

## 2 EMOTIONS AS AFFECTIVE TRAJECTORIES OF BELIEF IN MWARI (GOD) AMONG MASOWE APOSTLES IN URBAN ZIMBABWE

ISABEL MUKONYORA

This chapter shows how Shona-speaking Christians who are popularly known as Masowe (Wilderness) Apostles view Mwari (God) as an all-powerful sentient being with Eyes (Maziso), Ears (Nzewe), Mouth (Muro-mo), and Voice (Izwi) (Daneel 1970a, 24) and the point of origin of the elements of nature upon which all sentient beings depend as living creatures. As highlighted in Karanga myths of creation collected by Aschwanden (1989, 11–48), Mwari is identified with elements of nature which scientists say support life on earth, from water, wind, dirt, the sun, and the origins of sentient beings on earth. In Masowe Apostles' religious language for revelation, Mwari becomes known through divine wisdom and healing Izwi (Voice), associated with gospel stories of the Holy Spirit. In other words, God is part of this world and, being symbolically identical with it," speaks in order to help us understand our place among the living on earth. Death is thus emotionally disruptive to sentient beings among whom are human beings who pray to Mwari as a way of facing up to whatever forces contradict the divine purpose of creation when people die (Aschwanden 1989, 48). In short, Masowe Apostles are Shona-speaking Christians who fill themselves with emotions about Mwari, since European missionaries found "Mwari the most suitable term to use for God (Elohim)" (Daneel 1970a, 36). Mwari

is now perceived as that hidden mystery whose breath made life possible on earth at creation and functions like the Holy Spirit when Masowe Apostles go to the wilderness to express their longing for spiritual fulfilment.

It is suggested that experiences of displacement, originating from a colonial economy forcing Africans to migrate to cities as cheap labor, explain the ritual behavior from which we can learn about the Masowe Apostolic way of turning the margins of the city into a vibrant landscape to which the Wilderness Apostles have gone to pray since the origins of the church during the 1930s. The city of Harare, like many other cities of Africa in this era of what Jenkins (2011) has called “the next Christendom,” is filled with sites of struggle located in its margins, where African Christians either eke out their living by growing food crops or successfully turn the same margins of cityscapes into liminal places for reaching out to God in prayer for the poor and sick. Viewed as the source of life on earth and an ecological deity with holistic healing powers among the Shona in southern and central Africa, Mwari gives meaning to the ritual behavior of the Masowe Apostles. In fact, the ritual behavior summarized below tells us a lot about the emotions whose expressions amount to affective trajectories of faith in Mwari. Not only are Masowe Apostles a century-old church in which personal experiences of displacement give meaning to the work of the Holy Spirit; the prayer ceremonies have also incorporated a protracted history of Zimbabwe’s political conflicts and economic depressions since the 1930s. This was followed by more human suffering as the neocolonial period of white supremacist rule (1964–1979), and the postcolonial context of more political violence (1980 onward), added to the spiritual needs for the poor and sick in independent Zimbabwe. Briefly, the trajectories of faith examined here are the result of social problems such as poverty, violence, the spread of diseases, unemployment, and other misfortunes which cause human suffering and death. The opportunity to do some fieldwork on Masowe Apostolic theological language for transforming the margins of the urban landscape into the setting for rituals, with a focus on Mwari’s Voice, led to this paper. Not only is it common to find Masowe Apostles walking outdoors to the margins of the city landscape in places like Harare, but anyone who takes the trouble to attend their prayer meetings will find them expressing themselves in a variety of ways suited for discussion in this attempt to address the relation of religion, and African modernity, with the social theory about the “affective turn” outlined in the introduction to this book (See also Ticineto and Halley 2007). One observes people who share experiences of suffering, shed tears of sorrow, sing to stop preachers from talking, touch

each other on the shoulder as a sign of empathy during prayers for healing, or are mindful of Mwari's association with the elements of nature that support life on earth. All the emotions created by experiences of suffering and death in Zimbabwean society led to this paper on the affective trajectories of faith among the Masowe Apostles encountered during fieldwork on the outskirts of the city of Harare between 1996 and 1999.

As shown below, certain symbolic actions and the religious language that go with the choice to pray on the margins of the urban landscape have been used to formulate prayers to a God whose main attributes are his "Voice" and healing power. By attracting believers to the margins of the city in different parts of Harare, where the gospel language of the poor and sick has been used to give expression to the idea of total dependence on the same God who led the people of Israel through the wilderness, Masowe Apostles further our understanding of Christianity among the poor anywhere in sub-Saharan Africa today. When it comes to the affective dimensions of Masowe spirituality, the locations for prayer on the margins of the landscape correspond to struggles to survive in a society whose political history is filled with talk about an ancestral legacy of Africans having rights to possess fertile land. Barren land on the margins of the city is now a way of using the exposure to the elements of nature to control anger, fear, and sadness associated with marginality in society and based on the belief that the healing power of the Holy Spirit is all around the sacred sites for prayer. This is important in terms of affect because the term *masowe* corresponds to observable patterns of uniform behavior meant to control emotions of anger, fear, and sadness starting with turning up for prayer dressed in white robes and walking in a calm manner associated with entering a liminal space or sacred wilderness.

While the material examined here is based on research limited to the margins of the cityscapes of Harare between 1996 and 2000, it is important to recognize the history of the Masowe Apostles. Masowe Apostles are known to have been dealing with the frustrations of social upheavals by praying in the urban wildernesses of Harare, Gweru, and Bulawayo in Zimbabwe, and in many other African cities to which Masowe Apostles have migrated since the origins of the church during the Great Depression of the 1930s. According to Dillon-Malone (1978, 14–15), the Great Depression marked a difficult era in colonial Zimbabwe and neighboring countries. Not only did political conflict which led to World War I (1914–1918) and to the Great Depression (1929–1941) in Europe upset the global market, but the Depression caused social upheaval throughout the colonial world.

