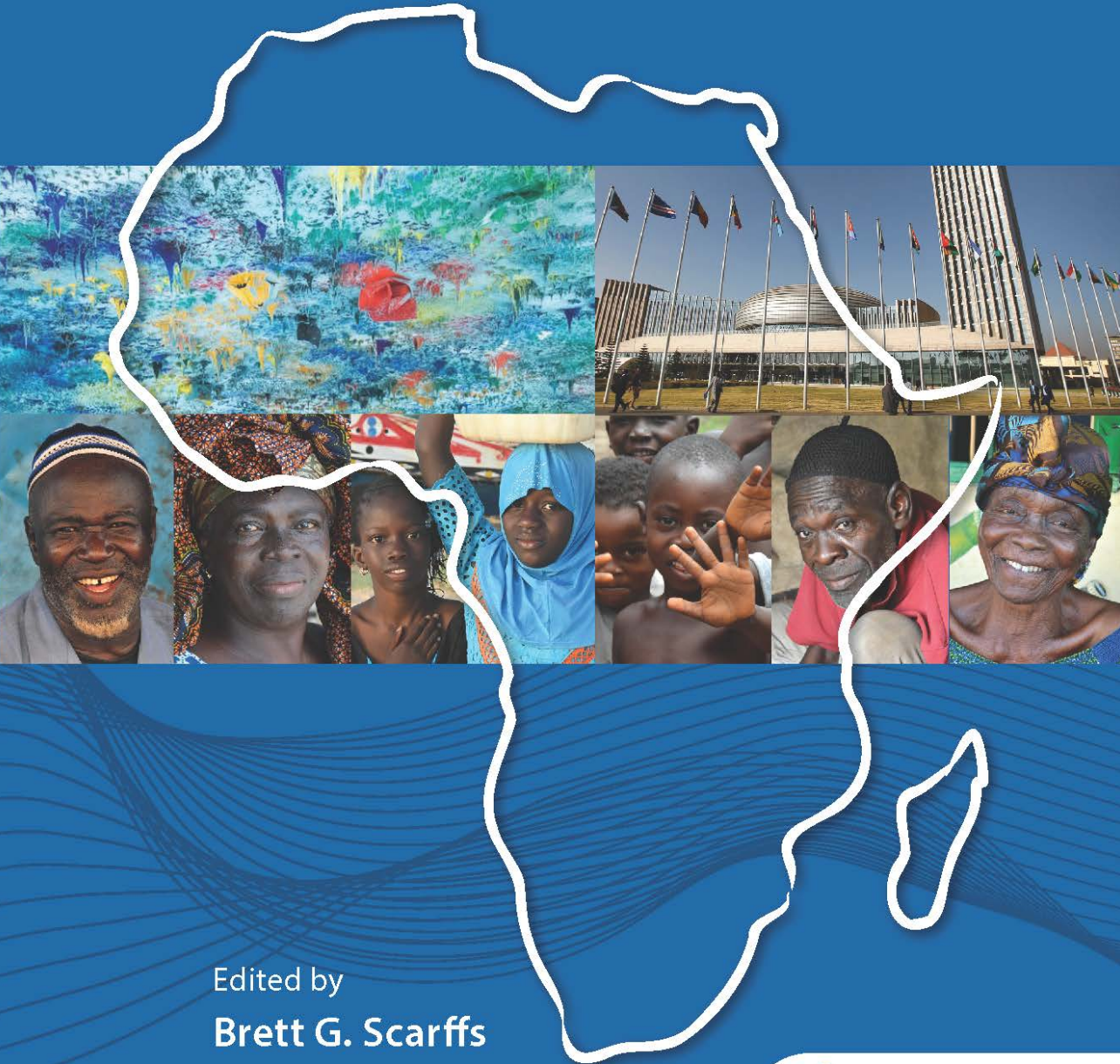


African Conceptions of Human Dignity



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5 DIGNITY AS A RIGHT AND AS A “MOTHER” OF RIGHTS

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THE BANALITY (OR DORMANCY) OF HUMAN DIGNITY

Without a doubt, dignity is one of the most overused words in our contemporary moral and legal conversations, in part because it is one of the many concepts by which we evaluate our social lives and governing institutions. But this notoriety is only matched by the global frequency with which it is also violated and disrespected. We rightly worry about the latter because, as the Israeli philosopher Avishai Margalit reminds us, our world is less decent and less civilised than it could be, further explaining that a decent and civilised society is one whose institutions do not humiliate people and whose members do not humiliate one another.² Thus, while several standard-setting documents that ground political and legal principles tell us that every human person is inviolable because of the dignity they possess, our everyday experience, regardless of the contingent frames that confer identities upon us, is one of indignities or undignified existence. The events responsible for this perilous state of our individual and social life vary in size, intensity and context. Contemporary situations might justifiably predispose us to think that only high-profile events such as wars, colonialism, slavery, global poverty, torture and, most recently, Covid-19, are the only fertile grounds for violations and disrespect of human dignity. But this is far from the truth, because there is a high probability that nearly everyone has experienced situations, formal or informal, when we feel that our dignity was not accorded the respect it deserves. This could be a careless comment or joke made about us or our belief system, a disparate treatment of a job application because of one's name or gender, a squint-eyed gaze from a fellow citizen because of our physical characteristics and all such similar experiences that are not easily cognizable by the society's legal mechanisms for dealing with actionable infractions, but whose impact on our self-esteem is no less devastating.

Given the use of parental metaphor to frame the conceptualisation of dignity in this essay, I would like to gesture toward what feminist scholars have called “the circle of ethical reasoning”, which urges us to pay homage to the centrality of human experience by making it the starting point and the endpoint of ethical reflection about the various contours of moral claims upon us.³ In that respect, I would like to situate the discussion of dignity and its intersection with human rights against the backdrop of my own experience.

1 Distinguished University Professor, Wake Forest University.

2 Margalit A. 1996. *The Decent Society*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

3 Farley, M. 2008. *Just Love: A Framework for Christian Ethics*. New York: Continuum; Townes, M. 2007. *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

My life is a laboratory of the oft quoted statement – that it takes a village to raise a child – which many attribute to the wisdom of African proverbs, but whose universal validity cannot be disputed. As I came to discover, my mother married my father in her early twenties, but the marriage was far from any of those romanticised variants of an idyllic African past. My mother's first three children, who were all female, died in infancy. In a culture where the birth of male children was seen as a source of the husband's pride and dignity and the birth of female children as his wife's fault, my mother was handed an expanded version of this cultural script, containing two inseparable verdicts that my father and his family meted out to her in a ritual-like version. The first sentence, which was milder, was that she had caused an embarrassment to her husband for not producing a male child and the second, a much harsher one, was that she was a witch because none of the "inferior" children she produced survived, which could only mean one thing to these self-appointed interpreters of culture: she must have killed her children.

