

# The Impact of Rastafari Ecological Ethic in Zimbabwe: A Contemporary Discourse

by

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## Abstract

*Climate change is a critical challenge that the world is facing today. The impact of climate change has resulted in a global climactic disaster on the environment and humanity. Nevertheless, the commitment from some rich nations towards reducing the effects of anthropogenic global warming is half-hearted to the detriment of the poorer ones. Whereas a number of contributions to the ongoing debate on the climate change have emanated from sectors such as social sciences, environmental studies and politics, this study adopts a fresh paradigm by engaging religion. Specifically, the study seeks to examine the contribution of Rastafari faith to the preservation and reclamation of the environment. The paper posits that religion has a vital role to play in the mitigation of the climate change which has brought environmental disaster. Therefore, it is urgent to involve religious players in strategies and actions that are meant to address environmental degradation. The study examines the efforts of the Marcus Garvey Rastafari House of Nyahbinghi Order in Zimbabwe. The paper utilises the grassroots methodology, interviews and observation techniques to gather data that is corroborated with the phenomenological approach to unravel the trend in its milieu. In the final analysis, the study concludes that Rastafari ecological ethics plays a complementary role to the national and global action in the preservation of the environment.*

**Key Words:** Climate Change, Degradation, Ecology, *Ital*, Rastafari, Zimbabwe

## Introduction

By far, climate change is one of the greatest challenges that the world is facing today. It is a threat to the ecological environment, business, communities and general livelihood. Sayed Haneef (2002:241) observes that due to loss of vision and greed for profit and economic growth, humanity has polluted the land, air and water by deforestation, use of excessive fertilisers, pesticides, chemicals and industrial waste spillage, release of active chemical wastes, among others. Yet, as Haneef further argues, it is essential to guarantee continued supply of fresh air, uncontaminated food, unpolluted water and other provisions of life for humans and other living creatures and plants which balances the ecosystem (Haneef, 2002:241). This is in tandem with contemporary observations that climate change continues to wreak havoc on food security in developing nations particularly in sub Saharan Africa. In a foreword to the Climate Change COP17 Magazine, the South African President, Jacob Zuma, (2011:12) noted that food prices are on the increase due to reduced agricultural production resulting from floods, drought and land degradation attributed to the changing weather patterns experienced globally. In recent months, South Africa hosted the 17<sup>th</sup> Conference of Parties of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP17) and the 7<sup>th</sup> Meeting of Parties to the Kyoto Protocol (CMP7) to ensure environmental sustainability. Nevertheless, COP17 and CMP7 revealed that the global commitment from some developed nations towards reducing the effects of anthropogenic global warming was half-hearted and yet behind schedule for the 2015 target of the United Nations Millennium Development Goal (MDG) Number 7. Therefore, the level of commitment from developed nations leaves a lot to be desired as it peddles the philosophy of the centre that situates developing nations at the periphery.

This study seeks to explore the role of religion to the global challenge of environmental degradation in contemporary times. Specifically, the research examines the contribution of Rastafari in the reclamation and preservation of the environment. The study is executed in the wake of the inexorable impact of secularisation and cultural globalisation that continue to eclipse the religious significance of nature particularly in the West. Thus, through a study of this magnitude, the rediscovery of the vitality of nature and other natural resources situates religion and the environmental crisis at the centre. As posited in the study, the existing global environmental disaster requires a collective action in which religious players perform a significant part through unique strategies. The study utilises the case of the Marcus Garvey Rastafari House of the Nyahbinghi Order in the low income and high-density suburb of Epworth in Harare, Zimbabwe. Through a grassroots approach, the study seeks to sensitise the local and global community about the meaningful role of Rastafari in current discourses on the environment and ecology in the Zimbabwean context.

## Methodology

The study adopted a poly-methodic approach in which it combined the grassroots approach, in-depth interviews and observation to collect data and corroborated these research techniques with the phenomenological approach. Jacqueline Leavitt (2006:2) following Nandi Azad (1995) defines grassroots “as those living at the base encompassing rural and urban areas in the developing and developed world.” Grassroots approach is a ‘bottom-up’ research process and technique that gathers ‘ground-level’ perspectives from the targeted population. The approach stresses a collective interactive process that provides a platform to present the main issue under investigation whilst allowing participants to discuss with an open mind (Panda, 2007:261). In other words, the approach has the advantage of tapping into the indigenous knowledge bases and expertise that validate the community as the knowing subject. In a way, the grassroots approach considers participants as “agents of their own knowledge, not objects to be examined, prodded, or studied” (Singh, 2011). Therefore, the grassroots approach is an ideal method to study the Rastafari community in Epworth since their existential circumstances of being marginalised make them a particular class condemned to live on what Gustavo Gutierrez (1971) describes as the “under side of history”. Evidently, the Rastafari grassroots environmental ethic proves that they are practising solutions whilst the rest of the world is debating theories.

