be identified in postcolonial Zimbabwe: unregistered customary marriage, registered customary marriage, civil marriage and cohabitation (*The Chronicle,* 10 July 2012). From the majority of the participants' perspective, all recognised marriages have their foundations on the unregistered customary marriage and are dependent on the payment of *roora* by the bridegroom's family to the bride's family. In the early years of independence around the 1980s, initially when

registering a customary marriage, proof of *roora* payment was a prerequisite. However, this has changed and *roora* is no longer a legal requirement of customary marriage, although the Customary Marriages Act assumes that in most cases *roora* will have been paid while couples over eighteen can choose to marry without *roora*, though according to one participant (P54), this is rare. To say, *roora* is no longer a traditional religious [‘foundational’] requirement depends on interpretation, so it must be emphasised that this statement is referring to general law (Chronicle, 2012).

Respondents strongly stated that their daughters are understood to be married when they have received a part of the *roora.* The emphasis on *roora* was well articulated by participant (P51) who said *kubvira makarekare kubvisa roora itsika yeChivanhu yaingotwa kutenda vadzimu inoratidza kuti mwana aroorwa,* meaning the bride price has been our traditional practice since time immemorial and was meant to thank both the bride’s paternal and maternal ancestral spirits. It is clear that this participant’s view of *roora* reflects a historical belief in the tradition of *roora* among the Shona people. Interestingly, ideas about *roora* payment were instilled in participants at a very young age as was expressed by participant (P32) who said “at a tender age, my grandparents always told me that it is culturally unacceptable to stay with a wife without *roora* having been paid for her”. Thus, according to Sithole (2005:15), before any such payments, parties living together are said to be cohabiting even if they have lived together for many years and have raised a family. To buttress this view, the indigenous African cultural system has it that *roora* is not an option (*The Chronicle,* 2012). A marriage is not marriage until *roora* has been paid despite being registered or not and also regardless of how much modernisation the family has undergone. It is delivered by the son in-law *(mukwasha/vakuwasha)* or his family to the father in-law *(tezvara/vatezvara)* or family of the wife. As raised by Chireshe and Chireshe (2010: 212), the procedures of *roora* payment are marked by negotiations which are facilitated by an intermediary (*munyai/sadombo).* There is no precise template followed in fulfilling this vital obligation, but some pay up following important events such as childbirth, as well as relating to the needs of the father-in-law and resources of the son-in-law (Ansell, 2012), in the case of this study, it is *roora* that is paid posthumously.

Prior to colonisation in Zimbabwe, generally, typical *roora* payment among the Shona people included *rutsambo,* which took the form of a hoe and part of the list could also include four to five herds of cattle, grain and blankets. According to Ansell (2010:699), with the advent of

British occupation of the country from 1890, payments began to be made in cash. This is buttressed by Chigwedere (cited in Ansell, 2010) who posited that, 'since 1890 the year Zimbabwe was colonised, we have become commercialised, every aspect of *roora* has become a matter of money.' Chiweshe, (2016:234) in (Ansell, 2001) argues that *roora* now serves as a means whereby elders are able to make claims on the next generation, specifically the earnings of potential sons-in-law. Insisting on high *roora* provides for comfortable subsistence, or, in the event of default, affords entitlement to a daughter's children. All this is a testament of commodification of *roora.*

Though traditional religious explanations were prominent and expressed by each participant on the reason why *roora* should be paid, Christianity and other modern beliefs impacted the importance of traditional beliefs. Specifically, one young participant had this to say; "if you are Christian and you believe in God, then you stay with your wife without worrying about *roora*". Christianisation of Zimbabwe also impacted negatively on the indigenous Shona customs, *roora* included. In its nascent stages, Christian missionaries castigated Africans for polygamy and the payment of *roora* (Zvobgo, 1986). Basing on teachings of the missionaries, some men no longer give in-laws their dues. In many elderly participants' views, attaching the idea of *roora* payment to Chivanhu represents a cultural prescription for behaviors. It explains why changes in the perception of *roora* have brewed hostilities and unending conflicts in modern society. The controversies of *roora* in modern- day marriage unions are used in this study to understand the meaning of traditional religion in a modern society of Zimbabwe where, *prima facie*, some commentators think that traditional religion is now irrelevant and meaningless.

Participants, however, remained aware of the *roora* tradition and observe it despite its intersection with Christianity and modernity. They said that the most common form of *roora* payment is cattle, known as *danga* in Shona though other gifts may include money, goats, bicycles, blankets, shoes, hats and suits. This fosters cooperation between the two families such that in happier and sad times they work together. According to participant (19), the custom is necessary for several other reasons; for example, in the event of a woman's death while living with her husband, without the payment of *roora* the man has no right to bury her. So it implies that *roora* is one rich component of the Shona traditional religious customs which define and regulate the complex relationships between tribe, family and individual.

5.5.3 Religiousness of *kuroora guva* among the Shona

In a *kuroora guva* funeral which I attended during the study, participants contended that in the traditional African way of life, more emphasis is given to rituals surrounding the dead through various traditional practices undertaken by the extended family. Close relatives (*veukama*) played prominent roles during the *kuroora guva* funeral proceedings. In order to avoid complications, elderly relatives such as grandparents and other experienced practitioners are in charge of *kuroora guva* funeral procedures. When performing rituals, participants identified perceived 'old age' as a religious and cultural script of the traditional Shona people. I observed that during the negotiations of the *danga*, the immediate family members of the deceased woman stayed together at a designated place and the same was the case with and family members of the son-in-law. The *dare* (traditional court session) was convened at the periphery of the homestead, maybe to avoid public ridicule. But still, it was clear that *kuroora guva* is a public ritualistic event. This resonates with Wolfet's description of it in these terms; "the funeral ritual is a public, traditional and symbolic means of expressing our beliefs, thoughts, and feelings about the death of someone loved" (Wolfet, 2000:12). Serious consultations on the default of payment of *roora* by the son-in-law took place with all camps headed by senior members of the families. According to Wilson et al (2005:188), the essence of assigning senior members to negotiate is to remove the emotional attachment and preserve the respect of the parents in-law, for Africans believe in common action and solidarity, guided by the *ubuntu* spirit that says 'I am because we are, since we are, therefore I am' (Mbiti, 1969:4). The son-in-law was instructed to do *Chivanhu* of making a formal death notice to the paternal parents of his wife (*kushuma rufu*) but the notice was accompanied by a live cow or ox. In the event that the deceased was not feeling well, the son-in-law was supposed to engage his wife's family while she is still alive so that they all attend to her illness (*kushuma denda*). So the implication of his silence in Shona traditional customs was that he is responsible for the death of his wife. So he had to a pay a fine of one cow. In *kushuma rufu* (death notice), the following words were used; "*mwana wenyu hakuchina, dzatiputsa pano"* meaning your daughter has passed on, funeral has destroyed us. The death notice was first communicated to the most junior member of the woman's family and it was passed on to his senior till it reached the eldest, but the natural father of the deceased was the last person to receive the message. It was not only verbal communication, but the people were also passing on a dry small tree bark attached to a coin. Symbolically, that was communicating the

death message to the spiritual world. When forwarding petitions to the spiritual world, communication is done when a coin is placed in a wooden plate. The coin is meant to draw the attention of the ancestors so that they remain active during the invocations. After *kushuma rufu,* the son-in-law was then asked to pay a live herd of twenty cattle before burial of the deceased.

In the proceedings of *kuroora guva,* participants readily admitted that the ritual displayed a masculine tendency. Maleness was in full charge of what was taking place during the funeral. It is a norm that in a traditional court, a woman is represented by her male relative. From what I encountered during the *kuroora guva,* there is duality in ownership of women's bodies. It is common to hear the Shona saying *chako makumbo chatezvara musoro* literally meaning what is rightfully yours after paying *roora* are the legs, the head belongs to her father. Though she had been admitted into a new family upon marriage, she remains owned by her biological parents who possess power over her life through and through. No wonder why if she is involved in a quandary, it is her father who represents her in the traditional court, guarding against possibilities of oppression and abuse during the court proceedings. Besides, if she is found guilty it is her father who pays the fine. The woman's silence at the court constitutes protection of her rights.

By the same token, by any utilitarian or rational calculus, the dead woman is no longer using her body anyhow. She has limited legal rights, chief of which is the right to remain silent. This explains why, as her corpse lies in the kitchen, her parents devote their energies summoning her husband and relatives in a traditional family court fighting for justice on her behalf.

Participant (P56) responded by saying that when he was before the custodians of the woman he was staying with as his wife, he had no option except to comply with their demands. The demand of cattle in (P42)'s view was made depending on the number of children the couple had. He further stated that s abuse or alleged abuse of their daughter by the *mukwasha* was another consideration made when deciding the number of cattle to be paid.

Reflecting on the *kuoora guva* funeral of his wife, (P56) stated that "after the death of my wife, I could not raise the demanded figure of twenty live herds of cattle, so in the third day of negotiations the body of my deceased wife started to decompose. Women relatives abandoned the traditional kitchen were the body was lying in state". From a traditional perspective, as claimed by (P27), the corpse was now believed to be having a polluting effect. In fact, the natal

family of the deceased started putting much emphasis on the horror of the pollution of the decomposed body as a way to enforce pressure on the in-law to pay the *roora* as a way of forcing the people to do what is socially acceptable (Swift, 1989; Baloyi, 2014:140). In view of the decomposing body, participant (P40):

> *"Kuroora guva* is shameful; it taints the whole family of the offender as cultural perverts. A man's failure to respond quickly to settle the *roora* is regarded as taboo against Shona cultural traditions. Some mourners here are even labeling the widower a witch who is insincere. How could a normal person let his wife rot in the kitchen?"

Participant (P40) also believed that by merely observing the sombre scenario at the funeral, *Chivanhu,* through this funeral created a stage for family conflicts. The conflict transcended the family level to the community level. Why do Shona people care about what happens to dead bodies? According to Wilson *et al*, (2005), regardless of situation or circumstances, all people experience powerful needs to be included, respected, recognised, and involved by the people who are important to them and in the decisions integral to their lives. So it is not only a living being who needs respect, even a corpse deserves to be accorded some rights and failure to observe this, results in vengeance from the dead person. However, participants in Churu Ward made it clear that the idea of demanding *roora* at a funeral is not only inclined to women, even if it is the husband who dies first the *tezvaras* still demand *roora* from relatives of the deceased son-in-law. One participant (P17) concisely said "my son-in-law could not settle the outstanding *roora* before his death, so we entered into an agreement with his relatives that upon marriage of his daughter, the maternal grandparents would be the receptors of her *roora".*

Participants acknowledged that though the wife was 'dead', the widower of the deceased woman remained her husband. Through the intervention of traditional leadership, all family members of the widower were urged to co-operate since the real husband had failed to meet the obligation. Because it was restitution, it shifted from being an individual obligation to a family one. The African person is defined as a member of a family, and so the African person is never alone either in self-concept or in the perception of others. The life of a person is wholly dependent on the family and its symbiotic functions of biological lineage, communal nurture, and moral

formation (Paris, 1995:101). Collectively, the son-in-law's families successfully mobilised resources that served as payment of *roora* for the dead wife.

5.5.4 Why *kuroora Guva* among the Shona People?

During the study, I noted a strong presence of death-phobia. Collins English Dictionary has defined 'phobia' as "a compelling fear or dread especially of a particular object or situation" (1978: p.1102). `Phobia' also means `extreme abnormal fear, or aversion to something or someone. So fear of the dead wife was a determinant factor in the way *kuroora guva* ritual was conceived. Firstly, on the part of the deceased's family, they were afraid that if they did not demand the *roora* they would face the wrath of vengeance (*pfukwa*) from their deceased daughter. So demanding *roora* in a way was meant to mollify her spirit. Secondly, the *vakwasha* also feared their dead wife. They were contemplating some serious reprisal afflictions had they not complied with the in-laws' demands. Thus, according to Mangena and Ndlovu, (2013:479), in some cases what moves people to pay *roora* is not that they believe in its value. Rather, what pushes them is the fear of avenging spirits or *ngozi* in Shona in cases of deaths of the wives whose bride price was not paid. One way of appeasing the angry spirit is payment of *roora.* So, the component of fear is well placed for it restrains serious cultural obstruction in modern societies.

A close look at the posthumous payment of *roora* shows that the practice is unusual. There was no announcement of the date and preparations of the rite. The payment technically was restitution with the involvement of traditional leaders taking the place of intermediaries. The payment demanded was in form of live cattle *(mombe dzinotsika).* The prioritisation of live cattle was based on Shona various socio-cultural beliefs of which cattle play an important part of their everyday socio-cultural milieu, language and gnosis. It is a Shona religious cultural tradition that cattle are associated with sacredness. They are venerated and used as a vehicle to propitiate spirits. Part of the payments done by the *vakuwashas* was in money, goats and ploughs in place of cattle, but the payment still symbolised 'cattle' *(danga).* Foremost to be paid was the cow for the mother, known as *mombe yeumai,* which literally means the cow of motherhood, and then followed by the rest. *Mombe yeumai* was meant to show gratitude to the maternal ancestors. A breach of this well-respected age-old custom was considered so severe a dereliction that it could affect a family generationally. Zimbabwean Shona traditions in *roora* ensure a balance of wealth,

respect, ritual and ceremony via an equitable gender-balanced distribution of wealth in the form of cattle (Mona, 2017). The *danga* gifts were paraded at the funeral and approved by members of the *dare*. Acceptance of the *danga* was communicated by the elders to deceased daughter's spirit as well as family ancestral spirits. Informing the ancestors about the payment signified acknowledgement of the supremacy of the spiritual world where their dead daughter was being handed over to. But, it was the obligation of the living relatives to make sure that no arrears were left unpaid before the dead was handed over to the spiritual world. This was done in preparation of the journey to be travelled by the deceased's spirit. I agree with De Coppet in Swift (1989) who summarized Hertz's ideas on burial as follows: Death is not felt as an instantaneous destruction of an individual's life. So, death was rather seen as a religious event, the starting point of a ceremonial process whereby the dead person becomes an ancestor. It is through the ritual of *kuroora guva* that one is persuaded to think that the journey to the world of the dead requires many rites and rituals.

