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**UBUNTU ETHICS: A FRAME FOR AN ETHICAL ANALYSIS OF
ENVIRONMENTAL MIGRATION OF UNACCOMPANIED MINORS
THROUGH THE MEDITERRANEAN SEA.**

A Thesis by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis demonstrates how the African ethics of Ubuntu and African liberation theology can be a response to the environmental-migration crisis that the Sub-Saharan African region faces today. It explains the relevance of the appreciation of the African cultural heritage to the restoration of the human dignity of the African, especially the migrants, and the recognition of the obligation of the human beings to protect the integrity of all creation. It shows the connection between the root causes of the environmental crisis and migration. These interconnected root causes need a holistic understanding of creation that Ubuntu ethics provides mainly in its concepts of interconnectedness, hospitality, and ecological harmony. To address the root causes of migration, the thesis proposes actions mainly in the domain of education, cultural formation, and religious practice. While I have drawn on the essential works of African authors in areas of environment and ethics, I also benefited from lived experience and cultural practices to proffer solutions to the crisis of migration. In addition to creation of employment and the fight against environmental exploitation, I argue for the reform of the colonial-sanctioned African educational system that excludes the rich cultural and spiritual practices and creates identity crisis in the youth and alienates them. Hence, they always think that to live abroad is more socially rewarding, even if they end up suffering in the process of searching for the elusive wealth abroad. The argument from the thesis is a holistic application of African and Christian values to addressing the challenges that young people face in Africa today which push them on the road of migration. As a result, the resolution of the current crisis will be to encourage young people to use their cultural heritage to create a new narrative and vision of their future rather than taking a perilous route journey of the desert and the Mediterranean Sea to Europe.

Julie H. Rubio, Ph.D., Director. Date

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GENERAL INTRODUCTION

In most of the Sub-Saharan African refugee camps such as Kenya, Uganda, Congo and Ethiopia, minors and families are not always victims of civil and tribal wars from the neighboring countries of Eritrea, Somalia, and South Sudan. Most migrants and refugee minors are victims of climate change and desertification.¹ Many of these minors are not settled in refugee camps; instead, they are sent by their families and are in transit to Europe as they see their hope and future going to rack and ruin in their home countries because of environmental catastrophe that creates scarcities in home economy and poverty. Although there are others root causes of migration, we want to focus on the environmental degradation in this case study.

The dead bodies of migrants trying to cross the borders to Europe on the Mediterranean Sea raise questions about the principles of human dignity, human solidarity, care, and hospitality. Safa Msehli, spokesperson of the international organization for migrants, termed this human tragedy, “a time of total moral collapse because... humanity is drowning.”² At the same time, the Italian Bishop Antonio Stagliano of Noto said that “brotherhood and solidarity are needed more than ever following the death of 130 migrants who for two days issued a distress call” that did not receive a positive response.³ This crisis raises many questions: What is the value of human dignity and the protection of minors?

¹ John R. Wennersten and Denise Robbins, *Rising Tides: Climate Refugees in the Twenty-First Century* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2017), 7.

² Elise Ann Allen “Italian Bishop Calls for End to Indifference after ‘Shameful’ Migrant Deaths | Crux,” accessed December 3, 2021, <https://cruxnow.com/church-in-europe/2021/04/italian-bishop-calls-for-end-to-indifference-after-shameful-migrant-deaths>.

³ Ibid.

How can we assert the protection of one's children and the children of others across borders? What is the suitable ethical response to the crisis? The images of sinking boats on the Mediterranean Sea have been disturbing and shocking, causing outrage and despair on numbers of dead lives across the Sea.

According to the UNCHR report of 2018, an estimated 2,275 people died or went missing in their efforts to cross the Mediterranean Sea. Though around 1,335 were estimated dead in 2019, 123,663 migrants reached Europe. In 2020 the report shows that 1,401 people were dead and missing while 95,031 migrants arrived in Europe.⁴

The plight of climate immigrants at the Mediterranean borders reveals a strong connection between how we treat the earth and human beings, revealing the fact that healing for the environment and caring for migrants is an ethical imperative.⁵ The earth crisis and climate changes show that the earth community is intrinsically linked. As a community of interconnectedness, all creatures depend on each other for survival and the malaise of one creature affect the whole creation. In the present crisis, a holistic assistance and care for the environment and migrants becomes an emergency that needs an action. The crisis appeals to human conscience showing that addressing these interconnected root causes is no longer an option but rather a duty. This ethical duty and care are related to ecological dept. An illustrative case comes from the Eastern Congo where the extraction of Coltan degrades the soil and push people to migrate. Although Coltan is used all over

⁴ Max J. Rosenthal, "Despite Pandemic, Refugee Numbers Grow to Unprecedented Levels," *HIAS*, accessed October 1, 2021, <https://www.hias.org/blog/despite-pandemic-refugee-numbers-grow-unprecedented-levels>.

⁵ Pope Francis, *Laudato Si* (Nairobi: Paulines, 2015), No. 119.

the world and boost the world economy, the victims of environmental disaster don't receive due care.

This research will be grounded in Christian social ethics. As a Christian social ethics, it will use biblical, theological, cultural, and sociological sources to reflect on the challenges posed to the social context of climate migration of minors. The climate catastrophe has become a structural social sin that needs healing and conversion. This dissertation will study the case of unaccompanied minors migrating through the Mediterranean Sea. Despite the shortcomings and imperfections related to Ubuntu, the dissertation proposes this ethical framework, and worldview from African spirituality, as one of the ethical frameworks for addressing the Sub-Saharan climate crisis and migration crisis arising therefrom. Liberation theology is the theological lens I will put into dialogue to challenge Ubuntu Ethics and comprehend how the understanding of Jesus as a liberator can set the minors free and instill hope in their lives. I will then use African spirituality, cultural heritage, and education to elaborate practical actions. My main contribution in this area of study is the restoration of unaccompanied minor migrants' dignity, hope for future and humanity using African cultural and spiritual heritage of interconnectedness.

This study will not be the first to explore the issue of migration of unaccompanied minors and Ubuntu Ethics. Some scholars have focused on migration related to political and armed conflicts. Others have focused on ecological ethics with no reference to migration of minor crisis. The articles and books we read so far, tend to ignore that the root cause of migration today is land and climate catastrophe. Again, even though drought, food security, and armed conflict are connected, there is not much literature on minors who are now climate refugees and migrants.

Some authors draw a connection between humanity and the principles of caring and connectedness inherent in our environment, showing that caring for human beings is also caring for the environment and nature.⁶ Felix Murove explores how the ethics of Ubuntu is helpful for ecological conservation. He argues that Ubuntu depicts a good relationship between human beings and nature.⁷ Kevin Behrens exploring a holistic interpretation of Ubuntu shows that the environment gets more attention in the African holistic view of nature, but he does not address the consequences of migration that the degradation of nature engenders.⁸ From the perspective of natural resources and development, Overson Shumba shows how Ubuntu influences and guides resource utilization in Africa and beyond. He argues that the ethical principal of interconnected could push the exploiter to take care of the victims of exploitation.⁹ However, he does not discuss how the depletion of African natural resources is a root cause of poverty and economic scarcity. Exploring the theme of the educational environment, Lagrange connects Ubuntu with education regarding environmental ethics showing how Ubuntu if integrated in educational system could enhances the care for creation. Museka and Madondo argue for the pedagogical benefits of Ubuntu showing how socially and culturally speaking Ubuntu favors an interdependence of creatures.¹⁰ However, these researchers do not reveal that the education is still one that

⁶ Mogobe B. Ramose, *African Philosophy through Ubuntu* (Harare: Mond Books, 1999), 45-50.

⁷ Munyaradzi Felix MUROVE, "An African Commitment to Ecological Conservation: The Shona Concepts of Ukama and Ubuntu," *Mankind quarterly* 45, no. 2 (2004): 195–215.

⁸ Kevin Behrens, "Exploring African Holism with Respect to the Environment," *Environmental values* 19, no. 4 (2010): 465–484.

⁹ Overson Shumba, "Commons Thinking, Ecological Intelligence and the Ethical and Moral Framework of Ubuntu: An Imperative for Sustainable Development" (2011): 13, 258-265.

¹⁰ Godfrey Museka, "The Quest for a Relevant Environmental Pedagogy in the African Context: Insights from Unhu/Ubuntu Philosophy," *Journal of Ecology and the Natural Environment* 4, no. 10 (2012), 258-265.

praises the colonizer and portrays Europe as a promised land in installing an “anthropological pauperization.”¹¹ Applying Ubuntu ethics to the ongoing crisis brings a holistically solution that heals both the nature and unaccompanied minors’ migrants in providing an anthropological and human solidarity that restores the harmony in creation.

One might expect this study to cover north African countries like Tunisia, Libya, and many others that have been the departing point of migrants. I want to address the root causes of migration of minors from sub-Saharan Africa. The humanitarian organization has revealed that the greatest number of migrants come from Sub-Saharan Africa. This thesis cannot resolve the issue of migration in Sub-Sahara Africa, but it is a contribution to our understanding of the migration crisis from a cultural and African spiritual perspective, providing a way forward. Thus, from the perceptive on Christian social ethics and liberation theology, the dissertation will build on the Christian concept and interpretation of the scriptural sources to reshape a better understanding of the crisis. Hence, the theological reflection will bring the face of Jesus as the liberator into the dialogue, building on the perception of liberation of African authors such as Jean Mark Ela, Engelbert Mveng, and Emmanuel Katongole.¹²

The question that this dissertation wants to answer is: What is Ubuntu ethics response to the ongoing crisis of migration of minors through the Mediterranean Sea? The main argument is that climate change and migration are linked and to address holistically

¹¹ Léocadie Wabo Lushombo, “Christological Foundations for Political Participation: Women in the Global South Building Agency as Risen Beings,” *Political theology: the journal of Christian Socialism* 18, no. 5 (2017): 399–422.

¹² Jean Mark Ela and Engelbert Mveng argue that the liberation theology from Africa is not more about politics and economic rather should concentrate on restoring human dignity of African using cultural and spiritual African heritage.

the root causes we need to reframe the anthropological, humanness and interconnectedness of Ubuntu ethics to this crisis.

Following the structure of this thesis, the pastoral spiral (seeing, judging, and acting) method will be used. Joe Holland and Peter Henriot give four primary areas of pastoral spiral and circle methods. The four areas of the circle methods process focus on the signs of the times that call for moral reasoning. The first area is the experience that exposes the crisis that is happening. In this thesis, migration of unaccompanied minors is the sign of the times that needs a critical analysis. It will scrutinize the migration of minors in relation to environmental degradation. The second area of discussion is the ethical framework which is Ubuntu ethics. Our judgement on the situation is that Ubuntu ethics concepts of interconnectedness, humanness and solidarity of creatures restore the dignity of both the creation and human beings. Furthermore, Catholic Social Teachings aspects of human dignity and solidarity can be a tool to the crisis of migration. Then comes liberation theology that depicts a theological understanding of the crisis using the face of Jesus as a liberator. The fourth chapter; on education and ministry map out practical actions using education, new narratives and cultural practice that humanize and empower minor migrants.¹³

This dissertation will demonstrate how Ubuntu Ethics can help to resolve the environmental migration crisis through its principles of interconnectedness, interdependence, solidarity, and humanness. It will be helpful for both scholars in African cultures/ traditions and people interested in studying African cultural ethics and spirituality regarding the contemporary crisis. It will also be helpful to practitioners and organizations

¹³ Joe Holland and Peter J. Henriot, *Social Analysis: Linking Faith and Justice*, Rev. and enl. ed. (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 1983), 7-20.

whose work is to reduce the number of migrants or provide safe migration. Additionally, the study will help to construct new narratives about migration. Furthermore, the work responds to the call of the Society of Jesus to take care of the marginalized, accompanying and journeying with youth in their struggle for a better future.

The development of this essays unfolds in four chapters. The first chapter is the analysis of the root causes of environmental migrants. The main argument is that environmental disasters and anthropological pauperization is pushing minors to migrate. I will discuss the root causes of migration as well as the push and pull factors of minors' migration.

The second chapter explores the Ubuntu Ethics in relation the crisis of environmental crisis. The main argument is that the cultural values and beliefs of interconnectedness, solidarity and anthropological humanness of Ubuntu ethics can be a new framework to the understanding, approaching, and responding to the crisis of migration. The first part will be a descriptive and critical overview of Ubuntu ethics and migration of unaccompanied minors. The second part will make a comparative study of Ubuntu ethics and some Catholic social principles such as human dignity and solidarity. The third part will give some cultural, cosmological beliefs that show the holistic approach of interconnectedness and inter-dependence.

The third chapter on African liberation theology I argue that Jesus as a liberator understands unaccompanied minor migrants as "crucified people," who need resurrection. The first part will use the hermeneutic of historical biblical liberation texts. The second part mitigate the participation of minors and host community in the liberation struggle. The third part will postulate for hope and new future to minor migrants.

In the fourth and last chapter, this essay finds its culmination by daring to design actions that can address the root causes. This chapter will provide practical strategies that address the root causes of minor's migrants revealed in chapter one. I will argue that action inspired from African spirituality and rethinking the educational system can provide new perspective for minors and African youth in general. The chapter will depict some practical policies such as education, cultural empowerment, accompaniment, and hospitality that empower minors.

Chapter One: SOCIAL ANALYSIS OF MIGRATION CRISIS

Introduction

The ongoing migration crisis on the Mediterranean Sea has caused a humanitarian disaster. While the reasons for these migrations are numerous and complex, the dominant narratives claim that African migrants leave their lands because of poverty and political instabilities in their home countries, searching for better lives. However, other significant reasons include the environmental crisis as well as the heritage of colonialism and neo-colonialism, which portrays Europe on the one hand as the land of success and Africa, on the other, as sub-human. The environmental disaster is, nevertheless, the primary cause for the sudden rise of immigration. In fact, before the rise of environmental degradation in sub-Saharan, the people from there did not embark on a risky boat to Western countries on such a scale, as their land was still fertile and their means of survival, such as rivers, forests, lands, and cattle, were productive.

One of the primary root causes of the African-Mediterranean migration of unaccompanied minors that is ignored or minimized is the environmental damage that is contributing to debilitating poverty in many sub-Saharan African countries. As nature is destroyed, thousands of people are compelled to migrate internally or externally for safety. As the ecological destruction increases, hundreds of species of trees and animals are being destroyed, killed, and disappear because they can no longer survive with the destruction of their natural habitat. Consequently, when the environment is trashed and the ancestral beliefs in the land, trees, and animal totems are plundered, the destruction of one's environment causes both physical and spiritual damage.

In this chapter I will broadly explore the root causes of the environmental degradation within systemic and human structures. I will demonstrate this social analysis in three parts: First, I will provide an overview of migration of unaccompanied minors in the Mediterranean Sea. The second part will analyze the root causes of environmental degradation and its human and systemic correlation. Then, the third section will explore the influence of environmental degradation on the life of children by examining the push and pull factors of migration. Finally, I will analyze some case studies in migrants and witnesses about the hardships of the journey on the part of the migrants.

1.1. Overview of Environmental Migration of Minors in Sub-Saharan Africa

In 2014, I was on an internship with the Jesuit Refugee Service in Ethiopia. As I had imagined it, I was going to work with victims of civil and tribal wars from the neighboring countries of Ethiopia and South Sudan, but mainly Eritrea. However, I was disillusioned when I found out that many in the refugee camp were not only victims of civil and tribal wars, but victims of climate change and desertification. Some die in the process of migration through the Mediterranean Sea, a migration they resort to because they cannot see their future improving in the refugee camps. The report released in 2021 by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) demonstrates that about 31, 500 African migrants were returned to the refugee camps in Libya or were imprisoned after their boats were intercepted trying to cross the Mediterranean Sea while more than 980 were reported dead.¹⁴

¹⁴ Associated Press, “Shipwrecked Refugee Crossings Leave 164 Dead in Mediterranean, Says UN,” *The Guardian*, December 21, 2021, sec. World news, accessed March 1, 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/dec/21/shipwrecked-migrant-crossings-leave-164-dead-in-mediterranean-says-un>.

I was personally affected by news of young people with whom I worked who died in their attempt to cross the Mediterranean Sea. One of the stories that is still with me is the story of Charles Amani, a young Congolese who lived fifteen years in a refugee camp waiting for opportunities for resettlement. As the resettlement opportunity delayed, he crossed the Kenya border, where he stayed for fifteen years and traveled to Ethiopia. He joined with other young people from different countries related to the same smugglers and traffickers. They made their way to the Mediterranean Sea. Unfortunately, he and many others that I accompanied in Ethiopia went unheard and missing for months until it was reported by their friends who remained in Libya that their boat did not make it to Europe. There are too many stories of minors from different countries who died in the process of migration but whose deaths will never be reported.¹⁵

Although I will focus on the sub-Saharan African countries as a case study in this thesis, the Mediterranean crisis concerns all African countries. Migrants dying at the Mediterranean Sea are from Sub-Saharan Africa, Northern Africa, and Western Africa. I focus on Sub-Saharan Africa in this study for many reasons. The first is that Sub-Saharan Africa produces the most significant number of young minors who decide to take that perilous journey to Europe through the Mediterranean Sea. The second reason is that most of them are forced climate migrant victims. The third reason is because it is a self-healing writing experience; after my internship in the refugee camp in Ethiopia, the news of death of young people in the Mediterranean that I received made me feel dejected as I failed to bring hope to those youth taking the deadly route.

¹⁵ Tara Brian and Frank Laczko, eds., *Fatal Journeys: Tracking Lives Lost during Migration* (Geneva, Switzerland: International Organization for Migration (IOM), 2014), 153.

Crossing the borders is no longer a sign of liberation. It is rather a struggle and fatal journey full of suffering and surrounded by threat of death. It is not a place for freedom and safety but a place of captivity where one experiences hardship, as well as loss of identity and human dignity. As Gemma Cruz argues, today's migration and border crossings are “no longer just the political membranes through which goods and people must pass, to be deemed acceptable or unacceptable. Today borders are thin, porous membrane that people risk passing and cross towards freedom or promised land only to find spoils and end up in a no migrant land.”¹⁶ Borders become an annihilation of humanity, identity, and existence. The challenge is to make the borders a meeting point of solidarity where the most vulnerable, such as unaccompanied minors, are protected.

1.1.1. Historic understanding of migration in Sub-Sahara

In the history of migrations, child migrants were associated with the movement of their parents. Children were considered passive migrants as they were dependent on their parents. However, more recent studies have shown that children are migrants in their own right and exploited in the border transactions. Whether on their own or pushed by crisis, “children do decide to migrate, and do so in much the same way as adults do.”¹⁷ That is why the numbers of unaccompanied minors migrating through the Mediterranean Sea are growing. However, when they migrate, they are most exposed to human trafficking and are vulnerable both on the sea and on the road. Studies on migration in the Mediterranean Sea reveal that, among the children who migrate, there is a big number of children who are

¹⁶ Gemma Tulud Cruz, *An Intercultural Theology of Migration Pilgrims in the Wilderness*, Studies in systematic theology, v. 5 (Leiden; Brill, 2010), 20.

¹⁷ Gwatirera Javangwe and Innocent Chirisa, *Navigating the Contours of African Childhood Experiences: Multidisciplinary Perspectives* (Bethesda: Academica Press, 2013), 55.

drowned in the sea or killed on the road. Even when they are not killed, children who migrate are reported missing on the way. Most of them find themselves in the detention center without any protection whatsoever, with no guarantee for their rights.¹⁸

As claim Hein De Haas, Stephen Castles and Mark Miller, there are three kinds of migrating minors who have environmental degradation as a common root cause. The first category consists of those who go with their family's blessings and get money for the journey. The second category is the minors who run away from the family compound without the consent of their parents. The third category comprises those who remain in refugee camps and may find an opportunity to finance their journey. They work in the transit countries or receive resettlement from some countries and donors.¹⁹ Furthermore, there is a gap between the rights of child migrants and the protection they effectively receive. The situation of minor migrants conflicts with the ideal vision of childhood growth and protection that society fails to provide for everyone. This discrepancy is observed in how migrant minors are treated; some are refused family reunification, while others are forcibly returned to their countries of origin.

Migration of minors has a long history in Africa that goes back to transatlantic ocean trade and slavery. Intra-Africa migration has always been a reality as children explore the possibilities and opportunities for studies, job opportunities, and life inventions. However, the migration of minors has not attracted much attention because many link the migration of minors to family members' reunification or associate the migration of minors along with

¹⁸ Brian and Laczko, *Fatal Journeys*, 28-30.

¹⁹ Hein De Haas, Stephen Castles, Mark Miller, *The Age of Migration: International Population Movements in the Modern World*, Sixth Edition. (New York: The Guilford Press, 2020), 45-50.

their parents or relatives. The modern migration of minors in the Mediterranean has shown another reality wherein unaccompanied minors migrate without family members, friends, or relatives. That is why they quickly fall into the hands of smugglers and trafficking, who present to them what seem to be a means of pursuing their aspirations but hide nefarious ulterior motives. Although the migration of minors seems to have become a norm, most of the closure of borders and national policies have brought chaos in the life of migrant minors. Elodie Razy and Marie Rodet say that “young migrants- fluid and difficult to control the population- make up the vast majority of illegal transnational migrants in the West... there is clear evidence that mobile, nomadic, or homeless children, including child migrants, unleash moral panics.”²⁰

In most sub-Saharan African countries, labor training of children is a lifestyle and process of maturation. It is perceived as a teaching tool for future households and manual workers that all children should know and practice.²¹ There is a cultural background of sending children out of their families to work for other family members or somewhere else in sub-Saharan Africa. Sociologists such as Esther Goody, Serra Renata, and Kielland Anne describe how in traditional and modern Sub-Saharan Africa parents send their children away to be workers for their relatives and others. Minors are fostered to live outside their families as workers or be trained by other community members.²² This

²⁰ R. Elodie & Marie Rodet, “Introduction Child Migration in Africa: Key Issues and New Perspectives,” in *Children on the Move in Africa: Past and Present Experiences of Migration*, ed. Elodie Razy and Marie Rodet (Woodbridge, Suffolk (GB) ; James Currey, an imprint of Boydell & Brewer, Ltd, 2016), 16.

²¹ International Labour Conference, “Child Labour: International Labour Conference, 87th Session, 1999 ; International Labour Office.” Report, 4 (1) (Geneva: International Labour Office, 1998).

²² Esther N. Goody, *Parenthood and Social Reproduction: Fostering and Occupational Roles in West Africa*, Cambridge studies in social anthropology 35 (Cambridge [Cambridgeshire] ; Cambridge University Press, 1982), 31-40.

practice of sending children out of the family explains an African proverb that says, “It takes a village to raise a child.” This proverb alludes to the fact that the task of raising a child and contributing to his/her maturation is not only the task of the family, rather the duty of the whole community. Thus, parents believe that unaccompanied minors will be cared for by a good Samaritan wherever he/she is found. Hence, from these traditional beliefs, the parents easily believe that unaccompanied minors will never be alone because the human care and compassion that is in the hearts of any parents, they will meet on the way. In addition to all the cultural aspects, there are other reasons that are leading parents to give their children to family’s members, including the economic reasons exacerbated by environmental degradation and climate change.

