

AFRICAN SACRALITY AND ECO-SPIRITUALITY

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Abstract

There is an underlining relationship between African sacrality and Eco-spirituality. African sacrality is a concept that encompasses various African practices, beliefs and some significant subject matters which are designated or exalted by divine sanction and entitled to extreme relevance, not to be profaned or violated. The concept of African sacrality has a direct implication on Eco-spirituality which is based on the sacredness of nature, earth and universe. Using the method of critical analysis the researchers found out that the African practice of upholding natural phenomena as sacred has been long dead and the belief that humanity is somehow separate and above nature has been birthed. This belief in turn has created many of today's problems as it concerns Eco-spirituality in one way or the other. The researchers, therefore, suggested that a review which would bring about the revival of the African sacrality is needed for a smooth evolution of proper and effective ecological-spirituality.

Keywords: Africa, African Sacrality, Ecology, Eco-Spirituality, Ecosystem.

Introduction

The transformational process brought about by eco-spirituality demonstrates a strong interplay between what Wayne Teasdale describes as the two sides of the spiritual journey. "... the awakening and actualization of who we are in our ultimate being is incomplete unless our compassion, sensitivity and love are similarly awakened and actualized in our lives and relationships". The inner path into the heart of creation leads to an expansion of one understands of reality, so that one starts to see the total reality as sacred. A transformed understanding of the world leads to the outer or *kataphatic* path; where one's task is to learn to live on the earth and in the cosmos in a way that honors the sacred that gives it life.

Africans over the past years is known for its *sacralities*, the fact that things like days, trees, animals, places, etc are sometimes set aside because of its historical significance and termed sacred has been the bedrock or foundation for eco-spirituality in Africa. The African sacred values have unintentionally been the most important form of conservation, this in turn, has given rise to the erroneous worshiping of these sacred entities. African ecosystem, therefore, creates an unfathomable aura of incomprehensible realities leading to a form of eco-spirituality. The proposed review would be such that corrects the erroneous notion of worshiping the eco system, bringing the true concept of eco-spirituality to life by so doing a clear picture of how to uphold the eco-system as sacred and spiritual would be in view.

African Sacrality

African people under the influence of traditional religion do not exploit the environment. Rather, they explore the environment. People and nature are bound together by moral order (Taringa 2006; Kanu 2015). A clear understanding of African *sacralities* would further be revealed by critically expose and show Africans appreciation of human relationship with the eco-system. For example, the Shona believe that the land belongs to Mwari and other lesser spirits. Also, for the Shona land belongs to the living, the dead and those yet to be born. Land and its resources, therefore, ought to be used sustainably for the benefit of future generations. Also, among the Shona, land belongs to ancestral guardians of the land (*varidzivenyika*). According to Chavunduka (2001), it was believed that each geographical area or territory belongs to the ancestors. The ancestors are responsible for controlling rainfall and fertility of the land. This implies that people should not exploit land as they are only stewards manning it on behalf of the ancestors. Ownership of land forms the main link between politics, religion and spirituality in Zimbabwe. The environment is thus sacred as it belongs to the spirit world. According to Ranger (1985), Shona people of Africa ideas are about relationships whether with other people, animals, ancestors and with the land. The Shona personify animals in the principle of totem animals (*mutupo*) (Taringa, 2006). Rocks, water bodies and mountains are also personified as living beings. People should, therefore, respect their totem animals. Good examples may be the *shiri* (bird) totem, people with such a totem are not expected to eat birds and also the *dziva* totem where people should revere water bodies thereby preserving aquatic life. Land is entrusted in the chief. Traditionally land had no marketable value and could not be sold. More importantly most resources found on the land like wood and other non-wood forest products had no market value. The practice

of selling firewood which has caused a lot of deforestation was, therefore, unheard of among the Shona people. Of paramount importance is the sacredness of the land. Land is sacred because it houses the dead relatives buried in it. Taringa (2006) also notes that land is sacred because the umbilical cords of people are buried in it. Common practices of, for example, starting fires were unheard of. Only natural fires were common in mountains and these had a religious significance among the Shona. The impacts of such fires were not destructive. Sacred sites on the landscape play a role in many African regions.