My mother's fate in the marriage was sealed: eviction was her only option and so she was sent back to her parents' house, thus subjected to a kind of humiliation that could not even be wished upon one's enemy. This is because the same traditional Yoruba Nigerian culture considered it a stigma for a married woman to return to her parents' home and be living there, regardless of the reasons, especially when the husband was still alive. The discovery a few months later that my mother was already pregnant with another child before her eviction – who turned out to be the author of this essay – could not reverse the verdict. In fact, it compounded her sense of humiliation.

So, in consequence of my father's action, aided and abetted by an implacable army of patriarchal and androcentric tradition, my mother was visited with three simultaneous indignities: returning to her parents' house to take up residence, disrespected for having all female children and being accused of witchcraft. The fact that my mother named me OLUSEGUN (my middle name), which means God has given me victory, indicates the extent to which victims often ironically imbibe the very ideology that has been used to victimise them, in this case, the irrational belief in the superiority of male to female children.

The humiliation visited upon my mother was not unlike what many African women have experienced and sadly still do today, even in the twenty-first century. But it is not the only cultural and societal instantiation of disrespect of human dignity. Two additional examples will suffice to illustrate the substantive argument of this essay. The second example occurred when a former Nigerian federal minister was asked on a television programme why a large percentage of the population was poor, considering that the country is a major oil producer. The minister claimed to be befuddled by the question, because he said he looked around and could not find any person picking up food from a dumpster – for only such an act constituted for him a threshold definition of poverty.⁴ The minister said this with a straight face in a country where, according to the 2019 *World Bank Report on Poverty and Inequality in*

4 Omozuwa A. 2018. "That nobody may eat from dustbin", *Ships & Ports*, 11 December.

Nigeria, about 83 million people, which is 70 per cent of the population, live below the country's poverty line of USD 381.75 per year, amounting to about USD 1.04 per day.⁵

The third example is an underreported feature of the tragic consequences of the criminal invasion of Ukraine by Russia. This is the disparate treatment of non-white refugees, a majority of whom were foreign students, who chose to study in Ukraine for cheaper living and more accessible education and who sought to flee to neighbouring European countries when the war broke out. As many of these students recounted their ordeal, Ukrainian officials in charge of evacuation repeatedly denied them entry onto the buses conveying refugees to host countries, stating explicitly that the country's priority was to its citizens. When confronted with a report of this alleged discrimination, a Ukrainian cabinet minister did not debunk it, but instead justified it by invoking the country's homogenously racial composition as a predominantly white country, a view that was shared by his counterparts in other European countries. A French politician said Ukrainian refugees represent "high-quality immigration".⁶ The Bulgarian prime minister said Ukrainian refugees are "intelligent, they are educated". The Bulgarian minister elaborated, "This is not the refugee wave we have been used to, people we were not sure about their identity, people with unclear pasts, who could have been even terrorists".⁷ It would not have been out of place to challenge these sanctioned disparate treatments on the legal and moral authority of Article 2 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) guaranteeing everyone "all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration without distinctions of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status".⁸ Unfortunately, the only entity that could have offered that challenge merely reconfirmed the perception of a double standard from the international community toward the non-Western world. Answering a question during a press conference, the United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees Filippo Grandi admitted that "there are instances" of discrimination at the borders based on race.⁹

But the temptation to classify for purposes of discriminatory treatment is not confined to the political class. In an opinion in *The Washington Post*, H. A. Hellyer, scholar of religion and international politics, observed that many journalists could also not hide their "longstanding racist bias" in the way they have so far covered the war. Media outlets across the United States and Europe and their respective political

- 5 "Nigeria releases new report on poverty and inequality in country", World Bank, 28 May 2020.
- 6 Alexander CJ. 2022. "The Racist Double Standard of the Ukraine-Russia Conflict", *The Daily Utah Chronicle*, 22 March.
- 7 Alexander, "The Racist Double Standard of the Ukraine-Russia Conflict".
- 8 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), G.A. res. 217A (III), U.N. Doc A/810 at 71 (1948), art 2.
- 9 Zaru D. 2022. "Many nonwhite refugees fleeing Ukraine caught in limbo at borders amid reports of discrimination", ABC News, 3 March.

spectrums humanised the plight of Ukrainian refugees. Meticulous vignettes about real people packing their bags and fleeing their homeland powerfully connected the refugee crisis with viewing audiences worldwide. Ukrainian refugees had real names and stories, with real children and real lives left behind for an uncertain future in a foreign land far from home. Hellyer rightly judged that the “implication for anyone reading or watching – particularly anyone with ties to a nation that has also seen foreign intervention, conflict, sanctions and mass migration – is clear: It’s much worse when White Europeans suffer than when it’s Arabs or other non-White people. Yemenis, Iraqis, Nigerians, Libyans, Afghans, Palestinians, Syrians, Hondurans – well, they are used to it.”¹⁰ Thus, Hellyer argued that it would be a mistake to see this widely shared evident double standard as anything new in the structured and informal interactions between the Global North and the Global South. “Far too often,” he concludes, “we dehumanise non-White populations, diminishing their importance and that leads to one thing: the degrading of their right to live in dignity,”¹¹ thus giving a lie to our much-vaunted notion of universal humanity.

These three cases – the unilateral humiliating revocation of a wife’s marital rights due to the delay in her ability to produce a male child, the society’s denial of conspicuous poverty or even marginalisation or erasure of the poor within it and the racialisation of basic protection in an acute situation of generalised dangers to physical security – do not exhaust the forms and patterns of behaviour and attitudes that we would regard today as falling below the standards of basic moral decency. But they do suffice to crystallise for us an important question about what it means for a human being, regardless of any contingent identifying factors, to live in dignity and why a dignified life is morally preferable to one without dignity. What is it about dignity that makes its possession a moral barrier against gratuitous disrespect and abuse? Is there anything special about the concerns it raises or the practical requirements it generates?

DIGNITY AS A LANGUAGE OF EMANCIPATION

Engaging this question requires an acknowledgment of dignity’s ambiguity as a moral and legal language. For some scholars, it is a conceptual chameleon, a particularly slippery and highfalutin rhetoric that seems simultaneously empty and complexly rich, possessing both a gravitas and a vagueness that makes it susceptible to multiple, but always insufficient and sometimes seemingly identical meanings, attractive to diametrically opposing camps.¹² Philosopher and ethicist Ruth Macklin may have sounded too harsh when she declared human dignity a useless concept

10 Hellyer HA. 2022. “Coverage of Ukraine has exposed long-standing racist biases in Western media”, *The Washington Post*, 28 February.