1.1.2. Environmental Degradation in Sub Sahara Africa

In many Sub-Saharan African countries, climate change has become a severe threat to the population. Climate change has reduced rainfall yield, causing the premature drying of crops, lack of drinking water, regular seasonal dysfunction in agriculture, and havoc on food supply. Climate change affects all aspects of life, such as livestock and population safety, and is a cause of crop pests, dry bushes, forest fires, disease, and poverty. All these elements inevitably force people to migrate.²³ In the report of the Pastoral Guidelines of the Catholic Church, it is stated that “In 2020 alone, more than 33 million people were newly displaced, bringing the total number to almost 51 million, the highest number ever recorded; and of these, 8.5 million (were displaced) as a result of conflict and violence and

²³ “Food Crisis / West Africa: Millions of People at Risk of Serious Food Crisis without Early Action, Says Oxfam,” *African Press Organisation. Database of Press Releases Related to Africa* (Lausanne: African Press Organization - APO, 2011).

24.9 million due to natural disasters.”²⁴ Cardinal Michael Czerny explains the moral question around climate change, insisting that: “God created all human beings, are brothers and sisters to each other and are living on the same planet. They have an obligation to each other and the earth.”²⁵ From this standpoint, it is agreed that beings cannot exist in isolation.

Although poor people contribute less to environmental degradation, pollution, and gas emissions, they are the most vulnerable and constitute the highest number of refugees and migrants. Most African cultures, as well as their economy, depend on the use of land for agriculture. Since one of the hazards of climate change is desertification, it implies that there will be food insecurity, which will invariably lead to a surge in climate migrants. There is a striking connection between drought, food security, and tribal-armed conflict.²⁶ Most of the tribal conflicts and wars in sub-Saharan Africa concern land and mostly lands rich in mineral resources. Land and natural resources are considered weapons of war in many African countries as “the environment is merely a symptom of a larger conflict, and the root cause of any population movement is the conflict itself and the reasons behind it is land’s quarrel.”²⁷ Given the low available water and crop yield, competition for the already limited natural resources in arid areas increases when drought occurs. During

²⁴ Zoie Jones, *Pastoral Guidelines on Climate Displaced People*,” accessed December 7, 2021, <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2021/03/30/210330b.html>, 6.

²⁵ Cindy Wooden, “Pope Francis: Human Selfishness Is Creating Millions of Climate Change Refugees,” *America Magazine*, last modified March 30, 2021, accessed December 7, 2021, <https://www.americamagazine.org/politics-society/2021/03/30/pope-francis-climate-change-catholics-240345>.

²⁶ John R. Wennersten and Denise Robbins, *Rising Tides: Climate Refugees in the Twenty-First Century*, 30.

²⁷ Robert Stojanov, “Environmental Change and Migration,” in *Refugees Worldwide*, ed. Uma Anand Segal and Doreen Elliott (Santa Barbara, Calif: Praeger, 2012), 75.

drought, movement of pastoralists with livestock rises as they are forced to compete for scarce resources, causing conflicts between communities.²⁸ Consequently, famine perpetrated by climate change becomes the root cause of armed conflict between tribes and countries therein.

Surveys and international studies demonstrate that Africa has the lowest number of international migrants. Most of the migration movement remains within Africa; Africans consider international migration as a last resort. However, even if few Africans migrate compared to other continents, “Sub-Saharan Africa has the largest share of children among its migrant population- nearly one in three immigrants in Africa is a child, more than twice the global average.”²⁹ Furthermore, many migrant children originate in sub-Saharan Africa, pushed by adversities and desperation due to climate change and environmental degradation. These adversities and natural disasters need a thorough discussion and endeavor that allows a holistic response.

1.2. ANALYSIS OF THE ROOT CAUSES OF MIGRATION OF MINORS

The root causes of environmental migration that concerns Africa includes environmental degradation, colonialism and neocolonialism, neo-liberalism, and capitalism, the technological paradigm, human trafficking, a sexual exploitation mindset, and gender inequality. I will briefly discuss each root cause in describing the background and historic injustices surrounding it.

²⁸ John R. Wennersten and Denise Robbins, *Rising Tides: Climate Refugees in the Twenty-First Century*, 142.

²⁹ Emily Garin, *Uprooted: The Growing Crisis for Refugee and Migrant Children* (New York, NY: United Nations Children’s Fund, 2016), 55.

1.2.1. Environmental Crisis and Related Issues

The causes of forced migration of minors are primarily environmental and economic, but they also relate to the deep anthropological and cultural crisis, hegemonic imperialism, poverty, and colonial education. As argues Ogenga Otunnu, millions of ecological and environmental migrants are overshadowed and largely invisible due to existing political violence, poverty, civil wars, and underdevelopment. He shows that “every year hundreds of thousands of Africans are displaced as a result of deforestation, land degradation, floods, droughts, famines, mining, the destruction caused by locusts, creation, and expansion of conservation reserves, construction of dams, lumbering, earthquakes, global warming and expansion of desertification.”³⁰ The environmental crisis is so devastating that it has led to a decline in food production, which subsequently led to insecurity in Africa. For example, the 2020 Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) report on food losses associated with frost, drought, and floods in the sub-Saharan countries stated that 2.1 million people in Somalia, 1.1 million in Ethiopia, 0.875 million in Sudan, 0.856 million in South Sudan, 0.85 million in Kenya, 0.85 million in Burundi, 0.7 million in Congo, and 0.175 million in Djibouti are affected by climate change and food insecurity.³¹ Given these numbers, one can perceive the alarming catastrophe caused by environmental degradation. This problem, affecting the aforementioned sub-Saharan countries, is a reality that affects both the poor and indigenous people of the continent. More than twenty-five million environmental refugees are not considered in the debate

³⁰ Ogenga Otunnu, “Root Causes of Forced Migration in Africa,” in *Religious and Ethical Perspectives on Global Migration*, ed. Elizabeth W. Collier and Charles R. Strain (Lanham, Maryland; Lexington Books, 2014), 68.

³¹ *Crop Prospects and Food Situation #2, July 2020* (FAO, 2020), accessed December 7, 2021, <http://www.fao.org/documents/card/en/c/ca9803en>.

about climate-related policymaking.³² This overwhelming situation had ended in forcing thousands of people to migrate, *en masse* or individually.

1.2.2. Colonialism and Neocolonialism

Melanie L. Harris argues that there exists an inseparable link between the environmental crisis and colonialism or ecological colonialism. The contemporary narrative focuses on the age of the industrial enlightenment revolution, but the environmental degradation goes back to Europeans' invasion of African land. Before colonialism, the sacredness of Africa's lands had no negative or exploitative stereotype, and Africans found themselves closer to nature. The impact of colonization consisted of undermining Africans' beliefs in environmental and spiritual forces, the destruction of the myths of the tribes, and discouragement to believe in their tradition.³³ During the colonial era, the destruction of the environment, and its consequences on the lives of the indigenous, started because of the exploitation of the land, which created microclimates that impacted on the population. The emphasis on economic income (within a liberal worldview) motivated the exploitation of the land, which lead to the desacralization of cultural and indigenous beliefs in a holistic interconnection of all lives on the earth.³⁴ In the history of colonialization, the relationship between humanity and nature changed at the arrival of the colonizer. During the colonial era, the earth was understood through the lens of

³² Cynthia D Moe-Lobeda, "Climate Change as Climate Debt: Forging a Just Future," *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 36, no. 1 (2016): 27–49.

³³ Melanie L. Harris, *Ecowomanism, Religion, and Ecology* (Leiden; Brill, 2017), 20-30.

³⁴ Martin S. Shanguhya, "Colonialism and the African Environment," in *The Palgrave Handbook of African Colonial and Postcolonial History*, ed. Martin S. Shanguhya & Toyin Falola (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 43-65.

exploitation, a resource for human masters. The creation narratives of Christianity were interpreted to affirm humanity's dominance over living and non-living objects.

Cynthia Moe Lobeda depicts this exploitative relationship to the land stating that “many voices of the Global South recognize this as climate colonialism and situate it as a continuation of the colonialism that enabled the Global North to enrich itself for five centuries.”³⁵ Climate colonialism persists due to the blindness of climate privilege, which monopolizes decision-making on how to frame the problem of climate change and monopolizes solutions as to how it must be remedied.

Colonialism was so devastating that it did not only exploit the land, but also other members of humanity. The ecological crisis emerged from a colonizing worldview or paradigm in which people and the planet were perceived as resources to exploit and advance the wellbeing of a select minority in the West. This stereotype and colonial perspectives are still internalized in the minds of minors. In fact, the human attitude towards the earth portrays how humans consider themselves the master of other creatures. There are human aspects of violence, power, and domination in exploiting the earth portrayed in the harm we inflict on it. The harm is primarily because of excessive human activity and power on creation. However, the degradation of the earth is the destruction of human beings. It is in this way that anthropological colonialism views people as instrument rather than human beings.

Elisabeth Giovanni, in her ethnography, ethnohistory study based on oral interviews with migrant minors from Africa, relates the root causes of migration to the cultural hegemony of the West that surrounds migrants' minds. She argues that “the diasporic trip,

³⁵ Cynthia D Moe-Lobeda, “Climate Change as Climate Debt,” 50-60.

in fact, is finalized to reach a better life and realize the economic mandate as result of a family decision. The improvement of living conditions is the reason that mainly pushes minors to migrate.”³⁶ This brings the other deep root cause of migration of minors in Africa, which is the impact of Neoliberalism. Families and minors have lost hope and confidence in their land and in their capacities to improve their own life conditions, thinking neoliberalism is the only ideal of development.

1.2.3. The Impact of Neoliberal Capitalism on Environmental Crisis

The relationship between neoliberalism and environmental exploitation is another root cause of environmental degradation. Joyce Ann Mercer, who has extensively done research in developing countries, argues that economic neocolonialism is another root cause of ecological and environmental degradation because neo-colonialism has fostered the modern anthropocentrism that praises technology over the wellbeing of creatures.³⁷ Economic activities, the trade of goods, and consumerism have contributed to the growth of carbon emissions. Because of the economic benefits, the multinational corporations and Northern countries fall into climate change denial and exercise their imperialism over the southern countries that consume carbon dioxide.³⁸

The practice of capitalism is demonstrated in the eastern Congo, where the root cause of environmental degradation through mining creates human injustice in global

³⁶ Elisabetta Di Giovanni, “Separated Children’s Migration in the Mediterranean Sea. An Ethnohistorical Perspective,” *Collegium antropologicum* 40, no. 3 (October 21, 2016): 165–169, accessed December 1, 2021, https://hrcak.srce.hr/index.php?show=clanak&id_clanak_jezik=266286.

³⁷ Joyce Ann Mercer, “Environmental Activism in the Philippines : A Practical Theological Perspective,” in *Planetary Solidarity: Global Women’s Voices on Christian Doctrine and Climate Justice*, ed. Grace Ji-Sun Kim (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 2017), 302-320.

³⁸ Michael Northcott, *A Moral Climate: The Ethics of Global Warming*, Politics and the Environment (London: Darton, Longman & Todd LTD, 2007), 20-33.

climate change. There is a rise of migrants leaving the land because of the international companies' extraction of the land. Although those people mostly the indigenous are victims of the natural resources mining, they never receive due care or compensation from the companies. As Northcott argues, "the neoliberal phase of modern capitalism has seen multinational corporations move many of their operations to places where they can achieve the lowest wage rates, where they pay the lowest taxes, and where environmental regulations are minimal or non-existent."³⁹ Northcott links the global economy and neocolonialism with the poverty of the poor and children arguing that "neoliberalism has advanced both human and environmental degradation that enforce family poverty."⁴⁰ The rich want to be richer and make the poor poorer. Though there is debate on climate change in western countries, the stakeholders tend to forget the climate population that is the victim of these changes. The ironic situation on the Mediterranean Sea in which the victims of environmental degradation, primarily children, are dying on the Mediterranean Sea while multinationals create economic wealth on the blood of the poor is an illustration of capitalism and the technocratic approach. In fact, capitalism is interrelated with industrialization, both of which tend to focus on development and forget the environmental and human crisis.

1.2.4. The Technological Paradigm

The technocratic paradigm constitutes another root cause of the ecological and environmental crisis. Technological progress and modern anthropocentrism have praised

³⁹ Michael Northcott, *A Moral Climate: The Ethics of Global Warming*, Politics, and the Environment (London: Darton, Longman & Todd LTD, 2007), 35.

⁴⁰ Michael Northcott, *A Moral Climate: The Ethics of Global Warming*, Politics, and the Environment , 36.

technology over the wellbeing of creation. Thus, technology has brought us to the crossroads at which technoscience is more treasured than the protection of creation.⁴¹ Conversely, the industrial revolution cannot be separated from the western understanding and interpretation of nature.⁴² The technocratic paradigm needs an approach in the modern world because, on one hand, we can appreciate the benefits of technology which has allowed us to explore our God-given creativity in looking for solutions that alleviate poverty and disease and enhance the quality of life for so many people.⁴³ On the other hand, our control and manipulation of nature have led us seeing it as a mere external object to be used to fulfill our needs.⁴⁴ Technology is meant to serve human and environmental wellbeing and is not an end in itself. The technocratic paradigm results from a skewed focus on technological progress to profit without concern for potential negative impacts on humans and nature. The technocratic paradigm affected daily life and human relations. Instrumental rationality prevails in our vocabulary when we use euphemisms like human resources instead of employees and livestock instead of animals. Instrumentality indeed connects many of the roots we have considered to capitalism, and we treat places, resources, and people as interchangeable and replaceable; the same can be said about human and social injustices issues.

⁴¹ Pope Francis, *Laudato Si*, 100-122.

⁴² Northcott, *A Moral Climate*, 34-35.

⁴³ Pope Francis, *Laudato Si*, 102-104.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 106.

1.2.5. Political and structural Injustices

The local political failure to ensure an integral development that protect and care for both human beings and creation is another root cause leading to environmental degradation and consequently to migration. Gus Speth regrets that climate impacts are now inevitable and due measure is not taken because of the poor political leadership. He calls for unprecedented measures to address the environmental degradation. He argues that it will be difficult for a democracy to act against climate change if it is still operating in the neo-liberalism and economy's shadow. We need a paradigm shift in the local political system.⁴⁵ There is an urgency of taking actions to resolve the environmental degradation that the political will need to provide in changing the structural injustices. Because of the economics and selfishness interest, the politics have forgotten the cultural heritage that cares for the environmental and less privileged (migrants). Those cultural values are threatened by structural injustice entertained by local and regional political and economic powers that impoverish the people in a way that some resort to violence, others migrate because of environment degradation.

1.2.6. Human Tracking, and Sexual Exploitation

There is an intersection between natural resource exploitation, environmental degradation, and sexual exploitation. In the eastern Congo, known for its natural resources and its soil, there is double exploitation of the environment and women in the form of embodied violation and domination. In the mines, it is not only minerals that are exploited but women and minors's rights are also violated. Hilda Koster's work illuminates the

⁴⁵ Gus Speth, "Stress Test: Democracy Confronts Climate Change," *TheNextSystem.Org*, accessed April 17, 2022, <https://thenextsystem.org/learn/stories/stress-test-democracy-confronts-climate-change>.

connection between fracking, natural resources exploitation, and children/ women sexual and body exploitation that reveals the background on abuses of power and violations. The exploitation of the earth is not different from other human exploitation of the bodies but mainly the abuses of children and women. Environmental degradation and migration are driven by a structural social sin and structural evils that prevent the love of God and the life of creatures from flourishing.⁴⁶ The intersection of women/children's exploitation and environmental exploitation is worldwide. There is a joint violation of both the bodies and the earth.⁴⁷ Solidarity requests that we include those who are most affected by the exploitation in the policy-making process, but women are left out in the decision-making process.

The exploitation and degradation of the environment arise from the same hyper-masculine culture of conquest and domination. The United Nations highlights that gender inequality is a hallmark of environmental degradation, migration, and gendered vulnerability. The fact is that we are not all equally affected by environmental degradation. People have been affected according to their geographical location, social status, access, and control over resources mostly because of gender and age status. Environmental degradation in sub-Saharan Africa tends to affect women and children more for many reasons. First, women and children are highly dependent on natural resources and perpetually in contact with the natural world. In fact, in sub-Saharan Africa, women and children are the ones who gather water, fuel, food, and many other materials concerning

⁴⁶ Hilda P. Koster, "Trafficked Lands: Sexual Violence, Oil, and Structural Evil in the Dakotas," in *Planetary Solidarity: Global Women's Voices on Christian Doctrine and Climate Justice*, ed. Grace Ji-Sun Kim (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 2017), 156-170.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.

domestic activities as they are the main producers and at the same time the sellers of food crops. Second, women and children do not have access to land ownership, and loans as equally as men. Third, they are excluded from decision-making when processing the policies that affect their lives due to cultural, social, and economic boundaries. The United Nations development program affirms that women and children are the most affected by environmental degradation. Because women and children have disproportionately suffered different political, social, and economic deprivation, they are impacted by the effects of environmental degradation and have no means for adaptation. Thus, the only ultimate solution is migration.

1.3. HUMAN ASPECT OF THE CRISIS: PARADOX OF POVERTY AND MIGRATION

There is a crossroads between the alarming number of people affected by the environmental crisis, poverty, and migration that is seen in a “tragic rise in the number of migrants seeking to flee from the growing poverty aggravated by environmental degradation.”⁴⁸ The unavailability of land for farming, drying of rivers and lakes, and disappearance of forests has heightened the threat of hunger and poverty in Sub-Saharan Africa. Whenever climate scarcities impact the land, the number of migrants also increases. The World Bank report has revealed an increase in the number of migrants who are minors in sub-Saharan Africa, highlighting the fact that “natural disasters in many parts of the African continent have led to the displacement of innocent people, many of whom are

⁴⁸ Pope Francis, *Laudato Si*, No. 25.

minors.”⁴⁹ These natural disasters justify the rise of minors migrating through the Mediterranean Sea.

As most of the refugees and migrants are minors, they live at extremely high risk of death and trafficking as they face extreme material and economic deprivation, dislocation, and lack of education.⁵⁰ As reported by the World Bank, “Sub-Saharan Africa is the only major region in the world where the status of children has deteriorated in recent years.”⁵¹ Migration has always been in the fabric of humanity. People moved from place to place for the same reasons, such as economics, politics, religio-cultural conflicts. However, what differentiates the current migration crisis is its perpetual nature and that people are willing to migrate because of environmental disasters and despair in their capacities to change the course of disasters.⁵²

The local desperation and disempowerment to face the disasters and transform one’s environment reflect the historical dehumanization, the story of slavery, colonialism, neo-colonialism, and globalization that enforces what Engelbert Mveng calls “anthropological poverty.”⁵³ He defines anthropological poverty is a broad way arguing that it is “when

⁴⁹ Nat J Colletta, Jayshree Balachander, and Xiaoyan Liang, *The Condition of Young Children in Sub-Saharan Africa: The Convergence of Health, Nutrition, and Early Education*, World Bank Technical Papers (The World Bank, 1996), 6-11.

⁵⁰ Hein De Haas, Stephen Castles, Mark Miller, *The Age of Migration: International Population Movements in the Modern World*, 205-207.

⁵¹ Nat J Colletta, Jayshree Balachander, and Xiaoyan Liang, *The Condition of Young Children in Sub-Saharan Africa*, 13.

⁵² Jonas Ostergaard Nielsen, “I am Staying! Climate Variability and Circular Migration in Burkina Faso,” in *Environmental Change and African Societies*, ed. Ingo Haltermann and Julia Tischler, Climate and culture, volume 5 (Leiden; Brill, 2020), 123.

⁵³ Engelbert Mveng, *L’Afrique dans l’Eglise: paroles d’un croyant* (Paris: Editions L’Harmattan, 1986), 203.

persons are deprived not only of goods and possessions of a material, spiritual, moral, intellectual, cultural or sociological order, but of everything that makes up the foundation of their being-in-the-world and the specificity of their ‘ipseity’ as individual, society and history.”⁵⁴ This kind of poverty is not a material poverty or possession but concerns the impoverishment of the person in the world and his human dignity. The anthropological pauperization is still a hindrance for youth to own and determine their destiny. Thus, the environmental issue as a universal phenomenon coupled with human and anthropological poverty are at the deep core of migration. Migration theories identify push and pull factors that prompt migrants to leave their land and the pull factors that bring migrants to Europe.

1.3.1. The push factors

The foremost push factors are related to environmental degradation and factors connected to life of families, primarily for children in Africa who cannot cope with the disasters. These environmental disasters make home unbearable, pushing minors to international migration for what is seen as a safer alternative. Robert Stojanov supports the idea of environmental degradation as a push factor, arguing that “environmental change seems to be one of the crucial factors for current and future development and an important push factor for population movement in Sub-Saharan Africa.”⁵⁵ Other severe environmental pollution and current catastrophes related to ecological disasters include

⁵⁴ Engelbert Mveng, “Impoverishment and Liberation: A Theological Approach for Africa and the Third World,” in *Paths of African Theology*, ed. Rosino Gibellini (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 1994), 156.

⁵⁵ Robert Stojanov, “Environmental Change and Migration,” in *Refugees Worldwide*, ed. Uma Anand Segal and Doreen Elliott (Santa Barbara, Calif: Praeger, 2012), 72.

climate change, desertification, and loss of diversities that constitute a motive for children to take the Mediterranean route.⁵⁶

1.3.2. The pull factors

Globalization and industrial development attract unaccompanied minor migrants to more developed countries. There are economic factors and markets that pull minors as they feel they can easily earn their living and support their families back home. Technological development and the labor market motivate people to move for a better life. Likewise, peer pressure and social media networks push minors to migrate when their friends post images on Facebook, and others social media. The phenomenon of migrant minors connected to a network of friends, and sometimes smugglers, who ensure a safe journey incite minors to migrate.⁵⁷ This social network has increased peer pressure on minors and their families. European and African media selectively show the positive aspects of Europe, seldom revealing the actual situation and challenges of people living overseas.

This interconnected and nourishing hopes can be demonstrated in the story of migrants. I have picked three sets of stories among many others that show the adversities and difficulties of the journey. Some make the journey to Europe, others return or die on the route to Europe, still others reach Europe but do not adapt and look for means to return to their countries. In fact, many migrants who have reached Europe suffer even more because they are forced to live as if they were slaves. Many find more poverty than that they had in

⁵⁶ Pope Benedict XVI, *Message for the Celebration of World Day Peace* (Nairobi: Paulines, 2010), 2.

⁵⁷ Pietro Alfano et al., “Image et Culture Dans La Prise En Charge de Mineurs Isoles Etrangers/Image and Culture in the Care of Unaccompanied Minor Refugees,” *Evolution psychiatrique* 83, no. 4 (2018): 557-578.

their countries. These stories play a pedagogical role in showing the dangerous and perilous journey that is to be avoided.

1.4.VOICES OF MIGRANTS

Minors migrating represent an overall diversified background. Although their destination looks the same, *id est* reaching Europe, their background and original motivation as well as the road to migration totally differ. This section brings the voices and testimony of minors who suffered, died on the way, or returned because of the hardship of living abroad without immigration documents. These voices represent three kinds of migrants: migrants in the first category are those who reach their destination after suffering and hardship on the road. They still suffer in the host country but cannot go back. The second category represents those who will never reach their destination and may die on the road. The third category represents those who reach their destination but cannot adapt because of hardship and discrimination in the host country.

