

ENVIRONMENTAL CHALLENGES IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA: POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

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Abstract

Departing from John Herbert Michael Agar's contention that "the truth that makes people free is for the most part the truth which people prefer not to hear," I focus this article on two all too often implied, although not explicitly formulated, major triggers of Africa's predicaments – including environmental degradation.¹ I argue that while the ruling elites (Africans and non-Africans alike) have been, and still are, the major players in the development and exacerbation of the myriad of problems facing Africa and its people, this elemental dimension has not received sufficient academic attention. I also ascertain how the challenges facing Africa and its people – ranging from environmental degradation to cultural putrefy, and from political paralysis to economic stagnation, are, while inseparably interlinked, largely stem from the denial of agency and humanity to the vast poor and struggling segments of society by the ruling elites.² Linking these two dimensions, I marshal evidence from across diverse fields and different academic disciplines that indicate:

- (a) How the many institutions put in place by the ruling elites, and the alien and alienating policies and programs they have repeatedly promoted, have driven populations living in poverty and squalor to destroy the environments where they live, that surround them, and depend on for their livelihood.
- (b) How the failure by African and non-African academics, international and

¹ This quotation, attributed to John Herbert Michael Agar, can be accessed online at: < <http://www.wfs.org/Q-abc-htm> > February 17, 2004

² Lately, this dimension is increasingly beginning to capture the attention of most environmentally inclined students and scholars of Africa and policymakers – thanks, in part, to the resurgence of the communitarian political discourse of environmental and economic sustainability.

development agencies and policymakers to listen (and hear with respect) and accordingly respond to the priorities and needs of the poorer segments of society has intensified the on-going systematic breakdown of Africa's institutions of socialization and destruction of crucial life support systems.

Although in a very different context, Mark Taylor, quoting Derrida, offers a glimpse of what I systematically investigate in this article. That is, as he notes, how “every structure – literary, psychological, social, economic, political, religious, etc – that organizes human experience is constituted and maintained through acts of exclusion. In the process of creating something, something else is inevitably left out. These exclusive structures [in turn] can become repressive – but that repression comes with consequences. ...What is repressed does not disappear; it always returns to unsettle every construction.”³

³ Mark C. Taylor. 2004. “What Derrida Really Meant.” *The New York Times*, October 14.

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Introduction

Upon reading, and there is indeed a lot to read, a sizeable number of books, journal articles, Internet commentaries, newspaper editorials and other reports on Africa, one cannot fail to notice at least two seemingly emerging consensus. The challenges confronting the continent of Africa and its people, especially its vast poor majority, are all well too known by African academics, national, regional and international development agencies and even policymakers. Their root causes and the solutions that are required are also well documented and widely recognized.

This common-place knowledge notwithstanding, two major triggers of Africa's crises – including environmental degradation – have thus far, as already noted, received insufficient academic attention. Although a lot has been written on what the underlying causes of Africa's problems are and the solutions that are required, little has been written about the role that the ruling elites (African and non-Africans alike) have played in the development and exacerbation of Africa's predicaments. In fact, this elemental dimension has to the present remained unregistered on the academic radar. The extent and degree How Africa's vast challenges are intricately intertwined, and how they are to a greater extent connected to the intermittent denial of agency, humanity and input of especially Africa's women, rural peasants and urban poor by the ruling elites (both African and non-Africans), has also remained largely unexplored.

It is, therefore, upon these two dimensions that I mainly focus this. However, moving in this direction, I also open up (for further debates and reflection) two other important challenges, which, I believe, require immediate and extraordinary investment of resources (time, labor and capital) if Africa and its people were to

ameliorate not only the accelerating environmental crisis but also other pressing challenges as well. One is the indispensability of addressing Africa's challenges through interdisciplinary approaches, contexts, and collaborations. The other is steering clear of the stupendous temptation – most notably exemplified by many intelligent and thoughtful students and scholars of Africa, higher-ranking bureaucrats, development partners and political elites – to prescribe quick-fix answers and solutions to Africa's otherwise complex, heterogeneous, yet crosscutting problems. Following are the reasons why, I believe, these two somewhat overlapping concerns merit a lot more attention.

Interdisciplinary approaches, contexts and collaborations

Thus far, in Africa — as it is the case elsewhere in the world — the accelerating environmental crisis, for example, has been examined through diverse academic lenses. Historians, Anthropologists, philosophers, theologians, legal scholars, artists, writers, literary and art critics, journalists, political scientists, sociologists, economists, scientists and even lay persons have, based on their training and experience, variously shed light on what each consider the primary root causes of Africa's predicaments to be and the answers and solutions that are required.

Of course, insights and ideas from each of the aforementioned disciplines have a distinctive role to play especially in terms of enlarging our understanding of Africa's problems. However, considered in isolation, independent of one another, the findings and insights from the aforementioned disciplines cannot conceivably help prevent, let alone resolve, the legion of life-threatening conditions that all too often drive poorer, struggling segments of society in Africa to destroy environments where they live, that surround them and that they depend on for their livelihood.

An effective strategy should and must involve a lot more than merely drifting as most scholars and policymakers all too often do into their supposedly “comfortable zones” of academic specialization and fields of competency. Granted what we now know, or rather profess to know, about the root causes of Africa’s widespread problems and how such causes could be effectively addressed, those who advise and influence the direction of Africa's recovery in virtually all facets of human life should now shift their focus elsewhere. As a first step, they need to begin investing considerable resources (time, brainpower, labor and capital) in contexts that are far more likely to produce a unifying framework. A framework through which, and from which, the many competing scripts and roadmaps to Africa's recovery that are spelled out in the humanities, social and natural sciences could ultimately be harmonized. This goal, it seems to me, should and must now become one of Africa's top priority agendas. As Donna Maher reminds us in her paper, “Re-visioning Development in a Changing Environment:”

To comprehend the extremely intricate interactions between human societies (which constantly deconstruct and reconstruct themselves) and the evolving ecology that sustains us, we must explore a variety of different and emerging fields of study and research. Our new world requires of us a new perception, and multidisciplinary collaboration is vital to tackling the complex array of issues concerning the ‘environment’ and our relationship with it...Cross-pollination and the sharing of ideas [should be encouraged over the still-reductionist education systems, growing specialization, and the sheer increase of ideas and information that is seldom synthesized.¹

The World Commission on the social dimensions of globalization arrives at a similar conclusion in its report, “A Fair Globalization: Creating Opportunities For All,” of 2004.² Among other concerns, this report – compiled by eminent scholars drawn from

¹ Maher’s article is available on line at: http://www.acdi.cida.gc.ca/cida_ind.nsf/0/c/d2a4210ae541318526a4c007b14b3?openDocument March 13, 2003.

different parts of the world and working in different areas of expertise – accentuates the importance of actively and consciously promoting “multi-stakeholder dialogues, bringing all relevant actors together to work toward agreement (and authentic consent) on key policy issues.”³

However, as important as this goal may be, in the burgeoning body of literature on Africa there are, to the present day, only a few isolated works that incorporate the plurality of voices and insights gleaned from the many fields and diverse academic disciplines and especially from Africa and African academics. I therefore see this article as a first step in not only bridging this lacuna but also stimulating more focused research in this hitherto unexplored vineyard.

Shunning quick-fix answers and solutions

With respect to the latter concern of steering clear of the stupendous temptation to prescribe half baked answers and solutions to Africa’s otherwise complex, heterogeneous, yet crosscutting challenges, a closer reading of the existing literature,

² The International Labor Organization commissioned this study. The fully report can be accessed on line at: <[Http://www.ilo.org/public/english/bureau/inf/pr/2004/7.htm](http://www.ilo.org/public/english/bureau/inf/pr/2004/7.htm)> March 13, 2003

³. Benefits likely to accrue from such an undertaking abound. First, such a move might minimize duplication of research efforts and organizational fragmentation. Second, if judiciously undertaken, it will make the multiplicity of voices expressed in the diverse fields of study and research easily accessible to interested and relevant parties. Third, it may help in breaking down the current impasse which, as the World commission on the social dimension of globalization rightly notes, has regrettably fostered “parallel monologues” and a “dialogue of the deaf” among and between academicians, public agencies and private researchers. Last, and perhaps most important, such a move may provide relevant actors – Africa’s ruling elite and the host of international consultants based in Africa – with a clear sense of purpose when translating the many proposed ideas from diverse fields of study into more integrated and synergistic policies.

especially on Africa's environmental crisis, point to a nearby unanimous consensus. And that is, the view that the panacea whereby to effectively address – or, failing that, to reduce to a minimum – Africa's monumental challenges, including environmental destruction, largely lie in formulating and implementing integrated and synergistic solutions. Such solutions must, however, according to Chinua Achebe, come out of Africa's own roots and also accommodate the priorities, legitimate needs, hopes, dreams and goals of local communities. They must, additionally, neither compromise environmental protection goals nor lose sight of the fact that sub-Saharan Africa is, as any other region in the world, not an island unto itself. Africa is, has always been, and will continue to be, an integral part of the world that is now, for good or for worse, becoming increasingly too small, too overpopulated and that its resources are exceedingly shrinking in direct proportion to the ever increasing power of human destruction.

However, in spite of this knowledge, many students and scholars of Africa – not to mention development partners, senior civil servants and political elites – continue, and quite lamentably, to prescribe quick-fix answers and solutions to Africa's complex, heterogeneous, yet crosscutting problems. In the relatively new field of environmental ethics, which is the focus (or is it the goal?) of this article, spectacular examples include the works of, among other distinguished deans of environmental ethics, J. Baird Callicott and Holmes Rolston III. Their obviously dissimilar environmental recovery roadmaps, clearly elucidated in their respective articles "African Biocommunitarianism" and "Feeding People Versus Saving Nature," gravitate toward prescribing quick-fix answers and solutions to the myriad of challenges facing Africa and Africans. See chapters one and two for more details on these two articles.

Structure and outline

Using these two articles and the responses they have thus far generated as my entry point into the on-going environmental recovery debates, I defend my already laid out thesis in three broad parts.⁴ Part one, examining how Callicott and Rolston frame their discourse on Africa's environmental predicaments and how they then proceed to determine what would be pivotal to ameliorating the run away environmental crisis, is divided into two chapters. These two chapters demonstrate how, contrary to Callicott's and Rolston's suggestions in the aforementioned articles (which I will explain shortly), the melioration of Africa's monumental environmental crisis will require much more than merely seeking to realign Africa's environmental recovery discourse to (a) the parameters of the anthropocentric versus nonanthropocentric debates and (b) organic views in which humans and nature are connected. This is how I proceed.

Chapter one, "Callicott's African Biocommunitarianism Revisited," critically examines Callicott's take on African traditional religious worldviews and intellectual traditions in two moves. In the first move, I provide a recapitulation of Callicott's argument, which simply stated goes as follows: Since traditional African religious worldviews and intellectual traditions tend to promote a *homosapiensphilia* outlook, they cannot then provide conceptual resources from which to reconstruct a non-human, nature-

⁴ I have selected these two articles as my ideal case studies for two reasons. First, generating as it were long drawn out debates in Western environmental circles, Callicott's and Rolston's articles provide an excellent point of entry into the on-going debate in environmental ethics while also calling for renewed reflection. Second, while these two articles have had a wide coverage in the existing literature on environmental ethics in the West, not one of them, at least to my knowledge, has captured the attention of environmental students and scholars in Africa. Hence, I consider my take on both and the discussions that each has generated thus far as a preface to the extension of this debate beyond Western environmental circles.

centered, ethic.⁵ Precisely for this reason, Callicott therefore counsels that Africa's environmental recovery initiatives ought to be necessarily realigned within the context of Aldo Leopold's land ethic.

In the second move, challenging Callicott's position that African traditional religious worldviews and intellectual traditions could not in their current form provide the raw materials from which a nonanthropocentric, nature-centered, ethic might proliferate, I focus my attention on at least four neglected aspects in his narrative. These are Africa's indigenous land ethic; diverse relationships that humans in traditional African settings had with each other, with one another, and with the physical part/s of the natural world; traditional Africa's subsistence practices and, finally; the rainbow of kinship networks of solidarity in traditional African settings.

My intension in zooming in on these four aspects, which are conspicuously missing in Callicott's narrative, is not as it would seem to appear to eulogize Africa's past heritage. To the contrary, I hope to show how despite Callicott's laudable efforts of attempting to open up the Western environmental discourses to non-Western intellectual traditions, including those from Africa, his treatment of traditional African religious worldviews and intellectual traditions is narrow in its discursive scope. It does not grapple with the mosaic of environmentally supportive systems, resources and practices (which I will shortly examine) gleaned from traditional African settings. It also fails to accommodate the priorities, dreams and goals of the growing pool of formally educated Africans who, as it were, show ambivalence toward their respective ancestral traditions and cultural heritage. In the company of their Western compatriots, for example, the

⁵ I define homosapiensphilia as an affectionate concern for human welfare, for human concerns and interests

majority of Africa's formally educated class tends to passionately defend their respective ancestral traditions. But in the company of the not formally educated rural kinfolds, who still cherish their respective ancestral values and traditions, they never hesitate to remind them why they should and must abandon many of their traditional ways of life, values and belief systems in favor of modern (read Western) ideals and modes of living.

Chapter two, "Holmes Rolston: Feeding People versus Saving Nature"

concentrates on a more immediate dilemma especially facing affluent nations, but whose resultant ramifications are mostly felt in Third World countries – including Africa, that Holmes Rolston attempted, albeit unconvincingly, to settle in his widely reprinted and discussed article: "Feeding People Versus Saving Nature." Here, I first provide a summary of how Rolston frames his argument in favor of, first, protecting the little remaining wild nature before feeding the hungry, malnourished populations who are disproportionately found in Third World countries. I then delineate and discuss some of the reasons why I am persuaded that Holmes Rolston's position, in this particular article, borders on the sphere of social irrelevance or malice. Vindicating, as it certainly does, early European conservation mentality of protecting the non-human part/s of the physical world "to the relative and sometimes absolute neglect of legitimate human needs," as Ramachandra Gupta points out, Rolston's position, if adopted in Third world countries, could further drive the poorer and struggling segments of society between a rock and hard place. It also cannot conceivably enlist the vast majority of Africa's poor into supporting environmental protection and remedial goals. More substantially, failing as it does to sufficiently grapple with: (a) Africa's development challenges and dilemmas; (b) the many survival needs and other legitimate concerns of that the poor and struggling

segments of population; (c) the major players and actors who perpetuate the many challenges facing Africa and its people, Rolston's recommendation will be of little value to Africa. What's more, his suggestion that environmental protection goals ought to come first before feeding the vast hungry, malnourished, segments of population is unmistakably at variance with the increasingly spreading mantra of developing more equitable, culturally sustainable and environmentally supportive livelihoods.

Part two, "illuminating the folly of addressing Africa's environmental crisis in isolation from the many other pressing challenges facing Africa and its people," clearly brings to light how both Rolston's and Callicott's dissimilar roadmaps to Africa's environmental recovery (in their aforementioned articles) speak to a miniscule component of Africa's environmental predicament. Two chapters suffice to vindicate this assertion.

Chapter three, "A Catalog of Africa's Problems," draw attention to how the accelerating environmental crisis in Africa cannot be decoupled from the systematic breakdown of encompassing systems of morality, rapidly collapsing economies, recurrent depressing cycles of political paralysis and widespread corruption to mention a few. To respond more effectively to the run-away environmental crisis in Africa, I here then argue, those who advise and influence Africa's roadmap to environmental recovery should and must abandon the mentality of compartmentalizing what could be said to be political, economic, moral, environmental, et cetera. All these spheres do intersect in more ways than we are often prepared to admit or know how to work with.

In fact, chapter four, "Prominently Identified Root Causes of Africa's Predicaments," supports this assertion – the folly of treating the environmental crisis as if

it were isolated from the many other pressing challenges facing Africa and its people. In this chapter, I mainly demonstrate the extent and degree to which Africa's crises, including environmental degradation are, while historically constituted by different forces and for different reasons, largely exacerbated by the ruling elites (Africans and non-Africans alike). To confirm this claim, I specifically turn the spotlight onto:

- (a) The persistent crisis of self/cultural identity in Africa
- (b) The rapacious plunder of Africa's wealth and resources by European colonialists, Africa's ruling elites and their cohorts, and multinational corporations and industrialized nations
- (c) Failures of development interventions
- (d) Africa's marginal integration in the global economy, and, finally
- (e) Africa's burgeoning population growth rates and its impact on the physical environment.

Two conclusions strongly emerge from this chapter. First is the undeniable fact that the environmental crisis in Africa cannot be resolved only by appropriating insights emanating from either the anthropocentric or non-anthropocentric approaches or both. Second, it is clear that, while other forces have in fact compounded Africa's problems, the ruling elites (Africans and non-African alike) are the major players in perpetuating the vast challenges facing Africa – including the raging environmental crisis.

Part three, "In Search of African Solutions," further explores how the ruling elites are the major players in perpetuating Africa's widespread crises. It is divided into three sections. Section one investigates a little more critically the proposal that is increasingly gaining currency in Africa. This is the claim that solutions to Africa's problems lie not in

emulating alien and alienating Western systems and models but rather in the active recovery and utilization (where necessary) of Africa's previously immobilized cultural sensibilities, resource management skills, practices, moral values and knowledge systems. Section two concentrates on the suggestion that what in fact Africa and Africans mostly require, in order to successfully restore rapidly eroding human-to-human and human-to-nature relationships, is investing substantial resources (time, brainpower, capital and et cetera) in building a foundation for a new moral republic. The third and final section focus on the claim that inducing sweeping (not cosmetic) reforms in Africa's existing institutions of governance, law regimes, policies and leadership is what ultimately will get Africa going in the right direction. Clearly, in these three sections, the targeted audience is not the rural “uneducated” folks. It is Africa's formally educated class, and especially ruling elites who decide and influence the direction and path of Africa's regeneration in all facets of human life.

Concluding this study, I not only reiterate the main argument/s arising from the preceding chapters but also identify areas that require further investigation.

Chapter One: Callicott's African Biocommunitarianism Revisited

1. A curious paradox

Callicott begins chapter eight, "African Biocommunitarianism and Australian Dreamtime," of his book by first highlighting at least two paradoxical views that are especially expressed in the West about Africa.⁶ "The mere mention of Africa," Callicott points out, "conjures up in the mind's eye a charismatic mega-fauna."⁷ For many people in the West, Africa is, among other racially loaded stereotypes, a wild jungle teeming with an infinite number and incredible variety of both fauna and flora. Theodore Roosevelt offers perhaps a more standard Western dreamscape picture of Africa as a place that is mostly inhabited by awe-inspiring and frightening marauding wild beasts. In his book, *African Game Trails* (1910), he notes, for example:

The land holds the fiercest of ravin and the fleetest and most timid of those beings that live in undying fear of talon and fang. It holds the largest and the smallest of hoofed animals. It holds the mightiest creatures that tread the earth and swim in its rivers; it also holds distant kinsfolk of these same creatures, no bigger than woodchucks, which dwell in crannies of the rocks and in the treetops. There are antelope smaller than hares, and antelope larger than oxen. There are creatures, which are the embodiments of grace and others whose huge ungainliness is like that of a shape in a nightmare. The plains are alive with droves of strange and beautiful animals whose like is not known elsewhere and with others even stranger that show both in form and temper something of the

⁶ J. Baird Callicott. *Earth Insights: A Multicultural Survey of Ecological Ethics from the Mediterranean Basin to the Australian Outback*. Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994: 156-184.

⁷ 2 Ibid. p.156

fantastic and grotesque. It is a never-ending pleasure to gaze at the great herds of buck as they move to and fro in their myriads; as they stand for their noon-tide rest in the quivering heat haze; as the long files come down to drink at the watering places; as they feed and fight and rest and make love... The wanderer sees the awful glory of sunrise and sunset in the wide waste spaces of the earth, unworn of man, changed only by the slow change of the ages through time everlasting.⁸

Concurrent with this view of Africa, in which human beings are remotely (if hardly ever) mentioned, Callicott points out, is the mind-boggling assumption in Western environmental circles that “traditional African cultures – unlike Zen Buddhism, Taoism and American Indian thought – evoke no thoughts of a nonanthropocentric, nature-centered, ethics.”⁹ In the West, many environmental ethicists are in fact largely persuaded that “African thoughts and practices orbit seemingly around human interests and concerns.”¹⁰ Precisely for this reason, Callicott conjectures, “the popular new environmental movement and scholars in the newer field of comparative environmental ethics have simply neglected indigenous Africa’s intellectual traditions when casting about for conceptual resources from which to reconstruct an exotic (whatever this means) eco-philosophy.”¹¹

1. 1. Gesture politics

This combination of circumstances, Callicott regrets, is at once paradoxical and

⁸ Cited in John Murray. ed. *Wild Africa: Three Centuries of Nature Writing From Africa*. New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993.

⁹ J. Baird Callicott. *Op.cit.* p. 156.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* p.158.

¹¹ *Ibid.* p. 156.

discomforting.¹² As he quips: “how could African peoples be blessed with such a wonderful complement of fellow voyagers in the odyssey of evolution and yet failed to have mirrored in their respective worldviews an explicitly articulated nonanthropocentric, nature-centered, ethic?”¹³

Up to this point, Callicott is obviously skeptical about the reasons that are invoked by Western environmental ethicists to justify the exclusion of Africa’s indigenous intellectual traditions when prospecting for raw materials from which to reconstruct a nonanthropocentric ethic. His skepticism notwithstanding, Callicott opts – and quite understandably – to hold his judgment in abeyance with regard to whether Western environmental ethicists are justified or not in shunning Africa’s indigenous intellectual traditions until he has familiarized himself with the relevant literature that would speak to his research agenda.¹⁴

1. 2. African traditional religions

To this end, Callicott first turns his focus on the religious worldviews of the Yoruba of Southwestern Nigeria, the San of South-central Africa, and the Lele of Congo. Focusing on these three ethnic groups in particular, and by extension other African communities, Callicott hopes to investigate whether or not their religious worldviews harbor the seeds from which a nonanthropocentric ethic might proliferate. However, upon evaluating what seem, at least to me, arbitrarily selected and tangential ethnographic accounts especially concerning the Yoruba’s religious worldview Callicott concludes with an air of finality:

¹² Ibid. p. 156.

¹³ Ibid.p.156.

¹⁴ Interestingly, the predominant culture of orality in Africa does not capture Callicott’s attention

Indigenous African religions tend to be both monotheistic and anthropocentric.

Most posit the existence of a high God, both literally and figuratively speaking who created the world... Most hold that the world was created with all its creatures for the sake of humanity ... Reinforcing anthropocentrism is ancestor worship – the belief nearly ubiquitous in Africa that the spirits of dead relatives haunt the living and must be ritually honored, served and propitiated.¹⁵

This view, as I will shortly explain, is one of the many interpretations of African religious worldviews. It is, nevertheless, not a particularly enlightened view. For persons like Callicott, whose knowledge of Africa's cultures is chiefly (if not exclusively) inferred from written sources, indigenous African religions will of course appear to promote a human-centered ethic. But for persons like this author, who have had access not only to written works on Africa but also firsthand knowledge of the mosaic of Africa's oral traditions, Callicott's assertion (above) would at best seem preposterous. Contrary to his claim, and my argument on this issue will become clearer as this chapter unfolds, in traditional African settings indigenous religions are inseparably intertwined with virtually all aspects of life. As Ambrose Moyo notes: in traditional African settings, "religion permeates all aspects of society. It is a way of life. In fact, it is identical with life itself."¹⁶ Not only does religion invest all facets of life with meaning and significance but it also ensures that specific non-human species and natural entities are bestowed with a sacred mystique and, as a result, protected through supernatural and other kinds of sanctions. This being the case, it would seem plausible to argue that in traditional African settings

¹⁵ Ibid. p. 157.

¹⁶ Yale Richmond and Phyllis Gestrin. *Into Africa: Intercultural Insights*. Yarmouth, Maine: Intercultural Press, Inc, 1998:30.

religion does promote cosmos-centric views of the world. While I will return to this issue later on, in the section below, however, I tease out some of the concomitant implications arising from Callicott's assertion that indigenous African religions tend to promote a homosapiensphilia outlook.

1. 2. 1. Deficiency of non-anthropocentric “vitamins”

Callicott seems to be suggesting that a nonanthropocentric ethic could not possibly be “distilled” from indigenous African religions. As he notes, as in Judeo-Christian and Islamic worldviews, indigenous African religious worldviews tend to place human interests and concerns at the apex of the moral pyramid. Non-human species (both sentient and non-sentient) are consigned to the very bottom of the moral pyramid and, consequently, treated as mere instruments to the achievement of human ends. To clothe this assertion with a ring of intellectual legitimacy, Callicott falls back with an absolutist faith on the works of, among other ethno-philosophers, John Mbiti, Geoffrey Parrinder, Mary Douglas, Noel King and Richard Lee.¹⁷ For example, quoting John Mbiti's widely read and critiqued book *African Religions and Philosophy* (1969), he writes:

In African myths of creation, man puts himself at the center of the universe... he ... sees the universe from that perspective. It is as if the whole world exists for man's sake. ... African peoples look for the usefulness (or otherwise) of the

¹⁷ Ethno-Philosophy — one of the identified trends in African philosophy— is considered to represent communally shared myths, folklore, religious beliefs, worldviews and so forth. As a philosophy, this trend is often invoked to validate a peoples' social values, patterns of behavior, institutional practices and myriad relationships that people forge with each other and with their natural surroundings. Other identified trends in African philosophy include: (a) nationalist ideological philosophy, (b) professional philosophy, (c) sage philosophy (or what some call philosophic sagacity); (d) hermeneutic philosophy and finally (d) artistic-literary trend of African philosophy.

universe to man. This means both what the world can do for man, and how man can use the world for his own good. This attitude toward the universe is deeply ingrained in African peoples. For that reason many people have, for example, divided animals into those which man can eat and those that he cannot eat.

Others look at plants in terms of what can be eaten by people, what can be used for curative or medical purposes, what can be used for building, fire, and so on.¹⁸

“Even Africans who regularly hunt for a living, according to Callicott, tend to take an anthropocentric stance toward the environment.”¹⁹ Elaborating a little more on this issue, Callicott, rather approvingly, quotes Mary Douglas’s description of the Lele hunter-gatherers. According to Mary Douglas, writes Callicott:

The Lele “frequently dwell on the distinction between humans and animals, emphasizing the superiority of the former and their right to exploit the latter ... Animals of the forest are ... under God’s power, though they have been given to the Lele for food.”²⁰

1. 2. 2. Lack of interest in meta-ethical debates

More interesting, though mind-boggling, is how Callicott rubs (unknowingly perhaps) the unhealed wound, the outrageous racist declaration attributed to, among other philosophers, Lévy-Bruhl, David Hume, Immanuel Kant and Hegel that when Africans are left on their own they cannot intelligently and logically grapple with meta-ethical debates. That they can only do so when prompted, for example, by Western trained anthropologists.²¹ On this matter, Callicott’s endorsement of Richard Lee’s ethnocentric

¹⁸ J. Baird Callicott. *Op.cit.* p. 157.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* p. 157.

²⁰ *Ibid.* p. 158.

²¹ These racially motivated assertions are more explicit in the works of, among other philosophers, Friedrich Hegel, Immanuel Kant, David Hume, and Levy Bruhl.

view of the San people is quite revealing:

Whatever the nature of their gods and ghosts [says Richard Lee and Callicott seem to concur] the Kung! do not spend time in philosophical discourse (except when anthropologists prod them). They are more concerned with concrete matters of life and death, health and illness in their daily lives.²²

It follows then, from this assertion, that the San (some of them, if not all) do not and perhaps could never find the time and interest to delve into meta-ethical discussions. They indeed have such immediate pressing concerns in their own life as not to have time to waste (or even to spare) discoursing over what Callicott consider, in most of his works, to be the central theoretical question in environmental ethics: and that is, “the concern as to whether or not nature as a whole, or some of its constituent parts, has intrinsic value.”

As he writes, in his paper “Intrinsic Value in Nature: A Meta-ethical Analysis”:

How to discover intrinsic value in nature is the defining problem for environmental ethics. If no intrinsic value can be attributed to nature, then environmental ethics is nothing distinct. If nature lacks intrinsic value, then environmental ethics is but a particular application of human-to human ethics.²³

Callicott’s verdict with respect to the possibility of mining a nonanthropocentric ethic from indigenous African religious worldviews is quite clear. Indigenous African religious worldviews, he is convinced, harbor no seeds requisite to the development of a nonanthropocentric ethic.

1. 3. Socially Embedded Notion of Individuality in Africa

Having cast aside indigenous African religious worldviews, Callicott then turns

²² J. Baird Callicott. Op.cit. p. 158.

²³ The electronic version of this article can be found at:
<<http://ejap.louisiana.edu/EJAP/1995.spring/callicott.1995.spring.html>>October 24, 2002.

his attention to the much-discussed African communalistic notion of individuality.

Taking the San, and their ways of life, as his point of departure, he here seeks an understanding of whether or not the concept of self in Africa, and the San's in particular, would provide the raw material from which a nonhuman-centered ethic could be reconstructed.²⁴

But upon studying the literature on this topic, Callicott proclaims: "the notion of self in traditional African settings is intertwined with family, clan, village, tribe and, more recently, nation. Africans are accustomed to think of personal identity and destiny as intimately bound up with community."²⁵ Apparently, on this issue, Callicott's position is in consonant with the views expressed by some African philosophers. For example, Joseph Nyasani, a Kenyan philosopher teaching at the University of Nairobi, notes: "the individual in traditional African settings has little latitude for self determination outside of the context of traditional family and community."²⁶ Likewise, John Mbiti insists that the individual "does not and cannot exist alone, except corporately." The individual, according to John Mbiti, owes his or her existence to other people, including those of past generations and his contemporaries. Whatever happens to the individual is therefore believed to happen to the whole group and whatever happens to the whole group happens also to the individual." Hence, the famous Mbitian dictum: "I am because we are and

²⁴ J. Baird Callicott. *Op.cit.* p. 158.

²⁵ Why, one might rightly ask, does Callicott find it prudent to exclusively focus his attention on the San concept of self and not any other community in Africa? Is it because, as his narrative seems to imply, the San have been (and still are) profoundly unaffected by contemporary demands of global economy or is it because the San have thus far remained uncompromisingly traditional, overly communal, small-scaled, self-contained and frozen in time and space?

²⁶ Joseph Nyasani. 1997. "The African Psyche," in *African Culture and Personality: Bad SocialScience, Effective Social Activism, Or a Call to Reinvent Ethnology?* James E. Lassiter. 1999.< <http://web.africa.ufl.edu/asq/v3/v3i2a1.htm>> March 18, 2001.

since we are therefore I am.” South African philosopher Augustine Shutte, whose work would have in retrospect enriched Callicott’s narrative, is perhaps even more forthright in delivering his verdict on this matter. Contrasting the Xhosa proverb “Umuntu ngumntu ngabantu” [a person is a person through persons] with the European concept of self, Shutte contends:

This proverb, which is also common in other traditional African languages and culture, is concerned with both the peculiar interdependence of persons on others for the exercise, development and fulfillment of their powers that is recognized in African traditional thought, and also with the understanding of what it is to be a person that underlie this... In European philosophy, of whatever kind, the self is always envisaged as something “inside” of a person, or at least a kind of container of mental properties and powers. In African thought, it is viewed as something “outside,” subsisting in relationship to what is other, the natural and the social environment. In fact, the sharp distinction between the self and the world, a self that controls and changes the world and is in some sense “above” it, this distinction so characteristic of European philosophy, disappears. Self and the world are united and intermingled in a web of reciprocal relations [1993: 46-47].

Granted the foregoing, in traditional African settings then, one could reasonably argue that the individual is not (to use B. J Van der Walt words) conceived as a singular, personal and impenetrable entity living in glorious isolation but rather as an integral component of the totality.²⁷ In fact, to be is to participate. It is to be become fully

²⁷ Quoted in James E. Lassiter. *African Culture and Personality: Bad Social Science, Effective Social Activism, Or a Call to Reinvent Ethnology?* 1999.
<<http://web.africa.ufl.edu/asq/v3/v3i2a1.htm>> March 18, 2001

immersed in the inestimable networks of societal gift giving and communal centered activities. As Nyasani points out:

The individual in Africa is almost totally depended on, and subordinate to, social entities and processes... the existence of the individual is a quasi-dissolution into the reality of others for the sake of his or her own existence. ... Everything that the Africa individual does boils down to the “me” in the “we,” or rather the survival of the self through the enhancement and consolidation of the “we” as a generic whole. ...[For this, and perhaps other reasons]...the individual will go to all lengths to ascertain the condition of the corporate “we,’ to play his/her part, if necessary, and to restore the balance of wholesomeness.”²⁸

Nevertheless, that as it may be, argues Callicott, the communal nesting of individuals in traditional African settings has unfortunately not been transformed into an equally deep sense of biotic embeddedness.” Therefore, in its current form, the concept of self in Africa is, Callicott is convinced, deficient in nonanthropocentric “vitamins.” As he notes, although not exactly in this terms, attempting to “distill” a nonanthropocentric ethic from the African concept of self would be a monumental feat. Doing so would perhaps amount, metaphorically speaking, to the futile exercise of searching for snowballs in hell. And for this reason, Callicott then concludes: “the ingredients requisite to the development of a non-anthropocentric ethic should and must be sought elsewhere – perhaps, as he writes, “in the unspoken and un-thought realm of human knowing.”²⁹ Meanwhile, pending a more focused study of what this realm might disclose, Callicott advice is that Africans and their respective governments ought to consider re-aligning

²⁸ Ibid, p. 81-82.

²⁹ J. Baird Callicott. Op.cit.p.172

their environmental recovery script with the parameters of Aldo-Leopold's land ethic.

1. 4. Missed opportunities and alternative interpretation

Callicott's audacity in plunging himself into a subject that he previously had little knowledge of is laudable. Provocative as his article is, it certainly has the merit of whetting the appetite (especially of this author) for a determination to free the study of African religious worldviews and intellectual traditions from the "debris of European sandstorms."³⁰ Beyond this commendable aspect, there are other commendable aspects in Callicott's motivation for including indigenous Africa's worldviews and intellectual traditions in his groundbreaking book.

If in fact Callicott's motivation in writing this chapter was to infuriate students and scholars of Africa, and in the process incite them to develop a more culturally and historically grounded narrative than what he himself has presented, then Callicott has succeeded in accomplishing one of his objectives. If his other goal was to open up the Western environmental discourse to non-Western intellectual traditions, including those from Africa, then it is only fair that we give Callicott the credit that he most assuredly deserves.

However, notwithstanding these and many other laudable aspects of Callicott's narrative, his treatment and contestable interpretation of the arbitrarily selected Africa's worldviews that he examined certainly generates more heat than light. As an illustration, juxtapose Callicott's position with the interpretation of the same that I provide below, dealing specifically with: (a) traditional Africa's land ethic, (b) spiritual/ moral bonds that

³⁰ This phrase is borrowed from Jedi Shemsu Jewheti a.k.a. Jacob H. Carruthers. See his article "The Invention of Africa" and Intellectual Neocolonialism. The article is available on line at ><http://www.nbufront.org/FRONTalView/ArticlesPapers/jake3.html>> April 23, 2003.

humans had forged with one another and with nature; (c) traditional Africa's agricultural science and; (d) the diverse mutualistic practices in traditional African settings.

1. 5. African worldviews: an alternative interpretation

In his paper "Emergent Key Issues in the Study of African Traditional religions," Christopher I. Ejizu offers a scathing attack of what he calls "armchair" scholars and students of African cultures and traditions who, as he suggests:

Prop up their armchair theories or the assumed role of the Hamitic stock in spreading civilization. [In doing so, however] they over-flog less important issues while significant issues receive, at best, little attention. The belief in the Supreme Being makes a typical case. For adherents of African traditional religion [whose numbers are in any case declining] it is the belief in, and reverence of, the deities, ancestors, fears of the spirits, ritual sacrifice, ritual symbols...healing...and upright living as well as their interrelated values like enhancement of life, continuity, community living... that are focal issues of their religious consciousness and life.³¹

How, one might perhaps ask, does Callicott's selective treatment and problematic interpretation of African worldviews fit in the category of scholars that Christopher Ejizu's attacks? What specific themes in traditional African worldviews, identified by Ejizu and others, did Callicott neglect to examine in his article? If indeed he had taken the initiative to examine some of the aspects of African worldviews that I have discussed below, would he have arrived at a more different conclusion? Let us find out.

1. 5. 1. Reliance and management of natural resources

³¹ Ejizu's full paper is available online at: < <http://www.afrikaworld.net/afrel/ejizu.htm> > February 19, 2003.

There is no denying that in traditional African settings the majority of rural folks depend largely on the free and open access of natural resources for food, medicine, shelter, building materials, fuel, craft materials and trade. For them, the availability of natural resources is (and has always been) a matter of survival. Their use, abundance and variety have been and still are an indispensable buffer against starvation, drought and opportunities for self-employment.³² For this and other reason then, many (if not all) rural communities in Africa had developed elaborate and widely acceptable environmental conservation measures. Of course, this was before European colonialists invaded Africa and subsequently introduced alien and alienating environmental development and conservation models that have to the present excluded and undermined customary arrangements for ownership and utilization of natural resources. Environmental conservation strategies and mechanisms that traditional African communities had developed ensured that natural resources were used in an efficient, equitable and sustainable ways. As James Murombedzi notes: “indigenous Africa's environmental conservation mechanisms were in fact woven into the fabric of life: in myths, place names, folkloric stories and in peoples’ imagination.”³³

This fact notwithstanding, in the body of literature that I have thus far examined, a

³² Rachel Wynberg. “Privatizing The Means of Survival: The Commercialization of Africa’s Biodiversity,” *Global Trade and Biodiversity in Conflict*. Issue No.2 April 2000. This article is also available online at: <[Http://www.grain.org/publications/issue5-en-p.htm](http://www.grain.org/publications/issue5-en-p.htm)> June 17, 2003. See also: Willemse Gert's "Green paper on the Conservation and Sustainable use of South Africa’s Biodiversity," 1996: 7. Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism. < <http://www.info.gov.za/greenpaper/1996/conservation.htm>> June 17, 2003

³³ According to Murombedzi, very little is known and written about pre-colonial Africa’s conservation practices. See his article, “Pre-colonial and Colonial Conservation Practices in Southern Africa and Their Legacy Today.” <<http://www.iucn.org/themes/ceesp/Publications/TILCEPA/CCA-JMurombedzi.pdf>>February 17, 2003

more systematized articulation of indigenous Africa's conservation systems and practices hardly exists, and if it does exist elsewhere it certainly sits beneath the radar of standard academic visibility. What one is likely to come across, having studied the vast body of literature on indigenous Africa's environmental wisdom, are scattered bits and pieces of more generalized and rhetoric-loaded statements indicating how for instance the revival and utilization (where necessary) of indigenous Africa's wisdom would be indispensable in spurring more supportive environmental views and practices. Reasons for this documentation problem are quite interesting but lie outside the purview of what directly concerns us here.