The corpse was taken to the grave without body viewing. From an Afrocentric view, this was an anomaly because viewing the corpse allows the family to re-see the deceased reassuring her to have a safe journey to the spiritual world (Swift, 1989:33). One participant (P11) explained that this rite was bypassed since the body had decomposed. Spiritually, omission of this ritual might result in an upset of the ontological order which, in turn, has an effect on the whole family ancestral cycle and could have negative consequences.

5.5.5 Status of *guva* among the Shona

Some participants felt that *guva* has close links with *chikuva* that has already been looked at. The woman's non-physical participation in daily Shona life is echoed in the notion of *guva*, for if a person is incapacitated to do anything on her own she is likened to a *guva*. This emanates from the understanding that a *guva* hosts a lifeless body. (P26) thought that *guva* is culturally and religiously symbolic among the Shona. The Shona religion is based on the grave. So *kuroora guva* is done in honor of the traditional kitchen hut which is a married woman's sacred place. In the central rituals of *kumutsa mudzimu* (rituals in honor of ancestors) the point of entry is the grave (Taringa, 2014:49). As such in *kuroora guva*, the grave becomes the dead woman's second sacred hut, commonly understood as *imba yemufi. Imba* is also known as a house, which is a designated place where individuals seek solace from life's vicissitudes. It is the grave which

is conceived as the final resting place for the deceased. The life of a Shona woman is always ritualised till her death.

The *kuroora guva* traditional court (*dare*) held before the burial of the deceased woman represented a traditional justice system of the Shona people. *Dare* is an earthly council featuring key figures in Shona traditional religion like traditional leadership and the elderly. Traditional leadership usually represents ancestors of the land. The death of a woman who is not properly married is an abomination which defiles the land. So payment of *roora* purifies the defilement. The traditional leadership symbolises justice. Demanding *roora* on her death day restores the deceased's lost pride and dignity. This can be referred to as "identity needs" which are a deep cultural drive to have the dead woman recognised and acknowledged as a full being worthy of dignity. In the course of seeking justice, the corpses could still get what they lacked during their lifetime. Some women participants think that *roora* gives them status and the value of the payment o demonstrates how important or valued they are.

5.5.6 Contestations associated with *kuroora guva*

Some participants viewed the practice itself as unjustified. Participant (P24), being a relative of the son-in-law who did *kuroora guva,* complained that "the in-laws used the death of their daughter as a means to their ends, by so doing disrespecting the dead woman, especially considering the state of the corpse, which ended up in a pathetic state till they received something from the *vakuwashas".* As such, some participants blamed the Shona tradition arguing that *roora* and how it is valued in African traditional religion is used as a foundation for property grabbing and abuse with disastrous consequences for innocent children and defenceless widowers. They further reasoned that *Chivanhu* has been consistently accused of not being sensitive to the welfare of the bereaved family materially. The same sentiments were echoed by E.Nyangari in her paper presentation on *Commodification of the Dead in Zimbabwe* saying: "When performing a *kuroora guva* ritual, it is one of those moments when the living relatives of the deceased interact with sacred world. But the challenge comes when relatives of the deceased, use it as an opportunity to amass wealth, thus treating death as a commodity in the socio-economic sense" (Nyangari, 2019). It was noted that the dominant number of participants who condemned *kuroora guva* practice had a Christian background. In debating the justification of *kuroora guva*, young participants pinpointed some of the in-laws as lacking care of what will

happen to the children of the deceased (*vazukuru).* Quarrels over *kuroora guva* practice often lead to hatred and lack of co-operation towards death registration and birth registration of children who would not have been registered at the time of the death of the mother (*The Chronicle*, 2012). During the research, I interacted with participants who had not acquired registration documents for their children till they became grown-ups and some of them admittedly said it "was due to complacency". One participant (P29) complained that "one of the adverse effects of *kuroora guva* was the tension it created between my family and that of maternal grandparents. Ten years down the line after marriage, I still have not yet acquired proper national registration documents". As such, acquisition of registration documents for grown-ups really needs the cooperation of the deceased mother's relatives, for example, releasing her death certificate. Maybe it is because the African worldview lacks this westernized facility of documentation in its operations.

However, another camp of participants justified the *kuroora guva* custom saying that demand of the *roora* and hard positions maintained by the *tezvaras* were a result of traditional religious and cultural pressures of *Chivanhu* which take cognisance of unmet needs and obligations. This was not going to be the case if the *mukwasha* had showed interest in paying *roora* prior the death of his wife. Responding to the above criticisms of property grabbing, one of the paternal family member (P62) argued that "It was very prudent to demand *roora* when our daughter was still alive. But this has been always a problem since the *mukwasha* was intransigent".

(P17) opined that though *kuroora guva* was a traditional religious funeral rite to be fulfilled, the modern generation of young men capitalise on it to put pressure on the elderly utilising it "as an opportunity to revenge episodes of sad moments which their daughter experienced in her marriage". This came against the backdrop that some participants were aware that their daughters were verbally, physically and emotionally abused by their husbands and relatives, so they had to wait for an opportune moment like the funerals day for a dressing-down.

5.5.7 Chivanhu in modern Zimbabwe: lessons from the meaning of *kuroora guva*

Lessons drawn from the *kuroora guva* custom are a pointer to how one can understand the meaning of ATR. There were mixed views as to how participants viewed *kuroora guva* custom. The majority maintained that *kuroora guva* funerals have become big lessons not only to the *vakwashas*, but the whole communities in Buhera in the modern era. Particularly the youth

stressed that they had learnt the importance of respecting traditional customs, in this case, of *roora* through a live drama pitting *tezvaras* and *vakwasha*. Proceedings of these funerals encouraged men to pay *roora* in time to avoid embarrassing situations such as *kuroora guva.* Because of this, *Chivanhu* has made the Shona to become a death-phobic society. After paying *roora* for his dead wife, participant (P56) said throughout the ritual he had asked himself the following questions: "will my friends still be my friends in the future? Are my relatives still accepting me as another member of the family? Am I still acceptable in my community?" What could be deduced from this participant's reflections is the idea of measuring personhood and humanness basing on fulfillment of *roora* payment obligation.

Participants commented on how they view *Chivanhu* in the context of their experiences during *kuroora guva* rituals. Specifically, participant (P28) succinctly observed that "Attending *kuroora guva* funerals alerts me on certain challenges facing modern day people". From these findings, in line with the focus of this study, it is imperative to show that the manner in which *kuroora guva* is practised is a pointer to the contemporary understanding of the meaning of traditional religion among the Shona people. One such important thing is the institution of the family. *Chivanhu* is a 'family' religion. On one hand, it brings families together especially unifying them when dealing with problems, yet at the same time it generates conflicts which are intra-family and inter family in nature. In *Chivanhu* there is primacy of the Shona family in spheres of religious reality and personal identity. In line with Paris's view of an African family in general, it can also be said of the Shona family that it is large, closely- knit community of blood relatives that is constitutive of the life and destiny of each of its members (Paris, 1995:77). Kinship institutes the utmost religious reality for traditional Shona people. Once kinship relationships are established, all concerned members are duty-bound to accept the corresponding behaviors as prescribed by tradition. The village functioned as one large family, a pattern that continues to the present day (Paris, 1995:78).

From the findings, it emerged that the Shona people have a 'death system' whose provision guides the treatment of death and bereavement as processes handed down by generational traditions. Since a death system is culture- specific, in the context of this study, it becomes a snapshot of the way the Shona people understand, feel about, and act with regards to *roora* and death. This is what traditional religion is all about in the modern world; it is handed down to the

contemporary Shona society orally and through deeds, since it has been the way of life of their departed elders, that is, *chinyakare*. In terms of *Chivanhu*, what is persevered and developed are the essential qualities of the African worldview, a view concerned with metaphysical rather than purely physical interrelationships such as that of religious functions and practice (Myers, 1987:73).

The study showed the relevance and importance of traditional leaders in *Chivanhu*. Their importance lies on the fact that they are the custodians of *Chivanhu*. There was a moment when the police were engaged to give an order to the family of the deceased woman to bury their daughter. The family simply informed the traditional leadership and the *vakwasha* that if the police interfered with the proceedings of their daughter's funeral they were now abandoning the funeral and they will leave the corpse unburied together with her belongings. One of the deceased's grandfathers (P13) aptly said, "leaving the body of my niece unburied was going to be disastrous for the stubborn son-in-law. We were going to engage traditional healers over the issue to make sure that justice had been met". Sibanda (2013:357) cements these findings by arguing that "The belief in *ngozi* and the related *zviera* (taboos) and punishments are used to mete out justice which is mediated by sacred practitioners such as chiefs, divine-healers, faith-healers and elders".

A woman is an alien to her husband's family so the son-in-law's family was going to experience a serious vengeful situation by remaining with an alien's dead body over *roora* payment. What was likely going to happen was that death would have been a constant visitor to the deviant's family members. It is only the earth which houses a decomposing human body. It is a taboo that a body decomposes in public; this attracts a curse from ancestors both in the family and community at large. So the traditional leaders wanted to make sure that there is no violation of *Chivanhu.* It is in this context that there are some who interpret *Chivanhu* as dreadful and malignant pertaining to punishment which comes in the form of death.

It is during funeral proceedings that *Chivanhu* has stood the test of time among the Shona people. Contrary to the idea that traditional religion is vanishing, the current socio-economic conditions have re-valued *roora* by commoditising it. So by giving emphasis to death rituals which need payment of tokens before and during burial of the deceased, the Shona people in Buhera are rapidly becoming a 'ritual rich society'. Rituals are the nerve center of *chivanhu*.

Kuroora guva reflects the values, priorities, and commitments of *roora*. In a marriage setup which dehumanises the woman, the *kuroora guva* ritual provides a chance to honor the uniqueness of the deceased woman. By merely attending *kuroora guva* ritual event, a person's understanding and appreciation African traditional religion may be strengthened, enhanced and reinterpreted.

But the institution of *roora* among the Shona people chiefly oscillates around in patrilineal and patriarchal realms. When claiming that *roora* is a religious phenomenon, fundamentally it is just a religious expression for the males. Masculinity is witnessed at play in *roora* in the sense that the son-in-law is obliged to pay *roora* to his in-laws and it is the father of his wife who has a big say in negotiations of the *roora* package. If the son-in-law defaults, *vatezvara* has mechanisms to recover what is due to him with regards to *roora*. It is common knowledge that in African systems of thought, men have to, a great extent, constructed a religious language that describes a religion of patriarchal family and ancestry. The practice of *kuroora guva* depicts how patriarchal traditions are becoming part of the commodification of women's dead bodies. Through *kuroora guva* women's bodies are commoditised, thus becoming the site of complex interactions of patriarchy, power and politics.

5.6 Witchcraft practices in Zimbabwe

For in-depth study of the conflicts in *Chivanhu* which happens to be one of its characteristic features in the modern society, this work looked at witchery. In the contemporary society of post-colonial Zimbabwe, beliefs in witchcraft are rife. A functional, substantive and affective meaning of ATR was researched on, paying attention to witchcraft because in Zimbabwe witchcraft and ATR are believed to have a conceptual symbiotic relationship. It is the controversy which surrounds the phenomenon of witchcraft which led me to explore it and how its nature influences the meaning attached to ATR in the modern society of Zimbabwe. Gordon Chavhunduka (1980:129) echoes the same sentiments about witchcraft when he argues that the subject of witchcraft continues to create controversy, not only in Zimbabwe, but in many other parts of the world.

A few years after colonisation, the settler regime promulgated a Witchcraft Suppression Act of 1899 which summarily showed a misunderstanding of the Zimbabwean witchcraft. According to Chavunduka, in the Witchcraft Suppression Act, witchcraft is defined as "the throwing of bones,

the use of charms and any other means or devices adopted in the practice of sorcery" (1980:129). From an Afrocentric point of view, this colonial constitution did not represent 'African' witchcraft. In *Chivanhu*, bones are thrown during the process of divination by traditional practitioners to diagnose problems of clients brought to them. These bones are called *hakata.* In this definition, traditional healers are misconstrued as witches. Yet they are important people whose role is cherished in indigenous Shona communities.

For the purposes of addressing my objectives and research questions, I just focused on two indigenous concepts which came from participants and some equivalence to witchcraft. The first term from participants was *kuromba.* They explained that in *kuromba* a person acquires charms to protect his or her family property and livestock from dangerous intruders. (P12) argued that in genuine African spirituality, *kuromba* is very positive despite the fact that foreign influence has resulted in some Zimbabweans branding everything associated with *kuromba* as negative. In sharp contrast to *kuromba*, participants mentioned *hurombwa.* (P12) thought that it is a practice of acquiring charms or magic to cause misfortune, illness, harm and destruction to property or human life. Participants confirmed that witchcraft can be understood as synonymous with *hurombwa* where an individual uses harmful medicines, charms, magic and any other means or devices to cause any illness, misfortune or death in any person or in causing any injury to any life or property destruction. The harmful charms and magic are understood as *gona* (singular) or *makona* (plural).

In *Chivanhu,* a person with *hurombwa* is known as a *muroyi*, that is, a witch no matter how he practices his witchcraft, or *uroyi*. This is confirmed by Humbe (2018:272) when he says that such a person is dangerous; therefore, his behavior causes severe suffering in societies. (P21) explains that in Zimbabwe, witchcraft (*uroyi*) is used as an explanation for people's deaths, crop failure, livestock failing to reproduce, examination failure, misfortunes in securing employment, marriage problems and daughters failing to attract bride price. Yet, (P29) maintained that there are also situations where the Shona attribute people's success to witchcraft. Extreme success politically or economically is likely to result in suspicions of witchcraft among the Shona (Humbe 2018:272). This is grounded on the conviction that people have to succeed up to certain "normal" levels. When their success goes beyond the "normal" levels, they are often charged

with the use of occult powers since the occult is often associated with the unusual, the extraordinary or the realm of the supernatural (Humbe 2018).