1.4.1. The stories of twin brothers Aimamo and Ibrahim.

Twin brothers Aimamo and Ibrahim Jawnoh left their village of Kombu Brikam in the Gambia after their father divorced their mother. Left with little agricultural means to support her children, the boys' mother sent them on the journey to Europe to work and send money home. She introduced them to a man who agreed to help them. Their journey was paid for through labor upon arrival in Libya. Aimamo and Ibrahim traveled from the Gambia to Senegal, then on to Niger, where they stopped in the desert near the city of Agadez. From there, the brothers were shuttled onto a flatbed truck along with other refugees and migrants from West Africa.⁵⁸

They were arrested and jailed in Seba because they did not have proper documentation. They were beaten every day in the prison until the driver (smuggler) paid money. Once in Tripoli, Libya, they were brought to a farm for manual labor. They joined

⁵⁸ Emily Garin, *Uprooted: The Growing Crisis for Refugee and Migrant Children*, 94.

more than 200 African children working on the same farm in what looked like the slave trade. After months working on a farm, they were given a location where they could board a boat in the middle of the nights. "It was very uncomfortable, but at least we had open-air," said Aimamo. The engine cut out several times in the middle of the sea until they were rescued by a European Coastguard and taken to the Italian island, Lampedusa. They were taken to the governmental shelter for unaccompanied minors, where they were provided with the necessities of life. At least they can call their mother back home.⁵⁹

Aimamo and Ibrahim represent a success story for all unaccompanied migrant minors who dream of reaching Europe, despite the suffering and perilous journey. Despite facing jail, forced labor, horror on the sea, and the unavailability of cash and work to support their mother, the twins feel they have realized their dream and are still hopeful about the future. The following case represents the many unrecorded death cases on the perilous journey.

1.4.2. Two bothers and the memory of loss

Amadou Osmane realized the dangers of the journey and decided to turn back. Amadou Ousmane started off his journey with his younger brother. They sold all the cattle of their fathers, promising to pay them back. On the way of migration Amadou lost his brother, who died of fatigue and hunger at the hands of smugglers in the Sahara Desert. After this dramatic experience, he decided to return to his father's land. It was challenging, and he needed to undergo psychological accompaniment and rehabilitation. He has now started his own business, and he is doing well in Senegal. He reached the point in which his experience taught him that salvation is at home.⁶⁰ This situation that creates an

⁵⁹ Emily Garin, *Uprooted*, 94.

⁶⁰ Alain Foka, FRANCE 24, *Migrants Africains : L'Europe à Tout Prix ?* • FRANCE 24, 2021, accessed December 1, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fkc3-UFSOIQ>.

awareness of danger and triggers a traumatic memory is a lesson for other minors attempting the dangerous road. It shows that, despite the difficult in the home countries, the best way to survive is to be creative in the home country. In fact, the money that migrants pay to smugglers and traffickers is so huge that it can start a small business in the home countries, as the following story of Bora Kasongo demonstrates in the following lines.

1.4.3. Bora Kasongo: A story of return

The other life experience is that Bora Kasongo, a female graduate student from the Democratic Republic of the Congo who hoped that the journey to Europe would change her life and the lives of her family members. After the perilous journey, which involved rape, trauma, and many sufferings she finally reached Europe. After two years in Europe without papers, shelter, or work, she bitterly decided to return home. She uses her own stories to convince other young people that migration is not the solution. Although she is still struggling to find an official job in the Congo, she has started a small project and organization that sells fruit-trees to people to help solve the problem of environmental degradation. She says that she feels there is no place like home. She is still hopeful that life will be better in the Congo and regrets her time she lost attempting to migrate.

The lives of the twin brothers Aimamo and Ibrahim, Amadou Ousmane and Bora Kasongo reveal that migration is not the solution to the environmental degradation. The situation of environmental degradation is worsened by the lack of agency among poor people to handle proper diagnosis and treatment of the health challenges that result from the environmental crisis. The environmental crisis ought to prompt our human nature to express its side of creativity and initiative. At the same time, it calls upon human beings to take responsibility and extend generosity towards people who have left their homes

because they can no longer go on with their livelihoods safely, as their environment has been destroyed.

These three cases show that the future and well-being of minors on the move demand that they should not always be regarded as helpless victims, powerless minors in need of backings, or mere beneficiaries of aid and gift. Instead, they should be allowed to use their capacities, talents, and abilities to be part of the solution and empowered to a level where they will build personal confidence and become self-sufficient. These resilient methods build hope and confidence to address their challenges in difficult future moments. Thus, minors will take responsibility and become the owners of the solutions for their well-being.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I described the social analysis of unaccompanied minors' migration in three parts. The first postulates an overview on migration and environmental degradation in Sub-Saharan Africa by providing some historical background of the crisis. It also exposes the fact in terms of numbers of people suffering from the crisis. The second part exposes the root causes of environmental crisis; colonialism, capitalism and neocolonialism, the technocratic paradigm, and social injustices comprehended as components of exploitation as they are revealed in the exploitation of the bodies of women and children. The third part reflect on the intersection between environmental degradation and poverty by examining the push and pull factors of immigration. The fourth part interprets the testimonies of minor migrants from different perspectives, mainly those who reach Europe, those who return and those who die on the way. In overview, I have shown the complexities of the problem under study in this case.

Environmental degradation, deforestation, air pollution, water pollution, and disturbances of the natural world are just some of the apparent environmental crises of our time. The emergence of these environmental hazards, risks, and disasters leads us to an understanding of the climate refugee crisis mainly for the sake of future generation. This Environmental degradation as the root cause of migration, needs an immediate response.

Traditional African hospitality operated so that migrants' needs were satisfactorily responded to. Nelson Mandela explains the concept of Ubuntu concerning migrants by observing that, “a traveler through our country would stop at a village, and he did not have to ask for food or water. Once he stops, the people give him food, entertain him. That is one aspect of Ubuntu, but Ubuntu has various aspects.”⁶¹ In traditional cultural behaviors, foreigners are welcomed, and they are given a particular space in the clan while they are allowed to remain with their own culture and identity. The host, therefore, provided land to grow food and settle their flock. Migration was not a threat, but rather a blessing because the guest contributed to the development of the hosts. Besides, the cultural exchange opened new horizons for both the hosts and guests.⁶² I will discuss this cultural philosophy and ethics that welcome and accommodate everybody in the following chapter.

⁶¹ Hanneke Stuit, *Ubuntu Strategies: Constructing Spaces of Belonging in Contemporary South African Culture* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 25-26.

⁶² Victor Adangba, "Jesuits' Concern for Migration and Development in West Africa," in *Migration in and out of Africa: Jesuit Ministry Outlook*, ed. Rigobert Minani Bihuzo (Nairobi: Paulines, 2015), 34-46.

Chapter Two: UBUNTU ETHICS: A RESPONSE TO ENVIRONMENTAL MIGRANTS

Introduction

Environmental degradation factors are at the nexus of the social crisis facing sub-Saharan Africa, which in human terms manifests itself through the flow of environmental migration. Apart from the environmental degradation there are factors related to political and economic crises. However, for specificity and focus, this chapter will emphasize on the issue of environmental degradation and migration by exploring Ubuntu in relation to its principles of interconnectedness (interdependence), anthropology (humanness) and hospitality (solidarity). The Dicastery for promoting integral Human Development emphasizes the interconnectedness and global response to environment degradation, arguing that, “a global ethic of solidarity and cooperation in the service of a future shaped by interdependence and shared responsibility in the whole human family,”⁶³ is needed to respond to climate and environmental degradation. This chapter will display how the above-mentioned principles help to curb the environmental-migration crisis in Sub-Saharan Africa through Ubuntu.

This chapter explores the contribution of *Ubuntu Ethics* as a response to the climate migrants. Ubuntu ethics originate from African languages, and are summarized in the saying, “I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am.”⁶⁴ It explains that the individual can only become conscious of his living by participating and improving the lives of other creatures. Ubuntu emphasizes interconnectedness, relationality and

⁶³ Holy Sea Press Office, “Pastoral Guidelines on Climate Displaced People,” accessed December 7, 2021, <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2021/03/30/210330b.html>.

⁶⁴ John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (London: Heinemann, 1969), 141.

interdependence between human beings and nature. I argue that the Ubuntu concepts of interconnectedness (interdependence), anthropological and solidarity dimension of all creation, which this ethics emphasizes, provides a new way of living together, welcoming migrants, and doing so in an environmentally sustainable way. The ecological and migration crises facing the Sub-Saharan Africa world cannot be envisaged in an individualistic way; instead, it should be responded to globally with a mindset of interconnectedness, interdependence, humanness, and solidarity with other creatures. There is no real existence on the earth without symbiotic and synchronous relationships with our environment and other creatures. Humanity and natural world have an intrinsic link and are bound together. As I will show it in the body of the chapter, in my culture of Bahavu and among the Bashi and Hutu, for instance, birth and death have a connection with the tree, other creatures, and the cosmic elements in general.

Many African authors have studied Ubuntu ethics. I have extensively explored the ideas and insights of Laurenti Magesa, John Mbiti, Bénézet Bujo who have pondered on the African traditional wisdom to explain Ubuntu ethics in relationship with interconnected and hospitality between all the creatures. Some readers may argue that their usage of Ubuntu ethics sound as more idealized for modern African scholars and readers who have never experienced in a tangible way traditional Ubuntu ethics in their own lives. Some authors such as Odozor and Katongole give a criticism of African ethics using some negative cultural heritages that offer a more balanced view of African ethics and Ubuntu in particular. Odozor and Katongole analyzing the novel of Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart* question the beliefs that African tradition and cultural heritage is that of abundant life. Speaking from the angle of tribal war in Africa and real life Odozor argues that “the

assumption that African tradition is straightforwardly one of abundant life is certainly not shared by a character like Clara in Chinua Achebe's *No Longer at Ease* or by many other groups or persons in African societies who are classified as nonpersons in the view of African traditional religious beliefs."⁶⁵ She concludes that we cannot only praise the African tradition because it has its weakness. We cannot ignore the sinful aspect and challenges that the African cultural ethics is facing in modern world. Katongole argues that Chinua Achebe in *Things Fall Apart* displays "the power and violence that shape both the traditional life of Okonkwo's Umuofia village as well as the colonial regime that seeks to civilize and evangelize the village... *Things Fall Apart* is not merely nostalgic musings about the violent (colonial) disruption of a peaceful order (traditional society)."⁶⁶ Thus Africa culture and tradition has the negative aspect where the weak and innocent were sacrificed. However, I will demonstrate in the next points, their criticisms do not diminish the relevancy of Ubuntu as a cultural and ethical value of Africa.

Conversely, Kwame Bediako in elaborating the perspectives that need attention in the twenty first century argues that African theologians should work on reestablishing the cultural heritage of Africa. Whatever the theological journey and discourse, the task of this theology is not about "indigenizing Christianity or theology" but "it is about telling Christians how the Gospel and Christianity can be shaped by the African experience. The question of what Africans Christians can do with their faith and commitment should be the criteria of developing Christian discourse and thoughts. It is about constructing a living

⁶⁵ Paulinus Ikechukwu Odozor, *Morality Truly Christian, Truly African: Foundational, Methodological, and Theological Considerations* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2014), 85-86.

⁶⁶ Emmanuel Katongole, *The Sacrifice of Africa: A Political Theology for Africa*, The Eerdmans Ekklesia series (Grand Rapids, Mich: W.B. Eerdmans Pub, 2011), 126-127.

experience of Christian and theology.”⁶⁷ Magesa argues that African ethics need a reevaluation of the legacy of missionaries’ catholic ethics. This re-evaluation should consider the acceptable ethical morals principle that missionaries rejected. He says that all cultures are imperfect in one way or another. However, when the culture meets with the Gospel it needs purification and cultural transformation. Among the cultural values that goes with Gospel values, Magesa enumerate the following: the spiritual view of life, the permanent presence of God, respect of human dignity, the sense of family and community of universe.⁶⁸

Accordingly, authors like Desmond Tutu, Magobe Ramose, Munyaradzi Murove and Aida-Terblanche provides another way of living and implementing Ubuntu in a modern world by confronting Ubuntu ethics with our sub-Saharan Africa puzzles and problems. I will exploit their insights on interconnectedness and hospitality to advance and explain my argument and reckon on Aylward Shorter’s conception of organic universe that argues for an anthropological restoration. But I will take a different perspective that can be considered as new insight on anthropological restoration of all the creatures. Thus, I will use the anthropological, interconnectedness and hospitality dimensions of Ubuntu ethics to show how it can be used to end the climate migration crisis.

Both the ethical view and the cultural heritage of Ubuntu portray the interconnectedness, interdependence, and anthropological worldview that we want to explore in this thesis. Bénézet Bujo puts it beautifully when he argues that “the cosmic

⁶⁷ Kwame Bediako, *Jesus, and the Gospel in Africa: History and Experience* (New York: Orbis Books, 2004), 52-57.

⁶⁸ Antonio Autiero, ed., “Catholic Ethics and the Construction of Social Reality in Contemporary Africa.,” in *The Catholic Ethicist in the Local Church*, Catholic theological ethics in the world church series 6 (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2018), 119.

community itself, including all beings, not just animals, is the essential foundation of African ecological ethics... Total realization of the self is impossible without peaceful co-existence with minerals, plants, and animals.”⁶⁹ Ubuntu’s perspective of interconnectedness intertwines with ethical and cultural values; implementing the spirit of care and respect for all creation. The *raison d’être* of all creation is a complementarity in co-existence that instills harmony on earth.⁷⁰ There is a continuation and self-support of all the forces in creation. These cosmic forces sustain creation, without which human beings cannot stand against the different forces that attempt to destroy life. The interrelationship between the cosmic and divine forces sustains life on the earth altogether. None among the forces can claim its independence from the others because, alone, it is impotent.

In this chapter we will explore three main parts. The first part explores the foundation of Ubuntu and its belief in interconnectedness, hospitality, and anthropology. It fleshes out, the response of Ubuntu ethics in the ongoing crisis of the sub-Saharan Africa. The second part displays the relationship between Catholic Social Teachings and Ubuntu ethics in studying the principle of Human dignity and respect for God’s creation. The third part uses the cultural practice of Ubuntu such as the burying of the placenta, the totemic beliefs, the tales, and myths to demonstrate how these cultural heritages can be expended to foster the interconnectedness, hospitality, and anthropological dimension among creatures.

⁶⁹ Bénédet Bujo, “Ecology and Ethical Responsibility from an African Perspective,” in *African Ethics: An Anthology of Comparative and Applied Ethics*, ed. Munyaradzi Felix Murove (Scottsville, South Africa: University of Kwazulu-Natal Press, 2009), 296.

⁷⁰ Thomas Berry, *The Great Work: Our Way into the Future* (New York: Bell Tower, 1999), 4.

2.1. The Foundation and Distinctiveness of Ubuntu Ethics

Ubuntu ethics, which incorporates the traditional African worldview, in its interconnectedness, hospitality and anthropological aspects will be used in this chapter as a new moral authority that can provide ethical, practical resources and perspectives to counter the ecological migrants' crisis. The interconnectedness and anthropological dimensions of Ubuntu will be depicted separately to highlight their contribution and particularity that responds to the crisis. It offers principles on how to welcome foreigners, strangers, migrants and at the same time how to incorporate the care for the environment in ethical and theological perspectives.

One of the essences of Ubuntu ethics is defined by Desmond Tutu, who testifies that “a person with Ubuntu (with full humanity) is open and available to others, affirming of others, does not feel threatened that others are able and good.”⁷¹ For linguistic illustration, the word "Ubuntu" has a different meaning in every African language, yet each definition harkens back to the same root of interconnectedness and humanness. For example, “Ubuntu is *Umunthu* in Chewa, *Umundu* in Yawo, *Bunhu* in Tsonga, *Unhu* in Shona, *Botho* in Sotho or Tswana, *Umntu* in Zulu, *Vhutu* in Venda, *Ubuntu* in Xhosa and Ndebele, etc.”⁷² Magobe Ramose and Felix Murove's definition of Ubuntu “infuses both the ontological and interconnectedness dimensions of human existence that suggest inseparability between human existence and the natural environment. In other words, to be fully human is to be in

⁷¹ Desmond Mpilo Tutu, *No Future without Forgiveness* (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 34.

⁷² Richard Tambulasi and Happy Kayuni, “Ubuntu and Democratic Good Governance in Malawi, a Case Study,” in *African Ethics*, University of Kwazulu-Natal Press. (Scottsville, South Africa, 2010), 427-428.

relation with all that constitutes existence.”⁷³ Thus, the environment is a complex reality because our environment isn't only associated with everything but contains everything in a network of relationships within it and it embraces the interconnected-interdependence that guarantees the wellbeing of every creature. This Interconnectedness and interdependence of all creatures is a focal point of what constitutes Ubuntu Ethics as I will highlight in the following point.

2.1.1. Interconnectedness- interdependence with creation and nature

The maxim of Ubuntu, “I am because we are, therefore we are because I am”, expresses the interconnectivity and true relationship among creatures. This interconnectedness is present not only in the same humanity we share as individuals in the community but also it is demonstrated in the connectedness of all creatures through visible and invisible interactions of power, life force, invisible forces and energy of the deceased found in the natural world. Thus, interconnectedness and interdependence express the universal existence of creatures and a holistic conception of the world. As Workineh kelbessa describes it, “Ubuntu and traditional African worldviews also recognize the interconnection between the natural and supernatural.... currently living human and nonhuman beings, ancestors, the yet unborn, and the natural world are interconnected.”⁷⁴ In this tempo of interconnectedness every creature finds its place in the ethical, humanistic understanding of the worldview.

⁷³ Munyaradzi Felix Murove, "An African Environmental Ethic Based on the Concepts of Ukama and Ubuntu," in *African Ethics*, ed. Felix Murove, 322-323.

⁷⁴ Workineh Kelbessa, “Indigenous Environmental Philosophy,” in *The Oxford Handbook of World Philosophy*, Oxford Handbooks (Oxford University Press, 2011), 569-570.

From its Swahili origin, the term Ubuntu encompasses many things that cannot be restricted to human beings. Thus, its broader sense includes not only human beings, but also nonhumans and the entire natural world. Puleng Bula puts it right when he argues that “no person is complete in him/herself; s/he is fully human in as far as s/he remains a part of the web of life, including creation and the earth.”⁷⁵ Nature in general, and one’s environment, make a person fully human. Without other creatures, human beings cannot exist. In addition, Aïda C. Terblanché stated that “it is apparent that a person wanting to attain Ubuntu should strive to become a person through relationships with others—humans (past, present, and future generations), nonhumans, and the natural environment.”⁷⁶ This communal relationship can be a global partnership on the issue of environmental justice. The symbiosis of community needs to come together to respond to the challenges of the environmental crisis. The action and vision for the natural world cannot exclude future generations and other creatures that need a clean environment.

Given this interconnectedness, one understands that the violence and exploitation of the ecosystem are the violence and exploitation toward the people and all creatures who depend on the environment. The well-being and safety of many individuals and communities rely on the well-being of the ecosystem. Leocadie Lushombo puts it well when she argues that “each component of the living creatures matters for the survival of

⁷⁵ Puleng LenkaBula, “Beyond Anthropocentricity – Botho/Ubuntu and the Quest for Economic and Ecological Justice in Africa,” *Religion and Theology* 15, no. 3–4 (January 1, 2008): 375–394, accessed December 7, 2021, https://brill.com/view/journals/rt/15/3-4/article-p375_10.xml.

⁷⁶ Aïda C. Terblanché-Greeff, “Ubuntu and Environmental Ethics: The West Can Learn from Africa When Faced with Climate Change,” in *African Environmental Ethics*, ed. Munamoto Chemhuru, The International Library of Environmental, Agricultural and Food Ethics (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2019), 93–109.

the whole.”⁷⁷ Ubuntu Ethics is “an ethic of the interdependence and interconnectedness of individuals within the larger society to which they belong and to the environment on which they all depend.”⁷⁸ The African totem (which are animal representatives of an African’s tribe), legends, and tales are connected to the universe and express this interrelationship with other creatures as we shall concretely demonstrate it in the last part. This relationship is not in terms of hierarchy; instead, it is based on interdependence and interconnectedness. The Africans know that nature is sacred and worthy of protection because the destruction of nature is the destruction of life. African cultures believe that a harmonious life depends on nature. This African ethics is holistic in such a way that there is no dualism between the sacred and the secular or between the human and the natural world because “total realization of the self is impossible without peaceful co-existence with minerals, plants, and animals.”⁷⁹ The relationship of human beings with creation is physical, social, spiritual, and ethical at the same time.

The Ubuntu worldview affirms interconnectedness and interdependence, which is a good resource for the environmental and immigrant crisis insofar as it recognizes the “essential global unity of humankind and between the human race and its environment, the planet earth, has always been a core belief of Ubuntu philosophy.”⁸⁰ A Muntu or a person guided by Ubuntu embraces others with neither fear nor complications. The Muntu knows

⁷⁷ Leocadie Lushombo, “Deforestation in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Climate change: An Ethical Analysis in Light of Laudato si”, in *Asian Horizons*, Vol. 9, No. 4, December 2015, 724-740.

⁷⁸ Aïda C. Terblanché-Greeff, “Ubuntu and Environmental Ethics, 315.

⁷⁹ Benezet Bujo, “Ecology and Ethical Responsibility from an African Perspective,” 181-182.

⁸⁰ Leonard Tumaini Chuwa, “African Indigenous Ethics in Global Bioethics,” in *The Cambridge Handbook of Human Dignity: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, ed. Marcus Düwell, Jens Braarvig, and Roger Brownsword (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 5.

that he belongs to the web of life, needing harmony and interrelationship to survive and flourish. Ubuntu is lived through mutual recognition, care, welcome, communication and cooperation with the other and most especially the stranger.⁸¹ Thus, a person with Ubuntu is a person “who is generous and hospitable, who welcomes strangers to her house and table and cares for the needy, increases in vital force.”⁸² The welcoming of strangers is part of the whole narrative on interconnectedness and interdependence, but also it is particularly anchored in the ubuntu aspect of hospitality toward the strangers and foreigners.

2.1.2. Ubuntu’s Aspect of Hospitality

Hospitality is a cultural and ethical values for Africans. Among many other authors Magesa and Tutu illustrates how hospitality is an African cultural value and an ethical value of Ubuntu *per se*. Magesa argues, the whole concept of Ubuntu calls for a universal hospitality where all creatures co-habitat in a harmonious order.⁸³ This universal hospitality and communion are a lived experience of interconnectedness and interdependence whereby every creature finds a place to live and develop. In these perspectives, Ubuntu philosophy offers us a crucial tool with which to address the complexity of both ecological crisis and its impact on migration. Hospitality is a cross-cultural value that is practiced in many tribes as a communal habit.

Furthermore, African hospitality can be considered as an African and christian virtue. Thomas Aquinas and the Encyclopedia of Catholicism agree on the meaning of Virtue as “an enduring quality of character or intellect, through which an individual is enabled to act

⁸¹ Laurenti Magesa, *What Is Not Sacred? African Spirituality* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2013), 13.

⁸² Augustine Shutte, "Politics and the Ethics of Ubuntu," in *African Ethics*, 92.

⁸³ Benezet Bujo, “Ecology and Ethical Responsibility from an African Perspective,” 21.

in praiseworthy ways or to live a morally good life.”⁸⁴ Thus, as a continuous way of practice and being, it becomes a virtue of a good person and of a community. This virtuous hospitality is communitarian because it displays a moral aspect of individual and community of interdependence and interrelatedness. As James Brektzeke will argue, the virtue goes beyond the level of individuality to include a community *habitus* because “every moral agent lives in a community and a web of social relationships, these factors likewise furnish important considerations in virtue ethics analyses.”⁸⁵ The moral agent as a social and community being contribute and strengthen the various relationship in the community. Hospitality recognizes the care that should be given to all the creation because the creatures can only live a meaningful life if they accept to depend on one another.