What then I propose to do, in the remaining part of this chapter, is to weave the scattered bits and pieces of indigenous Africa's environmental conservation credentials into a coherent whole. However, in doing so, I only tease out indigenous Africa's environmental conservation wisdom that if meticulously recovered and utilized (where necessary) might possibly help Africa in its environmental recovery initiatives. The reader must at this juncture be warned in advance. What I bring to light, knowledge mostly gathered from my own experiences having lived for the better part of my life in rural parts of Kenya, will inevitably vindicate what Ali Mazrui characterize as the romantic primitivism school of Africa's historiography.³⁴ I bring this information to the front burner not because I am convinced that indigenous Africa's wisdom was and still is valuable for contemporary Africa, but, rather, to use this knowledge as a springboard for dispelling Callicott's motivation in falling back on Africa's past values. In any case, at

³⁴ According to Ali Mazrui, this school of Africa's historiography take pride in, and attempts to validate, pre-colonial Africa's life of simplicity and non-technical traditions that were arrogantly despised by Europeans

the end of this chapter and in part three of the section dealing with “re-indigenization of Africa’s critical domains...” I express my reservations with regard to the effective revival and utilization of Africa’s indigenous wisdom. Principally, I argue that living as we now do in a mutually influencing, independent world — thanks to the combined forces of globalization, a meaningful retreat into Africa’s indigenous wisdom sounds more like a fantasy, a flight of imagination. But first, let me highlight and then discuss some of the missed opportunities in Callicott’s treatment of African religious worldviews and intellectual traditions.

1. 5. 2. Concept of community in the traditional African settings

In the traditional African settings, argues Christopher Ejizu and I agree, the notion of community is not exclusively limited to social group of persons who are bound together by reasons of natural origin or who share common interests and values.³⁵ The notion of community is broadly construed to include at least three heuristically distinguishable worlds.³⁶ The first – though not in an ascending order of importance – is the world in which human beings, or at least some humans, are granted a more privileged moral status relative to the non-human parts of the physical world. In this world, one could argue, non-human species and natural entities are valued and therefore protected

³⁵ Yale Richmond and Phyllis Gestin also confirms this claim in their book, *Into Africa: Intercultural Insights* (1998:35). They argue, for example, and quite correctly that “Africans live in a continuum of their family’s existence that includes ancestors, the living, and future generations, and that it is not unusual to be able to trace families back for as many as ten generations based on oral history.

³⁶ For more details consult Mazisi Kunene. “The Relevance of African Cosmological Systems to African Literature Today,” In *African Literature Today: Myth and History*. Eldred Durosimi Jones. Ed. London: Heinemann, 1980. See also Kaveta Adagala. “Mother Nature, Patriarchal Cosmology and Gender,” in *God, Humanity, and Mother Nature*, in Gilbert E.M. Ogotu. Ed. Nairobi, Kenya: Masaki Publishers, 1992: 48-49.

only because they are considered to enrich the quality of human life –physically, intellectually, aesthetically, spiritually and, of course, emotionally.

The second world, according Kavetsa Adagala, professor of Literature at the University of Nairobi, Kenya, is that of the sun, the moon, the Pleiades and the evening and morning stars. This world, Adagala insists, is all too often used to symbolically describe the functional and aesthetic relationships that humans forge with the non-human world. Such relationships, Adagala goes on to argue, are often inspiring, heroic, and legendary.

The third world, writes Adagala, represents the interplay of “distant” mystical forces. This world is often invoked to mark the distinction between the divine and the profane and the spaces that are imbued with spirituality and those of everyday life. Customarily, it is described in terms of gods who are revered but not worshipped, who participate in human activities and who act as a bridge – linking the visible and invisible worlds.³⁷ As Yale Richmond and Phyllis Gestrin observes:

Living close to nature, and in equilibrium with it, Africans have always held natural objects and phenomena in awe. Spirits of the sun, moon, sky and weather (not to mention) the earth, rocks, water and trees are... created by God as intermediaries between God and humans, having much the same status that patron saints often have for Christians. A hidden mystical power is believed to be available to these spirits as well as to certain human beings who can use it for good or evil.³⁸

³⁷ Kavetsa Adagala, “Mother Nature, Patriarchal Cosmology and Gender,” in *God, Humanity, and Mother Nature*. Gilbert E.M. Ogotu. Ed. Nairobi, Kenya: Masaki Publishers, 1992: 48-49

While these three worlds are heuristically distinguishable, they are, conceptually, indivisible. Camara Laye, Guinean member of the Malinke community, puts this claim perhaps even more succinctly. He argues, and quite rightly, that in the traditional African settings these three worlds “pour into one another and emerge from one another like ocean waves. They are, indeed, analogous to a body of water from which emerges the deepest waves that surface to follow the light, remembering one another, driving one another away, and emerging with one another into infinity.” [Camara Laye, 2000:73] Therefore, it would seem reasonable to argue that in traditional African settings the visible and invisible worlds exist not as two distinct worlds but rather as a continuum. Examined holistically then, as opposed to merely focusing on specific parts of the whole as if they were indeed representative of the whole, one could argue that traditional African worldviews tend to promote, for lack of a better term, a “cosmos-centric” or ncentric outlook. Examples vindicating this assertion abound.

1. 6. Indigenous African Land Ethic

In traditional African settings, rural folks are cognizant – even without being reminded by the so called experts of modernity – of the fact that their survival and that of non-human species and natural entities that they depend on for their livelihood are directly or indirectly linked to land. They know that to recklessly despoil and desecrate land is to endanger their lives and livelihoods and the welfare of many earthlings and interests of future generations—born and unborn. They also are aware of the fact that to painstakingly manage the land, conscientiously holding it in trust for its owners (i.e., past, present and future generations) is the surest way of managing land while also conserving

³⁸ Yale Richmond and Phyllis Gestrin, *Ibid*, p. 34.

resources. As Ali Mazrui correctly points put:

[In traditional African settings] many rural folks “treat the earth as a partner rather than something to be misused and abused. Animals are believed to have souls and are not merely placed on the earth for someone’s profit. Forests are also considered to have a religious function and are not just repositories for firewood.”³⁹

Jomo Kenyatta, founder-president of the Republic of Kenya, offers perhaps a sterling account regarding the importance that the Agikuyu people of Kenya in particular, and Africans in general, attach to land. In his book, *Facing Mount Kenya*, he writes:

As agriculturalists, the land supplies the Agikuyu with the material needs of life through which spiritual and mental contentment is achieved. Communion with the ancestral spirits is also perpetuated through contact with the soil in which the ancestors of the tribe lie buried. The Agikuyu people consider the earth as the mother of the tribe: ...the soil...feeds the child throughout its lifetime, and... after death... nurses the spirits of the dead for eternity. The earth is the most sacred thing above all that dwells on it... (p. 45-46.)

Before European invasion of Africa, the Agikuyu people [as many other communities in Africa] did not consider land held in common, by kith and kin, as a commodity that individual persons could own, buy, or sell at will. Besides ascribing a sacred significance to land, the Agikuyu believed that land belonged to the ancestors.

³⁹ Consult Paul H. Thomas review of Ali Mazrui’s “The Nature of a Continent” (1986), the first of a series (The Africans) of the nine one-hour programs that focus on the history and contemporary life of Africa. British Broadcasting Corporation. The Annenberg /CPB Multimedia Project. Co-sponsored by WETA-Washington, D.C.
<<http://www2.h.net.msu.edu/reviews/exhibit/showrev.cgi?path=56>> June 11, 2003.

Present humans were, as a result, considered mere trustees of a heritage destined to be passed over to future generations. The land and resources found therein, the Agikuyu people believed, was an ancestral trust – committed to the living for the benefit of the whole community and, in particular, future generations.

In his book, *The History of the Agikuyu People*, Kenyan historian, Godfrey Muriuki, argues that before European invasion of Africa and subsequent destruction of indigenous Africa's collective land ownership regimes, “every clan member had an inalienable right to use, but not to abuse or misuse, land that was held in common without paying any toll or price.” Numerous injunctions – ranging from superstitious beliefs such as animal totems, taboo species, to other prohibitions spelling out communally acceptable harvesting techniques — were invoked to limit over-utilization of scarce resources and to discourage individuals from fencing off and excluding others from utilizing communally owned land and resources found therein. From the early stages of life, individuals were socialized into believing that land was something sacred; it was part of what and who they were. Even though individuals were often taught appropriate techniques for pruning the land's bounty, especially its most promising shoots, they were, nevertheless, discouraged from harvesting scarce resources or knowingly carrying out activities that would clip off the lands’ ability for self-renewal. Furthermore, whenever resources came under pressure because of increased human population or rapid economic activity, “a typical response was for whole populations to move to new, uncolonized, resource abundant areas,” argues Murombedzi.⁴⁰ The early waves of migrations from Central

⁴⁰ James C. Murombedzi. “Pre-colonial and Colonial Conservation Practices in Southern Africa and Their Legacy Today.”

Africa to Southern Africa and back, from the Blue Nile to the Eastern parts of Africa, and from West Africa to what African historians call the Shungwaya dispersion in Southwestern Tanzania, are typical examples. Other rules, deployed to discourage overharvesting of nature's bounty, included bequeathing sacredness especially to prominent features of the physical landscape such as mountain tops, imposing hills, gigantic trees, dense forests, valleys, caves, rivers, lakes and so forth. Once considered sacred, these natural entities were then believed to not only inspire mystery but were also associated with hidden forces –whether good or bad– as mirrored in the many myths and breathless tales of spirits span. As Robinson notes, for example:

“Ashanti people of Ghana believe to the present day that god dwells on particular natural physical features such as lakes, trees and also in certain animals.”

This belief, argues Robinson, is in fact equivalent to seeing intrinsic value in the environment.⁴¹ In Zimbabwe, according to United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP) report of 2002, “some trees, such as *Scleracarya birrea* and *parinari curatellifolia* were directly linked to ancestral spirits and therefore protected by a standing penalty system enforced by a chief and his lineage.”

Furthermore, under traditional land tenure, this report notes, the Uacapa Kirkiana tree could not be cut without the express permission of the guardian of the land. Countless rules were also deployed to regulate the gathering of certain fruits and tree by-products and to limit access to sacred grooves and mountains. Individuals were, for instance,

<<http://www.iucn.org/themes/ceesp/publications/TILCEPA/CCAjMurombedzi.pdf>>
February 17, 2003

⁴¹ Consult Benjamin J. Richardson. “Indigenous Environmental Management Regimes in the Developing World: Self-determination, Survival and Sustainability.”
<<http://www.yorku.ca/fes/strategies/Richardson.PDF>> June 16, 2003.

discouraged from using both hands while picking fruits from a tree. They were also forbidden from shaking fruit bearing trees or using stones or other instruments to dislodge fruits from such trees. What's more, cursing or expressing delight about the quality or quantity of fruits gathered from such trees was forbidden. Individuals who failed to observe any of these rules, it was assumed, would disappear in the forest and would never be seen again.⁴²

1. 7. Africa's Totemic Systems

More significantly, argues Ali Mazrui, in traditional African settings, "respective clans and societal groups often identified themselves with objects or animals as a symbol of solidarity."⁴³ For example, Mazrui notes, "some African communities could not kill a snake because of a bond of brother-hood between the snake and members of a community. Members of the leopard clan could also not eat meat that had been torn or scratched by an animal."⁴⁴ The capacity in humans to empathize with nature, "their readiness to see a little of themselves and a little of their God in their surroundings, made them shrink from abusing totems to satisfy an appetite," argues Mazrui.⁴⁵ That African totemic system permitted and sometimes promoted a good deal of living together of human beings and animals need here not belabored. As Mazrui points out:

In the more purely indigenous epoch of African pantheism the distinction between man and nature, the divide between the living and the dead, and the

⁴² The exact title of this report is "African Environmental Outlook: Past, Present and Future Prospects." It is available online at: <<http://www.unep.org/aeo/016.htm>> October 31, 2003

⁴³ Ali A. Mazrui. *The Africans: A Triple Heritage*. Boston & Toronto: Little Brown and Company, 1986:50.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* p. 51-52.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* p. 52.

difference between the divine and the human was blurred. The sharp distinction between God and nature, the mandatory separation in habitat between man and animals was also virtually nonexistent.⁴⁶

J. H Driberg, in Mazrui's opinion, succinctly capture the supposedly indissoluble link between God, humans and nature among the lake Nilotes. Describing the Langi's concept of force (which in the native language is referred to as Jok) Driberg, for example, notes:

Like the wind or air, omnipresent, and like the wind, though its presence may be heard and appreciated, jok has never been seen by anyone ... his dwelling is everywhere: in trees it may be, or in rocks and hills, in some springs and pools ... or vaguely in air.⁴⁷

Echoing this view as well, Bethwell Ogot, distinguished Kenyan Historian, argues that Jok, the force permeating all things, is:

The spiritual part of man, the only part that survives death ... it is the same power, which is responsible for conception as well as for misfortunes. Hence, to the Nilote, Jok is an impartial universal power; it is the essence of every being, the force, which makes everything what it is, and God himself, the greatest jok, is life force in itself.⁴⁸

Clearly, in traditional African worldviews, all things, human and non-human, sentient and non-sentient, were (and in some communities still are) imbued with a unique signature of spiritual energy. As Mazrui observes, the poet, Alexander Pope, "in spite of

⁴⁶ Ali A. Mazrui. "Ecology & Culture" in his book *Africa's International Relations: The Diplomacy of Dependency & Change*. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1977: 262-279.

⁴⁷ Ibid. p. 266.

⁴⁸ Ibid. 267

his desire to be proper in Christian terms, nevertheless, felt his muse drawn to the worldview of the so-called savage,”

Whose untutored mind
Sees God in clouds, or hears him in the wind;
His soul proud Science never taught him to stray;
Far as the solar walk or Milky Way;
Yet simple nature to his hope has given
Behind the cloud-topt hill, and humbler heaven...⁴⁹

Furthermore, writes Mazrui, “carried away beyond his orthodox Christianity and moving closer to a pantheistic interpretation of the relationship between man, nature and the divinity reminiscent precisely of those societies which believed in such concepts as *Jok*, Alexander Pope confirmed,”

All are but parts of one stupendous whole,
Whose body Nature is, and God the soul;
That changed through all, and yet in all the same,
Great in the earth as in the ethereal frame,
Warms in the sun, refreshes in the breeze,
Glowes in the stars, and blossoms in the trees;
Lives through all life, extends through all extent,
Spreads undivided, operates unspent,
Breathes in our soul, informs our mortal part,
As full, as perfect, in a hair as heart,
As full, as perfect, in vile man that mourns,
As the rapt seraph that adores and burns,
To him no high, no low, no great, no small;
He fills, he bounds, connects, and equals all!⁵⁰

Clearly, in traditional African settings, “the realm of its gods was woven into peoples' daily life.” Thoughts, words and deeds were (and in some instances still are) permeated largely with a sense of mystical transcendence. Perhaps, an exploratory journey into the ‘onion-like-layers’ of insights embedded in Africa’s orature: proverbs, riddles, legends, poetry, animal stories, myths, et cetera suffice to illustrate this claim.

⁴⁹ Ibid. p. 267

⁵⁰ Ibid. p. 267

1. 8. African Orature

Africa's orature was arguably diffused in every fabric of life. It served both as "a journey and a joining weaving together protocol, desirable character traits, responsibilities, discipline, education and entertainment."⁵¹ Largely employed by older women and men, Africa's orature made the world in which people lived a better place: more gentler, more peaceful, and filled with compassionate and caring humans. But how so, one might ask.

First, through orature – riddles, heroic legends, satirical jokes, folk songs and so forth – younger children and maturing adults were taught to cherish community values, mores, traditions and customs. Africa's orature was also used to inculcate ideals of social inclusion and virtues of mutual reciprocity and to forewarn younger children and maturing adults of the dangers that would proliferate on the way as they mature and become adults. Orature was, additionally, used to scorn and ridicule unbecoming behavior without pointing a finger at any specific individual.

Second, through orature, communal dietary habits, desirable relations of solidarity and diverse cultural taboos were enforced. Orature was also used to nurture strong kinship bonds and to prepare the youth for what to expect in the future by teaching them the mosaic of community wisdom that they could not possibly learn through straightforward lectures.

Third, blending together a cornucopia of spiritual insights, ecological themes and philosophical explanations concerning, for example, the human condition, Africa's

⁵¹ Consult for more details Margaret Read MacDonald, *Traditional Storytelling Today: An International Sourcebook*. Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn, 1999

orature provided a social space from which human beings, animals, insects, plants, spirits of the departed, unknown forces and specific features of the physical landscape could interact on the same plane. As such, it afforded younger children and maturing adults an opportunity to “travel to new places where they could meet new people and other beings, acquire new ideas, come across deeds that often times went beyond their physical abilities, and to encounter images of events taking place in breathtaking heights and depth.”⁵² The “new people” the youth met, the new places they visited, and the new ideas they acquired in these imaginary journeys helped them to heighten their sense of belonging to place, to conquer greed, ignorance, pride, arrogance, prejudice and to tame the savagery within the “human beast”⁵³

Fourth, Africa’s orature provided a platform from which to nurture holistic relationships, to influence good behavior, to facilitate the process of conflict resolution, and to forge different kinds of alliances with members of the wider ecological community. A moral code, bound with nurturing responsibilities of human coexistence with the land, was clearly stipulated.⁵⁴ Moral virtues of love, compassion, self-sacrifice, courage, patience, respect for the elders, reverence for the sacred, and dread for the unknown were affirmed and celebrated. Moral vices of hatred, envy, cruelty, greed, prejudice, arrogance and dishonesty were similarly disdained through orature.⁵⁵

Last, but not least, Africa’s orature afforded its audience – the youth in particular – with an opportunity to reflect their past deeds, to probe the dispositions of their hearts, and to discover their inner personal depths. This process of self-introspection helped

⁵² Ibid. p. 10.

⁵³ Ibid. p. 11.

⁵⁴ Ibid. p. 34.

⁵⁵ Ibid. p. 9.

younger children and maturing adults to tame “the near-to-ready-willingness (exemplified in our world today) of selling the future for endless varieties of self-aggrandizement and the propensity to cave in to the culture of individual/collective greed. More importantly, this process of soul-searching was instrumental in breaking down existential barriers, which could have otherwise created distance amongst people and between people and the non-human world.

1.9. Indigenous Africa’s subsistence ways of life

In addition to the foregoing, Africa’s subsistent economies and communal ways of life were arguably environmentally sensitive. Consider, as an illustration, the following example.

1. 9. 1. Hunter Gatherers

Communities of hunter-gatherers neither cultivated nor possessed livestock. They met their nutritional requirements by trapping wild animals, collecting wild honey and gathering diverse berries and vegetables. Their diet included well over a hundred different fruits and vegetables drawn from many genera.

Undue exploitation of nature’s resources was discouraged through numerous social taboos and religious injunctions. Individuals could not take from nature more than they needed. The limit of competition was clearly defined. While individuals were at liberty to compete in hunting and gathering expeditions, they were nevertheless dissuaded from waging war on their competitors, destroying their competitor’s food sources, or denying them access to common food sources.

More important, communities of hunter-gatherers had a deep reverence and respect for nature. They were quite aware of their place in nature and nature’s limiting factors. Most plants and animals were, for the most part, considered to be of great

importance to them. Beside their instrumental value, they were also viewed as an essential part of the ceaseless regeneration of life.

1. 9. 2. Subsistence Farmers

Communities of subsistence farmers, on the other hand, mainly pursued a mixed economy. They grew multi-purpose, drought-tolerant, and nitrogen-fixing food-crops without the aid of synthetic chemicals.⁵⁶ They practiced shifting cultivation and grew legume and non-legume crops together. Windbreakers, consisting of thick deeply rooted bushes, were also erected around the perimeter of their crops to prevent soil erosion and to absorb dust in the air.⁵⁷

While the shifting cultivation that they practiced led to the receding of forests, driving wild animals out of their natural habitats, and endangering the livelihood of hunter-gatherer communities, it had several advantages. It allowed old farmlands to replenish soil nutrients via natural processes, not chemical containing fertilizers. It helped the soil retain moisture. It stabilized yield fluctuations, reduced the growth and spread of incessant weeds and pests, and protected topsoil from soil erosion.⁵⁸

In addition, besides practicing mixed cropping technique and planting diverse food crops in a variety of microenvironments in order to ensure a year-round supply of food and to replenish depleted soil minerals, subsistence farmers staggered their planting

⁵⁶ Subsistence African farmers grew sweat potatoes, cassava, bananas, yams, millet, sorghum and cowpeas to mention a few.

⁵⁷ According to Lloyd Timberlake, too much dust in the air reduces the amount of sunshine reaching the earth's surface, which would have the same rain-reducing effect as bouncing more solar radiation back off the earth's surface [Timberlake, 1986: 30.]

⁵⁸ See for details Workineh Kelbessa's "Indigenous and Modern Environmental Ethics: Towards partnership," in Gail M. Presbey, Daniel Smith, Pamela A. Abuya & Oriare Nyarwath. Eds. *Thought and Practice in African Philosophy*. Nairobi: Konrad Adenauer Foundation, 2002:47-61.

seasons and harvesting dates. Through repetitive practice, trial and error methods, and knowledge passed from successive generations, individuals in these communities were able to learn how to use and to conserve genetic resources surrounding them. They could also tell which food crop varieties to grow, which livestock breeds and species to raise, which kind of foods to store for future consumption, and which foods to sell at local food markets.⁵⁹

Like communities of hunter-gatherers, subsistence farmers had an in-depth knowledge of the use and usefulness of various plants and animals and fervently protected the habitats where medicinal trees and herbs could be found.⁶⁰

1. 9. 3. Pastoral Communities

Living, for the most part, in environmentally fragile ecosystems, nomadic communities pursued a pastoral lifestyle. They grazed their herds alongside wildlife animals to encourage sustainable use of pastures and to facilitate the natural interaction between the livestock they keep and the abundant wildlife that surrounded them. They ostensibly depended on the wildlife, which surrounded them, to detect changes taking place in environments where they lived.

More than this, nomadic communities maintained different breeds of cattle, sheep, goats and donkeys that matched the climatic conditions of ecosystems, which they inhabited. They kept desert or semi-desert tolerant cattle, sheep, goats and donkeys. They raised their livestock without traces of hormones or antibiotics in their blood. Their knowledge of timing the reproductive cycle of the herd to coincide with the coming of

⁵⁹ Ibid. p. 53.

⁶⁰ Lucy Mulenkei, "African Indigenous Women and Biodiversity Conservation," in Braulio Munõz. *A Story Teller: Mario Vargas Llosa Between Civilization and Barbarism*. New York: Little field Publishers, Inc., 2000:124.

the rains gave them considerable control over livestock breeding. For example, in anticipation of the rainy seasons, they would set particular ecosystems on fire to ensure that minerals held by plants were leached into the ground when the rains came. The resultant lush green grass provided the herd they kept and the wildlife that surrounded them with an adequate supply of food.⁶¹

Moreover, knowing all too well that animal manure caused water pollution and conversant with the concept of land-carrying capacity, individuals in these communities could not graze their herds in one particular ecosystem for a prolonged period. They were aware that doing so would render such ecosystems susceptible to opportunistic diseases. Armed then with this knowledge, nomadic communities practiced seasonal movements of the herd.

Like hunter-gatherers and communities of subsistence farmers, nomadic communities also had a deep understanding of diverse medicinal herbs and plants and meticulously protected habitats where medicinal plants and herbs could be found.

1. 10. Mutualistic practices

What's more, in traditional African settings, the physical terrain, soil structure, soil texture, weather patterns, proximity to water sources, security considerations and epidemiological data to mention a few, determined the manner in which both human and animal populations were distributed. These factors also influenced where settlements were to be located, the strategies employed in eking out a living and in structuring peoples daily narratives. As Yale Richmond and Phyllis Gestrin asserts, quoting Allister

⁶¹ Controlled fire burning is now a scientifically accepted wildlife management tool in modern wildlife conservation, says Kenya's wildlife consultant, Arthur Mahari. See, Kenya's Daily Nation Newspaper of January 21, 20003.

Spark's book *The Mind of South Africa* (1990): "traditional African societies were sophisticated organisms, finely tuned to the exigencies of climate and environment in a harsh continent..."⁶²

1. 10. 1. Decentralized institutions

Every aspect of life in traditional African settings – whether social, cultural, religious, political, and/or economic – was regulated through loose, fluid, open and decentralized institutions such as village councils, clan-systems, age-set structures, age grade groups, neighborhood associations and ad-hoc territorial groupings.⁶³ These institutions influenced how individuals interacted in the "market place," how they obtained, controlled, manipulated and circulated information and how they participate in the public as well as private spheres of life. More important, these institutions conferred on their members' specific duties, obligations, privileges and responsibilities.

1. 10. 2. Spirit of teamwork

From time to time, a group of related and sometimes unrelated individuals, drawn together by shared bonds of kinship or merely interested in undertaking collective socioeconomic ventures, would pool their resources together – material and labor – in pursuit of joint activities such as house construction, preparing the fields, hunting and gathering or taking care of the needs of livestock. Because the growing of crops, raising animals, hunting and gathering, as well as keeping of domestic animals was largely dependent on the availability of rainfall, mutual co-existence amongst individuals and between ethnic groups was all too often cultivated and constantly nurtured. Moreover, the

⁶² Yale Richmond and Phyllis Gestrin. Op cit. 1998. P. VI

⁶³ In more centralized groups, however, there was less consultation in decision making processes. More often than not chiefs imposed their own will on the ruled.

precarious nature of making ends meet influenced the establishment of diverse networks of mutual reciprocity as a form of insurance against difficult times.

Out of their own volition, individuals in traditional African settings mostly preferred to live close to one another, in continuous active fellowship, co-operating in many ventures to create a lifestyle that reflected their core shared values and mutual concerns. Allegedly, people cared enough about one another and relentlessly “monitored” each other’s lives while planning their future as a collective.

1. 10. 3. Life of material simplicity

Furthermore, despite spending long working hours in the fields, social life in traditional African settings was not as fast paced as it is today, with some individuals remaining far behind others. As Ben Okri notes, in his two books *The Famished Road* (1991) and *Songs of Enchantment* (1993), no matter how busy individuals were “they still found time to speak to one another, to listen more carefully to one another, and to quietly share their concerns, joys and fears – not as an injunction, but as a way of life.”⁶⁴ Everyone, Okiri goes on to note, knew everybody else. This willingness to create and to continuously nurture “loving” relationships with kith and kin, with distant relatives, and with neighbors, says Okiri, allowed individuals in traditional African settings to somewhat meet their material, emotional, psychological and spiritual needs with relative ease while also living in close harmony with one another and with nature.

Food was cooked with firewood. Cereals were dried in the open sunshine.

Perishable foods such as meat and fish were preserved after they were smoked by the fireside or dried in the open sunshine. Drinking water was fetched from village springs.

⁶⁴ For more details consult Bill Hemmiger. “The Way of the Spirit,” in *Research in African Literature*. Vol.32, No 1, Spring 2001: 77.

The soil was tilled with a simple iron-hoe forged by village blacksmiths. Pasture by the riverside and on higher altitudes did not belong to a single individual or community: all could graze their animals.

Most people, as already noted, relied on the knowledge from successive generation to grow foods, to raise animals, to hunt and gather, and to carry out other related sustenance activities. Excruciating poverty was not as rampant as it today. In most homes, rounded huts thatched with grass and clay walling, people sat on locally woven chairs. For the majority, dressing was bare: answering largely to the basic needs of clothing such as protection and modesty and not style or class.

Cures for most common illnesses were somewhat known and mainly treated through medicinal plants and readily available minerals, which could be picked or dug out and prepared whenever required [Susan Kent, 1996: 33.] Illness, particularly associated with human-ill will, were treated through therapeutic dances mimicking – and this is important – sounds of specific birds and movements of particular animals. These dances were ostensibly performed to ascertain the actual cause of illness, to cure afflicted individuals and to restore the hitherto upset social harmony.⁶⁵

Traditional remedies notwithstanding, digestive disorders, respiratory infections, skin and eye problems all too often overwhelmed a majority and particularly the young, the old, and the frail. Infant mortality was high and low-life expectancy was the norm, not the exception. Accordingly, married couples brought forth as many children as they could humanly have as a form of insurance against unexpected deaths, as an additional economic asset in meeting increasing rural labor demands, or just as part of the extension

⁶⁵ In Pre-colonial African Societies human-ill will was often associated with personal jealousy, vendetta, rivalry and so forth.

of their egos. However, this as it may be, population growth rates were for the most part regulated by frequent occurrences of natural catastrophes such as drought, famine, outbreak of diseases, and intermittent intra and inter-ethnic warfare and other forms of social vagaries.

1. 10. 4. Care and concern for one another

Most activities, in traditional African settings, were additionally undertaken not so much for individual gratification or glorification but for the sake and good of society writ-large. For example, in most societies, economic ventures pursued primarily –though not always — ensured mutual profit for most and minimum exploitation of the many.⁶⁶ Individual's claim to property, land, and other forms of material possessions were in fact subordinated to the good of the clan. The notion of individuals owing and accumulating private property, seemingly unperturbed by the haggard faces living in their midst, was indeed discouraged (Peter Herschok, 1999: 49).

Sharing of food, shelter, and everything else — from tools to understanding — was considered a communal value per excellence. In difficult times, it was incumbent upon all individuals to double their efforts, to go over and beyond societal expectations, in accomplishing what no single individual could humanly do when acting alone.

Proliferation of social structures that could have otherwise promoted individual autonomy over communal ties, and widen the reciprocal space among people and between people and nature, was equally discouraged. Vulnerable groups: the young, the old, the frail, and the malnourished, were protected from diverse harms and a helping

⁶⁶ This, however, is not to say that there was no exploitation at all in the traditional African setting. On the contrary, diverse forms of slave labor, slavery and gender inequalities to name a few did exist.

hand was often extended to them. They were never left to fend for themselves.

1. 11. Conclusion

Granted, three fundamental assertions can at least be made from the foregoing analysis. First, in contradistinction to Callicott's claim, the conceptual resources from which to reconstruct a nonhuman, nature-centered, ethic are latent in traditional African thought and cultural practices. In fact, if Callicott had only cast his net a little wider, beyond what he examined, he would have probably not claimed as he did that African worldviews are deficient in non-anthropocentric "vitamins."

Second, the attempts at resolving Africa's environmental crisis through either the anthropocentric or non-anthropocentric insights or both risks "crowding out" good ideas while also shifting the focus away from addressing more pertinent, more pressing issues. One could even go so far as to argue that realigning Africa's environmental discourse within the parameters of the long drawn out anthropocentric versus non-anthropocentric debates would get on the way of finding practicable solutions to the vast array of environmental challenges facing sub-Saharan Africa and its poorer and struggling segments of society.

Third, in today's Africa, a discourse that is wholly predicated on a people's past heritage, especially their alleged spirituality and closeness to the land, will be of little value. The undeclared, yet clearly noticeable, aspirations harbored by many Africans and especially African governments to ride the wave of modernity and progress (see chapter four, for example) would render efforts at retreating into Africa's past heritage suspect, if not, questionable. As such, and here I must admit up front, Callicott's position and the alternative interpretation that I have provided herein cannot for the most part resonate

with the intuitions of the millions of Africans whose attachment to land is no longer binding. As I argue in the conclusion part of chapter four, European colonialists broke the original connections that Africans had with the land. To the present day, the wounds from the violence that they unleashed upon Africans and their ways of life are too visible not to be noticed by any discerning observer. These scars have simply refused to heal. No wonder then, my friend, Chaungo Barasa, has chronicled some of the distinctive features that separate the “modern” middle class in Kenya from urban slum-dwellers, rural peasants and casual laborers. Chief of the features that Chaungo highlights include:

- A stunted understanding of indigenous cultures and traditions, which is nevertheless compensated for by an equally rudimentary and incoherent grasp of Euro-American (and therefore ‘modern’) lifestyles
- A pervasive desire for, and preoccupation with, materialism, consumption and status symbols and an equation of this with excellence and role modeling
- Schooling, learning and sophistication, which includes a restless appetite for acquisition or consumption of pop lifestyles
- A conflict in the family of language of choice (European, Kiswahili or vernaculars?)
- An overwhelming individualism (as opposed to communalism)
- A pretentious blue-collar work ethic which in real fact is propped up by free helpings to the employer’s or public property
- A morbid but carefully rationalized and well camouflaged fear and distaste for rural folks and rural environments
- A crushing inability to divorce completely from the often loudly expressed

distaste for traditions, resorting to expedient or feigned embrace and rejection, as per circumstances

- A carefully suppressed yet pervasive gender insensitivity otherwise inconsistent with a truly modern lifestyle
- A reluctance to embrace population control in regard to which responsibility is handed over entirely to the woman partner
- Incessant grumbling with the status quo with a numbing inertia or fear to criticize openly, and finally
- A stupendous tendency to be bought and manipulated by political barons and ruling cliques.⁶⁷

That granted, it can be reasonably argued that in the process of prospecting for solutions to Africa's predicaments – including the accelerating environmental crisis — students and scholars of Africa ought perhaps redirect their intellectual energy, time and resources to this zone of cultural instability. While I examine this zone of cultural instability more fully in part three of this article, chapter two essentially concentrates on a more contemporary dilemma raised by Holmes Rolston III in his article: “Feeding People versus Saving Nature.”

⁶⁷ For details, consult Chaungo Barasa. “Narrowing the Gap Between Past Practices and Future Thoughts in a Transitional Kenyan Culture Model, For Sustainable Family Livelihood Security,” in *Thought and Practice in African Philosophy*. Gail M. Presbey; Daniel Smith; Pamela A. Abuya and Oraire Nyarawth. Eds. [Nairobi, Kenya: Konrad Adenauer Foundation, 2002: 217-221].

Chapter Two: Holmes Rolston's "Feeding People versus Saving Nature"

While Holmes Rolston's article "Feeding People versus Saving Nature" is primarily written with a western audience in mind, it has far-reaching consequences for Third World countries, including Africa. Rolston's principal objective in writing this article is, as I see it, to persuade people in the West why the concerns for saving nature, the non-human part/s of the physical world, ought to be given top priority over the concerns for feeding the hungry, malnourished segments of society whom as we all know are disproportionately found in Third World countries. This is how Rolston frames his argument.

2. 1. Ominous new scale of values

Eradicating the chronic hunger and endemic poverty now afflicting well over twenty five percent of the nearly five billion people in our world while also taking the necessary steps to protect the little remaining wild nature from human desecration and damage are, according to Rolston, the two perhaps most pressing challenges of our time. However, concurrently meeting these two challenges has over the years proved to be a Herculean task. To the present day we (referring to citizens of industrialized countries and their governments) have failed to resolve concurrently the avalanche of ever worsening crises such as global warming, near-to extinction of worlds threatened species, wanton destruction of tropical forests, accelerating pollution of the atmosphere, soil and water, constantly burgeoning levels of material poverty and job insecurity to mention a few.

Rolston then asks: should feeding the hungry come first, or should taking the necessary measures to preserve, to defend and to protect what is now left on earth of its

original nature be a top priority concern even if this were to result in many Third world people going hungry or, in the worst case scenario, dying?⁶⁸ Put another way, what Rolston is asking is: “must nature always lose and humans win? Are there times when at least some humans should lose and some nature should win? And can we ever say that we should save nature first rather than feeding people?”⁶⁹

Confronted with this dilemma of choosing between feeding the hungry first or saving the earth from rape and pillage before feeding the millions of hungry people in our world today, many people will obviously take the high moral ground, insisting (and quite rightly) that feeding people should come first, insists Rolston. Feeding the hungry first, Rolston admits, “has a ring of righteousness.”⁷⁰ As he writes, no conscientious person would, for example, “allow Ethiopians (or other famine stricken human populations for that matter) to starve in order to save some butterfly.”⁷¹ Here, in this regard, Rolston reminds us of agenda 22 of the Rio declaration, which unequivocally insisted that all world governments and nation states should and must cooperate in the essential task of eradicating poverty as an indispensable requirement. If indeed agenda 22 of the Rio declaration were to be our guide, Rolston then contends, feeding the hungry first ought surely be a people’s first priority concern. He then reminds us of the biblical parable of the great judgment in which.

[After] the righteous had ministered to the needy, ...Jesus welcomed them to their reward, saying: I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you

⁶⁸ Holmes Rolston III, “Feeding People versus Saving Nature?” in Donald Van DeVeer & Christine Pierce. Eds. *The Environmental Ethics & Policy Book* (2nd Edition), New York: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1998: 417.

⁶⁹ Ibid. p. 410.

⁷⁰ Ibid. P. 410.

⁷¹ Ibid. p. 409.

gave me a drink. Those who refuse to help are damned (Mathew 28:31-46). The vision of heaven is that they shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more (Revelation 7.16). ...Jesus teaches his disciples to pray that this will of God be done on earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread (Mathew 5.11).⁷² But as noble as the concerns for feeding the hungry first certainly are, says Rolston, our everyday decisions and practices — either as individuals or collective — regrettably betray our commitment (though sometimes mendacious) of first eradicating world hunger. If, in fact, feeding the hungry first was always a top priority concern, argues Rolston, then:

- Christians, whom many look up to as paragons of moral example, would in the first place never have built an organ or a sanctuary with stained glass windows. Instead, they would have made the concerns for feeding the hungry, malnourished, segments of world society a top priority agenda.
- The most affluent individuals, who roughly constitute one fifth of the world population but who nevertheless consume four fifth of world's resources, would not be spending a lot of their monies as they often do on Christmas gifts, high prized symphony concerts, buying the latest car, or fitting their homes with the state of the art air-conditioning. Instead, they would first be more proactively involved, singly and in concert with one another, in combating world hunger.
- The ruling elites, in industrialized nations, would not be opposed to the easing immigration restrictions, which almost always lock out the poor from Third World countries on the pretext that they will end up becoming potential

⁷² Ibid. p. 410.

“parasites” on the wealth that the supposedly hardworking citizens of developed nations have labored to create.