Byers, Cunliffe and Hudak (2001) gave an example of Rusitu Botanical Reserve which is a traditional sacred forest in South eastern Zimbabwe. Unauthorized tree cutting is believed to be revenged by ancestral spirits through droughts, death and mental illness or vanishing. According to Bourdillon (1987), *mhondoro* spirits are viewed as guardian spirits of a place and are represented by lions. They maintain harmonious relations between people and the land. Chiefs and village heads are supposed to enforce respect for sacred sites and punish people who break the rules. In a study by Byers, Cunliffe and Hudak (2001) it was found that there existed numerous sacred places in Muzarabani area and these include sacred pools, forests, trees, rivers, mountains and mountain ranges. In the same study, a Korekore respondent indicated that dry forests are used as burial places, and this makes them spirit inhabited. The respondent argued that people like places with *Acacia ataxacantha* for burials because its thorns catch and stop witches from entering the forests to disturb the bodies of the dead for evil purposes. In a study by Byers, Cunliffe and Hudak (2001), 57.6% of the respondents acknowledged that there was a sacred site near them and 85.7% reported that it was important to respect sacred sites. Taboos (*zviera*) form part of Shona morality. Taboos are understood to be specific rules that forbid people from performing certain actions, the performance of which may result in the negation of the moral conduct that govern human behaviour (Chemhuru & Masaka, 2010). Breaching of *zviera* is thought to invite misfortunes such as bad luck, drought or death (Tatira, 2000). Violation of Shona taboos is thus said to invite an angry reaction from the spirit world. Taboos are one of the approaches used by the Shona to manage water sources such as springs (*zvitubu*, *zvisipiti*) or wells (*matsime*).

According to Taringa (2006), water bodies or wetlands are sacred because they are the abode of animals associated with spirits. Metal and clay containers which have been used for cooking may not be used to fetch water from certain water bodies. Water spirits/ mermaids and pythons are considered guardians of wetlands. Appropriate behavior and observance of obligations and rites are important and

required to maintain social harmony, longevity and contentment of spirits (Kazembe, 2009). The Shona peoples believe that there are spirits that guard such water sources and they migrate if the source is polluted and this results in drying up of the water source. Containers with soot are believed to pollute water sources, so through some cultural beliefs and practices, the Shona protected sources of water from pollution and running dry. Water spirits performed important duties and some of them were rainmaking and to mobilize chiefs and the community to conserve the environment (Machoko, 2013). He argues that there is an urgent need for Zimbabweans to be reconnected to their traditional beliefs if environmental degradation is to be reversed. The Shona also believed in sacredness of flora and fauna. Cutting down trees in certain areas was prohibited and these areas were called *marambotemwa*. Flora ensures that water table does not fall as it minimizes runoff. According to Mhaka (2015), vegetative cover of *marambotemwa* prevents soil erosion and sedimentation of water sources thereby ensuring sustainable environmental use.

In most traditional communities among the Shona people, mountains and forests are burial sites for chiefs and are also considered habitats for ancestral spirits. The Shona considers it morally wrong to cut trees in certain forests. The Shona thus holds taboos in relation to cutting or destroying of certain trees. In some cases, the misfortunes may befall the whole community in the form of droughts, hailstorms that destroy crops, or wild locusts that devour crops. Among the people of Chivhaku clan in Buhera district, it was believed that some wild beasts would destroy the perpetrators' crops. Certain animals are associated with bad omens and these include hyenas and owls. Hardly could a Shona person kill such animals as they are associated with witchcraft. According to Mhaka (2015) it should be noted that there are situations where Shona religious leaders have resisted embracing western scientific approaches to pest and weed control and enhancing soil fertility arguing that doing so would anger guardian spirits. Excessive use of agrochemicals can have a negative impact on the environment. The Shona sometimes performs rituals when the land is invaded by pests. The sacredness of the different ecology component in the Shona peoples community is just similar to most African communities, over the years even before Africans encountered civilization, these sacredness upheld have been a means of protecting the African heritage for the future generation.