This hospitality is so spontaneous that it does not require any formal invitation in one’s home. Whenever a neighbor and stranger come to a home even without invitation he is warmly welcomed and culturally celebrated. The visitor is celebrated and welcomed through rituals and not with empty word. As an illustration, in Ivory Coast and surrounding countries, upon arriving in a place, a visitor is welcomed by a glass of water and given seat before the community can ask him for news and the motif of his visitation. While in many countries of eastern African such as Uganda and Kenya, a visitor is given a coffee bean to chew and kolanut that symbolize his acceptance in the community before even the person can introduce himself to the community. Magesa explains hospitality as moral virtue and cultural heritage arguing that all creatures are hospital to each other and in their own ways.

⁸⁴ Richard P. McBrien and Harold W. Attridge, eds., *The HarperCollins Encyclopedia of Catholicism*, 1st ed. (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1995), 1316.

⁸⁵ James T. Bretzke, *Handbook of Roman Catholic Moral Terms* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2013), 246.

He speaks from the perspective of African village where hospitality and communion are the way of living. Katongole shows that the virtue of hospitality should shape all aspect of life in Africa arguing that, “in the end, the virtues of hospitality, care, and gentles offer an alternative to the competition for domination...”⁸⁶ Ubuntu ethics and African spirituality believes in the communion, hospitality, and coexistence among all the creatures.⁸⁷ This communion and hospitality if well implemented instill harmony not only in the land of migrant preventing minor from leaving their land but also it is applicable to the land of host. The mindset of exploitation and indifferent and separatism is what bring hostility and hatred. Migrant and Personhood should not be perceived as separated from the community rather they should be integrated in the community.

Traditional African hospitality operated so that migrants' needs were satisfactorily responded to. Nelson Mandela explains the concept of Ubuntu concerning hospitality by observing that, “a traveler through our country would stop at a village, and he did not have to ask for food or water. Once he stops, the people give him food, entertain him. That is one aspect of Ubuntu, but Ubuntu has various aspects.”⁸⁸ In traditional cultural behaviors, foreigners are welcomed, and they are given a particular space in the clan while they are allowed to remain with their own culture and identity. The host, therefore, provided land to grow food and settle their flock. Migration was not a threat rather a blessing because the

⁸⁶ Emmanuel Katongole, *The Sacrifice of Africa*, 130.

⁸⁷ Laurenti Magesa, *What Is Not Sacred? African Spirituality*, 170-180.

⁸⁸ Hanneke Stuit, *Ubuntu Strategies: Constructing Spaces of Belonging in Contemporary South African Culture* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 25-26.

guest contributed to the development; besides, the cultural exchange opened new horizons for both the hosts and guests.⁸⁹

How does Ubuntu ethics argue for the interdependence and interconnectedness of all creatures along with the principles of hospitality resembles what Jim Antal calls, “we are all in this together,” corroborated by the *Paris Climate Accord* as well as the declaration of Pope Francis and by the Ecumenical Patriarch, Bartholomew, who is the 270th archbishop of Constantinople (Eastern Orthodox Church).⁹⁰ The ethics of Ubuntu proposes the concept of hospitality and interrelatedness to overcome the dilemma of environmental and migration crisis. Ubuntu’s main claim states that the individual can only become conscious of his living by participating in the lives of other creatures.⁹¹ Ubuntu has great concern and respect for strangers and foreigners; rather than considering strangers as a threat, the principle of Ubuntu includes everybody in the society, especially the suffering. The welcoming of a stranger is a mark of the common humanity that we all share. Migrants hold a special place in African culture and Ubuntu philosophy because of “their deprived position, they (migrants) are given special treatment, such as being allocated land. Some also merge with the local people.”⁹² Laurenti Magesa opines that, “hospitality is the pivotal manifestation of Ubuntu. Current policies in various countries of the world's economically

⁸⁹ Victor Adangba, “Jesuits’ Concern for Migration and Development in West Africa,” in *Migration in and out of Africa: Jesuits Ministry Outlook*, ed. Rigobert Minani Bihuzo Bin Kakuru (Nairobi, Kenya: Paulines Publications Africa, 2015), 15.

⁹⁰ Jim Antal, *Climate Church, Climate World: How People of Faith Must Work for Change* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2018), 15.

⁹¹ John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 141.

⁹² Mluleki Munyaka and Mokgethi Motlhabi, “Ubuntu and Its Socio-Moral Significance,” in *African Ethics*, 75-80.

developed regions against immigration go directly against its spirit. So do xenophobic attitudes that seem to be gaining ground in some parts of the world.”⁹³ Hospitality is not only an African heritage, but rather a worldwide value that we find “among the major Abrahamic texts; the Torah, the Bible, and Qur’an, in their different ways, all describe a vulnerable stranger as either God or an instrument of God.”⁹⁴ This hospitality, which is such an integral part of Ubuntu, shows how creatures live because of the other and are dependent on the wellbeing of others. This co-habitation of all creatures underpins a peaceful living of creatures in such a way that each creature will care for the survival of the other creatures.

Ubuntu coordinates peaceful cohabitation among creatures (living and nonliving), but it is also concerned with strangers and foreigners who are also neighbors. Magesa argues that “Ubuntu is also a quality of groups and communities, in whom certain reputations of kindness, hospitality, and sharing are perceived.”⁹⁵ Among the Nyakyusa tribe, hospitality plays a vital role. Receiving strangers and sharing one's place and food is an honor for the family. Greed and isolation are not acceptable because they impede the communitarian purpose of the living community and ancestors. The Nyakyusa people will beat their children if they leave a stranger and come alone to eat because “such a character isolates a person and makes one inhospitable or greedy.”⁹⁶ Thus, community life, hospitality, and

⁹³ Laurenti Magesa, *What Is Not Sacred? African Spirituality*, 143.

⁹⁴ Jacqueline Bhabha, *Can We Solve the Migration Crisis?* Global futures (Cambridge, UK; Polity Press, 2018), 41.

⁹⁵ Laurenti Magesa, *What Is Not Sacred? African Spirituality*, 97.

⁹⁶ Laurenti Magesa, *African Religion: The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life* (New York: Orbis Books, 1997), 64.

sociability with the neighbors are identified as an imperative for African morality and religion.

As Daniel Mashau notes, “Ubuntu becomes real in the well-being of Africa when everyone is embraced by all, including aliens or strangers or sojourners.”⁹⁷ This exemplary way of living out the expectations of Ubuntu is illustrated and demonstrated in certain circumstances of migration and refugees. Uganda and Malawi countries have adopted an institutional approach whereby refugees and migrants are attributed a plot of land on which to live and grow vegetables. The practice of Ubuntu is also practiced in the African family approach where families welcoming migrants and refugees’ families into their home until they will be able to go back home. This is seen in Tanzania, Congo (Diocese of Budjala, Bongo), and Mozambique (Nampula) where there is an inclusive regional integration in the community approach.⁹⁸ These approaches are made possible because the community believes in peaceful coexistence, hospitality, and communion among creatures. They believe holistic communion brings harmony to the land and among creatures. In most of the cultures of Africa a visitor is always welcomed. The arrival of a visitor is a motif of celebration and symbol of unity for the community. Daniel Mashau recognizes this when he says that “visitors are valued members of African communities and this is expressed in the Tshivenda phrase that says, ‘Ri la nga mueni’ (literary meaning we feast because of a visitor).”⁹⁹ Furthermore, Tshivenda believes that “Ubuntology seems to be the theology

⁹⁷ Thinandavha D. Mashau, “Foreigners Go Home! Re-Imagining Ubuntology and the Agency of Faith Communities in Addressing the Migration Crisis in the City of Tshwane,” *Hervormde teologiese studies* 75, no. 4 (2019): 1–8.

⁹⁸ Susanna Snyder, *Asylum-Seeking, Migration and Church*, Explorations in practical, pastoral, and empirical theology (Farnham, Surrey ; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2012), 61-75.

⁹⁹ Mashau, “Foreigners Go Home! Re-Imagining Ubuntology and the Agency of Faith Communities in Addressing the Migration Crisis in the City of Tshwane,” 3.

that the world needs to resolve the current hostility towards migration and the call for foreigners to go home. It is an ethic that can provide space for the following: To see the world as a common home that should be shared by all and for their well-being. To see the world as a conducive environment for tolerance, peace, and support for each other for a common good.”¹⁰⁰ A person with Ubuntu cannot ignore victims of environmental and migration calamities because hospitality is one of the pivotal points of Ubuntu.

According to Maphalala, “Ubuntu has three pillars: interpersonal values (regard for others), intrapersonal values (regard for self) and environmental values (regard for the environment) ... the practicability of Ubuntu exists in five levels: the individual, the family, the community, the environment, and the spirit.”¹⁰¹ Ubuntu values interdependence and interconnectedness with the environment because the environment and creation are the cornerstones of every existence. The environment sustains other kinds of life and social interaction. The environment, as a gift from God, captures the attention of all beings and is the subject of harmony. This harmonious coexistence is manifested by the totem, folklore, tales, cosmologies, and culture that pay respect and protect human beings, animals, and the forest because their stories are intertwined with that of the clan. Cultural beliefs portray that there is a strong solidarity between the environment, other creatures, and human beings that constitutes an anthropological aspect of Ubuntu as an African ethic.

¹⁰⁰ Mashau, “Foreigners Go Home! Re-Imagining Ubuntu and the Agency of Faith Communities in Addressing the Migration Crisis in the City of Tshwane, 6.

¹⁰¹ Jacob Mugumbate and Admire Chereni, “Using African Ubuntu Theory in Social Work with Children in Zimbabwe,” *African Journal of Social Work* (2019), 3-4.

2.1.3. Anthropological dimension: Restoring humanity

The Concept of Ubuntu contains an anthropological dimension of restoring human dignity. We become fully beings and creatures if only we relate and enter a deep communion with other creatures in a just and right way. The anthropological dimension is found in the maxim of Ubuntu's definition that a 'human can only be human through another person.' The linguistic approach evinces a holistic relationship between Ubuntu and its anthropological aspect. The English-Zulu Dictionary of Roberts, Doke and Vilakazi defines Ubuntu as human nature, and they further regard it as denoting "humaneness, good disposition, good moral nature."¹⁰² In this definition, hospitality, moral deed, compassion, and mutual aid are portrayed as actions that evolve the humanity of the person.

Dirk Louw confirms the anthropological dimension of Ubuntu, arguing that "a person is a person through other persons" implies that to be human means to exercise one's humanity through the care of other creatures. Any other way of being would be inhuman in both senses of the word, that is not human and disrespectful of or even cruel to others."¹⁰³ Ubuntu, defined through the lens of "I am because we are, and since we are therefore, I am," opens an ontological anthropology that questions and enhances the existence of human beings and their meaning in the world. Isabella Ras argues that, from its essence, "African anthropology views personhood and the body in a holistic sense. The individual is embedded in an intricate network of relationships to family, the community, God, and

¹⁰² Bhekizizwe Peterson, "The Art of Personhood: Kinship and Its Social Challenges," in *Ubuntu and the Reconstitution of Community* (Indiana University Press, 2019), 81.

¹⁰³ Dirk J. Louw, "Rethinking Ubuntu," in *Ubuntu and the Reconstitution of Community*, ed. James Ogude, World Philosophies (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2019), accessed February 3, 2022, <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip,sso&db=nlebk&AN=2135078&site=ehost-live&custid=s8983286>.

nature.”¹⁰⁴ This anthropological connection is manifested in the interconnectedness and interdependence of human beings and other creatures. There are horizontal connections (creatures among themselves) and vertical connections (human beings with God). It can be deduced that from the anthropological aspect of ubuntu, the personhood and identity of the human exists are comprehended in two ways: It is given in a natural way (innate to personhood) from birth and at the same time it is achieved and confirmed by moral virtue in an ethical way, especially from the ethical value of life in the community and interaction with creation.

The anthropological aspect of ubuntu, as a way of restoring the humanity of migrants and their environment, has both interconnectedness and hospitality aspects. When sharing the same humanity, creatures are interconnected and come to an awareness that all creatures need one another to survive. Thus, anthropologically speaking, humans relate to other creatures and are interdependent with their environment from birth to death. There is a sense of cosmic interdependence, relatedness, participation, and affection that characterize African Ubuntu’s beliefs in creatures. This interconnected participation and solidarity within creation is also portrayed by Catholic social teaching, whose principles thus enforce the understanding of human dignity as well as life on earth and its well-being.

2.2. Catholic Social Teaching (CST) and Ubuntu Ethics

The care for creation and human dignity is not particular to Ubuntu Ethics rather a widely ethical values that are recognized both by the African cultural value and the teaching of the Church. As a theologian reflecting on African ethical values, it is good to compare

¹⁰⁴ Isabella F. Ras, “Broken Bodies and Present Ghosts: *Ubuntu* and African Women’s Theology,” *HTS Theologies Studies/Theological Studies* 73, no. 3 (October 1, 2017): e1–e7, accessed January 30, 2022, <https://hts.org.za/index.php/hts/article/view/4651>.

the Catholic Social Teaching of the church and the African ethical value of Ubuntu. First of all, we have to acknowledge that for an African christian living the Ubuntu ethics, there are many similarities between the two. However, for the sake of space and length, we cannot compare all the principles of CST with Ubuntu Ethics. We want to focus on respect for human beings and creations and highlight the similarities between the two principles.

Among many commonalities and similarities between CST and Ubuntu ethics, the care for the environment and human beings have been at the core of Catholic Social Teaching and Ubuntu ethics. Pope Francis, in his *Laudato Si*, shows how ecological concerns have always been a subject of care in the tradition and history of Christianity.¹⁰⁵ In the principle of the dignity of the poor and indigenous, solidarity and respect of God's creation are key concepts of catholic social teaching that Ubuntu ethics nourishes. Pope Benedict XVI, advocating for an integral development, combines the two crises and calls for a holistic response that cares for both human beings and nature, arguing that "our duties towards the environment are linked to our duties towards the human person, considered in himself and in relation to others."¹⁰⁶ It is obvious that the exploitation of the environment cannot be distinguished from the exploitation of human beings and other creatures.

Pope Francis calls humanity to move from individualism to communion with creation. Human beings are persons of interconnected relationships with God, one another, and all creation.¹⁰⁷ In some traditional culture of Africa from which Ubuntu emerges, the protection of nature and the environment is sustained by cultural taboos and narratives that

¹⁰⁵ Pope Francis, *Laudato Si*, 4-6.

¹⁰⁶ Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate* (Jansville: The Word Among Us Press, 2009), 51.

¹⁰⁷ Pope Francis, *Laudato Si*, 135-136.

forbid people from exploiting nature unconsciously. Any breaking of the taboo related to natural preservation brings the wrath of God and the divinities. People like the Sokpoe-Eve, and Enyi cannot enter the sacred forest without a ritual for fear of the divinities. Likewise, the Kikuyu people “were encouraged to preserve the environment by their beliefs in the sacredness of nature.”¹⁰⁸ However, colonialism and neo-colonialism have diminished the African beliefs in the sacredness of the natural world. Re-adopting the African values of sacredness in the forest and the Catholic Social Teaching on the conservation and preservation of the nature can be a tool to restore and perpetuate the natural world and hence preserve life dignity on the earth. Among the similarities of Ubuntu Ethics and CST, I will point out among others human dignity and respect for God’s creation.

2.2.1. Human Dignity and Respect for God’s Creation

Creation narratives highlight the dignity of all creatures as a dignified act of God. There is an ethical implication of respect for the creation and respect for human beings because they are created in the image and likeness of God. Thus, unaccompanied minor migrants are still bearers of the image of God. Two ethical implications need restorative actions here: the care of humanity and creation. Pope Francis insists on inclusiveness, arguing that we need “public policies that restore dignity to the oppressed (migrants) and make them autonomous and participating citizens.”¹⁰⁹ No one is sufficient to himself/herself, for our lives depend on the life and goodness of other creatures. However, the community in which

¹⁰⁸ Ebenezer Yaw Blasus, “The Bible and Caring for the Land: African Theology as Christian Impulsion for Creation Care” (Unpublished, 2018), 6-7.

¹⁰⁹ Leonardo Boff, *Francis of Rome & Francis of Assisi: A New Spring in The church?* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2014), 77.

we live does not show equality and dependency on the other.¹¹⁰ The CST and Ubuntu ethics emphasizes on the interdependence of all creatures without which life cannot be possible on the earth.

The concept of mutuality, interconnectedness, and interdependence enhance the vision of human dignity and human rights. In fact, the broad meaning of Ubuntu encompasses the respect of human dignity in all its diversity and contours.¹¹¹ The value and respectful co-existence of personhood include the respect of one's neighbor and all existence. It includes the well-being and care for one's surroundings, including the rights of creatures other than human beings. Thus, rights and care do not concern only human beings but also the environment and all creatures.

Pope Francis's encyclical letter, *Laudato Si*, has come out at a time when things are out of hand, and it portrays insights and inspiration from Ubuntu.¹¹² There is a complementarity between the teaching of Pope Francis on the care of our common home and Ubuntu wisdom on the care of the environment. This encyclical is essential because of its timely focus on the intersection of the human and environmental crises, especially the continued destruction of the environment which Pope Francis calls our home. He points out some of the current catastrophes related to deforestation, such as environmental migrants, and

¹¹⁰ Laurenti Magesa, "Christ the Liberator and Africa Today," in *Faces of Jesus in Africa*, ed. Robert J. Schreiter (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 1991), 154.

¹¹¹ Patrice Haynes, "African Humanism: Between the Cosmic and the Terrestrial," in *Beyond the Doctrine of Man: Decolonial Visions of the Human*, ed. Joseph Drexler-Dreis, First edition. (New York: Fordham University Press, 2020), 163.

¹¹² Berkley Center for Religion Affairs Peace and World, "A Culture of Encounter: Pope Francis' Ubuntu Paradigm for Global Fraternity," accessed December 7, 2021, <https://berkleycenter.georgetown.edu/responses/a-culture-of-encounter-pope-francis-ubuntu-paradigm-for-global-fraternity>.

climate refugees, desertification, and loss of diversity.¹¹³ Pope Francis then proposes numerous possible solutions by speaking in favor of human beings, animals, and forests, exhorting the spirit of generosity, true encounter, solidarity, sharing, and a change of mentality. Pope Francis calls upon human beings' responsibility, hospitality, and generosity for people who have left their lands and homes due to the environment's destruction.¹¹⁴ Human beings are not separated from nature but are part of nature. Environmental ethics is an excellent instigation for us, in these contemporary times of ecological crisis, to prevent the accidental outcomes of neglect and careless use of the environment, such as poverty, and to relate with the environment in ways that leave it in its natural form. Life on this earth is interrelated in a network of symbiotic interrelationship.¹¹⁵ The effort requires the contribution of all creatures living on our mother earth.¹¹⁶ The environmental crisis concerns the whole of humanity. To respond to this crisis, “we need a conversation which includes everyone, since the environmental challenge we are undergoing, and its human roots, concern and affects us all.”¹¹⁷ In fact, environmental degradation is threatening the human rights to life as well as access to food and water. As Pope Francis notes, access to water, and thus food, is a problem “especially in Africa where large sectors of the population have no access to safe drinking water or experience droughts which impede

¹¹³ Pope Benedict XVI, “39th World Day of Peace 2006, In Truth, Peace | BENEDICT XVI,” accessed December 6, 2021, [Pope Francis, *Laudato Si.*](#)

¹¹⁴ Pope Francis, *Laudato Si*, 34, 60, 63, 110, 128.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 138.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 5

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 14.

agricultural production.”¹¹⁸ That is to say, drinking water, food, adequate housing, shelter, and health are basic universal rights that are being violated by environmental degradation.

Human dignity and environmental care are concepts that are dear to both the African ethics of Ubuntu, Catholic social teaching, and the theology of the *imago dei*. Henceforth, all people should be treated with honor and dignity. This likeness and relationality of the person with God is lived out in the community of creatures. The image of God implements the attitude of mutual respect and recognition of the existence of others in a way that promotes human dignity, harmony, coexistence, and solidarity. In its social dimension, Ubuntu ethics values restorative justice and reconstitution of the powerless. Restorative justice intends to restore both the environment to its right and incorporate the refugees in their right as citizens of the land. It claims for restoration of relationships once it has been broken by any kind of injustice. Thus, collaboration and harmony are the key notes of the justice that Ubuntu ethics advocate to resolve conflict and rehabilitate everyone in their rights. However, we cannot idealize the ethics of Ubuntu because it has its own weaknesses. Like any ideal principle that pertain to human conditions, Ubuntu has shortcomings in the way it is lived out by the community.

2.2.2. Limits of Ubuntu: Perception of the Local Church and Community in its Ethics

Ubuntu ethics has many moral and ethical values that unite Africans and speak from the depth of their cultural heritage. However, one cannot ignore the cruel and unethical events in Africa that question the effectiveness of Ubuntu ethics. The issues of genocide, tribal wars, and xenophobia question the efficacy of Ubuntu ethics. Thaddeus Meltz provides a way forward in distinguishing the philosophical, political, and ethical level

¹¹⁸ Pope Francis, *Laudato Si*, 28.

about leaving out the values of Ubuntu. He argues that political leaders appeal to Ubuntu ethics but do not commit and live out the Ubuntu expectations and values. Thus, they appeal to Ubuntu on the philosophical level but do not apply it as a moral principle that should guide their lives and political philosophy.¹¹⁹ As argues Emmanuel Katongole, there is a danger of using the African values for one's political agenda and interest. How come, in a country guided by Ubuntu, there has been so much killing and conflict that has cost the loss of so many human beings?¹²⁰ The first and easiest response is that there are no perfect ethical or moral principles whatsoever, Christian, or cultural. The second resonates more with historical events and memories of the colonization of Africans. In fact, many of the misfortunes on the African land, whether genocide or tribal wars, are the consequences of historical and cultural imposition from the west. Africans still mourn and retrieve their cultural and ethical heritage. As Piet Naude argues, "the annihilation of Ubuntu has its roots in the combined effect of Africans being swept off their feet by an accelerated modernity and cultural globalization together with the interiorization of the colonial master's image of us. The former implies an attitude of cultural diffidence (global is always better than local), the latter a deep sense of inferiority- that, if we do not look, act and talk like our former master (now the center of the global village), then we have not made it yet."¹²¹ The fact is that many Africans are aware of western ethical principles, but few

¹¹⁹ Thaddeus Metz, "An Ubuntu-Based Evaluation of the South African State's Responses to Marikana: Where's the Reconciliation?" *Politikon* 44, no. 2 (2017): 287–303.

¹²⁰ Emmanuel Katongole, *The Sacrifice of Africa: A Political Theology for Africa*, The Eerdmans Ekklesia series (Grand Rapids, Mich: W.B. Eerdmans Pub, 2011), 55-56.

¹²¹ Piet J. Naudé, "'Am I My Brother's Keeper? An African Reflection on Humanisation,'" *NGTT is now Stellenbosch Theological Journal (STJ)* 54 (December 18, 2013): 241–253, accessed January 30, 2022, <https://ngtt.journals.ac.za/pub/article/view/360>.

know African-cultural ethical values. As a way of illustration, Ubuntu ethics is taught neither in school nor in Church. A third reason is that moral and ethical guidance is a never-ending process of adaptation to cultural change that leads to perfection. Whatever the perception and understudying of the weakness and criticism of the effectiveness of Ubuntu ethics on the state and social level of lives, there is a need for Africans and scholars to internalize and implement their own cultural values.