Furthermore, alongside the grassroots approach the study utilised unstructured interviews and observation in the gathering of data. As qualitative research tools, the researcher obtained firsthand information from the face-to-face interactions with the respondents and through observing their grassroots ecological activities. The phenomenological approach corroborated the other methods in the collection, presentation, analysis and comparison of the findings from the Marcus Garvey Rastafari community with existing literature. The study employed some phenomenological tenets such as *epoche* (bracketing of preconceived ideas) descriptive accuracy, empathy and *eidetic* intuition, the latter term being derived from the Greek noun *eidōs* to refer to the essence of phenomena (Cox, 1996). Hence, the phenomenological approach provided an *emic* view and allowed the researcher to respect the believer’s perspective and to unearth the essential aspects and meaning of Rastafari activities that are true to their community. Data collection from the Marcus Garvey Rastafari House in Epworth was done during end of November and early December 2011, a period that coincided with the hosting of the landmark international conference (COP17) in Durban, South Africa to deliberate on the climate change which has come into being due to global warming.

## **Understanding Climate Change**

The climatic change is a crucial subject to the African continent and the rest of the world. It becomes imperative to focus on the African continent because most of the nations are poor and vulnerable to changing climate. Lindsey Jones, et al. (2010:1) postulate that climate change attaches another layer of difficulty to existing development challenges such as the astronomical levels of poverty and inequality, rapid population growth and weak governance systems for developing countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Due to climatic changes, some ripple effects ensue that affect humanity in several ways including the social, economic and political sectors. It is a paradox that the African region comes under spot light in issues pertaining to climate change where they least contribute to its dilapidation. This segment of the study covers two sections, namely: the current trends on the ecological discourses in Africa; and the relationship of the African communities to ecology. These sections are vital to the study because brief reviews of the contributions from religious and non-religious players such as policy makers, Non-Governmental Organisations, Faith-based Organisations as well as individuals towards the issues on the environment are explored prior to the focus on Rastafari that forms the heart of the research.

### **Current Trends on Ecological Discourses**

The subject on climate change continues to attract the attention of a variety of sectors, individuals and communities. The World Bank (2010) estimated that “more floods, more droughts, more strong storms, and more heat waves make development policy and practice more complicated.” This has been echoed by a recent observation from Wangari Maathai, the Kenyan-born 2004 Nobel Peace Laureate for work that is linked to the environment, peace and sustainable development. Maathai (2011:88) lamented that “Here in Africa, we are paying the price for a rapidly changing climate – more droughts and food crisis – and it is set to get worse.” This scenario makes it imperative to heed the call for an ecumenical approach between science and religion in forging a global plan for the sustainability of resources. In caring for nature, science and religion are needed to bring salvation to mother earth or to keep life sustainable (Rolston III 2009: 924).

Scientifically, it is said that Greenhouse gases (GHG) and the resultant phenomenon known as global warming takes place when heat from high levels of carbon dioxide is trapped in the earth’s atmosphere and cannot escape into space. In this way, trees become essential for the livelihoods of people. Trees are regarded as the ‘carbon sinks of the world’ since they can store carbon dioxide in their branches, trunks and leaves. With this function, trees reduce the growth of GHGs and counteract global warming (www.essentialmag.co.za 2011:86). It is also known that there has been rapid increase in the warming of the earth’s surface in the past 50 years. There is also evidence that this warming was largely due to anthropogenic factors such as deforestation, burning fossil fuels and changes in land use (Levine, Ludi and Jones 2011:9).

Hence, climate change is a threat to sustainable development and other important development targets such as the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Periodic UN Climate Change Conferences such as the recently held COP17 and CMP7 are held as a global commitment to solve the environmental crisis in addition to the Environmental Days and Weeks celebrated annually. These include World Wetlands Day (2 February), World Meteorological Day (23 March), World Environmental Day (5 June), International Day for the Preservation of the Ozone Layer (16 September) and World Tourism Day (27 September) (<http://www.environment.gov.za/enviro-info/env/dates.htm> Accessed: 13.02.2012). Nevertheless, what is urgent is to earnestly and collectively ‘walk the talk’ by different players including the religious fraternity.

The diverse religious players also provide an alternative paradigm on how to understand the relationship between humanity and nature in the context of the global climatic change. The study identifies three main categories of religious traditions, namely, the Western traditions such as Judaism, Christianity, and Islam; the Eastern traditions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism; African Indigenous Religion and Afro-Caribbean traditions. This last category has not been accorded equal status with the so-called ‘the elite league of great faiths’. However, only the first category is tackled under this section whilst the third category is covered in subsequent sections of the study. In general, there is a common thread of the environmental ethic of stewardship that runs through the Abrahamic religions. The creation stories place humanity as coming at the end of creation and being granted dominance over animals and all creation (cf. Gen. 1:28). For some contemporary Jewish writers, the environmental crisis is rooted in the licence for subjugation and domination granted at creation (Kay and Chodos, 2006: 505). However, some critiques of environmental predicament such as eco-feminists call for the incorporation of stewardship principles in harmony with nature.

