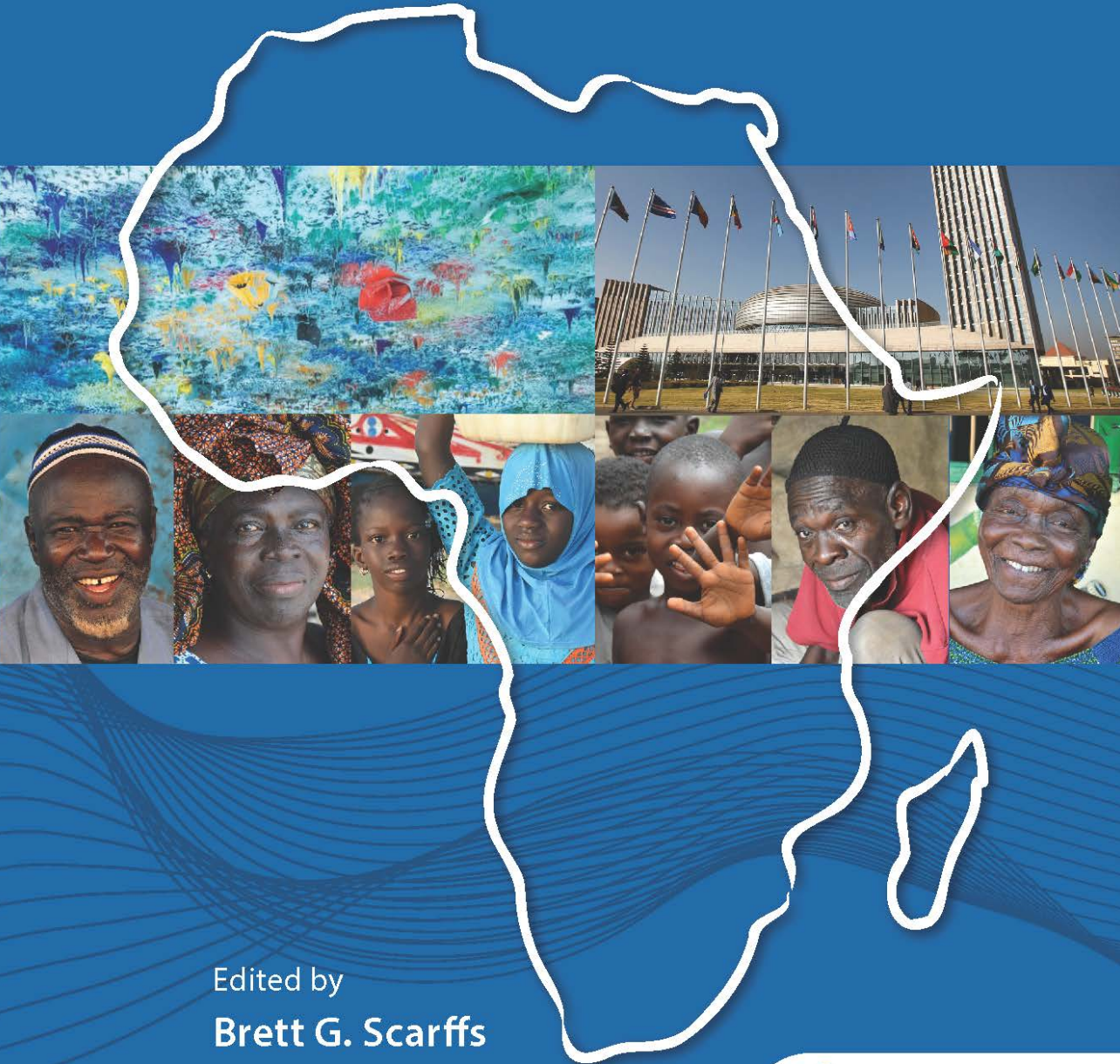


African Conceptions of Human Dignity



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10 HUMAN DIGNITY AND OUR ENVIRONMENTS

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to explore the relationship between human dignity and the environment by linking the African ethic of *Ubuntu* with an obligation to take care of the environment. Given the nature of the discussion, the study adopts an anthropocentric approach, despite the wide criticism that this approach has drawn in some contexts. The chapter hypothesises that humanity will preserve the environment for the sake of preserving itself. *Ubuntu* is the African ethic that underpins all relational encounters: human-human, human-environment, human and the supernatural. Therefore, at the centre of the ethic is humanity, because it is human beings who are responsible for creating, sustaining and transmitting *Ubuntu*. Using different sources of data, this chapter demonstrates, from an African perspective, how dignity is concerned with matters that are beyond human relations, including both the natural and the supernatural environment.