Understanding of Eco-spirituality

OCHENDO: AN AFRICAN JOURNAL OF INNOVATIVE STUDIES

ISSN: 26814-0788 (Print) 2814-077X (e). Vol. 3 No. 1. 2022

A Publication of the Association for the Promotion of African Studies

Ecology is the science of the mutual relationship of organisms to their environment. It is the relationship of living things to one another and their environment or the study of such relationships. Spirituality means attitudes, beliefs and practices which animate people's lives and help them reach out towards super-sensible realities. Spirituality includes several interrelated levels of reference such as the level of lived experience, which means the attitudes and behaviours of human beings which are typically influenced by their-ultimate values, and therefore their-spirituality.

Eco-spirituality expresses the joining of spirituality with ecological perspectives. There are numerous types, traditions, expressions, and understandings of eco-spirituality. It does not refer to any one set of beliefs, but to a range of ethical or moral, religious, spiritual, or agnostic beliefs, tendencies, or actions that relate to ecological concerns. Eco-spirituality has evolved since the 1960s and is currently part of popular culture in North America. The connection between spirituality and the Earth has deep and historical roots in many religious traditions and in particular with those that have remained in tune with the rhythms and limits of the Earth, such as some indigenous traditions around the world.

Eco-spirituality has many meanings, the first referring to a thirst for connection between spirituality and the Earth, given the extent of and the general lack of religious responses to the ecological crisis. There is this fact of recognition that the ecological crisis threatens all life on Earth, and it is fundamentally a moral, spiritual, and religious problem.

Since the early 1970s there has been a global, public, and political consciousness of the need for ethics and religions to be consistent with ecological and social liberation, noting, as does Steven Rockefeller (1992), that there are many diverse cultural paths joining in this awareness. Discussions have been increasingly cross-cultural and interreligious. Organizations such as the United Nations, the World Wildlife Fund, World Conservation Strategy, and numerous religious groups have been involved in interdisciplinary work aimed at developing religious and spiritual responses to the ecological crisis that are connected to political decision-making. From the initiatives of Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim, the Harvard Centre for the Study of World Religions hosted a Religion and Ecology Project involving ten conferences since 1996, bringing together scholars and environmentalists from Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, Shinto, Jainism, Hinduism, indigenous traditions, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. This work is entering a phase of discussions with the United Nations.

Eco-spirituality is also a term that can be applied to the work in cosmology and particularly that of Thomas Berry, a cultural historian of religions. Berry's work in scientific and religious cosmologies—stories about the origin of the world that provide orientation, guidance, and meaning to life—has done much to revive a sense of the sacredness of life, the Earth, and all the processes of the universe. He offers a comprehensive context for rethinking our current situation and for understanding ourselves as part of a larger evolutionary whole that is both spiritual and material.

There are several elements within eco-spirituality, and priorities are divergent. One challenges the belief that humans are the centre of life, or anthropocentrism. Some propose a bio-centric approach wherein the intrinsic value of animals, plants, rivers, and mountains has a priority over their instrumental value as resources for humans. The eco-spirituality insight emerges from deep ecology, eco-feminism, and African *sacrality* as such.

Philosophy of Nature

Philosophy of nature has much to do the concept of naturalness. Nature remains, despite all the contingency of its existence, obedient to eternal laws; but surely this is also true of the realm of self consciousness, a fact which can already be seen in the belief that providence governs human affairs. There is an infallible law of nature as nature. Nature is to be viewed as a system of stages, in which one stage necessarily arises from the other and is the truth closest to the other from which it results, though not in such a way that the one would naturally generate the other, but rather in the inner idea which constitutes the ground of nature. It has been an awkward conception in older and also more recent philosophy of nature to see the progression and the transition of one natural form and sphere into another as an external, actual production which, however, in order to be made clearer, is relegated to the darkness of the past. Philosophy of nature therefore is the application of philosophical principles and critical realities on nature or ecosystem as a given. It has to do with thoughts on nature as an extension or externalization of realities very sublime.