Pope Francis reminds us that elements of local cultures, such as taboos, enable us to reconsider the relationship and rights between human beings and the environment.¹²² This moral and ecological framework should make the planet habitable and secure life on earth. The natural world and human life should work together harmoniously within the divine vision of creation. Climate injustice and its challenges urge us for a change in the moral arena and push for a spiritual and cultural transformation which responds to climate changes and injustices. Ubuntu ethics provides a new ethical framework that can curb the environmental crisis using the cultural-spiritual heritage and traditional beliefs.¹²³ To demonstrate the usage of the cultural heritage and implementation of Ubuntu traditional beliefs, I want to show three practices that express how the cultural aspects of Ubuntu is still alive and a real practice in some parts of Africa and mostly in the rural areas.

2.3. Cultural Heritage of Ubuntu Ethics

In the following I want to offer more concrete examples of how these traditional beliefs play an important role and set a new cultural narrative that can serve the modern world. I argue that the retrieval of those Ubuntu and African cultural values can still influence the

¹²² Pope Francis, *Laudato Si*, 143.

¹²³ Antal, *Climate Church, Climate World*, 25-35.

lives of modern Africans if well explained and implemented. I will describe the cultural heritage contained in the burying of placenta, totemic beliefs, folklore, and proverbs. All of these three cultural values enhance the interconnectedness, solidarity, hospitality, and humanness that are precious to the philosophy and practice of Ubuntu.

2.3.1. The burying of the placenta and umbilical cord in the earth

John Mbiti explains the cultural practice of burying the umbilical as a way of relatedness, anthropological preservation, and human fertility. Thus, this ritual is a pledge against the destruction of human beings and nature. He argues that the burying of the placenta is a ritual that interconnect human beings with other creatures. It implies that care for the infant and the whole creation as the person is embodied in the cosmos.¹²⁴ Magesa gives this ritual a spiritual and theological understanding showing how the ground carrying the umbilical cord is connected to the ancestral spirits as the ancestor can influence the behavior of a child.¹²⁵ Thus, the supreme power of the land in which the umbilical cord is buried watch over the child as he grows and bestow on him the divine power connecting him with the other spirits of the cosmos.

Most Africans grow up with the land: from birth to death, their lives are surrounded by the natural world. As Wangari Maathai says, in many African traditions, life is surrounded by cosmic sacredness and all life celebrations from birth to death are in communion with the powers of nature.¹²⁶ This strong relationship with nature, especially with trees and animals, is expressed when the placenta and umbilical cord are buried with a tree's seed

¹²⁴ John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 146.

¹²⁵ Laurenti Magesa, *What Is Not Sacred? African Spirituality*, 59.

¹²⁶ Jean-Marc Ela, *My Faith as an African* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2009), 17.

after birth. Leonard Tumaini writes, “the burial of the placenta and the umbilical cord serves as a covenant between the newborn child and the ancestral land. The African attitude to land and nature, in general, is one of ecological concern and preservation.”¹²⁷ Among the Kikuyu from Kenya, the placenta is usually buried in an uncultivated field, covered with grain and grass as a symbol of fertility. There is a silent prayer that the mother’s womb should remain more fertile and fresher for other children by this ritual.

This ritual can be retrieved in a modern world to be a pledge against the destruction of nature and the influence of migration as one’s placenta interconnects us with our native nature. As the earth contains one’s body part, it should be cared for as we should care for mothers. When the tree is buried with umbilical cord, it implies that as the tree grows, the child also grows and is supposed to take care of that tree. A tree is planted at the grave during burial, signifying that the person’s spirit should find rest, shelter, and shade in that tree as his last home. If the family needs communion with the dead, they will gather under that specific tree for a particular ritual.

The relationship between burying an umbilical cord and environmental care is prevalent among the Ngoni people from Northern Malawi, as well as other ethnic groups across Africa. Fulata Lusungu Moyo gives an illustration: in IsiZulu language, the question “where are you from (Ikuphi inkaba yakho?) literally means, “where is your umbilical cord (buried).”¹²⁸ The burying of an umbilical cord with a tree in one’s land becomes a symbol

¹²⁷ Leonard Tumaini Chuwa, “African Indigenous Ethics in Global Bioethics,” 64.

¹²⁸ Fulata Lusungu Moyo, ““Ukugqiba Inkaba”—Burying the Umbilical Cord: An African Indigenous Ecofeminist Perspective on Incarnation,” in *Planetary Solidarity: Global Women's Voices on Christian Doctrine and Climate Justice*, ed. Grace Ji-Sun Kim and Hilda P. Koster (New York: Fortress Press, 2017), 179-180.

of interconnectedness and interdependence with the earth that links the person to their land, preventing migration that would lead to leaving one's umbilical seed alone. It is believed that if you go far from your umbilical land, you are incomplete. The motherland becomes the other part of the person that carries their stories and destiny. This ritual of burying the umbilical cord makes the person become part of the earth mother's womb. Because of this connectedness, it is evident that culturally speaking, caring for the earth is caring for oneself because the person belongs and depends on mother's earth. In many tribes, the placenta and umbilical cord buried are a sign of attachment to one's motherland. For spiritual and social welfare, the sacred trees and groves cannot be destroyed without awakening the spirits' wrath. The totemic and sacred trees are symbols of power, fertility, and renewal of life.

2.3.2. Totemic beliefs

Aylward Shorter gives a theological and divine accounts of the practice and beliefs about the totem stating that “the totem is the emblem of a clan or other ethnic grouping. Totems are more often secular than religious. When religious they may be a ‘sacramental’ link with divine reality.”¹²⁹ African religion and culture believe in the divine mediation and spiritual powers found in person and impersonal forces. Thus, the totem of a tribe plays a role of divine mediation between the tribe and the vital forces. As Shorter argues, the perception of totem and natural spirit vary from space to space and changes the meaning from one tribe to another. Some totem and natural reality can enhance life while others diminish life. He argues that “they have theological functions that vary according to different system. They may be refractions or modes of divine existence (Dinka, Nuer of

¹²⁹ Aylward Shorter, *African Culture, an Overview: Socio-Cultural Anthropology*, African Church handbook n. 007 (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1998), 43.

Sudan) ... [but also] intercessors (Bemba of Zambia) or they may be divinities, personalized departments of the Godhead (Yoruba of Nigeria, Ganda of Uganda).”¹³⁰ In the same perspective Magesa sees African culture, religion and “universe as the divine milieu” in which all the life forces or vital energy see creation as connected to all existence.¹³¹ Totemic forces have both religious and theological function as some are linked to the divine protection. From an anthropological background, Bujo affirms that the anthropology of human beings gravitates around life in the community, the harmony with God and the cosmic reality. Life on the earth depends on the support and protection that one receives from the cosmos. The cosmos plays an important role in safeguarding the identity of the persons.¹³² The totemic and natural spirit make Africa religions cosmic religions where the cosmic and human world becomes a sacramental channel that communicate God. Furthermore, the natural world provides shelter for sacred and religious rituals. We shall examine the ideas about natural religion in the next chapter of liberation theology.

Philip Junod shows that “Totemism shows well one characteristic of the Bantu mind: the strong tendency to give a spirit to animals, to plants, to nature as such, a tendency which is at the very root of the most beautiful blossoms of poetry, a feeling that there is a community of substance between the various forms of life.”¹³³ A totem is an emblematic

¹³⁰ Aylward Shorter, *African Culture, an Overview: Socio-Cultural Anthropology*, 40-47.

¹³¹ Laurenti Magesa, *What Is Not Sacred? African Spirituality*, 170.

¹³² Benezet Bujo, “Reasoning and Methodology in African Ethics,” in *Catholic Theological Ethics, Past, Present, and Future: The Trento Conference*, ed. James F. Keenan (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 2012), 147-159.

¹³³ Henri Philippe Junod, *Bantu Heritage* (Johannesburg, South Africa: Hortors, for the Transvaal Chamber of Mines, 1938), 112.

animal or tree that expresses the deep kinship of indigenous African traditions with creation. It instills a strong relationship and peaceful cohabitation between the tribe and the totemic animals, trees, or other creatures apart from human beings. The totem is important in African traditional spirituality and ecological understanding because it inspires respect for nonhuman beings arising from the history of the tribe or clan. The totemic animal or plant is not outside God's real presence; instead, it portrays a real spiritual and sacred presence. Thus creation, animals, and plants "are not just something before me- it is a resonance, a symbol, and a value within me. There is a mountain, vegetable, animal, human and a value within me."¹³⁴ Totemic belief expresses the interconnectedness with other creatures as being part of the living legacy of human nature and thus contribute to shape the humanness and anthropological aspects of human beings.

John Mbiti argues that "this sense of kinship (totem) binds together the entire life of the "tribe," and is even extended to cover animals, plants, and non-living objects through the "totemic" system. It largely governs the behavior, thinking and whole life of the individual in the society of which he is a member."¹³⁵ When two African strangers meet in a foreigner's land, to see whether they are related or come from the same ancestors they ask the question, what is your totem creature? If they have the same animal, tree, or any other creatures as a totem, it means they are relatives. In case they draw their genealogical trees, they may discover that they are from the same ancestors who separated because of migration or other root causes that might be the reason for them to separate from one

¹³⁴ Mark Hathaway and Leonardo Boff, *The Tao of Liberation: Exploring the Ecology of Transformation*, Ecology and justice (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 2009), 314.

¹³⁵ John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 135.

another. By the genealogical and totemic explanation, the African world view includes living within the entirety of creation, the departed, and the future generations. It is of note that “members of a particular clan observe special care in treating or handling their totem so that for example, they would not kill or eat it. The totem is the visible symbol of unity, kinship, belongingness, togetherness, and common affinity.”¹³⁶ Most of the time, the totemic creatures are associated with salvific history. An animal or any other creatures that become the totem of a tribe would have saved the tribe from a calamity or deadly situation.

Among the Ashanti people from Ghana, the Crocodile is the totemic animal. Once upon a time, the Ashanti were fighting with another neighboring tribe. As the other tribe seemed to be stronger than them, the Ashanti fled from the wrath of the other tribe. As they were running, they suddenly came across a very big and large river that they could not cross. They would have been killed by the other tribe. Suddenly, the crocodiles appeared. Many crocodiles aligned on the top of the river from one side to another creating a bridge for people to pass over their backs. That day the Ashanti were saved by their totemic animal as they all crossed the river on the back of Crocodile.¹³⁷ The power of the story is that as God saved the Israelites crossing the red sea, so the power of the totem saved the Ashanti from perishing. It is believed that if an Ashanti wants to migrate or cross a river, a crocodile is a sign of safety. If there is no sign of a crocodile, it is dangerous to take the journey. In all human beings’ struggle for life and death, cosmic beings are involved in the fight for a well-lived life and the struggle against threats to human life. This totem, among many

¹³⁶ John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 137

¹³⁷ This is testimony was delivered by John Ghansa SJ at Hekima University College at the opening of a speech. He used the story to explain the power of totem in African culture.

others, can persuade people from taking a perilous journey and convince them to safely stay at home. Every cosmic reality is a transparent manifestation of God. The tree, the inhabitants of the ancestors, the river, and the mountain all symbolize sacredness; the rain is the sign of blessing while thunder symbolizes the wrath of God; the moon, sun, and stars are manifestations of God's magnificence as they are portrayed in African tales and myths. All these vital forces of the divine milieu exhibit the interrelationship between totemic forces, their religious and theological meanings. None can claim its independence from the rhythm of the cosmos as a community of creatures.

2.3.3. Tales and myths

The encyclopedia of Catholicism defines myth as “a traditional story that deals with a character or characters from remote antiquity who are more than merely human.”¹³⁸ Myth can take different forms and be interpreted in different ways. However, the new catholic encyclopedia provides a broader definition that make comprehensible our cause in this context. It defines Myth and tales as “a story about the holy; it is a narrative or story concerned with gods.”¹³⁹ We will use myth in the context of the second interpretation. In our case study, myth displays a comprehensible meaning of divine reality through natural world to human beings.

Shorter defines tales as “stories or etiologies, purporting to explain the origin of animals and other phenomena of nature. Their real purpose is to teach a moral for human, family life. While myth are symbolic stories that teach religious or universal values or which

¹³⁸ Richard P. McBrien and Harold W. Attridge, eds., *The HarperCollins Encyclopedia of Catholicism*, 1st ed. (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1995), 902.

¹³⁹ Catholic University of America, ed., *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 2nd ed. (New York: Thomson, Gale, 2002), 182-186.

provide a ‘charter for present action,’ they cannot be limited only to the past.¹⁴⁰ Myth is also a set of creative imagination that imagine and implement a different world. As says Katongole myths and tale are about a new vision of the future. It is about implementing a “vision of something larger than one’s life.”¹⁴¹ Our use of myths and tales in this essay is an invitation to imagine and participate in the dramas of creation that embodies a holistic view of creation.

Many African cultures identify God as living in and having a relationship with the natural world and animals. The Lugbara argue that Hyena is the messenger of God while the Lele regard water pigs as animals with spiritual powers. There are many versions of myth related to the creatures and their salvific mission to human beings. Among them, we have the chameleon that God sent to inform persons that they would live forever or rise again after dying, but the chameleon loitered on its way and did not deliver the message.¹⁴² Magesa reinforces the taboos and tales understanding and their spirituality, explaining that, “it appears in the spirituality of totems, nonhuman objects inhabited by ancestral spirits, and the taboos associated with them. A lone individual walking in the darkness of the night can provide expert protection from a leopard if that is his or her totem. All members of his or her clan cannot, therefore, harm leopards.”¹⁴³

Many myths of traditional African tribes originated from their relationship with creation. The Nuer and the Herero speak in their mythical stories about the “tree of life”

¹⁴⁰ Aylward Shorter, *African Culture, an Overview*, 58-59.

¹⁴¹ Katongole, *The Sacrifice of Africa*, 79.

¹⁴² John S. Mbiti, *Concepts of God in Africa*, 177-193.

¹⁴³ Laurenti Magesa, *What Is Not Sacred? African Spirituality*, 37.

because, according to their beliefs, human beings originated from a tree. This specific tree symbolizes their ancestral stories and their father. A person in danger from other human beings or wild animals, if he embraces the specific tree, will be saved; he cannot be killed under the tree. The Sore tree among the *Gbaya* is sacred, and it is called “the tree of life.” It is used to bless people but also to save people from malediction, witchcraft, and sorcery. It is used in peacebuilding, reconciliation, initiation rites, protection of food, announcing death, and burial. These trees that are used as sacred places, trees of life and of God, symbolize the presence of God, his relationship to people, and his kindness or salvific compassion to his people during their earthly time.

The *Lodagaa* believe that when the soul of a departed arrives in the land of the dead, God makes the spirit sit in the sun on top of their sacred withered tree for judgment. According to its former life, it can then remain seated under that tree between three months to three years. Afterward, the tree will give signs on its branches for his redemption. If the sign from the tree delays, it means the person was bad during his earthly life. But if it comes quickly, it is a sign that the person was good and worthy to be counted among the good spirits.¹⁴⁴ African ethics and religion have developed strong beliefs in interconnected, interdependent, and anthropological connection with all creatures within nature because the natural world provides shelter, food, and medicine. The forest is a religious sanctuary, a place for worshiping ancestors and God.¹⁴⁵ The cultural practice of burying a placenta, the totemic beliefs, the myths and tales have provided proofs that African cultural heritage when well applied to a context and in particular to the context of environmental degradation

¹⁴⁴ John S. Mbiti, *Concepts of God in Africa* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1970), 194-201.

¹⁴⁵ Harvey Sindima, *Community of Life: Ecological Theology in African Perspective*, *Liberating Life: Contemporary Approaches to Ecological Theology* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1990), 138-142.

and migration can help to reduce migration and help people to find peace, salvation and meaning in their own land and cultural home. There are still many cultural aspects of Ubuntu beliefs such as the use of proverbs, rituals, and taboos that we did not explore in this chapter. We believe that the examples and illustrations provided can highlight the ritual and the importance of Ubuntu ethics and its power to address the environmental-migration crisis. Overall, myth and tales are not only stories about creation, but they convey important moral behavior and ethical code. They are mostly used in the commotions about creation and interconnectedness to explain to future generations the origin of the universe and human beings and how the divine power intervenes in the relationship of the earth and human beings. Our interpretation of myths and tales in this essay has shown that they are not only related to created world, but they also define the divine involvement in the earthly matter and after life.

Conclusion

The ecological and environmental crisis that the world is facing need a holistic response. In this chapter we have explored, the cultural and religious background of Ubuntu ethics in its holistic approach, recognizing that everything in creation is dependent on one another. We have argued that Ubuntu ethics, with its perspective of interconnectedness/interdependence, anthropology, and hospitality, has the potential to inform a holistic ethical response.

Environmental and humane restoration is possible in the examples and illustrations from the African traditional Ubuntu practices that we have gone over. The natural world sustains human beings, and the latter cannot live on the earth without the peaceful collaboration with the other. Thus, a harmonious cohabitation and understanding is the

ultimate response that the current environmental and human crises need, and Ubuntu Ethics provides us the tools to work toward this response. As Pope Francis reminds us, we must look at the environment and migration with a contemplative gaze, seeing the presence of the trinity in each creature. Consequently, each creature created in God's image holds a distinctive gift, talents, cultures, and riches from its history that can enrich our experience of what it means to be human.¹⁴⁶ The interconnectedness of all creatures and the anthropological aspect of human hospitality are foundational for Ubuntu Ethics and to any *locus theologicus* that I shall develop in my theology of liberation.

¹⁴⁶ Pope Francis, *Laudato Si*, 239.

Chapter Three: LIBERATION THEOLOGY: JESUS CHRIST AS THE LIBERATOR FOR MINORS CLIMATE MIGRANTS

Introduction

This chapter explores the faces of Jesus Christ and their meanings for minor migrants. I intend to provide answers to the question: What is the significance of Jesus Christ for minor migrants in the Mediterranean Sea? How can the face of Jesus, amid the suffering and oppressed, be used to restore human dignity and hope to migrants? Many titles for Jesus of Nazareth can be found in the Bible. In times of desperate inhumanity and suffering, the question should not only be how to resolve the puzzles presented by these situations, but more significantly the theodicy question of “who is God” becomes vital. I want to explore the vision of liberation theology using African perspectives of persons and nature as the paradigm of study. This approach intends to show how anthropological liberation theology can liberate both persons and creation through cultural retrieval and education.¹⁴⁷

The claim of interconnectedness and humanness that Ubuntu hold as a cultural heritage can be enhanced or depreciated in the lived life experience. In this context, African liberation theology that seeks to liberate the human person from its cultural and anthropological alienation through education become an imperative. Ubuntu ethics has religious and cultural entities that constitute the two sides of the same coin. In the second chapter we have mostly developed the cultural aspect of Ubuntu. In this chapter we want to show its religious aspect that is linked with African liberation theology perspective and

¹⁴⁷There are many forms and perspectives on liberation theology that seek to improve the material and life of people oppressed. The anthropological liberation intends to liberate the person as human beings. I intend to argue that anthropological liberation is the first and foundation of all the other attempts of liberation. Once a person is liberated, he can be able to liberate himself/herself from other forms of oppression. Thus, in our context, it is no longer the human beings who need liberation but also, they have to liberate themselves with all the creation.

its component on educative liberative that will be developed in the next chapter. As Bujo would argue, in Africa one cannot separate religion, culture and morality because all are intertwined in the same reality, the common ritual practice and beliefs.¹⁴⁸ Thus, an ethical discourse without a theological lens will be incomplete because it is through religious and cultural rituals that morality finds its foundation. Although the anthropological interconnectedness may be impoverished by Mveng's concept of anthropological pauperization, we will demonstrate how Ubuntu posits a cultural and anthropological heritage that finds its fulfilment in liberation theology and a practical educational system.

A broad perspective is needed when trying to construct a liberation theology for minor migrants in the Mediterranean Sea – a liberation from the unjust structures, injustices, suffering, poverty, and rejection. However, African liberation theology is one of the theological perspectives that suits the context. As Magesa says, “to consider Jesus Christ as liberator in the African situation is an attempt to present the only Jesus that can be comprehensible and credible among the African rural masses, urban poor and idealistic youth.”¹⁴⁹ Furthermore, doing theology in an African context, whether it is the perception of the faces of Jesus in different ways as an ancestor, a brother, or a mother, will always relate to liberation theology. It is challenging to do theology in Africa without reflecting on injustice, poverty, under-development, migration, oppression, governance, and corruption in ways that convey a liberating perspective. All the African theologies, churches, and forms of worship need to address the social injustices impoverishing Africans and take the preferential option for the poor and migrants.

¹⁴⁸ Bénézet Bujo, *African Theology in Its Social Context*, Faith, and cultures series (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 1992), 123.

¹⁴⁹ Laurenti Magesa, “Christ the Liberator and Africa Today,” 157.

From the perspective of such African writers as Jean Marc Ela, Emmanuel Katongole and Engelbert Mveng, among many others, liberation is not only political and economic, but rather anthropological and cultural. This anthropological theology builds on the cultural heritage that seems to be forgotten as people adopt a more globalized perspective on liberation. The anthropological liberation that restores human and cultural dignity of the Africans as started by Mveng, Ela, and Katongole will be a foundation on which I will build. However, I will add to their perspective a creative anthropological-ecological restoration of creatures which includes the liberation of both the human and non-human creatures. I argue that the liberation perspective that is needed in this particular context, is a cultural and anthropological liberation that restores the human dignity to minor migrants and retrieves their cultural heritage. I will develop my argument in four main points. After an overall view of African liberation theology that includes a synopsis on the different authors and a biblical foundation relating to the context of African minors, I will explore the ideas of Magesa and Bujo by showing how African liberation theology is intrinsically linked with African traditional religion in its facet of anthropological and cultural liberation. Using my own family history and cultural heritage, I claim that the traditional African liberation for which I argue was a holistic liberation that comprises social and natural world. Henceforth, Jesus Christ as a liberator of both human beings and other creatures is comprehensible to the Africans. From this cultural and anthropological liberation, I show how hope emerges from chaos and restoration of creation dignity becomes true.

3.1. Historical Survey of African Liberation theology Authors

African scholars such as Charles Nyamiti, John Mbiti, Agbonkhiamaghe E. Orobator, Teresia Hinga, Paulinus Odozor, Bénézet Bujo, Jean Marc Ela, John Bujo, Laurenti Magesa, Emmanuel Katongole and Engelbert Mveng have invested their energies in research about the Christological dimension of Jesus Christ as a liberator in Africa. These scholars have explored the face of Jesus Christ in Africa amid poverty, suffering, and oppression. However, I cannot explicitly explore their ideas in this thesis. For the sake of space, I will focus on Ela, Magesa, Mbiti, Katongole and Mveng. Their ideas can be summarized in three main themes mainly anthropological pauperization, ecological and human liberation, and Jesus' revelation through the natural world.