Anthropocentrism is a concept that has been perceived in very negative terms and has been accused of being responsible for environmental crises. The concept has been both attacked and defended by various groups. Among the myriad definitions, political scientist Ben Mylius aptly explains anthropocentrism in the sense that all creation human beings are different because they have values and language and are rational.² Therefore a “mild” anthropocentric value theory acknowledges that since human beings are more rational compared to the rest of creation, they must apply the rationality in taking care of the environment and therefore should be held accountable for damage to the environment. I argue in this chapter that human greed is more responsible for the current environmental crises than anthropocentrism per se. Greed affects both other human beings and nature at large.

Let me capture what dignity might look like in such a perspective with a story. In most African traditional societies, when a young boy who is herding cattle or goats gets very hungry, he may find himself far from home and family fields. In such circumstances, shepherd boys are free to enter a stranger’s field pick and eat a watermelon. They must eat just enough to fill their hunger and must not carry any away with them. This act turns into theft if they take more than they need to satisfy the panging pains of hunger. Similar narratives are reported outside Africa. A homeless man in Genoa, Italy, Roman Ostriakov, attempted to steal two pieces of cheese and a packet of sausage from a supermarket. This moment of desperation led to him being convicted of theft and sentenced to six months in jail, along with a

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2 Mylius B. 2018. “Three Types of Anthropocentrism”, *Environmental Philosophy* 15(2):159-194.

\$100 fine. A five-year legal battle was fought with a three-part trial and his case was finally brought to the Supreme Court of Cassation in Rome. The court ruled that he had not committed a crime as he had taken the food “in the face of the immediate and essential need for nourishment”.³ Especially in light of the economic crisis, which had led to more hungry people on the streets, this decision was arguably a good one.

A number of issues arise from the two stories above: How does any society reach a point where some of its members starve and some are homeless? While God has freely given land to all creation, due to greed that accompanies capitalist systems and the commodification of goods, natural resources like land are sold for money. Those who own resources accumulate more than they need, consequently leading to some people starving and homeless. Taking more than we need from the environment in the long run becomes detrimental to humanity. This is a concept that Karl Marx discusses conspicuously in his conflict theory: eventually workers strike.⁴ Therefore when people continue to be guided by greed in their attitude towards nature, nature will strike back.

Hence labelling the actions of the boy and the homeless man described above as criminal does not address the problem of human greed. Greed is an epitome of lack of *Ubuntu* as it demonstrates broken relationships. It is only when the young herd boy or the homeless man takes from the neighbour’s field or supermarket more than they need to address the hunger that their action becomes theft: dying of hunger will constitute an undignified death. The judge exercised *Ubuntu* in adjudicating this case. This attitude is also biblical: “People, do not despise a thief if he steals to satisfy himself when he is starving. But if he be found, he shall restore sevenfold; He shall give all the substance of his house.”⁵ It is noteworthy that the punishment for greed and selfishness is felt by both those who are deprived, who poor and starving and those that have who become victims of the crime of theft. The two groups are, thus, interrelated and *Ubuntu* is both a framework for human dignity and the gist of this chapter.

Human dignity means that all people have equal worth and deserve to live in dignity. Such a dignity is not exclusive to human beings but is equally extended to the environment. This chapter posits that human dignity and a healthy environment are indivisible rights essential to the three dimensions of sustainability – environmental, social and economic. A healthy environment is a necessary component of living in dignity: all have an equal claim to healthy air, water and surroundings. Dignity entails building strong and resilient communities in order to protect the environment and its inhabitants. Dignity is also essential to economic sustainability. Central to the African notion of health and healing is the recognition that the environment is the foundation for all human welfare and good health.

3 “Italian court rules food theft ‘not a crime if hungry’”, *BBC*, 3 May 2016.

4 Johnstone RL. 2006. *Religion in society: a sociology of religion*. First Edition. Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Pearson Prentice Hall.