- Affluent and politically connected individuals, in both industrialized and Third world nations, would least raise objections (whether overtly or covertly) in the attempts at charitable redistribution of the justified unequal wealth in our world today.
- The vast majority, in Third world countries, whose lives are characterized by high levels of underdevelopment, marginalization and material poverty would have, one would expect, now realized that giving birth to as many as ten children per family is an economic liability and not an economic or cultural asset (as some all too often believe).
- In the United States of America, as is the case in other industrialized world, the millions of dollars set-aside for National Endowment for the Humanities and National Science Foundation, for example, would have been redirected toward projects aimed at preventing deaths that strike thousands of millions of malnourished, hunger stricken, children in Third World countries.
- Third world and industrialized nations would have by now dramatically reduced their budgetary provisions on military buildups and instead reinvest the trillions of dollars cumulatively spend on military hardware and personnel emolument in extending basic health care services to the disproportionately huge pool of people who have little or no access to basic health care in our world.
- The US would have by now opened up part of its five hundred plus wilderness areas, which is nearly one hundred million acres, to millions of political refugees

fleeing from tyranny, violent conflicts in their mother countries, or to immigrants seeking economic asylum from the ravages of economic mismanagement, political instability and dehumanizing poverty in their own societies.

The list of what affluent individuals and governments do in both developed and Third World countries, and which clearly indicate that feeding the hungry folks first has never been a people's top priority concern, is certainly long. It cannot be possibly fully exhausted in a paper of this length. Think of what you may want to add, and whatever it may be, Rolston speculates, it would still point to one inescapable conclusion: "there are other equally important and beautiful things" that both the affluent and politically connected and even the poor care more about.⁷³ If this then were the case, Rolston quips, why would taking necessary steps to protect the little remaining wild nature against crimes of damage and despoliation not be an integral component of those things that people supposedly consider important and 'beautiful' in their everyday lives?

Make no mistake though, Rolston does acknowledge that hungry folks have immediate and pressing concerns, which obviously require the attention of and support from those who have more than they would need for their basic survival. In fact, he even pleads to those who are financially endowed to redouble their support for programs aimed at uplifting the welfare of the poor, hungry and malnourished Third world populations. However, he also admits that individuals who are finally gifted have, just like anyone else, other equally pressing concerns in their own lives.

Hence, Rolston argues, while we would expect the affluent to first attend to the needs of the poor, the hungry and the malnourished we should also not forget one

⁷³ Ibid. P. 410-412.

indubitable fact: “the poor are always there, and if we did nothing else of value until there were no more poor people, we would do nothing else of value at all.”⁷⁴ Attempting to vindicate this claim, that the poor have been and will always be with us, Rolston reminds us of the biblical story of the woman who washed Jesus’ feet with expensive ointment. When Jesus’ disciples complained, insisting that the ointment should have instead been sold and the proceeds given to the poor, Jesus replied: “you always have the poor with you. She has done a beautiful thing” [Mathew 26.10-11].⁷⁵

Furthermore, Rolston insists, while feeding the hungry first may help a few hundred thousands, if not millions, of poor people to survive at least in the short run, what is in fact needed, when all is said and done, are more lasting solutions. As he writes: “if we take over tropical forests, for example, and clear them in order to grow more food to feed the hungry, certainly we will be able to feed the hungry folks – but only for a short time. But what shall we do next, he asks, when this land, hived from tropical forests, has become exhausted? Is it not the case that after a meal for a day or two, or even perhaps a decade, “the poor will soon be hungry all over again, only now poorer because their natural wealth is also gone?”⁷⁶ Certainly, feeding the hungry today, or even providing them with a home, will not in any case deter the poor from raising big families.

Therefore, Rolston insists, we (the affluent, in both industrialized and Third world countries) should not always picture the hungry as always helpless.

The response then to the question: “are there instances when some humans should

⁷⁴ Ibid. p. 410.

⁷⁵ Ibid. p. 410.

⁷⁶ Ibid. p. 416.

lose and some nature should win” is, according to Rolston, an unambiguous YES!⁷⁷

Rolston is certainly not alone in promoting an agenda that relegates the concerns for feeding the hungry, malnourished, segments of world population to a lower level relative to the concerns for protecting the non-human world, or at least certain parts of it. Claude Lévi Strauss, the distinguished anthropologist, is on record as having noted in an interview he had with Paris Passion magazine in 1990 as follows: “I think ecologists make the mistake of thinking that they could defend humans and save nature at the same time. ... It is necessary to decide if one prefers humans or nature. I am on the side of nature.”⁷⁸

2. 2. Missed opportunities

Clearly, in this article, Rolston's motivation is to attack (and with good reasons) the pervasive hypocrisy in our world today. Cut to its bare bone, his argument would read as follow: the majority of affluent individuals, in both developed and Third world countries, are arguably reluctant to proactively promote the goals of environmental protection on grounds that there are indeed more pressing concerns that require immediate and first attention. Feeding the hungry, malnourished, segments of world societies, and especially those from Third world countries, many would argue is certainly one such concern. People who resort to this kind of reasoning, Rolston seems to suggest, would therefore find the attempts at raising huge sums of money, for example, by international wildlife conservation organizations for purposes of supporting Africa's wildlife conservation efforts, when millions of poor Africans are dying of hunger and

⁷⁷ Ibid. p. 417.

⁷⁸ Andrew Brennan. “Poverty, Puritanism and Environmental Conflict,” in *Environmental Values*. Vol. 7, No.3, 1998: 308.

hunger related illness, as morally reprehensible and also politically indefensible. However, compelling as this argument certainly is, Rolston admits, it cannot fly when juxtaposed with what happens on the ground, in actual life. Feeding the hungry, malnourished, segments of world population first, before doing anything else, has hardly ever taken a center stage vis-à-vis some of the concerns that affluent persons—individually and as a collective—consider to be at the top of the list of their priority agenda. If in fact this were the case, Rolston argues, then, the affluent in particular would neither easily succumb to temptations of undue material accumulation they have seemingly become accustomed to nor invested their monies in transport and communication technologies, medicine and medical equipments, space exploration, harnessing of energy and so forth — which we all take exceptional pride in. Instead, they would have first helped to create an atmosphere that is conducive to getting the poor, the hungry and malnourished in their own countries and in distant lands out of their endemic and pounding pain of poverty.

Granted then our questionable record of subordinating goals of eradicating world hunger to other concerns of a private nature, argues Rolston, would it seem justifiable then to first protect the now threatened biodiversity, for example, even as millions of poor people especially in Third world countries go to bed hungry every day? In any case, as Rolston insists, the hungry, malnourished segments of world populations have always been (and will continue to be) with us. We therefore should, he insists, not stop helping in other matters such as, in his case, saving endangered wildlife species, until we have eradicated the endemic poverty and hunger bedeviling thousands of millions in our world. And who knows, Rolston might go so far as to argue that environmental

protection, restoration of the damaged and despoiled parts of the physical world will the end perhaps help- even if indirectly – in combating world hunger.

Arguably, in this paper, Rolston raises fundamental concerns — especially with respect, as already noted, to the pervasive hypocrisy in our world today and the preoccupation of many people with material accumulation, consumption and status symbols. Rolston's laudable goal of bringing this matter to the front burner notwithstanding, his paper, I would like to believe, is wanting in at least two ways. First is the manner in which, in framing his argument, he circumvents efforts at addressing the pivotal question *cui prodest*: why is poverty and hunger so widespread especially in Third world countries? The second is the ramification that his position would have if it were to be used as a guide to adjudicating conflicts that all too often arise especially in Third World countries between meeting simultaneously the goals of improving the welfare of the vast poorer segments of society and protecting the environment. It is to these two concerns that we now must turn. I begin with the latter.

2. 3. Ramification of Rolston's position

Rolston's position that the affluent in both developed and Third World countries ought first to redirect their energies and resources towards saving nature before attending to pressing socioeconomic needs of the hungry populations, mirrors as it were the puritan European colonial conservation mentality, argues Brennan.⁷⁹ Underlying the puritan European colonial conservation mentality is a seemingly misanthropic agenda of seeking to protect the little remaining wild nature (by all means necessary, to use Malcolm X's phrase), from the so-called vulgarities of 'civilization, evil culture and evil people.'

Pushed to its absolute limit, this mentality, argues Brennan, has the propensity to promote

⁷⁹ Ibid. p. 325-329.

virtues of austerity and self-discipline even while shying away from confronting structures and agencies that for the most part impoverish the lives of millions of Third world people.

The agenda Rolston is trying to push forward in this particular article is, as Michael Zimmerman would say, packaged in a strong anti-people wrapper. Reading this article, one cannot help but conclude that many people – rich and poor alike – are no damn good – and that most of their activities, if left unchecked or unregulated, will inevitably lead to environmental destruction. Hence, they ought to be stopped before they end up rocking the “Noah’s Ark.”⁸⁰

This mentality and the assumption that it engenders — that most humans relate with nature only in ways that are harmful — can easily sponsor some kind of misanthropy – the mistrust, hatred and disgust of humankind, also argues Lori Gerber.⁸¹ But there is an even more insidious message in Rolston’s article. Present humans, Rolston seems to suggest, could not possibly forge creative and reciprocal relationships with the natural world. Accordingly, it would be prudent, he seems to imply, to set aside human off-limit ecosystems, away from the destructive hands of humans. Only then, according to this misanthropic logic, will future generations be guaranteed of enjoying something pure and good, untouched by the destructive hands of present humans. What in fact all this boils down to is one fundamental claim: “when you cannot trust yourself to do the right thing, then it would be okay to have an authority as wise as nature to decide

⁸⁰ Phrase is used by Robert H. Nelson in his article “Environmental Colonialism: “Saving” Africa from Africans.”
<[Http://www.irenkenya.org/speeches/environmental_colonialism_2002.pdf](http://www.irenkenya.org/speeches/environmental_colonialism_2002.pdf)>October 30, 2003.

⁸¹ Lisa Gerber. “What is so bad about Misanthropy,” in *Environmental Ethics*, Vol. 24, No.1, Spring 2002

for you.” Clearly, this lack of trust in humans, argues Lori Gerber in an unrelated article, is indicative of misanthropy – the belief that “there is no reason to trust people to act rightly since they are always a destructive species” (p. 53). Holding on to such a view can, says Gerber, nevertheless, overwhelm a person and weaken the human spirit. Instead then of submitting to this kind of thinking, Gerber counsels, we ought to embrace our humanity while also confronting the hard issues such pollution and the cruel behavior that is often directed toward most non-human species (p.5).

2. 4. Root causes of poverty in Third world countries

The last, but certainly not the least, word concerning Rolston’s article is the criticism advanced by Brennan. Rolston’s position in this paper, argues Brennan, “leaves a significant gap in history.” Particularly problematic is the use of the pronoun we, which runs throughout Rolston’s article. As Brennan notes, “while Rolston’s we is distributed over individual human beings, it does not in any conceivable way include corporations, nation-states, non-governmental organizations, international financial institutions, economic systems, international protocols and military action” that all too often set the agenda for most humans. Accordingly, notes Brennan, “Rolston describes the world of rich individuals and poor individuals, living in countries whose elected governments are largely independent and only linked by relative thin threads.” His work is therefore, on this account, silent on the role of social actors, the ethics of their behavior, and the nature of political and economic global forces, which principally fuel the accelerating environmental crisis in Africa – like elsewhere in the world.

2. 5. Conclusion

To conclude, I am convinced that pending an analysis of how responsibility is to

be distributed among individuals, global forces and corporate agents, it would be premature to endorse Rolston's position. There is need to investigate a little more closely (as I do in chapter four) why poor people tend to degrade the environments where they live, which surround them, and which they depend on for their livelihood. Pending a more pointed study of these two issues, it would therefore be intellectually injudicious to promote an agenda calling for the sealing-off of the little remaining wild nature from the poor, the malnourished and famine stricken folks as Rolston seemingly does (p.312-324).

Chapter Three: Catalog of Africa's Problems: An Overview

While keeping Rolston's proposal at the back of your mind, now visualize the following scenario that Martin Prozesky painstakingly describes in his paper, "Well-Fed Animals and Starving Babies: Environmental and Development Challenges in Process and African Perspectives."⁸²

Before you, there is a tall sturdy game fence stretching up the hill until it vanishes from sight in the distance. To the left of the fence, the grass is tall, dense and sways beautifully in the wind...magnificent animals [infinite in number and incredible in variety, ranging from the fiercest beasts to the fleetest and most timid, and from the largest to the smallest of hoofed animals] graze and roam peacefully. ... Gazing at the long files of animals [coming down to drink at the watering places, feeding, fighting, resting, making love, or standing for their non-tide rest in the quivering heat haze] is a never-ending pleasure. Chances are, you will be spellbound by this sight... Your heart may even beat faster at the wonder of it as you think of the world of smoke-shrouded cities, noisy traffic and stressed commuters that lie a few hours behind your back.

[Yet, that is not all!] Look now at what lies to the right side of the fence. The grass is very short and, in some places, it has vanished altogether. A few scrawny goats and sheep, and maybe a thin cow or two, seek out what is left to eat. A small black herd-boy dressed in grimy rags sits nearby under a small thorn tree... A few miles away, near a muddied stream, there is a group of African huts. You can tell at a glance the people here are very poor [at least by Western standards] for the huts are like the herd-boy. Certainly, there is no electricity, no telephone and no piped water... In all likelihood, there is not much to eat or many blankets for the chilly nights.

Continue to walk with me, in your imagination. A few hundred miles to the north take in the following scene. Before you, there is a pristine forest... Mahogany, Umdoni and many other species of trees are in abundance, and there is no sign of the ubiquitous Mexican pine or the Australian eucalyptus trees ... Again, your heart soars...for here...you are amidst one of the few remaining stretches of tropical forests. If you enter its cool heart, you would feel yourself drawn into its quiet, patient mystery and would rejoice at the bird life of the forest! [But as you proceed on]... you stumble upon a scene that brings an ache into your soul. You reach a clearing where only the charred stumps of trees are left, except for the huddle of humble huts off to one side, and the smell of the cooking pots. It is not

⁸² Martin Prozesky is the Director of Unilever Center for Comparative and Applied Ethics at the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, South Africa.

that you resent humans. It is just that you know that these humans are killing the forest...

And as you reflect on these two sights—of well-fed animals and hungry children, ...of humans managing to survive at the price of dead trees—the sight of that sturdy game fence fades and is replaced, in your mind's eye, by another fence, far stronger and taller, raced with razor coils and flanked by electrified wires. The fence you see, [in front of you], is however invisible. Those of us who are strong, rich, greedy and ruthless have erected it in order to enclose all that is tempting and vulnerable. ...Immediately it dawns on you, if you are [indeed] reflective enough, that this invisible fence runs not just around a few game reserves or forested areas [in Africa] but also everywhere on this planet that is [somewhat] weaker in muscle...⁸³

The problems highlighted above by Prozesky are just a tip of the iceberg. There are, as we have already noted, many equally pressing challenges facing Africa and especially its vast disinherited segments of society. Sample, as an illustration, the following examples:

Large scale cash-crop agriculture, which was introduced by European colonial settlers, has increasingly expanded over the years not only in forested areas – the natural sinks for atmospheric carbon dioxide and home to countless varieties of wildlife species and microorganisms – but also in ecological niches previously considered marginal to rain-fed agriculture.⁸⁴ Monoculture cropping is depleting soil nutrients. In many places, soil erosion is widespread. Food crops yields are crashing. Land is being abandoned, as many rural able-bodied persons migrate to urban cities and towns.

⁸³ See, Martin Prozesky's "Well-fed Animals and Starving Babies: Environmental and Development Challenges in Process and African Perspective," in *Concrescence*, the Australian Journal of Process Thought, Volume 1, June 2000. On line version of this: <http://www.alfred.north.whitehead.com/AJPT/ajpt_papers/vol01/01_prozesky_fr.htm> February 21, 2003.

⁸⁴ According to report "Action Plan of the Environment Initiative of The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) of June 2003" Africa's forest resources are now rapidly declining. Between 1980 and 1995 it is estimated that Africa lost 66 million hectares with 65% of this deforestation occurring during the 1990's. This decline, the report notes, has resulted mainly from the rising demand for agricultural land, timber and other non-timber forest products

The use of pesticides, herbicides and insecticides especially on these cash crop plantations has contaminated streams, rivers, lakes and ground water aquifers. Alien species have invaded and are increasingly spreading into wetland areas, river estuaries and water catchments, displacing local species, altering diverse ecosystems and disrupting their ecological processes.⁸⁵ Some local fisheries have crashed while others are now on the verge of collapsing.⁸⁶ Traditional fishing gear has for the most part been replaced by imported synthetic gill nets and automated trawlers. Many plant and animal species are now on the verge of going extinct.⁸⁷ Deserts are fast encroaching.⁸⁸ Streams and rivers are rapidly drying up. And to compound it all, the weather is increasingly becoming more unpredictable.⁸⁹

⁸⁵ In addition to the excessive use of pesticides other reasons cited include, for example, drought and climatic changes as a result of both natural and human causes.

⁸⁶ According to New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) Report entitled, "Action Plan of the Environment Initiative of The New Partnership for Africa's Development" of June 2003, over forty percent of sub-Saharan Africa's population derive their livelihoods from coastal and marine ecosystems. Yet these ecosystems, notes this report, are now under threat from pollution, coastal change and modification, stress on ecosystems, threats to the availability of water for use, invasive aquatic species, fisheries and biodiversity degradation, water quality degradation urbanization, population growth, and global issues of climatic change and sea-level rise threaten to be perpetual. In the last two decades, for example, rain has consistently fallen below average in Africa, sometimes by as much as 40 per cent. Ibid 1994: 43

⁸⁷ Recent estimates, from NEPAD's report of June 2003, " indicate that a total of 126 species have become extinct from the wild in Africa. Currently, this report notes, there are 2,018 threatened animal species, some 125 plants recorded as extinct and that 1,771 plant species are now threatened.

⁸⁸ The rate at which Sahara desert is expanding is too alarming to contemplate. According to some estimates, writes Ghanaian philosopher Kwasi Wiredu, the Sahara desert has been growing towards the south at the rate of about 40 kilometers per year. A study commissioned by the United Nations arrived at a somewhat similar conclusion. It found out that in 1998 alone this expansive desert advanced at least 150 kilometers to the south. Consult, for more details, Kwasi Wiredu. "Philosophy, Humankind and the Environment" in H. Odera Orika [Ed.] *Philosophy, Humankind and Ecology: Philosophy of Nature and Environmental Ethics*, Nairobi, Kenya: African Center for Technology Studies (ACTS) Press, 1994: 30-48.

In urban cities and towns – where some dislocated rural folks emigrate hoping to make their ends meet and/or where a majority of educated African youths relocate in search of salaried employment – living conditions are becoming even more abhorrent. Overcrowding, construction of high-rise, unstable, residential buildings and the mushrooming of ghettos (communities of squatters) now pose a potential threat to human health and safety. The poor and disadvantaged segments of population live in slums, without running water, without access to electricity, without recreational facilities and with little or no hope of finding gainful employment. Noise, air and water pollution from traffic congestion, burning of diesel, oil spills and domestic as well as industrial discharge to mention a few are dangerously a common happenstance.⁹⁰

Central business districts, as in most lower and middle class residential neighborhoods, lack proper drainage and sewage facilities. The mountains of uncollected garbage, and the disgusting stench this garbage discharges, speaks volume about the degree to which especially the Africa's middle class has succumbed to western consumption lifestyles. Crime, prostitution, drug abuse and other kinds of social ills (vices that almost always capture headlines of local newspapers and magazines) are just but a few of the many symptoms pointing to the dysfunctional nature of the entire societal moral fiber. Thousands of homeless and malnourished children, who are apparently condemned to a life of squalor amidst pockets of obscene affluence, sniff toxic

⁸⁹ According to Kwasi Wiredu, in recent years persistent drought has brought death and infirmity to unspeakable number of Africans, particularly those in tender age. Adverse weather conditions

⁹⁰ Part of the reason why urban cities in Africa are becoming increasingly polluted is because of the pressure to increase industrial output. In most rural areas, while pollution levels are low, much of it comes from toxins from domestic combustion of wood, charcoal, paraffin, crop residues and refuse.

substances and work tirelessly around the clock – begging for money and scavenging for food in trash dumps and waste disposal sites. The somewhat affluent, with their eyes focused on replicating the material quality of life in industrialized nations, lead a life of material luxury seemingly unperturbed, for the most part, by the plight of the thousands of poor and hungry populations that live in their own midst. For them, “hunger” for social status, which is largely expressed through unfettered material accumulation among other ways, has regrettably engendered an unparalleled atavistic (or should we call it cancerous?) culture of corruption. This culture of plundering the common wealth, of annexing common resources for personal enrichment, has admittedly crippled the ability and the will of most (if not all) governments in sub-Saharan Africa to deliver basic, essential services to their citizenry.

Healthcare delivery systems have virtually collapsed.⁹¹ Millions of people lack access to health care. Hospitals and rural health clinics are understaffed and persistently lack proper diagnostic equipment and even medicines. Detecting, preventing and managing some of the most debilitating diseases such as tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS and

⁹¹ A sterling example is Kenyatta Hospital in Kenya, which was once a pride of East and Central Africa like. Perhaps, to show how deep healthcare delivery systems have sank, we should here listen to a moving personal story that Njoki Njoroge Njehu presented to the US African Subcommittee of the House International Relations Committee Hearing on “Debt Relief for Africa.” When Njoki Njoroge Njehu visited her aunt who was hospitalized at Kenyatta national hospital in 1997, she found her auntie sharing a bed with another patient as most patients did. Medication had to be bought elsewhere and brought to the hospital for the nurses to administer. Food also had to be bought by relatives of the patients for the hospital could not afford to provide a healthy, nutritious meal. To compound this, the ratio of patients per doctor had doubled. In 1981, for example, she noted, there were ten thousand people for every doctor in Kenya but by 1994 that ratio had gone up to nearly 22,000 people for every doctor. In Uganda, there were 661 people for every hospital bed in 1981, while in 1994 there were 1,092 for every bed. Part of this sad state of affairs, according to Njoki, can be attributed to the implementation of structural adjustment programs (SAP’S), which is a consequence of Africa’s escalating debt crisis.

many other illnesses has increasingly become difficult.

Roads in much of sub-Saharan Africa are poorly maintained, and in most rural areas are virtually non-existent. Public transport in virtually all urban cities and towns throughout sub-Saharan Africa is in total disarray. Expansion and development of both the physical infrastructure and info-structure, particularly in remote rural areas, is no longer a top priority agenda in the budgetary provisions of most governments in Africa. Provision of clean drinking water and affordable quality education especially to the vast poor, excluded, and vulnerable majority has largely remained more like a cloudcuckoo-land. The list of Africa's insurmountable, crosscutting, problems is in fact inexhaustible. One could go on and on and on....

Now, the question that we must now address is: What are the causes of these, and many other, problems and challenges facing sub-Saharan Africa and its people? The next chapter grapples with this question.

Chapter Four: Root Causes of Africa's Predicaments

4. 0. Introduction

The many problems confronting sub-Saharan Africa, including those mentioned above, have thus far been traced to a plethora of sources.⁹² However, in this chapter, I focus on only five prominently identified causes. These are: (a) the persistent crisis of self/ cultural identity; (b) plunder of Africa's resources by European colonialists and, after independence, by Africa's political and ruling elites, Western nations and multinational corporations; (c) burgeoning population growth rates and its impact on the environment; (d) failures of development interventions and, finally; (e) the marginal integration of Africa in the global economy.

These five sources have, separately and combined, intensified *mutatis mutandis* Africa's grotesque economic mismanagement, collapsing infrastructure, mounting foreign debts, intractable ethnic conflicts, horrendous human rights violation, widespread corruption and the skyrocketing levels of poverty among other ills. Below, I examine more fully each of these identified causes.

4. 1. Crisis of self/cultural identity

Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Kenyan prolific writer, and the late Stephen Bantu Biko, founder and martyr of the black consciousness movement in apartheid South Africa, present arresting analyses as to why Africans in Africa continue, long after European colonialists surrendered the button of political power to African political elite, to be

⁹² Some of the reasons cited include: (a) the politics of opportunism, betrayal and dishonesty; (b) failure of African governments to put people at the very center of development; (c) blind imitation of Western culture; (d) indifferent, insensitivity and sometimes brutal African leaders; (e) Africa's ruling elites uncritical reliance on alien and alienating civilizations for ideas and analytical guidelines and so forth

mired in a debilitating crisis of self and cultural identity. In his book *Decolonizing the Mind* (1986), for example, Ngugi wa Thiong'o trace the origin of these two crises to the violence that European colonialists unleashed on African peoples and their culture, arguing:

The biggest weapon wielded and daily unleashed by imperialism (read colonialism as well) against the collective defiance is the cultural bomb. The effect of a cultural bomb is to annihilate a people – that is, belief in their names, their language, their environment, their country, their capacity and ultimately in themselves. It makes them see their past as one of non-achievement... Amidst this wasteland that it has created, imperialism [then] presents itself as the cure and demands that the dependent sing hymns of praise with the constant refrain: 'Theft is holy!'⁹³

The late Steve Bantu Biko expressed a similar opinion in his seminal book "I Write What I like" (1987). He, here, argued that "colonialism is never satisfied with having the native in his grip but, by some strange logic, it must turn to the past and disfigure and distort it." Exactly, one might ask, how did European colonialists meddle with and/or destroy Africans allegiance to their ancestral traditions and cultural worldviews?

4. 1. 2. Alien and alienating system of education

One of the lethal weapons that European colonialists used to disfigure and to distort traditional Africa's cultural practices, worldviews and epistemologies is by introducing the sons, and occasionally daughters, of Africa to an alien and alienating system of education. This project began in earnest soon after the Berlin Conference of 1884, which led to the demarcation of the continent of Africa into respective sphere of

⁹³ Ngugi wa Thiong'o, a prolific writer and public intellectual, has indeed helped to shape the debates about language, culture and politics. He is also one of the founders of modern African literature and an important theorist of post-colonialism. For more details concerning the effect of European system of education consult his books, *De-colonizing the mind*, (1986) and *Moving the Center* (1993) and particularly the chapter entitled "Imperialism of language."

European direct control. No sooner this happened than European colonial “educators” and some missionaries began to launch sustained campaigns, aimed at changing what in their opinion they considered as “inappropriate African practices and ways of life.”⁹⁴ African youths were, from this time forward, introduced to a system of education that systematically sought to undermine the pride (if they indeed had one) in their culture, language, customs and religions. Molding an African bourgeoisie, a class that would henceforth “identify with, and embrace as their own, European history, traditions and cultures whilst remaining, at least for the most part, ambivalent and/or indifferent toward their own cultural traditions, ways of life and history was one of their primary motivations.”⁹⁵ Franz Fanon, writes Bayart, puts this even more forcefully — arguing that:

[Harboring an attitude bordering on imperialistic arrogance] some European colonial elites, interested in ‘manufacturing’ a native petite bourgeoisie, picked promising adolescents and branded them...with principles of Western culture and stuffed their mouths full with high-sounding phrases, grand glutinous words that stuck to the teeth (Jean Francois Bayart, 2000: 265).

Transplanted from the comfort of their “ancestral womb,” and consequently inserted into the culturally corrosive belly of European colonial worldviews, African youths were “taught more about the history and geography of the Western world than Africa history and geography— even though their European instructors were arguably not

⁹⁴ With the exception of Ethiopia, the Berlin conference effectively marked the partition of African continent into respective European spheres of jurisdictions

⁹⁵ For more details consult Uhuru Hotep’s article entitled “De-colonizing the African Mind: Further Analysis and Strategy,”
<http://www.nbufront.org/html/FRONTalview/articlespaperas/Hotep_Decolonizing/AfricanMind.html> March 31, 2003.

entirely ignorant of both the history and geography of Africa” [Mwakikagile, 2000: xiii]. Reflecting little or no experience at all of the continent in its diverse fields of knowledge, the European-based school curriculum tended to glorify Western achievements while disparaging indigenous African worldviews, cultures and traditions (Mwakikagile, 2000: xiii). That European colonialists and some missionaries set in motion an educational infrastructure that to the present day incarcerates the conceptual universes of many formally educated Africans need here not belabored.

Casting African ways of life as exotic and “primitive,” European colonial educators and some missionaries brainwashed African youths to believe that they had no history, no valuable stories to tell, and significant civilization to be proud of. They denounced African religions, branding them as primitive. They censured African dances, declaring them excessively erotic. They also vilified African indigenous worldviews and cultural practices, claiming that they were a hallmark of “backwardness.”

With their single-minded focus of cultivating an African bourgeoisie, a band of intellectuals whom they could then and even thereafter use as conduits in “raping” Africa’s natural resources, European colonialists initiated sons and, occasionally daughters, of Africa into a somewhat quasi-aristocratic perspective of education. This system of education largely (if not wholly) subordinated indigenous African worldviews and epistemologies – which Okot p’ Bitek, the late Uganda anthropologist, poet and social critic repeatedly praised in most of his works because of their pivotal role in fashioning more rounded individuals – to ideals of classical learning. In Anglophone Africa, for example, memorizing European historical facts, meticulously reciting the works of Western poets and thinkers, and speaking and writing flawlessly in the queen’s

English became what Ngugi wa Thiong'o calls "the measure of one's readiness for election into the band of the elect."⁹⁶ In Francophone Africa, the experience was even worse. African youths were literally prepared to become French in all aspects: mental outlook, linguistic nuances, dress culture, dietetic habits and so forth. The Portuguese and the Belgians parodied the same approach, although leaning more sympathetically toward the French model of assimilation.⁹⁷

That to the present day the transplanted European system of education has produced an intelligentsia class that is usually hell-bent on despising its own ancestry and struggles – whether success or not – to blindly emulate everything and anything emanating from the west is not in question.⁹⁸ Ali Mazrui, Africa's celebrated political scientist, and his nephew, Alamin Mazrui, are even more eloquent on this matter than I am. Both argue, in their book *Political Culture of Language: Swahili, Society and The State*, that:

[Partly because of the Western system of education] ... a whole generation of African graduates has grown up despising their own ancestry and scrambling to imitate others. [These "black skinned white" men and women, who more often than not are] fascinated by the West's cultural mirror ... [have lamentably] remained intellectual imitators and disciples of the West.⁹⁹

⁹⁶ Ngugi wa Thiong'o. *Moving the Center: The Struggle for Cultural Freedoms*. Portsmouth, New Hampshire: Heinemann, 1993:32.

⁹⁷ Ngugi wa Thiong'o. "The Allegory of the Cave: Language, Democracy and a New World Order!" Lecture 111 of the Clarendon Lectures in English, Oxford, May 15, 1996. This article is also published in *Black Renaissance Noire* Volume 1, Number 3.

⁹⁸ Africa's elite, notes Ali Mazrui, have an insatiable obsession with Western values but not Western skills, capitalist greed but not capitalist discipline, Western culture of letters but not Western culture of numerals, Western consumption patterns but not Western production techniques, and last but not least culture of salaries and not culture of earning.

Okot p' Bitek's context specific rendition regarding the corrosive effects of European presence in Africa is even more telling. In his African Language poem, *Song of Lawino*, and its' Europhone response, *Song of Ocol*, p' Bitek eloquently describes how the transplanted European system of education has greatly helped in churning out graduates who, for the most part, look down upon their cultural roots and are, as a result, tied to the west. This group of Africa's elite class, according to Ngugi wa Thiong'o, "fancies itself as dwelling in some kind of celestial paradise [largely] disconnected with the real world of ordinary struggles," a world in which millions of poor Africans live in "the shadows of poverty, ignorance and disease – even though they have done everything they could to alleviate their lot."¹⁰⁰ As Ngugi wa Thiong'o notes, "African peasants and workers have always done all they could to send their sons and daughters to schools and universities at home and abroad in order to scout for knowledge and skills, which could relieve the community of these burdens. But lo and behold, upon returning to their motherland each one of them speaks in tongues," in obscure, and inaccessible foreign languages.¹⁰¹

Ocol, Lawino's husband, the main protagonist in p'Bitek's *Song of Lawino* and *Song of Ocol* (1984), is an ideal example. "By virtue of his knowledge of the master's language and culture," as Ngugi wa Thiongo's would say, Ocol – as many formally educated Africans – ridicules and looks down upon his ancestral traditions.¹⁰²In

⁹⁹ Ali Mazrui and Alamin Mazrui, *Political Culture of Language: Swahili, Society and the State*. Binghamton University, New York: The Institute of Global Cultural, Binghamton University, The State University of New York, 1996.

¹⁰⁰ Ngugi wa Thiong'o. "The Allegory of the cave: Language, Democracy and a New World Order!" Lecture III of the Clarendon Lectures in English, Oxford, May 12, 1996: 16.

¹⁰¹ Ibid. p. 4.

unparalleled tenacity, Ocol struggles – whether successful or not – to emulate Western values and lifestyle. Ocol, like many formally educated Africans, has a minimal taste (if any) for African cuisine: food made out of millet, cassava, arrowroots, sweat-potatoes, bananas, yams and leafy vegetables and pumpkins. He also constantly ridicules his wife, Lawino, and his parents, for being old fashioned. Like many formally educated Africans, Ocol has indeed become what Edward Said calls (although in a different context) “a prosecution witness for the West.”¹⁰³ A poem from Okot p’Bitek’s *Song of Lawino* and *Song of Ocol* suffice here to illustrate the degree to which Ocol has changed. In this poem, Lawino laments:

My husband treats me roughly...
 He says my mother is a witch,
 That my clansmen are fools
 Because they eat rats,
 He says we are kaffirs,
 We do not know the ways of God
 We sit in deep darkness
 And do not know the gospel,
 He says my mother hides her charms
 In her necklace
 And that we are all sorcerers

“Lost then in the labyrinth of a foreign path,” to use Ngugi wa Thiong’o words, Ocol no longer respects (let alone appreciate) his ancestral traditions, which Okot p’Bitek eulogize in his works precisely because of their critical role in fostering diverse kinship networks of solidarity in the traditional African systems of governance, commerce, education and family structure. Ocol neither listens (and hears) with respect the many voices – absent yet irremediably there – of the many earthlings that surround him, nor pay attention to the songs of the seasons, the language of the wind, rain, trees

¹⁰² Ibid. p. 6.

¹⁰³ Ibid. p. 6.

and insects. More inexcusably, Ocol denigrates African myths, legends, folklore and poetry. Like many formally educated Africans, Ocol is so brainwashed and enamored of the West that he has somewhat lost contact with his own ancestral history, traditions and culture.

Founder director of the International Center of Insect Physiology and Ecology (ICIPE), the late professor Thomas Odhiambo, offers, in my opinion, a very persuasive explanation of how a peoples' confidence in their culture and traditions can be eroded and their minds effectively colonized. He movingly notes, in his article "Africa beyond famine," that:

A brutal way to conquer a community or nation or continent is to defeat them in war. Such a conquest is [however] temporary and will inevitably be overcome as soon as the conquered can regroup and finally recapture their lost territory. ...

Another way to accomplish a more lasting conquest of a people, society and civilization is to destroy their self-image of accomplishment, well-being, enterprise and innovativeness, and their capacity to dream and to invent their own self-constructed future. Myths, legends...and the search for utopia are the essential tissues that fuel a people's will to survive and to prosper as well as the spirit of heroism and invincibility, which have a knack of becoming reality in a people who are true to their long running perceived destination (Thomas Odhiambo 1995: 157).

That as it may be, nonetheless, "every phenomenon in nature" notes Ngugi wa Thiong'o "tends to generate its opposite."

“The system that was geared to producing oneway interpretation – in favor of the slave owning and colonial presence – also gave rise to other contradictory impulses, practices and outcomes.”¹⁰⁴ A few audacious African intellectuals, says Ngugi wa Thiong’o, sought (amidst the ‘tsunami’ occasioned by the colonial system of education) to challenge “the conditions of their confinement in the colonial ‘caves.’

Assuming the role of “double agents,” these gallant sons and daughters of Africa not only “whispered conspiracies in their own languages,” but also worked untiringly to free themselves and their fellow Africans from the “chains of ages by demolishing all the walls that prevent(ed) the floodlights of the sun from reaching their space.”¹⁰⁵ They ostensibly refused to “carry the mind of their colonizers in their black bodies, to be recruited as conveyors of messages from the West, and to spy for the West among their people,” says Ngugi wa Thiong’o. Employing “counterespionage tactics in crying out for the light of the sun denied to them and their fellow Africans by European colonialists, these individuals managed to turn around and warn their people of what to expect and how to deal with the new (European colonial) invasion.”¹⁰⁶ Notable personalities in this category of courageous sons of Africa included Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya, Benjamin Nnamdi Azikiwe of Nigeria, Obafemi Awolowo of Nigeria, Julius Kambarage Nyerere of Tanzania, Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, and Leopold Senghor of Senegal to mention a few.¹⁰⁷

Their determination to free themselves and their fellow Africans from the

¹⁰⁴ Ibid. p. 7.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid. p.7.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, May 15, 1996

¹⁰⁷ Read, for example, Jomo Kenyatta. *Facing Mount Kenya: The Traditional Life of the Agikuyu*(1978); Nnamdi Azikiwe. *Renascent Africa* (1968), and; Kwame Nkrumah. *I speak of Freedom: A Statement of African Ideology* (1961).

“colonial cave” notwithstanding, ” these same individuals “unfortunately turned what at best was a temporary colonial expedience into a permanent necessity,” says Ngugi wa Thiong’o. Of course, this was soon after their respective countries gained “political independence.” Much like their European colonial predecessors, some of these African nationalists perpetuated the same vision animating the colonial system of education. The supposedly “ignorant,” “uneducated,” sons and daughters of Africa were (and still are to the present today) to be liberated from the darkness of their histories, languages and traditional lifestyles and thrust into the Europhone light. Their main argument was (and still is) premised on the conviction that “illiterate” sons and daughters of Africa could only better themselves only when they are inducted into the formal school system where they would be “furnished with new mirrors in which to see themselves and their people,” observes Ngugi wa Thiong’o. In other words, training “illiterate” sons and daughters of Africa to become cultural appendages of Europe was (and still is) considered indispensable to the realization of the goals of progress and modernity. This vision has, as already suggested, continued to animate, to shape and to inform post-independent Africa’s system of education. Despite repeated efforts at transforming post-independent Africa’s system of education, the vision animating the transplanted European system of education has remained largely unchanged. It is no wonder then that, for the most part, to the present day, many formally educated Africans are at ease representing and promoting – directly or remotely– European interests more than they are in defending the concerns and interests of their fellow citizens. Quoting from the book of Luke 6: 44, Gilbert Ogutu offers a concise summary of what one would expect from many formally educated Africans. “By their fruits,” says Ogutu, “you will know them.”

