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"Local Environmental Conservation Strategies: Karanga Religion, Politics and Environmental Control"

Mukamuri, B. B.

Mukamuri, B. B. "Local Environmental Conservation Strategies: Karanga Religion, Politics and Environmental Control." *Environment and History* 1, no. 3, Zimbabwe special issue (Oct., 1995): 297–311. doi:10.3197/096734095779522582 . In southern and central Zimbabwe, religious and political authority is drawn from land guardianship cults. Intellectuals have emphasised the role of these cults in providing communal economic and ecological benefits. Schoffeleers, for example, stated:

> *Territorial cults are rituals to counteract droughts, floods, blights, pests and epidemic disease afflicting cattle and man ... territorial cults function in respect of the well-being of the community, its fields and livestock ... and the general economic interests ... they also issue and enforce directives with regard to a community's use of the environment ... The impact of territorial cults on the ecological system is such that, borrowing Rappaport's phrase, we may justifiably speak of a 'ritually directed ecosystem.'*

This article questions Schoffeleers' interpretation. It argues that local religious institutions are used by ruling lineages for political control, to grant preferential access to particular resources, and to enhance political hegemony. The symbolism expressed in the rituals and environmental taboos is more powerful than the idiom of 'conservation.' Researchers should be more sceptical when they talk about a 'ritually controlled ecosystem.' All rights reserved. © 1995 The White Horse Press

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