5 Bible. Proverbs 6:30-31. All biblical citations in this chapter are to the King James Version.

ANTHROPOCENTRIC VALUE THEORY: AN APPRAISAL

The root of anthropocentric value theory can be traced back to the biblical account of creation.⁶ The biblical narrative places human beings in a privileged position because they are created in the image of God. The narrative further explains that God used his own hands to mould a human being from the soil and finally giving them his own breath, after which God gives human beings dominion over all other created beings.⁷ In addition to these biblical roots, when discussing human dignity and our environment, reference to the “anthropocentric value theory” is inevitable. This theory has been largely criticised for contributing to the degradation of environment.

Anthropocentric value theory emphasises the superiority of human beings over nonhuman species and these nonhuman species are valued through the lens or perspective of humans. In other words, human beings are assigned higher intrinsic value, while non-human species are accorded instrumental value.⁸ In the midst of the debates for and against the anthropocentric theory the chapter adopts the interpretation that international law and environmental law expert Dinah Shelton offers in unpacking the concepts of “dominion” and “stewardship” when she argues:

The earth was here before us and it has been given to us. This allows us to respond to the charge that Judaeo-Christian thinking, on the basis of the Genesis account which grants man “dominion” over the earth, has encouraged the unbridled exploitation of nature by painting him as domineering and destructive by nature. *This is not a correct interpretation of the Bible as understood by the Church.* Although it is true that we Christians have at times incorrectly interpreted the Scriptures, nowadays we must forcefully reject the notion that our being created in God’s image and given dominion over the earth justifies absolute domination over other creatures.

As Shelton further observes:

Each community can take from the bounty of the earth whatever it needs for subsistence, but it also has the duty to protect the earth and to ensure its fruitfulness for coming generations. “The earth is the Lord’s” (Ps 24:1); to him belongs “the earth with all that is within it” (Dt 10:14). Thus God rejects every claim to absolute ownership: “The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine; for you are strangers and sojourners with me” (Lev 25:23). This responsibility for God’s earth means that human beings, endowed with intelligence, must respect the laws of nature and the delicate equilibrium existing between the creatures of this world for “he commanded and they were created; and he established them for ever

6 Rae G. 2014. “Anthropocentrism”, in ten Have H (ed). *Encyclopedia of Global Bioethics*. Dordrecht: Países Bajos, 1-12.

7 Bible. Genesis, chs 1-2.

8 Rae, “Anthropocentrism”.

and ever; he fixed their bounds and he set a law which cannot pass away"
(Ps 148:5b-6).

From this, Shelton concludes: "Clearly, the Bible has no place for a tyrannical anthropocentrism unconcerned for other creatures. Together with our obligation to use the earth's goods responsibly, we are called to recognise that other living beings have a value of their own in God's eyes: "by their mere existence they bless him and give him glory" and, indeed, "the Lord rejoices in all his works" (Ps 104:31).^{9, 10}

Shelton's interpretation of dominion captures clearly the *Ubuntu* ethic of mutual respect between human beings and the rest of creation. A rhetorical question that is implied in the above quotation is, since the earth was here before human beings were created and was freely given, where does a human being get the urge to trade in land? How can we sell that which we didn't make? This is not a correct interpretation of the Bible as understood by the Church.¹¹ In the same vein, Rwandan Jesuit priest and biblical scholar Michel Segatagara Kamanzi emphasises that "the Judeo-Christian Creation tradition is or was wrongly accused of being the basis of excessive and harmful exploitation of the planet by granting superiority and power to human beings over other creatures. In making them pinnacle of creation, God also entrusts the care of his creation to human beings. In a sense, their dignity gives them more responsibility. Should we then see only dominion over creation or there is also a clear responsibility of human beings for creation? In our view, a coherent interpretation of the biblical creation narratives would lead to a pro-ecological attitude, asking the care of our environment which is God's garden."¹²

Given that God has given human beings the ability to effectively communicate and rationalise means that they should understand "dominion as stewardship" is not a reason to feel entitled. As long as "each community can take from the bounty of the earth whatever it needs for subsistence",¹³ there will not be any group of people who are poor because they do not have access to land. Selling of land, thereby depriving other people access to a basic need that enables individuals to produce food, is the source of poverty and deprivation and hence hunger and all other social ills. The poverty and hunger that led the young shepherd boy and homeless Italian man to "steal", as described in the stories above, should be prevented. It seems that *dominion* was only the first part of the assignment of *stewardship* towards the environment that God gave to humans. God gave to human beings a further assignment to execute that stewardship with due diligence informed by the ethic of *Ubuntu*.