4. 2. Plunder of Africa's Resources

Closely related – although not necessarily interchangeable– with the persistent crisis of self /cultural identity in Africa, is the scope and intensity by which European colonialists, and after independence, Africa's ruling elites, Western nations, and multinational corporations have voraciously plundered Africa's treasures, mineral wealth, biodiversity and so forth. A case in point! Propagating the myth of "saving" Africa's environment, and by extension "saving" Africans from their self-chosen path of destruction, European colonial conservationists stirred up anxiety about the destructive capacity of traditional African ways of life.¹⁰⁸ In their opinion, which was in any case racial and/or prejudiced, traditional African practices of timber extraction, game hunting, subsistence farming, fishing, animal husbandry and common property regimes were "primitive," inefficient and wasteful. They used this argument partly to justify their expropriation of Africa's most fertile land and resources and to uproot millions of Africans from their ancestral lands. This same argument was used to compress unrelated cultural communities into designated reservations, compounds and native homelands and to separate previously homogenous cultural communities. The late Edward Said, distinguished postcolonial theorist, offers in his essay "The Question of Palestine" a more poignant account of how European settlers and colonial administrators justified their conquest of indigenous peoples, land and resources. He writes:

Imperialism was the theory, colonialism the practice of changing the uselessly

¹⁰⁸ Commenting on the proposed forest rules of 1928 in Tanzania, Roderick P. Neumann notes, in his article, "Imposing Wilderness: Struggles Over Livelihood and Nature Preservation in Africa," how European colonialists believed that the natives had no more inherent property in forests than in the land, and had, as a result, to be protected against themselves."

<<http://www.upress.edu/books/pages/8071/8071.ch03.html>> October 23, 2002

unoccupied territories of the world into useful new versions of the European metropolitan society. Everything in those territories that suggested [difference] waste, disorder, uncounted resources, was to be converted into productivity... You get rid of most of the offending human and animal blight...you confine the rest to reservations, compounds, native homelands, where you can count, tax, use them profitably, and you build a new society on the vacated space [1980:78].

European misreading of traditional African land management systems was, as we now know, wrapped in a ribbon of vested self-interest. Their near to religious crusade to protect Africa's wildlife and tropical forests, for example, served their own interests and goals much more than they were meant to ensure that Africa's resources were to be, from thence forward, utilized in efficient and sustainable ways. The copious laws that they subsequently introduced to protect Africa's wildlife, to prevent the loss of Africa's biodiversity and to preserve scenic landscapes, and which incrementally altered Africa's common property regimes, also served them in at least five ways. First was to facilitate the creation of aesthetically appealing landscapes that would appeal to European preconceptions. Second was to ensure that only Europeans would have the unfettered access to Africa's resources. Third was to speed up the transfer of Africa's wealth and resources to European metropolitan centers. Fourth was to impoverish millions of Africans, control their movement and, as a result, indirectly push Africans into seeking employment in the cash-crop plantations and mining industries that they had by then established. The last, but not the least, was to prevent Africans from competing with Europeans especially in marketing wildlife and forest products.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁹ For more details consult Robert P. Neumann's "Imposing Wilderness: Struggles Over

4. 2. 1. The Spiral-Horned Bongo

The disappearance of a rare antelope, the spiral-horned Bongo from the Mount Kenya Aberdare forest, is perhaps a sterling example of how early Europeans “conservation laws” facilitated the transfer of Africa’s resources to European metropolitan centers, According to Gakuu Mathenge “early Euro-American hunters, settlers, and merchants made millions of dollars in their ruthless chase after the Bongo antelope.”¹¹⁰ This painful past, notes Mathenge, is best captured in Lucinda De Laroque’s book, *Paradise Found* (1992). In this book, Mathenge points out:

The story of Mount Kenya Safari Club starts from a 1930s sensational news item about the capture of an elusive spiral horned Bongo antelope by a white farmer, Raymond Hook, who lived in the town of Nanyuki. The story made international news—and the mercurial Mr. Hook was making a lot of money by shipping and selling these very shy, wild creatures to zoos in Europe and the United States of America.¹¹¹

The commercial rush for the Bongo antelopes, Mathenge goes on to say, “stirred and sent profiteers onto the bongo’s spoor, chasing it to near extinction and themselves to riches.”¹¹² Among those who allegedly sniffed money was a British colonel, Eric Smith Percy, who had moved from British India to British Kenya to partake of the Bongo wealth. Other individuals, who also made large sums of money by selling Bongo antelopes to zoos in Europe and United States of America, were a wealthy American

Livelihood and Nature Preservation in Africa,”

<<http://www.upress.edu/books/pages/8071/8071.ch03.html>> October 23, 2002.

¹¹⁰ Gakuu Mathenge. 2003. “The Return Of Rare Antelope,” *Daily Nation*, Kenya, <<http://www.nationaudio.com/nwes/DailyNation/supplements/horizon/cur.../story30102.html>> Thursday, October 29, 2003:2.

¹¹¹ Ibid. p. 2.

¹¹² Ibid. p. 2.

widow, Mrs. Myra Wheeler – whom Smith Percy had ostensibly met in India, and a wealthy America woman, Mrs. Rhoda Lewison, a wife of a New York City Jewish Millionaire.”¹¹³

4. 2. 2. Violence visited upon Africans

Of course, the rapacious plunder of Africa’s resources by European colonialists could not have gathered the momentum it certainly gained (at that time) were it not accompanied by the extensive violence, which European colonialists unleashed upon Africans. France’s involvement in Algeria is a typical example.

In the early phase of Algerian occupation, argues John Ruedy (1992), French troops raped Algerian women, stole millions of francs from the Algerian treasury, desecrated mosques, occupied buildings on indemnity and, even more despicably, destroyed cemeteries. As Algerians fled, their homes, their shops, factories, farms and property were seized and, subsequently, sold off at extremely low prices to European settlers. Condemning the unnecessary violence visited upon Algerians by French troops, a French parliamentary commission sent to Algeria to make policy recommendation unequivocally stated in its report of 1833:

We have sent to their death, on simple suspicion and without trail, people whose guilt were always doubtful and then despoiled their heirs. We massacred and... slaughtered, on suspicion, entire populations subsequently found to be innocent; we have put on trial men considered saints by the country, men revered because they had enough courage to expose themselves to our fury...we have thrown into prison chiefs or tribes for offering hospitality to our deserters.¹¹⁴

¹¹³ Ibid. p. 2.

Strangely enough, these horrific acts marked the beginning of France's mission to "civilize" Algerian "barbarians." France was, however, not the only European power involved in committing atrocities against Africans. The British, the Belgians, the Portuguese and, during my own lifetime, the apartheid racist regime in South Africa replicated almost intact the French pattern of conquest and plunder of African resources and humiliation of the African people. But the violence unleashed on black people predates the European conquest of Africa. Immanuel Kant [1724-1804], despite his blatant bigotry, is on record as having loathed the injustices perpetrated by European conquerors against foreign people and especially the black race. In his article "Eternal Peace and Other Essay (1939)," he, for example, writes:

The injustice that civilized nations displayed towards foreign lands and peoples was terrifying. When discovered...the lands occupied by the blacks...were regarded as lands belonging to no one, because their inhabitants were counted for nothing. Foreign soldiers were imported ...under the pretext of merely establishing economic relations, and with them came subjection of the natives, incitement of various nations to widespread wars among themselves, famine, rebellion, treachery and the entire litany of evils that can afflict the human race... And all these were actions perpetrated by powers who, while imbibing injustice like water, made much of their piety and who in matters of orthodoxy wanted to be regarded as the elect (Kant, 1983:119).

Nigeria's celebrated writer and novelist, Chinua Achebe, also eloquently highlights, in his seminal novel "Things Fall Apart," the resultant effects of the violence

¹¹⁴ John Ruedy. *Modern Algeria: The Origins and Development of Nation*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992: 50.

unleashed upon Africans and their ways of life by European colonialists. Centuries-old ways of life that purportedly had served Africans reasonably well, notes Achebe, were displaced by the violence of European “civilizing mission.” The tragic consequences of the violence unleashed on Africans by European colonialists continue to haunt Africa and millions of Africans to the present day. Everything that was African was devalued.

African people were counted for nothing and thousands of millions were subjected to a life of servitude in their own homeland (Emmanuel Eze, 1998: 238). Equally cast into the European “wastepaper baskets” were centuries old Africa’s values of hospitality (extended even to strangers), generosity, care for one another, respect for elders, dread for the unknown, and the sacred reverence bestowed especially on prominent features of the physical landscape: mountains, gigantic trees, grooves, and huge water masses to mention a few. Eroded as well was traditional Africa’s life of material simplicity, remarkable adaptation even in some of the most difficult physical conditions, and the endurance of many individuals amidst a few strings and arrows of fortune.

The impact of European violence on Africans and their ways of life are, as already noted, felt to the present day. Specifically, the system of private land ownership regimes that they introduced has profoundly transformed societies in many ways, often producing irreversible results. Chief amongst these results is the indignity of poverty, which today incarcerates the vast majority whose lives are characterized by high levels of exclusion, vulnerability and all forms of deprivation. The transplanted European system of private landownership has, additionally, consigned millions of Africans into a life of servitude, as the land that they previously owned communally has steadily been subdivided into small individual parcels and plots which are no longer viable for

commercial agriculture and other intensive subsistence activities. Many of Africa's rural communities have, as a result, been driven to seek alternative ways of survival that have had far-reaching environmental repercussions. The accelerating incursion, and the attendant destruction, of tropical forests is one such activity. Poaching is another. And the list goes on and on.

4. 3. Failures of development interventions

Moreover, the departure of European colonialists from the center stage and direct control of Africa's political affairs has not substantially improved the lives and livelihood of millions of Africans. Western nations, operating overtly or covertly, continue to overwhelmingly meddle with Africa's destiny and future – thanks to the native bourgeoisie class that they helped to manufacture. With a single-minded determination, of pleasing, in particular, their overseas benefactors – the world bank, the international monetary fund, donor countries and international development agencies – Africa's ruling elite have (and still) continue to mortgage the lives and livelihoods of millions of poor Africans, leaving them even worse off economically and, in some cases, in dire poverty. Ostensibly, the meddling in Africa's destiny and future by European powers has not changed, despite the forty plus years that many African have had since attaining “political independence,” This is precisely because Africa's political leaders have failed to chart a viable economic future for Africa; a future that is not so much dependent on others' charity and/or foreign aid.”¹¹⁵24 For instance, to build new roads, to improve deteriorating infrastructure, to keep government institutions and development programs

¹¹⁵ Robert H. Nelson, “Environmental Colonialism: “Saving” Africa from Africans.” <http://www.irenkenya.org/speeches/environmental_colonialism__2002.pdf> October 30, 2003

running, to protect Africa's rich biodiversity, and to maintain their lavish lifestyles, Africa's ruling elites

repeatedly turn to donor agencies whilst, of course, relying on the revenue internally generated from mineral mining, oil-drilling, commercial logging, cash-crop exports, tourism and its attendant activities.

Cognizant of the fact that the flow of donor money is in large measure dependent on their willingness to respect, and to accommodate the interests of their benefactors, Africa's ruling elites have learned the "play-safe-keep-out of trouble" game pretty well. But their readiness to play this game has unfortunately allowed post-independent Africa's priorities, goals and future to be determined and controlled from Western capitals: Washington D.C, London, Paris, Brussels, Bonn, Copenhagen, Tokyo, Brisbane, Ottawa and et cetera. The following examples suffice to illustrate this assertion.

4. 3. 1. Wildlife Conservation Policies and Programs

Africa's wildlife conservation policies and programs are still largely influenced, controlled, and managed by elites of the powerful cartel of international conservation organizations headquartered especially in Western Europe, Nordic countries and North America. Because of the much-needed financial support that they give to wildlife management bodies in Africa, not to mention the many conservation programs that they fund, these organizations impose their vision, agendas and priorities on vulnerable stage-managed institutions that have repeatedly proven to be either inappropriate or downright disastrous. This is partly because the modus operandi of the transplanted Western environmental and wildlife conservation models are exclusively premised on separating people from the environments where they live, that surround them and that they depend

on for their livelihood. Once particular ecosystems are declared as human-off limits and then statutorily protected, local communities living adjacent to these ecosystems are consequently denied user access even in times of extreme famine and other disasters.¹¹⁶

More profoundly, donor-driven conservation policies and programs are, as Robert Nelson correctly observes, all too often wrapped in an “overtly religious and anti-people language.” “Saving the earth from rape and pillage, building 'cathedrals' in the wilderness, creating pristine wilderness areas with laws such as endangered species act, and erecting electrified fences around wildlife protected sanctuaries” has largely been the most preferred conservation paradigm.¹¹⁷

Consistent with this paradigm of preserving wildlife and wildlife habitats at the expense of displacing and even impoverishing local communities living close to wildlife habitats, is the speed in which more land is often set aside for this purpose and then statutorily protected.¹¹⁸ As already said, once declared as human off-limits and then statutorily protected, cultivation, hunting, gathering and grazing of animals are either

This paper was prepared for presentation at the Inter Regional Economic Network conference, Conservation and Sustainable Development” in Nairobi, Kenya, and for the World Summit on Sustainable Development, Johannesburg, South Africa, August 25,

¹¹⁶ Tundu Lissu, “Policy and Legal issues on Wildlife Management in Tanzania’s Pastoral Lands: The Case Study of the Ngorongoro Conservation Area.”
<<http://www.elj.warwick.ac.uk/global/issue/2000-1/lissu.html>> August 26, 2003.

¹¹⁷ Robert H. Nelson’s paper “Environmental Colonialism: “Saving Africa from Africans,” <http://www.irenkenya.org/speeches/environmental_colonialism_2002.pdf> October 30, 2003.

¹¹⁸ Robert H. Nelson’s paper “Environmental Colonialism: “Saving Africa from Africans,”
<http://www.irenkenya.org/speeches/environmental_colonialism_2002.pdf> October 30, 2003.

proscribed or tightly controlled.¹¹⁹ No wonder, then, one perceptive Kenyan writer, W. J. Lusigi, calls this Western paradigm of environmentalism as “protection-against-man-conservation.”¹²⁰

There is no denying that the creation of statutorily protected ecosystems in Africa – as elsewhere in the world – has indeed greatly reduced human damage and desecration that would have otherwise, in the absence of such measure, gone wild. However, as already suggested, it has also hastened the displacement of millions of ordinary Africans from their ancestral homelands, leaving them worse off economically and in dire poverty. Tanzania's ministry of tourism, natural resources and environment report of 1995 does in fact admit how donor-driven conservation programs in Tanzania have negatively impacted local communities and made them less willing defenders of the wildlife that they previously cared about and fervently protected without fear of government retribution. This report, for example, confirms how:

Rural people [now] view conservation efforts as centered upon removing them from large tracts of their former land to establish human-free habitats. Resources that local people once utilized and regulated through traditional practices were removed from their control and, instead, central control was instituted through enacting of laws. ... Activities once carried out traditionally for food and other needs were made illegal. Furthermore, rural people received few or no tangible benefits for protecting nature, wildlife and biological resources [MTNRE, 1995:14].

¹¹⁹ Tundu Lissu. Ibid. <<http://www.elj.warwick.ac.uk/global/issue/2000-1/lissu.html>> October 26, 2003

¹²⁰ Lusigi W.J “New Approaches to Wildlife Conservation in Kenya,” 10 *Ambio*, 1981, 2-3:87-92.

Yet, even most mind boggling, donor-driven wildlife conservation policies and programs have tended to be preceded by conscious attempts at disparaging African indigenous skills, environmental management systems, and cultural practices.¹²¹ Like European colonialists, who used the 'laugh-loud notion of racial superiority' to consign Africans and their cultures to the lowest status of civilization's, Africa's ruling elites, working in tandem with local and international wildlife consultants, have routinely sought to change what, in their opinion, they consider to be environmentally destructive peasant ways of life. Tried and time-tested indigenous African environmental management systems and regulatory practices are often rubbished and considered as having no value. They are, as it were, often deemed unscientific and, as such, perilously deficient in fostering a more environmentally supportive and rationally grounded conservation ethic. African peasants are, by extension, judged intellectually incompetent – as possessing little or no valuable wisdom that could be appropriated in furthering environmental protection goals. Accordingly, Africa's ruling elites and their cohorts – that is, local and international wildlife consultants – arrogate unto themselves absolute power and authority in deciding the direction that Africa's roadmap to environmental recovery should take without bothering to involve local communities living adjacent to game and forest reserves.

It is crucial, however, to note, that this patronizing attitude of Africa's ruling elites toward rural peasants has since the late 1980's somewhat changed. The Brundtland report

¹²¹ For example, Prof. Bernhard Grzimek, President of the Frankfurt Zoological Society and author of the book *Serengeti Shall Not Die* (1973) decreed: far from people and wildlife living together, "National park must remain a primordial wilderness to be effective." "No men, not even native ones, should," he insists, "live inside its borders." <<http://www.panos.org.uk/briefing/cites.htm>>June 11, 2003.

of 1987, “Our Common Future,” which rekindled the resurgence of interest in the communitarian political discourse of environmental sustainability and sustainable development, has partly helped in the transformation of this patronizing mindset. Since its release, with a follow up conference of world leaders in Rio-de Janeiro, there has been a renewed interest in recovering and utilizing (where necessary) indigenous Africa's wisdom, values, skills, environmental conservation strategies and knowledge systems. Local communities are now partly involved and occasionally consulted in every stage and phase of mapping out a path of environmental renewal: in the conceptualization, prioritization, implementation and evaluation stages. Yet, before the Brundtland report, the message on the lips of most (perhaps all) environmental conservation experts – Africans and non-Africans alike – was unquestioningly clear-cut: the “stupid,” “ignorant,” “illiterate,” and “environmentally destructive” Africa's rural peasants had to be educated as to how they could best manage and conserve resources that surrounded them and depended upon for their livelihood. This mentality continued until the late 1980's to influence the nature and direction of Africa's environmental recovery. And this was in spite of the growing body of evidence (see chapter One, for example) indicating how African peasants have all along, even before the advent of European colonization, reverently considered certain ecosystems, non-human species, and most imposing features of the physical landscape as an integral part of their lives, livelihood and daily narratives.

4. 3. 2. Introduction of Nile Perch Fish in Lake Victoria

A second example indicating how Africa's rural and urban peasant are almost always

the victims, and not the major triggers of environmental degradation as it is often assumed, is best elucidated by Jansen Eirik in his essay “Rich Fisheries – Poor Fisher-Folk:

The Effect of Trade and Aid in the Lake Victoria Fisheries.” Here, in this paper, Eirik reveals how the introduction of the predatory Nile perch fish in Africa’s largest fresh water lake, Lake Victoria, in the late 1950’s, has steadily impoverished communities living around the shores of Lake Victoria and damaged the lake’s internal ecological processes. During the initial stages of this experiment, argues Jansen Eirik, the increase in the stock of Nile perch did not substantially alter traditional fishing regimes and practices. The fish catch, and market, was still predominantly local. Fishing gear was equally rudimentary. To limit and to discourage the over-harvesting of fish in lake, and even in other water masses, local communities had put in place several injunctions – ranging from social taboos to totemic systems.

However, as the Nile perch stock increased in size and in population, respective East African governments began to explore possibilities of marketing Nile Perch fillets to overseas and other domestic markets. Soon, demand for Nile perch fillet was established to exist in Europe, Japan, United States of America, and in the Middle East. No sooner was this information made public than some Asians entrepreneurs, who initially had little or no interest in the fishing business, began taking advantage of this emerging opportunity. With funding from the Asian Development Bank, East African Development Bank and European and Japanese banks among other banks, Asian entrepreneurs began to heavily invest in fish processing factories, synthetic gill nets, trawler fleets and canoes. Before long, as the domestic and international market of the Nile Perch and other

fish stocks such as the Tilapia continued to increasingly expand, the amount of fish available to local fishing communities started declining. Communities that previously relied on fish as their primary source of food and livelihood were, as result of these developments, left with little to eat and to sell at the local food markets.

Worse still, boomtowns emerging to meet demands of the rapidly expanding fishing industry, began to provide new temptations particularly to local fisher folks who had been thrown out of active work. As these towns expanded in size and in population, local cultures began to speedily disintegrate. Several families were then torn apart and many urban-related problems emerged – ranging from congestion of neighborhoods to air, water and noise pollution, from huge piles of stinking uncollected garbage to broken sewage pipes, and from prostitution to excessive consumption of alcohol, by unemployed locals, to mention a few vices. The road leading to not only the endangerment of Lake Victoria's rich biodiversity but also the destruction of lives and livelihood of communities living adjacent to the lake was officially cemented.

But more profoundly, the increased commercialization of the Nile Perch and the rapid spread of boomtowns around lake Victoria's shoreline have progressively contributed to the massive spread of the non-native water hyacinth and the murky and smelly algae now choking lake Victoria. As Oscar Obonyo notes, in his article "Why Africa's Largest Lake Stinks," "Kisumu, the third largest city in Kenya, has alone, on a daily basis, been spewing an estimated 7,000 cubic meters of untreated sewage into lake Victoria. Mwanza, a lake town located in Tanzania, has similarly been discharging close to around three million litres of untreated sewage and industrial waste flow into lake Victoria everyday." What is more, over-fishing and the increasing discharge of industrial,

domestic and agricultural toxic waste into the lake have in recent years threatened lake Victoria's biodiversity. For example, "Out of the nearly 300 registered fish species in the 1970's, only four fish species now remain in the lake, " observes Obonyo.

4. 4. Marginal integration of Africa in the global economy

In addition to the foregoing, Africa's environmental crisis is further compounded by the accelerating forces of globalization, which, according to Ali Mazrui, include religion, technology, economy and the rapid spread and acceptance of American pop culture and Hollywood values worldwide.

One cannot, of course, deny the fact that Africa and Africans have indeed benefited in many ways from the combined forces of globalization now driving the world closer to the image a village. Globalization has opened up for Africa and Africans – as other world's peoples – new and indeed exciting opportunities. Compared to just a few decades ago, it is now much easier and quicker to visit distant lands and to buy a wide range of products and other services from virtually anywhere in the world. The forces of globalization have also made it easier and faster for Africa and its people to learn more, relative to a few decades ago, about others cultures and worldviews and emerging markets for the products they produce, thanks for the most part to the near-to- ubiquitous power of, and advances in, modern technology. Television, radio, print and electronic media, cell phone, jet travel and, more recently, the Internet have, "supported by more open policies, created a world that is more interconnected than ever before."¹²²

Singly and combined, these new technologies have allowed information to be

¹²² For more details see the International Labor Organization (ILO) World Commission on the Social Dimensions of Globalization report "A fair Globalization: Creating Opportunities for All." 2004.

<<http://www.ilo.org/public/English/bureau/inf/pr/2004/7.htm>> February 24, 2004

disseminated much faster and on a vast geographical scale. For good or for worse, technology has intensified the penetration of previously closed socio-cultural systems, accelerated inter and cross-cultural interactions while also helping create new solidarities among peoples across the world. In addition, it has helped to foster diverse cross-cultural associations and alliances. In fact, the rapid proliferation of pluralistic identities and robust diversity in everything (ranging from bodily form to cultural values) and “the growing interdependence in economic relations – trade, investment, finance and the organization of production globally, not to mention the social and political interactions among organizations and individuals across the world, are all attributable to the positive impact of globalization.”¹²³ In our world today people who can, and have, access to these new technologies can now dream new dreams, which they could possibly not have dreamt before.

These new and indeed exciting opportunities have, however, not come without corresponding economic, political, social, religious, and even environmental costs. As the World Commission on the Social Dimensions of Globalization Report of 2004 asserts: The current process of globalization is generating unbalanced outcomes, both between and within countries. Wealth is being created, but too many countries and people are not sharing in its benefits. They also have little or no voice in shaping the process. Seen through eyes of the vast majority of women and men, globalization has not met their simple and legitimate aspirations for decent jobs and a better future for their children. Many of them live in the limbo of the informal economy without formal rights and in a swathe of poor countries that

¹²³ Ibid. <<http://www.ilo.org/public/English/bureau/inf/pr/2004/7.htm>>February 24, 2004.

subsist precariously on the margins of the global economy. Even in economically successful countries, some workers and communities have been adversely affected by globalization.¹²⁴

Of particular to note, and it is no wonder that there has lately been a resurgence of interest in cultural revival movements especially in Third World countries – including Africa, is the systematic breakdown of traditional cultures and encompassing systems of morality. Unlike in the past, many people today – and especially those living in urban cities and towns in Africa, as it is the case world over – are, because of this forces, somewhat unable (or is it unenthusiastic?) to weave their life-stories and daily fears, joys expectations and experiences with those of others. Many of today's people live as a collective, not as a community. Unwilling to maintain both physical and emotional contact with one another, because of the increasing demands of living in a rapidly changing world, many people, especially those living in urban cities and towns, now remain largely strangers to one another. Individuals who supposedly once lived in communities that were supportive of the less privileged in society have today been transformed into parasitic consumers.¹²⁵

Partly bombarded by the glitz and glamour of Hollywood motion pictures, many urbanites (and especially the African youth) are increasingly disappearing behind what they wear, the kind of houses they live, the cars they drive and other materially driven modes of expression. They prefer to identify themselves with what they have, rather than

¹²⁴ Ibid. <<http://www.ilo.org/public/English/bureau/inf/pr/2004/7.htm>> February 24, 2004

¹²⁵ Consult, for more details, Timothy Gorringer. *Fair Share: Ethics and the Global Economy*. New York: Thames & Hudson Press, 1999. See also Wafula Buke. "How Men in flashy Cars Broke Wanjiku's Heart." *The East African*. Kenya. Monday, June 28, 2004.

who they truly are. The hunger to “fit-in,” which is often expressed through what one has (such as the car that one drives and the clothes that one wears) has without a doubt fostered a general sense of social insecurity. In turn, this insecurity has arguably engendered the unparalleled “get-rich-quick-mentality” that fuels corruption and other gross, socially repugnant practices and habits in Africa.

Furthermore, the combined forces of globalization are negatively transforming traditional African values of care for one another, compassion for the less disadvantaged, and humility even in the face of adversity. These values are now being replaced by what Christopher Lasch (1991) calls the culture of “narcissism.” Ensnared in this culture, yet eager to get along with others, many people in African cities and towns are unable (or unwilling) to dedicate their jealously guarded time into establishing real and lasting friendships. Collapsing then into the world of signs and images, a world of “hyperreality” where the distinction between reality and illusion is blurred, as the French social analyst and philosopher Jean Baudrillard (1998) would say, many Africans living in urban cities and towns can no longer separate the world of illusion from the world of reality. For them, the world exists ostensibly not so much to serve human needs; rather, human needs must constantly be distorted to serve the expanding market – spelling death to cultural heritage.¹²⁶ Meanwhile, infinite desires of incompleteness have followed suit.¹²⁷

Minds have been corrupted and/or polluted and the many networks of kinship solidarity have been drastically severed. A whole generation, whose perception of the world and relations with others is entirely stripped of communal mores, has been born.¹²⁸ Many

¹²⁶ Ibid. p. 35.

¹²⁷ Ibid. p. 64.

cultural communities have also been dislocated at the structural level (social, economic and political) and at the belief levels (cultural, ideological, religious and et cetera).

4. 4. 1. Hegemony of the Market Economy

The predatory “hawk eye” of global capitalist elites has noticed this rapidly emerging lacuna. Taking advantage of modern technological breakthroughs, they have in a sense managed, as Scott Lash and John Urry would say, to restructure the circuits of money, means of production, consumption patterns and processes of exchange especially in the sphere of labor. They have, additionally, somewhat perfected “micro-marketing” techniques with an eye to baiting the supposedly ‘ignorant consumers’ into a pseudoguided sovereignty.¹²⁹

Amid this unfolding scenario, consumers’ tastes, desires, and dispositions have been fragmented for easier manipulation. For good or for worse, people’s attitude towards non-human species, politics, leisure, work, family life, personal relations and other aspects of life have been severely changed. Neither are their worldviews and epistemologies spared. They have, as it were, been subverted. The sad part, however, is that this is only the tip of the iceberg. That many equally disruptive forces have been unleashed need not here be labored.

4. 4. 2. Impact of Structural Adjustment Programs

It suffices to note, however, that from the early 1980’s onwards developed nations and Bretton woods institutions – the World Bank (WB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF)– have been arm-twisting developing nations, including Africa, to implement

¹²⁸ Ibid. p. 87.

¹²⁹ See, for more details, Scott Lash and John Urry. *Economies of Signs and Space*. London: Sage Publications, 1996.

sweeping institutional and policy reforms especially in the public sector. To be eligible for debt relief and/or development assistance, Third World nations are required to among other conditions reduce the number of public sector employees, introduce cost-sharing in previously state-funded programs such as education, health and other aspects of human development, and to reform laws in order to encourage direct foreign investment.

According to the thinking of the World Bank and the IMF, these measure (i.e., economic liberalization and reduced government spending) are projected to serve at least three primary short-term goals. The first is to promote industrialization in developing countries by giving economic incentives to foreign investors. The second is to reduce government deficits by cutting domestic spending. And the third is to stabilize domestic currencies, to promote market and private sector driven economic growth, and to enhance indigenous skills and capacities. The long-term goals of structural adjustment programs, on the other hand, according to the projections of the World Bank and the IMF, include, among others: (a) the substantial reduction and amelioration (if not elimination altogether) of the endemic poverty afflicting millions in developing countries, and; (b) the re-orientation of dynamics of economic growth toward international markets.

What has, nevertheless, remained hidden beneath the World Bank and IMF driven Structural Adjustment Programs (SAP) is, according to Ernest Harsch, the slow but gradual ceding of Third World economies and political sovereignty to the West and Bretton Woods institutions.¹³⁰ Timothy Gorringer voices a similar concern. In his book *Fair Share: Ethics and the Global Economy*, Gorringer sees the logic underpinning the

¹³⁰ Ernest Harsch, "Can Africa Claim the 21st Century? A New Report by the World Bank Sets Out What Needs to be Done." *Development and Cooperation* (No.3, may/June 2001: 8-15.

push for implementation of Structural Adjustment Programs in developing countries as a well-choreographed text by Western powers to gain unfettered access to Third World resources.¹³¹ As he notes: the World bank and IMF “demand for trade liberalization, economic deregulation and retrenchment of public sector employees ultimately serve interests of developed nations much more than those of Third world countries.” Sample the following, as an illustration.

In her article, “All Pain, No Gains: How Structural Adjustment Hurts Farmers and the Environment,” Christine Lee argues that the implementation of structural adjustment programs – especially in the agricultural sector – have increased profits for international agro-businesses whilst marginalizing rural small-scale farmers. Developing countries, Lee goes on to points out, are forced:

- To concentrate on generating foreign-exchange earnings through production of cash crops and non-traditional export crops
- To liberalize agricultural trade, which in part is to be achieved by replacing fixed prices and letting the market-determine the same.
- To provide incentives and subsidies for export-oriented agriculture whilst removing subsidies for staple food production
- To reduce availability of credit to local farmers and, last but not least
- To cut the staff, resources and government services in agricultural departments.¹³²

In this socioeconomic dispensation, the “poorest of the poor,” small-scale farmers, who largely depend on agriculture as their main source of livelihood and identity

¹³¹ Timothy Gorringer. *Fair Share: Ethics and the Global Economy*. New York: Thames & Hudson Press, 1999: 77.

¹³² Christine Lee, “All Pain, No Gains: How Structural Adjustment Hurts Farmers and the Environment,” *Global Pesticide Campaigner* (Volume 11, Number 1), April 2001.

and whom the Bretton Woods institutions ostensibly claim would be the principal beneficiaries of structural adjustment programs – receive little (if any) financial assistance and technical expertise to improve their standards of living. As Lee notes, “today's agricultural reforms tend to sacrifice rural farming communities in the name of modernization. They shift local economies from domestic to international markets with little (or no) regard for the impact they cause on small and medium-sized rural farmers.”¹³³

Consistent with the goal of promoting large-scale, non-traditional, export agricultural systems, argues Christine Lee, is the demand from Bretton Woods institutions that Third World countries should enact legislation that, despite its noble intentions of promoting individually owned export-oriented farming models, facilitate (directly or indirectly) the breakdown of Africa's traditional communal forms of agriculture.” If followed through, these laws will also give foreign corporations and politically connected African elites monopoly control over the production and marketing of non-traditional export crops. The poorest of the poor will, when this happens, be forced to identify new sources of sustenance. Many will either be forced to sell the only valuable asset at their disposal: land. Others will join the army of the hundreds of thousands of unemployed. Yet, others will grudgingly leave their rural homes in search of job opportunities in cash crop plantations and in the already overcrowded urban cities and towns.

The huge exodus of rural farming communities from their land will, in turn, further exacerbate the impoverishment and disintegration of many families. Food security will plummet. More instability, more deaths, and rampant malnutrition will also follow

¹³³ Ibid. p. 1.

suit. The physical environment will not be spared either. The now accelerating environmental damage and desecration will increase tenfold. Widespread usage of insecticides and fungicides on cash crop plantations will further fuel the steady contamination of streams, rivers, lakes and ground water aquifers. Increased acreage of mono-cropping systems will increasingly lead to the depletion of essential soil minerals and nutrients and the decrease in biological diversity (including beneficial insects that eliminate pests).

4. 4. 3. Export-processing zones (EPZ)

If what Africa has already gone through following its brief experimentation with structural adjustment programs is anything to go by, then, the future of Third world countries — including Africa — will assuredly be bleak. Consider the following. In recent years Third world countries have been forced to relax their environmental protection regulations and laws. To attract foreign investors, to jump start the growth of their economies, and to create jobs for the millions of unemployed, Third world countries are left with fewer options. One of which is to toe the line and ease environmental pollution standards.

Multinational corporations, reluctant to comply with stringent pollution requirements in their home countries, searching for better ways of cutting production costs, and/or simply escaping the high taxes they are required to pay in their home countries, are accordingly finding Third World countries to be safe business havens. They take advantage of sloppy environmental protection laws to prosper more than they would in their own home countries. They manipulate Third World governing elites, threaten union leaders with all sorts of scare tactics, and bribe local politicians and high-ranking

pen pushers to win government contracts and to evade paying taxes. Knowingly, multinational corporations and locally owned commercial enterprises are also increasingly releasing toxic pollutants into the atmosphere, poisoning fresh water sources, and dumping toxic effluents in deserts and semi deserts of Africa, in rivers, lakes and coastal beaches. They are also exposing their workers to many hazards. For example, workers are cramped in dangerous and filthy factories and required to work for longer hours than usual at unreasonable low wages. Those who attempt to resist, organizing protests, are either fired or subjected to unbearable physical and/or mental tortured. The hanging of Ken-Saro Wiwa, the Nigerian environmental activist, along with eight other Ogoni leaders opposed to Shell's continued exploitation of petroleum oil in the Nigeria's Niger Delta is just but a tip of the iceberg. Yet, strangely enough, these injustices are perpetrated by corporations whose home countries preach – in their political rhetoric – virtues of fair play, equal pay for equal work and justice for all as the basis upon which societies in their home countries are founded.

4. 5. Africa's Burgeoning Population and its impact

Besides the aforementioned, Africa's predicaments – including the accelerating environmental crisis– are fuelled by burgeoning population growth rates. According to the United Nation Population Division's (UNPD) report "World Population Prospects" of 2000, the population of sub-Saharan Africa has been growing much faster than that of other world regions. Between 1975 and 2000, for example, sub-Saharan Africa's population doubled from 325 to 650 million. Currently, it is growing at a rate of 2.4 to 2.5 percent per annum. If this trend continues, this report suggests, by the year 2025 sub-Saharan Africa's population will reach approximately 1.1 billion and this is even after

factoring in the already devastating effects of HIV/AIDS pandemic.¹³⁴

The reasons behind Africa's burgeoning population growth rates are quite interesting but lie outside the purview of what concerns us here. Briefly stated, they have to do in the first place with the fact that over 47 percent of sub-Saharan Africa's population is between ages five and twenty-four, hence the anticipated growth moment. In the second place, Ali Mazrui points out, the reasons have to do with the moving power of traditional belief systems and particularly "the set of traditional beliefs connected with the hope of parental immortality and the risks of infant mortality." In the third place, it has to do with the appreciable gains and improvements made especially in health care delivery systems, food production techniques and standards of sanitation.

The impact of Africa's burgeoning population growth rates on natural resource and the physical environment is not only massive but also infectious. For example, the hazards and risks associated with the challenges of feeding many mouths amidst declining food production and increasing competition for access to and control over rapidly shrinking land and resources, is one such impact.¹³⁵ Other forking problems, problems radiating from community and/or individual competition over dwindling natural resources, include the run away levels of endemic poverty, the pervasive and highly infectious get-rich-quick-mentality, the pernicious intractable bloody conflicts, and the skyrocketing socioeconomic and other inequities.

The increased competition for access to and control of scarce resources has also

¹³⁴ See, for more details, "Africa Human Population Growth" a report by United Nations Population Division.

<<http://www.prb.org/template.cfm?template=interestDisplay.cfm>> July 23, 2003.

¹³⁵ See Ali Mazrui's unpublished paper, "Population Policy and Ecological Balance: A North- South Equation," Summary of a lecture for Classroom use at State University of New York, Binghamton and Cornell University, Ithaca, March 2003.

forced thousands of individuals and families into seeking alternative survival mechanisms with tragic environmental consequences. The burning and selling of charcoal fuel to make ends meet, the unrelenting destruction of old growth forests, and the burning of open grasslands to pave way for agriculture are some of the survival mechanisms that immediately come to mind. Rampant poaching of some wildlife species and logging of old growth forests are others.

It is, nevertheless, crucial to point out that many rural folks resort to these activities not because they want to do so but precisely because of their desperation and determination to survive against all odds. Perhaps the deadliest of the effects arising from increased competition for access to and control over dwindling land and resources, a theme that we must now turn, is the pernicious bloody conflicts in Africa.

4. 5. 1. Causes of Africa's pernicious conflicts

Africa's pernicious conflicts have, thus far, been traced to a number of sources.

First, as it is noted and I agree, violent conflicts in Africa are often politically generated. Political elites spark these conflicts in the hope of either capturing or retaining power or diverting attention from their corrupt and blameworthy actions. The 1992 ethnic cleansing in Kenya, which claimed thousands of human lives, led to the destruction of property, and the displacement of many families from their own land, is one such example.

Second, many pundits (Mazrui included) argue that Africa's conflicts are triggered by the struggle for access to, and control over, increasingly shrinking land and resources. The Rwandan genocide of 1994, the long drawn out civil wars in Sudan, the on-and-off mineral driven conflicts in the Democratic Republic of Congo, and the bloody Diamond

wars in Sierra Leone and Liberia are also some of the examples cited.