3.1.1. Anthropological Pauperization

The reflection on the root causes and Ubuntu ethics have shown the existence of spiritual and cultural pauperization as youths find themselves in-between two ways of beliefs: theological and cultural. African young migrants grow in a world which seems to ignore their cultural and ancestral beliefs in the natural world. Thus, a return to the cultural heritage in the form of a process of liberation is needed. This struggle for human and cultural liberation for which we argue alludes to the anthropological pauperization of Mveng which he defines as “the dehumanization of the person” where someone is robbed of his cultural and anthropological beliefs.¹⁵⁰ This holistic liberation process is in reality a struggle for life because environmental degradation threatens life on earth. Anthropologically speaking, traditional African culture did internalize its solidarity with

¹⁵⁰ François-Xavier Akono, *Engelbert Mveng: chantre de la libération du Muntu : relecture plurielle de son œuvre* (Yaoundé, Cameroon: Preses de l'UCAC, 2014), 60-61.

the environment that the evangelization of the missionaries diminished. As Mveng says, an African is a cosmic being whose relationship and way of life is determined by cosmic nature. He shows how human beings are a microcosm among the other inhabitants of the earth. Human beings appear as the weakest force inhabiting the earth. Their living depends on the other natural forces. Thus, anthropologically, and theologically, the Muntu are incomplete without their cosmos.¹⁵¹

Ela argues that Christianity in Africa cannot ignore the anthropological and human liberation that Africans long for in their everyday lives, a longing brought about by historical events. He states that besides all the sacraments and faith in Jesus Christ, any African form of worship and theological reflection should start with “the struggles and hopes for human liberation. The faith must be lived in the cultural settings of African society.”¹⁵² Ela explores the situation of unemployed youth in black Africa and their suffering due to their future not being ensured. He proposes a practical faith that liberates and gives hope to the human person. Ela notes that there are forms of underdevelopment, environmental degradation, and educational systems that place black Africans under dependence to foreign countries, “placing our people (youth) under foreign tutelage, actually poses a problem for liberation.”¹⁵³ Thus the message of Jesus Christ and the living faith should work to liberate people suffering from social and environmental injustices. This holistic liberation should be inspired by African religion that fosters the interdependence of all creatures.

¹⁵¹ Mveng, *L'Afrique dans l'Eglise*, 10-14.

¹⁵² Ela, *My Faith as an African*, 52.

¹⁵³ Jean-Marc Ela, *African Cry*, trans. Robert R. Barr, Limited ed. (Eugene, Or: Wipf & Stock, 2005), 86.

3.1.2. Ecological Liberation

In the context of environmental migration, ecological liberation become an essential step toward the wellbeing of creatures. I want to argue that ecological restoration is an imperative stage to address the crisis and restore a new face of Jesus that portray the beliefs of African religion and spirituality. One African writer that has written extensively on liberation, and especially on ecological crises, is Katongole.¹⁵⁴ In his futurist vision concerning Vatican III, he imagines a call for a church grounded in the African soil. He draws attention to the ecological crisis that is particularly acute in Africa, a crisis that is aggravated by mass deforestation, food and water insecurity, and land disputes. He argues that Vatican III should consider the African connection and relationship with the land in a particular way. The African church should reveal the interconnection between God, the soil and salvation.¹⁵⁵ Although Katongole writes extensively on political liberation theology, he does not offer a clear path on the issue of holistic liberation whereby the human and natural world are set free from human subjugation and oppression.

Furthermore, the second special assembly of African bishops highlighted the crisis of environmental degradation and the treatment of African migrants - who traveled through the desert, the Mediterranean and eventually through Europe - as a structural sin that calls for conversion and liberation. In a particular way, Bishop Paul Ruzoka of Kigoma and bishop Emmanuel Wamala from Kampala denounced the oppression of both the

¹⁵⁴ In his books “The Sacrifice of Africa”, “Born from Lament: The Theology and Politics of Hope in Africa” and in his article “The Church of the Future: Pressing Moral Issues from Ecclesia in Africa” Katongole makes a connection between the moral and social issues of Africa with the liberation and narratives that are required to overcome the challenges that Sub-Saharan Africa is facing.

¹⁵⁵ Emmanuel Katangole, “The Church of the Future: Pressing Moral Issues from Ecclesia in Africa,” in *The Church We Want: African Catholics Look to Vatican III*, ed. A. E. Orobator (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2016), 169-170.

environment and human beings as constituting a social and human sin. It is a sin against humans and the environment, but also against future generations who will have no reason to hope for a better life. The synod stated that the mission of the Church in Africa should be redefined from the grassroots of environmental degradation, social injustice, liberation and inculturation.¹⁵⁶ This inculturation and liberation should find its inspiration in what has been labeled pagan animism by missionaries.

3.1.3. The Divine revelation in the natural world

One cultural theological and spiritual heritage that is still polemic on its rejection by missionaries and Christianity in Africa is the belief in what the missionaries have called “animism” as that belief that natural elements can have a spirit. John Mbiti gives a biblical and African description of Jesus Christ in his interpretation of “we have seen his star in the East (Mt 2: 1-12). He compares the Magi with African religions, arguing that the Magi did not find Jesus Christ through the Hebrew Scriptures, but rather as astrologers, seeking signs of him in the natural world. He concludes by saying that this biblical narrative helps us to see God in the stars, birds, natural phenomena as a vehicle and communicator of God to beings. Consequently, the Christian dismissal of African beliefs in the natural world as “animism, superstition, or paganism” do not have a Christological foundation, but rather constitute judgements which do not represent a true encounter with culture.¹⁵⁷ Henceforth,

¹⁵⁶ Holy See Press Office, “Second Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops - Final List of Propositions,” Proposition 22, 28 accessed March 4, 2022, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/synod/documents/rc_synod_doc_20091023_elenco-prop-finali_en.html.

¹⁵⁷ John Mbiti, “Is Jesus Christ in African Religion,” in *Exploring Afro-Christology*, ed. John S. Pobee, Studies in the intercultural history of Christianity, Studien zur interkulturellen Geschichte des Christentums Bd. 79 (Frankfurt am Main ; New York: P. Lang, 1992), 26-27.

the adoption and retrieval of this particular beliefs can enhance the care, protection, and veneration for the creation.

In African culture, the natural world is a living reality which is in constant engagement with other creatures. The oppression of the natural world becomes *de facto* the oppression of human beings, and both should be liberated together. Therefore, it is our duty to rethink and redesign the understanding of animism and find a new connection that restores the relationship between humans and other creatures. To avoid the historical ambiguity surrounding the word animism, I will use a creative Christological perception of animatism which is an anthropological term that sees forces and powers in every creature. It acknowledges the common and personal powers that exist in all living and nonliving objects.¹⁵⁸ These powers and forces inhabiting creation allow creatures to interact and communicate. Apart from the misunderstanding by Christianity of the African religions, we can hear the rebellious voices of nature in the contemporary crisis of environmental degradation. As Pope Francis says, both nature and human beings are crying out for healing and liberation.¹⁵⁹

3.2. The Biblical Foundation of Liberation in the Context of Minor migrants

This liberation dimension of minors migrating can be related to biblical scriptures and, in fact, finds its *raison d'être* in scripture. Natural calamities have always been a threat for the world since the time of creation, but God has always intervened to save his people from ecological calamities. God rescued people at the time of the floods of Noah (Gen 7: 23). He rescued them in times of drought and great famine (1 King 17-18). He saved his people

¹⁵⁸ Gene Brown & Jean Brown, "Animatism – Anthropology" - iResearchNet, <http://anthropology.iresearchnet.com/animatism/>

¹⁵⁹ Pope Francis, *Laudato Si*, 119.

from hunger through Joseph, who invited them to Egypt through a narrative of climate migration (Gen 37-50). The first experience of slavery, migration, and forced labor in the Bible illustrates the essence of liberation. The New Jerome Biblical commentaries interpret this exodus of Israelite as liberation from the land of slavery and suffering confirming that, “Exodus is an indelible portrait of the community of God, called from false and demeaning servitudes in an alien land to journey to the promised land.”¹⁶⁰ The Israelites experienced oppression in Egypt, but their hope in an unfailing God liberated them. Modern scholars denounce the use of biblical texts that tend to foster one’s personal power and position. They argue that in modern world we cannot disregard the global suffering of the planet and God’s purpose “of liberating humans from unjust bondage,”¹⁶¹ as he acted to liberate the Israelites from Egypt. The manifestation of God through the forces of creation is interpreted in three ways: it is eschatological, revelational and restoration of new creation and covenant. Through natural disasters, God Yahweh is revealed as “the supreme lord of nature, and his power must be demonstrated in salvation and blessing just as it is demonstrated in judgement.”¹⁶² The historical background of the Israelites’ experience is *mutatis mutandis* as migrants on the move. They are on the way to a land of freedom and liberation. Through these stories of climate crises in the Hebrew Bible, we see how God consistently saved the people from these natural catastrophes.¹⁶³

¹⁶⁰ Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, and Roland E. Murphy, eds., *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J: Prentice-Hall, 1990), 44-45, 1294-1295.

¹⁶¹ Francis, ed., *The Jerome Biblical Commentary for the Twenty-First Century*, Third, fully revised edition. (London ; New York, NY: T&T Clark/Bloomsbury Publishing, 2022), 2027.

¹⁶² Brown, Fitzmyer, and Murphy, *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary.*, 1295-1296.

¹⁶³ Ma Maricel S. Ibita, “The Great Flood in Genesis 6–9: An Ecological Reading of the J and P Traditions,” *Biblical theology bulletin* 50, no. 2 (2020): 68–76.

In the Biblical narratives, two illustrations can relate to the migration of African minors. The first one is the story of the young Joseph sold by his brothers, who will be his family's liberator when the environmental scarcity brought hunger and famine to the land (Genesis 37-50). This moving story also sets the stage for minor migrants to be the saviors of their families. However, it is worth noting that, in comparison to Joseph, African minors are not sent out of hate and jealousy, but rather out of love and a concern for both their future and that of their family members. The biblical migration of Abraham to Egypt shows the human perspective of migration as a means for survival. It illustrates the fact that environmental catastrophe, which results in a crisis of hunger, has always motivated the decision of people to migrate. The migration of minors provides survival insights as they need to take care for their present, the needs of the family they left behind and their own future needs.¹⁶⁴ The Israelites are not simply rescued from their oppression in Egypt; they are allowed to choose a self-actualized community created in partnership with a God who hears and responds to their experiences.

The second biblical source is the migration of Jesus to Egypt (Matthew 2: 13-23). Jesus and his parents are running from hostility and hatred to provide the child Jesus with the future that he deserves. At an early age, Jesus faced the hostility of the road and the sea. Furthermore, the historical Jesus came from a poor Jewish family. First, his birth in a natural environment, and among creatures, shows the importance of creation. Secondly,

¹⁶⁴ Robert K. Aboagye-Mensah, "Perspectives on Theological and Biblical Migration and Mission," in *Babel Is Everywhere! Migrant Readings from Africa, Europe, and Asia*, ed. J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, Andrea Fröchtling, and Andreas Kunz-Lübcke, Studien zur interkulturellen Geschichte des Christentums = Studies in the intercultural history of Christianity = Etudes d'histoire interculturelle du christianisme Vol. 157 (New York: Peter Lang, 2013), 22-24.

the Biblical narrative of his refuge in Egypt portrays the hostile environment where he grew up. Third, his family and ethnic background show that Jesus Christ was not from the dominant and oppressive culture or dominant background.¹⁶⁵ Shortly after his birth, the child Jesus was at risk of being killed by Herod. To flee this violence, he needed to travel in the same Mediterranean Sea. However, his escape to Egypt reminds us of the importance of struggling for life and keeping hope for a brighter future. In accepting the perilous journey with socio-political uncertainties, his parents show that frailty and vulnerability accompany hope and salvation.

Some Church traditions celebrate the liturgy dedicated to the migration of Jesus Christ in Egypt as an opportunity to raise awareness on the issue of minor migration through the Mediterranean Sea. Among these church traditions we have the Coptic Orthodox that celebrate the day on 20th June, which is a world refugee day, to raise awareness and to develop a theology of migration for children. They use icons and illustrative material that increase the awareness of the danger that child migrants encounter. They argue that a culture of welcoming the child Jesus as a refugee “should be used to develop an African child theology of philoxenia (love of strangers), based on elements such as an Old Testament ethic of Justice and hospitality to orphans....”¹⁶⁶ The Coptic believe that one way of creating awareness and attention to the plight of children is through liturgy.

In fact, in the stories of Jesus flying to Egypt, and of Joseph sold by his brothers, there is a double liberation: the liberation of humans and of nature. The liberation of

¹⁶⁵ James H. Evans, *We Have Been Believers: An African American Systematic Theology*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012), 10.

¹⁶⁶ Johannes Kritzinger and Martin Mande, “Theology Disrupted by the Challenge of Refugee Children,” *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 72, no. 1 (November 1, 2016): e1–e10, accessed December 3, 2021, <https://hts.org.za/index.php/hts/article/view/3546>.

humans is found in the fact that they find protection and salvation in the land where they took refuge. The second aspect of liberation is that, by their proximity with nature, they received protection and healing through creation. For Jesus to travel safely to the Mediterranean Sea, he should have enjoyed and received the hospitality of good weather, the natural environment, and the climate with which he perfectly lived in his ministry. The story of Joseph goes even further because he uses his talent of the care and protection of the land to save a nation, but mostly his family and his perpetrators.

The third biblical narrative is that of Jesus Christ Calming the storms (Mk 4: 35-41). This story found in Mark portrays Jesus as a liberator of human beings and of natural forces. It displays how the forces of nature can destroy life on the earth and how Jesus Christ has the power to liberate both the forces of nature and human beings in danger. The climax of the episode resides in the power of Jesus Christ who liberates and cares for both human beings and nature. His gesture is an act of restoration and of liberation as it is demonstrated through the verse; “He woke up, rebuked the wind, and said to the Sea, Quiet. Be still (Mk 4: 39).” He demonstrates his liberating powers on the natural forces that were hostile to human beings. His words reestablish the order of forces in chaos and rescue human beings troubled on the sea by the perilous storms. This episode is confirmed by the letter to the Hebrews that Jesus came to liberate the natural world that had been acquiesced to the power of death (He 2, 14).

As Mveng would say, Jesus outlines the path of a holistic and cultural liberation theology that liberates human beings and creation so that the whole creation would experience the fullness of life.¹⁶⁷ This holistic appreciation of liberation, which concerns

¹⁶⁷ Jean-Marc Ela, *Repenser la théologie africaine : le Dieu qui libère*, Chrétiens en liberté. Questions disputées (Paris: Editions Karthala, 2003), 126.

human dignity and the -environment, is expressed in a particular way in the practice of African religion and spirituality and its beliefs in the natural forces. One task of this African liberation perspective should re-interpret the notion of “animism” that has been systematically rejected and casually dismissed as being pagan. The difference between animism and animatism is that animism believes the creatures of the world do have spirits while animatism believes that creatures and nature have sacred powers.¹⁶⁸ It is worthy to note that African animatism does not give a soul to the natural world but affirms that the natural world has life and holds the fullness of revelation. Animatists believe that the natural world and human beings are all sacred and deserve care and respect. Animatism holds the belief that a common power inhabits all living and nonliving objects.

In their cultural and religious heritage Africans believe in the sacred power of all the creatures. They see sacredness and God’s revelation in the natural world as well as in all the creatures. This perspective of animatism inspires and empowers traditional African religion on the care and reverence that the natural world need. Thus, the force of Jesus as a liberator and a healer can easily be explained through the leaves, roots of trees, the sacred rivers that are used as medicine to heal and liberate people from evil forces. The voice of Jesus can easily be seen in the natural forces. Thus, cultural heritage of nature is interpreted as liberating forces but also an instrument to communicate God’s revelation and power in time of crisis.

Due to his own experience, Jesus the liberator, “will untiringly and unceasingly say no to hunger, torture, disregard of the common good, and many other features that enslave

¹⁶⁸ Benson Saler, *Conceptualizing Religion: Immanent Anthropologists, Transcendent Natives, and Unbounded Categories* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2000), 125.

Africa.”¹⁶⁹ He is the Christ through the Gospel reading who can understand the cries of children and give them hope for a new future. Jesus as the liberator ensures that all children are, in fact, children of God, and restores their human dignity. In the face of suffering, oppression, hardship, and the exploitation of minors, Jesus the liberator provides hope for minors that they can still forge their future. The bright future comes along with addressing the root causes of their problems. The historical background to the life of Jesus Christ shows that he is deeply connected with the suffering of minor migrants. The bible shows that Jesus lived in a society which was oppressed and exploited by the Romans while all the residents remained poor (Luke 4: 18). Thus, he had a mission to liberate himself, his family, and his land. His fight against oppression, poverty, and exploitation since childhood identifies him with the liberation and struggles of his people.

3.3. Liberation Theology and African Religion

African religious beliefs in divinities and the powers found in the natural world were despised as being animism and considered pagan by the Christian missionaries. However, it is becoming clear that African traditional religions have an important religious background which can liberate humanity and the natural world from suffering, oppression, and exploitation. I will use some of these traditional beliefs in a liberationist approach to call for a shift of paradigm. I will draw my attention to the holistic liberation and salvation of all creatures. Overall, we can argue that in most African cultures, all beings (human and non-human) are intertwined in a communal destiny. A liberation perspective that does not include or integrate the liberation of the environment is incomplete. The question of the liberation and salvation of human beings is therefore linked with the question of liberation

¹⁶⁹ Laurenti Magesa, “Christ the Liberator and Africa Today,” 160.

and salvation of the environment. This theology of liberation emphasizes the respect, care and restoration of the creation and creatures. This notion of a holistic salvation and co-habitation of all creatures can make a change in the environmental and migration crisis. However, a true liberation should first consider the African anthropological perception of human beings and the nature that needs to be liberated.

3.4. Anthropological and Cultural Liberation: Restoration of God's Image of Creation

The anthropological, cultural, and holistic liberation finds its pattern in the observation of Robert Schreiter stating that the Christological foundation can be lived in Africa in the aspect of inculturation and total liberation. He observes that, "liberation will only be achieved when Africans are again made whole,"¹⁷⁰ where both culture and self-esteem are fully lived and achieved. It is only this holistic liberation of the person and fullness of life for all creatures that can create a new hope in Africa. This liberating Christological journey should also restore the aspirations of African youths in reestablishing their culture and ensuring new aspiration for a self-assured future. As Leocadie Lushombo argues, "culture implies the conception of the person, the conception of God and the conception of the world. (This anthropological culture includes African experience of life, beliefs, rituals, art, symbols, and language...). Anthropological pauperization therefore implies not only material deprivation, but also spiritual and cultural deprivation."¹⁷¹ This anthropological pauperization is embodied in both minds of the families and minors who are on move.

¹⁷⁰ Robert J. Schreiter, "Jesus Christ in Africa Today," in *Faces of Jesus in Africa*, ed. Robert J. Schreiter (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 1991), 45.

¹⁷¹ Lushombo, "Christological Foundations for Political Participation," 399-422.

These children tend to think that their only future is in Europe and nothing else can be done on African land. They have lost their self-esteem, as well as their capacity to transform their land. They no longer believe in their own capacity to overcome poverty and to move forward. They have renounced their hope, identity, history, cultural heritage, and ambitions to become better than what they have been told and what their life looks like now.

The retrieval of cultural identity in accompanying migrants has been explored by Bishop Verryn from South Africa who argues that parenthood and cultural heritage are very crucial, and significant for the reinstatement of minor migrants and refugees. In his ministry of accompanying minors, he recruited people who share the same cultural background with the children to give them access to their cultural heritage and identity. He argues that “children need continuity, they need someone who understands their tradition, culture, and all sorts of things that children are socialized to in their communities back home. Remember (that) they will grow up and go back to their communities, so we must make sure that they will not be foreigners in their communities.”¹⁷² This cultural and personal identity empowerment should be implemented from the very early age of minor migrants in their native land, but it can also be implemented in the host countries. They should learn how to use their cultural heritage to empower themselves and find God in the spaces and interaction with cultural heritage and environmental surroundings. Thus, it should be a self-liberation journey from the grass-roots.

¹⁷² Sinenhlanhla S. Chisale, “An Integrated African Pastoral Care Approach to Unaccompanied Refugee Minors Based on Verryn’s Child Interventions,” *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 75, no. 1 (January 2019): 1–10, accessed November 9, 2021, <https://login.libproxy.scu.edu/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=141293930&site=eds-live>.

Self-liberation is a liberation that fights alienation in the minds of youths and helps them to clearly see a future in the African land and institution. This future is constructed by the liberation spirit whereby all citizens find pride in their land and nation. Steve Biko affirms that liberation from oppression in Africa requires first a liberation of the black mind, enabling a self-affirmation of identity and belonging of cultural and spiritual heritage. The problem behind migration is that the new generation “has lost his manhood. Reduced to an obliging shell, he looks with awe at the European power structure and accepts what he regards as the inevitable position”¹⁷³ to inherit. Bishop Verryn in his ministry for migrants and refugees in South Africa understood that the problem and mentality to combat was the rejection of manhood and the vision of Ubuntu that is relevant to all human beings. He started constructing a liberation narrative for young people who have resisted the temptation of migration and constructed their future in the land of their ancestors.

Teresia Hinga argues that Africa is in search of “a problematic ideology and belief in the radical otherness of Africans and self-confidence.”¹⁷⁴ Africans should reject the imposition of views and change the educational systems to emphasize contextual education rather than praising the colonizer. Children should be taught their abilities to transform the situation rather than accepting to be the victims of society. Struggle and liberation theories should humanize the system by not only proposing the new but demolishing the dehumanizing system to begin “a reconstruction of structures and systems that enhance

¹⁷³ Steve Biko and Aelred Stubbs, *I Write What I Like* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978), 30.

¹⁷⁴ Teresia M. Hinga, *African, Christian, Feminist: The Enduring Search for What Matters* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2017), 61.

Ubuntu, true humanity.”¹⁷⁵ Building a new system that addresses the complex, shocking crisis of migrants demands collaborative works and interdisciplinary solidarity. The change that is needed should include the participation of children. The question of environmental degradation and the hardship of migrants shake and shape the faith of the people on the Journey. Thus, to retrieve an African liberation, we need to dismantle the legacies and the challenges of neo-colonialism and inhuman structures to reestablish a cultural heritage in the lives of migrants.

The holistic liberation for which we have argued in this section is a liberation from all forms of dehumanization, cultural domination, and religious impoverishment. We have argued that the suitable African liberation for our case study is a holistic liberation that restore the wholeness of the human being from an early age. It is through this perspective of holistic liberation that the redemption and empowerment of minor migrants is possible. This holistic liberation that considers the wholeness of creation is the theological *locus* of African tradition religion.

3.5. African Traditional Religion: A Fabric of social and natural liberation

Among the authors that have laid the foundation of African religions and spirituality, Magesa, Mbiti and Orobator hold a common view on the role and perception of religion in Africa tradition. They all see African religion and spirituality with a holistic interaction between human beings, other existence, and the cosmos. This interaction of different encompasses a communal “sacred mystery and destiny of creatures whose telos or ultimate goal is communion of all creation into supreme Goodness or God, the author of

¹⁷⁵ Teresia M. Hinga, *African, Christian, Feminist*, 16.

harmony.”¹⁷⁶ Thus, African religions and spirituality are relational and holistic. This holistic view englobes the community, ancestral spirit, tradition, ritual, and the cosmos.

The African stories of creation, proverbs, beliefs, and God’s liberation for human beings are instinctively linked to the liberation of the world. Orobator argues that “creation is experienced and revered as a revelation of God who triumphs over death to save and liberate both humankind and the cosmos. The result is a moral imperative or duty to care for our common home.”¹⁷⁷ The African view of the world surpasses earthly domination because of its cultural and religious view of the powers of the natural world.

