

‘Hawks and Doves’: The Impact of Operation Murambatsvina on Johane Marange Apostolic Church in Zimbabwe

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Abstract

The paper discusses the socio-economic and religious impact of Operation Murambatsvina on Johane Marange Apostolic Church in Masvingo, a city and Zvishavane, a mining town. It adopts a comparative approach in order to demonstrate the extent to which this phenomenon impacted on the religious and socio-economic activities of this movement in the two urban centres. While the majority of the church members were negatively affected, there are some who unintentionally benefited from this operation. The church was threatened numerically and theologically as some members were forced to translocate to rural areas. It is argued that in spite of the continued disruptions by the government and municipal authorities, the Vapositori of Marange continue to operate their informal business and missionary activities without necessarily compromising their traditions. The paper uses the ‘hawks and doves’ metaphor to demonstrate the relationship between the marauding government and municipal police and the vulnerable Vapositori during and in the post-Murambatsvina era.

Keywords

church in Zimbabwe, Apostolic Church, church and politics, Johane Marange

Introduction

Operation Murambatsvina also known as Operation Restore Order was launched by the government of Zimbabwe as a clean up campaign of cities, towns and growth points. The operation started in Harare, Zimbabwe's capital city, on 19 May 2005 and spread like veld fire into a nationwide exercise.¹ Since Operation Murambatsvina was a military-style crackdown prosecuted by government police on the activities of the general populace including Vapostori (apostles) of Johane Marange, we adopted the metaphor 'hawks and doves' as part of the title caption of this paper. It is an imagery of a predator and prey representing the government police and Vapostori, respectively. The law and order riot police unit known as '*Gondo Harishayi*' is an apt label that depicts its operations. *Gondo* is the Shona word for a 'hawk', a famous predator of doves and chickens. This explains the Shona saying that '*Gondo harishayi; rikashaya nhiyo rinonhonga marara*' (A hawk does not venture for nothing; if it misses its real target, it picks up rabble). Unlike hawks, doves are humble birds of peace and simplicity. This compares well with all the victims of Operation Murambatsvina. Thus, in an effort to contribute to the on-going debate, this study endeavours to analyse the impact of Operation Murambatsvina on an African Initiated Church of Johane Marange in Zvishavane, a mining town in the Midlands Province, and in Masvingo city in Masvingo Province.

The important aspect that is still missing on this historic phenomenon of Operation Murambatsvina in Zimbabwe, however, is a comparative study that demonstrates its impact from a religious perspective. Furthermore, there are very few works that directly address the religious dimension of this phenomenon. Meanwhile, there is an undergraduate Research project that was submitted to the Department of Humanities at Masvingo State University on this subject.² This study, therefore, seeks to complement such existing unpublished works and media reports. A brief historical overview of Johane Marange Apostolic Church and Operation Murambatsvina is necessary before an exploration on the impact is undertaken.

¹ *The Herald*, Harare, July 28, 2005, 1.

² T. Mutsengi, 'Socio-Economic Impact of Operation Restore Order/Murambatsvina on Johane Marange Apostolic Church in Zvishavane', unpublished BA research project, Masvingo: Masvingo State University 2006.

Brief Historical Background

Origins and History of Johane Marange Apostolic Church

Johane Marange Apostolic Church is one of the various Independent Christian Churches that emerged in the last century. Quite a lot has been written concerning the causes and nature of Independent churches. However, it is noteworthy that there is not much literature on Johane Marange Apostolic Church, especially in the new millennium. In general, the traditional thesis was that Independent churches emerged as a kind of schism towards renewal in terms of organization, leadership and liturgical expression from Western-oriented mainline Christian churches.³ This is also true of the origins, growth and spirituality of Johane Marange Apostolic Church as a religious movement.

Johane Marange Apostolic Church arose as an acculturative, sociological and religious movement in the history of 20th century Christianity in Zimbabwe. The founder of this church was Johane Momberume Marange (1912-1963). Originally, before he formed his church, Marange himself was a full-fledged member of the United Methodist Church.⁴ Therefore, his church was formed as a separatist movement from a Mainline Church. Johane Marange Apostolic Church arose as a rural phenomenon in the Marange area, situated about 50 km southwest of the city of Mutare in Manicaland Province of Zimbabwe (see Map of Zimbabwe below). Johane Marange claimed to have seen a prophetic vision in 1932 at a tender age of twenty.⁵ In the subsequent years, he proclaimed to the people that he was divinely commissioned by God to pronounce oracles to the people of his community and even beyond. His call consistently remained the spiritual-fountain anchoring the entire church. In addition, a wide range of charismatic gifts such as speaking in tongues and faith healing have become strong liturgical traits of the Johane Marange Church.⁶ Therefore, it is a spirit-type church. This is what accounted for the momentous growth and expansion of the church as a great renewal movement. It soon spread to other parts of the country. The movement spread to other Southern African countries such as Malawi, Mozambique, South Africa, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Botswana, Angola and Zambia.⁷ The

³ M.L. Daneel, *Quest for Belonging*, Gweru: Mambo Press 1986, 51.