It is against this backdrop that to understand the meaning of African traditional religion in modern society of Zimbabwe, the theme of witchcraft cannot be sidestepped. This is the reason why the re-emergence of witchcraft in public discourse in postcolonial Africa has been inevitable. In Zimbabwe, the indigenous people have shown that they are not flaccid receivers of the 1899 Witch Suppression Act, for they have pushed for its repeal. Participant (P54) clarified that intense negotiations resulted in the amendment of the Witchcraft Suppression Act which took effect in July 2006, thereby acknowledging the existence of witchcraft in Zimbabwe; a phenomenon which had been calculatingly restrained by the successive colonial regimes. It replaced the provisions of the Witchcraft Suppression Act and reformed the criminal law on the question of witchcraft. Witchcraft is very much alive in the average Zimbabwean's everyday life. The media in Zimbabwe is awash with issues of witchcraft practice, an indication that it is a reality. What is intriguing is the manner in which these witchcraft stories are reported to make listeners, viewers and readers convinced that witchcraft is anti-life and unprogressive. If it is social deviance why is the practice so rampant?

5.6.1 The case of *divisi*

This study used *divisi* and its bearing on social relations to understand the meaning of African traditional religion among the Shona people. It is common among Shona people in poor rural areas of Buhera. According to (P12), *divisi* is powered by the desire to accumulate wealth. So, studying *divisi* was shaped by the notion of occult economy credited to John Comaroff, an anthropologist (Humbe 2018). Participants viewed *divisi* as a type of witchcraft understood as an enhancer of agricultural production in Zimbabwe. They said it is a practice of multiplying one's yields in a farming season. *Divisi* does well in dry climatic conditions, so once there is any peasant farmer using it, it expels any meaningful clouds which bring water to the surrounding area. At the end of the farming season the witch gets a bumper harvest despite the prevalence of drought.

Giving reasons why rural farmers acquire and use *divisi* in farming, participants said in rural communities, farmers who get bumper harvests are understood as wealthy people. Participant (P30) was apt to say attributes of wealth are largely measured in agricultural production, as when

a farmer owns large herds of livestock and full granaries of grain after every harvest. She went on to say that such a prosperous farmer is known as *hurudza*. Because of the wealth, the farmers get honor from the community which is consistently hard hit by drought. Information from participants showed that in *divisi* witchcraft, the agricultural production is heightened through an incestuous sexual relationship between a father and her natural daughter. This sexual practice works in conjunction with a crop field-enhancing magic. The girl involved in *divisi* witchcraft is called *mwana wembeu* (child of the seed) (Humbe 2018:273). Having sex with a daughter is meant to invoke the spirits of fertility in agriculture.

Participant (2) reported how the incestuous sexual intercourse is done:

> "The benchmark of the *divisi* ritual is removal of virginity of the daughter by the father. He uses a piece of cloth to wipe some of the blood which comes out during the intercourse. After the intercourse the two make a *mhiko*, (an oath) symbolised by tying a knot using the blood-soaked cloth. It is an oath pledged for the sole purpose of getting a boost in agricultural production. The cloth is mixed with some medicine and placed in a container, usually a horn, which is tightly sealed and buried in the crop field".

The horn and its contents transform participants of this ritualised sexual act to lead a charmed life. The ritualised sexual act is an expression of the bond that prevails between the father and his daughter in *divis*i witchcraft, as well as to show the bond between the farmer and spirits. By burying the container with ritualised sexual blood, the girl child ensures fertility of the fields. The *gona* transforms the fields with supernatural powers of the spirits by creating a formidable bond between the people performing the ritual and the spirits they invoke. More often than not, the daughter who is used for this agricultural ritual becomes the favourite child in the family (Humbe 2018:274).

5.6.2 Incest in Zimbabwean constitution

(P54) averred that the Zimbabwean constitution regards incest as a crime; therefore *divisi* incest is an unlawful practice since there is sexual intercourse between a parent and his natural child whether born in or out of wedlock and whether the child is under the age of eighteen years or not. She went on to say that in this case the father is guilty of sexual intercourse within a

prohibited degree of relationship and liable to a fine up to or exceeding level fourteen or imprisonment for a period not exceeding five years or both.

However, during field work I discovered that at family and community levels, there are no penal sanctions against any form of incest. Sexual relations with a daughter are spoken of as taboo, but no *divisi* farmer has served a sentence for committing this crime. In Gomo Ward, I witnessed two cases of children who were born with disabilities and the explanation I got from participants who happen to be these children's caregivers was that they were born out of an incestuous relationship. They insisted that incest offends ancestral spirits who can inflict punishment for breach of societal moral codes. It is a despicable conduct that the culprits ought to be ashamed of. This belief is so strong to an extent that a certain Chief of Zhombe in Midlands Province made shocking calls for children born out of incestuous relationships to be put to death so as to avoid the visitation of misfortune in both the communities and the country. He was speaking at the launch of The Midlands Province Integrated Environmental Day in October 2019 (newzimbabwe.com).

Participants singled out secrecy as the chief characteristic feature of *divisi.* Being a secret ritual, they argued that it has a characteristic feature of creating an aura of being "set apart" from everyday life. Its religious "mystery" includes particular beliefs about the power and presence of supernatural forces in the natural world, enacted in secret incest where the social fact of mysterious powers is produced. They explained that this is the reason why girl initiate *(mwana wembeu)* makes an oath to keep the *divisi* incest a secret. This vow of secrecy is known as *tsindidzo yemhiko,* according to one interviewed elderly. Divulging the secret is tantamount to inviting serious consequences to the life of the victim, such as madness and death.

5.6.3 Why villagers abhor divisi witchcraft?

Basically respondents raised complaints against the accused divisi witchcraft farmers. They charged that when the farming season is in session, they were being mysteriously awakened during night hours to do manual work on *divisi* farmer's fields. The work ranged from weeding the crops to watering the fields. Fields of *divisi* farmers in Buhera, which is an arid region with no swampy areas, were observed to be always moist throughout the farming season though there were no rains. The nonexistence of weeds made the *divisi* crops grow strong and fast.

Participants criticised this witchcraft practice for causing fatigue and serious backaches due to the laborious work in which they were involved. Because of the backache, some claimed that they had become incapacitated to have sexual relations with their partners. This created social tensions (Humbe 2018:276). Another participant claimed that during the funeral of his late neighbor, it was discovered that the deceased had a sack full of ants which were sent to collect fertiliser and manure in all surrounding fields. This always ensured success in the deceased's farming enterprise.

When it is harvest time, one of the serious accusations levelled against *divisi* farmers by participants was their mysterious power to take grain from neighbors' fields and granaries. Participants said *divisi* farmers use *gona* to draw grain from neighbours' fields during and after harvesting. Some complainants even lost their grain when it was already heaped on the thrashing place. This theft was complex to understand since it was not physically done.

At a traditional court session in Churu Ward, the accused justified his action of beating and burning the granaries of a *divisi* farmer who happened to be his neighbor, on the grounds that his neighbor's witchcraft was causing perennial hunger for his family. However, the matter later spilled to formal courts which could not find evidence that the *divisi* farmer was stealing grain through unnatural means.

Relatives and the community at large were accusing a divisi witch in Rwizi Ward because his witchcraft practice was barring his middle aged daughter from marrying. (P37) confirmed that she had never received a love proposal from any man in her life and does not even have sexual desire. Her auntie (P64) claimed that maybe there were spiritual forces form the father of the victim's *divisi* which were denying her the opportunity of being courted in a love affair. To cement the views of (P64), (P37) said "whenever I am away from home, I dream having sex with my father". Participant (P14) interpreted the victim's dreams as the ones which propel production of crops back home. In Gomo Ward, a middle-aged woman (P59) with no prospects of marriage was labeled as wife of *divisi* by villagers. The stigmatisation grew when accusations of participating in *divisi* witchcraft circulated. (P59) pointed out that she was marginalised and treated as a social misfit. There is, apparently, a big gap between the 'normal girls' and the

alleged ‘abnormal girls’ in their mainstream society. The above scenarios are examples of what drives communities to consult and engage witch hunters to solve these problems which have become hive of social conflicts (Humbe 2018:278).

5.6.4 Witch hunters: a cleansing wave

In contemporary societies, villagers believe that if the occult powers are not stamped out they would continue suffering at the hands of witches who are constitutionally protected by the law of Zimbabwe. So there is an inclination towards people who can counter the powers of witches. According to (P21); “As an expression of dissatisfaction – due to the Western and colonial understanding of witchcraft in postcolonial Zimbabwe – there has been an emergence of a cult of witchcraft-finding referred to as *tsikamutanda* (literally, step on the stick), based on the use of magic sticks to identify witches mainly among the Shonas”. Respondents added that the witch finders are also known as Gaurani and Tungatu. Most of the interviewees confirmed that this cult of witch hunters penetrated Buhera around the year 2000. They pointed out that the witch-hunters use non-natural means to cleanse the villages of witchcraft practices. Thus, participant (P9) had this to say “Witchcraft practices, such as using *divisi*, are successfully dealt with by these witch-finders”. Usually, traditional leaders, such as chiefs or village heads, sanction or initiate witch-hunting because they regard it as an essential social service. The operations of these occult practitioners often take place at a communal level, hence the involvement of traditional leaders.

Serious conflicts in families and communities which range from physical fights to deaths result in villagers engaging witch-hunters and witch- finders to manage the bad situations, as claimed by participants. I attended a witch cleansing ceremony in Churu Ward. The village head was officially notified about the problems affecting the accused’s family lineage so he gave them a go ahead to inform the Chief who agreed to have operations of the witch- hunters in his area of jurisdiction. The actions of the witch- hunter were done in full view of the community. Participant (P15) of the Tungatu cult boldly claimed to have powers to cleanse witchcraft activities, as well as to protect the innocent from future misfortunes caused by witches. So, villagers gathered at the troubled homestead to witness the cleansing ceremony. (P15) and his team established a camping base near the family of the accused. From the base they negotiated with the affected family demanding for travel and subsistence funds. Soon after the money was

paid up they sang and beat drums to invoke the spirit of (P15) who presided over the cleansing ceremony. (P15) became possessed and family members of the accused were told to stand in a single file for inspection. Those with *urombwa,* in this case the accused man and his wife, were identified by putting a mark on their foreheads using meallie meal. The two were labeled *divisi* farmers. Besides, water was splashed on them leaving their bodies completely wet. Inspection was followed by searching of the accused's magical charms at their homestead. The witch hunter sprinkled some ritualized water in and outside the home buildings including villagers in attendance to immunise them. This was done to avoid casualties due to the power of charms to be cleansed.

The searching team found a breathing *gona* (horn), decorated with some beads of white, black and red colors. Samples of all grain seeds grown in accused's community, including maize, sorghum, millet, *rapoko,* and more were stuck on the *gona.* The *gona* was alive and could not be caught easily. Initially after it was identified it vanished from everybody's sight and hid in granaries. Eventually, the *gona* was caught and villagers present had an opportunity to have a glimpse of it before it was thrown into large flames of fire. The first time it landed into the fire, it jumped as if it was about to fly but (P15) dived, caught it and threw it back into the fire. Another similar charm was unearthed from the accused's fields and burnt. As the charms were burning, milk started oozing out of the breasts of the elderly wife of the accused. The magical charm which stayed indoors was fed on human milk. The majority of the people who attended this *divisi* witchcraft cleansing ritual were victims who happened to be accused's neighbors. They claimed that ever since the accused used *divisi,* they had been experiencing crop failure in their community. This trend of crop failure became prevalent even though there was normal to above normal rainfall in their agricultural season.

The next stage was doing a *mhiko* (oath) ritual at the cleansed homestead using a steel nail. But the nail was first burnt together with some mealie meal before it was driven into the soil at the center of the accused's homestead using a hammer. The nail was understood as a *hoko* (peg) and its purpose was to block all witchcraft activities. Even the accused became incapacitated to go beyond the *hoko* to reengage in some *divisi* witchcraft activities. (P15) emphasized that an attempt to revive the *divisi* witchcraft would result either in death or madness of the accused. In a similar witchcraft cleansing exercise in another Rwizi Ward, (P15) unearthed a clay pot buried at

the center of the accused's homestead under a tree with some fresh blood in it. This blood was said to belong to four family members who had mysteriously died in a space of two years. After the cleansing (P15) and his team did not use a nail or a wooden peg for the oath ritual, but they slaughtered a ram, dug a pit and buried the ram at center of the homestead. A few months after this incident the accused and his family abandoned their homestead and established a new residential place in another district.

The major reason why (P15) was invited to cleanse villages of witchcraft shows that the belief in *divisi* occult powers is deeply rooted in Zimbabwe. The witch- hunters demystify the secrecy of witchcraft practices since the cleansing of the bad practice is done openly while people are watching the magic charms which caused havoc in families. So witch hunters perform acts which cleanse and protect villagers from witchcraft. This is further cemented by Kwilecki (2004:478) 46) who contends that magical rites are performed to produce tangible results here and now. After the cleansing, society ostracises the accused. This sends a strong message to those who had plans to acquire magic charms. If the accused feels he was wrongly accused, they can start the process of engaging a traditional healer again. Eventually the real offender is found out.

5.6.5 Debate on the relationship between *Chivanhu* and witchcraft

Participants gave their varying views on the relationship between the concepts of *Chivanhu* and witchcraft. The majority said the two are different, highlighting the statements that have already been mentioned earlier on the essence of *Chivanhu* such as believing in Mwari and *Vadzimu*. There is always interaction between humanity and the spiritual world through entreaties and libations. All the responses were meant to show that *Chivanhu* is good. It is the vernacular name of Shona people's indigenous religion.