11 Hellyer, “Coverage of Ukraine has exposed long-standing racist biases”.

12 Drawing on Wittgenstein’s use-dependent theory of conceptual meanings, Doron Schultzeiner notes that “some of the linguistic functions of dignity seem to imply different, even contradictory, meanings” because of the various contexts in which the word is used.

for ethical inquiry, but she undoubtedly represents many who see the term as a poor surrogate for ideas that are presumably "more precise" and illuminating, such as "respect for persons or their autonomy" or "capacity for rational thought and action" and thus believe it "can be eliminated without loss of meaning".¹³ In the legal arena, not only has dignity not been conceived as a right "until the late twentieth century",¹⁴ but even at this nascent stage of its recognition by law, it played what legal philosopher David Luban called "a cameo role",¹⁵ having "no more than an unintended by-product" impact. Dignity's apparent plasticity and lack of concrete meaning and consistent definition impose upon it predictable functional constraints, including the innocuous danger of being "debased by flabby use"¹⁶ and the more serious one of manipulation by judges who can "introduce their own moral standards amid competing claims of rights each of which has a plausible case of human dignity violation".¹⁷

Yet, to write off human dignity as a concept without normative weight is to ignore its moral genealogy, the historical evidence that dignity has functioned, whether in law, political discourse, social movements and other fields as a vocabulary for emancipatory political activity, animating groups and individuals to undertake struggles against systems of domination, oppression and exploitation. Examples include anti-colonial nationalist movements, women's liberation and student activists, variegated labour unions (including the Nigerian Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU)) and contested struggles by varied excluded groups. These groups include working men, religious minorities, women, ethnic and linguistic minorities and individuals like Ken Saro Wiwa, Tai Solarin, Malam Aminu Kano, Madame Nwanyeruwa, Mary Okezie and Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti, among others – all of whom invoked the language of dignity to challenge existing social arrangements and enact visions for a more just and egalitarian social order. Every such protest movement in recent times, according to Nigerian comparative literature and African studies scholar Biodun Jeyifo, has been "a proclamation of one singular message: that the suffering is enough, that Nigeria belongs to all Nigerians, that a looted, rubbished country instils deep and confounding feelings of worthlessness and lack of dignity in its citizens, most in particular the disenfranchised and the

Schultziner D. 2007. "Human Dignity: Functions and Meanings", *Global Jurist Topics* 3(3): art 3.

13 Macklin R. 2002. "Dignity is a useless concept", *British Medical Journal* 327:1419-1420.

14 Daly E. 2013. *Dignity Rights: Courts, Constitutions and the Worth of the Human Person*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1.

15 Luban D. 2005. "Lawyers as Upholders of Human Dignity (When They Aren't Busy Assaulting It)", *University of Illinois Law Review* 2005:817.

16 Dworkin R. 2011. *Justice for Hedgehogs*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 13.

17 Lee MYK. 2008. "Universal Human Dignity: Some Reflections in the Asian Context", *Asian Journal of Comparative Law* 3(1):1-33 (cited in Monslave VB and Roman JA. 2009. "Tensions of Human Dignity: Conceptualization and Application in International Human Rights Law", *Sur International Journal of Human Rights* 6(11):39.

looted”.¹⁸ The local vernaculars for dignity may be different, the constitutional rights that are pursued in its name may be multifarious,¹⁹ and the judicial dictions for describing “why dignity is important or what dignity secures” may be “diverse and scattered and at times may seem incongruous if not mutually intelligible”, even though it is “fundamentally the same idea throughout the world”, because it is associated with certain discernible patterns and “motifs that cut across geographic boundaries, factual settings and legal categories”.²⁰ It has remained an effective tool for mass mobilisation because it “has a meaning that is *particular to the history and present challenges of each culture*. It is the ‘flip side of “never again”,’ the customised magic weapon conjured to combat whatever demons are in each country’s closet”.²¹

A clear indication of the genuineness of this “never again” commitment is the nearly universal codification of human dignity, with the constitutions of several countries and major international human rights documents referring to the concept or its variations. For instance, Section 34(1) of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999, asserts that “Every individual is entitled to respect for the dignity of his person”, while Section 24(c) imposes on every citizen the duty to “*respect the dignity* of other citizens and the rights and legitimate interests of others and [to] live in unity and harmony and in the spirit of common brotherhood”.²² Similarly, Section 1 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996, describes the Republic as “one, sovereign democratic state founded on the following values: Human dignity, the achievement of equality and the advancement of human rights freedoms”.²³ Commenting on this section, public and constitutional law scholar Adeno Addis suggested that “if one were to take the order in which founding principles are listed, one could reasonably speculate that human *dignity is regarded as the leading, even perhaps as the supreme, value*”,²⁴ an interpretation for which he finds support in Judge O’Regan of the South African Constitutional Court who “expressed in the well-known case of *S. v Makwanyane*: [Human dignity] is the foundation of many of the other rights that are specifically entrenched in ... [the Bill of Rights].”

The same outlook is expressed in the UDHR and its core legal platforms – the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) – as well as their

18 Jeyifo B. 2016. “*Talakawa Liberation Courier* 182: Political Tsunami in Egypt: Reversing a Gross Deficit of Individual and National Dignity (1)”, in *Against the Predators’ Republic: Political and Cultural Journalism, 2007-2013*. Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 328.

19 Interests typically articulated in terms of dignity rights include “equality, expression, due process, privacy, health, family, work and virtually every other sphere of life”. Daly, *Dignity Rights* 5-6.

20 Daly, *Dignity Rights*, 5-6.

21 Daly, *Dignity Rights*, 6.

22 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999, s 34(1) and s 24(c).

23 Constitution of the Republic of South African, 1996, s 1.

24 Addis A. 2013. “The Role of Human Dignity in a World of Plural Values and Ethical Commitments”, *Netherlands Quarterly of Human Rights* 31/4:411, n32 (emphasis in original)

African regional instantiation in the African Charter of Human and Peoples' Rights, known as the Banjul Charter.²⁵ To the extent that this codification trend continues, we may be justified in declaring with philosopher Linda Zagzebski that "the dignity of persons is the core idea in a multitude of documents on human rights, representing the farthest human beings have gone in getting widespread acceptance of a framework for political life".²⁶ Human dignity helps frame human rights discourse by making it "a distinctive kind of discourse that articulates the most urgent claims of the human person in social life", such that by understanding human dignity, we can explain "the content and force of human rights as the urgent ethical and political project that puts humanity first".²⁷

We can also gauge the revolutionary impact of dignity language on modern constitutional law in the way that many countries' courts "find dignity rights to be relevant in cases where they are not necessary for the disposition of the case" because the actionable claims are grounded in "other provisions of a nation's constitution, such as the right to work or the right to life".²⁸ It is also not uncommon for courts to be sympathetic to dignity claims, even where they might otherwise be reticent, such as in the area of health policy, where the probability that a ruling might trigger "broad financial implications" may be a reason not to find "violations of the right to health".²⁹ However, "where the claim is converted into a violation of the right to dignity, courts are likely to intervene on the claimant's behalf".³⁰ This is precisely what the South African Constitutional Court did when it invoked human dignity to defend a 1957 statute prohibiting prostitution. Women sex workers challenged the statute on various grounds – discrimination against women, privacy, freedom to engage in economic activity and human dignity and other grounds – but the Court used human dignity to uphold the statute. As articulated by two of the judges on the Constitutional Court, Albie Sachs and Kate O'Regan, "Our Constitution values human dignity which inheres in various aspects of what it means to be a human being. One of these aspects is the fundamental dignity of the human body which is not simply organic. Neither is it something to be commodified. Our Constitution requires that it be respected. We do not believe that [the prohibition] can be said to be the cause of any limitation on the dignity of the prostitute. To the extent that the

