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21 AFRICAN INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE SYSTEMS AND THE CONSERVATION OF THE ENVIRONMENT AND CULTURAL HERITAGE IN BOTSWANA

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to explore how African indigenous knowledge systems have been incorporated into policies of Botswana environmental and cultural heritage conservation and management. The chapter further investigates how this incorporation has affected traditional conservation strategies. This will be done by adopting the theory of the sacralisation of space and time of historian of religion Mircea Eliade, by which Eliade explains that the importance of sacred places and sacredness in religion. The understanding by followers of a religion that certain places are endowed with divine power inherently demands that such places be treated with reverence. The belief of the existence of the supernatural powers in sacred places then becomes a good conservation strategy. There are regulations that govern human behaviour at the sacred places. In comparing the sacred and the profane, Eliade concludes that the only qualitatively different place is the sacred, while the profane space is always the same. Eliade has been criticised for the assertion that it is only within the realm of religion that sacredness is designated as a place that is qualitatively different.³ Critics of Eliade's theory of the sacralisation of places argue that though religion is pivotal in assigning a qualitative difference of places, it is not the only criteria that is used to designate a place as qualitatively different. They conclude by proposing a theory that they call the "plurality of the sacred".⁴

In this chapter, Eliade's theory is used along with what his critics call the "plurality of the sacred" theory to assess the idea of sacralisation of place in African indigenous knowledge systems. The chapter concludes that where the notion of sacredness forms the basis for assigning a place as qualitatively different, such places are conserved and treated with respect. The notion of sacredness, therefore, becomes a conservation strategy. On the other hand, though the notion of the plurality of the

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3 Holland A. 2004. "Is Nature Sacred? Response to Richard Norman", and Norman R. 2004. "Nature, Science, and the Sacred", in Rogers B (ed). *Is Nothing Sacred?* New York: Routledge, 28-41, 7-26.

4 See a detailed discussion of the theory in Mirdamadi Y. 2015. "The Plurality of the Sacred – Critical Remarks on Mircea Eliade's Conception of the Sacred", *Open Journal of Philosophy* 5:397-402 [<https://doi.org/10.4236/ojpp.2015.57048>].

sacred allows for the designation of qualitatively different places, the economic or profit-making approach towards such places leads to overuse, abuse and depletion of such places.

African local communities, taking this attitude towards the sacredness of places, have long devised management strategies aimed at conserving the environment and culture, even before the advent of international conservation bodies. The belief that all forms of life are sacred was a survival imperative to keep a balance between all forms of life and the environment. The local communities conserved their environment and cultural resources through psycho-social behaviour and indigenous knowledge systems that are embedded in environmental proverbs, sayings, rituals and taboos. The Batswana use cultural understanding of protection and conservation to positively interact with the environment. However, the need to protect the environment and cultural heritage at national level led to the development of legal frameworks that introduced administrative structures such as the Botswana Wildlife and Natural Resources and the Botswana Tourism Organisation.

This chapter explores how these administrative structures tap into indigenous knowledge systems by involving local communities to protect the environment and cultural heritage. However, it is not a rosy picture, because inherent in the modern conservation strategies is the commodification of the resources. Commodification of resources, potentially and realistically, leads to the depletion of the same traditional knowledge systems. Since the concept of sacredness is central to the conservation attitude in African traditional societies, it is imperative to discuss what the concept means.

THE SACRALISATION OF THE SACRED PLACE

Mircea Eliade explains that while for a religious person space is always qualitatively different, for a non-religious person space is always the same. There are some places that are qualitatively superior to other places. These are places and times that are, through special customs and rituals, sacralised; that is, they are made holy and are in deep connection with the sacred.⁵ Eliade explains that a place can become sacralised in three ways: human intervention, divine intervention and through mythology.⁶ For Eliade, it is only through sacralisation that the world becomes the world, or cosmos; otherwise, it is the profane world, or chaos. Myths, rituals, festivals and so on are tools through which the religious human of archaic cultures recalls the sacred.⁷ By contrast, Eliade explains that, "For non-religious man, all vital experiences-whether sex or eating, work or play have been desacralised."⁸ Eliade

5 Eliade M. 1957. *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*. New York: A Harvest Book, 26.

6 Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 20.

7 Mirdamadi, "The Plurality of the Sacred", 398.

8 Mirdamadi, "The Plurality of the Sacred", 398.

has been criticised especially for his stance that for a non-religious man space is the same. In real life, however, even for the most non-religious person, space is not always the same. For instance, those who have been in love hold dearly the place that they had their first date for dinner with their significant other, the place they went to for their honeymoon or holiday.