However, the problem comes when the same people in *Chivanhu* use *Chivanhu* for bad ends. When a witch wants to bewitch someone, an elder explained saying, the witch asks for permission to do so from the targeted victim's ancestral spirits. So the ancestral spirits allow the witch to harm their progenies. This means that witches have the power to manipulate the spiritual world for their own advantage. In this case, a witch uses *Chivanhu* to harm someone.

Some participants saw *Chivanhu* and witchcraft as similar in the sense that the supernatural powers in *Chivanhu* are the same powers used in witchcraft. Ancestral spirits connive with

witches to punish their living relatives. Participants rudimentarily thought that when a person is struck by a mysterious disease, that particular person is understood as being affected by *Chivanhu*, which in Shona is *kurwara kwake ndekwechivanhu*, meaning he/she is suffering from *Chivanhu.* Participant (P66) confirmed that when a person goes to hospital for medical treatment and the conventional medical diagnosis system fails to detect the ailment, the conclusion that is reached is that the cause is *Chivanhu.* This confirms Machinga's (2011:2) view that "Diseases are considered by the Shona culture to have physical, mental, social, spiritual, and supernatural causes. Cure extends beyond physical symptoms to address social and spiritual aspects too". Despite the presence of western-style medical systems and Christian faith healing approaches, the sick person and his family consult traditional healers. So, in the modern society of Zimbabwe, the meaning of ATR in matters of health and well-being have been designated by using *Chivanhu* in the medical sense to describe witchcraft practices among the Shona people.

Participants reasoned that there are traditional sacred practitioners (*n'anga, chiremba*) who have multiple roles to play in the life of the Shona people. Beach (1994) describes them as true doctors, psychiatrists and political scientists. Despite them being the reservoirs of indigenous knowledge systems, databases and vicars to cultural motifs, they are double faced in as far as they police relations between and among human beings and the patrons of the spirit world (Ranger 1967:18). But some participants were convinced that a *n'anga* can also operate as a witch. They said that many people have died; some fell sick and some have been struck by misfortunes as a result of the practices of the *n'angas*. They do what they are instructed to do by their clients for purposes of making money. Given this scenario, participants (P53 and P25) did not hesitate to label ATR or *Chivanhu* as an evil religion. According to (P12), this practice of fusing witchcraft and traditional healing is rampant in the modern society. In her explanation on how such traditional healers make money, she explained that a client asks a traditional healer to harm someone on behalf his/her behalf. When this is done the victim can also ask the same traditional healer to be cured, and the victim in turn requests the traditional healer to send back the witchcraft spell to the offender. As he/she serves the two clients the traditional will be receiving money. Duri (2017) casts a lot of doubt on the operations of some traditional healers, especially with hunters called *tsikamundas.* He thinks that the authenticity of some African indigenous beliefs related practices pertaining to witchcraft become compromised by opportunism in times of crisis as tensions rise during struggles over increasingly shrinking

resources while some self-proclaimed traditional healers capitalize on such dispensations to engage in extortionist tendencies in an effort to salvage sustenance. So from these views, one can safely say Chivanhu is being used in extortionist activities.

Machinga (2011:3) decries such practices by saying, "Unfortunately, like any other health delivery system, the traditional Shona system is susceptible to abuse and to unscrupulous practitioners". She cites the Zimbabwean National Association of Traditional Healers (ZINATHA) to have been established to act as a watchdog, and every traditional healer is obliged to register with the association. Though he is a registered with ZINATHA, participant (P8) said; "in executing my duties as a traditional healer, I am guided by the dictates of Chivanhu not an organ called ZINATHA." So, it is to overgeneralise to say that traditional healers are witches which can also be translated to mean witchcraft and *Chivanhu* are one and the same thing.

Christianity and colonisation negatively impacted the institution of traditional healing systems such that using the term *n'anga* sounds offensive. My respondents were in agreement that some of the vernacular terms which describe their profession are wrongly used by the society to dehumanise them and to disparage their profession. They particularly cited *'n'anga'* as a term which equates to evilness. But they said there are some terms which still carry some respect from the modern society like *chiremba* (doctor) and *sekuru* (grandfather).

From the above findings, the research discovered that the idea of equating ATR and witchcraft has some functional meaning tendencies for it focused on ATR's social or psychological functions. This is because in this context, ATR is viewed, to use Hedges' (2014:4) words, "as an aspect of culture and a by-product of complex social, political, economic, historical, and psychological factors; in strong forms, functionalism simply reduces religion to nothing but this, and so is reductionist." So, in their bid to understand the meaning of ATR, those who misconstrue this religion are influenced by witchcraft thus discarding the notion of *sui generis* as the first step toward conceiving ATR. Witchcraft is one aspect of human culture, which should be studied in the same way in which other aspects of culture are also studied (Hedges, 2014:4).

5.6.7 Emergent Trends in ATR and the modern health delivery system

The following is what emerged from the responses given by participants. Earlier on, it has been shown that there are some traditional sacred practitioners who protest being labelled *n'anga* because society was using it derogatorily. Whilst they preferred *chiremba* and *sekuru* to *n'anga*, upon further enquiry the participants explained that they were more comfortable to be called ZINATHA as a name of their profession. These sacred practices prefer a modern concept to the traditional one which has been in use since pre-colonial Zimbabwe. From these interview responses, it shows that the once despised traditional healing as a practice is reasserting itself in the modern society. In colonial Africa, the missionaries, colonial officers, doctors and nurses who introduced western medical services strongly opposed traditional medicine (Waite 2000:238) in (Sibanda 2015:77). Sibanda goes on to say this rendered traditional medicine a seemingly inferior and illegitimate form of health care during that period (Sibanda, 2015:77). Soon after independence in 1980, the government promulgated the Traditional Medical Practitioner's Act (1981) and approved the establishment of traditional medical practitioners body called Zimbabwe national traditional healers association (ZINATHA) to oversee traditional healing operations. This is a clear testimony of the modern government's approval of traditional healing. The founding President of ZINATHA was the late Professor Gordon Chavhunduka, who was an academic and practitioner in his own right. It is through ZINATHA that registration and certification of registered practitioners are done in offices found in cities and towns throughout the country (Sibanda, 2015:82). Sibanda goes on to say that it is on the basis of the efficient functioning of ZINATHA and its creativity in modernising operations that health and wealth can be guaranteed. This how traditional herbal remedies can be mainstreamed in Zimbabwe.

In modern Zimbabwe there is wealth creation through African traditional medicine. The traditional medicine practitioners self-advertise their services directly or indirectly. Sign posts are inscribed the following among other labels 'Chiremba', 'ZINATHA'. Some even state the kind of ailments they cure. So ATR which used to be a hidden religion can now advertise itself, it is now past the era of low self-esteem.

The conventional healthy system is now working hand-in-glove with the traditional healing system. This is because the Zimbabweans in the modern world have accepted that healing in ATR is holistic. African healing methods involve not only a recovery from bodily ailments, but

also a social, spiritual and psychological reintegration of the patient into the community of the living and the living-dead (Manda, 2008) in Sibanda (2015:82). Registered traditional midwives are given permission to operate as birth attendants in various communities in Zimbabwe. In hospitals patients are advised to consult *Chivanhu* in cases of mysterious illnesses which cannot be addressed by western type of healing. The emergence of Chinese herbs has fostered confidence in the traditional healing sector, helping to ward off the long-time stigma which has been attached to traditional herbs. In Zimbabwe there are now registered traditional healing training institutions. Lastly, in one of the universities which offer a Pharmaceutical Degree Programme, the curriculum has also roped in traditional medicine.

All this shows the intersection of traditional healing and modernity. So the meaning of ATR in the contemporary times can be drawn from the way African traditional medicine is conceived. This is because it is difficult to separate religion from medicine in the faith of the Shona, for they are closely linked to each other (Gelfand et al, 1985) in (Sibanda 2015:82). Cultural considerations and religion are overpowered by economic and financial mechanisms of the day.

5.7 Challenges associated with ATR

In this section, the study sought to establish negative perceptions about ATR. Interviews and observations were used to gather information which was relevant from an affective, functionalist and substantitivist theoretical meanings ATR could be interpreted. The information came from all three categories my participants. The following statements capture typical descriptions of ATR in the context of its meaning in modern society.

There are participants who belonged to Category A, who complained that *Chivanhu zvachinoreva zvakanganiswa nechirungu* (the meaning of *Chivanhu* has been negatively affected by modernity). Because of that sacred places have been desacralised. They stressed that this is the reason why Zimbabwe is now experiencing a lot of catastrophes. However, on the same issue of intersection between *Chivanhu* and modernity, mostly participants in Categories B and C said modernity is good because it helped *Chivanhu* to drop some bad practices which promoted abuse of human rights as espoused in the constitution. Women have proved to be the major beneficiaries of the impact of modernity on *Chivanhu*.

Participants reiterated that people go to *Chivanhu* for help but at the end they are abused in the name of seeking help, especially women. Some middle aged and young participants stressed that in modern times, people are using *Chivanhu* to amass wealth through phenomena such goblins (*zvikwambo*). However, this idea of being capitalistic has been propelled by modernity which means it has negatively nurtured ATR. (P45) pointed out that *Chivanhu* is a source of some mystified powers which are used by many politicians, pastors and farmers in modern Zimbabwe. One of the powers mentioned was the power of witchcraft activities. Participant (39) charged that it is through Chivanhu that people are having curses and misfortunes in their lives. She also cited *mhepo* (evil spirits) which torment innocent souls as being generated by Chivanhu through some entreaty rituals (*kupirira*). A few young participants accused Chivanhu of being segregatory in that it is a religion which favors the elderly. In the same line of thinking, young females argued that they also feel segregated and oppressed by Chivanhu. Thus Mercy Amba Oduyoye (2002) in (Kamwendo and Manyeruke, 2017:157) thinks that patriarchal mentality has brought about cultural limitations which clip the hands of women.

From the above findings, the participants' responses appealed to the three perspectives of constructing the meaning of ATR. All the participants agreed that the wickedness of *Chivanhu* has resulted in serious conflicts in the modern society. At a community level, conflicts are more prevalent in the context of the following groups of people: the young versus the old, women versus men, the learned versus the uneducated and the poor versus the wealthy.

(P13) admitted that in this contemporary world, a lot of families are not united in doing and following *Chivanhu*. He outlined the following as some of the reasons; it might be because of jealousy that a family member has been chosen by the spiritual world to be a spirit medium of the family ahead of others. Participant (2) reasoned that the jealous ones associate spirit mediumship with a lot of privileges, so there is sabotage of the medium when it comes to family matters. Some acquire magic charms and goblins for accumulation of wealth. However, the goblins and magic charms negatively affect other family members by causing sickness, misfortunes and even deaths. When problems arise in the family, the culprit informs their families that they are no longer following *Chivanhu* for they have embraced Christianity. In this context, (P13) feels there is no sincerity in joining Christianity by members who are known to have acquired charms and goblins. Christianity is just being used as a hiding place. Problems

caused by the goblins and magic charms are not easy to deal with since the Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment (No. 20) Act of 2013 forbids witch hunting. Also, the same constitution provides for freedom of worship, so if a person adheres to Christianity he/she cannot be forced to embrace African traditional religion to have family problems solved. What (P13) has said complements Mazhinye (2016)'s view of the cause of conflicts in Shona families because of *Chivanhu*. In Shona communities there is a belief that if a problem affecting a family is solved using *Chivanhu,* some members in the family would prosper leaving others behind, so it is better not to resort to *Chivanhu* and let everybody suffer. In the event that the family spirit has chosen a female medium, some senior male members of the family are reluctant to deal with family problems protesting why the ancestral spirits would choose the girl child thereby enriching the son- in- law. Others think that certain types of *Chivanhu* should be coming to his family only so he wants to monopolize the family *Chivanhu* (Mazhinye 2016).

There are nuclear families suffering because the father has ordered his children to desist from following *Chivanhu* and rely on prayer. But in some instances, the father would be the one with goblins affecting the son's family. This has led to the perishing of many families in Zimbabwe due to *hurombwa* of the fathers. But the other challenge is that there are some unscrupulous traditional healers who charge money and or cattle but fake solving *Chivanhu* in some affected families. So some victims end up thinking that all sacred practitioners are not genuine (Mazhinye 2016). If the traditional practitioner is genuine, *Chivanhu* can be successfully solved. Doing *Chivanhu* is not using bad magic charms but engaging one's ancestral spirits in the recommended way.

5.8 Summary

This chapter looked at some *Chivanhu* essentials which are considered when dealing with the nature of African traditional religion in a modern society of Zimbabwe. Since African traditional religion is too broad, the chapter came up with a thematic approach to explore the belief systems and practices associated with traditional religion among the Shona people of modern Zimbabwe. For example, the architecture, witchcraft and power of the dead in a rural community can be said to be a traditional religion miniature. In the modern society of Zimbabwe, *Chivanhu* is still relevant in the day- to- day living of the Shona people. *Chivanhu* is equal to a family religion. In

Chivanhu, there is a three-tier interaction pitting the underground world, earthly world and spiritual world. In examining the Shona people's traditional attitudes to rituals and how modernity pressures have impacted upon them, the study illustrated the fact that African traditional religious beliefs and practices are dynamic. Among the Shona people, both life and after-life have always had a spiritual interpretation. In modern Zimbabwe, the meaning of traditional religion is just ambivalent, in some situations its meaning is covert, while in other contexts it is open for all to see. There is also a way in which traditional religion is confused with abuse of authority. Rituals are the nerve center of *Chivanhu*, the Shona people in the modern society are rapidly becoming a ritual rich society.

CHAPTER SIX

6.0 Discussion

6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a discussion of the research findings. According to Bonsu (2016), if African people want the rest of the world to stop describing their religion and indigenous institutions with misleading and derogatory terminologies, then it is only natural that they come up with their own Afrocentric terminologies. The discussion of the research findings is done with reference to the research questions posed in Chapter 1. These questions directed the empirical investigation. The questions are as follows: how do the Shona people's traditional belief systems and practices fit into an affective postulation of the meaning of African traditional religious practices in Zimbabwe? How is the substantive meaning of ATR opening up new perspectives of an existing social matrix to meet the needs of the Zimbabwean indigenous people? In what ways is the functional meaning of African traditional religion's protean nature denoted in contemporary Zimbabwe.