⁴ M.F.C. Bourdillon, *The Shona Peoples*, Gweru: Mambo Press 1987, 298.

⁵ Bourdillon, 298.

⁶ Daneel, 53.

⁷ Interview with K.T. Gondo, lecturer at Great Zimbabwe University and a strong member of Johane Marange Apostolic Church, Masvingo, July 26, 2007. See also, Daneel, 58.

exact figures of Marange members cannot be established with certainty as no official count has ever been done. The church uses a loose method for assessing its membership. Counting is usually done during the Passover feast. For instance, after partaking the Holy Communion, each member confirms his or her attendance by throwing a stone in provided container. The stones are later counted to establish an approximate figure of the attendees. However, this cannot be depended on entirely as it does not capture all the members. The issue is complicated by the fact that not all members attend the annual feast. The figure obtained at such gatherings does not reflect a specific Zimbabwean membership of the church as the festival attracts international members. Bourdillon claimed that the Church had over fifty thousand members in Zimbabwe and about twenty five thousand members from the neighboring countries.⁸ Nevertheless he admits that these are approximate figures. Even if we credit his findings as realistic, time renders these figures obsolete. According to one informant who attended the 2007 Annual Paschal Festival in Marange, about seventy thousand apostles attended the function. All the same this did not help us to establish the exact number of adherents in Zimbabwe. However, the impression that we got from the same source is that neighbouring countries such as the Democratic Republic of Congo and Angola are overtaking Zimbabwe numerically. The other hitch encountered in coming up with a Zimbabwean figure of Vapositori is that any infant baptized is included in the overall figures and will stay as such even though he or she never attends church or even joins another church. This is what also obtains in the Catholic Church as noted by Paul Gifford.⁹ As such we can only come up with an estimate figure.

Features of Johane Marange Church

Religious Beliefs

In terms of historical and theological inspiration, Johane Marange and his subsequent followers claim to have been influenced by the Old Testament figures like Moses, Elijah, and Elisha. These prophets were associated with ascetic desert life and had no permanent residence (Exodus 13ff, 1Kings 17ff, 2Kings 2ff). This could explain why the Vapositori of Marange, conduct their

⁸ Bourdillon, 292.

⁹ P. Gifford, 'Some Recent Developments in African Christianity', *African Affairs* 93/373 (1994), 524.

services on the open places typifying the wilderness life. The idea of 'Jordan Rivers', popular among the Marange followers, is traceable to the Old Testament figures especially Elijah and Elisha (cf. 2 Kings 2). Wherever these apostles are found, there are 'Jordan Rivers' nearby where they perform baptism and cleansing rituals. Each 'Jordan River' is regarded as a *Pendi*.¹⁰ The term *Pendi*, which the Vapositori derive from the Jewish festival of Pentecost, symbolises a spiritual nucleus around which any local Vapositori church revolves. It normally constitutes at least forty to fifty families. It supplies a physical and spiritual justification for the existence of an authentic local Vapositori church because it offers a particular place to administer the sacraments of baptism and *paseka* (Passover or Paschal).¹¹ The Vapositori hold their Passover during the first two weeks of July annually in the Marange area. Members of Vapositori attend such a gathering from different countries in the region. Faith healing is another distinctive feature of the Marange Church whose theology is based on the Bible. This element has made this movement more attractive to Africans than the Mainline Churches.¹²

In terms of hierarchy, the church has no offices such as those found in the mainline churches like Papacy, Bishop, Deacons etc. According to Bourdillon, there are four major offices in the Marange Church namely, Baptizers, Evangelists, Prophets and Healers.¹³ However, one church member acknowledges the first two offices. The higher office is that of the Baptizer which directly emanates from Johane Momberume Marange himself. Senior Baptists are identified by a six star badge on their garments labeled 'APE'. This star is reminiscent of the Star of David. Junior Baptizers are identified by a three star badge labeled 'AP'. In the absence of their seniors, the juniors can lead a local church session. The office of the Evangelist, also known as *Mutumwa* (the One who has been sent), is second in command. He is also referred to as *Labhauma*. The letters 'LU' patched on their garments identifies this office. Junior Evangelists have their garments labeled 'L' to distinguish them from their seniors. The Evangelists are also described as *vakuru vebasa* (Veterans in church activities). The Evangelists initiate the would-be converts into the church and eventually refer them to the Baptist after *kusunungurwa* (an act of forgiveness

¹⁰ Daneel, 55, 57.