Other prominently identified root causes of Africa's conflicts include the clash of beliefs and values, territorial competition, and long standing ethnic rivalry and prejudices.

Some multinational corporations and some Western governments are also sometimes implicated in propping up and exacerbating most of Africa's bloody wars. Allegedly, some multinational corporations and Western mercenaries finance warring factions, providing them with military hardware and logistical support with the hope of winning their trust and, as a result, gaining unrestricted access to Africa's abundant mineral resources and/or to keep away would be competitors from investing in mineral exploration and mining.¹³⁶ The skewed distribution of political power, the consequences of changing weather patterns, and the seeds of ethnic discord planted by colonial imposed divisions of resources and power along ethnic lines has also helped in generating and intensifying Africa's violent conflicts.

Whatever their causes, these conflicts have placed a lot of stress on human and natural life support systems. As the Egyptian-born, former secretary General of United Nations, Dr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali, notes:

Conflicts... cast a dark shadow over the prospects for a united, secure and prosperous Africa, which we [Africans in Africa] seek to create... conflicts [cause]... immense suffering to ... poor people in particular and, in the worst case, death. Men, women and children are uprooted, dispossessed, deprived of their means of livelihood and thrown into exile as refugees. ... Much energy,

¹³⁶ Consult William Reno's article, "Africa's Weak States, Non-state Actors, and the Privatization of Interstate Relations", in John W. Harbeson and Donald Rothchild (Eds.) *Africa in World Politics: The African State System in Flux* (3rd Edition). Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 2000: 286-307

time and resources [is spent on]...meeting the exigencies of conflicts...[As a result, African] countries have been unable to harness the energies of [their] people and then target the same towards development.¹³⁷

But even more troublesome is the impact that displaced persons cause on nations that grant them temporary political asylum. Many of the refugees fleeing from the insanity of warlords carry with them small firearms, which all too often end up in wrong hands. These small but deadly arms are later used in activities ranging from poaching of wildlife in protected sanctuaries to car jerking in many urban cities and towns, and in extreme cases, in killing innocent civilians.

4. 6. Conclusion

To conclude, it is clear from the foregoing analysis that Africa's predicaments — including the accelerating environmental crisis — stem principally from at least three interrelated sources. The first is European insatiable greed toward Africa's resources and systematic disruption of African traditional ways of life. European colonial powers, as we have shown, eroded the dignity of Africans, the pride in their culture, and the selfconfidence that is pivotal in determining their own futures and destinies. European colonial powers were also responsible – whether directly and indirectly– for uprooting Africans from their ancestral lands and in subverting traditional African cultures, encompassing systems of morality, worldviews and epistemologies. Many of the obstacles that to the present day hamper the vast poor and disadvantaged majority from accessing basic needs: food, shelter, security, and other essential services, can in fact

¹³⁷ This statement, from Boutros Boutros-Ghali, is put in a much wider context by Francis M. Deng. See his article, “Reconciling Sovereignty with Responsibility: A Basis for International Humanitarian Action”, in John Harbeson and Donald Rothchild, (Eds), *Ibid*, 2000: 353-378.

partly be traced to the impact of European “civilizing” violence.

Second, political and economic elites from developed countries (especially those working for Bretton Woods institutions, international non-governmental organizations, and multinational corporations) have also greatly contributed to the myriad of problems facing Africa and Africans. Pushing forward disinherit policies and programs into the throats of financially hamstrung Africa governments, this group has helped (whether overtly or covertly) in not only fuelling the already horrendous conditions that many people face in Africa but also in driving poorer segments of society into the desperate race for survival.

Third, a claim powerfully expressed by Martin Prozesky, Africa's enormous challenges can also be traced largely to “the growing population, increasing needs of rural and urban communities (who are themselves growing) and the rapacious plunder and greed of Africa’s ruling elite. These three causes of Africa's vast problems are, separately and combined, deadly forces –but of different kinds, ethically speaking.” The affluent few and politically connected elite prey upon poorer sections of society. The vast majority of politically disenfranchised and economically vulnerable population, on the other hand, “vents their anger against wildlife, against what is left of the remaining wild nature.”⁴⁷ Regardless, however, of who is gaining or who is losing, for nature the result is the same: more damage, perhaps most irreversible. Closely related, though not interchangeable with this, is the near-to-ready-mentality (of the poor and rich alike) of mortgaging their own futures and those of their children and grandchildren for shortterm, ephemeral, material gains and hedonistic pleasures.

Perhaps, concerning the foregoing, we should here listen to Lao-Tzu’s (604-

531BC) wise counsel in his book *The Way of Lao-Tzu*. He notes: “there is no calamity greater than lavish desires, there is no greater guilt than discontentment and there is no greater disaster than greed.” That as it may be, the question that we must now address in part three of this article is: How can Africans in Africa, African governments, and Africa's outside friends ameliorate, and perhaps ultimately resolve, these arguably insurmountable problems and challenges?

Chapter Five: In Search of African Solutions

Many scholars and students of Africa have labored in this vineyard. Here, however, I focus on only three prominently identified solutions concerning how Africans themselves and their respective governments might effectively respond to the myriad of challenges facing the continent. The first is the view that, in addressing Africa's enormous challenges, Africans and their respective governments must in addition to abandoning Western models of development, cultural images and intellectual robes of a colonizing legacy, develop homegrown, local specific solutions. The second is the suggestion that Africans in Africa, their governments and Africa's outside friends must as a *sine qua non* invest substantial resources in promoting a robust moral education in existing institutions of socialization; a moral education emphasizing virtues of altruism, justice, responsibility, honesty and care and concern for the less fortunate members of society. The third is the proposal that Africa will largely get going in the right direction when wholesale (not piecemeal) reforms are undertaken in existing institutions of governance, law regimes, policies and leadership.

However, before I examine each of these proposals more fully, a caveat is required. By unpacking what various experts say regarding these three proposals, my intention is to explode the notion that the poor and struggling segments of society in Africa are (and have been) the major obstacle to the interests and goals of conservation and contemporary perceptions of the aims of modernization. On the contrary, I argue that they are (and have always been) victims of disinheritance policies and programs that time after time are promoted by Africa's ruling elites, politically connected intelligentsia and international development consultants. Singly and in unison, these three groups, I argue,

have all along offered wrong prescriptions to Africa's festering crises. Following are my reasons for believing as I do. I am sure you will tell me others.

Re-indigenization of Africa's Institutions of Socialization: A Source of Inspiration, a Fountain of Civility and a Power of Self-correction.

5. 0. Introduction

Lately in Africa, as elsewhere in the World, there has been an emerging consensus indicating how the recovery (and utilization where necessary) of pre-colonial Africa's natural resource management regimes, techno-scientific skills, values, practices and institutions of governance would be pivotal in preventing, if not eliminating, some of the most major challenges facing the African continent and its people. This move of recovering pre-colonial Africa's immobilized "grid of cultural antiquity" to use Uzo Ensowanne's words, must, however, as Prof William Ochieng' suggests, "originate from within, not from outside."¹³⁸ In other words, solutions to Africa's vast challenges must ipso facto come out of Africa's own roots and not through grafting on to things and ideas that are alien to Africa and Africans.

That once Africans begin to utilize homegrown, local specific, models of development as the Chinese, Japanese and Malaysians did before they eventually succumbed to America's McDonaldisation of the world, then, as Ochieng' suggests, Africa's tragedies and humiliations, which are (and have been) largely engendered by an over reliance on Western models, will also come to pass. Short of fall back on homegrown solutions, Ochieng' concludes, Africa and Africans will as it were continue being under the yoke of the all too often assertive, aggressive, manipulative, exploitative

¹³⁸ Professor William Ochieng' is the current director of research at Maseno University, Kenya.

and abusive tutelage of a few powerful black, white and brown corporate executives of multinational corporations, international bureaucrats, unscrupulous local politicians, international investors and money speculators.

William Ochieng' is certainly not the only one who raises this concern. Other equally distinguished commentators on Africa's condition had earlier expressed a similar view. For example, with an undue optimism, the celebrated Nigerian writer, Chinua Achebe, had forewarned, saying:

If alternative histories must be written, and the need is more apparent now than ever before, they must be written by insiders, and not 'intimate' outsiders.

Africans must [learn to] narrate themselves in their own context, in their own voices, and not be mere stagehands in a ventriloquist's show.

Franz Fanon, arguably one of the most ardent critics of colonialism and Europocentric imperialism, had expressed a similar concern. Pleading with students and scholars of Third World countries, including Africa, to avoid the temptation of realigning Third World discourse with the parameters of Western conceptual/epistemic models, Fanon had warned about the dangers of especially “paying tribute to Europe by creating states, institutions and societies which draw their inspiration from her,” arguing that:

Humanity is wanting for something other from us than such an imitation, which would be almost an obscene caricature. If we want to turn Africa into a new Europe, ...then we must leave the destiny of our countries to Europeans. They will know how to do it better than the most gifted among us. But if we want humanity to advance a step further, if we want to bring it up to a different level than that which Europe has shown it, then we must invent and we must make

discoveries. If we wish to live up to our peoples' expectations, we must seek the response elsewhere than in Europe. Moreover, if we wish to reply to the expectations of the people of Europe, it is no good sending them back a reflection, even an ideal reflection, of their society and their thought with which from time to time they feel immeasurably sickened. For Europe, for ourselves and for humanity, comrades, we must turn over a new leaf, we must work out new concepts.¹³⁹

5. 1. Indigenous African heritage: its exclusion and impact

Yet, regrettably, long after securing their political independence, most governments in Africa – with the exception perhaps of Tanzania's short-lived Julius Nyerere's Ujamaa policy – have continued to heavily depend on Western models of development and economic assistance.¹⁴⁰ That transplanted Western models, which virtually all governments in Africa obediently turn to or are forced to implement by their financial benefactors – industrialized nations and multilateral lending institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund – have engendered mixed results need not here belabored. Bringing as they have certainly done many benefits for a few, and a little for most, these models have painfully pushed Africa's poorer and disadvantaged segments of society deeper into poverty. They have additionally least

¹³⁹ Franz Fanon. *The Wretched of the Earth*. Middlesex, England: Penguin Books Ltd, 1963: 254- 255.

¹⁴⁰ According to Julius Nyerere, the philosophy and policy of Ujamaa was meant “to recreate a society premised on customary adherence to principles derived from traditional African cultures such mutual respect, mutual responsibility and equality in accessing the material needs of subsistence.” Julius Nyerere. *Ujamaa: Essays on Socialism*. Dar-es-Salaam: Oxford University Press, 1968.

helped Africa in preventing (let alone resolving) the huge catalog of “daily outrages, unnecessary miseries, horrific obscenities and fragrant injustices that are dutifully highlighted on a daily basis through the electronic and print media.”¹⁴¹

Amidst this grim background then, one begins to understand and even to appreciate why lately there has been a resurgence of interest in promoting a communitarian political discourse of environmental sustainability and sustainable development. The guiding principle underlying this discourse is the conviction that the vast majority in Africa, whose lives are characterized by high levels of exclusion, vulnerability and poverty, ought first to be empowered to become architects of their own socioeconomic and political futures if in fact Africa is to get going in the right direction. Along with this belated realization is also the recognition that headstrong top-down approaches to socioeconomic development ought to be abandoned in favor of local specific, bottom-up communitarian models of development and environmental regeneration. Put into question as well is the “know-allism,” “fix-it” mentality especially of Africa's political elite, senior government bureaucrats and host of international experts who typically advises, decide and influence the direction of Africa’s roadmap to recovery in virtually all facets of human life. For example, indicting the host of international consultants who work or have previously worked in Africa for their culpability in fuelling most of the crises bedeviling the African continent, Washington Post columnist Stephen Rosenfeld notes that:

It is hard to look at black Africa without feeling that something has terribly gone

¹⁴¹ I have borrowed these words from South Africa's President, Thabo Mbeki

wrong. It is not the spectacle of suffering that troubles us. It is the sense that we – we of America and the West who thought we knew how to help these people – did not know well enough, although we acted as we did ... our advice has been deeply flawed.

There are, of course, other reasons as to why lately there has been an upsurge of interest in reviving and utilizing (where necessary) the stock of pre-colonial Africa's beliefs, oral traditions, moral values, cultural practices and techno-scientific skills.

According to Africa's most acclaimed political scientist, Ali A. Mazrui, the going back to Africa's roots movement seeks to also respond to at least two main concerns. First is the debilitating process of Westernization in Africa. Second is the spiteful Western arrogance of treating Africans as underachieving children, constantly in need of parental guidance.

The former, the debilitating influence of Westernization in Africa, has, argues Mazrui, deplorably engendered the widespread cultural amnesia witnessed in Africa as many Western educated Africans, ashamed of their tribal heritage, repeatedly scramble to imitate the West.¹⁴² The later, the spiteful Western arrogance towards Africa and Africans,

has, according to Mazrui, promoted a cultural nostalgia – a celebration, idealization and glorification of Africa's pre-colonial heritage and civilizations – as evinced in the works especially of the so called African nationalists.¹⁴³

¹⁴² Stephen Buckley has written a very interesting article in the Washington Post, Sunday, September 28, 1997. This article explains how the youths of Kenya in particular have been “pulled away from the rural links that shaped their parents and grandparents” The exact title of this article is: “Youth in Kenya Feel Few Tribal Ties.”

<<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wpsrv/inatl/longterm/africalives/>> July 20, 2003.

¹⁴³ Mazrui identifies two forms of cultural nostalgia: romantic primitivism and romantic gloriana. The former, he says, tries to capture and then defend — with exceptional

Following the trajectory of this formulation then, it would seem reasonable to argue that the going back to Africa's roots movement is more or less a protest, a rebellion against (a) the tyranny of Westernization and the values it promotes in Africa and (b) the condescending Western arrogance of treating Africans as children, constantly in need of parental guidance. That as it may be, there is a more substantial goal. Exponents of this movement attempt "to shore up a viable sense of identity and selfhood in the face of the perceived ruptures, which colonialism [and imperialism] has wrought on the African psyche."¹⁴⁴

Above and beyond this goal, it is also correct to argue that the dramatic turn around from top-down to bottom-up approaches to socioeconomic development and environmental recovery that is now increasingly gaining currency world-over, including Africa, was principally triggered by the recommendations of the Brundtland report of 1987. Immediately after this report was released, with a follow up conference of world leaders in Rio de-Janeiro in 1992, a new song has arguably begun to capture the attention of virtually every scholar and student of Africa. The overarching message of this song runs as follows: "while top-down improvements of Africa's predicaments are more than welcome, genuine solutions to most (if not all) of the pressing problems afflicting the African continent will really only come from the bottom-up."¹⁴⁵ In other words,

pride—Africa's past life of simplicity. The latter, romantic gloriana, not only celebrates Africa's heroic ancestors ("kings, emperors, and eminent scholars of the past) but also salutes what these ancestors bequeathed to Africa and the rest of the world: their complex knowledge of the world and architectural accomplishments. For more details on these two forms of cultural nostalgia, consult his chapter on "Africa's Identity: The Indigenous Personality," in his book *The Africans: A Triple Heritage*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1986:63-79.

¹⁴⁴ Consult, for more details, Ato Quayson. *Strategic Formulations in Nigerian Writings: Orality & History in the works of Rev. Samuel Johnson, Amos Tutuola, Wole Soyinka & Ben Okri*. Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997.

ultimately, the future of Africa lie not so much in emulating Western models of development but, rather, in developing homegrown, local specific corrective responses. However, as Nigeria's most celebrated novelist Chinua Achebe argues, the envisaged responses must at least fulfill three minimum requirements. First, they must come from Africans themselves and not from 'intimate outsiders.' Second, they must be sensitive to Africa's long history of contact with the outside world, developmental challenges and values cherished by Africa's multiethnic composition. Third, and perhaps more important, they must, besides keeping on the front burner the pressing survival needs and other legitimate hopes, dreams and goals of poorer segments of population in Africa, not compromise environmental protection goals. Stated in another way, the envisaged solutions must be an African treasure and not meant (as it is all too often the case) to meet interests and expectations of foreign demands.

5. 2. Why re-indigenize Africa's institutions of Socialization?

Justifying, for example, why Africa's environmental protection agenda ought to be necessarily grounded on revived indigenous natural resource management systems, techno-scientific skills and ethno-cultural practices, Darrol Bryant writes:

It is essential that this wisdom be recovered if Africans were to address the environmental problems and challenges facing the continent and its people ... this is because, African traditions understood nature more than just matter for

¹⁴⁵ This position has now become a new mantra in Africa. It is even championed by the newly formed organization in Africa, The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). Under its umbrella, African Heads of States and Governments have agreed, based on a common vision and a firm and shared conviction, to eradicate poverty and to place their respective countries on a path of sustainable growth and development while also participating actively in the world economy and body politic
<[Http://www.nepad.org](http://www.nepad.org)>June 2003.

exploitation. Nature was a natural home. Being in harmony with nature meant living in close contact with the deeper sources of divine life... It was necessary to listen to the voices from nature [implicit as they were in] the rhythm of the seasons, the coming of the rains, the flowering of crops and the fruits of the earth.¹⁴⁶

Bishop Desmond Tutu, one of the most vocal critics of the now dismantled South Africa's apartheid racist madness, voiced a similar opinion. In his keynote speech presented at the World Future Studies Federation conference held in Nairobi, Kenya, in 1995, Tutu argued:

We [referring to Africans] need to re-awaken our memories, to appropriate our history and our rich heritage that we have jettisoned at such a high cost as we rushed after the alien and alienating paradigms and solutions. We must determine our own agenda and our own priorities. To recover our history and to value our collective memory is not to engage in a romantic nostalgia. [Far from it], it is to generate in our people and in our children a proper pride and self-assurance.¹⁴⁷ And drawing parallel insights from Judeo-Christian and Islamic religious

worldviews to vindicate his position, that Africans ought not be ashamed of reviving and utilizing their ancestral heritage and [perhaps] their modern capacities as well, Tutu argued:

Although the Jews live in the present (for the most part), they (all too often) look back to the Exodus and they have been shaped in their remembrances of the holocaust to become a peculiar people. Muslims (as well) look back to Muhammad and his encounter with Allah, and they commemorate events that

¹⁴⁶ Darrol M. Bryant, "God, Humanity and Mother Earth: African Wisdom and the Recovery of the Earth," in *God, Humanity and Mother Nature*. Gilbert E.M. Ogutu. Ed. Nairobi: Masaki Publishers, 1992: 73 & 76.

¹⁴⁷ Bishop Desmond Tutu, "Greetings: Congratulations to World Futures Studies Federation -African Future Beyond Poverty," in *Futures Beyond Poverty - Ways And Means Out Of The Current Stalemate -Selections From The XIV World Conference Of World Futures Studies Federation held in Nairobi, Kenya, July 25-29 1995*. Gilbert Ogutu, Pentti Malaska and Johanna Kojola. Ed. Turku Finland: Finland Futures Research Center, 1997: 18.

were significant for him. Christians [too] look back especially to the death and resurrection of Jesus who commanded them to do this in remembrance of Him as what hope and theme distinguish them from those who do not have these memories. (Furthermore) nations and people have their common collective memory, official or historic, and we need (therefore) to remember where we come from to know where we are going (and) how to get to our destination.¹⁴⁸

Likewise, Basil Davidson, a prolific British writer on Africa, offers a more illuminating account as to why Africa's roadmap to recovery ought to be grounded on Africa's revived indigenous wisdom. In his article, "For a Politics of Restitution," Davidson argued:

The facts as they come today (seem to) suggest that there was and there remains, in the ethos of African communities, a fountain of inspiration, a source of civility, a power of self-correction; and these qualities may yet be capable, even in the miseries of today, of great acts of restitution.¹⁴⁹

5. 3. Projected benefits

The message from the foregoing is clear and, I believe, cogent. Several benefits are expected to flow from Africa's going back to the roots movement. Amongst them, include:

- Empowerment of individuals, sub-groups and communities in managing their own affairs
- Helping respective individuals, sub-groups and communities to reasonably adapt to "the shifts and changes taking place in our increasingly globalized, mutually influencing, world
- Restoration of kinship networks of solidarity
- Providing individuals, sub-groups and communities with a "fountain of

¹⁴⁸ Ibid. P.18

¹⁴⁹ Basil Davidson. "For a Politics of Restitution," in *Africa Within The World: Beyond Dispossession and Dependence*. Adebayo Adedeji. Ed. New Jersey: Zed Books, 1993: 26.

inspiration, a source of civility and a power of self-correction” [as Basil Davidson aptly notes]

- Overcoming the seemingly intractable limitations of transplanted Western models and the restrictive outlook they engender.
- Providing individuals, sub-groups and communities with a more promising escape route from what Wendell Bell calls recalcitrant horrors of modernity, including artificially induced socioeconomic inequalities, acute adulteration of the physical environment, despicable human rights violation, widespread indifference to the concerns for interests of future generations—born and unborn—and the triumph of rational, causal, thinking.
- Cultivating a more genuinely grounded sense of belonging to place
- Boosting Africans pride in themselves and dignity in their immobilized cultural values
- Strengthening virtues of collaboration, teamwork and cooperative problem solving mechanisms. And last but not least
- Providing individuals, sub-groups and communities with a renewed sense of hope, audacity to dream new dreams and the confidence they need in creating their own futures and in determining their own destiny.

5. 4. Vortex of suspicion

Notwithstanding these anticipated benefits, several questions must first be fully addressed. Can Africans retreat, even if minimally, into their traditional worldviews and epistemologies under the conditions of current global regime without risking further impoverishment and marginalization? Can the back to the Africa's roots movement viably

take off given Africa's long history of contact with the outside world, economic dependency on the West and international donor agencies, and its lack of a solid technoscientific culture? Given Africa's somewhat screwed up land distribution regimes, increasing rural-urban exodus and the conspicuous deficiency of visionary political leadership will the going back to Africa's roots movement help Africans in achieving the anticipated benefits? More substantially, who precisely should steer the going back to Africa's roots movement? Should this task be entrusted to Africa's ruling elites who, as Franz Fanon rightly points out, "have nothing better to do than to take the role of managers for Western enterprises and often in practice set up their countries as the brothels of Europe"?¹⁵⁰ Should philanthropic non-governmental organizations and international developmental agencies based in Africa facilitate, as it is the case today, the enterprise of reviving and utilizing indigenous Africa's wealth of knowledge and accumulated experience? To what extent would entrusting such an important task to "Africa's outside friends" further deepen and even perpetuate existing paternalistic – although sometimes benign – relationships? Can individuals who work for nongovernmental organizations and international development agencies in Africa, and who in the first place have partly generated and exacerbated some of the problems now bedeviling the continent and its people as Rosenfeld rightly observes, conceivably promote a genuinely grounded discourse of reciprocal partnership? What, one might also ask, will Africans stand to lose by going back to their cultural roots in light of what we

¹⁵⁰ See Franz Fanon's "The Pitfall of National Consciousness" in his book *The Wretched of The Earth*. Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, Ltd, 1963:123.

now know — that our present world is increasingly shrinking and becoming more interdependent? Will the going back to Africa's roots movement not further isolate Africa from the global body politic? Moreover, given the predatory tendencies of global capitalism will this movement of going back to Africa's roots not end up helping to further prepare the ground for the eventual penetration of global capitalism in Africa? Indeed, while there is no clear-cut answer to these questions, Arif Dirlik, a prolific critic of post-colonialism, provides what I would like to believe is a somewhat persuasive articulation of the parasitic nature of contemporary global capitalism. In his book, *The Post-colonial Aura* (1997), Dirlik, for example, notes:

Employing micro-mapping techniques and guerrilla marketing strategies, global capitalist elites have managed to manipulate consumption habits, to break down previously sacrosanct cultural boundaries, while also appropriating the local for the global. Different cultures have been admitted into the realm of capital only to be broken down and remade (again) in accordance with the logic of capital production and consumption. In addition, subjectivities have been reconstituted across local, national, regional boundaries with an eye to creating producers and consumers who would be more responsive to the operations of capital. Those who do not respond, the (so-called) “basket-cases,” according to Dirlik, are no longer coerced or colonized. They are simply marginalized... simply kept out of capitalists' pathways (circuits) [1997: 98].

If indeed Dirlik's assertion is correct, and I am inclined to believe he is, then one could safely argue that for capitalism to continuously enjoy legitimacy *ad infinitum* its top managers must repeatedly tinker with its logic to realign it with local aspirations and

feelings of being at home and secure. As Dirlik notes: the underpinning logic of contemporary global capitalism “is the belief, that is nevertheless unspoken, that the local is in no way a site of liberation, but, rather, a site of manipulation” (1997: 6). This logic, according to Dirlik, enables then “global capitalism to consume local cultures while also enhancing a pseudo-awareness that the local is a potential site of resistance to capital” (1997: 6). Precisely because of this reason, Dirlik then concludes:

(The) declaration(s) of pre-modern (especially) in the name of resistance to the modern rationalist homogenization of the world has resulted into a localism which, for the most part, is willing to overlook past oppression out of a preoccupation with the oppression engendered by capitalism and its Eurocentric cling on (1997: 98)

Indeed, a brief detour into some the earlier movements that sought to recapture and to thenceforward celebrate pre-industrial simpler lifestyles might help in vindicating or invalidating Dirlik’s assertions. The 1960's hippie movement especially in Anglo-America and the Negritude movement in Africa may offer special insights as comparative analogies. I begin with the hippie movement.

5. 4. 1. The Hippie Movement

In Anglo-America, in particular, individuals attracted to the hippie movement were, shall we say, obsessed with a nostalgia for a better-than-present world. They looked for answers and solutions to the problems of that time by turning to India’s religious sensibilities.¹⁵¹ For them, India was not only a symbol of rebellion, a rejection of the terror of war and the ‘straight politics’ of the time, but it also signified the ultimate

¹⁵¹ Julie Stephens. *Anti-Disciplinary Protest: Sixties Radicalism and Postmodernism*. [New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998:51].

rebellious stance: the desire to become the other.¹⁵² India, followers of the hippie movement were somewhat persuaded, was the ‘uncontaminated’ place – far removed from the skewed moral values and misplaced priorities of industrialized nations at the time.¹⁵³ As a living museum, India then provided followers of the hippie movement with the possibilities of transcending urban problems, suburban sameness and burgeoning materialism of their time. India also drew exponents of this movement closer to a kind of spiritual connectedness with all living creatures and life forms.¹⁵⁴ Therefore, while in a cultural sense India typified a return to an innocence lost, in a biographical sense, it symbolized a return to “childhood.”¹⁵⁵

The fascination with India and the values it apparently embodied did not however last long. What might have contributed to the decline in the compelling force that India exerted on the minds of the followers of the hippie movement? Before I respond to this question, let me first explain what the Negritude movement represented or sought to challenge.

5. 4. 2. The Negritude Movement

According to Ali Mazrui, the concept of Negritude, the celebration of African identity and uniqueness, was invented in Paris by the Martinique poet and philosopher, Aimé Césaire. However, its most famous proponent in Africa according to Mazrui was the founder-president of independent Senegal, Leopold Senghor.¹⁵⁶ Other proponents of

¹⁵² Ibid. p. 51.

¹⁵³ Ibid. p. 53.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid. p. 57

¹⁵⁵ Ibid. p. 58

¹⁵⁶ Ali A. Mazrui. “Pan-Africanism and the Intellectuals: Rise, Decline and Revival,” unpublished paper delivered as a keynote address for CODESRIA’S 30th Anniversary on

the Negritude movement in Africa included Senghor's compatriot: Cheikh Anta Diop, Kwame Nkrumah, Birago Diop and Ousmane Socé.

Very briefly, the Negritude movement was “born of out of the disillusionment and resentment of the dehumanizing oppression of colonial domination and suppression of the black people.”¹⁵⁷ Primarily utilizing ideas and aesthetics, more than political activism, exponents of the Negritude movement sought to not only reject everything the colonizing powers stood for, but also actively and consciously sought to glorify and to idealize Africa’s past traditions while also extolling its communal virtues.

But as a philosophy, the concept of Negritude was meant to counter the very forces of history that were aimed at destroying African pride in themselves, their history, their culture, and their traditions. Particularly contested were the Eurocentric prejudices attributed to David Hume, Immanuel Kant, Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and Lévy Bruhl. These arguably canonized European philosophers insisted that Africa was outside of history and civilization and that its people, essentially lacking in rationality and logic, were more or less like under-achieving children.

Troubled by these racially motivated prejudices about Africa and Africans and the mentality they engendered, that Europeans were at the apex of human civilization and culture, exponents of the Negritude movement became more convinced that Africa's truly liberating possibilities lay most of all in honoring and actively promoting pre-colonial Africa's humanistic values and moral sensibilities. As philosopher Lucius Outlaw observes: “the Negritude movement...attempted to distinguish Africans from Europeans

the general theme, "Intellectuals, Nationalism and the Pan-African Ideal," Grand Finale Conference, December 10-12, 2003, in Dakar, Senegal.

¹⁵⁷ Consult, for more details, Mafeje A. In Search of An Alternative: A Collection of Essays on Revolutionary Theory and Politics. Harare, Zimbabwe: SAPES Books, 1992.

by defining the African in terms of the complexity of character traits, dispositions, capabilities, natural endowments and so forth, in relative predominance and overall organizational arrangements, which form(ed) the Negro essence....”¹⁵⁸

The promise of the Negritude movement, before and during the struggle for independence, notwithstanding, the fire enlivening its clarion call for back to Africa's roots was unfortunately extinguished soon after most African countries secured their “political independence.” The basic question that we must then answer is: if in fact apologists of the Negritude movement could not reach out to as many people in the 1960's, in spite of the highly charged climate of colonial resentment, what positive indications exist today that the current resurgence of interest of going back to Africa's roots will triumph? What might have contributed to the swift demise of both the hippie and the Negritude movements? Was it because the vision informing these two movements was as it were hijacked by the very societal forces its exponents were striving to rebel against? Was it because exponents of these two movements experienced a sense of fatigue and frustration especially after failing to attract as many disciples as they would have perhaps desired, or is it because these two movements did not as it were enjoy a more broad based legitimacy and could therefore not push their agenda forward? What lesson/s might individuals who are now drumming up the clarion call for Africa's return to its roots learn from the failure/s of these two movements? How might Africans, in Africa, precisely translate this rhetoric, of going back to Africa's cultural roots, into a more practical, more appealing, vision of building economically viable, culturally

¹⁵⁸ See Lucius Outlaw. "African, African American, Africana Philosophy" in *African Philosophy: An Anthology*. Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze. Ed. Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers, 1998:40.

sustainable and environmentally supportive lifestyles?

5. 5. Challenges of re-indigenization

The combined forces of globalization – technology, religion, international trade, international treaties and protocols, and the unprecedented intrusion and near to ready acceptance of American pop culture in virtually all parts of the world, including Africa – render, I submit, the going back to Africa's roots movement appear more like a mirage, a flight of imagination. Our present world, as we are often reminded, has now considerably shrunk and is increasingly becoming interdependent. Thanks, in part, to techno-scientific innovations in electronic and print media advertisement, Hollywood entertainment, jet travel, international trade, global tourism and instantaneous learning made possible especially by the arrival and swift domestication of the Internet.

Singly and in concert with one another these forces, I would like to believe, render the return to Africa's roots movement sound more like a pseudo-rhetoric wanting in both substance and vision. Let me clarify what I mean by paying special attention to the shifts and dramatic changes now taking place in the global economy.

In his article, "Where is world capitalism going," Nicholai S. Rozov argue that most students and scholars of futures studies, avoiding the problems now occasioned by global political economy, often turn to social and religious utopias, environmentalism, postmodernism, epistemology, interpretism and neo-mythology."¹⁵⁹ However, in doing so, Rosov points out, they fail (as it were) to address the good old question *cui prodest*: for whom is it profitable (anyway)?¹⁶⁰ Granted, the questions that we must now ask are:

¹⁵⁹ Nicholas S. Rozov, "Where is world capitalism going?" in the *Futures Bulletin of The World Futures Studies Federation* (23), 1. April 1997:6

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.* p. 6

do exponents of the of going back to Africa's roots movement shy away from addressing the good old question: for whom is it profitable? If they do not address this question, as they should, would the goals they envision then fail to materialize for, as Rosov would say, global capitalists are always a step a head of everybody?

In subsequent sections of this paper, while searching for an adequate response to these questions, I propose to situate this discussion within the context of the findings brought to our attention by Scott Lash and John Urry in their book *Economies of Signs and Space* (1994) and Krishan Kumar in his book *From Post-Industrial to Post-modern Society* (1995). I have especially chosen these two books because they same reservations that I have (and which I have already expressed) concerning the going back to Africa's roots movement. This is how they frame their concerns.

5. 5. 1. Lash and Urry: Economies of signs and space

Lash and Urry explicates how, and the manner in which, top managers of "global hot money of casino capitalism" constantly seeks to re-define, re-secure and re-entrench capitalism.¹⁶¹ They also seek an understanding, in this book, of how the evolving world of global capitalism will influence, and be influenced in turn, by social and religious utopias, environmentalism, post-modernism, interpretism and neo-mythology. Either way, they point out, that the constant attempts at restructuring and resuscitating global capitalism has in fact enabled global capitalism to inescapably enjoy an unprecedented

¹⁶¹ The phrase "global hot money of casino capitalism," is borrowed from Hazel Henderson. See his article, "A Looking Back from the 21st Century" in the *Futures Bulletin of the World Futures Studies Federation* (23), 1, April 1997:10. While Henderson does not exactly define what it means, I would like to imagine that he is referring to the new phenomena in the flexibility and mobility of international finance – a phenomenon, which, currently, is defying the logic of both national and regional boundaries and operates according to the dictates of global market opportunities.

monopoly control over money-capital, means of production, consumption patterns, and labor relations. Market forces, they suggest, are now circumventing the crucial role that central governments have all along played especially in terms of planning, organizing, directing and coordinating relational exchanges between capital production, consumption, accumulation, and labor processes.

That, indeed, in our world today, global capitalism arguably enjoys monopoly control over capital, technology, people, and even ideas produced in the academy cannot be gainsaid. Academic institutions are, for example, now concentrating on churning-out a work force that is best suited in furthering goals of global capitalism. Knowledge of almost always evolving technology, which incidentally allow information to be mutually shared between and within global capitalists elite across local, national, regional and international divide, is today a must-know skill for students majoring in business oriented disciplines and even other subjects. To be industry relevant students, especially in the business-oriented disciplines, are now required to learn extensive micro-marketing skills in order to be able to, for example, systematically manipulate and fragment consumers' psychic dispositions. Mastering the craft (or is it the science?) of how to ingeniously guide consumers in choosing what elites of global capitalism would like them to consume, and of knowing how to milk the most vulnerable, alienated, exploited, and dehumanized populations of society to the bone is certainly an a must know skill in our today's business world.

Presumably, Lash and Urry seem to celebrate and to even endorse the entrenchment of the evolving, restructured, global capitalism. As they note: Spatialization and semioticization of contemporary political economies is less

damaging in its implications than many writers...[whom they do not specify] suggest. This is because the implication for subjects, for the self, of these changes, is not just one of emptying and flattening. Instead, these changes also encourage the development of 'reflexivity.' Such a growing reflexivity of subjects that accompanies the end of organized capitalism opens up many possibilities for social relations – for intimate relationships, friendship, work relations, leisure, and consumption.¹⁶²

5. 5. 2. Krishna Kumar: post-industrial to postmodern society

Unlike Lash and Urry, Kumar is neither optimistic nor pessimistic about the potential benefits to the self, which would accompany a resuscitated global capitalism. Instead, he opts to evaluate how post-industrial theories (i.e. the idea of information society, theories of Post-Fordism and Post-Modernity) give credibility to the position that Lash and Urry, along with other scholars, take with respect to the so-called end of organized global capitalism.

While I may be oversimplifying Kumar's otherwise complex argument, it seems to me that Kumar is somewhat convinced that there has not been a substantial change in the logic of capitalism to warrant its celebration (in spite of the claims to the contrary). Listen, for example, to what he says with regard to the flexible specialization associated with Post-Fordism:

Certainly (it) indicates continuity of purpose and outlook that casts doubt on the idea of a fundamentally new departure, a second divide, in the evolution of industrial societies.¹⁶³

¹⁶² Scott Lash and John Urry. *Economies of Signs and Space*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications. 1994: 31.

Furthermore, referring to the phenomenon of Post-Modernism – a term that I am somewhat reluctant to use here because of its ambiguity – Kumar notes:

At the very least, it forces us to acknowledge in ‘localism’ and ‘diversity’ - a motive and force not very different from those forces that have propelled capitalism for most of its history.¹⁶⁴

The significance of these two quotes can be traced to at least four structural shifts, in today’s consumption habits, identified by Phil Macnaghten and John Urry in their book entitled *Contested Natures* (1998). First, they note, internationalization of markets and tastes has led to an exponential increase in the range of goods and services that are available to those who can afford them. Second, the rapidly increasing semiotization of products has made sign value – not use value – to become a key determinant in choosing what to consume. Third, consumer tastes have become more fluid and open especially after the breakdown of some traditionalized institutions and structures occasioned by contemporary global capitalism. Last, but not least, the shift from producer power to consumer power occasioned by increased consumption patterns has led to the formation of multiple identities.¹⁶⁵

Granted, it would seem therefore plausible to argue that Kumar is correct particularly when he agrees with Hamelink’s viewpoint about the myth of information society. Hamelink, for example, asserts:

The information society is a myth developed to serve the interest of those who

¹⁶³ Krishan Kumar. *From Post-Industrial To Post-Modern Society: New Theories of the Contemporary World*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Blackwell.1995: 61.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid. p. 58

¹⁶⁵ Phil Macnaghten and John Urry. *Contested Natures*. Thousand oaks: California: sage 1998: 24.

initiate and manage the 'information revolution' - the most powerful sectors of society such as the central administrative elite, the military establishment and global industrial corporations.¹⁶⁶

Yet, even more telling, in a calculated stroke of 'genius,' Kumar reiterates Walker's ideas about the information society. Walker argues, for example, that industrial capitalism has not been transcended but simply extended, deepened, and perfected."¹⁶⁷

While I do in fact acknowledge – with delight – the many new and exciting possibilities ushered in by the new evolving economic world order (read changes in people's attitudes to politics, leisure, work, family life, personal relations, identity formation, etc.) I find Lash and Urry's project seriously compromised.¹⁶⁸ From their thought provoking explication of economies of signs and space, I can immediately visualize, with ease, how a path to political, social, cultural, and religious mobilization would lead to a blind cultural conformism which is unsustainable given the level on which capitalism has reorganized patterns of relationships in virtually almost all spheres of life. What I cannot however fathom is how an individual, or group of individuals, who are outside of the capitalist loop could if they indeed are free as Lash and Urry seem to suggest, wage a counter-hegemonic struggle against the manipulative tendencies of what

¹⁶⁶ Krishan Kumar. Op cit. p. 31

¹⁶⁷ Ibid. p. 31

¹⁶⁸ According to a ground breaking report presented to the International Labor Organization (ILO) entitled: A fair Globalization: Creating Opportunities For All of February 24, 2004, Globalization has opened the door to many benefits. It has "promoted open societies and open economies and encouraged a freer exchange of goods, ideas and knowledge...More importantly, this report notes, "a truly global conscience is beginning to emerge sensitive to the inequalities of poverty, gender discrimination, child labor and environmental degradation, whenever these may occur." For details visit: <<http://www.ilo.org/public/english/bureau/inf/or/pr/2004/7.htm>> February 24, 2004.