The appearance of local prophets like Johane Masowe (1914–1978) does not merely coincide with the rise of religious innovation in indigenous societies experiencing conquest around the world; there are thousands of examples from Africa alone (Barrett 1968). Today, Gandanzara (the Land of Hunger) is more than the name of the village where the founder of the Masowe Apostles was born; it is now a place of pilgrimage distinguished by the site of the prophet's burial on a rock (Dillon-Malone 1978, 15). Gandanzara is expressive of the emotion out of which arose Johane Masowe's longing to transform Africans into converts to Christianity in search of spiritual ways of controlling angst through prayers for healing.

Besides the side effects of colonial conquest, economic depressions, political conflicts, the poverty created by the sudden introduction of Western technologies, industrialization, urbanization, and what Timothy Burke calls "the commodification of society in modern Zimbabwe" (1996, 10–15) explain the popularity of Masowe prayer gatherings. Furthermore, sporadic droughts during the 1930s economic depression caused so much anxiety that many youths ran away from rural areas to cities like Harare. Hence the majority of Masowe Apostles in suburban Harare, where large numbers of Shona men hoped to find jobs as domestic servants or factory workers or from where they would travel further to provide cheap labor for European-owned mines, railway lines, and newly built manufacturing industries for all sorts of western material goods for developing trading relations with European countries and introducing white-controlled capitalism to Africans (Schmidt 1992, 42; Jeater 1993, 35ff; McCulloch 2000, *passim*; Elizabeth Schmidt 1992, 42). With so much of the job market built for turning African men into cheap labor as required by European colonial architects of industrial Zimbabwe, it is no wonder men lead while women outnumber them among as the most vulnerable members of the patriarchal world (Schmidt 1992, 42; plus observations from fieldwork done in Harare by Mukonyora during 1997). The human cost of building cities and industries run by men aside, the experiences of displacement articulated during ritual activities are so Christian in character that they can be seen as originating from a critique of the oppression which European missionaries associated with advancing God's plans for a universal redemption.

I am suggesting that not much has changed to eradicate the emotions that were once blamed on British imperialism and a global patriarchal Christianity. A recent BBC news report on Zimbabwe reads:

Once the breadbasket of the region, since 2000 Zimbabwe has struggled to feed its own people due to severe droughts and the effects of a land re-

form program which saw the seizure of white-owned farms redistributed to landless black Zimbabweans which led to sharp falls in production. . . . Cash-strapped and impoverished, Zimbabwe's economy faces severe challenges. Unemployment and poverty are endemic and political strife and repression commonplace. Many Zimbabweans have left the country in search of work in South Africa. (BBC News 2016)

Many other citizens who have stayed in Zimbabwe are not unlike the Masowe Apostles when it comes to finding ways of turning experiences of displacement into an African interpretation of the personal God of Christian orthodoxy as Mwari in Shona religious language. Just before I wrote the conclusion to this chapter, a Pentecostal preacher of His Generation Church was in the news for using a national flag to mobilize a nation whose independence is characterized by making the country and its cityscapes places to fight against corruption, economic mismanagement, and unemployment in Zimbabwe (*Zimbabwe Daily*, October 16, 2016). By wearing the national flag around his neck and using the language of suffering and hope for salvation for the people of Zimbabwe in a city church, Reverend Mawarire is a good example of a religious leader using the symbolic speech of the colorful flag to communicate the general experiences of displacement and hope for salvation. In other words, this study of affective trajectories of faith among Masowe Apostles can be applied to other theological concepts regarding that which creates the mood for prayer in a society where most African Christians experience the problems of life in urban Zimbabwe (J. Burke and Enders 2016).

#### THE URBAN WILDERNESS OF HARARE AS A "THREATENING SPACE"

Briefly, the background setting for this chapter is a Zimbabwean society built on memories of violence so that "shedding blood" acts as a reminder of the civil rights of the poor. Historians, politicians, and ethnographers interested in studies of Zimbabwe (cf. Alexander, McGregor, and Ranger 2000, 19) generally recognize the disruptive effects of violence caused by one problem or another since the British South Africa Company conquered the territory by fighting off indigenous people who opposed the establishment of the British colony of Southern Rhodesia in 1890. The First Chimurenga, meaning the first uprising against colonialism, which took place between 1893 and 1896, left behind strong emotions such as grief, anger, and espe-

cially the longing for Mwaru to correct the injustice of huge tracts of land being seized from Zimbabweans to create a modern capitalist and urban colonial society. The fact that a minority population of white people interested in building cities from which to collect material wealth and conduct international trade viewed the biblical God as the transcendent masculine God of dominion behind the conquest of the land coincided with many abuses of power, including uses of education, to make the subjugation of Africans as Christian men whose subordinate roles in society came with missionaries failing to recognize the central place of women as mothers, farmers, and hunter gatherers. Hence, right from the beginning of the conquest of Zimbabwe, says McGregor, “marginalized minorities invoked a relation to the landscape in their claim to resources. Ideas about relationships with the landscape are thus more than statements of idealized cultural norms of the past: they are ways of creating meaning at a personal and family level, often in contexts of dispossession and hardship” (2003, 105). The fact that the majority members of the Masowe Apostles are women makes sense vis-à-vis the much-needed African critique of missionary Christianity as colonial politics.

During the Great Depression of the 1930s, when Masowe Apostles first appeared on the outskirts of Harare, the experiences of displacement caused by colonial conquest reminded people of Mwaru’s Voice the First Chimurenga, high levels of unemployment, and a severe drought (Dillon-Malone 1978, 14). Today, the national flag of Zimbabwe uses the symbolic color red to highlight the shedding of blood in a guerrilla war (1964–1979) and related human suffering as the price for freedom (Mukonyora 2012, 139). The Second Chimurenga, or “struggle for liberation,” which took place between 1965 and 1980, made poverty more acute and Masowe Apostles even more popular and transnational (Mukonyora 2006, 67–68). As Britain imposed economic sanctions and encouraged other European countries to follow its lead, the white regime led by Prime Minister Ian Douglas Smith (1919–2007) agreed to the first democratic elections held in Zimbabwe in 1980. Masowe Apostles gained popularity because they had established rituals through which Zimbabweans could express their emotions as part of prayer to a God who comes to the aid of Africans whose ritual behavior corresponds to the mood of different believers. Masowe Apostles traveled from city to city with their founder and leader, Johane Masowe (John of the Wilderness), leaving behind amorphous communities of believers that mirrored the continued spread of Masowe Apostles throughout the Second Chimurenga (Mukonyora 2006, 65–66).