One critique towards the Judeo-Christian tradition has been provided by Norman Habel (2009) in his text entitled: *An Inconvenient Text: Is a Green Reading of the Bible Possible?* He argues that the Bible is an inconvenient text with ‘green texts’ and ‘grey texts’ that do not reflect empathy and concern for creation and Earth. He refers to an ecological ambivalence of Scripture that attracts a ‘hermeneutics of suspicion’ that enables the reader to identify with the Earth as “a character and voice in the text” (Habel 2009). This calls for a re-reading and re-claiming of the Bible as a sacred text. Along the same lines, Holmes Rolston III (2011) asserts that “Environmental justice needs to be eco-justice as with the World Council of Churches’ emphasis on justice, peace, and the integrity of creation.” Some Christian theologians have formulated an ‘eco-theology’ based on stewardship and care under the realisation that Adam and Eve were commanded to “till the garden and keep it” (Gen. 2:15). In other words, humanity must revere the sacred on earth and should rule creation in freedom and in love.

Like in Judaism and Christianity, Muslims hold that man and nature were created by God. However, although humanity was physically created from the same substance from which matter is made up, they were elevated to the position of the master architect of nature and its content through possession of a spiritual element. This made human beings to be the sole moral and rational agents on earth. It explains why God gave man the authority over the created things. In the words of Haneef (2002:242), God intended man “to be His viceregent (*khalifah*) on earth, to recognise (affirm His existence/*tawhid*) and to serve Him (*‘ubudiyyah*) as a responsible agent (*amin*). A deviation from this course disturbs the harmonious relation of man to nature leading to serious ecological crisis and disaster. Essentially, the doctrine of *amanah* (human accountability/trust) fulfils man’s task of vice regency that God offered him. The betrayal of trust (*khiyanah*) is prohibited (*haram*) in Islam. When *khiyanah* is committed against the environment, it leads to self-destruction (Haneef, 2002: 247). Islam has some legislative measures meant protect the environment by, *inter alia*, upholding the inviolability of human life; protecting animals and plants; saving land, water and air; and protection against noise pollution. Although the environmental crisis is largely caused by developed nations, the duty to restore it falls on humanity as a whole, whether religious or non-religious, individual or communal, among other variables.

## **The Relationship of African Indigenous Communities and Ecology**

The Rastafari view towards the environment would be better understood if one first considers the traditions from which it largely evolved and borrowed. One of these is the African religious tradition. The discussion on the relationship between the African communities and ecology focuses on the perspectives informed by African Indigenous Religions (AIRs), particularly the Shona experience which is not very different from other African societies. Africans have their own environmental conservation models that constitute their indigenous knowledge systems (IKSs) including that of ‘weather forecasting’ (Muguti and Maposa, 2012). The Shona are also conscious and knowledgeable about their environment to the extent that some can manipulate natural weather patterns like lightning and thunder for benevolent and malevolent factors (Sibanda, 2011). Essentially, IKS is inseparable from AIRs as well as the ecological base. In this way, in the Shona traditional context, the use, management and conservation of natural resources emanate from the people’s spirituality, culture, practices, taboo systems and knowledge accrued since time beyond reckoning (Rusinga and Maposa, 2010:201). Despite the existing influence of colonisation and globalisation, by and large, the Shona still cling to some of their values. Evidently, as part of their spirituality, the Shona still have strong beliefs in the supernatural in relation to the surrounding environment sustained through taboos (Chemhuru and Masaka, 2010:122).

Taboos (*zviera*) constitute the prohibitions and restrictions that guard against an unsustainable use of certain plant species, forests, mountains, rivers, pools and non-human species (Tatira, 2000). Through taboos the endangered species, nutritional and medicinal plants as well as water sources were protected. The indigenous existential philosophy of totemism was utilised to enforce a sustainable use of some animal species within families that adopted them as totems. It was also a basis on which *makunakuna* (incest) was forbidden, a breach of which was a sign that one lacked *Unhu/Ubuntu* (humanness) that could provoke the anger of ancestral spirits resulting in catastrophic natural disasters like drought (Rusinga and Maposa, 2010). Therefore, one needed to espouse an acceptable conduct with the environment, human beings and animals. However, taboos are not merely conceived as avoidance rules whose breach attract punishment from the metaphysical world but are also conceptualised as pedagogical tools that consequently nurtures an ‘environmental ethic’ stressing a profound ecological alertness on the sustainable use of natural resources (Duri and Mapara, 2007; Chemhuru and Masaka, 2010). In other words, the use of the natural resources go beyond instant needs as they form part of the strategies for conservation and celebration of culture and human life.