¹¹ Daneel, 55.

¹² J.N. Amanze, 'Theology Already Cooked in an African Pot', in: K. Fiedler, P. Gundani and H. Mijoga, (eds.), *Theology Cooked in an African Pot*, Zomba: ATISCA 2000, 77.

¹³ Bourdillon, 301.

complemented by the laying of hands). Therefore, their roles are complementary. Besides their specific duties in the church, they can also prophesy and heal. The positions in the church are accorded basing on seniority in terms of when one joined. Men occupy the above offices although women can be prophets and healers. A prophet appoints all office bearers to their posts through dreams or inspired announcement.¹⁴ Initially, close relatives of Johane Marange occupied most of the positions of the church.

Economic Activities

The kernel of the economic activities of Vapositori of Marange is vocationalism. Each family is renowned for a wide range of one or more of technical skills like carpentry, basketry, metalworking, building and leather working. Women and children are mostly involved in the trading of homemade artifacts of their respective families. Some of our informants noted that the church members were initially discouraged to seek formal employment, either in government, or in the private sector.¹⁵ Two reasons were given. Firstly, their church was born in the context of the hated white colonial labour capitalism. Therefore, economic exploitation has remained anathema in the minds of the people ever since. Secondly, seeking formal jobs is seen as potentially negative to the numerical growth of the church as members are likely to be absorbed by the outside world.

The Vapositori believe that God is the source of their practical skills.¹⁶ It is the Holy Spirit that puts a skill into 'the hands' of each person in order to survive and help spread the gospel of Christ. Each family is endowed with a particular trade. If the father were gifted at say, basketry or tin-smithing, then the sons would likely be good at those trades as well. Therefore, self-reliance is the prime motivating factor behind Vapositori economic activities. However, today a number of Vapositori are employed in the public and private sector as lecturers, school teachers, managers and some holding political positions in government.¹⁷

¹⁴ Bourdillon, 302.

¹⁵ Bourdillon, 204.

¹⁶ M.F.C. Bourdillon, T. Mashita and M. Glickman, 'Traditional Religion and an Independent Church', in: M.F.C. Bourdillon (ed.), *Christianity South of the Zambezi*, Gweru: Mambo Press 1977, 203.

¹⁷ For example in politics, Chris Mushowe who is the Minister of Transport and Communication is a member of the Marange Church.

Social Life

The social life of the members of Johane Marange Church is typically guided by spiritual religiosity for it is rooted in Holy Scriptures.¹⁸ Their social pattern is anchored in patriarchal conceptions reflecting enduring Jewish influences. Women are in the majority of church membership but in terms of status they are marginalized.¹⁹ Top leadership positions like being priests, bishops and evangelists are monopolized by men, yet women play active roles in Church especially in the areas of singing, ushering, healing and prophecy.²⁰

The Vapositori families are characterised by the social institution of polygamy. An ideal family constitutes an average of four to five women. Our informants indicated that polygamy has biblical justification. They noted that Old Testament patriarchal figures like Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were polygamous (Gen.16: 3ff; Gen.29: 9ff). This tallies with the African traditional practice.²¹ Vapositori believe that wives must come from within the church. Therefore, they are endogamous.

Operation Murambatsvina in Masvingo and Zvishavane

The operation was instituted without any proper warning to the people. There was destruction of 'illegal' business premises such as vending sites, tuck shops and flea markets as well as houses, which displaced hundreds of thousands of people. Ironically, municipalities within the parameters of its by-laws had erected some of the so-called illegal structures. Hence Operation Murambatsvina was also referred to as "tsunami" due to its disastrous adverse effects across the board. The media was awash with comments on the 'blitz' emanating from the local, regional and international community.²² This has made Operation Murambatsvina to be a subject of much controversy at various fronts, viz, the political, social, economic and religious because it impacted negatively on people in small towns like Zvishavane as well as cities like Masvingo that are

¹⁸ I. Mukonyora, 'The Fulfillment of African Religious Needs through the Bible', in: I. Mukonyora, J.L. Cox and F.J. Verstraelen, (eds.) *"Rewriting" the Bible: the Real Issues*, Gweru: Mambo Press 1993, 254-255.