In the struggle of human beings for life and death, cosmic beings are involved in fighting for a well-lived life and the struggle against threats to human life. In African wisdom, the destiny of human beings cannot be separated from the destiny of creation. This common history and destiny with the cosmos are expressed in proverbs such as “the forest is our skin, and if one removes the skin of the human being, the result is death.”¹⁷⁸ Thus, the destruction of the natural world by human beings also constitutes self-destruction, because creation and human beings are interconnected. Liberation is always connected to the cosmos and all beings, namely organic and inorganic, living and inanimate, visible, and invisible.¹⁷⁹ Jesus’s action portrays that kind of holistic liberation that the African religions propose. Jesus and African religions see liberation as a question

¹⁷⁶ Laurenti Magesa, *What Is Not Sacred? African Spirituality*, 24-30.

¹⁷⁷ A. E. Orobator, *Religion and Faith in Africa: Confessions of an Animist* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2018), 111.

¹⁷⁸ Bénézet Bujo, *The Ethical Dimension of Community: The African Model and the Dialogue between North and South* (Nairobi, Kenya: Paulines Publications Africa, 1998), 209.

¹⁷⁹ Bénézet Bujo, “Ecology and Ethical Responsibility from an African Perspective,” 282.

of liberating both human beings and the natural world. In the stories of calming the storms, Jesus reveals that holistic aspect of liberation that liberates and brings to peaceful living all the natural forces and communities.

3.6. The Liberating Power of Jesus: The Cultural Heritage of Nature

I want to demonstrate in this section the relationship of the beliefs of animatism with my *Bashi*¹⁸⁰ indigenous religion and culture which believes that caring and worshiping inanimate objects can deliver and prevent people from harm and evil forces. They believe in the mystic and religious power of the natural world sent by God on the earth to help them live peacefully with all the creatures. As Gene Brown argues, animatists believe that “the supernatural forces residing in various objects interact with each other. They may then receive information from these forces regarding diseases, calamities, and other pertinent catastrophes.”¹⁸¹ This interrelation of forces and power, leading to the liberation of both human beings and nature can be seen in what I outline for cultural traditions and beliefs that depict Jesus as a liberator of human beings especially minors and cosmic forces.

I was born into a traditional animism religion and practice. Both my grandfathers practiced traditional religion and believed in their traditional power through the natural world. The father of my father was a traditional priest who could liberate people and nature from bad spirits. It was believed that he had the power to liberate and clear the way for healing and liberation for someone. On the other hand, the father of my mother was a

¹⁸⁰ Bashi is a tribe in the Eastern Congo. It is the tribes of my grandfathers and the religion they practiced before the coming of missionary. The Bashi tribes share the religious beliefs with other neighboring tribes.

¹⁸¹ Gene Brown et al., “Difference Between Animatism and Animism | Difference Between,” n.d., accessed March 22, 2022, <http://www.differencebetween.net/miscellaneous/difference-between-animatism-and-animism/>.

traditional healer who uses trees and herbs to heal human sickness and appease the natural forces. Incidentally, my immediate family members' conversion to Christianity ended up separating them from my grandfathers. It was believed that they were pagan and witches. My point is on the power they hold to liberate both nature and human beings. As I reflect on their experience and the episodes of Jesus Christ calming the storms and saving human beings on a perilous journey, I cannot stop thinking about the healing and liberating gift they received from Jesus Christ, but which went unrecognized. Whenever life in the village was threatened, the whole village would come to both my grandfathers for concoctions, leaves, ointments, root trees and other remedies to get healed and liberated from whatever put life at risk. Thus, the natural world holds the power of healing that increases the reverence and care of human beings. There was an interdependent healing complicity between the living and the non-living. I do believe that this power of liberation came from the highest being who first liberated and gave power to liberate his creatures. As a theologian reflecting on the power of my grandfathers, I realize that far from the label given to them by the new converts to Christianity as pagan, and animistic, they were able to put into practice the liberating power and message of Jesus Christ through their animalistic practices. They both hold a cultural and religious power that aims at liberating human beings and the natural world from suffering, disappearance, and death. They were given God's grace to liberate both the natural world and human beings using the natural forces of traditional wisdom. They walked in the footsteps of Jesus Christ as the first liberator and his mission to give fullness of life to living creatures. I believe that Jesus the liberator - presented in terms of African traditions, languages, cultures, and anthropology - would speak deeply to children migrating under the threat of death. Thus, by means of their

cultural heritage, migrants should attempt to find healing and liberation in their natural world through education and resilience rather than destroying and running from their homeland.

Robert Shore-Cross convincingly argues that “the divines communicate to us primarily through the language of the natural world. The spirit is the living energy sustaining all creation.”¹⁸² My grandfathers discovered this communication in the natural world that cares both for the restoration of humans and care of the environment. When nature becomes the healing power of God, the protectors of human beings, the restoration of a holistic life, it becomes an instrument of hope. The spirit of Jesus who liberates and empowers was in the natural world and everything that surrounded them. Thus, in nature and creation they could find hope and empowerment. It is good to see how traditional animatism is coming back to the theological approach as one of the eco-theology and spirituality used to address the present environmental crisis. The notion of animatism and panentheism which is a belief that the divine exists in nature are shaping the theological understanding of liberation and salvation. In their doctrine God is a force that animate the universe. God lives everywhere and the divine presence inhabits and animate the world. On the same note, Robert Shore-Goss argues that “there have been attempts in recent decades of Christian theologians to develop Christian panentheism. Both animism and panentheism are attempts to create adequate inclusive theological language to comprehend the universe as alive and/or matter as consciousness.”¹⁸³ In fact, we cannot despise the

¹⁸² Robert E. Shore-Goss, *The Insurgency of the Spirit: Jesus's Liberation Animist Spirituality, Empire, and Creating Christian Protectors* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2020), 300-301.

¹⁸³ Robert E. Shore-Goss, *The Insurgency of the Spirit: Jesus's Liberation Animist Spirituality*, 11.

cultural narratives that form and inform society and human beings. Human beings are cultural beings shaped by their narrative of God's mercy and encounter. As argues Robert shore, "Jesus's kingdom message and compassionate actions reflect his animist [and animatism] spirituality, fiercely shaped into his justice concerns for the poor and outsiders, his love beyond family and tribe to the outsiders, and ultimately, to enemy."¹⁸⁴ As Jesus was connected with the earth in founding inspiration and restoration through its contemplation, so the human beings spirituality and religious background finds its meanings and fulfillment in his encounter and embodies with the earth and the natural world.

The courage and power of my grandparents is confirmed by Wangari, who calls the African Christian to "self-betterment- *id est*- the belief that one can improve one's life and circumstances and the earth itself"¹⁸⁵ by enhancing and finding meaning in his cultural beliefs that do not contradict the Christian belief, but rather fulfill it. Holistic liberation means liberating the African child and his cultures, as his hope for a brighter life is restored and confirmed. In other words, as Mveng argues, it is about recreating the human being by unleashing his creative imagination that allows him to face his destiny.¹⁸⁶ When Mveng speaks of the African experience of liberation he emphasizes the holistic liberation that comprises human beings and the natural world, as well as liberation from evil forces. Liberation comes in Africa at the intersection between life and death. Jesus Christ the liberator is the one who restores the life of creatures. In my language, the name of God as

¹⁸⁴ Shore-Goss, *The Insurgency of the Spirit*, 294-295

¹⁸⁵ Wangari Maathai, *Replenishing the Earth: Spiritual Values for Healing Ourselves and the World*, 1st ed. (New York; Doubleday, 2010), 135.

¹⁸⁶ Engelbert Mveng, *Théologie, libération et cultures africaines: dialogue sur l'anthropologie négro-africaine*, Essai (Yaoundé [Cameroun: C.L.E., 1996), 14.

a “Lulema” signifies the creator and protector of the creatures without distinguishing nor separating their origin.

3.6.1. Jesus Christ as a *Lulema* for the Bashi

Among the Bashi, the tribal and traditional religion of my ancestors, one of the names of the trinitarian God is “Lulema”, which means the one who creates, dwells in creation, and liberates his own creation by protecting it. *Lulema* as God is not alive only in human beings but in all of his creation. He still soars over his creatures and his symbols, and signs can be found within every creature. Thus, the beliefs in *Lulema* invite us to see God in all creation and God’s message is heard in all creatures. The Bashi would easily interpret God’s liberation message in human beings but also in creation in general. In times of erosion, infertility of the earth the Bashi wisdom and culture will interpret those catastrophes as God’s message to stop exploiting this area. They will see an irruption as a sign that God is not happy about the kind of exploitative agriculture that people are conducting. This reading of the voice of God who cares and liberates in the signs of nature pushes them to liberate themselves but also the natural world. In times of erosion, disturbances of the natural world and scarcities experienced by the inhabitants of the earth, a ritual is performed to liberate and keep both the environment and creatures healthy and safe.

The same name and African traditional beliefs are found among the Akan of Ghana who call God a ‘Boadze,’ which means the one who creates.¹⁸⁷ Both *Lulema* and *Boadze* have the common aim of seeing the flourishing and fulfillment of life in creation. Thus,

¹⁸⁷ John S. Pobee and John Pobee, eds., “In Search of Christology in Africa: Some Considerations for Today,” in *Exploring Afro-Christology*, Studies in the intercultural history of Christianity, Studien zur interkulturellen Geschichte des Christentums Bd. 79 (Frankfurt am Main ; New York: P. Lang, 1992), 18-19.

whatever obstacles to that fullness of life go against the will of God. God reveals his power not only in the act of creation but also in his constant manifestation in the revelation story as he continuously cares and liberates his creatures from the bondage of any oppression. In this perspective, Jesus Christ as the creator, and liberator becomes the savior of the world (John 4: 42). African religion believes in the creative and saving power of God. The concept of *Lulema*, *boadze*..., and these beliefs in the saving power of Jesus-Christ who dwells in the creation, is manifest in the way most of the African tribes relate to nature and the community. From childhood, young people see the natural world as the foundation of human life. Whenever life and creation are threatened by danger, Africans can find protection, liberation, and healing in the natural world and in human rituals. In the context of African migrants as children of God, the liberating God should be found in the manifestation of God through the natural world. Their situation is more or less like the Israelites in the wilderness and African ancestors contemplating nature and encountering God in the cloud, in the desert, through his manifestation in the rock and manna as a sign of his presence that ensures a hopeful future. The restoration of the environmental, cultural, and anthropological heritage is one of the mechanisms that restores hope in a new future for minor migrants. This hope is not only an African reality but a biblical and christian value. Hence, the cultural aspect of restoring human dignity and ignite hope in the lives of minors is strengthened by the biblical and christian dimensions that bring not only hope but also present and eschatological salvation.

3.7. Hope as Salvation and Anthropological Restoration

In this section I want to explore hope and salvation as a restoration of future perspective for minor migrants. Migrating through a perilous and uncertain journey is by itself an act

of strong hope. The hope that pushes young people from sub-Saharan African to start the migrating journey can conversely be used to restore hope and anthropological restoration in their cultural heritage and their land. I will first elucidate the biblical and christian understanding of hope and salvation. Then I will explore the insights of some scholars on holistic hope and salvation grounding my arguments in the perspective of some theologians such as Elisabeth Johnson, Jean Marc Ela, who believe that the death of Jesus Christ liberates and restores hope not only for human beings but also for all the creatures.

There is a strong relationship between hope and mobility of African minor migrants. Beyond the difficulties on the journey and homeland, hope offers a prism of imagination, resilience, and endurance for minor migrants. This hope full of expectation can open new horizon in the migrants' land and restore humanness and proudness to implement solutions. For minor migrants, hope is that expectation of a good life that is not yet present. Therefore, I argue that the valid aspiration for the good life to come is found most especially in the homeland and not only abroad. Thus, liberation theology and actions aim at restoring the anthropological hope and empowerment that is needed in the context of minor migrants.

Hope is tangible in creatures and in the natural world that surrounds us, but most especially through the living signs of Jesus Christ, who does not only offer worldly salvation but also heavenly salvation. Hope is a biblical, Christian tradition but also an African reality that envisions a new life. As Saint Paul testifies in his letter to the Romans, "we are saved by hope" (Rm 8:24). This salvific hope that Saint Paul proclaims is not only anthropological but also considers the totality of creation. Saint Paul writes to the community saying that: "For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed... We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of

childbirth right up to the present time...For in this hope, we were saved. Nevertheless, hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have?" (Rm 8, 19-24). Hope gives the power to transform a life of anguish and trauma into a life of new significance. The encounter with Christ the liberator bestows a new meaning and fresh perspective, helping child migrants to rise from anthropological nihilism to the resurrection and to empowerment. Minor migrants need this kind of hope and salvation that accompanies and empowers their vision from within. Thus, hope that enables a brighter and more promising future, despite the struggles and trials of the present is needed in the time of crisis for young man.¹⁸⁸ However, this hope can only be tangible and effective for minor migrants, if it includes the restoration of all creatures and the natural world. This kind of hope will allow minor migrants to find salvation in their land as they shape their future lives.

Hence, it is essential for minor migrants to realize that they can still hope for a brighter future, despite the anguish in their immigrant status and present life. The final message of the synod of African bishops interprets hope in the context of Africa stating that, "the synod was intended to be an occasion of hope and resurrection, at the very moment when human events seemed to be tempting Africa to discouragement and despair." The synod concludes by appealing to Christians with these words: "We want to say a word of hope and encouragement to you family of God in Africa, to you, the family of God all over the world: Christ our hope is alive; we shall live!"¹⁸⁹ The refreshment of creation is a motif of hope. The presence of each creature is what sustains hope and life.

¹⁸⁸ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae: A Concise Translation* (Westminster: Christian Classics, 1989), I-II.69. 1 ad 3.

¹⁸⁹ Pope Benedict XVI, *Africae Munus: Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2011), 2, 172.

This hope for a better future and new life encourages our actions to change the minors' suffering from their chaotic past to a new and brighter future.¹⁹⁰ Hope accepts and incorporates personal history into the lives of the victims. The hope that accompanies the victim is the resurrection experience because, as Jesus' life experience shows, "no future hope or restoration negates the reality of past injury."¹⁹¹ The resurrection of Jesus is a testimony of that hope that enlightens the disciples in their fearful isolation. Life and mission did not end with the cross, but beyond all, hope and resurrection continue the mission of Jesus Christ to this day. Beyond the horror of life through migration on a perilous journey, faith and hope in Jesus Christ empower people in their everyday struggles.

New life emerges not only from the encounter with humans but also through the encounter with creation in general. Elizabeth Johnson has a holistic view of the redemptive incarnation and resurrection that restores hope to all creatures. She argues that "Biblical themes of the community of creation, God's covenant with all creatures of flesh on the earth, incarnation, resurrection and hope for a renewed heaven and earth where justice dwells open up a tremendous vision of salvation not only for humans but for all creatures who are other-than-human and the ecological niches in which they dwell and interact."¹⁹² For Johnson, the resurrection of Jesus includes the flourishing not only of human beings but of all creatures. Thus, the resurrection of Jesus gives a hopeful future to the whole of

¹⁹⁰ Benedict, *spe salve*, 35.

¹⁹¹ Flora A. Keshgegian, *Redeeming Memories: A Theology of Healing and Transformation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000), 175-178.

¹⁹² Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Creation and the Cross: The Mercy of God for a Planet In Peril*, First paperback edition. (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2019), 146.

creation and liberates all the creatures groaning under the burden of oppression and violation. Pope Francis points out that God's mercy is not only for human beings, but rather for all creation. In his interpretation of "the gaze of Jesus" Pope Francis sees a deep relationship with God's will for all his creatures. All creatures are important in God's eyes and they are not forgotten in salvific history.¹⁹³

The vision of Pope Francis, African spirituality and Elizabeth Johnson concerning holistic salvation is a response to Paul's writing (Rm 8, 18-25) that creation is groaning while waiting in hope for their redemption and liberation. The liberation of all creation processes, argues Johnson, must be taken seriously in all contemporary theology, as well as the process of restoring wellness, care, hope and salvation for humanity. Johnson argues that, "since salvation means making life whole, liberating, healing, forgiving, restoring, cleansing, opening up new possibilities, beliefs in a God who saves is obviously germane to the polluted, ravaged natural world."¹⁹⁴ For Johnson, the theology of atonement, which argues that Jesus Christ redeemed only humanity, should be replaced by the theology of accompaniment that sees the holistic solidarity and option for all creation as sharing and waiting for the resurrection and hope for liberation. Hope is that presence of God among his creatures because, "Jesus Christ risen embodies the ultimate hope of all creatures in creation."¹⁹⁵ This restoration of creation cannot be only eschatological rather it should inspire present generation in taking care of their environment as they realize that the

¹⁹³ Pope Francis, *Laudato Si*, 97-100.

¹⁹⁴ Johnson, *Creation, and the Cross*, 42, 225.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 193.

interconnectedness is not only an earthly reality rather a salvific and resurrection experience.

This kind of hope is what can sustain the dreams for the future of minors. The approach of Jesus Christ in encountering the crisis is to give back an active hope to minor migrants. The hope for the minors is the belief in humanity and in persons who promise a future life and realize Christ's promise. The historical and present suffering brings minors to the awareness that they are loved and held in his power, and to the possible hope of the self-liberation process. They can believe in their capacities to transform their lives and transform the future. However, the minors who still have a future before them should know that hope projects us in the future, but it does not give us future knowledge. To avoid illusion and utopia, this hope for the future should be grounded in the present situation with awareness of the present injustices and the struggles that still impact their daily lives. Thus, better life in the future is a gift of the present struggle.

Minor migrants facing sufferings, will hardly understands God who offers salvation and liberation at the end of their life-living. The only hope and salvation that are contextual in this framework are liberation and salvation that find their fulfillments in the present and future promises because “salvation is the object of hope, but it has a present dimension. To be saved means to be delivered now, to be liberated already from the forces of alienation that enslaved persons.”¹⁹⁶ Therefore, salvation is not only about the soul after death. Instead, it is about living a dignified human life. In the context of African minor migrants, Christian salvation that fails to bring life and hopeful future to minors and youths in this time of suffering is not worth believing. God's revelation and promise of a new homeland

¹⁹⁶ Ela, *African Cry*, 30-31.

in the exodus journey is a God of Hope. A migration journey is a journey of hope. All the migrants nourish that hope and faith that “God who reveals the divine name is the God of Hope in the future of an irreversible movement and a radical novelty. In referring the human being to a future of God, the divine name of the exodus becomes a call of hope.”¹⁹⁷ It is necessary that minor migrants who still have the vision for the future be given that glance.

Another hermeneutic of hope in the context of migrants is to empower minors. This empowerment is about reconstructing hope and human dignity in the lives of minors. The education system should revise the cultural and spiritual revival in the context of Africa.¹⁹⁸ This educational system should show the beauty and potentiality of Africans by portraying salvation as not being far away, but rather being in the here and now of the reality of culture and land. Cultural revival, educational renewal, and spiritual redemption are vital because they create new and personal narratives that bring about changes and empower or create young leaders. Education helps to forge a new person who is capable of transforming his environment into opportunity and of changing his challenges into opportunities. In fact, liberation theology and Ubuntu ethics have the same vision to restore hope for creation. The new form of education, as it aims to change the cultural mindset of the youth, is a long-term goal to change society and provide new hope.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁷ Keshgegian, *Redeeming Memories*, 83.

¹⁹⁸ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum, 1987), 83.

¹⁹⁹ Hinga, *African, Christian, Feminist*, 23.

In this section we have shown how hope which is needed for minor migrants is a biblical and Christian reality that Christ the liberator bestows on creation. Authors such as Johnson and Ela envision a holistic restoration of hope that encompasses not only human beings but also all the creatures. Thus, we have argued for what Johnson calls a theology of accompaniment which considers the holistic solidarity and resurrection of all creation. However, in the context of minor migrants, we have shown that hope and resurrection are not only an afterlife reality. It is a present reality that ought to liberate minors in the present sufferings.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have tried to outline a theology of liberation in the context of minors migrating through the Mediterranean Sea. Biblically and theologically speaking, there are many faces of Jesus Christ that could speak to the situation of migrants. I have demonstrated how the people of God (Israelites) were victims of environmental degradation and migration, and Jesus himself was a migrant in the same Mediterranean Sea that minors are traveling. He therefore understands the struggle of the minors. His experience as a migrant brought Jesus close to human beings, but also to natural forces. He could easily liberate both human beings and natural forces that were a threat for life.

We have shown this holistic liberation in two main theses and perspective. The first perspective has retrieved the Christian understanding of liberation, hope and salvation in revealing that liberation and resurrection of Jesus Christ cannot be constrained to the human beings, rather, they concern the whole creation. Jesus as a liberator, liberates all creation. The second perspective has argued from the African religion and spirituality,

demonstrating how the African traditional religion considers salvation as holistic existence that encompasses human and non-humans' beings.

From an African perspective, we have revealed that culturally and anthropologically speaking, the traditional religions of Africa response to the call for the holistic liberation perspective that is needed in the context of minors migrating. The cultural heritage of the Bashi and Logba show the interconnectedness of a holistic liberation that restores hope of minors and easily reassures their dreams and hopes for a new future. Africans need an anthropological liberation that constructs hope and builds the future.

Chapter IV: DESIGNING ACTION: A RESPONSE TO THE CRISIS

Introduction

Ubuntu ethics and liberation theology are not only ethical, theological, and philosophical visions and discourses. Ubuntu and liberation theology without a praxis lens would be incomplete. In a way, Ubuntu ethics, liberation theology and the practical aspect of education all thrive to restore the anthropological and the holistic care of creation. There is a need to define actions, such as: educational and pastoral care empowers youths and provides them with hope of a brighter future, so as to restore their human dignity. In fact, as Buhle Mpofu argues, the liberative process “is not just a matter of peace and reconciliation among human beings- but it is also the liberation and restoration of the relationship between humanity and the created order of the universe.”²⁰⁰ In the African theological and religious context, rituals take care of both human beings and the environment. Consequently, there are two characters that are in dire need of healing and liberation, namely the unaccompanied minors and the environmental.

This chapter aims at designing a praxis-oriented ministry that can make a difference in the lives of minors who are environmental migrants and their relationship both with their community (culture) and environment. Thus, the key question that this chapter will try to answer is what Ubuntu ethics and liberation theology could do to create actions necessary to address the root causes of unaccompanied minors, victims of climate change. They suggest the need for resilience, liberative education, cultural formation, pastoral care as

²⁰⁰ Buhle Mpofu, “Pursuing Fullness of Life through Harmony with Nature: Towards an African Response to Environmental Destruction and Climate Change in Southern Africa,” *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 77, no. 4 (May 1, 2021): e1–e8, accessed December 2, 2021, <https://hts.org.za/index.php/hts/article/view/6574>.

well as professional training in integral ecology, both in migrants' homelands and the host countries.