6.2 Discussion of Findings

The first intriguing finding arose when the qualitative research data was analyzed using an affective postulation on the meaning of African traditional religious practices framework.

6.2.1 Categories of Power in ATR

The meaning of ATR in the modern society of Zimbabwe is determined by various matrices of power. What emerged during the study was that there were several categories of power which were noticeable during the research in regard to the intersection of *Chivanhu* and modernity in Zimbabwe. Detection of the power categories was done using an Afrocentrism and Symbolic Interactionism. The various categories of power which were noted were: transcendental power, traditional power, family power, modernity power. These forms of power contribute towards an understanding of ATR effectively. Because of these powers and even though in a modern set- up where secularization has gained ground, ATR is still treated as an awesome and mystified religious tradition. The following is a presentation of the meaning powers for ATR in a modern society.

6.2.1.1 Transcendental Power

In seeking for the meaning of African Traditional Religion, there is an affirmation of the existence of Mwari (Shona Supreme God), but the Shona do not *necessarily* labour themselves to offer rational proof of his existence. This does not suggest that the Shona are not rational. For them, God simply exists. There is no need to doubt, question or even to disprove the truth of this statement. His existence is a metaphysical pre-supposition (Onwumere 2005). It explains why the Shona have designations for their Supreme Being. The designations are replete with meanings, showing what the people think of Him. The names are symbolic, manifesting His nature, essence, or creative function. Thus, the names for God in the ATR manifest his identity. In addition, to know the names for God is to know the reality of God: the Being, whose reality is manifested in those names. A strong belief in the presence of Mwari in daily living is captured in the Shona naming system, especially when they coin theophoric names.

Between Mwari and humanity are ancestral spirits who serve as conveyor belts. The Ancestors are the founders of the 'Shona community'. Chavhunduka (2001:4) argues that ancestors occupy a central position in our African religion largely because of their ownership of land and to their relationship to God.They are referred to as *varipasi* (those below) and dwell in a spirit world called *nyikadzimu.* They are guardian spirits who are influential in people's lives (Bourdillon 1976: 263). The Shona people are in the presence of their ancestral spirits wherever they are and whatever they do. Expressions like *vadzimundiringe*, (ancestors take care of me) *vadzimu vandirasa* (ancestors have forsaken me), *vadzimu vadambura mbereko* (ancestors have broken their back sling), *vadzimu vandinzwa* (ancestors have heard me) are very common to confirm how the Shona worldview is dominated by ancestral spirits. Ancestral spirits perform various positive roles provided the living relatives honor them regularly through libations. Some of their functions are; protection of their progenies from danger, misfortunes and witches, success in agricultural enterprise, hunting, employment and job security, education, sport and business. A successful and productive marriage attributed to ancestral spirits is marked by bearing of children. *Vadzimu* insist on strict observance of moral values, thus incest and adultery are tabooed. Respect for elders is inculcated in the family by the belief that an unkind act towards elders, for example one's mother, would be remembered after death by her angered spirit which would descend as *ngozi,* that is, avenging spirit on the guilty child and so punish him or his children (Gelfand,1970). The living invite spiritual wrath through blunders, negligence and

omission of rituals. *Midzimu* can bring illness, diseases, impotence or any misfortune like drought, plague, pestilence, floods and misfortune. They can also allow witches to bring in evil and disturb the state of the living's health. In the Shona's own statements, they 'open the door' and allow evil. It can be argued that rejection of *vadzimu* implies rejection of *unhu* as well as acceptance of being subhuman in terms of the Shona worldview. Shona people are also fearful of vengeance which is brought by so many immoral acts like murder and disrespecting own mothers. The establishment and maintenance of the morals and customs of the people are attributed to *vadzimu*. They are the custodians of morality and take care of their descendants (Onwumere 2005).

6.2.1.2 Architectural power

The meaning of African traditional religion in a modern society can be discerned through power of architecture, especially the traditional kitchen hut. Contrary to the view that it is extinct, African traditional religion in the modern society exists and expresses itself in and through space like the traditional kitchen hut. So, since the study paid attention to it, it resulted in what can be referred to as kitchenology as a source of valuable information for African studies in general and African traditional religion in particular. In Shona homesteads, whether they are rich or poor, whether they are educated or not, whether they spend most of their time working in urban areas or not, the traditional homestead in the rural areas has a kitchen hut. It is a prerequisite structure that is built following a traditional architectural design of roundness and cone shaped roof. The round shape has some ideological underpinnings. The comprehension and explication of Shona traditional kitchen hut architecture possibly involves the simultaneous understanding of two things: the nature of the architectural artifacts themselves and the many forces that lie behind their production. Understanding the morphology of the traditional kitchen hut in studying the meaning of ATR takes into consideration the rural dwelling in isolation and focus being paid on how the traditional kitchen's elements determine factors of indigenous Shona's identity. As was highlighted earlier on, the kitchen huts are round in nature. This is a pragmatic expression of the philosophy of communalism and the complementary nature of the Shona society. Roundness is flexible and inclusive. Then the roundedness is covered by a cone- shaped roof which is perhaps one of the most important identifying characteristics of Shona traditional hut architecture. The

roof has a round base and a focal point of a peak top, perhaps persuading an interpreter to draw some symbolisms. This is because most of the Shona gatherings take place in rounds around a focal point. So the approach toward the second factor is centered on symbolisms. The kitchen hut which is regarded as a sacred space belongs to the living, the unborn as well as to the dead. Its purpose depicts the whole nature of traditional religion. It was a religion of the departed forefathers; it is again for the present and future generations. Symbolism of the traditional kitchen hut communicates the value of ATR. The word, *value,* comes from the Latin word, *valére,* which means something having or believed to have real worth or merit (Onwumere 2005). It is that reasoned and firm conviction that something is good or bad; that those convictions or beliefs are organized in the human psyche to form scales of preference or scales of values. Value reflects the personality of individuals and expresses the cultural tone, moral, affective, social and spiritual dimensions of the community, marked by the family, the school, the institutions and the society (ibid). Symbol helps to communicate value in people's culture and religion. Symbolic communication denotes a boundary drawn between the transcendental and categorical, and the different moments which the symbolic action expresses (ibid).

The atmosphere one gets when getting into a kitchen for ritual purposes cements the idea that Shona people have religious centers where they meet the spiritual world. The contribution of fire is vital in most of Shona rituals. The fire in the hearth is the clearest image of the unity which exists between the living and the dead. Spirits of the dead are considered as living in *chikuva*, which also the altar for numerous rites. It is the soul of the household and turns the house into a sanctuary. The hearth is a sacred ritual place, a place of peace, or refuge, and of victory over sterility. Fire helps to forge unity in communities through a practice called *kugokedzana moto* (sharing fire done by neighbors). In the domain of rituals, the kitchen paraphernalia has some mystic powers which sacralise the dramatisation process and the impact of outcome knowledge on the performances done by the people who use the paraphernalia. A traditional kitchen hut is a symbol of Africanness and unity. It is crucial to national identity and conscience as it serves as a neural fibre to African traditional religion.

6.2.1.3 The Traditional Power

Traditional power dictates that certain customs are to be followed in Chivanhu customs and practices. Rituals begin and end the life of a Shona person. So, right from the onset, traditions dictate procedures that are followed in marriage, how pregnancy is managed, prenatal, natal and postnatal rites, dying, death burial and post- burial rituals. Traditional leaders are the earthly custodians of traditions. They are the link figures between the earth and the spiritual world. Whenever they convene traditional court meetings, they will be doing this on behalf of the spiritual councils convened by their departed relatives in the spiritual world. Also, old age is understood to be inclined towards traditional power. Among the Shona people, old age is associated with wisdom and maturity.

Usually communities are run on the basis of traditional power. It is the source of traditional law, taboos, proverbs and idioms. Thus, a functionalist interpretation of ATR depicts that this religion solidifies the community despite individuation which has been propagated by modernity. There is a depiction of Durkheimian notion of religion, that is, religion as any set of beliefs and practices that forge moral community. Cladis (2006) suggests that religion is alive not in spite of modernity, but rather because modernity and religion are not necessarily antagonistic. It is simply no longer useful to think of religion as an anomaly in the modern age (Cladis 2006). The community is the core of African spirituality, hence, by community one will be referring to the living and the dead, the power of the living, and power of the dead. All African people agree that the community is the paramount social reality apart from which humanity cannot exist. The community is a sacred phenomenon created by Mwari (God) and governed by ancestral sprits (Paris 1995:51).

6.2.1.4 Family Power

The Shona culture is family- centric. It treasures the extended family. To exist in Africa is to belong to a family. By the same token, the existence of ATR in the modern society is actualized by the power of the family. The African person is defined as a member of a family, and so the African person is never alone either in self-concept or in the perception of others. The life of a person is wholly dependent on the family and its symbiotic functions of biological lineage, communal nurture, and moral formation (Paris, 1995:101).

In some cases believing in Chivanhu is done as a family. In a country experiencing rapid social changes like Zimbabwe, with the traditional kitchen hut being the cog of the religion, most of the

ATR practices and ceremonies are strictly family activities. This is more pronounced at funerals. In most families, funerals are administered by the male family members. When the funeral is held in the rural areas, families which reside in the rural areas are the ones which are dominant in decision making of the funeral proceedings. Their dictatorial tendencies are based on the demands of culture and tradition where family members viewed as anti-tradition may be side-lined (Kamwendo and Manyeruke, 2017:156).

6.2.1.5 Gender Power

One thing that brought a new way of looking at traditional religion is the status of women in this religion. It is common knowledge that in African systems of thought, men have, to a great extent, constructed a religious language that describes a religion of patriarchal family and ancestry. The practice of *kuroora guva* depicts how patriarchal traditions are becoming part of the commodification of women's dead bodies. Through *kuroora guva* women's bodies are commoditised, becoming the site of complex interactions of patriarchy, power and politics. There is a general belief that the status of women in an African traditional religious setting is a breeding ground for abuse. In modern Zimbabwe, in rural communities there are developments which have taken place that cannot conform to the recurring view of regarding women as second class citizens in ATR. The study noted the shift of power relations between men and women in traditional communities, weighing prospects of its brunt on the traditional justice systems in modern Zimbabwe.

The traditional kitchen hut which is the epicenter of ATR in Shona rural communities is associated with femininity. There is sexual identity of the Shona Supreme God as *Muwariri* and *Muwaruri*, bothl roles performed by a woman in the kitchen hut. Also, the Supreme Being is known as *Muumbi*, which a feminine attribute. This makes women awesomely sacred figures in ATR, especially in the modern world. Cases of injustices towards women are dominating the Shona worldview as noticed in the spirits of the deceased women seeking for justice. This definitely has redefined the status of women in ATR and the central place occupied by women in the *Chivanhu* belief system. So, in the modern society of Zimbabwe, female symbolism has secured a religious space without controversies and perturbation.

In the modern society of Zimbabwe, the fact that gender roles and relations are worked out differently is a motivating factor in leading women to question the roles and status ascribed to

them in traditional culture, and to envision new ways of behaving as alluded by Cartledge and Cheetham (2011:75) in (Kamwendo and Manyeruke, 2017:157). Power dynamics suggest that the solution is not to overthrow tradition, but to work with it, and through it, to bring about a transformation of attitudes and reconciliation between the genders. (Kamwendo and Manyeruke, 2017:158).

6.2.1.6 Modernity Power

It is well realised in commodification of the ATR. In the modern society, modernity has shaped the complexion of ATR in so many respects. Because of changes taking place in the modern world, rituals which used to be held in forests, mountains, rivers are now all held in the kitchen hut. The religion which has been believed to have no sacred buildings is revering the kitchen hut as its axis mundi. Modernity has commodified death and burial practices in Zimbabwe. The religion has also been commodified in the health sector where traditional medicine is being commercialised. The education sector has made provisions for establishing the traditional kitchen hut in all schools as a symbol of ATR. In the Design and Art industry the kitchen hut has been dominating when designing a Zimbabwean home. Elements which enable the existence of ATR in modern society of Zimbabwe are: diversity, capacity for cultural self-assessment, consciousness of the dynamics inherent when cultures interact, institutionalisation of cultural knowledge and developing adaptations to service delivery reflecting an understanding of cultures (Mapara, 2014). It opens new grounds for traditional religion dialogue, networking and creating new cultural resources from private sectors.

Also, through the constitution some of the belief systems and practices of ATR have been challenged by the government, human rights advocacy groups and Christianity. In fact, the merging of religious ideas and the country's policies is unavoidable in a world marked by global population movements and exchange of ideas. Syncretism and cross-fertilization have always been aspects of all religious cultures and ideas, but the crossing and transgression of boundaries is particularly visible today (Hedges, 2014:22). What it means is that ATR just like other religious traditions, has not remained a single religious tradition that has not developed in dialogue with other traditions and external secular forces, adapting their ideas. This, therefore, challenges the way people speak of *Chivanhu* in the modern world. In the modern society, ATR

has reasserted itself nationally and internationally after being disturbed by colonisation, it is becoming a matter of public discussion, a major source of daily news, and a marker of identity and source of resistance (Hedges, 2014:22). The movement of populations and information around the globe and the growing influence of popular culture (particularly film and music), is transforming the Zimbabwean traditional religion. This affects the way we understand religion as a marker of identity, notably with the growing awareness in Zimbabwe of what are termed dual or multiple religious identities, where someone belongs to, or practices within, two (or sometimes more) religious traditions at the same time (Hedges, 2014:22).