These social upheavals of the Chimurenga wars not only caused more and more Zimbabweans to migrate to urban areas but also worsened the suffering among the poor in cities like Harare. Even the name *Chimurenga* is a reminder of the psychological effects of the displacement experienced by national heroes (i.e., individuals prepared to leave home to fight and kill if necessary). The image of the wilderness as the setting for prayer has continued to function as a reminder of the psychological turmoil that becomes blunted through uniform symbolic actions at prayer meetings that would go on for an average of five to six hours at every weekend prayer gathering of barefoot, white-robed Christians (Mukonyora in Harare, 1996–1999).

Mainly because I decided to become a participant observer intent on finding out the emotional appeal of the image of the sacred wilderness, this chapter focuses on a period associated with the threat of the Third Chimurenga, an economic war caused by the failure of politicians to keep promises made to the masses about stopping war and reducing poverty. As Kanji (1995, 36–37) found, the 1991–1995 Economic Adjustment Program produced more poverty and strife than wealth. When it comes to attempting to theologize with the emotions of Africans whose experiences of modern life are riddled with the continual problems of the urban poor, it is safe to say that the emotions that characterize the religious aspirations of Masowe Apostles are rooted exactly in these experiences of displacement and urban marginalization. As Terrence Musanga found in his study of the Mugabe regime’s attempts to use violence to cleanse the city of Harare of its poor:

The boundaries between “safe” and “threatening” spaces are constantly transgressed by Zimbabwean urban dwellers in their day to day struggles for survival in a harsh and unrelenting economic and political climate. This political and economic environment has resulted in most Zimbabweans being insecure as testified by heightened intra-urban mobility. Furthermore, the insecurity and intra-urban mobility are exemplified by the creation of unstable identities premised on fear, anxiety, and restlessness as characteristics of affect that characterize the lives of most urban dwellers. (2015, 102–103)

This is interesting to relate to the Masowe Apostles because their name can be said to describe the religious response to anxieties caused by political conflicts since the colonial era. Consequently, between 1996 and 2000, I regularly visited the margins of suburbs north of the city of Harare where the University of Zimbabwe is located and I lived. Besides Lake Chimombe, a popular location for baptisms, I saw barren land onto which workers from

nearby factories added random piles of trash. Wandering in the urban wilderness thus acquired a special meaning for me as the theologian experimenting with the anthropology of Christianity for the first time. This urban wilderness was easy for me to access on a bicycle; it consisted of at least five acres of a meadow surrounded by main roads across Avondale, toward Mount Pleasant, Marlborough, and Borrowdale—the expensive suburban homes built for Europeans to occupy, with Africans serving them as domestic servants since the colonial era. The more this inquiry involved my own wandering across the urban wilderness north of the city of Harare, the more convinced I was of the suggestion being made in this book that there are affective trajectories of the Christian faith in Africa. In this case study, deep-seated emotions were triggered by experiences of displacement originating from racial hierarchical uses of the power to dominate Africans whose own concept of God explained the ritual behavior of Masowe Apostles.

As hinted at earlier, the general idea of an ecological deity is much like a sentient being whose “Voice” and healing power are coterminous with his presences among victims of oppression, poverty, sickness, and other misfortunes. The Christians I met in the urban wilderness of Harare respected each other as believers whom the Holy Spirit inspired through prayer. As one female Masowe apostle put it: “God speaks to us here . . . God loves all his children equally, and talks to us in our hearts. . . . The Bible is an ancient source of knowledge about the same God who continues to speak directly to his children today.” She then looked toward the meadow as birds flew across the sky above. This emotional God-talk and numerous other expressions of people sensing God in their hearts or consciences explain the topic of this chapter insofar as its aim is to examine the expression of ritualized ways of allowing believers to express their grief, anger, and fears about being human in Masowe religious language. In short, rather like dressing in uniform, making a point of talking about being equal before God during healing ceremonies produced peace and harmony as well as gave everyone present a shared hope for salvation (Werbner 1985, 267–268).

My first personal encounter with a Masowe Apostle in Harare took place in early February 1996. A woman in her late twenties was walking across a meadow all by herself, upset because her husband had died of AIDS, leaving her self-employed as an urban vegetable farmer who sold her crops by the side of the road. Madzimai Sarah not only had a way of using the margins of the cityscapes to address an acute problem of poverty by growing vegetables but also was a member of a community of Masowe Apostles who met for prayer on the same meadow. The regular visits to the prayer



site that followed my first meeting with Madzimai Sarah showed just how deep-seated the emotions were that led her to the belief that God spoke to people in the wilderness and could heal the poor and sick (Mukonyora 2012, 136–159). According to Engelke (2007, 109–136), the gift of prophecy and healing power act together as a hermeneutical tool through which “a live and direct language” of God is formed. What is more, Engelke argues that power importantly mediates healing and transcendental experiences. By contrast, I will emphasize that my interlocutors, most of them unknown to official leaders, emphasized God’s personal voice and direct experiences of the power of the Holy Spirit.

In the late 1990s, it was possible to find poor people who planted food crops on the outskirts of the city going to pray without any interest in being noticed as official members of the church. It is fair to characterize the Third Chimurenga as a time when the poor wandered between communities, if it was possible to find soul mates at prayer meetings. Wherever there is a city and opportunities for cheap labor, wandering in the wilderness is a common way of practicing Christianity among Masowe Apostles (Mukonyora 2006, 59–80). As it happens, the margins of Harare are also a good example of a city filled with “high-density suburbs,” meaning homes that are so crowded by people who are poor that the longing for places to go to and share one’s emotions became connected to believing in God as the one who responds to humanity by speaking through the Izwi, or Holy Spirit.