¹⁹ I. Mukonyora, 'Women's Readings of the Bible', in: Mukonyora, Cox and Verstraelen, 209.

²⁰ Bourdillon, 301.

²¹ Bourdillon, Mashita. and Gluckman, 204.

²² United Nations, Report of the UN Special Envoy, Anna Tibaijuka on the Scope and Impact of Operation Murambatsvina, 2005 reproduced in *The Zimbabwe Independent*, August 12, 2005, U3.

at the centre of this study. The Map of Zimbabwe (Figure 1) shows the location of Zvishavane (south west of Masvingo), a small mining town in the Midlands Province. In 1985, Zvishavane had about 25 000 inhabitants. Over a period of about two decades, they had increased to approximately 35 000 people before Operation Murambatsvina. The historic retrenchment of workers in the Zvishavane asbestos mine in 1987 rendered many jobless and a significant number joined the informal sector until the government introduced Operation Murambatsvina.²³ Masvingo city is the provincial capital of Masvingo Province. In 1985, the total inhabitants of Masvingo city were approximately 50 000. After two decades, and before Operation Murambatsvina, the inhabitants had increased to about 57 000. It is clear that the population in these two locations was drastically reduced as a result of Operation Murambatsvina since it displaced people geographically. In the like manner a significant number of Vapostori were affected as we shall see in this study.

In Masvingo and Zvishavane the police officers proceeded by first destroying all the flea markets in the Central Business District and expelling vegetable vendors and hawkers. After ridding the town centres of what the Government termed '*tsvina*' (dirty) the operation moved to Mucheke and Mandava business areas, the busiest places in Masvingo and Zvishavane. People from different places came to do their business at these areas. Venturing into such diverse informal activities for livelihood was referred to as *kukorokoza*.²⁴ Commodities such as cooking oil, flour, bread, rice, sugar and even fuel that had become scarce in Zimbabwe were sold at exorbitant prices at these centers, especially at bus terminuses. Apart from trading in small items some traders engaged in the production of coffins, scotch carts, farm equipment and building material. Indeed, the informal sector had become the source of livelihood for the people of Masvingo and Zvishavane.

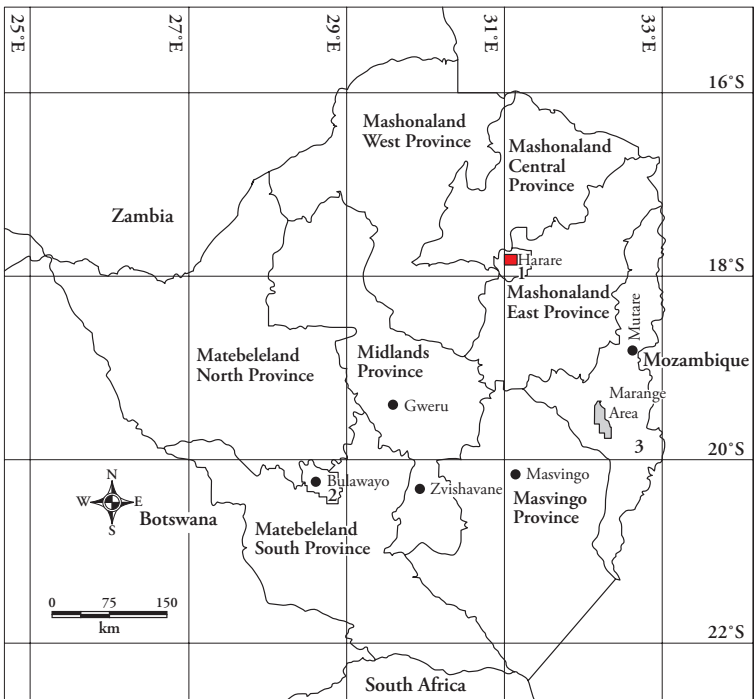
From Mucheke and Mandava business areas, the clean-up campaign was directed to the residential areas. The most affected areas were Kandodo, Maglas, Mimmosa, Old Mabhula and Mandava in Zvishavane. Residents in

²³ Interview with T.M. Zhou, a history lecturer at Great Zimbabwe University, Masvingo, July 26, 2007.

²⁴ Originally, *kukorokoza* was associated with small scale illegal alluvial gold panning. In this way, the televised Zimbabwean Theatre Production, *Amakorokoza*, was developed on this theme. However, since *kukorokoza* had been transformed to imply making ends meet by any means necessary, after Operation Murambatsvina in 2007, the government introduced *Operation Chikorokoza Chapera* to end *kukorokoza*.

these areas, had set up cottages and shacks at their backyards to house their growing families and rent paying lodgers. Moreso, there were numerous tuck shops and salons that were not licensed by the relevant authorities.²⁵ However, very few houses in Masvingo were destroyed as most of them were constructed according to the by-laws of the city council.