Generally, due to the impact of colonisation and Christianisation, the meaning of ATR was informed by a variety of happenstances. Over the last few decades, however, the desire to have African assertiveness in Zimbabwe invoked a more active form of traditional religious meaning-making. The monopoly of Christianity on religion in Zimbabwe has been neutralised. This is supported by Ukuekpeyetan-Agbikim'si (2014) theory of religious economy. The theory of religious economy argues that the economic model of supply and demand has a significant role in the development and success of organised religions. A religious economy consists of a market and a supply of different organisations. A competitive free market or economy makes it possible for religious suppliers to meet the demands of different religious consumers. By offering an array of religions and religious products, a competitive religious economy stimulates activity in the marketplace. This sees different religious organisations competing for followers in a religious economy, much like the way business compete for consumers in a commercial economy. Theorists assert that a true religious economy is the result of religious pluralism, giving the population a wider variety of choices in religion.

In the modern society, like consumers, in the domain of religion, people are not loyal to one "product" but experiment with different religious traditions including Christianity and ATR to construct their own system of meaning. This non-institutional type of religion is described as "pick-and-mix-religion" (Hamilton, 2000). What this implies is that ATR has become a visible religion which has embraced facets of modernity and other religious traditions' practices. So, I can make a claim that modernity has shaped religion even as religion has shaped modernity.

The power of modernity in understanding the nature of ATR in Zimbabwe is realised in media. Media is a very powerful tool in the dissemination of information especially religious matters.

From the media, modern society knows what is expected of them by the law of Zimbabwe. This covers a wide range of issues like human rights and emancipation of women. ATR has become one of the fundamental matters in Zimbabwean media. The Zimbabwean society's understanding of ATR is done by the media, both print and electronic. From the media the society gets to know the dynamics of ATR's belief systems and practices which are attributed to modernity.

Chivanhu fulfills religious functions and helps express the various ways in which human beings conceive of themselves and act in the world. ATR gives traditional laws on marriage, human life, environmental conservation, respect of human property, observance of sacred days, criminal punishments, food regulations, and marriage. This raises questions about whether the meaning is sought in terms of beliefs, practices, or social codes. Amanze (2010:298) in Sibanda (2015:78) argues that besides asserting cultural identity and authenticity of the people, ATR offers psychological reassurance, behavioral confirmation, social integration, explanation of the unknown, explanation of origins and, above all, a practical way of solving problems.

New perspectives for substantive meaning of traditional religion in a modern societal set-up of Zimbabwe.

This study got new perspectives on the negative meaning of ATR from a substantivist perspective. Under this theme, I will break down the emergent issues into three different findings:

6.2.2 Circleness

Within the context of Afrocentrism and Symbolic Interactionism, an application of Seda's (2000:162) notion of the curvilinear theory was useful in interpreting the material culture of Zimbabwe, thereby unraveling latent indigenous knowledge as it is manifested in architecture. This study has found it fitting to suggest the circle theory to depict the nature of traditional religion. From its remote past *Chivanhu* has been guided by a framework of roundness. This framework ensured continuity in *Chivanhu*so it does not end because of modernisation. Looking at the circle, an onlooker is not in a position to tell where it starts and where it ends. In as much as one cannot pinpoint where *chivanhu* started, therefore its ending cannot be determined. In this circle, the orbit provides unwritten laws, norms and values. Breaking them will be tantamount to

moving out of the obit. Coming back is facilitated by performing rituals, and among the Shona, supplications, libations and offerings are known as doing *Chivanhu*. Some have converted to Christianity due to many reasons. But the indigenous Zimbabwean is always immersed in his traditional religion. When he faces a crisis he reverts back to his traditional religion to manage problems bedeviling his life and family. ATR serves to the emotions of the indigenous Africans in times of hardships and tribulations. So, the framework of his religious disposition is circulatory in nature.

The life of an indigenous Zimbabwean revolves in a circle. He has his rural home and a residential stand in town. There is always circular migration which happens. He works and stays in town but he occasionally goes back to his rural home on holidays to perform rituals. When he dies he wishes to be buried in his rural home, the home of his ancestral spirits. And mostly, when he retires he permanently relocates to his rural home. Most traditional Shona villages consist of nucleated settlements. This is indicative of an intuitive sense of coming together and the closeness of family ties as suggested by the circle. The traditional hut also connotes the concept of Shona people's sense of communalism. It is the most accessible structure in Shona homesteads. Its circular fireplace provides a warm hearth for the whole family and, at times, several human activities such as relaxation, cooking and recreation may take place simultaneously. It is a living room that brings everyone together. It has no divisions and this affords it a multi-functional role. While to be an ancestral spirit constitutes the indigenous Shona as a key soteriological belief, the dead is brought back home through the bringing- back home ceremony. The spirit has several duties to perform which range from guiding the living relatives, blessing them as well as punishing offenders. Sometimes, the dead are represented by animals like bulls. The bulls are given names of the deceased relatives. There is also the notion of incarnation whereby the deceased member's name is conferred to the surviving elder son.

In this circle, ATR is the ultimate source of social cohesion in the modern society. The modern society's primary concern is the possession of social values by which indigenous Africans control the action of self and others and through which society is perpetuated. Science and technology cannot create this value https://www.academia.edu/3838157. Killing is not allowed, children should respect the elderly, and women should not cheat on their husbands, just to mention but a few. So ATR serves as the foundation upon which these values rest.

6.2.3 Separation of the religious from the irreligious

Basing on the findings of the study, it was clear that not everything is religious among the Shona people. There are certain practices which are abhorred by the Shona like witchcraft. The idea of having witchcraft hunting cults developing is a clear testimony that it is not religiously accepted. ATR is used to counter witchery. The Shona have the notion of separation of the sacred and profane. In their language, they have the term *kuera* (sacred), so they talk of sacred places (*nzvimbo dzinoera*) sacred days, sacred people and sacred activities like rituals. The elderly in the study lamented that a lot of sacred places have ceased to be sacred due to modernity, for example, forests, pools and mountains. However, in a home set-up where there is a lived religion, the study noted that the traditional kitchen hut is sacred. This means that what is not prefixed with *kuera* is either secular or profane. So, the sacredness of a phenomenon is contextually understood by the adherents. A bull is just an ordinary beast in one's kraal and in the community. But when the same bull is ritualised, beer poured on it, it becomes a revered sacred bull, its status changes and it becomes known as *Bambo vemusha* (father of the family). It explains why Chitando (1997:91) argued that, indeed, preliminary results of research into the religion of the Karanga people of Zimbabwe indicate that there is a concept which serves to differentiate between the religious and the secular. Citing the term *Chivanhu,* he said it is used to refer to indigenous beliefs and practices. A substantive meaning of *Chivanhu* shows that the separation exists in reality when the Shona think of *Chivanhu* as the solution to all problems facing people in the modern day. This means that when a person comes back home and has rituals performed in response to the problems he/she is facing, it shows there is separation of religious and non-religious life. Coming from an irreligious environment, the person is coming home where he hopes to encounter the sacred/hierophany. The separation between sacred and profane space and time can be easily illustrated during rituals.

6.3 Alterisation of ATR

From the views of participants, it could be discerned that religious conceptualisation in the modern society of Zimbabwe is characterised by what Martí, (2015:85) calls dynamics of alterisation processes that condition the contemplation between *Chivanhu* and western religions (especially Christianity). These processes of alterisation are characterised by representing and treating *Chivanhu* through synecdochisation, exoticisation, undervaluation, overvaluation, misunderstanding and exclusion (Martí, 2015:85). All these procedures which have been raised

by Martí, (2015) have also an enormous contribution in the negative construction of the meaning of ATR in the modern society of Zimbabwe.

6.3.1 Synecdochisation

Synecdochisation plays an important role in the characterisation of *Chivanhu.* Through synecdochisation, only a particular aspect of *Chivanhu* is generalised to be the essence of *Chivanhu.* In this way a particular feature or behaviour of some individuals is applied for the whole collective essence of ATR yet sometimes this feature might be noted due to circumstantial contexts. For example, this is evident in the roles of women in ATR, such that this religion is described as oppressive and abusive. This has been predominantly propagated by modernised women in their interpretation of traditional cultural practices in Africa (Martí, 2015:85). It is understood as void of human rights issues (Martí, 2015:85). This synecdochisation has been key in the affective meaning of ATR. The modern society has generated negative conception of this religion on the grounds that *Chivanhu* is against modernity when it comes to respect for human rights issues. That characterisation is propagated in print and electronic media and peddled by critics of this religion.

6.3.2 Exoticisation

According to Martí (2015:85) exoticisation is a tendency to see a particular group through those cultural features or traditions which clearly diverge from those of the observer. In this subjective construction of *Chivanhu*, common aspects which it shares with other religious traditions in Zimbabwe are not taken into account or are minimized, and the relevance of the exoticised tradition is not relativized. Exoticisation enhances that practice of *Chivanhu* which appears strange in the eyes of the outsider, for example, commercialisation of African traditional medicine and commodification of death practices.

6.3.3 Undervaluation

The undervaluation of *Chivanhu* simply occurs when, according to the cognitive framework of other religious traditions like Christianity, determine features that they think have lower value than those which are ascribed to them. For example, lack of sacred written texts and information technology devices. This then depict a substantive meaning of ATR in the modern society. Many of the cultural traits which are seen as exotic may also serve to undervaluate their bearers (Martí, 2015:85). For example, witch hunting is not only understood as something strange but also as

backwardness signs that serve to undervaluate not only "culture" in general but also its bearers (Martí, 2015:85). This undervaluation of *Chivanhu* practices like witchcraft hunting and cleansing constitutes the main strategy to morally justify its condemnation.

Examination of the functional meaning of African traditional religion in contemporary Zimbabwe

6.3.4 Overvaluation

There is no doubt at all that in the alterisation processes to understand the meaning of ATR, overvaluation also appears. For example, this is noted in the notion that African traditional religion is predominantly prevalent in rural areas. So people who reside in rural areas are regarded as true followers of *Chivanhu as* compared to those who reside in town. This is because modernisation in the rural areas has not yet reached the level being experienced in urban environments. In this context, a functional meaning of religion is implored which results in overevalaution of the ATR. The indigenous Shona people lead a communal life. The indigenous Africans have overevaluated the meaning of ATR when they advocate notions like no separation of the sacred and the profane, seeing everything in the African worldview as religious. Also, the idea that it can provide solutions to all human problems, yet there are situations which need science, especially in health and well-being.

6.3.5 Misunderstanding

Another important element of the alterisation processes is misunderstanding. There are some belief systems and practices which are misunderstood in the way ATR is viewed. For example, polygamy, in its polygynic form, is very often understood in a simplistic manner as something that focuses on lubricious sexual privileges for men, yet an Afrocentric study of the practice actually shows that there are multiple functional explanations of it and that in determined contexts women as well as men may seek advantage in polygyny (Martí, 2015:85). This isThe same with dressing, for example, the veil and wrap around which are usually worn by rural women. So they misunderstand the multiple meanings associated with this kind of cultural dress only to see it as a "static practice which symbolises the oppressive nature of patriarchy in African societies" (Hoodfar1993: 16) in (Martí, 2015:85).

6.3.6 Exclusion

Description of ATR is done by excluding it from major world religious traditions because it does not fit into the template of western -oriented religions. As a result, *Chivanhu* is not regarded as a religion. Some derogatory concepts are used to describe it like witchcraft practices. It can be extremely instructive to think about this term when looking at the meaning of ATR in modern society of Zimbabwe. This inappropriate use of the term witchcraft resulted in *Chivanhu* being misunderstood as witchcraft. In fact, several participants failed to distinguish *Chivanhu* from witchcraft. Even some adherents think that traditional religion deserves a better name because in *Chivanhu* there is also witchcraft which has some evil connotations. So *Chivanhu* refers to the ideas of primitivism and backwardness.

6.4 Final reflections on the meaning of ATR in modern society of Zimbabwe

From the research, it is not always clear what the Shona people mean by *"Chivanhu"* in the modern society. As a traditional religion, its traditions encompass a whole way of life so that, for example, some people born into this tradition follow the customs associated with traditions of *Chivanhu* but define themselves as non-traditionalists. A discord here arises for people who claim to show no affiliation to *Chivanhu.* They are comfortable to be addressed as *vanhu*, yet *Chivanhu* derives from the term *vanhu.* The contradiction lies in the fact that once one is born into *Chivanhu* traditions, he/she is automatically an adherent of *Chivanhu*. Denouncing it becomes just superficial. Does denouncing *Chivanhu* makes one a non-adherent of it when he or she was born into it? Another key finding is that *Chivanhu* is a vernacular term which sums up a Shona way of life. By using *Chivanhu*, there is conscious habituation with some religious realignment in studying the religion of the contemporary African. It represents a home grown religion, for this reason it also known as Shona religion. Basing on the participants' lived experiences, what came out of the study was that African Traditional Religion, which is also *Chivanhu,* is a 'Shona lived religion'.

There are also issues about who gets to define the limits or terms of *Chivanhu.* The use of the adjective *"chivanhu"* unmistakably reflects a very concrete way of understanding the contemporary Shona traditional religious world. What the modern society usually does is to say *Chivanhu chemakaranga*, meaning *Chivanhu* of the *karanga* people. So in this case *Chivanhu* is being understood as an ethnicity; one is in *Chivanhu* because he/she is born to an ethnically

Shona parent. However, people can convert to some forms of *Chivanhu* without being ethnically Shona. Therefore in the modern society, ATR may be better described as a culture, worldview, or lifeway. As has been said before, it is not easy to find unanimity of views on what *"Chivanhu"* actually means. But apart from this conceptual problem, what is clear is that the differentiated use that is made of the term clearly reveals a deep religious ideological problem in modern society of Zimbabwe.

Another key finding was that ATR can also be private and individualistic in its meaning. Onwumere (2005) thinks that this takes essentially two dimensions: that is it could be routine or occasional. A private routine practice of ATR includes daily incantations made by the head of the household to the family ancestral spirits in the kitchen hut. The meaning of ATR becomes occasional when rituals are performed in response to a specific situation for example the rites of passage like naming.