9 Shelton D. 2015. "Dominion and Stewardship", *American Journal of International Law/ AJIL Unbound* 109:132-135.

10 Shelton, "Dominion and Stewardship".

11 Shelton, "Dominion and Stewardship".

12 Kamanzi S. M. (2010) "Dominion or Stewardship? An Ecological Perspective on Genesis 1-2", in *Hekima Review* No.43:95-103

13 Shelton, "Dominion and Stewardship".

In discussing the characteristics of religions, religion scholar Ninian Smart cites particularly the social and institutional dimension.¹⁴ This dimension involves the official and formal persons of a religion, that is, the hierarchy. Religious institutions have structures that are led by individuals whose purpose as stewards of the religion is to ensure that the beliefs system and practices of a religion are respected. It is these structures that sustain and transmit the religion. Likewise, the environment needs stewards to make sure that the environment keeps on providing for human needs, in particular food. All indicators of environmental crisis, such as global warming, eventually affect the supply of food for human beings; hence, human beings need to protect the environment for their own good. The environmental crisis we face is an indication of the failure of human beings to take care of themselves by failing to take care of their environment. Philosopher and environmental ethicist Anthony Nwokoye explains that environmental ethics needs to be concerned the “construction of a system of normative guidelines governing man’s attitude, behaviour and action towards his natural environment”.¹⁵ Therefore, we must acknowledge that human beings are a necessary structure to care for their environment by fully applying themselves to exercising positive environmental ethics to ensure a constant supply of their basic needs, such as food.

MODALITIES OF DIGNITY IN AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGIONS

Ubuntu towards nature and conservation strategies

Human beings have a responsibility to take care of natural resources. The *Ubuntu* ethic extends to the ability of human beings to cultivate the right attitude towards the environment. The environment encompasses plant life, animal life and the spiritual world, since all of these are intertwined.¹⁶ For instance, the lack of *Ubuntu* by human beings towards the supernatural world leads to catastrophic results, such as droughts and other natural disasters. African communities have developed conservation strategies within a framework of African indigenous religions, which are guided by the principle: *do not take from the environment more than you need to meet basic needs*.¹⁷ Profit making does not constitute part of what basic needs entails. To achieve this balance between respect for nature and need to meet basic needs, Africans have always regulated their relationship with nature and with fellow

- 14 Smart N. 1998. *The World’s Religions*. Second Edition. Melbourne: Cambridge University Press.
- 15 Nwokoye AU. 2021. “An Assessment of the Theory of Environmental Ethics”, *Aquino Journal of Philosophy* 1(1):124.
- 16 Behrens K. 2010. “Exploring African Holism with Respect to the Environment”, *Environmental Values* 19(4):465-484; Munro PM. 2012. “Holistic Healing: An Analytic Review of Medicine-men in African Societies”, *Journal of the Philosophical Association of Kenya* IV(1):111-122.
- 17 Setume SD and Phili A. 2020. “African indigenous knowledge systems and the conservation of the environment and cultural heritage in Botswana”, in Green MC and Haron M, eds. *Law, Religion and the Environment in Africa*, 315-331.

human being in such a way that sustainability of resources are maintained and sustainable.¹⁸ Maintenance and sustainability of the environment ensures dignity for both human beings and the environment. People care for the environment so that the environment will sustain them. This takes various forms, such as totemism. As a colleague and I have written previously, "This attitude towards nature will further subjects certain animals, hills, trees and intangible culture as sacred to followers and hence treated with respect. Where animals and trees are needed for human needs, people will take from their environment only much as it was needed to meet their basic needs."¹⁹

Many scholars have presented African indigenous ways of healing as holistic.²⁰ These scholars posit that in order for humanity to enjoy maximum health, there must be a balance between three forms of life: human, animal and plant life. These three are significant for the cultivation of a healthy environment and the attainment of dignity for both human life and the environment. As has been observed, "It then becomes imperative that human beings take care of the environment in order to ensure that this equilibrium is maintained. Poor environmental care will result in catastrophic situations where scarcity, natural disasters such as drought and illness will occur threaten all forms of life."²¹