In addition, the vitality of the Shona religio-cultural systems in informing the perceptions of people on how to access and utilise the available resources is linked to the spiritual entities such as *Mwari* (High God), *Vadzimu* (ancestors) and *mhondoro* (guardian lion spirits). These are ‘guardians of the land’ (Schoffeleers, 1978) as well as its natural resources. The rules and regulations that guide the use of natural resources are done through spiritual considerations and customary law. This results in a collective responsibility to preserve and to extract resources that are preserved for posterity. Inclined to this, there is the concept of sacred space and species that serve a symbolic gesture for the need to preserve the environment. In this manner some animals, rivers, forests, mountains and other natural landscape are regarded as sacred (Rusinga and Maposa, 2010). Therefore, respect for ancestral spirits contributed to biodiversity conservation showing that the Shona had indigenous ways of living in harmony with nature. This defies the Western notions steeped in a technocratic-industrial worldview that saw nature as potentially productive landscape for egocentric passions (Wolmer, 2007). In contrast, the Shona traditional cosmology and their cultural understanding of nature provide an attachment imbued with reverence. Nature and society are almost inseparable. This explains why the idea of CAMPFIRE – Communal Areas Management for Indigenous Resources – has been very successful in the Zimbabwean grassroots communities. One of the reasons for success is that the CAMPFIRE programme complemented the cultural values and practices of the indigenes that predate colonialism and globalisation (Kasere, 2010 cited in Masaka and Chemhuru, 2011:142). Thus, the African communities, endowed with a communitarian approach to life, have an ‘environmental ethic’ that makes them to live in harmony with nature. With the Rastafari movement having its roots in AIRs, it would be interesting to see the various strategies that they employ for enforcing a sustainable use of natural resources.

## Historical Overview of the Rastafari Community in Africa

In general, Rastafari is a religion of Jamaican origin. It began as an Afro-Caribbean religio-political movement inspired by the ideas and influence of an early 20<sup>th</sup> century Jamaican evangelical preacher and Black Nationalist, Marcus Garvey (Parsons 1993:265). His ideas were a rallying point to the majority of the Black formerly enslaved who found themselves in poverty-stricken conditions and at the lowest strata of Caribbean society. The experiences of bondage, unemployment, racial discrimination and harassment made Rastafari a beacon of hope for the affirmation of Black traditions, identity and history (Parsons 1993:266). Two of the most important ideological pillars to Rastafari faith are Ethiopianism and Pan-Africanism. As such, the coronation of Ras Tafari as Negus of Ethiopia in 1930 to become Emperor Haile Selassie I brought a paradigm shift to the movement of Rastas. The Rastas regarded the crowning of Haile Selassie as a fulfilment of the spiritual revelation by God from Marcus Garvey. In his prophecy Garvey had told his followers to look to Africa for a Black king who would be crowned to redeem the oppressed Black people (Afolabi 2004:37).

Historically, Ethiopia was not colonised by any external power and it is also presented as a great land in the Bible. For instance, the Bible also says: “Princes come out of Egypt; Ethiopia stretches forth her hands unto God” (Ps. 68:31). This has also influenced Rastas to identify themselves with Ethiopia that sometimes symbolise the rest of Africa. In addition, Rastafarians have adopted the red, green and yellow colours of Ethiopia into their movement. Gerald Parsons (1993:267) succinctly writes in reference to Rastas thus: “Having suffered enslavement at the hands of the white Babylon, they look forward to redemption from slavery and return to the promised land in Africa, symbolised above all by Ethiopia, the seat of ancient African civilization and symbol of a free and uncolonized African identity.” Therefore, Rastafarians use the ancient Nyahbinghi philosophy to refer to all ‘downpressors’ and repressive structures, whether from blacks or whites as ‘Babylon’ whilst the restoration of both physical and mental oppression restores their ‘Zion’, dignity and self-respect.

In addition, history has shown that Rastafari as an existential reality in Jamaica has grown, flowered and the wind has dispersed its seeds far and wide (Semaj 1980:22). This analogy shows its growth and spread to other nations. Yasus Afari (2007) describes Rastafari phenomenon as “Jamaica’s gift to the world”. Indeed, some of the Rastas have come to settle in Africa as part of repatriation emerging from the global Pan-Africanism. Arguably, the repatriated settlement in Shashamane in Ethiopia revealed the concrete Pan-African form of the Rastafari phenomenon (Campbell 1988). However, some Rastas in the Diaspora have since transformed their focus from the idea of a physical repatriation to Africa to a spiritual conception that sustained images of self-worth. In fact, Rastafari was an important vehicle for spreading Pan-Africanism and conceptions of liberation through various means. As Horace Campbell (1988:78) rightly observes, “Rastafari culture in all its manifestations has been popularised by the musical form of reggae throughout the world.”