James Marsh, philosophy professor at Fordham University, New York, calls the ‘capitalist ideological mobilization.’¹⁶⁹ If they cannot do so, then how can we unquestioningly buy into their analysis of reflexive subjectivity (despite its prophetic message of hope)? Is Lash and Urry’s optimistic analysis of economies of signs and space therefore intended to sweep under the carpet imperialistic motives underpinning the evolving economic new world order? To what extent, one might ask, will this system foster surrogate relationships in human endeavors? Will it maximize or minimize existing forms of subordination and inequality in contemporary societies? Will the supposedly “freed individuals” - those who are free from the “imprisoning social structures” and who are, as they would like us to believe, capable of reflecting upon multiple possibilities in the various spheres of human endeavors – be able to wage a counter-hegemonic struggle against manipulative capitalist ideological mobilization?

Probably not! The truth of the matter is that these individuals can wage a counter hegemonic struggle if and only if they are liberated, empowered and centered (to use Ali Mazrui’s words). But who are such individuals? Are they not those already situated at the very center, and not the periphery, of capitalist class? In fact, Leslie Sklair (1995:71) consider, and I agree with him, the primary beneficiaries of the unfolding economic new world order to be transnational capitalist class: corporate executives of multinational corporations and their local affiliates, state bureaucrats, capitalist-inspired politicians, professional elite merchants, and media personnel. Granted, the new unfolding economic world order, which Lash and Urry envision, carries then with it a complex and hidden

¹⁶⁹ For a detailed treatment of this subject matter consult James Marsh's chapter eight "The Hermeneutics of Suspicion II: Dialectical Phenomenology of Social Theory" of his book *Post-Cartesian Meditations: An Essay in Dialectical Phenomenology*. New York: Fordham University Press, 1988: 200-238.

global capitalist agenda of subordination and exploitation. By shifting emphasis from relations of production to relations of reproduction, circulation and exchange of goods and services in that order, global capital elite come up with a model of economic analysis that can be described at best as a camouflaged, manipulative and highly sophisticated form of neo-imperialism. This now emerging form of neo-imperialism, I would like to believe, will supersede in all its intentions, means of achieving its goals, and the consequences it will usher all other forms of imperialistic maneuvers that humanity has witnessed thus far. Here, I define imperialism, as Walter J. Raymond does in his *Dictionary of Politics* (1978), as an inherent propensity on the part of some human beings to interfere, subvert, alter, influence, manipulate, control and regulate through suggestive means, or otherwise, a people's social, epistemic, cultural, religious, political and economic aspirations.¹⁷⁰ Perhaps, Ngugi wa Thiongo, in his book *Decolonizing the Mind*, is even more articulate in defining what in fact imperialism does to especially the wretched of the earth, arguing that:

Imperialism presents the struggling peoples of the earth with the ultimatum: accept theft or death. But the biggest weapon wielded and daily unleashed by imperialism against the collective defiance is the cultural bomb. The effect of a

¹⁷⁰ Walter J. Raymond describes the three ways in which imperialism operates at the nation-state level; that is, cultural or vertical imperialism, economic imperialism and territorial or horizontal imperialism. For him, cultural imperialism occurs when a people's language, cultural habits, religious beliefs, institutions, and politico-ethical values are by instrumental calculation subverted by others inside or outside of a nation state. Economic imperialism takes place when people are exposed to highly seductive, "new and more rewarding" modes of production, and distribution of goods and services. Territorial imperialism takes place when the sovereignty or territorial rights of a people are interfered with through external forms of manipulation leading to a blind cultural assimilationism. Walter Raymond J. *Dictionary of Politics: Selected American and Foreign Political and Legal Terms*. Lawrenceville VA: Brunswick Publishing Company, 1978: 295-296.

cultural bomb is to annihilate a people – (i.e., belief in their names, their language, their environment, their country, their capacity, and ultimately in themselves). It makes them see their past as one of non-achievement...Amidst this wasteland that it has created, imperialism presents itself as the cure and demands that the dependent sing hymns of praise with the constant refrain: ‘Theft is holy!’¹⁷¹

Ngugi wa Thiongo's verdict is clear and, I believe, cogent. The now unfolding economies of signs and space are nothing more than a new kind of neo-imperialism, which will adversely restructure (if it has not done so already) all human institutions– i.e., intellectual, social, cultural, religious, economic or otherwise. Despite its promise of fostering a pseudo-reflexivity and widening the space and scope of a people's choices, it will negatively affect a people's habits, behavior, material and spiritual creations, institutions, laws and norms governing these institutions, visions of life individuals have had, and long held religious convictions. With these changes taking place, the environmental values that people cling on to will also become gradually eroded. And given the unstoppable entrenchment of cultural imperialism world wide to which Ngugi alludes, will re-indigenization of sub-Saharan Africa's environmental protection initiatives appeal to the vast populations who are now bombarded (thanks to CNN and Hollywood images) with glamorous lifestyles from the West? Certainly not!

5. 6. Conclusion

Having said that, what then can one say in conclusion? An ‘exit option,’ or even a relative retreat into self sufficiency that would consign populations in sub-Saharan Africa

¹⁷¹ Ngugi wa Thiong'o. *Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*. London: J. Currey; Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1986: 3.

back to their ancestral roots as an alternative route to development (or ecological regeneration) may not, I here submit, be a viable option especially in light of the new challenges and tensions associated with living in these new global times. What in fact contemporary Africa needs is not so much a retreat into its pre-colonial heritage—its values, traditions, technological practices and beliefs but, rather, a paradigm shift that would offer a more balanced synthesis of pre-colonial Africa's knowledge systems and Western science and techno-scientific skills.

Building A Foundation for a New Moral Republic

Traditionally, two basic skills were thought to be necessary for minimally educated person: literacy and numeracy, [the ability] to read and use numbers in calculations. [Now, there is inescapably] a third requirement for a minimally educated person in today's world: ecolacy, the understanding of ecology or the natural environment and our relationship to it.¹⁷²

6. 0. Introduction

In addition to reviving and utilizing indigenous knowledge – what ordinary people know among other ways through experience, repetitive practice and knowledge passed from one generation to the next – there is also another suggestion that is increasingly gaining currency in Africa. A popular verdict, especially in the court of public opinion, is that ultimately “transforming the self and its structure of needs” is what Africa most requires to effectively respond to its legion of problems and challenges.¹⁷³ Put simply, the argument goes like this: For Africa (like other world regions) to resolve—or failing that, at least reduce to a minimum — its myriad of life threatening conditions, including environmental degradation, substantial resources (time, labor and money) ought to be invested in building what Martin Prozesky calls “a foundation for a new moral republic.”¹⁷⁴

¹⁷² The term ecolacy was, according to Louis P. Pojman, coined in 1985 by the American ecologist, Garrett Hardin. Consult, for more details, Louis Pojman. *Global Environmental Ethics*. Mountain View, California: Mayfield Publishing company, 2000.

¹⁷³ This notion, of seeking to consciously transform the self and its structure of needs in order to in the end generate right actions, is borrowed from Eric Kartz, Andrew Light, and David Rothenberg. ed. *Beneath the Surface: Critical Essays in the Philosophy of Deep Ecology*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2000: xvi & 5.

¹⁷⁴ Martin Prozesky. “The Quest for Inclusive Well-Being: Groundwork for an Ethical Renaissance.” An inaugural Lecture delivered on 12 May 1999 at the University of Natal,

By building a foundation for new moral republic it is meant, among other things, cultivating a culture of farsighted, selfless, responsible, conscientious, defiantly honest, morally impeccable, and environmentally knowledgeable citizenry. That is to say, nurturing a citizenry that will out of its volition be willing to match and even to surpass (where necessary) the pursuit of their self-interests with the concerns for the well-being of the less disadvantaged segments of human society, threatened non-human species and, perhaps, inanimate things. Martin Prozesky puts this challenge even more succinctly. Ethics, Prozesky contends, defined as “the art of using power, freedom, information, and, above all, conscience to live wisely and well, is to human life what the Nile river is to Egypt: its very lifeblood.”¹⁷⁵ Like the Nile that “gives life, beauty, and value to the barren dessert land along the banks, morality gives life and value to the cultures and worlds that we (humans) try time after time to make and remake.” “Without an ethical renewal then, a new surge in moral power,” argues Prozesky, “there can be no general renaissance – least of all in Africa.”¹⁷⁶

Africa’s celebrated political scientists, Ali Mazrui, concurs with this view even whilst identifying two other dimensions that also require radical surgery if the much touted African Renaissance is to come of age in the course of this 21st century. In his unpublished paper “The African Renaissance: A Triple Legacy of Skills, Values and Gender,” Mazrui argues that, in addition to addressing the massive collapse of encompassing systems of morality in Africa, a revolution in techno-scientific skills and gender relations must also be undertaken. Short of concurrently inducing sweeping (not

Pietermaritzburg, South Africa. <<http://www.ethics.unp.ac.za/inaug.htm>> March 27, 2003

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

cosmetic) reforms in the moral sphere, in techno-scientific skills and gender relations, he seems to suggest, Africa's efforts at resolving its monumental challenges will (to use Bryan Norton's words) conceivably collapse into "an effective babble."¹⁷⁷ Similarly endorsing this view, a report from the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, of 1997, asserts: "ultimately, the elaboration of an African path to progress is a question of ethics and moral philosophy."¹⁷⁸ Ghanaian philosopher Kwasi Wiredu expresses a similar opinion as well in his paper "Philosophy, Humankind and the Natural Environment." He argues:

To ameliorate Africa's problems — the combined poverty of knowledge, wisdom and virtue — knowledge and wisdom are needed, and so is morality. Of these, perhaps, knowledge is the easiest to get and wisdom the hardest. But morality is the most essential. ...without morality no human community is sustainable, with or without protected environment. ...Without morality, the ordering of human affairs will be a chimerical aspiration. ...The inculcation of the quest for meaning into the thought habits of the generality of humankind may be philosophy's greatest contribution to the solution of the problem of the environment and other problems too...¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁷ This unpublished paper was presented as the Keynote Address at the 5th General Conference of The African Academy of Sciences held in Hammamet, Tunisia, April 22-27, 1999.

¹⁷⁸ The report from the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs is entitled "The Search for a New Global Political Project" and it is available online at: http://www.um.dk/udenrigspolitik/copenhagenseminars/summary97/sum_9.asp March 31, 2003

¹⁷⁹ Kwasi Wiredu. "Philosophy, Humankind and the Natural Environment," in *Philosophy, Humanity and Ecology: Philosophy of Nature and Environmental Ethics*, Volume I, ed. H. Odera Oruka. Nairobi, Kenya: African Center for Technology Studies (ACTS) Press, 1994: 30-48.

But it is Sunny Binda, a Kenyan newspaper columnist, who, I believe, brings this matter into a sharper focus:

If ever there was a call to arms that should be heeded, (Binda notes) it is the challenge of rediscovering our (Africa's pre-colonial) essential human values... When our values are healthy and our ideals are noble, the foundation [of a new culture, in which individual and community concerns and rights will be treated everywhere and always as equal and indivisible,] will have been re-laid. Our institutions will become robust again and our leaders will (henceforward) be a reflection of the desires in most peoples' hearts.¹⁸⁰

The foremost desire, in the hearts of many people, says South Africa's incumbent president Thabo Mbeki, is "the silence of peace and the passionate hope for the warm rays of the sun in the cold and dark nights of the winters of our hearts."¹⁸¹ Equally yearned, if I may hasten to add, is the assurance of leading a healthier, comfortable and fulfilling life; a life, shall we say, that is relatively devoid of the burden of easily preventable diseases, unnecessary wars, oppression, ignorance, manufactured starvation, material deprivation and discriminations on the basis of gender, clan, tribe, age and religion.

6. 1. Wining this "battle"

To re-evolve such a culture, however, where the concern for the interests of others are actively upheld, respected and the well being of each heartily promoted, a major transformation is inevitably required. Especially in need of radical (not piecemeal) change are our (a) imperious human centered (read male-centric) worldviews, (b) the

¹⁸⁰ Sunny Binda. "Good Governance, The Test of Our Civilization." Kenya's Sunday Nation Newspaper <www.nationaudio.com> February 23rd 2003.

¹⁸¹ Thabo Mbeki. "The African Renaissance." SABC, Gallagher Estate, August 13th 1998.

constricting spheres of interpersonal relationships, and (c) the growing mentality and practices of emasculating the environments and resources where people live, that surround them, and which they depend on for their livelihood to often meet whimsical human needs and other desires. Following are some of the ways in which this goal may be accomplished. I am sure you will tell me others.

A simple and achievable starting point (although more of a pipe dream) is to begin proactively promoting countrywide education campaigns and debates to sensitize ordinary folks, and particularly the unemployed youths, about some of the major qualities those seeking political positions must genuinely exude. For example, ideally, individuals seeking elective positions must be above moral reproach, be steadfast in their commitment to improving the welfare of those whom they represent and especially disadvantaged groups in society and must also be willing defenders of the interests of future generations — born and unborn. They must also transcend the mentality of the current crop of African leaders who no sooner are they elected into office than they begin to calculate (rather than meaningfully addressing the plight of the poor) how they will win the next round of elections.¹⁸² Individuals seeking elective positions must, additionally, be devoted in walking the talk (no matter how costly this might be to their political careers) of stamping out the despicable culture of greed, corruption, cronyism, and nepotism. They should also possess the charisma that is pivotal to enlisting relevant stakeholders in managing public affairs and the environment with caution, wisdom and foresight.

In addition to this requirement, the teaching of ethics (and ecolacy in particular)

¹⁸² The youth are particularly singled out for they will in any case live longer and therefore shoulder the responsibility for the decision made or not made in the present.

should be formally institutionalized in the school system curricula, beginning from kindergarten to the high school. Similarly, at the university level, all disciplines in the humanities, social, and natural sciences should be supplemented with systems of thought that, to use Stephen David Ross words, “open and illuminate other worlds, worlds of plenishment, where all things are cared for in a harmony in which none are hurt.”¹⁸³ In our respective households, families, communities, houses of worship, workplace and professional organizations to mention a few, virtues of material simplicity, openness to the views and beliefs of others, and respect for the concern for the interests of others – whether humans and/or non-human species – should likewise be actively promoted (but not through indoctrination). The awareness concerning especially of the consequences of our near-to-ready mentality of mortgaging not only our own futures but also the futures of future generations for transitory material gains and hedonistic pleasures should also be raised. This could be done through print and electronic media, literature, music, drama, visual arts, film, photography, oral storytelling traditions, humor, irony and other artistic forms of expressions

6. 2. Devil in the details

Translating this seemingly disarming rhetoric – of radically reforming the self and its structure of needs – into actual practice is one of the greatest challenges. Apart from the massive financial implications that would be involved, and the logistics of implementing the desired changes, a far greater challenge would be deciding and coming to an authentic consensus about the kind of ethic that, if integrated in the formal school system curricula and the other spheres of life, could help Africa and Africans in among

¹⁸³ Stephen David Ross. *Plenishment in the Earth: An Ethic of Inclusion*. Saratoga Springs, New York: State University of New Press, 1995: 1-7.

other goals:

- Reversing the (a) burgeoning levels of human greed (b) meretricious attraction of Western tastes, lifestyles and ideas (c) rapidly contracting networks of kinship solidarity and (d) widespread abandonment of what Nigerian Nobel laureate, in literature, Wole Soyinka, calls “the final vestiges of known norms of civilized society.”
- Opening the gates of moral consideration to what Stephen David Ross refers to as the “heterogeneities of both human and natural kinds.”
- Awakening the awareness of planetary interdependency
- Reducing, if not eliminating altogether, the glaring and sustained human rights violations, rampant human-wildlife conflicts, artificially induced socioeconomic inequalities, ethnic bigotry, generational prejudices, and widespread discrimination based on gender, religion, ethnicity, et cetera.
- Eschewing some (if not all) of the major forces – internal and external – that time and again have driven especially the poor and disadvantaged segments of society into destroying environments where they live, that surround them, and which they depend on for their livelihood.
- Responding more effectively to endemic bloody conflicts, horrendous sectarian violence, the rapacious plunder of state treasuries, natural wealth and resources by both African and non-African elites, and the selective dispensation of elementary rules of justice and, finally
- Restoring a modicum of parity to the otherwise exploitative socioeconomic world order, which, apart from robbing millions of poor people of their

personality, self-esteem and the audacity to dream big dreams, allows a few self-seeking affluent individuals to overwhelmingly control the lives, future and destiny of the vast poor and disinherited majority in Africa?¹⁸⁴

Would falling back exclusively on insights, the accepted wisdom, emerging from the forking anthropocentric and/or nonanthropocentric pathways help Africa and Africans tackle all of these challenges?¹⁸⁵ Would the goal of evolving a new culture, in which the interests of all earthlings are treated as equal and indivisible, not require much more than merely realigning Africa's environmental recovery discourse and initiatives within the strictures of either one or both of these two widely debated approaches in the evolving academic field of environmental ethics?

To the extent that Africa's problems are not only varied, complex and crosscutting but also historically constituted in a number of ways by different forces and for different

In contrast, non-anthropocentrism is a nature-centered mentality for environmental protection. Its champions place more emphasis on the importance of extending moral consideration to the non-human parts of the natural world.

¹⁸⁴ The myriad of problems facing African continent, including environmental damage and despoliation, are largely generated by political elites. They are in part also traceable, I think, to the unfair rules governing the operations of the world economy; disenfranchising policies thrust upon African governments by the World Bank and the International Monetary fund. Other major triggers include Africa's widespread material poverty, skewed land tenure regimes that have all too often favored the affluent minority and, last but not least, the inability of Africa's political elites to liberate their respective nations from the recurrent cycle of dependency on the West.

¹⁸⁵ Simply, anthropocentrism is a buzzword for conventional, human-centered morality. Although not always, in general exponents of this approach use classical ethical theories in ordering the affairs and actions of moral agents in ways that would be least injurious to the interests, values and rights of not only other humans – born and unborn – but also the non-human part/s of the natural world.

For many reasons, the goal of reforming the self and its structure of needs should and must accommodate the potpourri of the already proposed transformative interventions (which I will review shortly). What's more, considered in isolation from the other approaches in the evolving sub-discipline of environmental ethics (reviewed below), the insights and ideas emerging from either the anthropocentric or the non-anthropocentric approaches cannot possibly speak to the crowd of divergent interests of Africa's multifaceted stakeholders. A more effective strategy of approaching the myriad of environmental challenges facing Africa and Africans should involve the utilization (depending on the interests of relevant stakeholders) of the buffet of ideas gleaned from the rainbow of proposed transformative interventions that we must now review.

6. 3. Anthropocentric (human-centered) interventions

“Man is the Measure of all things”

- Protagoras –

It is not hard to visualize why, in Africa, promoting the forking anthropocentric interventions would offer a more promising strategy of (a) transforming the self and its structure of needs and (b) cultivating more supportive environmental views and practices. But before I discuss the various strands of the anthropocentric approach, let me first reiterate the overarching argument that cuts across the many strands of the anthropocentric approach.

6. 3. 1. Primacy of humans and their interests

The gradually rising environmental awareness, anthropocentric apologists maintain, is not primarily born out of the concern for saving nature, the non-human parts

of the physical world, per-se (in spite of the rhetoric gesturing that way).¹⁸⁶ To the contrary, and this is best articulated by Diana Dumanoski, people who express concern for the environment and work to promote environmental protection goals do so precisely because they are mostly haunted – whether knowingly or unknowingly – “by the conundrum of the human future.”¹⁸⁷ Their near-to-religious enthusiasm of managing the earth (air, water, soil, plants, animals and even inanimate things) with caution, wisdom, foresight and goodwill is, the argument goes, informed by at least two key concerns. One is to preserve, to protect and to improve the health, sources of livelihood and standards of living of present humans. The other is to make sure that future generations – born and unborn – will, like present humans, also have the opportunity to enjoy and to partake of the many benefits derived from nature. Some of the benefits they highlight include, for example, economic advancement, aesthetic enjoyment, emotional uplift, moral replenishment, educational training, outdoors recreation and spiritual sustenance. Human survival (and secondarily the health, beauty and integrity of the nonhuman parts of the world), they argue, is what primarily is and has been at stake. What present humans value, their needs, preferences and life goals are what mainly matters. Life, anthropocentric apologists admit, is essentially about people (Bryan Norton, 1987). As Dianne Dumanoski observes in her article “From The Land Ethic to the Uncharted Territory of Global Humanity:”

A profound confusion persists about the ultimate stakes and about exactly what

¹⁸⁶ Notable anthropocentric apologists include Mark Sagoff, Eugene C. Hargrove, Bryan Norton, Diana Dumanoski, John Passmore and Kristin Shrader-Frechette to name a few.

¹⁸⁷ Dianne Dumanoski's article “From The Land Ethic to the Uncharted Territory of Global Humanity,” Harvard Seminar on Environmental Values, December 15, 1999, is available online at: <<http://www.ourstolenfuture.com/Commentary/DD/199-12DDHarvard.htm>> March 31, 2003.

we are “saving.” The heart of the crisis that is upon us is not about pandas or tropical rainforests or about saving the earth. This is a crisis, primarily, about humans and our ability to adapt our new global culture to the radically changed world that we now inhabit. ... We have crossed a fateful threshold into a new era and a radically altered world with new rules and challenges unlike anything humans have faced before. ... Perhaps we would begin to understand the meaning of this crisis if we called it a “humanity crisis” rather than an environmental crisis and gave earth day a new name – the festival of human continuity.¹⁸⁸

Richard T de George also argues, in his paper “Modern Science, Environmental Ethics and the Anthropocentric Predicament,” that for anthropocentric defenders: The destruction of forests is not unethical because of what it does to forests but because it carries with it certain results such as consequent flooding, changes in temperature and climate, and famine if the land is not able to sustain crops and so on.” ... Polluting streams is [likewise] not wrong because of what it does to rivers or to fish, but because of what it does to humans. Endangering or eliminating species of animals or vegetable life is [equally] not wrong because of what it does to those species but because of what it does or might do to humans, given the interconnections of the ecosystem that supports life.¹⁸⁹

From this angle, it would seem then plausible to argue that, according to anthropocentrists, saving the non-human world (or some of its constituent parts) as such

¹⁸⁸ Diana Dumanoski. *Op.cit.* p. 3.

¹⁸⁹ Richard T De George. “Modern Science, Environmental Ethics and the Anthropocentric Predicament.” In *Philosophy, Humanity and Ecology: Philosophy of Nature and Environmental Ethics, Volume I*, ed. H. Odera Oruka. Nairobi, Kenya: African Center for Technology Studies (ACTS) Press, 1994: 21.

is secondary to the concerns of safeguarding the “festival of human continuity” on planet earth.¹⁹⁰ Partly, precipitating this human-centered outlook are the apocalyptic predictions that indicate how and the manner in which the accelerating destruction of delicate ecosystems, contamination of natural systems, obliteration of non-human species and alteration of the atmosphere's chemistry will in the foreseeable future reverberate and adversely impact human health, economic well-being and ability to comfortably survive into the distant future.¹⁹¹ As Luc Ferry, quoting Michel Serres (who is nevertheless not a defender of anthropocentrism), notes:

For the first time, no doubt, in the history of humanity, the problems posed by the devastation of the earth have become global. As on a ship lost in a storm, there is no escape possible, nowhere to seek salvation and protection. The world we have treated as an object has become a subject again, capable of revenge: worn out, polluted, mistreated, it now threatens to dominate us in turn.¹⁹²

Dumanoski's counsel is even more telling. The frightening accelerating environmental crisis, she notes, is “at its deepest level a cultural and metaphysical crisis

¹⁹⁰ Dianne Dumanoski. *Op.cit.* p. 4.

¹⁹¹ Dianne Dumanoski. “From The Land Ethic to the Uncharted Territory of Global Humanity,” Harvard Seminar on Environmental Values, December 15, 1999. This article can be accessed on line: <<http://www.ourstolenfuture.com/commentary/DD1999-12DDHarvard.htm>> March 31, 2003. Read also Donella and Dennis Meadow. Ed. *The Club of Rome report: The limits to Growth of 1973*. This report's urgent and sobering message is, writes Jim Dator, that we (humans) are running out of everything but people (whose population has been rising at an alarming rate) and are, as a result, squeezing ourselves to death from overpopulation—unless something intervenes (as it must). Painting an ominous scenario about human population exceeding the earth's safe carrying capacity, as it did, the immediate reaction to the findings of the club of Rome report, was, as humans are often apt to in moments of crisis, that of panic and fear. It is no wonder then there has been an increased systematic questioning of our old patterns of dominance and exploitation of nature in recent years.

¹⁹² Luc Ferry. *The New Ecological Order*, Translated by Carol Volk. Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1992:71.

cutting to the most basic question of human self-understanding.”¹⁹³ Hence, according to Dumanoski, the underlying concerns in the debates about environmental protection, or the lack thereof, is the response to the question: “who are we and how do we (humans) fit in the world that we now inhabit?”¹⁹⁴ Understood as such then, the efforts directed toward saving the non-human parts of the world are secondary to the concern for safeguarding the long-term viability of humans, including survival and ability to flourish and to achieve a life that is both satisfying and sustainable.

6. 3. 2. Humans: Arbitrators of ethics, meaning, value and rights

Beyond the claim that humans and their interests are central, primary and determinative, there is another reason why defenders of anthropocentrism argue that humans and their interests ought to be a greater priority vis-à-vis the interests of nonhuman species, natural entities and inanimate things. Human beings, they argue, “remain until proof to the contrary the only beings able to make value judgments and, as the bible says, “to separate the wheat from the chuff.”¹⁹⁵ In other words, as Richard A. Young notes:

“humans are (all things considered) the final authority and arbitrators of value, meaning, ethics, rights and the direction that society should take.”¹⁹⁶ Frederick Frieré is even perhaps more eloquent in delivering his verdict on this matter. He argues that exponents of the anthropocentric approach are in fact convinced that “there is one logical

¹⁹³ Dianne Dumanoski. *Op.cit.* p. 4.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.* p. 71

¹⁹⁵ Luc Ferry. *Op.cit.* p. 133

¹⁹⁶ Richard A. Young. “Healing the Earth: A Theocentric Perspective on Environmental Problems and Their Solutions”

<http://www.chattanooga.net/sustain/healing_the_earth.ch6.html> April 10, 2003.

inescapable fact that humans must face about the ethical decisions that they make.

However mean and/or however generous these decisions are or might be, they will and must continue to be made by humans.”¹⁹⁷ Not to acknowledge this fact as champions of non-anthropocentrism do is, they insist, in effect, to deny the obvious (which is nevertheless problematic, as I see it); and that is: humans are the only beings who value nature and not the other way around.

6. 3. 3. Humans: The only species that possesses intrinsic value

More substantially, defenders of the anthropocentric approach maintain (and this is in fact contestable) that humans are the only beings that possess intrinsic value (who are ends in and of themselves).¹⁹⁸ The non-human world in contrast, they note, only possesses, as it were, instrumental values. It is valuable, they argue, only to the extent to which it can be domesticated, manipulated, exploited and used by humans for humans.¹⁹⁹ As Robin Attfield, philosophy professor at the University of Wales, Cardiff, U.K, observes: for anthropocentric believers, nature is only “a resource – laboratory, museum, art gallery, playground, temple and /or cathedral” – to be used (and even abused) by humans for humans.²⁰⁰ Accordingly, whenever irreconcilable conflicts arise especially

¹⁹⁷ Frederick Ferré. “Technology, Ethic and the 'End' of Nature.” In *Philosophy, Humanity and Ecology: Philosophy of Nature and Environmental Ethics*, ed. H. Odera Oruka. Nairobi: African Center For Technology Studies (ACTS) Press, 1994: 240.

¹⁹⁸ Tim Hayward. Quoted by Andrew Light in his article, “Contemporary Environmental Ethics: From Meta-Ethics to Public Philosophy.” *Meta-Philosophy*. Volume 33. No.3, 2002: 1.

¹⁹⁹ Justifications for environmental protection or the lack of ought therefore be grounded on practical human considerations. The natural world — resources, plants, animal species, ecosystems, indeed the whole biosphere — ought to be protected against crimes of damage and despoliation precisely because it provides humans not only with an open space for recreation, diverse goods such as energy, food, medicines, raw materials, and minerals but also of human contact.

between meeting simultaneously the goals of improving human livelihood and protecting the environment, humans and their interests, anthropocentrists insist, must be given greater priority.

6. 4. Forking Anthropocentric Pathways

With that said, it is crucial to note that there are several variations or forking pathways of the anthropocentric approach. Three in particular are quite familiar. These are narrow anthropocentrism, enlightened anthropocentrism and intergenerational anthropocentrism.

Partly precipitating these three significant tributaries of the anthropocentric approach are responses to the question: how can a more profound turn-around towards environmental protection goals be best achieved? Is it by addressing the accelerating environmental crisis in relation to the needs, wants and aspirations of all human beings regardless of their socioeconomic situations, geographical location, social standing in society and et cetera? Or is it by addressing the environmental crisis to the concerns and interests of specifically targeted groups and especially women, racial and ethnic minorities, indigenous peoples, nation states and/or geographical regions? As already suggested, the response to this question has occasioned the three forking anthropocentric pathways to which we must now turn.

6. 4. 1. Narrow (what is it for me?) strand of anthropocentrism

Even at our best, argues Andre and Manuel Velasquez, we are only out for ourselves... Everything we do – from the selfless to the heroic, we do ultimately

²⁰⁰ Robin Attfield. "Development and Environmentalism." In *Philosophy, Humanity and Ecology: Philosophy of Nature and Environmental Ethics*, ed. H. Odera Oruka. Nairobi: African Center for Technology Studies (ACTS) Press, 1994:138.

for our own benefit. In some instances, the personal gain is obvious, such as when we reap public admiration or praise. In other instances, it is not so obvious.²⁰¹

The good man, according to Aristotle, should be a lover of self. For he will both himself profit by doing noble acts, and will benefit his fellows.²⁰²

Self-interest, the rewards one believes are at stake, says Michael Laskow, is the most significant factor in predicting dedication and satisfaction toward work.²⁰³

Clearly, as these three quotes indicate, the overarching argument of the narrow anthropocentric approach is that environmental protection goals should and must ipso facto accommodate, and be sensitive to, the interests of relevant stakeholders. Without doing so, defenders of this position argue, persuading individuals, sub-groups, communities and nation states to become willing custodians of the environments and ecosystems surrounding them and which they depend on for their livelihood will be a monumental feat. In order to enlist their support, defenders of the narrow anthropocentric approach point out, arguments in favor of environmental protection ought to be framed in language that they can easily relate to. For example, such arguments should explicitly highlight the immediate and tangible benefits – economic, aesthetic, moral, recreational, and, of course, spiritual – that would accrue to them if they were to remain committed to environmental protection goals. Alternatively, in tandem with this claim, such arguments

²⁰¹ Andre and Manuel Velasquez. “Unmasking the Motives of the Good Samaritan,” *Issues in Ethics* vol. 2, No. 1, Winter, 1998. Also available online at: <<http://www.scu.edu/ethics/publications/iie/v2n1/samaritan.html>> June 11, 2003

²⁰² Cited in *Journal of Social Philosophy and Policy*. Vol.14, No.1, Winter 1997. <<http://www.bgsu.edu/offices/sppc/self-int.htm>> June 14, 2003

²⁰³ Michael Laskow. “Self Interest.” <<http://www.taxi.com/faq/ideas/self-interest.html>> June, 14, 2003

should clearly illuminate how their adulteration of the environment, ecosystems and natural resources will in the foreseeable future reverberate and destroy their health, sources of livelihood, standards of living, cultural values and ability to meet and to satisfy their basic survival needs. Two illustrative examples, discussed below, make this point clearer.

Example 1: U.S withdrawal from the 1997 Kyoto Protocol

Almost immediately after taking office, in March 2001, the 43rd President of the United States of America, George Walker Bush and his industry-sympathetic administration declined to ratify the 1997 Kyoto protocol, citing at least two major concerns. One was based on economic self-interest. The other was rooted in what Bush's White House claimed was unclear and insufficient scientific data directly linking global warming to industrial greenhouse gases emissions.

If implemented, Bush's administration argued, the terms of the Kyoto protocol would inevitably slow down United States economic efficiency and this, in turn, would adversely affect United States' economic interests. That most US based corporations and industries would be forced to relocate to overseas and especially to Third World countries where labor costs are low and environmental laws are hardly, if ever, enforced. In these circumstances, Bush's White House maintained, United States farmers, small business entrepreneurs and consumers to mention a few will feel the heat of pain and suffering resulting from this eventuality.

Since then Bush's administration has, using this argument as its centerpiece, "invalidated, as Ronald Reagan's administration did before him, most of the regulations – environmental and otherwise – that could be shown, through a benefit-cost analysis, not

to promote United States' economic efficiency.”²⁰⁴ For example, environmental regulations promulgated and enforced by Clinton’s administration such as stringent smog rules were postponed for short-term pollution and natural destruction based-prosperity. Repeated attempts have also been made, though not without opposition from some environmental lobby groups, to ease restrictions on energy exploration and to exempt deep-water naval activities from the marine mammal protection act.²⁰⁵ James M. Clifford, Vermont senator, in a letter addressed to his colleagues in the Senate, allegedly warned how, for example, the passing of “major energy legislation in a House Senate conference will endanger the nation’s air and water, jeopardize non-human species and limit environmental review and public participation in energy projects to the benefit of special interest.”²⁰⁶

Example 2: Southern Africa lobby against the ban imposed on international trade in endangered species

Following the footsteps of “big brother,” although of course in a different context, in 2002, Zimbabwe, South Africa, Botswana and Namibia launched a spirited campaign to be exempt from the 1989 worldwide ban on international trade in endangered species of fauna and flora (CITIES).²⁰⁷ Their arguments, which are best encapsulated by Fred

²⁰⁴ Bryan Norton. *Toward Unity Among Environmentalists*. Oxford & New York. Oxford University Press, 1991: 6. See also Eric Pianin and Dan Morgan’s, “GOP seeking to delay environmental bills: senators say they are balancing industry needs; Critics worry about air quality.” *The Washington Post*, November 13, 2003.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.* p. 2.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.* p. 2.

²⁰⁷ Established in 1973, and now adopted by 135 nations, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Fauna and Flora was meant, according to Fred Pearce and Robert Lamb, to curb trade in endangered animals, plants and goods derived from them. Besides banning trade and trading in “all species threatened with extinction,” it

Pearce and Robert Lamb in their article “Peoples and Parks: Wildlife Conservation and Community,” went as follow:

The elephant population has tremendously increased in recent years. It then stood at one hundred and fifty thousand and was still rising. Therefore, wildlife experts argued, that there would be no credible scientific justification for invoking the risk of extinction.²⁰⁸ Moreover, Southern Africa's wildlife conservation experts maintained –quite accurately – that the sustained increase in elephant population pose a real gathering threat not only to humans, to their crops and animals but also to ecosystems inhabited by elephants and other wildlife species. The ban on international trade on endangered species, and in this case, the “harvesting” of elephant ivory tusks, they argued, should therefore be lifted to enable these countries to cull the rapidly increasing elephant population, to minimize real and potential conflicts between humans and elephants and to restore hitherto damaged ecosystems.

A related argument, though not explicitly articulated in this context, was that the ban on international trade in endangered species has at any rate served elite interests, values and goals much more than the interests of ordinary Africans. Developed nations, and especially the powerful cartel of international conservation organizations, have all along valued African wildlife much more than humans. As John Clark, quoting Ramachandra Guha, notes: in Third World countries, nature preserves have are established/created not to protect “nature” (broadly construed) but, rather, to protect the large mammals which are of interest to rich tourists. In Africa, for example, financially

also set strict safeguards over other species considered to be under lesser threat.

<[Http://panos.org.uk/briefling/cites.htm](http://panos.org.uk/briefling/cites.htm)> March 31, 2003.

²⁰⁸ Fred Pearce and Robert Lamb. “People and Parks: Wildlife, Conservation and Communities.”<[Http://panos.org.uk/briefling/cites.htm](http://panos.org.uk/briefling/cites.htm)>August 26, 2003

hamstrung government departments are forced – through covert and/or overt means or both – to implementing wildlife conservation programs and policies that, while placing environmental conservation goals in the hands of distant national governments, displace, exclude and alienate local communities from utilizing natural resources found in environments where they live and that surround them. Consequently, local people's responsibility for ownership and stewardship of environments and the resources found on them has progressively been undermined. Communities that now live adjacent to statutorily protected wildlife sanctuaries have, as a result, continued to consider wildlife and related environmental conservation policies and programs as a new kind of “ecocolonialism,” points out Robert Nelson.

As that may be, one might rightly ask: how does Southern Africa's campaign to have the ban imposed on international trade in endangered species lifted in their favor fit in the context of narrow anthropocentrism? It is clear, at least to me, that wildlife experts in Southern Africa were willing to subordinate the intrinsic rights and moral consideration of elephants to human centered concerns. By launching this campaign, the interests of elephants were arguably secondary to the economic benefits that these countries would reap from harvesting and selling elephant ivory tusks. Indeed, protecting their revenue-generating reservoir first and, not being mindful of the interests and intrinsic value of elephants, was what motivated them to launch this spirited campaign. Economic self-interests, one could argue, reigned supreme.