The proponents of secularisation theory posit the irrelevance of religion as scientific knowledge intensifies and societies become more modernised. However, despite the developments in science and technology, religion still plays a significant role in the everyday life of most Africans. Sacredness as an environmental conservationist strategy has been explored by many scholars.²² The concept of sacredness is central in ensuring care of the environment. Geographer of religion Chris Park defines sacredness as "that portion of the earth's surface which is recognised by individuals or groups as worthy of devotion, loyalty, or esteem. Space is sharply differentiated

18 See Setume and Phili, "African indigenous knowledge systems"; Tarusarira J. 2017. "African Religion, Climate Change and Knowledge Systems", *The Ecumenical Review* 69(3):398-410; Mbiti JS. 1989. *African Religions and Philosophy*. Oxford: Heinemann; Amanze J. 2002. *African Traditional Religions in Botswana: A Comprehensive Textbook*. Gaborone: Pula.

19 Setume and Phili, "African indigenous knowledge systems", 330.

20 Setume and Phili, "African indigenous knowledge systems"; Iddrisu MT. 2017. "Healing and Medicine in Traditional African Societies: A Reflection of the World View", *International Journal of Development* 3(2):51-9; Mokgobi MG. 2015. "Understanding African Traditional Healing. *African Journal of Physical Health, Education, Recreation and Dance* 20 (Suppl 2):24-34; Kubukeli PS. 1999. "Traditional healing Practices using medicinal herbs", *The Lancet Supp* 4(24):354; Iddrisu MT. 2017. "Healing and Medicine in Traditional African Societies: A Reflection of the World View", *International Journal of Development* 3(2):51-9; Ajima OG & Ubana EO. 2018. "The Concept of health and Wholeness in Traditional African Religion and Social Medicine", *Arts and Social Sciences Journal* 9(14):1-5.

21 Setume and Phili, "African indigenous knowledge systems", 320.

22 Setume and Phili, "African indigenous knowledge systems"; Tarusarira, "African Religion, Climate Change and Knowledge Systems"; Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*.

from the non-sacred or profane world around it”.²³ The understanding is that “the environment has some divine element within it”.²⁴ Once an entity is imbued with the notion of sacredness, it is alive and it therefore draws to itself respect and demands dignity. The concept of sacredness still plays a significant role in maintaining the dignity of the environment.

Philosopher Polycarp Ikuenobe explains that African views and thoughts on ontology, cosmology, medicine and healing and religious practices support their moral attitudes towards conservations and preservation of nature.²⁵ On the concept of sacredness, anthropologists of religion G.W. Burnett and Kamuyu wa Kang’ethe explain that nature is interconnected with power inherent in all objects of nature in the following hierarchy: God, ancestors, humans, animals, plants and non-biological things.²⁶ When all things in nature are viewed as having some elements of divine power within them, it then becomes a divine responsibility that human beings should take care of nature, conserve and preserve it.

To sum up the African worldview in relation to the environment, Ikuenobe explains that for most Africans the natural environment is divine, for “it is in such things in which gods, deity, spirits and ancestors are made manifest ... hence religious rites are performed with various natural objects”.²⁷ John S. Mbiti expresses the same sentiments when he explains that due to the African worldview on the environment, natural objects have religious significance and are treated by humans with reverence. Such attitudes towards the environment by human beings endure so that the dignity of both human beings and the environment are established and protected. Human beings need a dignified environment in order to access a dignified life. In African traditional religions, totemism is a conservation strategy used toward such dignity.

Totemism

This practice is popular in most African societies. Totemism is a system in which different families or villages respect different animals or plants and natural objects in which their ancestral spirits are believed to reside.²⁸ Religion scholar Musa Wenkosi Dube and her scholarly collaborators point out that in an African setting “most communities identify themselves with particular animals – a totemic

23 Park C. 1994. *Sacred Worlds: An Introduction to Geography and Religion*. London and New York: Routledge, 249-50.

24 Setume and Phili, “African indigenous knowledge systems”.

25 Ikuenobe PA. 2014. “Traditional African Environmental Ethics and Colonial Legacy”, *International Journal of Philosophy and Theology* 2(4):2.