Precisely this externality is characteristic of nature: differences are allowed to fall apart and to appear as existences indifferent to each other; and the dialectical concept, which leads the stages further, is the interior which emerges only in the spirit. Certainly the previously favoured teleological view provided the basis for the relation to the concept, and, in the same way, the relation to the spirit, but it focused only on external purposiveness and viewed the spirit as if it were

entangled in finite and natural purposes. Due to the vapidness of such finite purposes, purposes for which natural things were shown to be useful, the teleological view has been discredited for exhibiting the wisdom of God. The view of the usefulness of natural things has the implicit truth that these things are not in and for themselves an absolute goal; nevertheless, it is unable to determine whether such things are defective or inadequate. For this determination it is necessary to posit that the immanent moment of its idea, which brings about its transiency and transition into another existence, produces at the same time a transformation into a higher concept. Nature is, in itself a living whole. The movement of its idea through its sequence of stages is more precisely this: the idea posits itself as that which it is in itself; or, what is the same thing, it goes into itself out of that immediacy and externality which is death in order to go into itself; yet further, it suspends this determinacy of the idea, in which it is only life, and becomes spirit, which is its truth. The idea as nature is: (1) as universal, ideal being outside of itself space and time; (2) as real and mutual being apart from itself particular or material existence, – inorganic nature; (3) as living actuality, organic nature. The three sciences can thus be named mathematics, physics, and physiology.

Man's Relationship with Nature

Nature as they say abhors vacuum. Man as a being in nature contributes positive and often negatively to the existence of nature. However man depends greatly on nature and nature is often nurture by nature. This nurturing, therefore, determines the man's effect on nature. Hence, the relationship between man and nature must be reconsidered. Nature is the whole of the physical world. It is also what exists outside of any human action. Man is in nature but he acts upon it, thereby emancipating himself of it. He is part and parcel of nature as Scripture mandated thus: God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth" [Gen 1:26–28]. Here lies the foundation of the spirituality underneath the ecosystem and man as the head of creation.

Man's removal from the natural environment and his anthropocentric positioning in the *anthropic* environment are as a result of long cultural development. Man therefore is part of nature as well as the master of nature. This sublime idea goes through changing patterns of thought and action and cosmogenic myths which have supported, in the consciousness of humanity, the feeling of belonging to

nature as a place of genesis and the becoming of man. When man was no longer identified with nature and extracted from its systemic functioning, he becomes a user of the resources generously offered by nature. Thus, the development of human habitats was done with the decline of the natural environment and at the expense of the alienation of man from nature. The nature that gives us everything and does not request anything in return now appears as a lost paradise that we are looking for inside us. The operation of the natural environment on earth is a model of systemic organization in which the intelligence of matter is an everyday observable reality. Living according to natural rules is a profoundly religious experience of meeting with eternity, finding the lost paradise. That is why the return to nature in the sense of observing and reproducing a model of action and organization, validated by the very functionality of the planet, may be the solution to the salvation of human society from self-destruction, the need to revolute eco-spirituality is then a pressing one that mustn't be left unattended to.

African Sacred Practices: Implication for Eco-spirituality

Many concepts in the African worldview associate God with natural objects and phenomena. It is generally assumed that God created the heaven and earth. Heaven is the counterpart of the earth, and it is considered by African people to be the dwelling abode or place of God. There are stories told all over Africa, of how heaven and earth were originally either close together or joined by a rope or bridge, and how God was close to humanity. The Scriptural account of the Garden of Eden has similar story. All African people associate God with the sky or heaven in one way or another. There are those who say that God reigns and lives in the sky and some even identify Him with the sky or consider it to be his chief manifestation. There are many people whose names for God mean sky, heaven or simply the above.