ATR is also a public practice with two forms being distinguishable, namely: the family and lineage rituals, and clan or village rituals. Both involve annual or bi-annual celebrations bringing people together to enact aspects of the history of the family, lineage or clan, as well as to perform agricultural rituals together. Examples of family and lineage rituals include; death, burial, conferment of the deceased's name and bringing back ceremonies. Occasional public village rituals include rain inducing ceremonies.

The assumption whether *Chivanhu* is essentially a private and individual matter or whether it is essentially communal and national is one that operates in much public debate, and legislation in Zimbabwe. There is freedom of worship, which means ATR is also included. However, there are some clashes between the religion and the constitution where the legislative provision claim that ATR is abusing human rights, for example, the oppression of women and ritual murders. Also, there are practices which have been banned by the government like witch hunting, for it is believed that it is all about extortion. This is tied into an interpretation, or definition, of religion that has become dominant in modern times. But, it is a public religion because there are several debates carried on national television and in other modes of media communication on ATR as a heritage which should be cherished by the modern world. Several times ATR adherents are seen performing rituals in public spaces. Emile Durkheim was one of the first sociologists to

emphasize that religion is not simply a private belief, it is "something eminently social" (Hedges, 2014:22).

Whether the meaning ATR is substantivist, affective or functionalist, it is never entirely neutral and objective; it often holds all sorts of hidden assumptions. Sometimes the meanings attached to ATR in the modern society are ideological or tactical designations which gain their power from their essential simplicity. These meanings are often explanations advanced in support of a single overriding thesis, and as Sharpe points out, many are aphorisms, or epigrams, for example: *Chivanhu chedu chinoti* (our Chivanhu says) *ichi ndicho Chivanhu chedu* (this is our *Chivanhu*). The intention in using these epigrams is to make "religion" mean neither more nor less what the person communicating decides it to mean Hedges (2014:4). It explains why some people in the modern world posit *Chivanhu neuroyi zvakafanana* (ATR and witchcraft are just one and the same thing). Though use of a substantivist, affective and functionalist perspective was handy in construing the meaning of ATR in the modern society of Zimbabwe, there was a challenge in that the approaches could be used in various ways to explain away ATR, yet at the same they were useful in emphasizing interpretation and exploring the ways humans use symbols to explain and make sense of their world.

A close look at the way in which ATR is understood shows that people use Eaghll's concept of clichés to extol and condemn this religion. In its common use, cliché simply means "a stereotyped expression, a hackneyed phrase or opinion", and signifies that which is unoriginal, conventional, and overused (Fountain 2012:7) in (Eaghll 2015:33). From the research findings, in their daily life, the Shona regularly mention the following: *ichi Chivanhu* (this is ATR/chivanhu), *paita Chivanhu* (*Chivanhu* has occurred), *zvinotoda Chivanhu* (what is needed is Chivanhu), *akashandisirwa Chivanhu* (what was used for him/her is *Chivanhu*). The general assumption that underlies these clichés is that behind all the life experiences of the Shona people lies a primordial phenomenon that remains unscathed from the messiness of modernity.

Kushandisirwa Chivanhu carries some negative overtones. *Chivanhu* is viewed as bad such that it can harm someone. In this context, *Chivanhu* becomes equivalent to malevolent spirits (*mhepo*) or witchcraft. Usually, the term *mhepo* is mentioned when saying *kusimudza mhepo dzechivanhu* (activating malign spirits of *Chivanhu*). *Chivanhu chinosimudza mhepo* the problem is that it describes *Chivanhu* in terms of some negative transcendent spiritual forces rather than

focus on various forces at play in the classification of ATR discourse. However, it emerged that what controls people in freely using the term *Chivanhu*/ATR might be due to the modern society of Zimbabwe's understanding of this moniker as knotty. This is why it is normal to hear modernized people often excusing themselves when they are forced to use this term but in spite of this, they still use it or try to find other substitutes that most often are just not fully convincing (Martí, 2015). In and outside academic circles, *Chivanhu* is widely used in everyday language depicting its religious ideological importance and therefore social dimension as well. The fact that some treat it as a knotty nomenclature does not imply that it has a contested analytical value since it is something common with many concepts in the domain of religion studies. It would be difficult to find unanimity among the specialists regarding the different concepts that are used in the religious practice. The problem with these terms is also the fact that they can connote a pejorative dimension, an inheritance of the evolutionary anthropologist theories vision of anthropology that did not only classify religions that it studied but also arranged them into a hierarchy (Martí, 2015:85). *Chivanhu* becomes reserved for the poor and those who are less modernized.

However, when expressions like *panotoda Chivanhu* are used they imply that the bad situation can be successfully solved by employing *Chivanhu*. It might be sickness when the conventional healing practices have failed, *Chivanhu* is seen as better positioned as the panacea to the ailments. The belief is that *Chivanhu* is a wholesale package which solves all human problems. Instead of seeing *Chivanhu* as one of the approaches which can collectively be used to deal with human problems, the rhetoric privileges *Chivanhu* as the only solutionto human problems. So, *Chivanhu* is regarded as the origin of all meaning and existence and the organizing center of human life (Eaghll, 2015:33). The dual clichés that *Chivanhu* unites people and *Chivanhu* causes conflicts among people is another area to look at. Using these clichés is to engage in a game of definition that not only reduces ATR to a series of stereotypes, but to understand it from the perspective of selective exclusion. All this is to suggest that what is important is not what *Chivanhu* is or is not, but how the term is defined (Eaghll, 2015:35).

As was noted in findings of the study, in the modern society, *Chivanhu* is a creation of the "present," not the past. The conditions for the possibility of being in Chivanhu religiosity are a

product of the modern institutionalised world. It is because of the changes taking place in the modern world. So modernity has resulted in some ATR adherents craving for (*Chivanhu chechinyakare*) the religious past more than the present. Once this understanding is endorsed in understanding the nature of ATR, then modernity is believed to be behind the world's problems. There are those conservatives who think that they are the only ones who are following *Chivanhu* and often see some, especially those who have embraced Christianity as breaking essential elements of the tradition and see them as having left *Chivanhu.* But those with the dual affiliation do not just see the boundaries of the two specific religions being contested but the boundaries of *Chivanhu* itself. So which one represents the most acceptable version of *Chivanhu* in a modern society? This selection of definitions of ATR already shows that the question of the "Meaning of ATR in modern society of Zimbabwe" can be posed with various intentions. The multiple answers prove that the so-called Shona attitudes and qualities never have been defined in a univocal or consensual way (Dellmann 2018).

In the findings, another conflicting binary cliché emerged. It maintained that *Chivanhu* is shrouded in a superstitious religious belief that needs to be eradicated, or the understanding that modernity has produced and given people a religiously valueless world in Zimbabwe, so it is imperative to return to the roots of *Chivanhu. Chivanhu chechinyakare* is presently viewed as an outdated cultural practice that should be rejected in favor of modernity. For example, because it lacks science it is judged as an ancient way of knowing that needs to be surpassed by more sophisticated forms of knowledge. However, on the contrary those who are polemical of *Chivanhu,* appealed to *chinyakare* (religious past) to critique modern culture. These clichés have dominated the modern world such that any bad situation is explained using the goodness or badness of *Chivanhu.* It can be seen that when these clichés are used to provide a clear and distinct presentation of some religious essence of *Chivanhu,* the meaning becomes distorted. However, when they are used to frame how ATR is discussed in scholarship they can be useful tools (Eaghll, 2015:33).

CHAPTER SEVEN

7.0 Summary, Key Findings and Conclusion

7.1 Introduction

This work provided a study about the meaning of African traditional religion in modern society of Zimbabwe. It was apparent from the phenomenological research that traditional African religion is a dynamic but staple ingredient in the lives of Shona people of Zimbabwe. The current phenomenological study on the meaning of African traditional religion was conducted using purposively selected participants in Buhera District of Manicaland Province in Zimbabwe. Notwithstanding the fluid representations of various African religious traditions in Zimbabwe, the findings show that the reception and uses of the traditional religious narratives in the modern society comprise a synthesis of full embrace onthe one hand and skepticism on the other. In this chapter, I stress the synopsis of the key interesting findings which emerged from this research which mostly appear from the synergy of the qualitative interviews and observations. The contribution of this study to scholarship of religion, particularly African traditional religion is also highlighted in this section. The last part of this concluding chapter has to do with recommendations for further studies on the meaning of traditional religion in Zimbabwe.

7.2 Summarisation of the Central Points in the Thesis

I started this research by pointing out that exploration of traditional religion in a once-colonised country is a persistent tussle. I indicated in chapter one and two that westernisation and Christianisation impacted heavily on the vitality of African traditional religion in Zimbabwe. Among the modern views which engender regular exposition are how varied religious traditions and their rituals have been portrayed in Government activities, dominant Christian circles and contemporary media. This reinforces the approach which was used by westerners who used evolutionary and prejudicial methodical approaches to study African traditional religion, rendering the participants to the periphery. As indicated in chapter three, this approach of examining the religious constructs without valuing the participants in recent times has been rectified by employing Afrocentrism and Symbolic Interactionism Theories which give precedence to the African religio-cultural values. The study chose a term which closely depicts

the religious belief systems of the Shona people. The term is *Chivanhu* which is a Shona way of life. So this study consistently uses ATR and Chivanhu interchangeably in an attempt to find the meaning of the Shona people's religion in modern society of Zimbabwe. Such an approach in studying the meaning of African traditional religion using the indigenous equivalent term of religion as shown in Chapter Five was novel, particularly paying attention to architecture, rituals, death systems and witch hunting practices.

7.3 Summary of Conclusions

The conclusions of the research are reported with reference to the research questions posed in Chapter 1. These questions directed the empirical investigation. The questions are as follows:

1. In what ways is the functional meaning of African traditional religion's protean nature denoted in contemporary Zimbabwe.
2. How is the substantive meaning of ATR opening up new perspectives of an existing social matrix to meet the needs of the Zimbabwean indigenous people?
3. How do the Shona people's traditional belief systems and practices fit into an affective postulation of the meaning of African traditional religious practices in Zimbabwe?

The ability to employ significant symbols enables Shona people to interact with one another on the basis of traditional religious meanings. Relevance of Afrocentric and symbolic interactionist theoretical perspectives in this study was hinged on their emphasis on an interpretive meaning construction. In line with Blumer's perspective, the study managed to explore the relationship between the meaning people assign to objects, including physical environments as objects and the self. So, the meaning of ATR in this context was studied in relation to symbolism. The interpretive methodological stance of Afrocentrism and Symbolic Interactionism was based on direct examination or probing of the actual empirical social world rather than simulation of that world (Kwon, 2010:11). In this view, humans give meaning to their behavior through reflection and interpret the meaning of behaviors, events, and things. So individuals use language and significant symbols in their communication with others.

ATR in the modern society of Zimbabwe is a 'lived religion'. But for ordinary people, English monikers like ATR are not used by the Shona people in their daily language. But, a vernacular term which is closely equivalent to religion is *Chivanhu.* In this study, ATR and *Chivanhu* are used interchangeably. But specifically; the use of the adjective *"chivanhu"* unmistakably reflects

a very concrete way of understanding the contemporary Shona traditional religious world. Coming up with the meaning of ATR is daunting task in modern Zimbabwe. The term is used in so many ways. Sometimes it is understood as an ethnicity; one is in *Chivanhu* because he/she is born to an ethnically Shona parent. But the problem is that due to modernity and intercultural and interreligious mixtures, people can convert to some forms of *Chivanhu* without being ethnically Shona.

Chivanhu has proven to be debatable as to whether it is essentially a private and individual matter or fundamentally communal. In a multi-religious society, there are some clashes between the religion and the constitution where the legislative provisions claim that ATR promotes oppression and abuse of some sexes, especially women and children. However, this is challenged by ATR. The notion that African traditional religion is responsible for women's suffering and oppression has become the easiest expression of one's implied approval of existing so-called 'modern' social arrangements (Government of Zimbabwe, 2010). From the study, the outrage which mobilised the whole community against the *divisi* farmer when the crime was finally exposed means that *divisi* is not condoned by the Shona community as part of "tradition" of African religion. Yet, the *divisi* rapist was protected by the neo-colonial constitution, courts and the police, not the African "traditional" community when his crime became known. This is because the government does not allow witch hunting. This is tied into an interpretation of ATR that has become dominant in modern times. But, ATR in Zimbabwe is a public religion taught in educational institutions and is always covered by national television and other modes of media communication as a heritage which should be cherished by the modern world. In modern Zimbabwe, people freely gather performing rituals in public spaces.

From its remote past *Chivanhu* has been guided by a framework of roundness. This framework ensured continuity in *Chivanhu*, so it does not end because of modernisation. In this circle, the orbit provides unwritten laws, norms and values. Breaking them will be tantamount to moving out of the obit. Coming back is facilitated by performing rituals and, among the Shona, supplications, libations and offerings are known as doing *Chivanhu*. The nature of ATR in the modern society is characterised by circleness. Circleness provides a profound unity in ATR. So, from the study it was seen that the meaning of ATR is derived from unity of life. In ATR, human beings maintain the bond between the visible and invisible spheres of the universe (Magesa

1997:72) in (Beyers 2010:6). Rituals are an expression of this unity. Morals and ethics are concerned with maintaining unity.

The meaning of ATR in the modern society of Zimbabwe is determined by various matrices of power which include: transcendental power, architectural power, traditional power, family power, modernity power. These forms of power have contributes towards an understanding of ATR effectively.

From the study, one can note that the Shona people have a 'death system' where they treat death and bereavement as processes in what Smith calls "cumulative tradition" (1962: 144). Since a death system is culture -specific, in the context of this study, it becomes a snapshot of the way the Shona people understand, feel about, and act with regards to *roora* and death. This is what traditional religion is all about in the modern world. Basing on the death system of the Shona, the study found that African traditional religion has been commodified. In terms of *Chivanhu*, what persevered and developed were the essential qualities of the African worldview, a view concerned with metaphysical rather than purely physical interrelationships, such as that religious functions and practice (Walton, 1972) in (Myers, 1987:73).