25 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, G.A. res. 2200A (XXI), 21 U.N. GAOR Supp. (No. 16) at 52, U.N. Doc. A/6316 (1966), 999 U.N.T.S. 171, entered into force Mar. 23, 1976; International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, G.A. res. 2200A (XXI), 21 U.N. GAOR Supp. (No. 16) at 49, U.N. Doc. A/6316 (1966), 993 U.N.T.S. 3, entered into force Jan. 3, 1976; 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

26 Zagzebski L. 2016. "The Dignity of Persons and the Value of Uniqueness", *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 90:68.

27 Gilabert P. 2018. *Human Dignity and Human Rights*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1.

28 Daly, *Dignity Rights*, 6.

29 Daly, *Dignity Rights*, 6.

30 Daly, *Dignity Rights*, 6.

dignity of the prostitutes is diminished, the diminution arises from the character of the prostitution itself.”³¹

The Janus-faced character of dignity revealed in the South African case exemplified by the contrasting perspectives of the constitutional judges and the women sex workers highlights the double conundrum at the heart of human dignity and human rights dialectics. For, if human dignity is posited as the ground or mother of human rights, then, if we are to avoid a *petitio principii* fallacy, we are compelled to explain the ontological property of dignity, as it is neither a self-generating nor self-explanatory concept. To repeat a previously stated question, what is special about human dignity that qualifies it as a ground for human rights? If, on the other hand, we posit human dignity as an object of human rights to which a person has a valid claim, then the justificatory task shifts to the *nature* of human rights, requiring us to explain their conceptual intelligibility regardless of the moral goods procured by virtue of one’s entitlement. This dual-tiered analysis is inevitable in the discourse of human dignity and human rights. In the remainder of this essay, I will limit myself to the first tier by examining the varied understandings of the material content of human dignity. My core argument is that insofar as anchoring human rights on human dignity is a step in the right direction, the divergent conceptions of the qualities or attributes in virtue of which dignity is possessed undermines the secure foundation that the human rights regime is seeking at the altar of human dignity.

Specifically, I will argue that none of the extant conceptions of dignity, including the two that I will discuss in this essay, fully meets three important criteria that constitute the special concerns of dignity and which any adequate account of dignity must satisfy. The first criterion is that of *scope*, that is, the range of persons to which dignity applies. Because dignity is a moral signifier, it has a universal scope, i.e., it applies to all persons regardless of actions, circumstance, or vicissitudes. All human beings have the same dignity because there is only one *sort* of person. This universality of scope is what is intended in Article 1 of the UDHR that “[a]ll human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights”.³² I call this the “status-dignity” of every human being, which is “the normative standing in accordance to which human individuals are entitled to the obligatory treatment that human rights state”.³³ The second criterion for an adequate account of dignity focuses on its practical requirements, which are also determined by the logic of its universality. As explained by one scholar, this logic correlates with a *directed* duty of respect to every bearer of human dignity and always involves a three-place relation between an agent, the required action and the party to whom the duty is owed.³⁴ Like the first, this criterion is similarly captured in Article 5 of the Banjul Charter, which provides that “Every individual shall have the right to the respect of the dignity inherent in a human being and to the recognition of his [or her] legal status”. I call this

31 *Jordan v State* 2002 (6) SA 642 (CC) S. Afr), para 74.

32 UDHR, art 1.

33 See Gilabert, *Human Dignity and Human Rights*, 3.

34 See Zylberman A. 2016. “Human Dignity”, *Philosophy Compass* 11/4:202.

"condition-dignity", which "concerns the states of affairs in which human beings enjoy the treatment owed to them".³⁵ The difference between "status-dignity" and "condition-dignity" is that even when a person is denied what philosopher Martha Nussbaum refers to as "external goods", meaning "the conditions in which [human] capacities can develop and unfold themselves",³⁶ they still retain status-dignity because it is inherent and inalienable. However, the creation of these conditions is a necessary proof of a society's commitment to the imperative of status-dignity, without which the latter is all but a shadow of a dignified life. Thus, as I use them, status-dignity and condition-dignity are conjoined twins and respect for both is not just lip service or constitutional window dressing but evidence of a commitment to identify with and empower one another as fellow citizens. Concretely, this requires "shap[ing] our social life in such a way that we support every person in their pursuit of a flourishing life by affirming negative duties not to destroy or block their valuable capacities and positive duties to protect and facilitate their development and exercise of them".³⁷ This leads us to the third and final criterion of an adequate conception or theory of dignity, which is its grip. By this, I mean that the duty of respect that dignity generates or dictates is especially exigent: it should override other kinds of considerations and should prohibit sacrificing the dignity of a single person for the greater well-being or even the dignity of others.³⁸ I will now discuss, in turn, two of the multiple conceptions of human dignity that have shaped current usage of the term.

DIGNITY AS ELEVATED STATUS

In the vast literature on dignity, a clear set of meanings that has been consistently associated with it is the one supplied by its etymology – *dignitas* in Latin and *iyi* or *ipo ola* in the Yoruba language – both of which are interpreted as an elevated status, that is often the hallmark of many status-ranking or hierarchical societies. *Dignitas* is the status of some being which makes a deferential or respectful attitude to that being appropriate. Thus, classics scholar Miriam Griffin explains: "Dignitas is an attribute signifying a certain standing or rank in the community; it rests on a particular office or status and on the prestige that accrues to its holder... It is an outward-looking quality, in that it depends on the view taken of one by others."³⁹

This aristocratic conception of dignity, which had its origin in the crucible of late classical antiquity, especially via Cicero and later the Renaissance, contains three aspects. First, it can refer to the *elevation* of a role or position. Thus, a role that has

35 Gilabert, *Human Dignity and Human Rights*, 3.

36 Nussbaum M. 2008. "Human Dignity and Political Entitlements", Schulman A (ed). *Human Dignity and Bioethics: Essays Commissioned by the President's Council on Bioethics*. Washington, DC: President's Council on Bioethics.