As Hammar, McGregor, and Landau observed, “Since early 2000, political violence and dramatic economic contraction have displaced people within and beyond Zimbabwe’s borders on an extraordinary scale. The politicized state intrusions into Zimbabwean rural and urban economies, the dramatic disintegration of public services, rampant hyperinflation, destruction and redistribution of assets (planned and unplanned) have all had more than simply local effects” (2010, 263–264). In the following section, I describe how I found my way into exploring the emotional experiences of Masowe in the urban wilderness of Harare since the Third Chimurenga.

## THEORY AND METHOD

Somewhat struck by the fact that I was about to finish a doctoral dissertation, titled “The Complementarity of Male and Female Imagery in Theological Language: A Study of the Valentinian and Masowe Theological Systems” (Mukonyora 1999), without meeting Masowe Apostles for myself, I decided to do precisely that. By acting on my limited knowledge of the



FIGURE 2.1 Children of the wilderness church. Photo reprinted by permission of the National Archives of Zimbabwe.

anthropology and sociology of religion, where one must employ empirical methods of research, it became clear that my first book was not going to be about gender imagery in theological language. By the time I finished my first year as a lecturer in the history of Western theology at the University of Zimbabwe in 1996, I was used to seeing men, women, and children dressed in white robes walking past my house into the meadow across the road to pray; I also learned from watching the quiet mood associated with walking toward the sacred sites for prayer. “We are going to the masowe [wilderness],” said one of the young mothers, making sure I did not distract her by holding hands with a little boy of five or six years. Such direct encounters opened my eyes to fieldwork before I came across Ninian Smart’s book *The Phenomenon of Religion* (1978), an exploration of empirical ways of studying religion with what can be observed of religion, rather than its claims of truth as primary sources of knowledge.

For the next three years I spent half of my weekends in the National

Archives of Zimbabwe in Harare, looking at reports on Masowe Apostles produced by white settlers, most of them concerned by the political ramifications of the practice of Christianity outdoors instead of in church buildings, speaking in Shona to relate independent ideas about God without the supervision or guidance of European missionaries. It made sense to combine my fieldwork with a more detailed focus on the human conditions in which Masowe Apostles had emerged in the first place. When not looking at archival documents produced by colonial administrators and European missionaries worried about Africans who were turning away from their established churches during the 1930s, I wandered through the city, looking for Masowe Apostles who were going about the business of praying outdoors.

All sorts of open-air places on the margins of cityscapes were filled with reminders of the displacement and marginalization of Zimbabweans from their ancestral land, which turned out to be known as the masowe, meaning a sacred wilderness as far as Masowe Apostles were concerned. The attention paid to the general problem of human suffering and healing in *Wandering a Gendered Wilderness* (Mukonyora 2007, xi–xix) thus began with both a scholarly attempt to face analytical challenges to do with the history of Masowe theology through the study of textual data, and participant observation at prayer meetings held by either members of the same family or coworkers and good friends interested in each other's well-being, rather than the power of the official leaders of prayer groups.

Tempting though it was to ignore the origins of the Masowe Apostles and start describing the obvious place of emotions in their ritual behavior and related theological language, it seemed wrong to overlook the pivotal figure, the prophet Johane Masowe. This prophet is the author of the oral tradition of Christianity that attracts its African audience to dramatize knowledge about God under discussion. Against the background of difficult human conditions caused by oppression, the founder of the Masowe Apostles Church applied to his personal experiences of suffering in the British colonial world of the 1930s what he had learned from popular stories used by missionaries to draw attention to God as a loving supreme being who liberated the people of Israel in the Exodus, and through Jesus offered salvation to the victims of Greco-Roman colonial conquest. What Johane Masowe learned from European missionaries he adapted to a modern world in which his experiences of British colonialism caused enough sadness, fear, and anger to lead to the dramatization of a lived understanding of ritualized attempts of controlling angst (Ticineto and Halley 2007, 1–33).

Briefly, this response to the invitation to write on Masowe Apostles in a book focused on “affective trajectories” that draws attention to a world of affects and emotions would have been extremely difficult to follow through without having had the previous opportunity to do fieldwork in parts of the city of Harare frequented by men, women, and children whose sole purpose for going to the masowe was to worship God, or Mwari in Shona, their mother tongue, in the practice of an oral tradition of Christianity.

First, the Shona language that is used to communicate ideas about the biblical God in the practice of Christianity is analyzed against the background of metaphorical speech about Mwari as a supreme being with powerful feelings and emotions to do with his intimate relationship with the living in a world filled with sadness and “no place to go.” As Schmidt put it, “Unequal exchange between African commodity producers and industrialized countries is a legacy of the colonial era that has contributed to the deep impoverishment of African populations” (2013, 9). Second, toward the end of this chapter, I will attempt to explain the “affective turn,” not so much in descriptions of it but in relation to the ritual behavior used to reduce sadness, fear, and anger to things caused by Satan. I will do so by describing three examples of ritual behavior that I observed during fieldwork on the margins of the cityscapes of Harare. The case studies summarized here are important not only because this book is concerned with “affective trajectories” but also because the examined cases draw attention to the goals of faith against the background of a dread of Satan. Venturing into the wilderness to investigate religion made it necessary to treat empirical methods of inquiry as part and parcel of the study of Christianity in Africa. Writing about Christianity as it is practiced alone presents an interesting challenge for anyone trying to make sense of traditional Christian ideas about God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit from a Western theological perspective. Let us begin by considering God-Mwari and the Voice that is said to create certain emotions, which will help us to understand Masowe Apostles.

#### MWARI AND THE HOLY SPIRIT OF THE CITYSCAPES

According to Daneel (1970a, 23), the high god Mwari of the Shona was a territorial spirit of the ruling lineage of the Shona people, the Rozvi, when the British seized the country of Zimbabwe. The violent means of conquest triggered an immediate emotional response to the seizing of African ancestral land, followed by the building of a new landscape. Since Shona people

believed that Mwari spoke directly to the living not only in the thunder and the wind but as a voice heard in places “approached by the living with sacrifice and supplication” (Ranger 1967, 22), it is easy to see why the margins of the city became significant among Masowe Apostles. Ranger states that the Shona people had reacted to European domination by invoking Mwari as a territorial spirit in whose name the Shona and Ndebele planned a revolt in Southern Rhodesia in 1896–1897 (17–18). Whether one has in mind the Shona concept of God as creator, with the power to control human beings, or the view of him as the Mother, the source of planetary life (Aschwanden 1989, 26–31), these basic facts about Mwari and the living can be said to explain some of the emotions and feelings about the biblical God whose voice Masowe Apostles associate with the promise of salvation for *vanhu vatema* (black people) or Africans.