6. 4. 2. Enlightened (or farsighted) anthropocentrism

In contrast to protecting the environment and natural resources based on narrow anthropocentric considerations, defenders of enlightened anthropocentrism appeal to a

different set of human values.²⁰⁹ First of all, they do in fact concede the claim that humans are intrinsically more valuable than the nonhuman world or certain parts of it and that, therefore, human interests, wants, needs and priorities ought first be given greater priority over everything else. However, they also recognize that the non-human world (or at least certain parts of it) has a worth of its own that we, humans, sometimes imperfectly understand.²¹⁰ As Luc Ferry notes: “from the simple point of view of our immediate intuitions, even of our carefully weighted convictions,” we cannot wholly dismiss the fact that nature has value that is independent of human valuations. At times, Ferry goes on to say, “nature tend to surprise us, even to instill a sense of wonder in us, outside of any consideration of mastery or utility. This “lived experience, he then concludes, seems immediate, independent, at least, of our goals.”²¹¹

Beyond the tangible benefits that specifically identifiable humans derive from nature, exponents of the enlightened version of anthropocentrism also concede that there are countless intangible benefits that if popularized may encourage environmentally supportive views and practices. The peace of mind that, for example, follows from watching beautiful sceneries, walking in the woods or even enjoying the view of the sunset is one such benefit. Being in a natural setting, away from the distraction of urban life, can also allow humans, especially keen nature observers, to regain their sense of who they truly are and, as a result, begin to appreciate what they have in fact lost in their relentless pursuit of the conveniences that all too often accompany technological

²⁰⁹ Exponents of enlightened anthropocentrism include, among others, Bryan Norton, De Shalit, Eric Katz and to some extent, Andrew Light.

²¹⁰ See for example the works of Bryan Norton, Avner de-Shalit, Andrew Light and Eric Kartz to mention a few.

²¹¹ Luc Ferry. *The New Ecological Order*. Translated by Carol Volk. Chicago: University of Chicago press, 1995:128.

breakthroughs. As Henry Thoreau reminds us: “nature has an inherent power to transform a human individual and to convert that person from materialistic consumerism to the joyous participation in the creativity and sustenance of life.”²¹² Contact with nature, Bryan Norton also writes, can “open up dark and striking places, which can be very transformative – in terms of making us (humans) become better people.”²¹³ John Muir also shares the same view. He argues that “the serene beauty of flowers (read also undefiled nature), existing entirely independent of human manipulation or utility, can make us to begin to question the human-centered assumptions of our cultural upbringing and, to consequently, see the world from a new, larger-than-human, perspective.”²¹⁴ However, such a perspective, as Kevin Van Tighem would say, can, for the most come about when we (humans) are willing to internalize this simple maxim: “I am the world I love. I cannot be separated from it. I am connected to it and dependent on it.”²¹⁵ What's more, undefiled, nature can be a source of aesthetic inspiration, a source of emotional redemption and a spark of spiritual awakening. Nature can, in addition, be a source of moral renewal, a reservoir of raw materials, a place for outdoor recreation and a storehouse for cures of many diseases– known and yet to be discovered. More substantially, writes poet Nancy Newhall, “nature holds answers to more questions than we even know how to ask.”²¹⁶

²¹² Quoted by Bryan G. Norton in his book *Toward Unity Among Environmentalists*, New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991:35.

²¹³ *Ibid.* p. 19.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.* p. 240

²¹⁵ Kevin Van Tighem. “Better Anthropocentrism: A challenge to Rowe,” in *Trumpeter*, 1994:3.

²¹⁶ Cited in Hwang Kyung Sung’s article, titled “Apology for Environmental Anthropocentrism.” <[Http://www.Biol.tsukuba.ac.jp/~macer/ABC4/abc4304.htm](http://www.Biol.tsukuba.ac.jp/~macer/ABC4/abc4304.htm)> April 20, 2003.

To sum up, defenders of enlightened anthropocentrism argue that arguments in favor of environmental protection should be articulated in a language that appeals to humans to begin managing the earth with caution born primarily out of humble ignorance and a much sharper power of foresight. In addition, they bring to our attention the importance of being concerned about, and morally responsible toward, if I may use Stephen David Ross's phrase, "the heterogeneous things and kinds of the earth." Not to care about nature, enlightened anthropocentrists point out, is to fail, as Kevin Van Tighem reminds us, to protect others and us and that, this, as they would argue, is somewhat equivalent to self-abuse.²¹⁷ Eileen Crist puts this assertion even more forcefully. She argues: "if present humans were to allow environmental destruction to march on, its measure will be social currents of unfathomable sorrow, loss of human creative potential, demoralization, existential suffocation and brutally self-centered forms of anomie."²¹⁸

6. 4. 3. Intergenerational anthropocentrism

On the other hand, says James Sterba and Andrew Kadak, defenders of intergenerational anthropocentrism insist that the arguments in favor of protecting the environment must be cast in ways that would accommodate, and are sensitive to, the pressing needs of present humans without of course sacrificing the computable interests of future generations – born and unborn. In other words, they insist that future generations should under no circumstance be denied the opportunity of "enjoying bountiful natural resources, whole and functioning ecosystems, the full spectrum of

²¹⁷ Kevin Van Tighem, *Ibid*, 1994.

²¹⁸ Eileen Crist, "Deep Ecology, Sustainable Development, and the Abolition of Consumer Culture_ <<http://www.cist.vt.edu/stshome/deepecology.htm>> July 14, 2003

environmental amenities and the many other opportunities that present humans derive from the natural world. That, like present humans, future generations should be able to enjoy the opportunity “to partake of psycho-spiritual experiences afforded by nature and to explore ecology and taxonomy intellectually.”²¹⁹ Put plainly, present humans, while meeting and satisfying their needs and desires, should not needlessly destroy the capacity of the natural environment to also serve the needs, aspirations and interests of future human generations.

There are however two variations of this position: the weak and strong intergenerational anthropocentrism. The former, James Sterba notes, insists: “a right to life applied to future generations would be a right of a person whom we can definitely expect to exist and to receive the goods and resources necessary to satisfy their basic needs or to the noninterference with their attempts to acquire the goods and resources necessary to satisfy their basic needs.” The latter, strong intergenerational anthropocentrism asserts, notes Andrew C. Kadak, that: “no generation should needlessly deprive its successors of the opportunity to enjoy a quality of life that is equivalent to its own.”

In fact, the 1987 World Commission on Environment and Development report “Our Common Future” and agenda 22 of the Rio Earth Summit of 1992 are especially unequivocal with respect to the strong intergenerational anthropocentric claim. These two reports identify what is at stake vis-à-vis the raging environmental crisis in terms of future consequences – and more specifically – for future humans. Accordingly, both reports call upon world governments to begin designing developmental policies and

²¹⁹ Bryan Norton, 1987.

programs that will ensure that present humans are able to “meet their basic needs and other legitimate concerns without compromising the interests of future human generations.”²²⁰ Not to comply with this basic requirement, these two reports warn, is to invite, as Eileen Crist affirms, “a slow-motion avalanche of imperceptible” catastrophes which will inescapably deprive future generations the capacity to enjoy the tangible as well as intangible benefits that present humans obtain from nature.²²¹

6. 5. Anthropocentric (environmental) reformism

The second approach, which might also prove to be invaluable in the short run, is anthropocentric (environmental) reformism or what the Norwegian philosopher, Arne Naess calls the shallow form of deep ecology. According to Michael Zimmerman, exponents of this approach, seek neither to articulate a moral discourse that would usher in a new kind of thinking in the ways in which we (humans) relate with each other, with one another, and with nature. Nor do they try to reconfigure classical ethical theories in order to make them be more amiable to the concerns for the interests of the non-human world or some of its constituent parts. In fact, the goal of transforming the moral obtuseness that all too often prevent a lot of people from discerning the intrinsic value of the non-human world is, for them, a somewhat tangential issue. If exclusively focused upon, they argue, it would distract humans from the immediate task of finding a transformative praxis – a praxis rooted less in theory and which steer clear from the philosophical tradition of “trying to figure out what has been wrong with the present order of things and who is to blame for it” (as Jim Dator would say.)²²²

²²⁰ The Brundtland report, *Our Common Future* (WCED 1987: 8)

²²¹ This point is discussed more fully in Eileen Crist’s article “Deep ecology, Sustainable development, and the abolition of consumer culture.”

<<http://www.cis.vt.edu/sthome/deepecology.htm>> July 14, 2003

Accordingly, departing from this premise “that our problems are human, institutional and technically solvable” (as Jim Dator would say), anthropocentric reformists consider two challenges to be of utmost concern. One, a short-term goal, is to nurture, through “a host of incremental transformative interventions” (discussed below), an environmentally knowledgeable and caring citizenry. The other, a long-term goal, is to induce what one might call piece-meal reforms in our current institutions of socialization, law regimes, policies and technologies of destruction. The purpose here is to gradually reverse skyrocketing levels of human ignorance, self-serving greed, illegal behavior and the shortsighted mentality (exemplified by the rich and poor alike) of mortgaging their own futures and those of future generations for transient pleasures and fleeting material comforts. These importunate vices, anthropocentric reformists argue, have to the present day remained the primary root causes of air/water and soil pollution, wasteful use of natural resource and other environmentally harmful practices. The urgent task before us then, they insist, is not so much to reconfigure classical ethical theories or to create an entirely new ethics but, rather, to design and to promote simple, down to earth achievable strategic interventions. Amongst the proposed interventions, include:

- Encouraging place-based learning to instill especially in younger children and maturing adults a sense of environmental awareness, social responsibility, love, care and concerns for others welfare and an appreciation of how and the extent to which nature in its richness, diversity and complexity has the potential for enriching our lives and those of others.
- Promoting experiential learning for younger children and maturing adults to

²²² Jim Dator's, “My World—and Welcome to It! A song for Doves, hawk, and Unaccompanied Optimist.” March 1993.

enable them understand and experience the natural world first hand, in an emotionally direct way and, as a result, develop a sense of kinship with the rest of nature.

- Integrating transformative values (environmental or otherwise) in public and private spaces and especially in our architectural designs in order to instill pride, sense of cultural identity, and to bring to light community's history and historical memory.
- Placing a lot more emphasis on hands-on type of learning such as (a) organizing activities that would help in “greening” of our neighborhoods, the places where we live, work, worship, shop and play (b) promoting aggressive recycling programs and (c) organizing and participating, as a collective, in community environmental regeneration activities such as tree planting and et cetera.
- Reforming and/or tightening existing policies, laws and regulation while also developing effective and efficient enforcement mechanisms
- Promoting public education and debates that emphasize the responsibilities and obligations that humans (and especially those who are privileged) owe to poorer segments of society, future generations, and the non-human world or some of its constituent parts.
- Teaching younger children and maturing adults – through stories, graphic images and other artistic expressions – the importance of protecting the environment and why they should wisely, dutifully and, as it were, religiously manage the environment and natural resources with wisdom and foresight.
- Transforming, through commonly acceptable formulas, our currently skewed land

distribution regimes, which while favoring the affluent minority disinherit the vast poor and disadvantaged segments of society and, finally

- Providing incentives – in the form of stewardship payments, tax breaks and other inducements – to individuals, groups and relevant stakeholders in exchange for (a) introducing sound environmental technologies and (b) for managing land and resources in ways that are sensitive to the goals of biodiversity conservation.²²³

6. 6. Indigenous environmentalism

A sixth approach, which arguably could be classified under the umbrella of the anthropocentric approach, is indigenous environmentalism. Defenders of this approach focus their attention on at least two major concerns. First, is “protesting – through their writings – against the “one dimensionality” of the modern world.” Second, in tandem with this goal, is bringing to the front burner “the voice of the oppressed, of the damned of the earth,” demanding that their cultures, interests and concerns be also accorded utmost attention for they too have an invaluable contribution to make. Since I have discussed indigenous environmentalism more fully in the preceding section, I will here be brief.

As already noted, indigenous environmentalism is born out of a belated – although still valid – realization that “Western models, and specifically wildlife and other environmental conservation policies and programs, tend to promote a new kind of imperialism which subordinates Third World livelihoods to First World consumer

²²³ For a good review of the anthropocentric reformism arguments, consult, for example, David Farrier's paper "Conserving biodiversity on private land: incentives for management or compensation for lost expectations? In *The Harvard Environmental Law Review*, Number 303, winter 1995, and Timothy Beatley and Kristy Manning. *The Ecology of Place: Planning For Environment, Economy and Community*. Washington, D.C: Island Press, 1997: 194-232.

preferences when thrust into a third World context.”²²⁴ In other words, the typical line here goes like this: In Third World countries, including Africa, transplanted Western models have been (and still are) incompatible with the goals and aspirations of the vast struggling, desperately poor majority in Third World countries. The sub-text then is: Third world governments and its peoples ought therefore resist the temptations of falling back on imported ideas and models and instead re-direct their energies, time and resources toward the goal of recovering and utilizing (whenever necessary) the wisdom and knowledge systems of their ancestral heritage - their values, traditions, technological practices and beliefs. Reasons abound as to why exponents of this approach believe as they certainly do.

Before European colonization of Africa, defenders of indigenous environmentalism points out, respective African communities had an extraordinary wealth of knowledge concerning how to manage and protect the environments where they lived, that surrounded them and which they depended on for their livelihoods. This knowledge, incrementally acquired through trial and error methods, keen observation of the changes taking place in their environments and passed from one generation to the next, was embedded in their respective political institutions, moral discourse, legal systems and daily practices. If meticulously recovered and utilized (whenever necessary), the argument goes, it might provide valuable environmental stewardship insights. Furthermore, and this is also important, it is alleged that indigenous methods of food production and storage, collective mechanisms of conflict resolution and networks of

²²⁴ This claim was underscored in controversial documentary aired by the BBC and ABC Television networks titled “The Case Against Nature.” For a review, see <http://www.shoothemessenger.com.au/u_nov_98/tele/against2.htm> July 14, 2003.

kinship solidarity, if actively recovered and utilized, could also provide local communities with a newfound sense of power in determining their own futures and in controlling their destiny. Whether or not such a movement is in fact practical in today's Africa is an issue that I have explained in the preceding section.

6. 7. Environmental justice movement

There is no denying that many communities in Africa have been (and still are) victims of powerful reverberations of not only the disinherit policies promoted by the ruling elites but also the unscrupulous activities of local entrepreneurs and especially multinational corporations that command the largest market share in the agrochemical and other sectors. Precisely because environmental justice movement is primarily concerned with exposing environmental injustices that are especially visited upon the poorer and vulnerable segments of society, its resonance in Africa cannot be underestimated.

For starters, this approach, as Dana Alston correctly noted in her speech of 1991 to the environmental leadership summit of people of color, departs from a straightforward premise. The accelerating environmental crisis is intertwined inseparably with the struggle for political democratization, economic empowerment, social justice, religious tolerance and the fight against all forms discriminations based on race, national origin, ancestry, sexual orientation et cetera. In other words, exponents of environmental justice suggests that the goals of cultivating desirable ecological relations must go hand in gloves with the struggle more just arrangements of power, historical accountability, empowerment of disenfranchised groups and the wholesale (not piece-meal) transformation of the existing structural and power relations that perpetuate poverty and

diverse forms inequities.²²⁵ The following example serves as an illustration.

Black environmentalists in Anglo-America such as Bill Lawson and others tend to steer clear from the predominant moralistic tirade common especially in the works of white male environmental ethicists such as J. Baird Callicott, Holmes Rolston III and others. The utmost priority of Black environmentalists and other advocates of minority concerns is to bring to light the real and/or potential health risks that people of color, the so called minorities, constantly face — thanks in part to the close proximity of polluting industries and the dumping of hazardous waste in environments where they live.

Exposing this and other kinds of injustices is, for them, a much more pressing issue than participating in mainstream theoretical debates in environmental philosophy.

In Third world countries, however, the concerns are slightly different. For example, in Africa the debate about environmental protection or the lack thereof is (and has been) linked with issues related to, among other concerns:

- Expropriation of individual and communally owned lands by central governments – in the name of creating room for large-scale commercial agricultural, mineral mining, exploration and drilling of oil, agro-forestry and the creation of statutorily protected wildlife sanctuaries and development related projects– with little or no compensation whatsoever to the owners of such lands.
- The dumping of radio-active waste along the coastal shoreline and arid and semiarid parts of Africa by multinational corporations
- The desecration of indigenous lands, the health hazards and deaths arising from detonated bombs and mines left behind by local and Western militaries after

²²⁵ K. Philip, “Needs of nature? Environmentalism, Human rights, and the Global Corporation” <<http://web.english.ufl.edu/mrg/01Abstracts/Philip.txt> > June 25, 2003

conducting military training especially in sparsely populated areas of Africa

- The low wages paid to local workers and the mistreatment and poor working conditions they are subjected to by locally owned and multinational corporations taking advantage of the relaxed export processing regimes and the fast-growing garment manufacturing workshops benefiting from the United States' government sponsored African growth and opportunity Act (AGOA)
- The massive industrial, domestic and agricultural toxic waste that is discharged into Africa's lakes, rivers, and streams by multinational corporations and locally owned industries.
- The demands by organized local groups seeking a share of the hundreds of millions of dollars accruing from the 'illegal' bio-prospecting, extraction, trafficking and subsequent patenting and use of biological resources found in their environments, without commensurate compensation, by especially Western pharmaceutical industries.
- The unwillingness (or is it stubbornness?) of Africa's ruling elite to compensate individuals who lose their loved ones and/or sources of livelihood and property to marauding wildlife.
- The reluctance of central governments in Africa to share profit accruing from tourism and wildlife related activities with local communities living adjacent to wildlife reserves and national parks.
- The misanthropic policies and campaigns promoted especially by the green peace movement that perpetuates Africa's underdevelopment and keep millions of Africans poor, starving and sick. The campaign by green peace movement to ban

the use of DDT insecticide, which has proved effective in saving millions of lives in Africa from mosquito borne diseases such malaria is, a perfect example. A second example is the campaign by green peace movement against the exporting of genetically modified seed crops, which if there were to be used in Africa could save millions from starvation. A third example is their campaign to promote expensive, renewal energy (solar and wind generated electricity), which if followed through would keep electricity well out of reach of poor people in Africa.

- The quarantine rules imposed by European Union and the United States of American on Third world – including Africa – agricultural products. Related to this is (a) the export dumping of Japanese, Chinese European and American products in Africa hence undermining Africa's manufacturing and employment prospects and (b) the farm subsidies in the rich world– amounting to about \$ 360 million dollars each year countries– which contribute directly to the impoverishment of Africa's peasant farmers especially in rural areas.
- The plight and struggle for the rights of millions of children who spend their better part of childhood shifting through the mountains of uncollected garbage in urban cities and towns looking for 'left-overs' to sustain their malnourished bodies. And who at the dawn of sunset retreats to the dark allies where they slumber on dirty cartons and cover themselves with tattered linen. And finally is,
- The public outcry over (a) the rapid proliferation, in complete disregard of city by-laws, of temporary dwelling and business structures in most urban cities and (b) occasionally government mandated demolition of these structures, leaving

behind hundreds of poor people homeless.

6. 8. Eco-criticism

A fifth long-term approach that might also help Africa in building a foundation for a new moral republic is eco-criticism. Simply stated, this approach, which is a subfield

of comparative literature, examines ecological writings and cultural productions such as poetry, folklore, dance, fiction, myths et cetera of specifically identified groups or sub-groups with a view to highlighting:

- The networks of relationships that humans had (and still have) with one another, and with the natural world and how and what has led to the gradual decline of such relationships.
- How the language deployed in the daily narratives of group/s studied promoted what Michael Branch (1998) calls the “hegemony of anthropocentric constructions of the environment” or the lack thereof.
- The methods and strategies used by the group/s studied to instill in younger children and maturing adults environmentally supportive skills, values, views and practices
- How the group/s that are studied established environmental priorities and how they sought to harness and mobilize constructive environmental action.
- The manner in which environmental security was established and how issues of social justice, economic fairness, empowerment of women and rights of vulnerable populations were addressed. And finally,
- Whether the daily narratives of the group/s studied facilitated or hindered the

mushrooming of environmental responsible behavior and practices.

6. 9. Nonanthropocentric (or nature-centered) interventions

Nonanthropocentric interventions, if prudently promoted, might also help Africa in many respects. At the risk of simplifying the constellation of the otherwise complex, multidimensional and sometimes irreconcilable perspectives, I will here first bring to light what nonanthropocentric apologists consider as the forces at work in the destruction of the biosphere and then tease out some of the significant tributaries of this approach.

6. 9. 1. Forces at work in the destruction of the biosphere

Ostensibly, defenders of the nonanthropocentric approach trace the root cause of the accelerating environmental crisis to the anthropocentric mentality, explained above, of seeing everything and valuing everything from the human standpoint. In tandem with this, they also trace the genealogy of ecological problems to one or a combination of the following:

- The burgeoning consumption of the affluent, which, while taxing the earth immensely, has stimulated the insane rush for a materialistic way of life throughout the world.²²⁶
- Related to the aforementioned is “the capitalist imperative of profit maximization, accumulation and market expansion, which require the continuous subjection of nature – human and physical”²²⁷ As Sung-U Hwang notes: “profitability, as the motor of capital, replaces social needs – and ecological sustainability – in determining what to produce and how to distribute. As growth is the key to

²²⁶ Eileen Crist. Op.cit. p. 2.

²²⁷ Sung-U K Hwang. Ecological Panopticism: The Problematization of the Ecological Crisis<<http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?Did=000000039560541&Fmt=3&Deli=1&mtd=11dx=13&Sid=24&RQT>> September 27, 2002.

raising profits, the system continually engenders the expansion of production, consumption and waste. The ecological crisis is not a surprising interlude to, but an ongoing process of, capitalism.”²²⁸

- The dominance of human-centered (and especially male centered) worldviews and the exploitative relationships (human-to-human and human-to-nature) that they engender.
- The non-egalitarian, masculinized, agribusiness and industrial practices (and especially factory farming); a theme painstakingly examined not only by Peter Singer, the famed animal liberation activist and writer, but also Vandana Shiva who is a prolific critic of Western developmental paradigms,
- The structural and power relationships engendered by the dualism– mind versus body, production versus reproduction, public versus private, human versus nonhuman, culture versus nature, male versus female, reason versus feelings, theory versus practice, et cetera – that has dominated especially Western intellectual traditions stretching all the way from Plato’s time, through the Christian era, to the present day.
- Expropriation of indigenous peoples land and dislocation of their histories, oral storytelling tradition, knowledge systems, values, technological practices, sacred beliefs, aesthetic sensibilities, et cetera – by European colonialists, America’s Macdonalization of the world, and the near-to ubiquitous Eurocentered paradigms. And finally,
- The deleterious relationships (human-to-human and human-to-nature) that are

²²⁸ Ibid. p. 3

engendered particularly by the spectacular spread of Judeo-Christian values in virtually all corners of the world and the meteoric ascendancy of modern science and technology to mention a few.

Departing from either of the above positions, nonanthropocentric apologists variously challenge the view (defended by anthropocentric apologists) that “people’s behavior toward the non-human world should solely be evaluated on the basis of how it affects humans.”²²⁹ This view, they argue, is arbitrary, unjust, illogical and morally indefensible. It unfairly restricts the sphere of moral consideration exclusively to human beings.

The non-human world or some of its constituent parts, they point out, should be protected not just because humans stand to benefit (although there is nothing wrong this) but because it also possesses intrinsic value – a value that “exists independently of a conscious reflection or even a minimally sentient awareness.”²³⁰ In other words, according to non-anthropocentric believers peoples’ behavior toward the non-human world should be evaluated on the basis of how it affects (and will affect) not only present humans but also future generations, non-human part/s of the physical world and, if the Gaia hypothesis is correct, the biosphere as a whole.²³¹

6. 9. 2. Contested issue/s

Notwithstanding this consensus — regarding the genealogy of the accelerating environmental crisis — two key concerns have remained sharply contested. First is the

²²⁹ Mikael Stenmark, “the relevance of environmental ethical theories for policy making,” in *environmental ethics: divergence and convergence* (3rd edition), ed. Susan j. Armstrong and Richard g. Botzler. New York: McGraw hill, 2003: 565.

²³⁰ Ernest Partridge. “Values in Nature: Is Anybody There?”
< <http://www.igc.org/gadfly/papers/values.htm> > September 20, 2003

²³¹ Ibid. p. 567

kind of ethic, which, if actively promoted, would:

- Be broad enough to also accommodate the interests of the natural world — resources, plants, species and ecosystems — into the circle of membership of the moral community
- Help to radically transform the predominant patriarchal-centered institutions and the malevolent relationships they engender
- Be instrumental in reversing the simplistic assumption held in our ordinary human arrangements that we (human beings) can in fact de-link our own fate from that of the non-human world.
- Illuminate the strengths of planet earths' diversity in its underlying unity and the obligations that we (humans) have toward other humans, non-human species, inanimate things and future generations – born and unborn.
- Hasten the goals of cultivating moral qualities of mutual respect, reciprocity, nonviolence, humility and restraint from harming others – whether humans, nonhuman beings and natural entities. And finally,
- Promote a more grounded sense of place and perspective whilst awakening the awareness of the ways in which we (humans) are just but “mere actors in a drama, and participants in an adventure, that is indeed far too complex to ever fully comprehend” (to use Ernest Partridge words).

The second contested issue has revolved around the concept of nature’s intrinsic value. Is it nature as a whole (broadly construed to include resources, plants, species and ecosystems) or some of its constituent parts that possesses intrinsic value? Are some

constituent parts of nature more intrinsically valuable than others? How might the intrinsic value of nature as a whole, or some of its constituent parts, be morally justifiable? When irreconcilable conflicts arise between defending the intrinsic value of nature (whether in its totality or some of its parts) and legitimate human claim of access to and use of nature's resource whose interests should be accorded greater priority? Should the goal of protecting nature's beauty, health, stability and integrity take precedence over legitimate human demands to be allowed access to and use of nature's resources? Under what circumstance/s, and how might this be defended, should the intrinsic value of the non-human world (or some parts of it) be sacrificed in the name of meeting basic human survival needs and development related goals? These two concerns, as already noted, are what have triggered the forking nonanthropocentric interventions to which we must now.

6. 9. 1. Ecological feminism

Ecological feminism, which is a broad-based philosophical perspective, has many distinct theoretical approaches. Because of space and time limitations, here, however, I cannot examine all of its divergent viewpoints. What I then propose to do is to merely provide a synopsis, without getting into the deeper nuances, of eco-feminism.

Despite their obviously divergent viewpoints, ecofeminists such as Karen Warren, Val Plumwood, Carol Adams, Carolyn Merchant, Charlene Spretnak, Susan Griffin, Diamond Irene, Gloria Orenstein, Vandana Shiva, Maria Mies and others seem to concur on a number of issues. First, as Stephen David Ross observes, they agree "that there is an intimate relation between concerns that involve women and the concerns that involve the

natural world.”²³² “The domination and oppression of women and men by other men (but especially the oppression of women),” they point out, “cannot be separated from the domination of nature.”²³³ The oppression of women and the domination of nature are intertwined, inseparably. As such, they insist: “the defense of one cannot be separated from the other without harm.”²³⁴ As Karen Warren points out:

Ecofeminism is a position based on the following claims: (a) that, there are important connections between the oppression of women and the oppression of nature; (b) understanding the nature of these connections is necessary to any adequate understanding the oppression of women and the oppression of nature; (c) feminist theory and practice must include an ecological perspective; and (d). solutions to ecological problems must include a feminist perspective.²³⁵

But what would pass as an ecofeminists perspective? Perhaps it is the claim that is most widely acknowledged that an ethic of care, compassion and concern for the interests of others – and not one premised on rationally founded principles and rules — is what would offer a new moral compass in resolving some of most intractable problems facing humanity, including the ecological crises. However, developing such an ethic is what has occasioned many divergent viewpoints within eco-feminism.

According to Ross, enroute to developing an ethic of care, some ecofeminists begin their work by first “understanding the perceptions of who we (humans) claim be and how our present values, worldviews, memories and relationships have been shaped

²³² Stephen David Ross. *Plenishment In The Earth: An Ethic Of Inclusion*. Albany: State University of New Press, 1995: 11.

²³³ *Ibid.* p. 11

²³⁴ Quoted in Luc Ferry’s book. *The New Ecological Order*, p. 116

²³⁵ Luc Ferry. *op.cit.* p.116-117.

and influenced by the history of thought – and especially of Western philosophy.”²³⁶ For others, Ross goes on to note, it is the “tracing of an inclusive thought of gender and of nature to the beginning of philosophy – less to retrieve that insight there than to establish a more inclusive transformational roadmap.” A roadmap that, shall we say, is not only cognizant of the problematic nature of Eurocentric history but which also transcend past exclusionary moments, tendencies and practices.”²³⁷ Ecofeminists who take this intellectual path, Ross points out, “seek not so much to introduce a memorable perspective on humanity and the world but to call upon humanity to trace the transformations throughout our histories in an inclusive way.”²³⁸ Yet for others, such as Susan Griffin (1978), articulating a new ethics and a new politics, which avoids the classificatory *modus operandi*, hierarchical ordering and exclusionary predispositions of Eurocentric epistemologies, poetics, logic, concepts, language and vocabulary is what command their attention.

From this angle then, it would seem reasonable to argue that in general ecofeminists contest the problematic foundations upon which our knowledge of the world, our consciousness, and our worldviews is (and has been) grounded. They, additionally, highlight not only the manner in which our present state of knowledge and consciousness is (and has been) problematic but also propose alternative ways of thinking, of relating with one another, of regenerating societies and self that transcend the obviously problematic Cartesian conceptualization of excessively self-wrapped and communally estranged cogito. Furthermore, ecofeminists also invite us to join them in a

²³⁶ Stephen David Ross. *op.cit.* p.11

²³⁷ *Ibid.* p.11

²³⁸ *Ibid.* p.11

journey back in time; a journey of self-discovery, of learning to how to unlearn our old habits and pernicious views that we have been socialized into. Put in another way, ecofeminists invites us to a journey in search of non-violent, reciprocal and biocommunitarian relationships that are largely grounded on collaborative experience, spirit of teamwork and compassion for other humans and especially the less advantaged members of society (whether humans, non-human species and/or inanimate things).

6. 9. 2. Moral extensionism

Moral extensionism, a strand of the non-anthropocentric approach, is mainly associated with the works of Aldo Leopold, Albert Schweitzer, St. Francis of Assisi, Christopher Stone and the first generation of animal rights/liberation advocates such as Peter Singer, Tom Regan, R. G Frey and Richard Ryder. Various, these individuals seek to expand the circle of membership of the moral community to also include the nonhuman world or some parts it. Their main argument is straightforward. Far from being a standing stock for human use, they argue, the non-human world or some parts of it, does in fact posses intrinsic values and rights. It therefore ought to be accorded the same moral consideration extended particularly to group of humans who are, in the conventional language of ethics, moral patients.²³⁹ The work of Peter Singer — the pioneer, in its modern form, of animal liberation — here suffices as an illustration.

²³⁹ Perhaps Andrew Brook offer a best summary as to why the moral extensionism position could reasonably be classified under the general rubric of the anthropocentric approach. In his paper titled "The Structure of Ethical Positions on the Environment he, for instance, argues that "the notion of rights is a notion that has its primary home in the interpersonal context of creating and protecting rights in law, as a result of a process of agreement (or surrogate agreement, where legislators are the surrogates)." As such, he goes on to say, "it is hard to see how beings who have no capacity top give consent or enter agreements could be said to acquire rights, except (and this is important) by the grace and favor of those beings who do.

Singer takes sentience: the capacity to feel pain and to enjoy pleasure, and not the ability to make rational decisions, to understand the consequences of one's actions, to consciously plan for the future, and to master the nuances of language — as the minimum benchmark of moral standing. As he writes:

If criterion of moral standing is pitched high enough to exclude all non-human beings, it will also exclude some human beings. If pitched low enough, it will also include a large and diverse group of non-human animals....²⁴⁰

More substantially, Singer points out:

Humans share the planet with members of other species who are also capable of feeling pain, of suffering, and of having their lives go well or badly. We should, (on the basis of this fact the) regard their experiences as having the same kind of value as our own experiences. The infliction of suffering on other sentient creatures should be given as much weight as we would give to the infliction of suffering on human beings. The deaths of non-human animals, considered independently from the suffering that often accompanies death, should also count, although (obviously) not as much as the deaths of human beings.

Granted, for Singer, argues Andrew Brook, “all beings that have the capacity to feel pain and pleasure should fall within the domain of moral concern not because of their value to us but in their own right.” Sentience is what then Singer uses as his launching pad in defending the interests, values and moral consideration of non-human sentient beings. And based on this quality, Singer vehemently opposes:

- The breeding, the abuse and misuse of animals especially in industrial animal

²⁴⁰ Cited in Thomas Gramming's “Ethics: Anthropocentrism, Biocentrism.”

agriculture, including the “farming” of mink, fox and lynx and others for fur

- The use of animals for frivolous scientific experiments such as testing of cosmetic toxicity
- Raising of animals for purposes of harvesting their organs in order to assist ailing humans
- Keeping in captivity animals such as whalers, dolphins, bears, seals and others for entertainment and/or educational reasons
- Incarceration of wild animals in zoos
- Aboriginal exploitation of wildlife reserves, and
- The opening-up of statutorily protected wildlife sanctuaries and marine ecosystems to hunting, trapping and commercial exploitation in the name of maintaining balance in the ecosystems.

6. 9. 3. Deep ecology

Another significant tributary of the non-anthropocentric approach that might also further Africa’s goal of building a foundation for a new moral republic is deep ecology, which has two significant strands. One strand of deep ecology maintain the view that “far from humans being different from, or dominant over nature, they are an integral component of the natural order and are, consequently, utterly dependent on it.” The other strand seeks to justify how the natural world in its totality or parts is intrinsically valuable. Let me briefly examine these two strands.

Humans: An integral component of the natural order

According to Henry Skolimowski, exponents of deep ecology who subscribe to this view “do not identify the natural world as a place for pillage and plunder, an arena of

gladiator. Rather, they see it as a sanctuary in which humans temporarily dwell and must, therefore, take utmost care of.” In other words, they argue that “rather than being acquisitors and conquistadors, humans must dutifully, if not religiously, assume the role of a guardian and prudently protect the interests of the non-human part/s of the natural world. Chinua commencement speech at Bates College, on May 27th 1996, does somewhat capture the gist of what this strand of deep ecology tries to promote: nature’s diversity. This is what Achebe observed:

The world is big. Some people are unable to comprehend that simple fact. They want the world on their own terms, its people just like them and their friends, its places like the manicured little patch on which they live. But this is a foolish and blind wish. Diversity is not an abnormality but the very reality of our planet. The human world manifests the same reality and will not seek permission to celebrate itself in the magnificence of its endless varieties. Civility is a sensible attribute in this kind of world we have; narrowness of heart and mind is not.

Without a doubt, all humans are able to “exist and to survive only because they are (and have always been) on a permanent, although usually imperceptible, life support systems that are made up of others– humans, non-human species and perhaps inanimate things.” To pretend otherwise is to essentially deny the undeniable: we (humans) are dependent, inescapably, on other humans and on nature much more than nature itself is dependent on us. While the extinction of nature would be ominous to human survival, the extinction of humans as a species would in fact allow nature to even abundantly flourish. The onus then is on us. Partly, what we need then to do, argues exponents of this strand of deep ecology, is to begin reducing our current ways that are “built on pillaging the

earth and are buttressed by the mendacious pledge of redeeming human existence,” as Eileen Crist points out. The technologies of destruction need also be checked. And finally, we should drastically reduce our today’s unnecessary consumption levels. Becoming more genuinely involved in real work of conserving biological complexity and of creating ecologically secure, prosperous, inclusive, sustainable and humane worlds is a task that we humans can only ignore at our own peril. Perhaps Aldo Leopold’s justification as to why we should love and respect the land is worth noting here. Leopold argued, writes Bryan Norton: “there is a special nobility inherent in the human race. This entails, among others, the responsibility to protect the interrelated functions of larger systems on which human civilization depends.” Human beings, as Leopold further noted, must similarly learn to experience mother earth as a live and soulful, mourn the extinction of a species as we do when death strikes a member of our family and, more important, watch over and care for ecological systems like living organisms in need of comfort and nurture. Beyond this, Leopold asserts, we must limit, willingly, our consumptive excesses out of love and respect for the land on which we continue to depend on, physically and culturally.

The intrinsic value of nature or some of its constituent parts

Many schools of thought have radiated from this particular strand of deep ecology. One is biocentrism, the view held especially by Albert Schweitzer that every living thing, and perhaps (if Gaia hypothesis is right) the ecosphere as a whole, has intrinsic value and therefore deserve respect. The second is eco-centrism (or system holism), the view that compared to ecological systems, the individual parts of ecosystems, have little value. This is justified as follows. If value were to be defined

without whole systems, then there would be no individuals to have value. On this account then, ecological systems are the primary bearers of value of all the sorts that there are.

And the last is individualism, which holds a contrary view to ecocentrism, arguing that it is individual parts of the whole and not the whole ecosystem that is more intrinsically valuable.

All in all, non-anthropocentrism is arguably revolutionary in its intent and orientation. It seeks to evolve a new metaphysics, a new epistemology, a new cosmology and a new environmental ethics of the person and of the planet. It also emphasizes, as Eileen Christ notes, the importance of creating human communities that out of love for nature's biodiversity—human and physical – share the biosphere generously and equitably with the myriad of beings who live on earth and in waters.

Conclusion

That Africa is in need of a moral rebirth is not in question. What, however, is in doubt is whether Africans are prepared and can afford (monetarily) to invest substantial resources in building a foundation for new moral republic. A related concern is how a moral rebirth in Africa could be engineered. Is it by promoting classical ethical theories, which limit the sphere of moral consideration to only humans and their interests? Or, is it by actively promoting (in all institutions of socialization) a more robust moral/ecological ethic, an ethic that is expansive enough to also accommodate, and be sensitive to, the interests, rights and intrinsic value of the non-human world — resources, plants, animal species and ecosystems? While I have argued in favor of the latter option, I have also delineated and reviewed the rainbow of already proposed transformative interventions that Africans in Africa might find in many ways, including:

a) Cultivating a morally responsible and environmentally alert citizenry. A citizenry that will in all likelihood listen (and hear with respect) and accordingly respond to the endless injustices all too often perpetrated, as Ali Mazrui would say, in the name of “God, gold and glory.”

b) Fostering “a culture of shared transpersonal ends,” a culture where people will not only value, appreciate, and embrace the “other” and negotiate (as a collective) cultural commitments, but also respect and passionately defend the interests and concerns of impoverished populations, future generations, non-human beings and, perhaps, inanimate things.