Through reggae music Bob Marley drummed a variety of messages that sought to promote, *inter alia*, Pan-Africanism, African unity, and liberation. The admonition of Rastafari to emancipate oneself from mental slavery attracted a number of youths on African continent as was the case in the Caribbean islands in colonial and post-colonial times. For instance, the emergence of Rastafari communities in Zimbabwe is largely linked to the historic performance of Bob Marley at the eve of Zimbabwe's independence in April 1980. One wonders how far the current generation of Rastas could employ reggae music to hammer the message of utilising the environment in a sustainable way.

## **The Rastafari Communities in Zimbabwe**

There is no clear indication of when Rastafari seeds first took root on the Zimbabwean soil and from which direction the wind was blowing. Therefore, some theories emerge. Some say that the emergence of Rastafari precedes the attainment of independence in Zimbabwe. This could be plausible in the context of the power of reggae music, particularly Marley's songs with words like 'Emancipate yourself from mental slavery', all of which influenced the freedom fighters of Zimbabwe (Campbell 1988:80). On the contrary, another popular position situates the development of Rastafari in post-colonial Zimbabwe where it is said the spirit of Rastafari found fertile ground mainly among youths who particularly listened to reggae music. Once again, this later phase coincides with the Bob Marley show that was staged at independence. As such, Campbell (1988:76) postulates that the African youths in the urban areas who had radio receivers and video recorders were enticed to the internationalisation of African redemption that was channelled through reggae music. Yet paradoxically, the tremendous prejudice against Rastafari movement that was initially fuelled by western scholarship was maintained in some African States including apartheid-ruled South Africa and Zimbabwe (Campbell 1988:81). This paradox has resulted in a continual criminalisation of Rastafarians as 'rogues', social outcasts and dagga-smokers.

Notwithstanding the negative images that the sections of the Zimbabwean society have held, today, the country is a home to several Nyahbinghi Rastafari Houses located in different towns and cities. The Rastafari community in Zimbabwe consists of eight Houses, namely, the Chaminuka Rastafari House in Chitungwiza, Dzimbabwe Rastafari House of Glen Norah; the Marcus Garvey Rastafari House in Epworth, Murahwa Rastafari House in Mutare; Chirorodziva Rastafari House in Chinhoyi; the Joshua Nkomo Rastafari House in Bulawayo; the Mwenemutapa Rastafari House in Kwekwe; and the Cherutombo Rastafari House in Marondera. Because there is a wide array of Rastafari Houses in Zimbabwe, this study focuses on the case of Marcus Garvey Rastafari House in Epworth, one of the high density suburbs of Harare. It is hoped that the case can provide a general picture of Rastafari environmental ethic in the Zimbabwean context. However, before examining this case, it is instructive to look at the general picture constituting the Rastafari ecological ethic.

## The Rastafari Ecological Ethic

In general, many Rastafari beliefs and practices emerged from a matrix of diverse religious traditions including African Indigenous religious tradition, Hindu tradition and the Judeo-Christian tradition. The Rastafarian reverence for nature from which their 'ecological ethic' developed is also traceable from these multiple traditions (David 1998). For instance, in the Jamaican context, the religion of the enslaved had a belief that the "entire realm of nature has been endowed with personal life; and every tree or plant, every river or stone, becomes a source of energy or power which may be used, abused, offended or destroyed" (Morrish 1983). This animistic belief is also upheld in African Indigenous Religion as well as the Hindu tradition to preserve the environment. The influence of the Indian philosophy is largely traced from indentured labourers that were brought to Jamaica who had a similar outlook on nature through herbal medicine as Afro-Jamaicans. It is believed that the Rastafarian use of *ganja* has roots in the Indian tradition where it was used in meditation and as herbal medicine. Therefore, Rastafarians received a respect and a deep connection to nature from these traditions (David 1998).

Rastafarians seek to pursue natural 'livity', that is, an independent life style that is in harmony with the natural world. This Rastafari 'livity' is acted out in various ways but the objective is to lead an *Ital* way of life. Johnson-Hill (1995:202) cited in David (1998) notes that the Rastafari word '*Ital*' conveys "a sense of natural, organic purity, as well as cultural authenticity." Therefore, the *Ital* way of life is directly opposed to the artificial lifestyles espoused through western consumerism. Furthermore, the Rastafarian consciousness of "the *Ital* ideal is expressed through diet, hairstyle, a rural experience, a sense of community, and emphasis of simplicity" (David 1998). For Rastafarians, living naturally implies producing one's own food, eating an *Ital* diet consisting of organic and vegetarian foods as well as upholding the sacredness of the earth by refusing to pollute and commercialise it. In their diet, Rastas advocate taking holistic and unprocessed foods such that some fruits and vegetables are eaten raw in order to attain maximum nourishment. In this manner, Rastafarians are consistent with the ways of Jah (God) and the African way that supports the pre-Babylon epoch.