The police officers, like 'hawks', invaded these areas, demolishing all structures that were considered to be illegal and confiscating precious items such as



LEGEND

- 1 Harare Metropolitan Province
- 2 Bulawayo Metropolitan Province
- 3 Manicaland Province

Figure 1: Map of Zimbabwe showing Provinces and study areas²⁶

²⁵ Mutsengi, 1, 6.

²⁶ Map of Zimbabwe produced by E. Chazireni, lecturer in Geography, Great Zimbabwe University, August 31, 2007.

minerals, foodstuff, foreign currency and fuel. There was commotion in these places as people wrestled with the police to safeguard their source of livelihood. However, the victims were overpowered and forced to take part in the destruction of their own business structures before vacating.

Operation Restore Order also targeted churches, particularly those that conducted their services on the open space. These include among others Apostolic and Zionist Movements such as Vapitori of Johane Masowe and Johane Marange, the latter being at the centre of this study. These churches were banned from worshiping on open places as they were accused of distorting the environment and creating a potential health hazard. They were advised to either apply for permanent places to build their church structures and toilets or disappear forever.

However, the government clean-up exercise did not start with Operation Murambatsvina. In colonial and post-colonial times, the government ahead of international conferences or other events such as Commonwealth Heads of State and Government (CHOGM) sanctioned police 'blitz'. In one study focusing on police raids, L. Jackson notes that although the main motive was of getting rid of prostitutes, squatters and beggars, the police 'crackdown' ended up netting a wide variety of people including members of the informal sector of the economy.²⁷ A leaf can be plucked from such an experience for the benefit of this study. For instance, whereas the government claims that the motive of Operation Murambatsvina was to restore public order, there is debate on the timing and motive of its implementation. Some argue that the government had, among other things, a concealed political scheme. It meted out a "collective punishment" in order to regain its lost glory in urban centres where opposition political movements thrived.²⁸ The Vapitori of Marange came under crossfire. The political dimension of Operation Murambatsvina on different churches would enhance the Church-State relations controversy in a new guise. The Church-State relations of Johane Marange Church are out rightly an area that merits further investigation. Notably, some Vapitori

²⁷ L. Jackson, "'Stray Women' and Girls on the Move": Gender, Space, and Disease in Colonial and Post-Colonial Zimbabwe', in E. Kalipeni and P.T. Zeleza, (eds.), *Sacred Spaces and Public Quarrels: African Cultural and Economic Landscapes*, Trenton: Africa World Press, Inc. 1999, 146-147.

²⁸ See, for example, F. Duri, 'The place of Operation Murambatsvina in Zimbabwean History', unpublished seminar paper presented in the Department of Humanities, Masvingo State University, Masvingo, April 2006, 40.

movements in Zimbabwe have been co-opted, by hook or crook, to be on the government side. Chitando notes that Johane Masowe WeChishanu Church has secured permanent places of participation at major national functions²⁹ thereby compromising their potential for undertaking a prophetic mission that puts unjust government policies and practices in check.

The Impact of Operation Murambatsvina on Johane Marange Church in Masvingo and Zvishavane

Operation Murambatsvina had both negative and positive results in Masvingo and Zvishavane just like in many other cities, towns and growth points throughout the country. The majority of researchers including the United Nations envoy, A.K. Tibaijuka, established that Operation Murambatsvina had devastating consequences to most people. In the same vein, this study noted that the Murambatsvina adversely affected the Johane Marange Church. The effects are discussed under the following headings: socio-economic impact and religious impact.

Socio-Economic Impact

The majority of the Vapositori of Marange in Masvingo and Zvishavane depended on informal trading as the mainstay of their livelihood. The destruction of illegal flea markets, tuck shops, vending in items like fruits, vegetables and carrier bags especially at door entrances of big shops and bus termini were all disrupted. In Zvishavane, the flea market at Mupedzanhamo near Chiedza Hall was destroyed. Similarly, the illegal flea market in Masvingo city centre that was opposite Tsungai Supermarket was ransacked. The destruction of flea markets had ripple effects since cross-border trading was also affected. Although the Vapositori of Marange were not the only victims, this study established that quite a substantial number were active players in both urban centres.