In the study, it was clear that not everything is religious among the Shona people. There are certain practices which are abhorred by the Shona like witchcraft. The idea of having witchcraft hunting cults developing is a clear testimony that it is not religiously accepted. The Shona have the notion of separation of the sacred and profane. In their language they have the term *kuera* (sacred), so they talk of sacred places (*nzvimbo dzinoera*) sacred days, sacred people and sacred activities like rituals. This means that what is not prefixed with *kuera* is either secular or profane. However it emerged that restrains in the use of the term Chivanhu as an indigenous religion of the Shona people might be due to the modern society of Zimbabwe's understanding of the moniker ATR/*Chivanhu* as knotty. Traditional religious conceptualisation in modern society of Zimbabwe is characterised by dynamics of alterisation processes that condition the contemplation between *Chivanhu* and western religions (especially Christianity). These processes of alterisation are characterised by representing and treating *Chivanhu* through synecdochisation, exoticisation, undervaluation, overvaluation, misunderstanding and exclusion.

The study noted that whether the meaning ATR is substantivist, affective or functionalist, it is never entirely neutral and objective; it often holds all sorts of hidden assumptions. Sometimes the meanings attached to ATR in the modern society are ideological or tactical designations, which gain their power from their essential simplicity. For example emancipation of women in the modern society has also contributed towards a gendered outlook of ATR in modern Zimbabwe. These meanings are often explanations advanced in support of a single overriding thesis, summarized in aphorisms and or epigrams, for example: *Chivanhu chedu chinoti* (our Chivanhu says) *ichi ndicho Chivanhu chedu* (this is our *Chivanhu*), *musha mukadzi* (the key person in a home is a woman). Modernity has uplifted the role and status of women in ATR. Taking cognizance of the religious role of the traditional kitchen hut which has some feminine imagery and also the death system of *kuroora guva,* it is worthy to maintain that women have pillars of African traditional religion. This serves to challenge and correct the recurrent view that ATR is a masculine religion. Through women traditional religion is revitalized, routinized, and maintained.

In the modern Shona society of Zimbabwe, a traditional kitchen hut is a building of mediation with the sacred. Kitchenology has provided an invaluable repertoire of African beliefs about the Shona people's Supreme Being, ancestral spirits and sacral rituals. The traditional kitchen hut, being a storehouse is also a powerhouse. It is authoritative when it comes to imaginaries, representations and symbolisms. The paraphernalia in the traditional kitchen hut provide a means of exploring the spiritual world. Through them, ancestral spirits are reached and discover their dispositions to provoke their reaction with regards to the partakers of the ritual, for which their intervention is sought. In rituals, communication with the spiritual world is accompanied with a token to trigger the ancestral spirits go into action. Since they were once on earth, they understand that offering money validates a request being made. So, ancestral spirits can be bought by money.

The study also discovered that ATR's meaning in Zimbabwe has been made through use of clichés. These clichés have dominated the modern world such that any bad situation is explained using the goodness or badness of *Chivanhu.* While these clichés are used to provide a clear and distinct presentation of some religious essence of *Chivanhu,* but the resultant effect is that the

meaning becomes distorted. However, when they are used to frame how ATR is discussed in scholarship they can be useful tools.

7.4 Modern day challenges in studying ATR in Zimbabwe

From the research study, there are challenges which have contributed to a botch in interpreting the meaning of the concept traditional religion in a modern society of Zimbabwe. To begin with, it is colonialism and its legacy. The coming of missionaries and colonizers to Zimbabwe ushered a conquest of traditional religion as well as its ancestral land, and this was accomplished economically, militarily and spiritually. The indigenous people's social, cultural and religious foundations broke down under the weight of civilisation. African traditional religion was condemned and forced to go underground and internal exile. A continued practice of Africans' belief systems was done under the guise of culture and not in the name of 'religion' (Mndende 1998:115). African religion was then denied its proper place as a recognised religion. Africans openly pretended to be Christians yet at the same time secretly going underground as African religionists. This becomes a real challenge because studying a hidden religion is not easy. Maybe because of the colonial legacy, some do not even know whether they are following traditional religion or not. Some might know but because of the stigmatisation, it seems as if it is the normal trait of traditional religion to remain concealed in a pluralist world. When it is showcased, there is a general tendency to view it as cultural art form. Thus, another challenge of relegating traditional religion to mere culture emerges.

Since independence the government has only focused on the economic and political impact of colonialism, ignoring the destruction wrought by Christianity on the traditional religious identity of the African people. At national level, the current constitution provides for freedom of worship but this has proved to be theoretical because on the ground there is evidence of marginalisation of traditional religion in national religious activities which are dominated by Christianity in a multi-religious society. It is not surprising that four decades after independence, government officials, Christians, politicians, academics and journalists use public events and national state media to insult African traditional religion. Labels have been attached to those who still cling to traditional religion as "uncivilised" believers of superstitions.

Absence of written literature poses a challenge to those who want to study *Chivanhu*. Because of the absence of written records, many of the cryptic references to events, people and places in oral literature are difficult to unravel. On certain themes like sexuality, vestiges of information about the old system are found here and there but, oral tradition offers almost no help (Pongweni 1992). The failure of oral tradition arises from the near-prohibition of discussions about sexual activity between the generations or between spouses, a situation attested to in all parts of [Buhera] (Caldwell, 1992:385).

Closely related to the above problem is death of the elderly. The elderly are the source of information. In line with JS Mbiti's argument, when an elder dies, a library has been lost, so in rural communities of Zimbabwe the deaths of elderly people have impacted greatly on the nature of traditional religion because this religion over relies on oral literature. Oral literature is by definition dependent on a performer who formulates it in words on a specific occasion – there is no other way in which it can be realized as a literary product. Sometimes there is a missing gap because the connection between transmission and existence is a much more intimate one, and questions about the means of actual communication are of importance – without its oral realization and direct rendition by a speaker, an unwritten literary piece cannot easily be said to have any continued or independent existence at all (Finnegan 1977:2).

Most of the problems encountered by the young generation are caused by the failure of the elderly to expose *Chivanhu* to the young. If a young person refuses to follow *Chivanhu*, it is because he/she was not nurtured in *it*, hence they do not take it seriously. Each time there is *Chivanhu* to be done like *kubika doro* (brewing traditional beer), bringing back ceremonies, *kudira gono* (bull ritualization), *kutsigisa musha* (ritualization of a home), *kuenda kugata* (consulting sacred practitioners after death of a family member), the young should be there attending and participating, learning how these practices are done and why they are done. If beer is brewed, the child should know why it was brewed and its symbolism. Once they are exposed to the practices at a tender age, when they are grown-ups they know the necessary steps to take when there is a problem in their lives, especially when the father is not around. So, some of the problems they experience are because these young are ignorant of the appropriate remedies to be taken.

7.5 Contribution to the Academic World

The major contributions of this thesis to religion studies can be traced back to the context of the study; the approach used and the methodologies employed in the research. This thesis was approached from an interpretive perspective thereby adding another approach to understanding the meaning of African Traditional Religion.

The study exposed the substantive, functional and affective meaning of ATR in modern society of Zimbabwe. Though use of a substantivist, affective and functionalist perspective was handy in construing the meaning of ATR in the modern society of Zimbabwe, the same theories of meaning for religion in various ways explain away ATR yet at the same they were useful in emphasising interpretation and exploring the ways humans use symbols to explain and make sense of their world.

The study brought a contemporary dimension of how African traditional religion should be understood through the inclusion of architecture and rituals. The newness of this approach is in treating African Traditional Religion not as a fossil but as one of the most important building blocks of modern African life. Researching on ATR and its meaning in modernity discourse by looking at kitchen architecture, the role and status of women, rituals, Shona death systems, and witchcraft practices in the context of the current legislative provisions has opened new attitudes for dialogues between ATR and the arts and design sector, health sector and education sector.

This study has put a feminine flair in understanding the meaning of African traditional religion. This was more elaborate in the traditional kitchen hut and *kuroora guva* practice. The great but invisible role played by women in making traditional religion move forward is premised on the fact that women are the real custodians of the religion. This is a challenge to the recurrent notion of masculinising ATR in its undertakings.

When looking at the meaning of ATR in modern society of Zimbabwe, its vitality should not only be considered in terms of numbers of adherents who freely exhibit themselves, but also taking cognisance of the various traditional religious experiences modern people have in their socio-economic and political lives.

This study challenges the notion that everything in the African worldview is religious. It shows that in the modern society, this separation is vital to distinguish itself from other spheres which

are non-African traditional. The study advocated the idea of circleness as the characteristic nature of *Chivanhu,* where sacredness is provided by transcendental power and traditional power. Anything in the circle is sacred, and the circle provides profound unity in *Chivanhu*. This framework ensures continuity of *Chivanhu* so that it does not end because of modernisation. In this circle, the orbit provides unwritten laws, norms and values. Breaking them will be tantamount to moving out of the obit. When Chivanhu is broken, rituals are done to facilitate the coming back of the offender.

7.6 Further Study

Several issues emerge from the research on the meaning of African traditional religion in modern society of Zimbabwe. But, perhaps, the most important issues which need further research are; urbanity and traditional religion. The general understanding is that it is in the rural areas where the vitality of traditional religion is conceived. If every African carries his or her traditional religion wherever he goes, it implies that it also exists in urban environments.

There is a general tendency to view Africans, the indigenous Shona to be particular, as people who lead a communal life. But this research has discovered that there are also individualistic tendencies especially when it comes to abhorred practices like witchcraft. So, more researches should be done on private ritual life in communal living because private life can be distinguished from public discourse. It is this idea of a privatized religiosity that this work thinks that in the contemporary times, traditional religion has become a family religion, and this invites further research.

Though there has been no public space reserved for traditional religion in Zimbabwe, this thesis recommends that further studies should be carried out on traditional religion and modern day governance. The trust invested in traditional religion by high profile figures in Zimbabwe, though secretly, is worth investigating. Each time elections are held in Zimbabwe, politicians stampede to traditional practitioners seeking success rituals. The same is true of times for cabinet appointment or reshuffling; government officials are reportedly seen consulting sacred practitioners in a bid to win cabinet posts. Are these traditional practitioners key stakeholders in running Constituencies and or Cabinet Ministries?

There is need of some study on how Africans, Zimbabweans in particular, have their minds decolonised so that they do not place their ancestors on a lower level than foreign ancestors (Mndende 1998:115). The current constitution has opened some space to encourage adherents of traditional religion to stand up on their own and claim their right to practise their religion independent of foreign faiths.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS GUIDE

Preamble

I am a doctoral student at the University of Free Statecarrying out a research study on the meaning of African Traditional Religion in modern society of Zimbabwe. So I would like to deepen my understanding on this research theme. After the rsearch, the findings will be used to come up with a thesis and I may also come up with a publication at the end. I request to know if you are willing to share your ATR knowledge and experiences with me. I assured you that no one will know you shared information on this research theme with me and you will not be identified in any way in the writing(s) that I will produce. If you have any question, I am ready to respond to them.

A: Background information

What is your age? What is your occupation? What is your highest educational level? What is your religious affiliation? How and why did you become affiliated to Chivanhu?

B: Items on the meaning of ATR in modern society of Zimbabwe

1. What is your view on Chivanhu as a religious concept for the Shona people of Zimbabwe?

2. How does a traditional communal set up provide meaning for Chivanhu?

3. Can you tell me in detail how a traditional kitchen hut serve as an epitome of ATR in the modern society of Zimbabwe

4. In which ways do you see the landscapes of *roora* and death in the modern society of Zimbabwe providing a meaning for ATR?

5. Is there any conceptual symbiotic relationship between ATR and witchcraft in the construction of the meaning of ATR in modern society of Zimbabwe?

6. Generally, how is Chivanhu perceived in the modern society of Zimbabwe?

APPENDIX B: PROFILE OF PARTICIPANTS

Participant	Age	Sex	Occupation
1	77	Male	Unemployed
2	73	Female	Retired
3	39	Female	Self employed
4	72	Male	Traditional leader
5	44	Male	Spirit medium
6	31	Male	Self employed
7	74	Female	Unemployed
8	62	Male	Traditional healer
9	37	Female	Unemployed
10	69	Male	Traditional healer
11	67	Female	Unemployed
12	61	Female	Traditional healer
13	75	Male	Unemployed
14	42	Female	Traditional midwife
15	36	Male	Witch hunter
16	53	Female	Unemployed
17	68	Male	Unemployed
18	70	Female	Retired
19	38	Male	Unemployed
20	47	Female	Spirit medium
21	75	Male	Retired University Lecturer
22	64	Male	Traditional leader
23	20	Male	Unemployed
24	41	Male	Pastor
25	40	Male	Self employed
26	54	Male	Self employed
27	53	Male	Traditional leader
28	45	Female	Self employed
29	53	Female	Teacher
30	76	Female	Potter
31	66	Female	Unemployed
32	70	Male	Traditional leader
33	62	Female	Unemployed
34	75		Unemployed
35	54	Female	Teacher
36	60	Male	Traditional leader
37	40		Self employed
38	68	Male	Traditional leader

39	40	Female	Traditional midwife
40	80	Female	Unemployed
41	48	Female	Unemployed
42	63	Male	Builder
43	70	Male	Traditional leader
44	61	Male	Tailor
45	25	Male	Unemployed
46	24	Male	Unemployed
47	70	Male	Retired
48	32	Male	Unemployed
49	77	Female	Potter
50	68	Male	Traditional leader
51	70	Male	Unemployed
52	80	Female	Unemployed
53	46	Female	Health practitioner
54	35	Female	Legal practitioner
55	22	Male	Unemployed
56	48	Male	Self employed
57	39	Male	Witch hunter
58	24	Female	Unemployed
59	35	Female	Self employed
60	58	Male	Traditional leader
61	42	Female	Teacher
62	62	Male	Traditional leader
63	80	Female	Unemployed
64	64	Female	Traditional midwife
65	79	Male	Traditional leader
66	49	Female	Health practitioner