The Christian God is thus viewed by Masowe Apostles as Mwari, a supreme being revealed through sentient beings, among whom are human beings who respond to messages of divine love by worshipping God and taking the time to listen to Izwi, meaning the Voice of God or the Holy Spirit. Key to the development of a theology of liberation in which the special Voice of God heard in the wilderness touches the human heart is rather like the Paraclete (Greek: *παράκλητος*; Latin: Paracletus). The latter is an advocate or helper, which is just another way of describing the emotional function of the Holy Spirit, who is equated with the Voice of God in Masowe teaching. God is capable of speaking to the human conscience in a way that helps believers develop not only an emotional capacity for love and a concern for virtue but also the courage to face *kufa*, the Shona term for all kinds of human suffering and death, which fits in with the social upheavals mentioned earlier and explains the emotional response of Mwari, which is arguably an affective trajectory of hope in salvation.

The defeat of negative emotions of hate, anguish, and the fear of *kufa* (death) furthers our understanding of the places chosen to worship God on the margins of the landscape where reminders of the social causes of *kufa* are easy to relate to in terms of their historic roots in colonialism (Werbner 1985, 251–252). It is time to end this discussion aimed at highlighting the religious root causes of the development of a theology that brings together the image of a biblical Elohim and Shona traditional ideas of God as the source of life with a Voice to be heard, and a presence to be felt on earth. Mwari’s Voice, or Izwi, seems to be directed at the conscience, so that one’s emotions become part and parcel of God-Talk among Masowe Apostles.

As Aschwanden observed, Mwari is more than an ecological deity who responds to human emotions: the almighty has a female dimension that is the same as Mother Earth, shaped like a fertile Womb of Earth. This image is used to further our understanding of the observable fact about the biological origins of life and need for humans to procreate, nurture life, and promote good on earth (Aschwanden 1989, 11–45).

As mentioned previously, Masowe Apostles worship close to the elements of nature, which is a way of invoking the healing power of the ecological deity Mwari. The apostles are thus often seen dressed in white robes to draw attention to the masowe (wilderness). Revelation 6:11 reads, “Then they were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brothers should be complete, who were to be killed” (English Standard Version). So, anyone looking for Masowe Apostles will find them situated in places they call masowe (wilderness). By dressing in white robes, praying barefoot, and sitting, standing, and kneeling on dirt and facing east to listen to Mwari’s Voice, they turn their surroundings for prayer into a threshold from which to expect divine intervention, a way of consoling affective trajectories blamed on sin behind which is Satan.

#### NAMING AFFECTIVE TRAJECTORIES

In the Shona background culture of the Masowe Apostles, names may be used to describe either deep satisfaction or anguish. For example, the name *Tafadzwa* suggests someone’s feeling of joy. *Rutendo* expresses gratitude. *Tapera*, on the other hand, means someone is afraid of being destroyed, while *Muchazviona* suggests a deep longing for revenge (Mukonyora 2007, 77–89). As a young man, the prophet Johane was among the thousands of Zimbabwean youths who ran away from the difficult human conditions created by colonial conquest. His experiences of displacement, sickness, and fear of death are thus foundational to the establishment of his legacy of a Christian faith practiced on the margins of society. Johane Masowe traveled from Gandanzara (the Land of Hunger) to different parts of urban Zimbabwe, where he hoped to find jobs during the Great Depression of the 1930s, from Reshape to Harare, Norton, and Bulawayo and across the border to Gaborone, Johannesburg, Durban, Lusaka, and Ndola, where in 1978 he died of a cardiovascular disease (Dillon-Malone 1978, 15). Fears of kufa in a colonial society that was creating permanent victims of oppression were

central to the founder's theology of liberation centered as much on naming as on ritual behavior and dramatizing wandering in the wilderness (Mukonyora 1998, 191–192).

Johane Masowe not only suffered from acute headaches, which reminded him of death as that silence to be broken only by the Voice of Mwari, but also was beaten up by the police for preaching with neither a license nor permission to preach outdoors (Mukonyora 1998, 191–207). Moreover, as the term *kufa* covers every negative emotion possible, the emotional attachment to Christ and God the Father will not go away anytime soon. What we have today are “disparate trajectories of identity politics in postcolonial transformations” of colonialism (Werbner 1985, 22). These transformations, says Schmidt, “include wars of terror” (2013, 18).

By going outdoors, Johane Masowe may have been driven by his anguish. He also dramatized a few powerful religious stories about God's Voice and developed a lasting source of knowledge about the consequences of colonialism and responses to it based on sharing expressions of total dependence on God and the work of Christ represented by the Holy Spirit. In this way, Masowe Apostles have a way of turning experiences of marginality, whether psychological, economic, gender-relational, or political, into the establishment of a mood and a motivation of ritual action.

The liberation theology under discussion is thus distinguished by the self-empowerment of the believer, whose experiences become embodied in ritual actions of the hope for salvation among people who are encouraged to feel things and express their emotions. According to Nengomasha, one of his immediate followers, Johane Masowe not only addressed the personal problems of life in a colonial society but also turned the acuteness of his suffering into a hermeneutical tool for attracting fellow Africans to the margins of the cityscapes (National Archives of Zimbabwe, Harare File AOH/4). Thus, we have a perfect example of African Christians who draw our attention to an experiential path to understanding God in the contemporary history of Africa, which starts with naming the affective trajectories of Johane Masowe's charisma. Emotions shaped by ritual experience and articulated by symbolic language therefore become a source of empowerment for those who live at the margins of society. The next section illustrates how symbolic language articulates emotions of marginality, which concern both the economic conditions people in Harare live in, and experiences of social exclusion and isolation in the anonymity of the city with no one to care for them.