Operation Murambatsvina did not spare the backyard light industries that were a traditional stronghold sector of Vapositori. The Vapositori manufactured a variety of products such as chicken troughs, letterboxes and meter boxes, and pushcarts. Furthermore, they did handcraft, carpentry and welding among

²⁹ E. Chitando, "In the Beginning was the Land": The Appropriation of Religious Themes in Political Discourses in Zimbabwe', *Africa*, 75/2 (2005), 231.

other economic activities in places like Mandava and Mucheke Business Centres in Zvishavane and Masvingo, respectively. This came to a halt when these industrial activities were destroyed leaving many of them jobless and desperate. This shows that Operation Murambatsvina removed the economic pedestal and affected their hard earned social status based on self-employment.

Vapitori of Marange Church operate in polygamous families. As noted earlier, a man can be married to an average of four to five wives. This makes women and children the majority of members in the church. It is notable that before the introduction of Operation Murambatsvina, women among the Vapitori had become economically active and empowered. This became a thing of the past as Operation Murambatsvina dispossessed them of their primary sources of income. The women in both Masvingo and Zvishavane could no longer complement their husbands to fend for their exceptionally large families and were relegated to be perpetual dependent backbenchers.

With very big families as obtains among the Vapitori of Marange, the negative impact was particularly felt when all illegal structures including houses, extensions to houses and cottages were destroyed in both places under study. In the typically depressed high density residential areas like Mandava and Mabhula in Zvishavane as well as Rujeko, Runyararo West, Old Mucheke and Old Railway sections of Masvingo, a substantial number of the Vapitori of Marange were left homeless. However, as noted before, there was a massive spate of destruction of shacks in Zvishavane more than in Masvingo. The existence of large polygamous families exacerbated the situation for the Vapitori who resided in these affected areas. Some had no immediate option except to sleep in the open and under cold temperatures with their families and property before some of them moved to their rural homes³⁰ or secured the expensive and now scarce alternative accommodation. Thus the accommodation crisis and overcrowding evidently characterized the life patterns of the already struggling families.³¹ As rightly argued by one observer, an individual's home, no matter how small and miserable, is one's outer shell and is part of oneself. Destroying that home is an assault to one's personality and dignity.³² It explains why many people also referred to Operation Murambatsvina as "tsunami", a real disaster, that left Vapitori paralyzed socially and economically.

³⁰ *The Independent*, June 3, 2005, 12.

³¹ See, for example, D. Auret, *Urban Housing: A National Crisis?*, Gweru: Mambo Press 1995.

³² Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops Conference, *A Preliminary Report on Operation Murambatsvina*, 2005, 34.

Due to the accommodation crisis, some of the previously intact and well-established families were disrupted as they sent part of their large families to stay in the rural areas. It was pathetic as some had come to consider the cities as their permanent homes such that they had no existing rural homes to talk about or had very mild links with their roots. Naturally, the Vapositori found city life as ideal and lucrative to their informal indigenous enterprises. Thus, they had chosen to stay in cities rather than the rural areas where they were forced to resort. A. K. Tibaijuka stated that it is totally unacceptable to force translocation of people to the rural areas that wish to continue staying and working in urban centres.³³ It is from such open international criticism against the government-sanctioned Operation Murambatsvina that some of the people victimized including Marange Vapositori, benefited from the introduction of Operation Garikai/Hlalani Kuhle³⁴ which was perhaps meant to 'paper up the cracks' of Operation Murambatsvina. Arguably, Operation Garikai/Hlalani Kuhle was an unintentional government initiated programme for constructing legal affordable houses and factory shells in all places where Murambatsvina had struck.

Though Operation Murambatsvina produced more victims than beneficiaries amongst the Vapositori of Marange in both cities, it is also important to note the positive results that emanated from it. In Masvingo and Zvishavane as noted earlier, there were some Vapositori of Marange who managed to secure houses and market stalls offered under Phase One of the new programme of Operation Garikai/Hlalani Kuhle. The selection and registration process of beneficiaries was rigorous but at least some of them were lucky to benefit as many victims failed to secure that chance. Thus, some of those who failed to benefit from this government venture continued to clandestinely operate illegal vending activities such as the sale of tomatoes, bananas, oranges and other seasonal wild fruits. They devised new strategies such as maximizing their business efforts on Sundays when both Municipal police and government police seem to cause less havoc than during the week. Sunday is also an ideal day for Vapositori of Marange since they observe their Sabbath on Saturday. Yet others chose to confine their operations to the premises of their houses. All the same, these strategies did not render them immune to arrests, fines and the confiscation of their goods when the police caught them. Thus Operation

³³ *The Herald*, August 24, 2005, 11.

³⁴ *The Daily Mirror*, June 28, 2005, 2.