26 Burnett GW and Kang’ethe K. 1994. “Wilderness and the Bantu Mind”, *Environmental Ethics* 16(2):145-160.

27 Ikuenobe, “Traditional African Environmental Ethics and Colonial Legacy”, 5.

28 Burnett and Kang’ethe, “Wilderness and the Bantu Mind”, 156.

practice”.²⁹ They give further examples from Botswana ethnic groups, such as the Bakwena and the Bakgatla, whose totemic animals are the crocodile and the monkey respectively. This means that among the Bakwena and Bakgatla, the crocodile and the monkey, respectively, are respected and protected and therefore they can neither be killed nor eaten. It is a taboo for one to either kill or eat their totem. One is further expected that they will respect their totem. Kindness towards the totem are expected. It is further believed that the totem may assist in terms of need or desperation.³⁰ This practice, by limiting the populations that would kill a specific animal or destroy specific plants, contributes to the overall conservation and preservations of certain species of animals and plants. On the same note, environmental and developmental studies researcher Elliot Sibiri carried out a study in Nigeria in which he was exploring environmental indigenous practices that could promote environmental preservation among the people of Nembe in Bayelsa State.³¹ The findings of the study show that totemism as an indigenous practice promotes species conservation, including, among others, pythons, eagles, sharks and snails, with minimal threats or risks to the social environment. A similar study in Zimbabwe confirms that totemism is a traditional way of conserving the environment.³² In this study, religion scholars Clemence Makamure and Vengesai Chimininge perceive totemism as an example of African beliefs and practices that are environmentally friendly.³³ Since most ethnic groups have specific animals and plants as their totems and are compelled to protect these species by not eating and killing them, each community, by preserving a specific species, contributes to the overall protection of the environment. The African attitude towards health and healing is another angle through which a belief in the sacredness of the environment contributes to the conservation of the environment.

Ubuntu and notions of health and healing and the environment

Notions of health and healing are perceived in both physical and biological terms as the results of a breach in relationship – in other words as lack of *Ubuntu* on the part of human beings. Illness is caused in part by disequilibrium in the order of a person’s connection with the cosmic order of nature.³⁴ This belief is crucial, as it cultivates within humanity a respectful attitude towards the environment. The environment is the source of all products that are needed in the different modes

29 Dube MW et al. 2016. “Botho/Ubuntu: Community-building and Gender Constructions in Botswana”, *Journal of the Interdenominational Center* 42:1-22.

30 Burnett and Kang’ethe, “Wilderness and the Bantu Mind”, 156.

31 Sibiri EA. “Totemism and Environmental Preservation among Nembe People in the South-South Zone, Nigeria”, *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences* 5(7):519-529.

32 Makamure C and Chimininge V. 2015. “Totem, Taboos and sacred places: An analysis of Karanga people’s environmental conservation and management practices”, *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention* 4(11):7-12.

33 See also Chemhuru M and Masaka D. 2010. “Taboos as sources of Shona people’s environmental ethics”, *Journal of Sustainable Development in Africa* 12 (7):121-133

34 Ikuenobe, “Traditional African Environmental Ethics and Colonial Legacy”, 8.

of healing. Therefore, due to the interconnectedness between the divine, human and animal life, plants and non-living objects, the spiritual worlds of Gods and ancestors and nature and natural objects are given due reverence by humans.³⁵ The natural environment that provides items for traditional medicine must be respected and taken care of. These concepts of sacredness have been one way of conserving both plants and water sources that are used for medicinal purposes in various ways.³⁶ The use of indigenous knowledge in the area of health and healing ensured protection of the features in the environment that were believed to be the sources of healing such as specific species of plants, water sources and animals.

The healing properties of plants in traditional religions and the preserving of traditional medicinal plants have already been observed.³⁷ Kennedy Kanene carried out a qualitative study among the Tonga in Zimbabwe.³⁸ The purpose of the study was to explore what role culture played in preserving the environment. Among other things, Kanene focused on the strategies that the Tonga community used to conserve medicinal plants. He found out that the idea that some water sources and plants species are sacred was very important. That which is sacred is alive. For example, when cutting barks from a plant for medicinal purposes, the traditional doctor will either cut the “south or the east or the west facing side”.³⁹ This way of harvesting parts of trees for medicine insured that the tree was largely left intact and could re-grow the bark soon. The same principle was applied when cutting roots and when harvesting leaves. The idea is to leave the plant alive. The Tonga used this way of harvesting from nature because they believed that cutting the whole tree will “lead to the cutting (death) of the patient”.⁴⁰ Taking care of the environment is a way of ensuring self-preservation by human beings. As human beings take care of the environment, they want nature to keep providing the much-needed products – and this ensured that nature was preserved and conserved.