The majority of African religious thought forms are based on the notion that heavenly bodies such as the sun, moon and stars communicate the magnificence of God. The regularity of day and night and the constant rhythm of the seasons illustrate the unfailing sustenance of God's providence. The sun, moon and stars feature in the myths and beliefs of many people. Most Kenyan societies consider the sun to be a manifestation of God himself. However, there is no concrete indication that the sun is considered to be God, or God considered to be the sun, however, these may be closely associated. At best, the sun symbolizes aspects of God such as his omniscience, his power, his everlasting endurance and even his nature.

Similar concepts exist concerning the moon, although on the whole, there are fewer associations with God than is the case of the sun. A few societies personify the stars as spirits. For example, the Gikuyu take them as God's manifestations. Rain is regarded by African people to be one of the greatest blessings of God. For that reason, He is commonly referred to as *The Rain Giver*. Some people like the Elgeyo and Marakwet personify rain as a divinity, a supernatural being, or a son of God. Others, like the Akamba, consider rain to be the saliva of God, this being a symbol of great blessings. Many societies make sacrifices, offerings and prayers to God in connection with rain, especially during periods of drought. Rainmakers are reported in all parts of the continent, their duty being to solicit God's help in providing rain or in halting it if too much falls. The Banyore of Western Kenya as well as Igbo people of Nigeria are believed to be able to manipulate rain. They have the ability to cause rain or stop it from raining. Thunder is taken by many to be God's voice. Others like the Gikuyu and Embu interpret it to be the movement of God. The Abanyala and Samia regard thunder as an indication of God's anger. Thunder is personified as a divinity among the Abaluhya, Luo and Kisii. The Gikuyu take lightning to be God's weapon by means of which He clears the way when moving from one sacred place to another.

In few cases, the wind is associated with God. Some people describe him metaphorically as the wind or air, or moving like the wind while others think that the wind is one of the vehicles by which God travels in great power through the sky. The Nyala, Hayo, Samia, and Marachi consider wind and storms to be God's manifestations while The Wanga consider wind as the movement of God. Like the heavens, the earth has many natural objects and phenomena and various concepts associate them with God or give them other religious meaning. In some areas, rivers and streams are personified or attributed to divinities. Oceans, seas, lakes and permanent ponds are often thought to be inhabited by spirits or divinities that generally have to be propitiated when people use the water in one way or another.

The symbolism of water appears in rituals of blessings, marriages, healing and purification. The stream is a receptacle of cosmic forces and therefore, a preferred location for certain rituals. Rivers and streams are often accorded religious significance, especially when they are believed to be dwelling places of spirits. Water is responsible for the germination of seeds and sprouting of plants and therefore offers assurance for the formation of all new life

Sacred Biota (Flora and Fauna)

Animals and plants constitute human food and their importance is obviously great. African people have many religious associations with them, some of which are linked with concepts of God, such as the beliefs that he has absolute power over the universe. The religious significance of a particular animal or plant may differ from one community to another. For example, the Luhya of Busia District, Kenya have religious practices often binding oaths or purification rites, which involves the use of certain animals. Hens and cocks may be used as sacrifices to God or mediators between God and humanity, including ancestors. Burnt offerings are widely considered to be essential. There are myths which tell how domestic animals originated at the same time or in the same way as man himself. Cattle, sheep and goats are found for sacrificial and other religious purposes and examples of this are found in most Kenyan communities. Many people have a sacred attitude towards their animals.