37 Gilabert, *Human Dignity and Human Rights*, 3.

38 Zylberman, "Human Dignity", 202.

39 Griffin M. 2017. "Dignity in Roman and Stoic Thought", in Debes R ed. *Dignity: A History*, New York: Oxford University Press, 50.

dignity, or someone who is a dignitary, has a high rank and deserves respect in virtue of that rank. It is the position or the office itself that confers dignity onto the individual, rather than the other way around, thus dignity in this sense has “a tangible quality and a distinct social aspect”.⁴⁰ Second, dignity can refer to the duties, attitudes, virtues and bearing that ought to characterise those who occupy the higher-ranking position and are definitive of it. In many African societies, for example, especially in Yoruba society, a king does not bow or shake hands when greeting people. This understanding of status or rank dignity presupposes that “social rank alone was not always a sufficient condition and having a position of power did not necessarily mean one had *dignitas*. To have it one must possess and demonstrate characteristics of worthiness, excellence and honour and this most often had to be recognised by one’s fellow citizens.”⁴¹ Third, dignity can refer to the higher value or worth of the office itself or of the actions performed in accordance with it. This explains why job promotion is a nearly universal desire of every employee, a professional honour and glory for which to strive.⁴²

One scholar who has argued for the contemporary relevance of this account of dignity is political philosopher Jeremy Waldron, who urges us to understand dignity as a quasi-legal status held by all persons and constituted by a cluster of rights and norms of respectful treatment. Waldron’s strategy for recommending this conception of dignity is twofold. First, he retrieves the idea of rank-dignity, or dignity as high standing as an aspirational model, a kind of life to which those especially at the bottom of the totem pole can aspire, for a dignified person in this picture of life is able to enjoy certain social benefits that are generally not available to others. One of these benefits is commanding authority, not only in the sense of having control over one’s affairs, but also having one’s claims recognised by others. As philosopher Elizabeth Anderson explains,

To have dignity entails having the authority to command others to act or refrain from acting and to hold them accountable for their conduct. It entails having a voice in decision-making, being entitled to speak for oneself and to demand reasons for complying with others’ requests. Beings of lower rank have none of these attributes. Like animals, they might be bent to the will of others by goading or prodding. Or as servants, they may simply be ordered to do things. No reasons need be offered to get them to do what commanding authorities want them to do.⁴³

40 Watson JDE. 2016. *A Universal Human Dignity: Its Nature, Ground and Limits*. Ph.D. Thesis, University of Exeter, 42.

41 Watson, *A Universal Human Dignity*, 43.

42 For a robust discussion of this idea, see Sangiovanni A. 2017. *Humanity Without Dignity: Moral Equality, Respect and Human Rights*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; Den Hartogh G. 2014. “Is human dignity the ground of human rights?” in Düwell M et al (eds) *The Cambridge Handbook of Human Dignity: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 200-07.

43 Anderson E. 2014. “Human Dignity as a concept for the economy”, Düwell et al. (eds), *The Cambridge Handbook of Human Dignity*, 494.

Going back to the story with which I started, it seems only husbands are presumed to have this authority to issue commands, which was why the husband in our opening story had no scruple commanding the wife to vacate his house because she could not give him the kind of children he desired. Another benefit of dignity is dignified bearing or conduct. Figuratively and literally, "dignified persons stand erect, hold their heads high, address demands to others with a confident sense of their own entitlements and manifest pride in their appearance and conduct. Lowly persons bow and scrape, beg and wheedle and humble themselves before their superiors".⁴⁴ The third and final benefit is that dignified persons are "objects of others' respect. Others take their entitlements as normally conclusive reasons for action, address them with honourable titles and manifest respect by obeying other norms of civility towards them. Lowly persons are treated with contempt."⁴⁵

In short, rank-dignity, as Waldron construes it, entitles its possessor to live a life free of humiliation and infantilisation. "We suffer indignity – humiliation and/or infantilization – when our public presence goes unacknowledged, when we cringe before the powerful, when we are unduly subject to the paternalistic will of others and when we are denied the opportunity to employ our reason and voice in making choices that affect us."⁴⁶

Waldron's second strategy is to shift the structural direction of dignity from being a template for hierarchical relationships to a horizontal one. In plain language, a society that embraces an ideal of dignity is committed to generalizing to all its citizens the high standing formerly reserved for a privileged few. The commitment is expressed through the institutionalisation of human rights into the society's legal and political structure. Of all the means through which a society may want to assure its citizens of their equality under the law, none is more powerful and effective than the human rights idea, Waldron argues. As he explains, it was the human rights revolution, which was inspired by a hermeneutical shift in the understanding of dignity from a socially contingent but defeasible status to a non-transactional moral status, that made possible the equalisation and democratisation of rank and nobility. It ennobled and conferred an elevated rank upon everyone, thus transforming dignity from being a language of privilege to that of right, making it not only the ground, but also the content, of rights.⁴⁷

As Justice Aharon Barak, former President of the Supreme Court of Israel, says, in agreeing with Waldron, "most central of all human rights is the right to dignity. It is the source from which all other human rights are derived. Dignity unites the other human rights into a whole".⁴⁸ The result, according to Waldron, is that "Every

44 Anderson, "Human Dignity as a concept for the economy", 494.

45 Anderson, "Human Dignity as a concept for the economy", 494.

46 Josiah Ober J. 2014 "Meritocratic and civic dignity in Greco-Roman Antiquity", in Düwell et al (eds), *The Cambridge Handbook of Human Dignity*, 53-54.

47 Waldron J. 2013. "Citizenship and Dignity", in McCrudden C (ed). *Understanding Human Dignity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 327-43.

48 Daly, *Dignity Rights*, 1.

man [becomes] a duke, every woman a queen, everyone entitled to the sort of deference and consideration, everyone's person and body [becomes] sacrosanct, in the way that nobles were entitled to deference or in the way that an assault upon the body or the person of a king was regarded as a sacrilege."⁴⁹ If we follow this line of reasoning, what it would then mean when we say all persons have dignity is that we all command or should command the rights and respect previously enjoyed by an elite few. This is not an insignificant claim and will be a spectacular political achievement in a world that seems morally insouciant to the logic and allure of tyranny and oppression. However, we should not overlook what appear to be the underbellies of this conception of dignity. Three are worthy of note. First, on this conception, dignity is something that is conferred, rather than something that is inherent in persons. This raises an important question about whether one's humanity alone is sufficient to be conferred with dignity. The evidence around us points to the contrary, whether in Africa or elsewhere. The contemporary social reality of dignity in many parts of the world seems to reflect specific understandings of power relations in which contingent factors – class, race, religion, nationality, ability, etc. – are deployed to rank people. Rather than being a universal feature available to all, a conferred dignity is “an expression of how a particular constellation of values, beliefs and understandings structures and constrains social arrangements in a given context”.⁵⁰

In an age where decades-long achievements on voting rights and other forms of citizenship empowerments are being reversed with venomous frenzy and clamours are rising to high heavens to close borders against non-compatriots, or as we see in many countries of the Global South where a few members of the elite have cornered and monopolised the levers of power for years, it would be nothing short of ethical malpractice to assume that our membership in universal humanity can still be taken for granted. Thus, predicating access to dignity upon the social practice of conferment risks leaving large segments of the human family out in the rain, for not only the criteria by which dignity is conferred but also those who keep the conferment gate have historically tended toward exclusivism and nothing now suggests that that paradigm would change anytime soon. Prevailing social practices and the values that ground them still apportion dignity and shape our understanding of the “human” with which it is associated “in ways that exclude as much as include, that mark out only the members of certain groups as truly, fully human, while others are regarded as second class”.⁵¹

49 Waldron J. 2012. *Dignity, Rank, Rights* (The Berkeley Tanner Lectures). New York: Oxford University Press, 34.

50 Goodhart M. 2018. “Constructing Dignity: Human Rights as a Praxis of Egalitarian Freedom”, *Journal of Human Rights* 17(4):405.