Another study was carried out by historian Philip Musoni in Zimbabwe in which the interest was on two religious shrines, the Chivavarira hill and Gonawapotera

35 Ikuenobe, “Traditional African Environmental Ethics and Colonial Legacy”, 9.

36 Kanene, K.M. 2016. “Indigenous practices of environmental sustainability in the Tonga community of southern Zambia”, *Jambá: Journal of Disaster Risk Studies* 8(1):a331.

37 Magoro MD, Masoga MA and Mearns MA. 2010. “Traditional health practitioners’ practices and the sustainability of extinction-prone traditional medicinal plants”, *International Journal of African Renaissance Studies* 5(2): 229-241; Chen SL et al. 2016. “Conservation and sustainable use of medicinal plants: problems, progress and prospects”, *Chinese Medicine* 11(37):2-10.

38 Kanene, “Indigenous practices of environmental sustainability”.

39 Kanene, “Indigenous practices of environmental sustainability”, 4.

40 Kanene, “Indigenous practices of environmental sustainability”, 3; Rankoana SA. 2016. “Perceptions of climate change and the potential for adaptation in a rural community in Limpopo Province, South Africa”, *Sustainability Journal*, 8(8):1-10; Mavi S and Shava S. 1997. “Traditional Methods of Conserving Medicinal Plants in Zimbabwe”, *Botanic Gardens Conservation International* 2(8):36-37.

pool of Chirumhanzu located in the Midlands Province of Zimbabwe.⁴¹ The two shrines are regarded by the indigenous people as renowned and sacred. Both the pool and the hill were believed to have healing powers and were therefore treated with respect and there are rules to be observed at the site to show respect to this day. According to Musoni, “the community members are not allowed near the pool; neither to do fishing nor laundry”.⁴² These rules are meant to ensure that the pool and its surrounding area are kept as possible in its original state thereby protecting the healing waters of the pool from possible misuse and pollution. Hence the concept of sacredness is very significant in giving the environment dignity, as plant and animal life are crucial in the well-being of human life.

LAW, FOOD SCARCITY, FOOD SECURITY IN BOTSWANA

The whole world is concerned about food scarcity and food security, especially the African continent. The African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights elevates human dignity as one of its focus points.⁴³ Human dignity as a right cannot be achieved until individuals enjoy economic freedom: there is no dignity in hunger. The United Nations “State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World” reports chronicle efforts aimed at insuring that a healthy diet is made affordable.⁴⁴ In a study of Botswana’s political economy, the purpose of which was to explore “how political economy...climate change and livelihood dynamics are synergically. on household food security”, William G. Moseley describes Botswana as a semi-arid country that imports 90% of its food.⁴⁵ The major findings of Moseley’s study were that poor households are challenged by increasingly high prices. This increase directly affects their ability to remit any money to the rural areas. Inevitably people in the rural areas are then plunged further into poverty. The Covid-19 pandemic has further negatively impacted food security in most parts of the world.

The government of Botswana has developed several policies that are aimed fighting food scarcity and thereby ensuring food security. These policies include the National Policy on Natural Resources and Development,⁴⁶ the Botswana

41 Musoni P. 2016. “Contestation of ‘the holy places in the Zimbabwean Religious Landscape: A study of the Johane Masowe Chishanu yeNyenyedzi Church’s sacred places”, *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 72(1):1-8.

42 Musoni, “Contestation of ‘the holy places in the Zimbabwean Religious Landscape”, 6.

43 African [Banjul] Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights, adopted June 27, 1981, OAU Doc. CAB/LEG/67/3 rev. 5, 21 I.L.M. 58 (1982), *entered into force* Oct. 21, 1986.

44 See Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations. 2023. *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World*. Rome: FAO.