The *Standard Shona Dictionary* defines the root word *sowe* as a derivative of the Bantu word *sasa*, meaning “uninhabited fringes.” The word *sasa* could be used to describe any uninhabited fringes, barren land, swamps, and/or forests, especially those filled with the most common indigenous trees, called *msasa*. In the book *The Sacred and the Profane*, Mircea Eliade says that the human quest for transcendence leads people to create sacred spaces away from the humdrum of daily life (1959, 25). Eliade also says that “the threshold is the limit, the boundary, the frontier that distinguishes and opposes two worlds so that one world is profane and the other sacred . . . within the sacred precincts the profane world is transcended” (25).

This is interesting because the Masowe Apostles identify their frontier for the Voice of Mwari in places that do not always look like a wilderness removed from the humdrum of life in the city. I carried out my fieldwork next to a golf course just off Second Street north of downtown Harare, behind a popular suburban shopping center with a movie theater and a fancy coffeehouse called the Italian Bakery in Avondale. Most of the time the threshold for prayer is near the highway to avoid the need for too much walking. At the same time, these are real thresholds insofar as there is a limit on uninhabited fringes (*sasas*) with which to explain their shifting definitions in the context of the Masowe theology of liberation.

Nonetheless, the terms *sasa* and *sowe* still describe uninhabited places where it is possible to find Masowe Apostles (by the river, at the edge of fields, among bushes near the well, up or down the hill), some of them ancestral and/or territorial spirits. In fact, the word *masowe* has a modern meaning behind the writing of this chapter, referring to liminal spaces called *masowe*, most of them found at the margins of the cityscapes of Africa. Under the circumstances, it makes sense to conclude that there are many trajectories of the Holy Spirit insofar as our knowledge of them comes from meeting Masowe Apostles on their own terms, in places almost as diverse as the feeling and emotions that attract people to worship Mwari in the open air (Mukonyora 2007). My own favorite image is just behind a garage, a space that the city council had transformed into an open-air market by the end of 1998. Perhaps the power that Mwari must commune with believers is rather like the rays of the sun, capable of touching any believer who reaches out to God by going out to pray, if people agree.

In the context of the rise of a Masowe Apostles liberation theology, emotions that correspond with the hope for salvation are needed to adapt the self



to conversion as what enables one to counteract the feelings of displacement with those of belonging to a sacred realm where justice, peace, and love are expected to prevail (Barrett 1968, 156). The dynamic interplay between reality and imagination becomes obvious in Masowe Apostles' spiritual language, for instance, in how they associate God with the image of people who go out to pray in the wilderness (Werbner 1985). As far as Madzimai (Mamma) Anna and her family and close friends, described later, were concerned, God-Mwari exists and becomes known through echoes of the Izwi, the human conscience, and should therefore be known emotionally first. For anyone *ari kufa* (suffering or dying) of hunger or disease (which in this context includes HIV/AIDS), the appropriate spiritual help the believer can hope for is existential. Hence, the role of deep emotions was central from the start in the development of Masowe theology. By dressing for the sacred wilderness in white robes, removing shoes in places, agreeing to sit for prayers on dirt and facing either east or west, almost as if the universe is one big dictionary of symbols of the divine, Masowe Apostles create room for each other to express the hope that negative experiences of reality will end because of the sacrificial suffering of Christ, with the margins of the sacred wilderness partially left to the imagination.

Mwari is expected to send the Holy Spirit as a voice that individuals can hear when they sit on the ground and face east to listen. The sense of touch is invoked by the laying on of hands during healing ceremonies so that the elements of nature such as the sun, dirt, and wind become part and parcel of the setting in which emotions about God are expressed. All this fits in with past ways of portraying Mwari as a deity concerned with life on earth. Like the rays of the sun, Mwari touches the hearts and minds of humans who seek him in the masowe, or urban wilderness. Although the author of the *Standard Shona Dictionary* (1984), the Catholic priest Father Hannan, is correct to mention "prayer and fasting," there is more to be said about ritual behavior and theological language from the fringes of cityscapes. There is a strong connection between places and the subjectively felt power of rituals and words that fosters a sense of belonging and of connectedness between God, health, and participants of the prayer.

Briefly, the term *masowe* does more than describe a variety of things, starting with the environment used for prayers for healing: it is also on the fringes of cityscapes, masowe, where one finds the Africans who call each other Masowe Apostles. The conclusion that they are Christians has a lot to do with patterns of ritual behavior that are tied to belief in God as the creator as he who gives hope to people living with death, among other mis-

fortunes. In short, God as the omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent deity over all of creation has been translated into an African concept of God as Mwari, the ecological deity who is appropriate to worship in places that are in many ways direct reminders of evil as that which destroys life on earth.

It is fair to end this discussion by pointing out that Masowe Apostles gained popularity because the term *masowe*, or wilderness, has a variable meaning. It not only denotes being in physical space in the wild but also is associated with a sense of being touched by God's word; it is a promise of healing, belonging, and wholeness that is instilled through rituals endorsing the earth. Rather like the name Johane Masowe, this term points to a religious idiom related to the name of the founder, his church, the margins of the cityscapes, and most of all human emotions that need expression in societies riddled with problems of kufa. Masowe Apostles are biblical theologians in their own right insofar as the Shona language used for prayer corresponds to problems of displacement caused by social changes paralleled with the concerted effort to overcome them. As Werbner (1985) puts it, a certain mixing of images takes place so that the masowe become a people of the wilderness looking for a promised land like those in the Bible, only their "argument of images" of the wilderness is also very African.

Emotions are thus key to this study's characterizations of affective trajectories (see the introduction to this volume), which are ways of making the urban wilderness into a symbolic speech whose aura of factuality corresponds to anger, grief, and other painful emotions that the Holy Spirit, or Voice of Mwari, addresses at prayer. Prayer comes up many times in this chapter because it is the formal way of mapping the perceived predicaments and contradictions having to do with life on earth. Put in terms of the Shona language about the all-powerful Mwari, the source of life is the Father of all sentient beings. It matters that his voice is heard in response to everything said about the affective trajectories and corresponding emotions that characterize life in the sacred wilderness.