James Ogude and Unifier Dyer observe that, “the idea of education involves the broad processes of learning, upbringing, socialization, initiation, acculturation, and teaching people the communal ways of life, tradition, beliefs, values, a broad range of prescribed conduct...”²⁰¹ The actions I want to propose were inspired by Wangari Mataai, while others are grounded on the teaching of the Church drawn mainly from *Laudato si* and the dicastery for promotion of integral human development. This perspective on education develops the capacities and skills for promoting sustainable agriculture, halting deforestation, and desertification, and developing nature-based solutions that develop the economy and protect the environment. Thus, it engenders actions that renew relationships with humanity and creation by upholding an authentic integral vision of humanity and development that restores a truly human ecological and anthropological dignity. As maintains the dicastery of human development, we need “to create a holistic education system that enables all children to realize and appreciate fully their common humanity, thereby contributing to peaceful and sustainable national development and environmental sustainability.”²⁰² The ecological actions that we encourage in a postmodern developed world are an attempt to respond to the environmental crisis. The actions advocate for policy implementation and

²⁰¹ James Ogude and Unifier Dyer, “Utu/Ubuntu and Community Restoration: Narratives of Survivors in Kenya’s 2007 Postelection Violence,” in *Ubuntu and the Reconstitution of Community* (Indiana University Press, 2019), 219-220.

²⁰² Holy Sea Office, “Pastoral Guidelines on Climate Displaced People,” accessed December 7, 2021, <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2021/03/30/210330b.html>.

argue for a liberative education that both empowers and frees the minors' vision, utilizing their potentiality to transform their environment without relying on intervention.

4.1. Overview of the Action and Resilience

The European Commission (EU) has a framework of plan of action for unaccompanied minors that includes three actions that are shared by the EU countries: “prevention of trafficking and at-risk migration, reception and procedural guarantees across all of the EU, the search for durable solutions.”²⁰³ The EU policy focuses on the protection and identification of minor migrants as preventive measures but does not address the root causes of their migration. The EU parliament has focused on the rights of migrant minors, specifying the principle of non-refoulement, granting permits, the identification of minors, and family investigation. The countries affected by the environmental crisis have development initiatives to prevent their communities from natural and human calamities. However, these initiatives need to be developed and extended to other communities.

The first response of the local community to the growing climate change can be resilience, as is illustrated in the case of the Tuareg people. The local community (Tuareg) has tried to remain in their land by fostering local and indigenous innovation such as “the use of various types of mulches to conserve soil water and animal skin to wrap around jars to keep water cool. The sense of community also plays a central role as means of survival, with the most resilient members of the community extending a generous hand to the less

²⁰³ Giovanni Giulio Valtolina and Marina D’Odorico, “Crossing Alone the Mediterranean Sea. Some Critical Issues about Unaccompanied Minors in Europe,” *REMHU: Revista Interdisciplinar da Mobilidade Humana* 25, no. 51 (December 2017): 77–94, accessed November 10, 2021.

resilient.”²⁰⁴ Their practice of resilience includes innovation in gardening, an association that intends to reduce the effect of environmental degradation, planting heat-resistant varieties of seeds, local production of compost to enhance the soil fertility, planting trees that constrain the propagation of the desert, water and soil management. This indigenous genius is practiced by the Tuareg tribes in most countries around Mali, Nigeria, Niger, and Mauritania. The decision to move from one area to another has been the last resort surrounded by bitterness and despair. Thus, the first insights of the local population have been adaptation; only when they are no longer able to adapt do people consider moving away from their ancestral land. Some find refuge in neighboring countries, others move far away without expecting to come back, while still others, mostly youths, take the route of the Mediterranean Sea. Some people, though, would rather die than move away from their motherland. However, despite these cultural innovations, the education system continues to suffer as climate change continues to affect the area, parents are unable to provide for their children, and their children end up dropping out of school. Additionally, some teachers have left the area in search of better opportunities elsewhere. The custom of resilience as practiced by the Tuaregs people can be an efficient response to climate and environmental degradation that restores both the environmental and human dignity as it empowers people to respond locally to the environmental and migration crisis. Hence resilience is very important in managing disaster and implement an alternative way of leaving and adapting to the ecological and environmental crisis. This cultural practice of

²⁰⁴ Fouda Ndikintu and Mohamed Ag Malha, “Resilience, Adaptation, and Learning: Malian Refugees and Their Mauritanian hosts, “Forced Migration Review, No. 64 (June 2020): 45-48.

resilience can also be perpetuated by education as elders convey their wisdom and cultural heritage to younger generation.

4.2. Liberative Education

Liberative education for migrants will be all-encompassing and will include moral, spiritual, and developmental dimensions of human development in order to brighten the future of the refugee children. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) confirms that, "wherever they are and regardless of their migration status, children have a right to be protected, to keep learning and to receive the care and services they need to reach their full potential,"²⁰⁵ and I believe education is the most important tool that can ensure the future development and growth of unaccompanied minors. Education and development of skills not only play an invaluable role to reestablish hope but also boost opportunities and future potentialities of migrants, whether they are in their homeland or in their host countries. Furthermore, education, skills-development, and creative empowerment are beneficial to the host society, the homeland and to the unaccompanied minors themselves.

It is worth noting that the passivity of people affected by environmental degradation makes them think that migration is the best and the only solution to their plight. By failing to take adequate responsibility to reduce actions inimical to environmental and socio-economic improvement, youths blame state, government, colonialism, and neo-colonialism as the bane of their future. The actions being proposed in this paper intend to raise the consciousness and the conviction that one can improve, radically change one's life in all circumstances and improve one's land by responding locally and individually to the crisis

²⁰⁵ Garin, *Uprooted*, 14.

they are facing without waiting for someone else to do so for them. The call and actions of Wangari are about enforcing self-empowerment, popular education, self-reliance, and confidence in our human dignity. There is a need for an education that helps learners to acknowledge and believe in their power to bring change in the community.²⁰⁶ This self-empowerment enhances self-liberation and the liberation of the environment. Empowerment through education plays an important role in the anthropological development of humanity and mankind. The work of Wangari Maathai demonstrates that environmental education (protection), poverty reduction and reestablishment of human dignity by empowerment is the perspective that is needed in Africa. Thus, in the following, I want to show the living legacy and critical pedagogy of Wangari Maathai who used her traditional beliefs, along with her people, to reshape a modern restoration of the environment and humanity.

4.2.1. The Legacy of Wangari Maathai

Wangari Maathai was an exemplar of a cultured African woman and theologian whose actions restored dignity to both humanity and the environment. Maathai, the Nobel Laureate argues that the trees and all of creation are “understood by the communities as nodal points that connect the world above with the world below...A place where we find protection and shelter.”²⁰⁷ In African cultures, proverbs, culture, spirituality, and cultural narratives of salvation are related to the care of the environment. The cultural beliefs of the Kikuyu people helped Wangari to implement her scientific knowledge in working with

²⁰⁶ Maathai, *Replenishing the Earth*, 15, 130.

²⁰⁷ Ibid., 93

rural people to achieve change both in the society, politics, and care for the environment. One of the local Kikuyu proverbs states, “*rigita thi wega, ndwaheiruo ni aciari, ni ngombo uhetwo ni ciana ciaku* (Kikuyu) meaning, “you must treat the earth well. It was not given to you by your parents, it is loaned to you by your children.”²⁰⁸ This proverb calls for action that takes care of the earth. It informs everyone to take care of the earth, our common home, because it is a dwelling for some divinities and for the sake of future generations.

The traditional belief and understanding of the Kikuyu culture about the fig tree helped Wangari to mobilize people for the sake of creating a healthy environment that sustains human development. Among the Kikuyu, a fig tree is symbolic and has a spiritual and cultural connection with a human being. Furthermore, the Akamba, Egede, Meru, and Tonga people consider a fig tree to be sacred. Thus, they offer their sacrifice before a fig tree, and so worship under the tree. In many traditional African cultures and religions, some specific trees hold a special place in the tribe.²⁰⁹ They are sacred trees that cannot be cut down because they signify divine presence. Wangari Maathai built on these cultural understandings of the African cultural understanding heritage to mobilize local women to plant trees while promoting development and human dignity in their locality. The strength and originality of Wangari’s method was that she showed the link between environmental degradation with political, economic, and social problems, and thus provided a holistic solution to them. She came to the conclusion that by addressing holistically the problem of environmental degradation, she could resolve the root causes of underdevelopment,

²⁰⁸ Proverbs in African are popular wisdom carried by people. It is difficult to find a collection of proverbs although people know those proverbs. I learnt this proverb from a friend of mine from the Kikuyu tribe when I was working and studying in Kenya.

²⁰⁹ Maathai, *Replenishing the Earth*, 66.

poverty, and disempowerment of the marginalized. As Anke Graness explained, the Belt movement “organized women in rural Kenya to plant trees to combat deforestation, restore their main source for firewood and generate income while preserving their land resources. Moreover, it offers education and professional training to women.”²¹⁰ Wangari brought hope, healing, and empowerment to a desperate population by improving the life condition of the population. The belt movement was not only about planting trees and taking care of the environment, but also planting ideas of human dignity, relatedness, political change, social life improvement, independence, and empowerment.²¹¹ This is a grassroots movement whose primary focus is poverty reduction, environmental care, cultural retrieval, restoring human dignity, and giving hope and pride to Kenyans. Wangari and her movement brought a shift in cultural thinking and modern living that is still perceptible in Kenya, even after her death from cancer many years ago. The movement was perceived as a source and model for empowering women on the issue of environmental justice, democracy, social justice, and human rights as well as proposing a solution to people’s social problems.

4.2.2. Educational and training empowerment

Taking care of the environment by performing daily ecofriendly action seems to be an adequate response to environmental and socio-economic challenges as proposed by Pope Francis and Wangari Maathai. Actions such as: planting trees, agricultural adaptation, prevention of desertification, and caring for the rivers, streams, and lakes protects the earth

²¹⁰ Anke Graness, “Ecofeminism in Africa: The Contribution of Wangari Maathai,” in *African Philosophy and the Epistemic Marginalization of Women*, 1st ed. (Routledge, 2018), 189–206.

²¹¹ Wangari Maathai, “Agroforestry, Climate Change and Habitat Protection,” in *Agroforestry - The Future of Global Land Use*, Advances in Agroforestry (Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 2012), 3–6.

and the rest of creation from harm. Caring for the soil through a multi-dimensional perspective prevents erosion; improves soil nutrients, peoples' healthcare, and makes the land rich for food production.²¹²

Through education, the church and society participate in the liberating process of the poor and empower the weak and vulnerable. Bishop Verryn, in his ministry to the unaccompanied migrants in South Africa, understood education as a key liberative empowerment of minors. He says that, "the plight of refugees is a sin that is institutionalized and systematized...[he sees] human liberation and empowerment of minor migrants through education as being one of the many possible solutions."²¹³ Education can be a peaceful weapon to end dependency and marginalization. As Paulo Freire argues, in the context of oppression and marginalization we should prioritize education as being a tool that liberates and humanizes.²¹⁴ Bishop Verryn's approach for unaccompanied children is more contextual. It responds to the needs of minors by removing "dependency syndrome, victim syndrome, and initiates a survival syndrome through advocating for praxis-oriented and prestigious education."²¹⁵ This education should place emphasis on creativity, entrepreneurship, and self-employment. In the case of migration of minors in an African context, any attempt to address the root causes should include women who are the

²¹² Maathai, *Replenishing the Earth*, 32.

²¹³ Sinenhlanhla S. Chisale, "Bishop Paul Verryn's Pastoral Response towards Unaccompanied Refugee Minors," *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 72, no. 2 (November 1, 2016): e1–e8, accessed October 30, 2021, .

²¹⁴ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 72-75.

²¹⁵ Chisale, "An Integrated African Pastoral Care Approach to Unaccompanied Refugee Minors Based on Verryn's Child Interventions," 6.

educators and transmitters of African values, customs, and tradition.²¹⁶ The empowerment of local communities in activities that mitigate environmental degradation, and which also respond to the plight of climate refugees can take many forms. Whatever the form; dialogue and training in strategic education is essential.

4.2.3. Change of cultural and curriculum formation

In the African cultural context, there exist too many forms of education and training methodology that are broader than normal school setting would allow. As Marie Rodet and Elodie Razy argue, “in many cultures, education also refers to the acquisition of various skills, including domestic tasks, and of cultural competencies... in this context, child labor, -which is often at the heart of migratory concerns- is generally a component of education and not just a source of revenue for the children themselves and/ or those around them as highlighted in Hepburn’s contribution.”²¹⁷ There are many forms of education that can enhance the humanity of unaccompanied migrants. Whatever the system and program, the transformation of the cultural perspective that restores the dignity of humanity to minors is highly needed.

Education is a worldly reality that is not only cultural but also contextual. In some way, education upholds the vision of transforming an entire population or place. The identity and context of unaccompanied minor migrants make education even more challenging. Their education ought to respond to the context of the host community, and at the same time provide the means necessary to minimize environmental degradation. In other words,

²¹⁶ Leocadie Lushombo, “The Politics of Forest Conservation: Ethical Dilemmas and Impact on Peacebuilding,” in *Amazonia: Gift and Tasks*, ed. Geraldo De Mori, Michelle Becka, and Antony John Baptist, Concilium 2021 (London: SCM Press, 2021), 51.

²¹⁷ R. Elodie & Marie Rodet, “Introduction Child Migration in Africa: Key Issues and New Perspectives,” 18-19.

any form of education to be adopted should consider the identity, context, and cultural background of the students because, as Leah Adams and Anna Kirova argue, “immigrant children’s identity formation is influenced by at least two distinct, and sometimes contradicting, cultural systems: the home culture and the school culture... identity and agency are important factors in immigrant children’s adaptation to the host culture.”²¹⁸

Cultural beliefs and environmental management should be part of the curriculum that enlighten children how to manage and protect the environment at this time of protracted climate change. They should learn theories and practices that restore their relationship with the environment so that they can know how to deal with the crisis and this learning will address the anthropological pauperization as viewed by Mveng. In fact, true development comes from a consciousness of a cultural cycle. It is a cycle where people are conscious of their conditions and accept the means to free themselves. The cultural cycle should aim at analyzing the situation in which people live and act to humanize them and bring them out of oppression and anthropological nihilism. The dialogical consciousness method of Paulo gives back the oppressed the power to liberate themselves, raise their voices and become masters of their destinies. It empowers them to transform their world and culture.²¹⁹ This type of empowerment is also an integral part of pastoral care as well. Thus, a pastoral perspective on professional training in human ecology, lay formation curricula, integration and advocacy is the ministerial response of the church towards ending the crisis and addressing the anthropological pauperization.

²¹⁸ Leah Adams and Anna Kirova, *Global Migration and Education: Schools, Children, and Families* (Mahwah, N.J: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2007), 8.

²¹⁹ Paulo Freire and Paulo Freire, *Education for Critical Consciousness*, 1st American ed., A Continuum book (New York: Seabury Press, 1973), viii.

4.3. Pastoral Response

4.3.1. Ministerial Response

The church leaders can respond to the environmental and migration crisis in three ways. First, they can raise awareness about the conditions of life of many unaccompanied minors at the borders. Secondly, they can provide pastoral and psychological care. Third, they can address the root cause of migration in their ministry. The document of the catholic church concerning environmental degradation summarizes the actions and response that the church has already taken, affirming that “empowerment of unaccompanied minors to navigate basic social functions successfully through capacity building program such as language tutoring, cultural education ... and promoting spaces for mutual listening and cultural exchange”²²⁰ is a lane of response to migrants. The Church's ministers can then provide practical tools for their faithful to be involved in the problem and work toward a sustainable solution. In calling the faithful for action, the Church responds to the many injustices of the society. Prophetic voices can increase the promotion of climate justice and awareness across the borders.

The conference of the United Church of Christ during their synod gives three moral imperatives to the Clergy. The first moral imperative appeals to the Clergy to preach on climate change, migration, and injustices. The second asks Clergy and their faithful to incarnate the change they long for in their lives. The third imperative is to be a disciple of truth because it is by this witnessing of the truth that “people of faith have been a crucial part of social change” across the world.²²¹ The ministerial approach is then paramount for

²²⁰Holy Sea Office, “Pastoral Guidelines on Climate Displaced People.”

²²¹ Antal, *Climate Church, Climate World*, 30-40.

addressing the crisis when they are practiced in a practical way and give back voices to the voiceless victims of climate injustices.

4.3.2. Advocacy

The Church in its advocacy ensures that the principle of justice for all and especially for migrants is taken into account by ensuring that the vulnerable are heard and cared for in all human dimensions.²²² This awareness entails a sacrificial engagement because, as Todd Muller writes, “there are environmental activists who have risked- and even lost- their lives to raise awareness about the urgency of the current ecological crisis and to champion sustainable, just, and cooperative living.”²²³ Against all the odds, solidarity and closeness can bring about change for the victims of the environmental crisis. Advocacy and awareness can help break the chain of violence and exploitation to create a new world of ecological justice. Advocacy is also concerned with addressing the complexity and root causes of migration. Pope Francis strongly condemns an economic system that treats human beings as consumer goods that can be used and discarded. This system promotes what he calls the “idolatry of money”²²⁴ and treats the human being as a cog in the gigantic machine that serves the elite at the expense of the poor.²²⁵

A saying that is often used in education goes, “give a man a fish, and he will eat for a day. Teach a man how to fish, and you feed him for a lifetime.” This wise observation informs us that the best strategy to alleviate and address poverty is not through charity and

²²² Holy Sea Office, “Pastoral Guidelines on Climate Displaced People.”

²²³ Todd Miller, *Storming the Wall: Climate Change, Migration, and Homeland Security*, Open media series (San Francisco, CA: City Lights Books, 2017), 34.

²²⁴ Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* (Nairobi: Paulines, 2013), 54-55.

²²⁵ Ibid., 62.

almsgiving; rather, it ought to be manifested by teaching and educating those in need how to get rid of their poverty. The environmental crisis is one of the most significant challenges that the world is facing today, and it causes irreparable damage to the earth and people's health. To address the environmental crisis is also to address the unending cycles of poverty and, by extension, to break the chains of forced migration. Education and formation that address the extreme poverty in the countries of emigration, and especially encourage initiative and action that redress environmental disparities, are a pathway to address the root causes. This includes the support of the private sector aiming at protecting the environment. The support can also be provided through religious and theological formation that aims at developing the capacities of faithful to address the crisis.

4.3.3. Religious and theological formation

The church in Africa can also valorize African spirituality and ethics that, as we have demonstrated, provide holistic care. Courses on African ethics and spiritual traditional values ought to open the mind of ministers and Christians to act justly when it comes to nature. African spirituality truly has values that can save nature from degradation. Religious education and formation can bring a change in mentality by adopting a new lifestyle and advocating for a new educational curriculum that re-claim the traditional and African spirituality with its aim of restoring African human dignity. As Pope Francis stated, “the best ecology always has an educational dimension that can encourage the development of new habits in individuals and groups.”²²⁶ This African theological dimension should be taught not only in the seminarians but also in all institutions with new perspectives on ecological approach.

²²⁶ Pope Francis, *Querida Amazonia: The Beloved Amazon* (Huntington: Our Sunday Visitor, 2020), 26.

Henceforth, we can recognize that education, cultural formation and pastoral or ministerial engagement far from being separate respond constitute one respond to the crisis. They aim at empowerment the individuals and communities to be able to address the root causes of environmental degradation by themselves. These perspectives on empowerment can be a lasting solution to the crisis on environmental and migration in Sub-Saharan African context. The damages are huge, but I believe the crisis is still redeemable and controllable if all the stakeholders invest their energies in addressing both the human and environmental crisis.

Conclusion

Approaches, actions, and education of unaccompanied emigrating minors should be inclusive in that they build on their culture, beliefs, and historic background. Adults should listen and learn from minors in order to construct values from their knowledge and background. This approach is necessary because it gives respect and protection to minors in initiating them into society and reconstructs their memories and heritage. This approach values the ethnographic and narrative approach as well as, learning by question-response pedagogy, to build trust and direct the minor to the place where they want to be.

In conclusion, the educational system and faith formation should aim at restoring anthropo-cultural heritage and empowering minors from an early age. When minors are empowered from the beginning and early ages, they build confidence and resilience that allow them to find creative solutions in addressing the challenges they are facing rather than running from those challenges. Starting from the legacy of Wangari Maathai, the church perspective and cultural education we have shown how to construct soluble actions to address the root causes of environmental degradation and migration. The change of the

colonial educational system to an African education system that uses the language, culture and reality of Africans is one of the solutions and may be the most effective.

These actions we have designed kept the spirit of Ubuntu and liberation alive by fighting and redressing the environmental and anthropological dehumanization that minor migrants confront in their daily lives. Ubuntu ethics, African liberation and education are intricately intertwined in their fight of the well-being of humanity and creation. The cultural and religious perspective ought to offer perspective to minors to create their own lives and livelihood that founds proudness in their humanity and culture heritage that need to be perpetuated. Overall, one can argue that Ubuntu and African perspective on liberation are all attempt to set free the human being and his creation. The ubuntu theology of humanness and imago Dei, finds its fulfillment in the education that conveys the mission to restore human dignity and creation. Thus, the restoration of the image Dei becomes the essence of both Ubuntu as an ethics, liberation as a theological discourse which finds its self-actualization in the educational system.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

An African proverb says, “when there is something wrong in the forest, there is something wrong in society.”²²⁷ In a way, this proverb summarizes the relationship that exists between the environment and human beings. Both human beings and the natural world constitute a symbiosis of relationship that cannot be separated from one other without creating havoc in the rhythm of creation. In the natural world, Africans find everything: divine revelation, protection, healing, foods, and connection with other non-human beings. When this connection no longer exists, it impacts the perception and lives of creation in general. This thesis has explored this symbiotic interrelation, interdependent, anthropological, and hospitable interaction between human beings and the natural world. It applies these African ethical and theological values to the case study of minor climate refugees migrating through the Mediterranean Sea. In this thesis I have studied the environmental-migrants crisis by proposing Ubuntu and African liberation theology as a framework for addressing the crisis. African cultural heritage and spirituality have tools to address the challenges of environmental migration.

In the first chapter, I examined the root causes of environmental degradation and climate change. I discovered that the crisis has many root causes that are intertwined with other human and natural crises. This chapter on social analysis has analyzed the root causes from the colonial background, through the post-colonial, until the present day. From the present perspective, we have discovered that environmental degradation enforces poverty, thus creating human catastrophes such as environmental migrant crisis and death.

²²⁷ Proverb from the general knowledge that can also be find in many sources.

The second chapter dealt with the ethical perspective of Ubuntu ethics. I focused mainly on three dimensions of Ubuntu: Interconnectedness, anthropology, and hospitality. I discussed the Catholic Social Teaching of the Church in relation with Ubuntu ethics because there were many correlations between the two. The practical dimension of burying of the placenta, totemic beliefs and the use of tales and myths in the environmental and climate refugee crisis showed the applicability of Ubuntu ethics as one of the ethical approaches that can be used to curve the crisis.

The third chapter explored the theological dimension of the crisis by reflecting on the image or face of Jesus the liberator to migrants. After exploring the works on African liberation theology and Christology we have argued that Jesus, as a former migrant, understands the situation of migrants poignantly. Thus, liberation that is needed is a holistic liberation that delivers both human beings and their nature. It is through the interaction of creatures and nature that hope can be restored.

The fourth chapter has designed and suggested possible actions that ought to be done to address the challenges of environmental migration crisis. Learning from Wangari Maathai, I proposed a holistic education that empowers youth to find the solution to their own problems. These actions can be summarized in three ways: liberative education, cultural education, and pastoral ministries that can empower young people. In the process of research and writing I have learnt that the durable solution is to address the root causes of environmental migration and by doing so, anthropological pauperization can be significantly addressed. I proposed that we need to make a retrieval of African cultural heritage and spirituality that can help to address the challenge.

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