Moreover, the Rastafarians are against the long-term misuse of land by Babylon through pollution of the soil, water and air, which in turn affect people and the environment in general. They complain that the land has been poisoned through the use of modern methods of fertilizing and other chemicals which do not only impoverish land but also the bodies of people who eat the food from such land (Dickerson 2004:28). Such is the general concern of Rastas to the extent they seek *Italism* as a way of life and a rehabilitation of the relationship between humanity and ecology that is sustainable. It remains to be established through a study of this magnitude how far the Rastafari movement in Zimbabwe are living in harmony with nature and are contributing to the reclamation of the environment and other natural resources.

## ***Nuff Respect to Rastafari Green Philosophy?: Lessons from Marcus Garvey Rastafari House***

The findings that were mainly gathered through interviews and observations are presented through the phenomenological element of descriptive accuracy interspersed with interpretation of data. With much justification, the grassroots approach was a useful tool for understanding the Rastafari activities studied in as much as it gathered the ‘ground-level’ perspectives. As a starting point, the study established that the Marcus Garvey Rastafari House of Nyahbinghi Order in Epworth was officially opened on 17 August 2008 as an off-shoot from the ‘mother and father of Nyahbinghi in Zimbabwe’, the Chaminuka Rastafari House of the Nyahbinghi Order that was established in 1995 in Chitungwiza, a dormitory town to Harare. Notably, the date for the founding of the Marcus Garvey Rastafari House coincides with the birthday of Marcus Garvey, the Pan-Africanist and Jamaican born prophet whose ideology greatly influenced the Rastafarians. Indeed, Garvey’s ideas were influential to the Rastafari movement as they were meant to promote Black identity, self-worth and redemption. Yet it still has to be asked: To what extent has the Rastafari community in Epworth developed an ‘ecological ethic’ commensurate with this symbolic landscape named after a legendary figure in the movement? How far could the Rastafarians translate the Marcus Garvey watchwords of ‘One God, One Aim, One Destiny’ to formulate a collective stance to preserve the environment?

Part of the answers to the above questions are contained in the careful research, recollection and *reasonings* of the Rastafari community in Zimbabwe in general and to at Epworth in particular. Several activities have transpired at this historic site in Epworth where Rastas now gather for their *binghi*, having recognised some natural features and what Carlo Ginzburg (1989) calls “clues, roots of an evidential paradigm”, something that convinced the Rastafari community that this was an ideal spiritual place and site for ceremonial gathering. The remarks of one interviewee are informative in this regard. He noted thus:

When I was still a little boy in the early 1980s, I used to see a group of young adults who regularly visited these hills and probably this cave armed with a radio receiver to play and listen to reggae music. In those days, their love for reggae music and keeping ‘Afro-hair’ earned them a negative label in society because our parents did not feel comfortable to emulate or associate with them. I am also convinced that these individuals were responsible for the white paint marks on the rocks and boulders in this place, long before I dreamt of troding the Rastafari livity.

In this way, the words, phrases and other visual images at the site constitute the *clues* referred to by Ginzburg in the process of recollecting and reconstructing history. One observable inscription in white paint is found on the cave wall of the *binghi* depicting the anchor of a ship vessel.

A closer scrutiny of this symbol suggests the legendary ship for repatriation of Blacks in the Diaspora to Africa that is linked to Marcus Garvey's ideas and Rastafari philosophy in general. Another catchy phrase inscribed in calligraphic capital letters on top of the *binghi* cave and at the foot of the two flag masts reads: "Strictly Philosophy of Rastafarianism". The realisation of these relics definitely endeared the place to the community of Rastas to "Get Up, Stand Up" and not to give up this landscape to other non-Rastafarian contenders, as the study will show. Arguably, the locus of Rastafari control and protection of the environment or landscape around the *binghi* partly emanates from the discovery of the supposed remnants linked to Rastafari philosophy.

In line with the above assertion, the study also established that by merely observing the location of the Marcus Garvey *binghi*, one notices the Rastafari environmental consciousness. First and foremost, the site is found in a remote and secluded location punctuated by a range of hilly and rocky outcrops outside Epworth residential suburb. One informant said that the official position of the Municipality of Harare City considers the entire landscape outside the Epworth suburb (to the East) as 'wasteland'. Perhaps this was because largely the land has poor sandy soils, a rocky and rugged terrain. However, it is within the so-called 'wasteland' that the Rastafari ecological ethic has experienced a practical dimension constituting the centre of this study. The Rastas developed notions of attachment to the landscape and transformed it to suit their values that have transformed it from 'wasteland' to 'sacred land'. For instance, on one occasion as we *trod* towards the hills from Epworth suburb and just after crossing a river, the researcher was shown some rocky features that were given a symbolic meaning from Rastafari. One feature was a rock image accorded the form of a royal throne or seat akin to that of His Imperial Majesty, Emperor Haile Selassie I. Just nearby, there was another rock image accorded the outward appearance of a lion. It was explained by one of the informants that the latter image that was analogous to the Lion of Judah had been displaced from its elevated position by 'enemy' forces to the Rastafari cause to preserve the natural environment from which they could also find meaning for their faith. But who could be these 'fiends of doom' to the Rastafari ecological ethic and vision?