Reforming Africa's Legal Regimes, Institutions of Governance, Policies and Leadership

7. 0. Introduction

As important as is promoting a robust moral/ecological education in existing institutions of socialization – respective homes, professional associations, workplaces, school curricula, houses of worship, et cetera – when unaccompanied by genuine efforts aimed at transforming the structural and power relationships that perpetuate poverty and various kinds of inequities this goal cannot accomplish much. A moral rebirth, in and of itself, will not conceivably catapult Africa out of its recurrent depressing cycles of political paralysis, economic stagnation, cultural degradation, moral bankruptcy, environmental destruction to mention a few.

The melioration of Africa's predicaments will without a doubt require much more than merely transforming, for the better, people's ignorance, arrogance, antiquated beliefs and environmentally destructive lifestyles. What also need to be confronted more honestly, more persistently and more robustly are:

- a) The entrenched cultural, political and economic systems of domination, of servitude, and of institutionalized violence.
- b) The decades old "expert-knows-best" mentality especially in the manner in which policies are designed, implemented and evaluated.
- c) The widespread culture of corruption, finger dipping in the public coffers, and the despicable "closed-tribal-shop-mentality" of especially Africa's political and bureaucratic elites.
- d) The horrendous practices of Africa's political leaders –those in government and in

the opposition – of using unemployed youths and economically vulnerable segments of society as pawns in their political power games and play. And last but not least,

e) The selective manner in which the rule of law is enforced.

7. 1. Effecting change

To meet these challenges, infinite strategic possibilities for action are conceivable.

Four here, however, command our attention. The first, which has been all along the most preferred strategy, is allowing politicians and government bureaucrats to shape, to influence and to determine the direction and pace of change. A second strategy, a long-term goal, is falling back on market-driven economics, the whip of the marketplace, to play the catalytic and energizing role. A third alternative is to resort to citizen-driven and managed change. And the final option, which I find more attractive, is to combine, as the case may warrant, any two or all of the above strategic possibilities for action. Below, I examine the merits and demerits of using especially the first three strategic possibilities for action.

7. 2. Government directed and managed change

That the success or failure of any country is largely dependent on the vision and political will—or the lack thereof – of its ruling elite cannot be gainsaid. Other determinants include: climatic conditions, mineral endowments, historical legacy, demographic composition, citizens' resilience—or the lack thereof, the nature of relations between the governed and the governors, outside interference, quality and character of intellectuals and the degree to which citizens' remain complacent/ or confrontational in the event of gross injustice and human rights violations.

In Africa, with the exception of a few intellectually astute and visionary leaders, the majority of its ruling elite are predators, mercenaries and opportunists at best who use their positions and the trust bestowed upon them by the electorate as avenues of personal enrichment.²⁴¹ The quality and character of mind of the majority of Africa's ruling elite is mediocre at its best and patently evil at its worst. Their leadership credentials are unimpressive. Their sense of morality is distorted. And their commitment to creating "institutions that would be responsive to the needs of their citizens — not to mention carrying out reforms that would strengthen the rule of law, support democracy and promote greater accountability and transparency" — is open to question.²⁴²

In addition, showing no inclination to govern their respective nation-states beyond tribal considerations and self-preservation, the majority of Africa's ruling elites have, in their vocabulary, no concepts of thrift, sobriety, honesty and fair play. Many are bereft of elementary morality and the only thing that they seem to know best is how to "manipulate and to politicize ethnic differences in their quest for power, for political support" and in order to cover-up their mediocrity. Many vie for political positions not because their conscience is piqued by the sea of squalor and poverty overwhelming the vast majority but to advance their personal interests, while hiding behind the cover of

²⁴¹ Shaka Zulu, Menelik, Nelson Mandela, Julius Nyerere, Nkrumah to mention a few are some of the few African political leaders whose leadership has been proven by events in recent history as being superior.

²⁴² For a detailed treatment of the different categories and styles of leadership in Africa consult Ali Mazrui's "Political Leadership in Africa: Seven Styles and Four Traditions," in Hans d' Orville, *Leadership For Africa*. New York: African Leadership Foundation, 1995. See also chapter five "Regimes in Independent Africa" of Naomi Chazan, Peter Lewis, et.al's., book *Politics and Society in Contemporary Africa*. 3rd Edition. Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1999: 137-158. Management and gross inhumanity, irresponsibility and official pillage, ceaseless political bickering, backstabbing and incessant political confrontations perhaps captures best the general trend of what could say about Africa's political leaders.

defending the interests of their constituencies. Ostensibly, the glamour, status, prestige and enviable privileges that awaits those who make it to parliament is what motivates many into choosing politics as their vocation. As Imre Loeffler, a regular newspaper commentator, in Kenya, notes:

Members of Parliament (in Kenya) are in the enviable position to bestow gifts upon themselves. This they do in unison. No matter which party... which tribe, which denomination they belong, when it comes to giving themselves gifts (and members of their kin, close aides and ethnic group²⁴³) there is remarkable unanimity, a perverse national unity. ...A nice gift they give themselves is overseas travel with all costs fully paid from taxpayers' resources and a pair of impressive motorcars: one for town and one for upcountry. Other gifts include a hefty pension scheme, generous medical insurance and luxurious duty free cars. Regular travel to western capitals – accompanied by their spouses – to open secret accounts, to buy estates, to vacation, to woo investors (as they often claim), to track footprints of corruption, to attended meetings and to investigate technologies that the country may need is yet another gift [...Emphasis added]. Because of the many privileges they enjoy, the jostling for political power and for maintaining it is increasingly reaching a frightening crescendo, with the potential of shifting the national discourse away from development-oriented issues and debates. This disconcerting phenomenon is, nevertheless, not just limited to Kenya. It is pervasive throughout sub-Saharan Africa. From Cape Town to Timbuktu, from the east coast of

²⁴³ The gift they give members of their families, close aides, and ethnic kin include accelerated consideration in securing jobs in the private and public sector, government contracts, scholarships, and so forth.

Africa to the west coast, the public discourse – in rural areas, small towns, urban cities, pubs and restaurants, public gatherings, boardroom meetings, religious congregations and workplace –is, for good or for worse, focused mostly on endless, time-consuming, and fruitless political debates. On a daily basis, newspapers carry screaming headlines centered on the hypocrisy of Africa’s political elites, their intrigues, backstabbing and ceaseless scheming for prime political positions—an issue that certainly does add value to the lives and livelihood of ordinary citizens. But this is not to say that the media has failed Africa and Africans in all respects. In fact, the media has done a good job especially in entertaining, informing, misinforming and confusing the public. It has also been at the forefront of educating the public (those who can afford television sets and/or buy newspapers on a regular basis) about the failures of government in all its three branches: executive, judiciary and legislature. These positive aspects notwithstanding, the media has failed in fulfilling its other mandate. One of which is setting the agenda for constructive dialogue on matters of national importance. Here, I am thinking about setting the tone for countrywide debates centered, for example, on how disenfranchised populations could — with or without government intervention — be empowered to organize and to produce by themselves the production fulfilling their basic needs. I am also thinking about how the media has failed to ignite national discussions centered on how, for instance, the millions of children who scavenge for food in waste disposal sites, and the thousands of begging mothers with infant babies crying in hunger, could be empowered to become architects and managers of their own lives and futures. Debates of this nature — which could perhaps allow disenfranchised groups (women, rural peasants and urban poor) “to develop their own communication spaces, to forge alliances, to

define their agency and dialogue, to transform their struggles and to empower themselves” – are unfortunately sacrificed at the alter of incessant political bickering. Reasons abound as to why this sorry state of affair has persisted. The first has to do with the endemic poverty, which renders poorer segments of society susceptible to the corrupting influence of politicians. The second has to do with the complicity of ordinary citizens who, despite knowing that their ‘salvation’ will certainly not come from predatory and corrupt politicians, nevertheless make no efforts to insert themselves at the center of their civic universe. The third, perhaps most important, is the blind ethnic loyalty that many Africans (elites and ordinary folks alike) show toward their leaders. Despite running the affairs of their respective nation states as private estates, many politicians still get the support of, and continued loyalty from, local leaders and ordinary folks with whom they share ethnic ties. Perhaps, on this matter, we should listen to what Ndiribe A. A. Ndiribe, professor of international relations at Seton Hall University, New Jersey, says. Commenting about Nigeria, a standard format replicable in other parts of Africa, he notes [although I have paraphrased his comments]:

We have all sorts of "loyal dogs" that insist that the system is not to be changed even when Nigeria is bleeding to death...[these are the people] who have divided and shared Nigeria's wealth as their private estates while others watch. ... Like loyal but stupid dogs, these people are protecting a nation bleeding to death, at the brink of total collapse [perhaps, a little exaggeration]. They are protecting a country with a mountain-load of debts, one of the most corrupt nations on the face of this planet. A nation where young mothers perish during childbirth because the hospitals lack the most basic drugs... where the affluent minority

ride half a million dollar Mercedes Benz on roads ridden with gullies and potholes and where the dead cannot remain intact until burial because electricity supply to the morgue is erratic. They are protecting a nation where each ethnic group sees the other as the source and culmination of all the problems...a country that feigns ignorance and helplessness as the only means to extract help from the international community... In effect, they are protecting doom, decay and disaster. They are presiding over a terminally sick patient who requires urgent blood transfusion, where the physician must not be admitted because he will discover the festering sour called a nation. This is the dog sense of loyalty in Nigeria, the shame of the shame of the entire human race.²⁴⁴

7. 2. 1. The Dilemma

Granted, one then might rightly ask: can Africa's political elites become credible transformational agents? Being the eclectic ethnic barons they certainly are, who would do whatever it takes to maintain and to defend existing structural and power relations that perpetuate poverty and many inequities as long as their material needs are guaranteed, can they be entrusted with the task of transforming the aforementioned spheres?²⁴⁵ As graduates of a system that since the colonial period to the present day has drilled into their consciousness an anti-people disposition, would they not conceivably torpedo efforts by ordinary citizens of founding more democratic and open processes of

²⁴⁴ Ndiribe A. A. Ndiribe. "Defenders of the Status Quo."

<<http://www.naijamall.com/News/Ngr/Articles/DefendersOfStatusQuo.html> > February 12, 2004.

²⁴⁵ Professor Yash Ghai, the Chairman of the Kenya Review Commission, expressed similar reservations when questioned moments after handing over the draft report. He wondered: "what would happen to a nation (like Kenya) where words like morality and integrity no longer count and where love for money can ruin even the best of institutions?"

governance? Moreover, used as they are to the old habits of running public affairs through patron-client networks, not to mention the many benefits that they reap from the system even while thousands of millions swim in the sea of squalor and poverty, would they ever entertain the possibility of loosening or yielding their hold onto power? In the absence of mounting pressure from ordinary citizens, international financial agencies and donor institutions, would they readily accept to equitably share the burden and rewards of decision-making with the man and woman in the street? Put a little more figuratively, has a leopard ever change its spots? Can a mother hyena give birth to a soon-to-be leaping baby tiger? Are these questions trivial?

A brief exposition of the diversionary tactics that most African heads of state and the inner circle of their advisors employ to protect their interests and to quell demands from citizens and the international community — to radically transform the obviously flawed, weak and ineffective corpus of government structures, regimes, polices and governance would vindicate our doubts.

7. 2. 2. Investing heavily on appearance

Several tactics are employed to delay the fight against corruption, to undercut citizens' demands of founding more democratic and open process of governance, to hoodwink international financial agencies and donor institutions into disbursing withheld foreign aid, and to control the pace of the reform process. Chief amongst them include:

(a). Constituting far too many overlapping commissions of inquiries, task forces and advisory committees whose recommendations are hardly (if ever) made public and/or implemented. More often, commissions are set up and given the mandate to investigate what in the wisdom of the ruling elites are extremely sensitive matters

that may break a nation apart if recklessly handled or that may help cement national cohesion if judiciously resolved. To this end, some commissions are constituted and charged with the responsibility of identifying corrupt government employees and to then make appropriate recommendations about what actions that government should take. Others are constituted to identify perpetrators of human rights violations or assassins of murdered politicians. Yet others are constituted and charged with the task of investigating how and who has illegally acquired public land, whether appropriate taxes were paid and to then make appropriate recommendations about how government could (within the confines of law) repossess illegally acquired public land/s. Rarely are commissions formed to identify obstacles that hamper governments from responding more effectively to the needs of citizens.

(b) Creating new bureaucracies headed by their close aides and ethnic kin and who are then given high sounding esoteric titles—minus the financial resources, institutional support and political will that is necessary to effectively carry out their brief.

(c) Allowing, albeit reluctantly, public “watchdog” institutions: parliament, auditor general’s office, and central bank to: (i) oversee and police government spending and procurement systems; (ii) expose shadowy business operations in the public sector;

(c) monitor and advice the direction of government policies and so forth. While these institutions do sometimes provide the much needed checks and balances, their role most of the time, as the term itself connotes, is to basically “watch, guard and defend interests of their master while keeping away would be “intruders.” Partly, this is because the government they are required to supervise sets their agenda, meets their operating costs and provides the technical and support staff as well as office

accommodation. That these public watchdog institutions are an inalienable component of the same government they are meant to keep in check is not in doubt. Can we then blame them for their inaction? The African saying: “one cannot bite the arm that feeds him/her,” is here perhaps vindicated.

(d) Sacking, demoting, reshuffling and, occasionally, prosecuting corrupt senior government employees in order to apportion blame for failure and to dupe citizens and especially the international community that they are indeed “committed” to the reform process.

(e) Alternating, as the case may warrant, the stick and carrot type of politics to silence vocal opponents and to woo – through lavish entertainment, extension of credit facilities, promises of appointment and other benefits – members of the opposition parties, ‘fire-spitting’ academics and other outspoken critics of government, and finally,

(f) Clamping down on dissenting voices by using all instruments of state coercion: the police, paramilitary units and, in exceptional circumstances, the military.

In short, what I am suggesting here is that ordinary citizens in Africa must not become too dependent on their governments as the catalyst of change. While governments may (and do occasionally) carry out reforms, especially in public spheres where the interests of the ruling elites are not threatened, for the most part what governments in Africa do (or promise to do) amounts to a public relations exercise, an exercise purposely designed to fool and/or hoodwink the public and donors.

South Africa’s President, Thabo Mbeki, who himself knows first hand the boardroom intrigues and incessant scheming of Africa’s political elites warns of the

dangers of entrusting political elites with an as important a task as inducing sweeping reforms in the structural and power relations that perpetuate the myriad of injustices and inequities in Africa. This is what Mbeki says:

[For an African renaissance to occur] ordinary citizens, in partnership with others, must ... maintain a permanent vigilance against the danger of the entrenchment, in African society, of this rapacious stratum with its social morality according to which everything in society must be organized materially to benefit the few.²⁴⁶

What's more, masquerading as championing the interests and concerns of those whom they represent, Africa's ruling elites have steadily promoted policies and programs that, whilst disinherit the people whom they are intended to assist, benefit the affluent minority. The brand of politics that they practice — the politics of patronage, deception, opportunism, incessant infighting, backstabbing and so forth — is even more deadly. It is incompatible with the goal of founding institutions of governance that would be accountable, transparent and responsive to the needs and other legitimate aspirations of the vast poor majority whose lives are characterized by poverty, marginalization and underdevelopment.

7. 3. Citizen Driven Reforms

And if in fact Ronald McGuire's assertion that "no slave has ever won his freedom through the generosity of his master" is correct, then ordinary citizens in Africa (and especially the poor and working class people) must, united in thinking and action,

²⁴⁶ This view is also expressed by Patrick McAuslan in his article: "The international Development Act, 2002: Benign Imperialism or a Missed Opportunity." *Modern Law Review*. Vol. 66. Issue4. p. 563, July 2003.

henceforward become architects of their own political futures and own liberators from poverty, underdevelopment and marginalization.²⁴⁷ As Harry C Boyte notes: “unless politics is popularly owned and widely practiced, ordinary citizens [will continue] being marginal players.”²⁴⁸

It would however not be easy for ordinary citizens to own politics as Boyte counsels. Many obstacles will certainly proliferate on their path. Circumventing (a) the “decades old mentality of “the expert knows best,” (b) established systems of domination and servitude, and (c) entrenched state-funded institutions of violence will undoubtedly prove to be a monumental feat. How ordinary citizens might also overcome today’s technocratic-market oriented, citizen-disinheriting, politics enroute to seizing the control of their daily lives and inserting themselves and their interests at the center of the civic universe would be yet another daunting challenge. Even much more challenging would be outsmarting political elites who almost always find ways of inserting themselves in virtually all endeavors initiated by ordinary citizens interested in, for example, building coalitions of civic involvement in community driven self-help economic ventures, biodiversity conservation and projects aimed at controlling soil erosion. But there is hope!

7. 3. 1. Strategies of reclaiming control of civic universe

Working as a collective, and in partnership with civil society organizations, ordinary citizens must first take an inventory of the benefits and the missed opportunities

²⁴⁷ Ronald McGuire, “Cry of the wild,” in Olubengo Adesida and Arunman. Oteh. Eds. *African Voices, African Visions*. Uppsala: Nordic Africa Institute; London: global 2001:60

²⁴⁸ Harry Boyte quotes A. M kambudzi’s article “Issues and Problems of Political renewal” in Olubenga Adesida and Arunman Oteh. Eds. *African Voice, African Visions*. Uppsala: Nordic Africa Institute; London: Global, 2001:60

of the politics controlled by parties, politicians and political pundits. However, regardless of the conclusion they arrive at, they should begin to find ways and means that would allow them to participate more fully in what Boyte calls an everyday politics. That is to say, a politics whose primary preoccupation is in developing capacities for collective and collaborative work across sharp lines of ideological, racial, economic and other cleavage. In other words, as Boyte notes, an everyday politics is rooted in the gritty soil of human plurality. It accommodates the particular stories, interests and outlooks that each person brings to public life. It is a kind of politics that is productive, not simply distributive. It is an every day politics, which aspires to solve problems and to create public wealth by tapping diverse talents. It also holds potential to break the tyranny of technique that eviscerates human capacities to shape the world. Finally, it pays sufficient attention to the problem of agency.

But for this kind of politics to take root, argues Boyte, the so-called experts must on the one hand see themselves as “on tap, not on top” while citizens, on the other hand, must also move, unlike in yesteryears, to the center of the civic universe. More important, ordinary citizens (poor and working class people in particular) must the culture of entreating hopelessly incompetent governments to address their problems and instead become directly involved in transforming their marginal status. They must also put aside their differences. They must make sure that their voices are heard directly, not filtered through the established patron-client networks. And they must begin to participate, as a collective, in the “kamirithu like hair-raising-conscientizing-confrontationist-down-with the status-quo type of community action that famed African writer, Ngugi wa Thiongo

helped to found, in Kenya.”²⁴⁹ Songs and anecdotes, dance, theater, street performances, market literature, underground presses, graphic art, sculpture, painting — the list is long — would come in handy as a medium of expressing dissent. Other forms of expressing dissent, as Chazan notes, may include: (a) participating in constant and acrimonious political debates. They may also involve becoming indifference to government dictates, refusing to comply with laws of the land, withholding taxes, not participating in elections and plebiscites, and/or creating alternate, decision making institutions and networks of conflict adjudication.

A second strategy might involve creating parallel grassroots-centered forms of governance that would allow ordinary citizens to reclaim their voice, humanity and their dignity. A third strategy, even though more controversial, might entail participating in what Naomi Chazan calls popular conflicts, or quiet rebellions, against state authority. This strategy, as Chazan suggests, is especially suited in nation states where state structures are weak, where leaders are capricious, where patronage networks have broken down, where alternate avenues for power accumulation exist, and where economic conditions have wrought widespread misery. The purpose of resorting to quiet rebellions is, says Chazan, not so much “to gain access to the center or to change the political center or alter its forms. Rather, it is to undermine the existing political fabric by limiting its reach, to minimize vulnerability to official interventions, to reduce exposure to the vicissitudes of government actions and to assert autonomy in a multiplicity of locations

²⁴⁹ Mary Esi Dogbe, “Culture and Development Process: Rethinking Women’s Participation in Development Dialogue.” Paper presented at the CASI/ACEDI 12th Annual Conference on “Identity, Citizenship and Democracy.” Brock University, St. Catharines, Ontario: May 31 to June 2, 1996. This paper can also be accessed on line at: <[Http://www.brocku.ca/epi/casid/dogbe.htm](http://www.brocku.ca/epi/casid/dogbe.htm) > December 14, 2004.

and ways.”²⁵⁰ What essentially would motivate individuals and groups into joining quiet rebellions is the realization that the exploitation that they have thus far endured is far outstripped by the gains that would follow from their participation in rural collectivities that are removed from official power centers, argues Chazan. Furthermore, the very idea of local communities controlling resources and evolving their own political institutions based on shared norms is yet another attractive reason.

A fourth strategy, already in use in most parts of Africa, is participating, as Chazan points out, in the informal economy: black marketeering, smuggling of goods across borders and so forth.

7. 4. Inducing change through the whip of the marketplace

Despite almost four decades of “political independence,” there is still little or nothing spectacular to show that Africa is making progress in terms of investing in its people, let alone protecting its charismatic megafauna. Billions of dollars that the continent has received in the form of foreign aid have least improved the lives of millions of Africans whose lives are characterized by poverty, marginalization and underdevelopment. Billions of dollars that are internally generated, financial and technical support that Africa has thus far received from industrialized nations, United Nations, multilateral lending institutions, local and international non-governmental organizations and philanthropic organizations have not improved the conditions of millions of Africans living in poverty and squalor.

Africa is to the present day still saddled with far too many problems. Even the best minds in Africa and outside of Africa have to date not come up with a magic formula

²⁵⁰ Naomi Chazan, Peter Lewis, et.al. *Politics and Society in Contemporary Africa*. 3rd edition. Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1999:213.

that would reverse Africa's economic stagnation, collapsing infrastructure, crumbling healthcare delivery systems, environmental degradation, high levels of illiteracy, burgeoning unemployment, pathetic living conditions, rapidly spreading HIV/AIDS, persistent famines, widespread hunger and the list is inexhaustible.

The question in many people's lips is: why is Africa such a basket case? Many factors have obviously contributed to this sorry state of affairs. I have already examined most of them. I have looked at the festering wounds from the violence unleashed upon Africans by European colonialists. I have discussed how the infantile behavior of Africa's ruling elites has compounded Africa's problems. I have also surveyed the flawed prescriptions thrust upon African governments by the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, international non-governmental organizations and the powerful cartel international conservation organizations headquartered especially Western Europe, Nordic countries and North America. What I have not thus far touched upon, a theme to which I must now turn, is how some of the monies that Africa receives could be invested in incentive based communal development programs and biodiversity conservation/creation projects. Perhaps, and I repeat, perhaps, this way is what might pull Africa out of the doldrums. But let me first provide some brief background information.

7. 4. 1. Development assistance

In the first few decade after independence, writes Lloyd Timberlake (1986), much of the foreign aid that Africa received was used to build symbols of modernity: defense forces, roads, dams, ports, conference centers, hotels, universities and the list is endless. In the 70's, however, Timberlake goes on to say, with a growing realization that the building of symbols of modernity had not benefited the vast impoverished segments of

society priorities began to shift, at least on paper and in speech. More attention was then focused on meeting people's basic needs and especially food self-sufficiency. Obstacles, nevertheless, which to the present day still stand on the way, began to proliferate.

Unnecessary bureaucratic tape remained as a major obstacle. Aid could not get through to small farmers. The people who were meant to facilitate this goal arguably did not have adequate knowledge about the real needs of poorer segments of society. More important, African governments were (as they still are today) somewhat unsympathetic to meeting basic needs.

Come 1980's onwards, the focus shifted again. How the expenditures of African governments, especially in personal emoluments, could be reduced and the monies saved re-invested into social projects and programs that would improve the lives the poor took a center stage. The 80's through the late 90's were then the era of the now infamous structural adjustment programs. Government-owned parastatals were sold off. The retrenchment of public employees followed hot on the heels. Massive cutbacks in many government supported programs kicked in. Cost sharing was introduced in the education and health sectors. State subsidized agricultural extension services were reduced or eliminated altogether. Unemployment shot up. Crime rates rose tenfold and they are still rising. Many people sought refuge in alcohol and other self-destructive social habits. In short, market-driven reforms again did not offer an effective antidote to Africa's quandaries. The situation can however be corrected. But how so, one might ask? I here zoom in on conservation of Africa's biodiversity.

7. 4. 2. Environmental stewardship payments

As David Farrier correctly notes, “biodiversity conservation in Africa certainly requires active management and restoration of ecosystems.”²⁵¹ The current modus operandi of biodiversity conservation, which is based on “command and control regulation,” cannot however achieve the desired results. New strategies are therefore required. Providing financial incentives to individuals and groups in exchange for restoring adulterated ecosystems may prove to be a more effective strategy of conserving/managing/creating more biodiversity and restoring damaged ecosystems. Financial incentives might be given to individuals and groups who have at least made an effort to conserve resources and environments where they live and that surround them. Farmers and herders who are willing and committed to relocating from fragile ecosystems or who have clearly demonstrated they are making an effort to abandon environmental destructive practices should, I believe, be paid what for lack of a better term I call an environmental stewardship honorarium. Individuals and organized groups that may wish to become involved, and have indeed shown interest, in “producing” biodiversity on lands that they own should also be fully encouraged to do so. They could be offered incentives in the form of money, public recognition and/or appointments in local or central government departments.

Why provide financial incentives? First doing so would complement the already existing command and control systems. Second, it would make those involved feel they have a continuing stake in conserving or creating biodiversity on their lands.

²⁵¹ David Farrier. “Conserving Biodiversity on Private Land: Incentives for Management or Compensation for Lost Expectations.” <<http://www.lib.ttu.edu/playa/rights/r995-04.htm>>October 24, 2004.

Third, others may follow suit and begin to assume stewardship responsibilities. Fourth, as David Farrier correctly notes, this strategy's focus is on “early protection of ecosystems, not last minute resuscitation of damaged/despoiled natural systems and species.”²⁵² Fifth, it is best suited in places where command and control enforcement mechanisms have proved most daunting. Sixth, it would motivate disgruntled populations into becoming conservationists, for they would begin to “perceive elements of biodiversity as asserts, rather than the liabilities that they currently represent.”²⁵³ Seventh, it would help to cultivate and nurture a sense of responsibility not only to the community but also to the non-human world. Eight, it will provide supplemental income support. Finally, and most important, paying farmers on marginal land for biodiversity conservation, as Farrier notes, “will be attractive from a political perspective. It will help to curb rural-urban exodus and this, in turn, will be a plus to easing urban congestion. It is also good politically speaking, for it power is decentralized and decisions are made based on existing local conditions and institutions.”²⁵⁴

Conclusion

I have focused this book on three themes. While keeping in mind the many documented root causes of Africa's challenges, I have first looked at the role that local, national and international elites have played in the development and exacerbation of the myriad of environmental challenges facing Africa and its people.²⁵⁵ To this end, I have

²⁵² Ibid. <<http://www.lib.ttu.edu/playa/rights/r995-04.htm>> October 24, 2004

²⁵³ Ibid. <<http://www.lib.ttu.edu/playa/rights/r995-04.htm>> October 24, 2004

²⁵⁴ Ibid. <<http://www.lib.ttu.edu/playa/rights/r995-04.htm>> October 24, 2004

²⁵⁵ Identified root causes of Africa's problems include, among others: ravages of climate; topographical constraints, Africans attachment to anachronistic traditions and socio-religious values; the impact of investment regimes and trade interests of Western governments and multinational corporations; mounting foreign debts, dis inheriting

examined how the policies and programs repeatedly promoted by elites (Africans and non-Africans alike) have increasingly driven the poorer, struggling segments of society in Africa to destroy the environments where they live, that surround them and that they depend on for their livelihood. The examples I have cited to vindicate my argument include:

- a) How the introduction of the Nile Perch fish into Africa's largest fresh water lake, lake Victoria has, besides impoverishing local communities living around the lakeshores, damaged the lake's internal ecological processes.
- b) How the continuous utilization of transplanted Western misanthropic conservation models, the "fence and fine" approach to biodiversity conservation, have led to the displacement of millions of ordinary Africans from their ancestral homelands, leaving them worse off economically and in dire poverty. They have also made local communities become less willing defenders of the wildlife and old growth forests that they previously cared about and reverently protected without fear of retribution.
- c) The extent to which the introduction and consequent expansion of cash-crop farming in forested areas and in fragile ecological niches, previously considered marginal to rain-fed agriculture, has herald far reaching consequences to the environment, human-health, food-self-sufficiency and economic security.
- d) How implementation of the World Bank and IMF's -led structural adjustment

policies and programs sponsored by international financial institutions; Africa's moribund institutions of governance, impact of the burgeoning population growth rates; widespread corruption and infantile behavior and practices of Africa's political elites, the unrelenting invasion and meretricious attraction of western lifestyles, values and ideas, and last but not least; Africa's marginal integration of in the global economy.

programs in the agricultural, health and education sectors have pushed the poorer, struggling segments of society even further deeper into poverty whilst setting in motion unintended cascading environmental travesties.

e) How policies put in place to attract foreign investment have instead attracted pollution-belching industries, sweatshops factories that expose their workers to many hazards, and created loopholes that foreign companies use to export and dump radioactive waste on African coastal waters and in semi-arid and arid ecosystems.

The second theme that have I explored is the correlation between Africa's monumental crises and the failure of elites – all those who advise and influence the direction of Africa's recovery in virtually all facets of human life – to acknowledge the humanity, input and agency of people of all walks of life: local people and organizations, grass roots, rural and city people, a plurality of voices etc. In this respect, I have demonstrated how and the extent to which the reluctance of elites (Africans and non-Africans alike) to listen and to hear with respect and accordingly respond to the priorities and needs of poor groups in society has stoked the fire of the on-going systematic breakdown of Africa's indigenous cultures, institutions of socialization and destruction of crucial life support systems.²⁵⁶ Marshalling evidence from a variety of academic disciplines, I have argued that the root cause of Africa's predicaments—including the accelerating environmental crisis— stem primarily from the three that Lao Tzu identified

²⁵⁶ I am here referring to some African and non-African academics and elites drawn from local and international development agencies, Bretton Woods Institutions (i.e., the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund) and elites drawn from the powerful carter of international conservation organizations headquartered especially in Western Europe, Scandinavian countries, and North America. 3 Martin Prozesky. Op.cit p.3

in his book *The Way of Lao-Tzu* (604bBC-531 BC). As Lao Tzu noted, “there is no calamity greater than lavish desires... there is no greater guilt than discontent.... and there is no greater disaster than greed.” Supporting this assertion as well, South African philosopher Martin Prozesky writes, in his paper “Well-Fed Animals and Starving Babies: Environmental and Developmental Challenges in Process and African Perspective,” that:

The needs of the poor and the greed of the affluent are both deadly forces — but of very different kinds ethically. The poor damage the environments (where they live, that surround them and which they depend on for their livelihood) out of need. The affluent, [on the other hand], who have choices about what to do which the destitute do not have, damage and despoil the non-human part/s of the physical world out of greed. ... [Put in another way], the strong prey upon the venerable: powerful people against weaker people, weaker people against animals and against what is left of nature.... But notwithstanding this major difference, for nature the result is the same: more damage, some of it perhaps irreversible.²⁵⁷

There is no denying that European colonialists laid the foundation of the structural and power relations that to the present day impoverish millions of Africans. With their zeal to radically overhaul what they deemed — though not without prejudice— as being “primitive” African ways of life, European colonialists introduced sons (and occasionally daughters) of Africa into an alien and alienating systems of education. This transplanted system of education, whose core vision of pulling the ignoramus sons and daughters of

²⁵⁷ Martin Prozesky. *Op.cit* p.3

Africa “out of their primordial ways of life into the Europhone light” has remained largely unchanged to the present day, has arguably “been the most revolutionary influence operating in sub-Saharan Africa.” While it has empowered some Africans, it has also especially undermined the youths’ pride in their cultures, native languages, customs, moral ethos and traditional methods of conflict resolution. It has additionally helped to mold generations of African graduates who, while lacking faith and confidence in their ancestral heritage, have an avid craving for virtually everything emanating from the West: ideologies, economic structures, institutions of governance, development and environmental recovery models, languages, histories, literary productions, symbolic systems, cuisine, dress culture, lifestyles, et cetera. As Ali Mazrui notes, The differences among educated Africans do not lie in whether they are cultural captives but in the extent to which they are. Africans vary in degrees of bondage but not in the actual state of being enslaved.... One measurement of dependency is objective: how far an African has become a black European in dress, ideology and style. The other measurement is subjective: how far the slave realizes he is a slave at all and seeks to rebel against his condition.²⁵⁸

What is more, “fascinated by the West’s cultural mirror” (to use Mazrui’s words), this group has for the most part remained intellectual imitators and disciples of the West. And as Ngugi wa Thiong’o observes, the majority of Africa’s elites have remained mostly “unconnected with the world in which millions of poor Africans live in the shadows of

²⁵⁸ Ali Mazrui, “Educated Africans in Politics and Society,” in Robert L. Ostergard, Jr. Richardo R. Laremont & Fouad Kalouche (eds.) *Power, Politics and the African Condition: Collected Essays of Ali Mazrui*, Vol. 3. Trenton, NJ & Asmara, Eritrea: African World Press, 2004:216-217.

poverty, ignorance and disease.”²⁵⁹ But it is the late Thomas Odhiambo, founding director of the International Center of Insect Physiology and Ecology (ICIPE), who, I believe, offers an interesting take on how the transplanted Western system of education has, in Africa, tragically helped to produce “intellectual gatekeepers of Western hegemony.”²⁶⁰

For Odhiambo (1995: 157), ... the best way “to accomplish a more lasting conquest of a people, society and civilization is to destroy their self image of accomplishment, well being, enterprise and innovativeness and their capacity to dream and to invent their own self constructed future.” Because many students and scholars of Africa, including Mazrui, have painstakingly highlighted the different kinds of cultural, political, economic and socioreligious dependencies perpetuated the uninterrupted reliance on discourses and paradigms imported from the West, I will here not belabor this issue.

Concomitant with the manner in which the transplanted Western system of education has helped to produce, in Africa, intellectual gatekeepers of Western hegemony, I have also examined the ways in which European colonialists, industrialized nations, multinational corporations and postcolonial Africa’s ruling classes have, singly and in unison, unrelentingly plundered Africa’s treasures, mineral wealth, indigenous forests and Africa’s biodiversity. I have argued that, hiding behind the cover of saving Africa’s environment and by extension saving Africans from their self-chosen road to destruction, European colonialists expropriated huge tracks of Africa’s most fertile and

²⁵⁹ Ngugi wa Thiong’o. “The Allegory of the Cave: Language, Democracy and a New World Order!” Lecture 111 of the Clarendon Lectures in English, Oxford, May 15, 1996. This article is also published in *Black Renaissance Noire* Volume 1, Number 3.

²⁶⁰ Ella Shohat. ‘Notes on the Post-Colonial,’” *Social Text*, Vol.10, N0.2 & 3, 1992:93-103.

mineral endowed lands and thereby uprooted millions of African peasants from their primary source of identity and sustenance. They also not only compressed groups “with no traditions of shared authority or shared systems of settling disputes,” but also “separated people who would otherwise have lived together” (as Mazrui would say) in designated reservations where, in Edward Said’s words, “they could easily control their movement and tax and use them profitably.”

Moreover, the “fence and fine” Western approach to conservation, an approach still prevalent up to date in much of sub-Saharan Africa, has I have argued proven to be either inappropriate or downright disastrous. Transferring the control and management of wildlife, wildlife habitats and indigenous growth forests from adjacent local communities to central governments, the “fence and fine” conservation paradigm has indisputably discouraged local communities from defending the wildlife and old growth forests that they once cared about and reverently protected through numerous religious injunctions. The increased human-wildlife/nature conflicts witnessed in Africa today are, in fact, partially attributable to the continued utilization of this arguably misanthropic European conservation paradigm. Denied the right of access to, and control of, resources in the then declared human-off limits ecosystems local communities who once relied on natural resources for their survival, and who had put in place sound traditional rules of access and management, now care less about the wildlife and forests that surround them. They regard statutorily protected wildlife and indigenous forests as no longer an integral part of their lives and livelihood. Because central governments in Africa have, since the colonial period to the present day, arrogated themselves the power to police, to control and to manage wildlife and forests reserves, local communities have increasingly felt that they

have no stake in dutifully and responsibly managing natural resources in then statutorily protected ecosystems. Even more disturbing, is the fact that Africa's conservation projects and programs mainly serve the interests of a few Africa's political elites and the "crowd of camera-toting safari tourists from rich countries, who blithely flock to Africa to delight in the magnificent spectacle of Africa's charismatic megafauna."²⁶¹ Local communities, who shoulder most of the burden of conservation while governments in Africa and the tourism industry share in its profitability, have least benefited.

The exit of European colonialists, and the forty plus years that most countries have had since attaining "political independence," has not significantly improved the lives of the majority of Africans. Millions are still trapped in poverty, thanks for the most part to the policies and programs promoted by Africa's ruling elites that European colonialists help to manufacture. Chiefly concerned about how to please their foreign benefactors – Western nations, Bretton Woods institutions and international conservation and development agencies – Africa's ruling elites have not only mortgaged the lifeblood of millions of Africans, leaving them worse off economically and in some cases in dire poverty, but have also readily allowed Africa's futures to be controlled from Western capitals.

The third theme that I focus on dispels the notion that is now increasingly gaining currency in Africa; and that is, the view that what Africans in Africa essentially need, in order to get the continent going in the right direction, is to actively promote a robust moral/ecological education in all institutions of socialization. Such an education, some

²⁶¹ Michael McCarthy. "Can Africa's Impoverished People and its Animals Live Together?" <<http://news.independent.co.uk/world/africa/story.jsp?story=590434> > December 17, 2004

argue (see chapter one, for example) should be premised on recovered shared values, traditions, technological skills and practices as well as belief systems from Africa's precolonial heritage. Others suggest it should be grounded on radically improved classical ethical theories. Yet, for the majority, it should be based on a well thought-out creative synthesis of both pre-colonial Africa's knowledge systems and improved classical ethical theories. Obviously, no sensible person would dispute the fact that Africa is in need of a moral rebirth. But to exclusively focus on resolving the gargantuan of problems and challenges facing Africa and Africans through a moral rebirth – without also grappling with the structural and power relations that perpetuate poverty and different kinds of inequities – is, I have argued, to retreat into the sphere of social irrelevance. That the structural and power relations that perpetuate poverty and diverse kinds of discriminations based on ethnicity, clan, religion, age, gender, et cetera should also be confronted more robustly, more persistently and more honestly need here not belabored. Another important theme that I have not examined in this study, a possible theme for future research, is how Africans in Africa might, in addition to domesticating the forces of globalization to their advantage, maintain a proactive vigilance against the predatory tendencies and practices of contemporary global capitalism.

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