The snake is thought by some people, like the Luo, to be sacred, especially the python which may not be killed by people. A considerable number of societies associate snakes with the living dead or other human spirits and such snakes are given food and drink when they visit people's homes. However, some snakes are associated with the religion, therefore, their appearance represents a bad omen. Of the birds, chickens are used in most societies for religious purposes or thought of as lower spiritual beings and part of the living dead. Animal constitutes human food and their importance is obviously great (Mbiti, 1999; Kanu 2013). Likewise, Igbo people have many religions associations with them. The Hindu also respects and venerates the cow. In many myths of African traditional societies, the tortoise or chameleon symbolizes the messenger who brought news from God that men should die. The dog, on the other hand, symbolizes the messenger who should have brought news of immortality or resurrection, but lingered on the way and the other slow animal overtook it and got to God first and delivered death message. Again, the spider, though small creature, appears in many myths and stories. Among the Akan and Ashanti, the spider symbolizes wisdom. For that reason, God is given the title of *Ananse Kokroko* which means the "Great Spider" that is the "Wise One". Likewise in Igbo land, there are some sacred animals which are not to be tampered with for instance the Idemili people of Anambra State consider the python as a sacred animals and dared any one not to kill it even if killed mistakenly, a full burial rights must be performed in its honour. The Awka people as well consider the monkey as a sacred animal in their community. These different *sacralities* have helped preserve the lives of these creatures.

The ancient African society never suffered deforestation nor live in fear of ever loosing the natural gift of the eco-system in fact it was to their credit that we enjoy the vague serenity of the environment. The sacredness and respect attached to the environment and its inhabitant was second to, nevertheless, it became a big problem when the respect, value and honour bestowed on this natural resources metamorphosed into worshipping and offering diabolic sacrifices which negatively affected humans surfaced. A redefinition of this practice is encouraging rather a total discard of a culture that has been the source of our natural wealth.

Some plant and tress species are conserved due to their significance to the community, while some are treated with reverence and protected for future use due to their sacred value. Some are protected for their medicinal value, while others are utilized for rituals. Mythical trees feature in a number of stories. The symbolism of vegetation in black Africa centres on trees, which speaks the language of life and death. Some speak of their tree of life to be the source from which all life emanates. For example, the Meru in Kenya talk about the forbidden tree whose fruit God forbade the early men to eat. When men broke that law and ate the forbidden fruit, death came into the world and God withdrew Himself from men. The fig tree is considered sacred by many societies all over Africa, and people make offerings, sacrifices and prayers around or under it. There are sacred groves and other trees, including the baobab tree used for religious purposes or associated with God and other spiritual beings. Many trees beyond its medicinal potency are symbols of great reminiscence. The leaves, barks and roots of *neem* tree can be used to cure forty diseases, giving it the name *mwarubaine*, meaning forty.

Some people hold that rocks are a manifestation of God. Outstanding mountains and hills are generally regarded as sacred and are given religious meaning. The Akamba believe that the first men were brought by God out of a rock, an area they have kept sacred to date. They claim that God left His footprints on Nvau. These are rocks considered to be sacred and are used for religious rites and observances. Sacred stories are often employed in rainmaking ceremonies. Many consider rocks and boulders to be the dwelling places of the spirits, the departed or the living dead. Clay is said by some communities to be or to have been used by God to form human beings. Therefore, the Wanga and the Bukusu use special clay during circumcision ceremonies. The initiates apply clay all over their bodies to symbolize unity with the ancestors. These beliefs are rooted in the ANET as well as the Scriptural all in one narratives with regard to creation with special reference to nature. People worship while facing these phenomena and it is the role of the

community to preserve them. This is why the Gikuyu make prayers facing Mount Kenya, the chief of their sacred mountains. Mountains, hills and other high standing earth formations are in no way thought to be God; they simply give a concrete manifestation of his being and his presence. Furthermore, they are physically closer to the sky ' than ordinary ground and in that sense, it is easy to associate them with God. They are on earth next to the sun and to a lesser extent the moon and stars are in heaven.