51 Herdt JA. 2021 “Of Wild Beasts and Bloodhounds: John Locke and Frederick Douglass on the Forfeiture of Humanity”, *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 41(2):208. For an insightful development of this point, see Phillips A. 2015. *The Politics of the Human*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 10.

This, then, is the second unattractive feature of dignity as elevated status, in that it can be lost and not necessarily due to anything that its possessor may have done but precisely because it is tied to the whims and caprices of others. Since dignity is conferred, on this conception, it can be revoked. The extreme form of this revocation, as philosopher and ethicist Jennifer Herdt has shown, takes place in the context of our criminal justice system where the discourse and ritual of punishment, which she rightly regards as communicative action, often become excuses for treating others as less than human and not deserving of any moral considerability. The intellectual source of this conflation is, ironically, John Locke, to whom conventional reading attributes advocacy of basic human equality. However, in Locke's less-known meditations on aggression and punishment, we encounter "slippage between the quite unobjectionable notion that specific rights may in particular circumstances be forfeited and the deeply troubling claim that one's moral standing as human can as such be relinquished".⁵² For every one step our society has taken to move away from this Lockean legacy, we take five steps backward, reinforcing in almost every jurisdiction the notion "that particular human individuals or groups can act in ways that forfeit their moral standing as fellow humans, such that they are bestialized, categorized as non-human animals".⁵³ Are there ways to rectify these flaws? I will now briefly examine another conception of dignity for this possibility, building on the work of philosophers Michael Rosen and Suzy Killmister, who lay out contours of human dignity especially well.⁵⁴

DIGNITY AS INNER WORTH

Those who hold this conception of dignity understand it principally as an inestimable inner worth that grounds our standing to make moral claims. The major proponent of this view in Western philosophy was Immanuel Kant who, especially in his *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1796), interprets dignity as an attribute of the human person that is not subject to a bargain or barter because it is above all price. Because this attribute inheres in us, it cannot be a means to a further end, but rather an end in itself. So conceived, he identifies dignity with autonomy, as only the moral law has a worth above all price and thus only human beings have dignity, insofar as we alone have the capacity to respect the moral law, which we do through the exercise of our moral autonomy.

The antecedent view to which Kant aimed his argument was not just the emerging laissez-faire economic ideology of the era, but a major philosophical fortress of that ideology, Thomas Hobbes, for whom "dignity refers solely to the *public* worth or value of an individual, as determined by the inter-subjective judgement

52 Herdt, "Of Wild Beasts and Bloodhounds", 209.

53 Herdt, "Of Wild Beasts and Bloodhounds", 209.

54 See Rosen M. 2012. *Dignity: Its History and Meaning*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. Killmister S. 2020. *Contours of Dignity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, ch 2.

of society",⁵⁵ rather than being an inherent human attribute. He made this point forcefully in his *Leviathan*:

The value or worth of a man, is as of other things, his price; that is to say, so much as would be given for the use of his power: and therefore is not absolute; but a thing dependent on the need and judgment of another ... let a man (as most men do,) rate themselves as the highest value they can; yet their true value is no more than it is esteemed by others ... The publique worth of a man, which is the value set on him by the Common-wealth, is that which men commonly dignity.⁵⁶

In contrast to this instrumentalist conception, Kant asserts human dignity as an unconditional and incomparable worth, which has value in and of itself. He is unapologetically optimistic in his view of human nature, for he sincerely believes that if we share this view with him, we would be willing to "test our principles to see whether they could be a universal law of nature, because that will show whether we have really given all human beings equal respect and concern, or whether we have unfairly favoured our own case".⁵⁷ More importantly, we would recognise that what respect for human dignity requires is to treat the human being as an end, rather than merely as a means to one's own purposes.⁵⁸

As many scholars have noted, Kant is hardly alone in understanding dignity as an inherent attribute of human beings. In fact, Kant was paying homage in his theory to an earlier view attributed to the Greeks and Stoics, who believe that "the basis for human community is the worth of reason in each and every human being".⁵⁹ In the Stoic view, reason – that is, practical reason, the capacity for moral choice – is a portion of the divine in each of us. And each and every human being, just by virtue of having rational capacities, has boundless worth. Male or female, slave or free, king or peasant, all are alike of boundless moral value and the dignity of reason is worthy of respect wherever it is found. Moreover, even if human beings vary in their moral attainments, their moral value is fundamentally equal and a source of our equal worth across all that divides us.⁶⁰

Jewish and then Christian theology subsequently refined this theory by developing a conception of the value of the human person linked to the condition of having been created in the *imago Dei* ("in the image and likeness of God"), thus making their dignity derivative. As philosopher Kurt Bayertz explains, "human dignity is viewed here as reflecting the dignity of God",⁶¹ and dignity is used, in turn, to

55 Watson, *A Universal Human Dignity*, 65 (emphasis in the original).

56 Hobbes T. 1968. *Leviathan* [1651]. London: Penguin, 151-152.

57 Nussbaum, "Human Dignity and Political Entitlements", 353.

58 Nussbaum, "Human Dignity and Political Entitlements", 353.

59 Nussbaum, "Human Dignity and Political Entitlements", 352.

60 Nussbaum, "Human Dignity and Political Entitlements", 352.

61 Bayertz K. 1996. "Human Dignity: Philosophical Origin and Scientific Erosion of an Idea", in Bayertz K (ed). *Sanctity of Life and Human Dignity*. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 73.

distinguish humanity from the rest of creation. It is a theological anthropology that reflected the medieval belief in a Great Chain of Being, in which humanity was placed above all animals but below the angels and which finds its locus classicus in Thomas Aquinas's *Summa Theologica*: "Free-will is part of man's dignity. But the angels' dignity surpasses that of men".⁶² The merit of understanding dignity as an inner worth lies in its attempt to rectify the flaws of its connotation as high rank, which is to remove dignity from the accidents of fortune in order to give it its due reverence. "If moral capacities or God's image in us are of equal and infinite worth, then they can't be the sort of thing that is tarnished or eclipsed by fortune: for otherwise the degree of people's human worth will be dependent on fortune and the well-born and healthy will be worth more than the ill-born and hungry."⁶³