THE QUEST FOR DIVINE LOVE, PEACE, AND HARMONY:  
A COMMUNITY ON THE MARGINS OF SOCIETY

In this section, it is important to share something more about the special effort made to employ phenomenology in the study of Christianity, and at least demonstrate some of the emotions evoked by dressing in white robes and going out to pray. It did not make sense to pry into the Apostles' personal affairs, so in July 1997 I shifted my focus to a sowe three miles away,

to a small field behind Avondale Shopping Center. There I met a group of sixteen white-robed Christians who opened my eyes to the importance of developing good relationships between men, women, and children sharing the same space, wearing similar white robes with shoes carefully arranged to mark the boundary of the threshold for prayer, and developing a discourse about God, love, mutual respect among the believers, and shared hopes for healing.

Once I arrived dressed in a light blue dress to make sure I was not mistaken for a member of the church, I too removed my shoes and sat next to a woman elder, who introduced me to her daughter and three of her grandchildren playing in the meadow before the prayers for healing began. During prayers, the children sat next to their mothers, as everyone was now concerned about the direct efficacy of prayer. I spent every other Saturday afternoon observing up to eight women with their four children between the ages of four and six years. One of the women brought her sick husband and let him sit next to the only men present—three men already known to the young preacher who was in his midtwenties. If not part of the same extended family, this group of Masowe Apostles were close friends employed in the same job market as domestic workers. Whatever other difficult emotions influenced them, the most striking factors here were the loving relationships that the Voice of Mwari made apparent. Even the sick husband looked peaceful as he listened to a sermon about Mwari having love for all his children, young and old being guaranteed an equal status according to the Voice. In fact, the reason for insisting on men sitting separately from women and children resonated with the Shona custom, where it was and still is considered normal for people to sit in this gendered fashion in huts as the special place where the family unites to eat, entertain, and educate one another.

The women and their children were often seen walking down Arundel School Road, always deep in conversation about God, his revelation, and the true nature of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. On one occasion, a mother of two became upset about a wandering preacher who was trying out his skills and failing miserably to show humility before God when addressing fellow believers. “He knows nothing about the Holy Spirit,” she complained, “because there is no love in his voice. This means there is no God in his heart. He should go.” Speaking in Shona, she expressed an opinion held by women members of the wilderness church. The Holy Spirit, women often insist, is a blessing or gift from God and must not be treated as the reason to abuse

power in the church: “One knows the work of the Holy Spirit because its ‘power’ comes with a generosity of heart, kindness, love, and humility before God.”

Madzibaba (brother) Petros, who was the subject of the discussion, was said to lack certain virtues, yet he pretended to have the power to see into the minds of believers. I could not tell quite what Petros had pretended to see that my informer found so unsettling. It was only clear that Petros’s behavior had provoked this discourse on the meaning of Christianity. Two of the six women went on to accuse Madzibaba Petros of being obsessed with the power to control others in the name of the Holy Spirit. They did not accuse their leader of being possessed by evil spirits, as one would expect of talk about Satan in popular culture. It was only that the way in which Madzibaba Petros delivered the news about Mweya Mutsvene (the Holy Spirit in the Shona Bible) made him sound too sure of himself. The following week, Madzibaba Petros was gone, most likely back to a neighboring group of Masowe Apostles where he had no chance to exercise authority as a preacher. Harare is filled with large groups of Masowe Apostles who prefer to concentrate the power of the Voice of Mwari on one person who claims to know the proper *mirao*, or the norms of faith.

The fifth time I decided to follow the groups of women walking past my neighborhood in Mount Pleasant to the Avondale Shopping Center almost a mile down a small path meandering across a dry meadow, I realized that the women had an intimate knowledge of each other’s problems and cared for each other enough to share food and protect one another’s children. The most striking part of this behavior when it comes to the subject of emotions of peace and harmony was the ritual meaning given to the affective trajectory of walking to the sacred wilderness. It was almost as if this was a time to educate each other about the horizontal relationships that follow from understanding Mwari as the origin of the Izwi, and Christ as a human symbol remembered because of his compassionate sacrifice made from love for the poor and sick. I did not have to insult my new friends by asking them about the mystery of the doctrine of the Trinity. Their language about Mwari went hand in hand with ritual activities that included pointing to nature as evidence of the existence of an omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent God of love and source of life on earth. Elaborate God-Talk about the Trinity would have been impossible to express in Shona.

The second case study aims at highlighting the significance of all that effort made to explain Shona terms that tell us something about Masowe theology. It also illustrates the importance of the landscape as a site of affective trajectories, and of how Masowe Apostles come to usurp the outskirts of the city as space for healing bodies and minds through the Voice of God giving rise to a diversity of emotions. I focus on one of the large groups of Masowe Apostles, the Johane Masowe Apostles Church, to remind us of the normative role of the emotions of the founder, whose personal journey was discussed earlier. It was impossible to walk to this *sowe*, located all the way across the city on the outskirts of a much less affluent neighborhood, the African township of Marimba. Besides attracting thousands of Masowe Apostles who take the trouble to tell stories of the founder figure's personal experience of *izwi raMwari*, the "Voice of God," it was much more exciting to start by looking at the surroundings.

After taking a bus to the nearest stop in Mufakose Township, I walked across a railway to a piece of land surrounded by a few *masa* trees left by people who had cut down some of the original trees to supplement their incomes by growing food crops like corn, sweet potatoes, and pumpkins. Left to create a small woodland were enough *msasa* trees to provide shade for a crowd of nearly two hundred men, women, and children, who came dressed in the same white uniform as other Masowe Apostles and used their shoes to signify the liminal. It was early one afternoon during the month of August 1998 when I arrived as a participant observer, once more interested only in learning as much as possible about the believers' moods and motivations for calling upon the Voice of God.