Murambatsvina did not totally stamp out the illegal vending activities by some of the Vapositori of Marange that made police raids to intensify. The 'hawks and doves' relationship between the police and the Vapositori of Marange, respectively, continued as the latter persisted to hunt them down. Furthermore, like 'doves' some of the Vapositori passively accepted the socially and economically degrading results of Operation Murambatsvina.

As has already been noted, the challenges brought by Operation Murambatsvina affected Vapositori of Marange variedly. Some managed to soldier on and brace up to the challenges whereas others were totally crushed and forced to move out of both Masvingo and Zvishavane. It is enlightening to note that the socio-economic impact of Operation Murambatsvina on Vapositori are comparable to the findings of V.N.Muzvidziwa in his study on the survival of women in Masvingo urban during the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP).³⁵ Muzvidziwa identifies four socio-economic categories. These are: "the burnt-out" group — those who could hardly support their urban existence; "the hanging on" group — those who experienced difficult conditions but strived on to the bitter end; "the coping" group — those who could make ends meet but made no savings, and "the climbing out of poverty" group — those who operated well above board with both savings and investments.³⁶ These various permutations on the ESAP experience are typical of how the Vapositori of Marange in Masvingo and Zvishavane can be classified due to Operation Murambatsvina.

Just as some women during ESAP were able to "climb out of poverty" as Muzvidziwa notes, some Vapositori of Marange also emerged out of Operation Murambatsvina as winners by exploiting the challenges into opportunities for survival. Muzvidziwa refers to the Human Factor concept of development to explain how women climbed out of urban poverty. There are six major dimensions of the Human Factor whose elements include "spiritual capital, moral capital, human capital, aesthetic capital, human abilities, and human potential."³⁷ The human abilities, human potential, spiritual and moral dimensions are all useful attributes that catalyzed the resilience of Vapositori under Operation Murambatsvina just as women under ESAP. The small percentage of

³⁵ V.N. Muzvidziwa, 'Survival of Urban Women Under ESAP in Masvingo, Zimbabwe', *Review of Human Factor Studies*, 5/1 and 2 (2000).

³⁶ Muzvidziwa, 127.

³⁷ S. Adjibolosoo, 'The Human Factor in Nation Building', *Review of Human Factor Studies*, 5/1 and 2 (2000), 4.

Vapitori of Marange who successfully bore the pressure of Murambatsvina perhaps possessed what Muzvidziwa describes as a “high sense of discipline, resourcefulness, innovativeness, dedication, commitment to duty, an enterprising and entrepreneurial spirit, networking and strategizing skills and responsibility.”³⁸ Some of these qualities have been utilized by some of the Vapitori of Marange to champion their socio-economic challenges to ensure their survival in Masvingo and Zvishavane.

Religious Impact

There were numerical and theological effects of Murambatsvina on Vapitori of Marange. The destruction of the illegal business and accommodation structures forced some of the members in both Masvingo and Zvishavane to move to the rural areas. Such a translocation of a significant number of families drastically affected the Vapitori. It can be argued that the displacement process cannot be underrated given that the church members are largely polygamous. One Marange Church elder lamented the loss of members from urban centres. He remarked, “It is vital for instance, to note that the withdrawal of one adult married member with an average of four wives and each of them with approximately six children translates to about twenty five family members.”³⁹ This implies that if a total of say ten families were displaced in each of the two urban centers under this study, hundreds of church members were lost to their respective congregations. Certainly, the *Pendi* notion was significantly affected. Thus Operation Murambatsvina was a real trauma that struck at the very heart of the Johane Marange Apostolic Church and severely affected it numerically in both Masvingo and Zvishavane.

The Vapitori in both centres have a standing tradition of holding their weekly church services in the open spaces. Like other independent churches such as Vapitori of Masowe, they gather under trees. They do not build permanent structures at all, arguing that they were pilgrims whose mission and theology defied the construction of permanent worship structures. Apparently, the respective municipalities had not officially allocated these portions. Operation Murambatsvina disrupted the open-air gatherings on the grounds of health and ecological reasons. There were no existing ablution facilities at these sites. The municipalities advised the Vapitori to apply for stands where they

³⁸ Muzvidziwa, 117.

³⁹ Interview with S. Dube (church elder), Masvingo, January 10, 2007.

could build structures such as toilets and get supply of safe drinking water.⁴⁰ This would bring revenue to the municipalities but would have financial and missio-theological implications on the Vapositori. The Vapositori of Marange church services were practically disrupted in both Masvingo and Zvishavane in the first few months of Operation Murambatsvina after which the illegal open-air church gatherings resumed even without the requisite facilities. This has created another 'hawks' and 'doves' scenario in both cases. Thus, whenever the government and municipal police decided to enforce the by-laws, the Vapositori church services are unceremoniously disturbed with far reaching missio-theological implications.