But this conception of dignity is not without its shortcomings. First, Kant restricts dignity to human beings, thus creating what has been called "the animals problem" in his theory, in which the descriptions of human worth involve a pejorative comparison with non-human animals. The Christian theology of the Great Chain of Being is also susceptible to this flaw. Both theories not only split humans off from other animals more sharply than the evidence supports, refusing to grant any share in intelligence, they also deny "without any argument that there is any dignity or end-like worth inherent in those human capacities in which animals also partake, such as sentience, everyday (non-moral) practical reasoning, emotion and the capacity for love and care. Thus, the split not only slights the other animals, it also slights elements in human life that would appear to have worth, urging us to respect only a small sliver of ourselves."⁶⁴ As philosopher Robin Dillon warns, "in claiming that only rational beings are ends in themselves deserving of respect, [Kantian ethics] licenses treating all things which aren't persons as mere means to the ends of rational beings and so it supports morally abhorrent attitudes of domination and exploitation toward all nonpersons and toward our natural environment".⁶⁵

This instrumental and potentially exploitative attitude toward and treatment of non-human animals and the environment is contrary to the indigenous morality of many African societies, whose sense of consanguinity is not confined to human relations but includes a sacral and primordial connection to the spirit world and the biosphere. As African religion scholar Jacob Olupona rightly argues, precisely because "several African societies, individuals, lineages, villages and towns

62 Aquinas T. 2006. *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province [1912]. Reprint Edition. Raleigh, NC: Hayes Barton Press.

63 Nussbaum, "Human Dignity and Political Entitlements", 355.

64 Nussbaum, "Human Dignity and Political Entitlements", 354-5. See also Rosen, *Dignity*, 2 ("The influence of Kant has helped make it natural for people now to assume that all dignity in the full sense of the word has to be human dignity. But before Kant this was not so – and nor was it so in the Catholic tradition after Kant. Kant's conception of dignity makes an exception of human beings from the rest of creation.")

65 Dillon RS. 2003. "Respect", in Zalta EN and Nodelman U (eds). *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Fall 2022 Edition.

maintain totemic kinship relationship with animals, trees and plants”,⁶⁶ these forces make moral claim on us for dignified treatment and preservation, not simply for humanistic or self-interested reasons, but because they are “hierophanies through which divine essence or power is manifested”.⁶⁷

The second issue with this theory is what it identifies as the attribute in virtue of which humans are owed respect and moral concern, which is reason. A strict interpretation of this argument would suggest that infants and at least some severely cognitively disabled individuals do not have dignity. However we cash out the capacities necessary for rationality or moral reasoning, there will be some age below which we lack those capacities and some level of cognitive impairment beyond which those capacities are lacking. And since dignity grounds the claim that individuals must be treated with respect (i.e., as ends rather than means), we are led towards the particularly distasteful conclusion that infants and some severely disabled individuals need not be accorded respect or moral concern. Examples abound in history – Nazi Germany, eugenics associated with anti-miscegenation laws and exploitative medical experiments in third world countries – are grim reminders of how easy it is for societies to degrade, instrumentalise and humiliate those considered less than human.

A third and perhaps the most devastating, challenge that the conception of dignity as inner worth faces is its view of the quality or comportment that is considered admirable for a dignified person to have. Because the locus of dignity is internal rather than external, it has been used to construct, in both secular and religious contexts, a doctrine of the worthlessness of external, especially material, goods. Money, honour, status – but also health, education, friendship, the lives of children and spouse – all these things, the theory seems to suggest, have no true worth, nor should they ever be the objects of eager attachment. One should recognise that only virtue and moral capacity deserve our reverence. Even in the face of oppression, poverty and humiliation, one should strive to develop the qualities of composure, calmness, restraint, reserve and subdued emotions or securely controlled passions; for after all, one’s worth is intangible, invulnerable and inaccessible to destructive or corruptive or subversive interference. Dignity is thus comparable, metaphorically, to something like “tempered steel”. It tends to connote the “features of self-contained serenity, of a certain inward and toned-down but yet translucent and perceptible power of self-assertion: the dignified type of character is of emphatic activity rather than sullenly passive, perhaps impassive rather than impassible, patient rather than anxiously defensive and devoid but not incapable of aggressiveness”.⁶⁸ In short, it is a conception of dignity that can easily be used, even if inadvertently, to valourise

66 Olupona JK. 2000. “African Religions and the Global Issues of Population, Consumption and Ecology”, in Coward H and Maguire DC (eds) *Visions of a New Earth: Religious Perspectives on Population, Consumption and Ecology*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 184-85.

67 Olupona, “African Religions and the Global Issues of Population, Consumption and Ecology”, 186.

68 Kolnai A. 1976. “Dignity”, *Philosophy* 51:253-4.

suffering, oppression and poverty. In many countries of the Global South, but even here as well, this is too much a burden to impose upon already helpless and defenceless people.

HUMAN DIGNITY, HUMAN RIGHTS AND THE POLITICS OF CONTESTATION

In this final section, I want to reiterate the argument already advanced in different forms in this essay, that there are good and unassailable reasons for understanding human dignity and human rights as reciprocal anchors and catalysts for each other, with neither playing a subordinate or perfunctory role. They both denote an ensemble of moral goods, often articulated as entitlements, which accrue not just in consequence of citizenship, but also of universal human status and together constitute features of a flourishing life, that is, life that is “good, or worthwhile, in the broadest sense”.⁶⁹ When human beings are denied or stripped of either of them, an unfortunate lot of many people in the world today, especially in Africa, it is not because of voluntary forfeiture but a result of external coercive forces. This explains why both continue to function, separately and conjointly, as vocabularies for emancipatory praxis, animating groups and individuals to undertake struggles against what political philosopher Iris Marion Young called “faces of oppression”, identified as exploitation, marginalisation, powerlessness, cultural pluralism and violence.⁷⁰

Thus, codifying them as both grounds and objects of each other – e.g., first, that “all human rights derive from the dignity and worth inherent in the human person”,⁷¹ and second, that “economic, social and cultural rights [are] indispensable for [persons’] dignity and the free development of [their] personality” – send both moral and legal signals to the global human family about the threshold for acceptable conduct at the level of both interpersonal relations and state policies. Philosopher Christina Lafont rightly points out that these references fulfil at least three important functions. First, they help “*identify* the bearers of the rights in question”, without which it would be impossible to convey whether rights (1) “apply to all human beings or only to some”, (2) “apply only to human beings or to other subjects as well”, or (3) “apply to all human beings equally (or only to different degrees depending on differences in social or political positions, achievements and so on)”. Second, references to human dignity serve to “*justify* the demarcation of rights bearers” and clarify “why this demarcation is not simply an arbitrary stipulation, but instead grounded in something that all and only those bearers have in common, which also has high moral significance”. Third, such references serve to “identify

69 Pogge T. 1999. “Human Flourishing and Universal Justice”, *Social Philosophy and Policy* 16(1):333.

70 See Young IM. 2011. *Justice and the Politics of Difference*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 48-62.