The sacred forest in a typical African community is a forest which have been mapped out as holy land or dreaded. Either ways such forests are kept in isolation and can only be entered by a particular group of individuals, in some communities used these sacred forest are believed to be the abode of spirits and at such are left unhampered. This practice of the ancient African communities was in no way intending to conserve natural resources but ended up achieving this fit. All around the world, people depend on natural resources and more particularly on forests, which are used for many different purposes. This dependence is notably due to the fact that tropical forests shelter a great biodiversity.

According to the Beninese Ministry of Environment, Habitat and Urbanism (MEHU), biological resources represent at least 40% of world economy and 80% of poor people needs (MEHU). Forests provide essential resources for the local rural economy such as valuable food supplements, construction materials, medicines, organic fertilisers, fuel wood, and religious items. These products are collected frequently for traditional and commercial purposes (Altieri & Gbaguidi, 1998). Forests contributions are "vital in many developing countries for the subsistence, and sometimes survival, of the poorest rural population groups" (Montalembert, 1991:2). It is no wonder today that African still holds an impressive record as regards to forestation all over the world. The continuous deforestation Africans practice in a bid to imbibe the western development and brace up to trends will have short- and long-term consequences on the population in the near future.

Evolution of Eco-spirituality

Eco-spirituality has a history. It cannot go beyond proper appreciation of nature as an auxiliary to man's being. Finding a kind of relationship with man, nature becomes something that is God-given and from this point of view is graded thus within the purview of spirituality. Most people follow and are influenced by some kind of spiritual faith. We examined two ways in which religious faiths can in turn influence biodiversity conservation in protected areas.

First, biodiversity conservation is influenced through the direct and often effective protection afforded to wild species in sacred natural sites and in semi-natural habitats around religious buildings. Sacred natural sites are almost certainly the world's oldest form of habitat protection. Although some sacred natural sites exist inside official protected areas, many thousands more form a largely unrecognized shadow conservation network in many countries throughout the world, which can be more stringently protected than state-run reserves. Second, faiths have a profound impact on attitudes to protection of the natural world through their philosophy, teachings, investment choices, approaches to the land they control, and religious-based management systems. We considered the interactions between faiths and protected areas with respect to all 11 mainstream faiths and to a number of local belief systems.

The close links between faiths and habitat protection offer major conservation opportunities, but also pose challenges. Bringing a sacred natural site into a national protected-area system can increase protection for the site, but may compromise some of its spiritual values or even its conservation values. Most protected-area managers are not trained to manage natural sites for religious purposes, but many sacred natural sites are under threat from cultural changes and habitat degradation. Decisions about whether or not to make a sacred natural site an official protected area therefore need to be made on a case-by-case basis. Such sites can play an important role in conservation inside and outside official protected areas. More information about the conservation value of sacred lands is needed as is more informed experience in integrating these into wider conservation strategies. In addition, many protected-area staff needs training in how to manage sensitive issues relating to faiths where important faith sites occur in protected areas.

Conclusion

African people have strong belief in the love and respect for the *spirit* of the nature, as reflected in their lifestyle and wisdom. The way of life and traditional ecological knowledge of the indigenous people of Africa have been based on the belief in the spirit, which led to the creation of the sacred areas. Traditional spiritual beliefs in ancestral spirits are closely related to various aspects of environmental management in Africa. The assertion that a traditional community's reverence to the natural habitat is a significant factor contributing to sustainable local nature resource management has been established in this work. Having critically analyzed the concept of African *sacrarity* in relation to eco-spirituality, it is proper

then to say that sacred African practices can be upheld for a revolution of eco-spirituality. That notwithstanding it is important that the aspect of these practices that encourages worshipping of the ecosystem be eradicated. Rather the ecosystem deserves to be explored then exploited and this is the underlying fact with regard to eco-spirituality.

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OCHENDO: AN AFRICAN JOURNAL OF INNOVATIVE STUDIES

ISSN: 26814-0788 (Print) 2814-077X (e). Vol. 3 No. 1. 2022

A Publication of the Association for the Promotion of African Studies

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