Missiological Reflections and Implications

The Vapositori consider self-employment as key to their survival and livelihood. It is biblically and theologically based. The Jewish tradition of tent making which the apostle Paul reinforced amongst the churches he established is relevant to Vapositori of Marange (Acts 18:3; 1Thes 2:9). Thus, doing hand-crafts and other informal activities is part of a God-ordained means of earning a living and a form of a special mission. F.J.Verstraelen notes that churches should utilize their "religious services not only to comfort people, but also to equip them for mission in all its multifaceted dimensions."⁴¹ Vapositori of Marange understand their participation, *inter alia*, informal economic activities as part of their mission and theology.

Furthermore, the City Council by-laws on health and ecology due to unsanctioned open-air gatherings is another point of interest. Recently, there has been a rise in the deployment of State and Municipal police in post-Murambatsvina era to stamp out the resurfacing of illegal dealings. This development has not spared the open-air religious meetings at undesignated sites. If the authorities succeed in their endeavour to suppress these illegal operations, then this would definitely affect the religious and economic activities of the Vapositori in a great way. From a theological perspective, the Johane Marange Church would be challenged to adjust how it operates by shelving their we-are-on-a-pilgrimage stance by constructing permanent shrines for

⁴⁰ Interview with J. Mhlanga, (Zvishavane Town Council Clerk), Zvishavane, December 20, 2006.

⁴¹ F.J. Verstraelen, *Zimbabwean Realities and Christian Responses*, Gweru: Mambo Press 1998,135.

worship. This would be tantamount to reverting to the mainline church patterns from which the Marange church emerged. Notably, the changes that Operation Murambatsvina espoused are direct challenges to be strategically dealt with to avert maximum damage to their mission and theology.

Although the Apostles of Marange might have suffered from cognitive dissonance as a result of the immediate impact of the Clean up Campaign, they remained committed to their theology and tradition. Like 'sheep led to the slaughter' (cf. Isaiah 53:7f), the apostles suffered silently in face of the difficulties encountered during the Operation Murambatsvina. Nevertheless, they remained resilient in their religious beliefs. They were not like 'a reed shaken by the wind' (cf. Luke 7:24). Furthermore, there seems to be a continuity of forms of worship and theological ideas. In addition, the church still has a special appeal to Africans due to the element of healing. Sickness and its cure largely explain attraction to spirit-type churches such as Johane Marange. Conversion to this church is not the *sine qua non* for treatment. However, people who benefit from the healing services may join the church thereby contributing to the numerical growth of the church.

Along the same lines, Operation Murambatsvina can be conceived as a 'necessary evil'. The Vapositori of Marange who were in the "burnt-out" group and translocated to their rural homes moved with the word. Another wave of the Vapositori from the urban areas were beneficiaries of the controversial government initiated Land Reform Programme. This is comparable to the element of persecution in the Early Church that fueled the spread of the gospel far and wide (cf. Acts 8ff). Operation Murambatsvina like persecution of early Christians was centripetal force. This implies that the victims of Operation Murambatsvina were randomly broadcast nationwide, healing and preaching the gospel.

Conclusion

Operation Murambatsvina had marked socio-economic and religious effects on the Vapositori of Marange in both Masvingo and Zvishavane. The study has shown that the government and municipal police, like 'hawks,' mercilessly preyed on the non-violent Vapositori. The destruction of illegal houses, tuck shops and vending sites had long standing negative effects on the church members, most of whom virtually depended on the informal business ventures. The subsequent accommodation crisis saw some members moving to rural and resettlement areas. A few Vapositori of Marange, however, benefited

from Operation Garikai/Hlalani Kuhle. Nevertheless, one should guard against the temptation to exaggerate the advantages of this relief programme to the Johane Marange adherents. A study on the impact of Operation Murambatsvina, on one hand, and Operation Garikai/Hlalani Kuhle, on the other, in other African Independent and non-Independent churches could be undertaken. Important insights on Vapositori can also be drawn from the Human Factor concept of development, particularly on the 'human potential' dimension. Their informal economic activities inspired by the Jewish tent-making tradition is a form of doing theology. Operation Murambatsvina disrupted the bulk of the Vapositori ventures that could have been utilized by the government positively. Further research is indispensable to establish the real contribution of Vapositori of Marange in the socio-economic turn around programmes of Zimbabwe.