71 Vienna Declaration, World Conference on Human Rights, Vienna, 14-25 June 1993, U.N. Doc. A/CONF.157/24 (Part I) at 20 (1993).

the ultimate aim of human rights practice, namely, protecting the inherent dignity of all human beings and, in so doing, convey *why* having such a practice matters".⁷²

However, regarding how the two concepts can effectively deliver on their normative expectations, we may have to move beyond the realm of philosophical and legal theorisation to that of *praxis*, understood as "the (real) social and political activity or rights-claiming by groups and individuals, including the thinking that orients it and the practices through which it is advanced".⁷³ Differently put, by reading fewer texts in legal and moral philosophy and paying more attention to the voices and strategies of grassroots human rights advocates and social movements, we will be better able to appreciate the emancipatory thrust of human dignity and human rights claims as fundamentally an expression of a commitment to freedom and equality for all. For "if people have different [dignity and/or] rights, or different entitlements to them, then the effectiveness of rights [and dignity] claims against arbitrary power is undercut".⁷⁴

Aristotle may have understood politics as "deliberations by which we order life in the polis, to make human goods and human virtues possible",⁷⁵ but the persuasive power of social movements lies in their deployment of what social scientists have called "contestation" as a strategy for making moral claims on each other. To contend is to argue, usually with someone, about shared moral meanings or a common moral frame. Examples of these shared moral meanings in Africa are the dignitarian affirmations in many national constitutions that certain conditions are crucial for personal and communal flourishing. They include the protection of physical and civil security, the guarantee of civil-political liberties, provision of socio-economic goods and support for communal self-determination and cultural development. To the extent that all these conditions still elude many Africans, many civil society organisations have emerged not just as surrogate institutions that provide services that state governments are unwilling or unable to provide, but as social movements that help channel, through structured contestation, the anger and outrage of politically and economically disenfranchised citizens.⁷⁶ As others have explained, "contentious politics" consists of coordinated contention by groups around a shared agenda, involving governments as "targets, initiators of claims, or third parties".⁷⁷ Practices shaped by this politics "span a spectrum from pure moral

72 Lafont C. 2016. "Should We Take the 'Human' our of Human Rights? Human Dignity in a Corporate World", *Ethics & International Affairs* 30(2):238.

73 Goodhart, "Constructing Dignity", 407.

74 Goodhart, "Constructing Dignity", 407.

75 Lovin R. 2008. *Christian Realism and the New Realities*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 12.

76 See Stout J. 2012. *Blessed Are the Organized: Grassroots Democracy in America*. Princeton: Princeton University Press; Macamo E. 2011. "Social Criticism and Contestation: Reflections on the Politics of Anger and Outrage", *Stichproben. Wiener Zeitschrift für kritische Afrikastudien*, [Samples. Vienna Journal of African Studies] 11:45-68.

77 Tilly C and Tarrow S. 2006 *Contentious Politics*. New York: Oxford University Press, 4.

argument at one end, to riots, war and other violent acts on the other".⁷⁸ Regardless of the form these activities might take – from "petitioning, publicity campaigns, theatrical performances, candlelight vigils, litigation and political campaigns, to street demonstrations, boycotts, teach-ins, sit-ins, picketing, strikes, building occupations and other forms of civil disobedience" – their aim is to disrupt "habitual ways of life"⁷⁹ that are epitomised by multiple manifestations of "the corporeality of dehumanization" or "dehumanizing atrocities" across the continent.⁸⁰

The Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), representing the entire teaching staff of federal and state universities in Nigeria, were on strike for ten months between 2022 and 2023, demanding better salaries and funding of the nation's tertiary institutions. Whatever benefits African workers have been able to squeeze from their governments have usually been through such organised protests, but it is a mechanism that still leaves out a larger percentage of the people who are not government employees or unemployed. Citizens in this latter category rely on the contentious activities of other civil society groups, such as the "Save Nigeria Group", (an interreligious human rights organisation) to make their demands known and intelligible. Whatever the protesting conduit may be, "contention aims to secure the satisfaction of claims by eliciting the recognition of those in power of the legitimacy of those claims and thereby the incorporation into social institutions of an established recognition of those claims".⁸¹ Pastor Tunde Bakare of Nigeria invokes a Yoruba proverb to explain the rationale for deploying this strategy: "When a man keeps quiet, what is on his body will keep quiet with him as well".⁸²

He goes further to articulate an argument that seems to be excerpted from the notebook of a United Nations Rapporteur on human dignity and human rights. Anticipating that some people might be confused as to why a pastor, a man of God, "whose job is supposed to be preaching about the virtues which will transport people from the misery of their earthly bodies to a place of perfection where the streets are paved with gold, [should] concern himself with earthly politics, after all, our kingdom is not of this world", he directs such potential cynics to the Hebrew prophets, who "didn't merely cavort with kings while the state of Israel was being vandalized by pretend-leaders".⁸³ Seeing his own ministry against this backdrop, he opines that "men of God cannot afford to stand on the sidelines muttering pious incoherencies while their country is embroiled in a political and social crisis",

78 Anderson E. 2015. "Moral Bias and Corrective Practices: A Pragmatist Perspective", *Proceedings and Addresses of the APA* 89:32.

79 Anderson, "Moral Bias and Corrective Practices", 32, 33.

80 Oliver S. 2010. "Dehumanization: Perceiving the Body as (In)Human", in Kaufmann P et al. *Humiliation, Degradation, Dehumanization: Human Dignity Violated*. Dordrecht: Springer, 85-97.

81 Anderson, "Moral Bias and Corrective Practices", 33.

82 Bakare T. 2012. "Why We Cannot Wait or Be Quiet" (A welcome address delivered at a public rally in Lagos, Nigeria on 12 November 2012). Available at <https://herald008.wordpress.com/2012/11/>. [Accessed 19 September 2023.]

83 Bakare, "Why We Cannot Wait or Be Quiet".

defending his stance on sounds like dignitarian grounds that: “a preacher’s duty does not stop with the soul of the flock. It spreads to the soul of the nation as well because the flock of God does not live in a vacant space. The people of God do not live on an island where they are hermetically shut from the challenges confronting everyone, Christians and non-Christians alike. They live in the general world and so our religious sensibility extends to social responsibility as well. We simply cannot afford to look away from the rot that goes on in the world.”⁸⁴ This seems to me to be an effective way to mobilise people to build a world in which dignity-inspired rights can be enjoyed by everybody.

⁸⁴ Bakare, “Why We Cannot Wait or Be Quiet”.