45 Moseley WG, 1.

46 Republic of Botswana. 1990. “Botswana national conservation strategy: national policy on natural resources conservation and development as approved by the National Assembly on the 17th December 1990”. Gaborone: International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

National Climate Change Strategy⁴⁷ and the National Policy on Arable Agriculture and Dairy Development.⁴⁸ Botswana is a desert; therefore, food scarcity is the lived experience of most of its citizens. Hence, it is becoming imperative for the government to be concerned with food security issues. The African ethic of *Ubuntu* is a critical influencer in establishing and sustaining cordial relationship between human beings and the environment as a good conservation strategy. Treating the environment with *Ubuntu* will ensure that the environment continues to provide human beings with the food humanity desperately needs.

In 1990, the government of Botswana developed the National Policy on Natural Resources and Development, whose aim was to “increase the effectiveness with which natural resources are managed so that the beneficial interactions are optimized and harmful environmental side effects are minimized.”⁴⁹ The policy focuses on natural resources issues, such as water, rangeland pasture degradation, overuse of veld products, depletion of wood, pollution and the conservation of wildlife and cultural resources. A closer analysis of these issues shows that they are a result of misuse of the environment by human beings driven by greed, desire for more money and hunger for profit making. This is an indication of human beings losing their grip of their role as stewards of natural resources on behalf of the current generations and those to come.

The government of Botswana has put in place several initiatives to fight food scarcity and to promote food security. For example, the former president of Botswana, Sir Seretse Khama Ian Khama was determined to change the mindset from that of poverty reduction to poverty eradication. One of the initiatives that he introduced to achieve this milestone was backyard gardening. This was introduced as a strategy to improve the economic status of women in rural areas. The backyard gardening programme was aimed mainly at the poor members of the population. William Moseley explains that numerous other initiatives were introduced by the government of Botswana to ensure food security, such as improving the industries of cattle husbandry, diamond mining and ecotourism. These were mainly targeted at the rich, who would be the drivers of the economy and create more commodities for the export market. There is therefore a call from law and the care of environment that human beings should use the natural resources responsibly. *Ubuntu* is again at the centre of proper relations by human beings towards their environment: human beings are because the environment is. It is therefore in the best interest of human beings to take care of the environment so that the environment can continue to provide basic needs, such as food.

47 Republic of Botswana. 2018. Botswana National Climate Change Strategy. Online at: <https://faolex.fao.org/docs/pdf/bot208159.pdf>. [17 October 2023].

48 Republic of Botswana. 2002. National Master Plan for the Arable Agriculture and Dairy Development (NAMPAADD). Online at: <https://faolex.fao.org/docs/pdf/bot191513.pdf>. [Accessed 17 October 2023].

49 Republic of Botswana, National Policy on Natural Resources and Development.

CONCLUSION

Dominion, understood as stewardship, implicates the deep anthropocentrism that other scholars have understood as the misinterpretation of the creation narrative of Genesis 1 and 2. The chapter has examined the stories of a young herd boy and a homeless man, whose actions, which in normal circumstances would have been acts of theft, in their circumstances and when seen through the application of *Ubuntu* became actions necessary for human dignity. *Ubuntu* functions as a mirror in which societies are forced to introspect on their greed: how do we create a community in which some members are deprived of basic needs, such as food? The biblical concept of “dominion”, understood as stewardship, negates the interpretation of the biblical dominion as giving human beings absolute power over the rest of creation to a point where human behaviour becomes self-destructive.

This is similar to how concepts that guide human interactions in a patriarchal society can either oppress or liberate, depending on how they are applied. If in a patriarchal society *Ubuntu* is understood to give men dominion over women, then gender-based violence will be the order of the day. However, if the concept is properly understood in the *Ubuntu* context of “I am because we are” then men will feel the need and obligation to respect women. Therefore, the anthropocentric value theory needs to be understood in the context of a dominion that requires responsibility, stewardship and *Ubuntu*, as well as concern for the welfare of both current and future generations.

At the centre of a broken relationship between humanity and the environment is greed. Human beings have, over time, failed to fully apply their rational power to regulate behaviours that are detrimental to their own survival. Humanness, or *Ubuntu*, is a significant guiding principle in the attaining dignity for both humanity and the environment. The different conservation strategies that are central to African indigenous religions, such as sacredness and notions of health and healing, are ways through which mutual respect and dignity between humanity and the environment are maintained.