The traditional connection between words like *sasa* with *sowe* came to mind when I glanced at factory furnaces releasing smoke at one side of the sacred wilderness, and heard the sudden noise made by a passing goods train on the other side. I had an emotional reaction to sitting down with so much noise and black smoke fifty yards away from a sacred wilderness but then remembered that I was, in fact, traversing the fringes of the cityscapes, as was appropriate for prayer as far as these Johane Masowe Apostles were concerned. They brought under one roof numerous small groups of believers with strong bonds enforced by either working together or having family ties. The area of Marimba is also perceived as a sacred wilderness remembered as the place visited by Johane Masowe while he was fasting for forty days.

This religious experience is mentioned here, first, because the knowledge that Jesus also went to the urban wilderness of the city of Jerusalem to pray makes the sacred wilderness attractive to Christians of a certain type, by which I mean Masowe Apostles who practice fasting as a way of clearing the body and mind of negative emotions associated with sin.

On another deeply emotional level, wandering into this crowded sowe in August 1998, I found myself dealing with a community led by preachers using a location for prayer to build upon the memory of the suffering and death of the founder figure, Johane Masowe. For Johane Masowe is reported to have been on Marimba Hill when he fasted and then, feeling acute pain, lay unconscious, “as if dead,” when he heard God’s Voice. God said, “Do you know why you have been ill so long? You have been ill because of sins which you have committed against me on earth since the day you were born.” After this, the founder was anointed John the Baptist, recovered from his near-death experience, and began to roam the outskirts of the city of Harare, looking for places to preach and heal the sick (Dillon-Malone 1978, 144). The decision to say something about the founder of the Masowe Apostles serves its own purpose when it comes to groups of Masowe Apostles whose high regard for the founder has led to the extraordinary annual ritual attended by thousands of his followers. The Johane Masowe Apostles, some from as far away as Nairobi, Kenya, visit the rock on which Johane was buried in Gandanzara to perform rituals that can trigger strong emotions about death, as well as hope for the return of Christ to the wilderness (Mukonyora 2006, 66).

Again, central to this trajectory of faith is the Paraclete supplicating for the vanquished as the most sought-after affective trajectory of the Masowe Apostles. In this instance, the sowe visitors have a high regard for their “John the Baptist” in surroundings as grim as the land between the factories releasing toxic dust and a bad smell, the railway, the weeds, the crops, and the msasa trees nearby, which, taken together, form a typical African township built during the colonial period. With the township now bursting at the seams with people who would rather suffer as members of the growing urban Shona society than a rural one, it was hard to compare the emotions experienced in Marimba with those of the Masowe Apostles who worked as domestic servants for some of the richest members of Zimbabwean society in the suburbs to the north of the city of Harare. Spending hours praying in the Marimba township, I could relate to the Masowe theology of liberation, not so much because I felt good about the defeat of the forces of evil through

Mwari's Voice but because I was surrounded by too many reminders of human suffering brought about by urbanization, individualism, poverty, overcrowding, and the spread of diseases such as HIV/AIDS. The harsh reality of kufa became the overwhelming emotion with which to reflect on the threshold of prayer among Masowe Apostles, depending on where they go.

## CONCLUSION

This chapter has employed an anthropological method of inquiry to study both small groups of Masowe Apostles and big crowds. Worshipping on the fringes of different parts of the landscape surrounding Harare and other cities found in Zimbabwe and across its borders in Botswana, South Africa, Zambia, Malawi, and all the way to Nairobi, Kenya, are communities waiting for scholars to examine them with the same questions as those raised by the scholars who have contributed to this book (see the introduction to this volume; Mukonyora 2006, 59–80). Millions of Africa's poor are finding spiritual fulfillment in dressing in white robes and going to pray in the urban wilderness because of what Werbner (1985) identifies as postcolonial encounters with social changes that continue to transform identities, rather than reduce the problems of life on the margins of the global village.

In the limited space available, I hope I have successfully shown how the urban wilderness acts as both a space of affective trajectories and a symbolic universe from which emerges a way of turning ritual behavior into an emotional language concerned with reducing the damaging effects of the difficult human conditions of injustice, sickness, and general misfortunes that also give a meaning and purpose to the God of the wilderness. Earlier, Madzimai Sarah was described as wandering the outskirts of Harare feeling the loss of her husband, a victim of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. She is a good example of a Masowe Apostle living with the hope that God's love can be felt, just as his healing Voice can be heard during prayer. I realized it was not the preachers alone who established an official platform to express their emotions, sometimes by yelling at women about sex and witchcraft as deadly sins. Throughout this inquiry, Masowe Apostles identified each other as emotional beings who needed to talk to one another about the challenges facing them in their day-to-day lives, and, by laying on hands at healing ceremonies, stimulating each other with proclamations of faith, singing and acting as equals. Preaching, as well as singing and moments for silent prayer, were all ways of communing with God-Mwari using a combination of Shona words, biblical imagery, and symbolic actions. All these



FIGURE 2.2 Revelation 3:8. “Wear white garments so that you may clothe yourself, and that the shame of your nakedness will not be revealed.” Photo reprinted by permission of the National Archives of Zimbabwe.

are central to this chapter, where theology faces a rather special analytical challenge rooted in social anthropology.

Finally, as this chapter has explored the term “affect” as associated with either religious emotions relating to experiences of displacement, or positive ones linked to ritual behavior and reaching out to God on the margins of the urban landscape, it is fair to end on a positive note. For a theologian interested in the critical analysis of modern and postmodern inquiries about God in urban Africa, it has been possible to reflect on a unique African Christian way of handling human suffering in the city of Harare in Zimbabwe. Some readers might wonder why social history and anthropology are as important as the main theological idea of a God whose Voice has a healing effect on the believer in Masowe theology. In this global society, which is increasingly being disturbed by social upheavals, the destruction of the environment, and human suffering, it seems important to recognize the need for more case studies where knowledge of God corresponds to problems specific to the believers concerned. In this case, being asked to talk



about affective trajectories is a welcome challenge, reminding me of a way of understanding God corresponding to the deep emotions and feelings of displacement. As shown here, theologians can learn a great deal from other disciplines, especially when it comes to Christianity in the global South (Jenkins 2011, 73–100). As Jenkins has noted, Christianity is at its most vibrant in countries found in sub-Saharan Africa, like Zimbabwe.