There are various contenders to the landscape that Rastas have defined and demarcated as 'sacred land' yet it remains a 'contested' space. In general, different contenders go through 'mental mapping' of the landscape in different ways and at diverse levels. This reminds one of William Wolmer's (2007:49) observations concerning landscape when he noted thus: "[landscape] evokes the possibilities and limitations of space: encompassing the physical land, the people on it, and the culture through which people work out possibilities of the land. 'Landscape' means existence. Land is simultaneously and ambiguously territory, homeground and reproductive soil." Thus, besides Rastas, the researcher observed within the so-called 'wasteland' that there were some families doing subsistence urban farming in some pockets of the same landscape; there were also people who used hammers to crush stones for construction; and there were also different groups of African Initiated Churches gathered to worship at different sites in the same landscape. Yet still, though not seen in action at that time, there was also evidence of some other people who cut trees in this landscape for firewood.

This phenomenon is caused by the need to commercialise wood fuel or to utilise it at domestic level given the high rate of electric power outages and non-connection to the power grid in some houses in Epworth suburb. In one way or another, the wood fuel hewers stick out clearly as direct destroyers of the natural trees in the area, which is contrary to the interests and activities espoused through the influence of the Rastafari environmental ethic.

Furthermore, along the way to the *binghi*, just before crossing the river valley, the researcher was shown a well tended garden identified as belonging to the family of one of the Rastas in Epworth. The garden had a lot of bananas, some yams, and maize among other crops. This triggered the reference to *Italism* and its importance in Rastafari which will be covered later in the study. Meanwhile, as we crossed the river, attention was drawn to the effort of Rastas who made a temporary bridge out of scrape concrete cylinders they gathered in Epworth suburb. In this regard, an interesting concept of reusing scrape material comes to light among Rastas. The bridge is used by all and sundry and to this day honour and praises are accorded to the Rastafari community in Epworth. Hence, the researcher was informed with regards to the bridge that “*iri rinonzwi bridge remaRasta*” (This is known as the Rastas’ bridge). This shows the Rastafari effort to be relevant in the area. Along the river valley, the Rastas pointed at the land where they planned to plant some indigenous and exotic trees during the National Tree Planting Day for the year 2011 held every first Saturday of December. Some of the trees were a donation from the Forestry Commission where one Rasta in Epworth is said to be employed. The other lot was expected from Ruwa Primary School where the child of one participant attended school. The plan was to mobilise support from both Rastas and non-Rastas for the tree planting to be successful. This is an element of community engagement by Rastas in their existential situatedness. So hopeful and keen was the coordinating Rastafari Elder in promoting the planting of trees in one section of the ‘wasteland’ turned ‘sacred land’ that one could not minimise the broader and long-term contribution of Rastafari in the reforestation of Epworth. Indeed, this is a ‘green revolution’ symbolically represented through the green colour of the Rasta flag in reference to vegetation and land or Mother Earth (Afari 2007:97). This also resonates with the advice that Ras Earnest of South Africa attributed to King Selassie I encouraging Rastas to plant one million trees per year for food, medicine and as part of the Rastafari ecological ethic.

As one further *trods* to a higher terrain from the river valley towards the *binghi* yard for Epworth Rastas, one is greeted by the words in bold black paint: ‘Garvey Hills’. The influence of Marcus Garvey becomes apparent. Though there is no fence that demarcates their area, this label is symbolical as it clearly marks the official entrance, which unfortunately other members of the public use to access places beyond. One also observes just a few metres away from this inscription that there is a newly planted non-fruit indigenous tree (*Munga/Muhlofunga*) with a trench made around it to catch water. This was also enough evidence of the environmental consciousness of Rastas. The trees that they planted and tended were meant to add on to the vegetation that has survived the axe of the “environmental terrorists” (Sibanda, 2010).

The area right round the *binghi* yard and even inside it is also endowed with diverse indigenous tree species that were deliberately preserved by the Rastafarian community. These tree species include among others, *Munhondo* (*Julbernadiaglobifora*), *Musasa* (*Brachystegiaspiciformis*) and *Mupfuti* (*Brachystegiaboehmii*). There are also some species of nutritional and medicinal value such as *Munzvuru*, *Mutohwe* and *Muroro* in the Rastafari landscape.

Within the vicinity of the *binghi* some other features from the natural landscape have been identified and given a Rastafari interpretation. For instance, one cluster of rocks has been visualised as a 'lion's paw' whilst yet another image centres on a rock painting of a resting lion, a creative feature indeed. The importance of the lion imagery cannot be underestimated in Rastafari theology in line with the royal authority attributed to Haile Selassie I. The lion paw also serves as the pattern of Rastafari greeting. By all standards, this is a place with a serene atmosphere and therefore conducive to retreats and *binghis*. One participant acknowledged the ideal nature of the *binghi* as a place for individual and collective spiritual development through meditation. This resonates with the observation from among some Jamaican Rastafari *Italists* who found it rewarding to visit the natural settings in the hills for "solitude, reflection and observation or appreciation of the natural world" (Dickerson 2004:118). This is a clean environment that has a healing impact for participants through discipline expressed "*bingically, yardically and communistically*", as one participant noted to refer to context and those involved. In other words, the Rasta community in Epworth participates in the environmental management of natural resources in their area consciously and unconsciously.

The Rastafari ecological ethic is also espoused through the *Ital* vegetarian diet. The Rastafari lifestyle that comprises *Ital* food, drink and medicine is best understood within the prism of natural livity in the use of land from which all these ends products emanate. As stated in the Chaminuka Rastafari House brochure, Rastafari "... support agriculture since we are vegetarians and we need organic farming to keep our temples clean". This suggests that the Rastas require good land to practice their organic farming that would not pollute the land, crops and people through the over use of chemicals and fertilizers. At their annual *Nyahbinghi* held at the Marcus Garvey *binghi*, Rastas brought and shared *Ital* food and fruits such as mangoes, bananas, groundnuts and cucumbers. The participants confirmed that Rastas are suspicious of the fruits and vegetables they buy from the supermarkets as they may not be organic products. The use of *Ital* livity is also espoused in the use of *ganja* or *marijuana*. *Marijuana* is a herb that is known in Shona as *mbanje* but Rastas call it *mupanjere* (wisdom weed) whose use has a Biblical basis for its spiritual and medicinal properties. Some prefer to eat *ganja* as vegetables or drink it as tea but in general, it is smoked communally through the chalice as a ritual action. This is comparable to existing literature where *ganja* is regarded as food and medicine that is as natural as fruit and vegetable (Dickerson 2004:102). Therefore, Rastafarians live in a sustainable way through their *Ital* livity.

Finally, the majority of Rastafarians pursue a socially and economically committed livity that is characterised by attributes of self-reliance, peaceful co-existence and natural organic living. One way of doing this is through reusing and recycling of scrape material that doubles as a means of livelihood and reducing pollution of the environment. The author was able to see some of the works of one Elder who shared his experience on his occupation. There was a variety of toys made from scrape canes to mould children's toys whose market is local and regional. In this way, Rastafarian lifestyle is abreast with the global call by ecologists and environmentalists to engage the 3Rs, namely: to Reduce, Reuse and Recycle. The utilisation of recycled resources to produce works of art is a creative and innovative paradigm of thinking and acting the talk of 'living green'. Evidently, the Rastafari community exercises an *ecomorality* that is based on an 'emergentist' understanding that requires a continuous participation in protecting and celebrating Mother earth (Goodenough and Deacon 2009:870). Undoubtedly, there is every reason to give '*nuff respect*' to the Rastafarian green philosophy and livity that leave some practical lessons to the local, regional and international community.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

The paper has shown that within the framework of the global climate change, religion is one of the key players to resolve the environmental crisis. The study posited that Rastafari is a typical advocate of 'green religious practices' that thrive on an *Ital* experiential livity, which is natural and simple. The Marcus Garvey Rastafari community in Epworth is a grassroots social group living in harmony with nature through rejecting the artificial in favour of the natural. The Rastafari commitment to the natural and organic states is quintessential to an '*ecomorality*' that respects Mother Earth to promote sustainability on the basis of practising some components of the 3Rs: 'Reduce, Reuse and Recycle'. Thus, through the 'green' lifestyles, Rastafarians defy the unbridled spirit of western consumerism and 'ecological holocaust'. Indeed, the misanthropic and egocentric approach to environmental issues particularly from some developed nations continues to place the poorer ones at ransom. This scenario breeds the Orwellian 'double think' that renders international forums on climate change such as COP17 to be a farce masterminded by Babylon systems. In the wider African context, the Rastafari *Ital* livity provides a platform from which several paradigms in the religious and secular contexts can be merged to operate diachronically and synchronically in the preservation of the environment. This is complementary effort to the national and global effort. Therefore, the African Renaissance studies are being extended to the ecological field to restore natural livity and stem the global climate change by 'thinking, acting and living green' as espoused by Rastafari movement in Zimbabwe.

In light of the findings and conclusions drawn above, the following recommendations are suggested:

- Rastafari and other reggae artistes should use the popular music genre to conscientise society to utilise natural resources in a sustainable way. This will concretise their participation in external environmental networks on projects and campaigns dealing with sustainability such as the World Environmental Day.
- To ensure that *Ital* food is available on the market, Rastafarians should seriously consider engaging the government to acquire land for practising organic farming. That way, real *Ital* markets and *rasta-urants* can be established in Zimbabwe.
- Religious environmentalists involved in the post-modern dialogue between religion and ecology should engage Rastafari to grapple with planetary environmental degradation.

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