Scholars who have criticised Eliade point out that religion cannot be the only criterion for designating places as qualitatively different from all others. Consistent with this argument, the government of Botswana has identified some places in the country as qualitatively different from others. The qualitative difference has made it necessary to set aside these places and protect them. Notwithstanding the existence of qualitatively different spaces on secular terms, there are a number of places in Botswana that are sacred both in religious and secular terms. The examples include Matsieng footprints in Mochudi, the Tswapong and Tsodilo Hills and the Gcwihaba caves. These places have been revered by the local communities for religious purposes. Over and above the physical tangible cultural heritage of these places, their inhabitants possess a rich intangible heritage that has become of interest to the government as tourist attraction, independent of any religious connotation. For purposes of this chapter, in discussing the traditional indigenous knowledge systems of preserving heritage and government interest in preserving the same, we adopt the Eliadean view of the sacralisation of place, as well as the ideas of some of his critics.

AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION AND CONSERVATION STRATEGIES

African indigenous conservation strategies are imbedded in African Traditional Religion (ATR). Consistent with other scholars who came before him,⁹ Joram Tarusarira, a professor of religion, conflict and peace building, conceptualises ATR as a religion that is “expressed in the way Africans have always regulated their relationship with nature and with fellow human beings”.¹⁰ This attitude towards nature deems certain animals, hills, trees and elements of intangible culture as sacred to followers, hence to be treated with respect. Where animals and trees are used to meet human needs, people will take from their environment only as much as is necessary to meet their basic needs. Unfortunately, due to lack of full understanding of the ATR, some scholars have wrongly argued that “Africans are environmental unfriendly because they seem to have bad environmental record ... Africans cannot be expected to make substantive contributions to the world’s environmental problems and that they have no ideas or solutions to offer to any environmental

9 Mbiti JS. 1989. *African Religions and Philosophy*. Oxford: Heinemann; Amanze J. 2002. *African Traditional Religions in Botswana: A Comprehensive Textbook*. Gaborone: Pula.

10 Tarusarira J. 2017. “African Religion, Climate Change, and Knowledge Systems”, *The Ecumenical Review* 69(3):401 [<https://doi.org/10.1111/erev.12302>].

issues”.¹¹ On the same note, scholars in environmental ethics G.W. Burnett and K.W. Kang’ethe explain that “in the West, it is widely believed that, since Africans lack an emotional experience with romanticism and transcendentalism, they do not possess the philosophical prerequisites necessary to protect wilderness. However, the West’s disdain for African systems of thought has precluded examination of customary African views of wilderness”.¹² Through the review of literature, this chapter presents a different view, arguing that Africans have always had positive moral attitudes towards the environment. Though there are some environmental problems in Africa, Africa is currently a continent rich in both wildlife and natural resources.

From an African perspective, a healthy life requires a state of equilibrium between all forms of life, human, animal and plant life. It then becomes imperative that human beings take care of the environment in order to ensure that this equilibrium is maintained. Poor environmental care will result in catastrophic situations where scarcity, natural disasters such as drought, and illness threaten to all forms of life. The next section discusses how the notion of sacredness plays an important role in the conservation of the environment in African traditional religion.

THE AFRICAN WORLDVIEW AND ENVIRONMENTAL BELIEF SYSTEM

Joram Tarusarira speaks along the lines of the sacralisation of space as expounded by Eliade. He explains that for most African societies the “entire relationship between humans and nature, including activities such as land use, has deep religious and spiritual underpinnings” and that “religion is central to many of the decisions people make about their own community developments”.¹³ Theologian John S. Mbiti explains that Africans believe that God exists in nature.¹⁴ This mindset encourages positive relations towards the environment, since the environment has divine elements within it. Polycarp A. Ikuenobe, a professor of environmental ethics, explains that, “Traditional Africa had conservationist values, moral attitudes, practices and ways of life ... which were destroyed by the exploitative ethos of European colonisation and modernisation.”¹⁵ This implies that the European ethos, with its focus on profit making led to humanity demanding from Mother Nature more than what is necessary to meet the basic needs, hence the destruction of the environment.

11 Kelbessa W. 2006. “The Rehabilitation of Indigenous Environmental Ethics in Africa”, *Diogenes* 207:21; Burnett GW and Kang’ethe KW. 1994. “Wilderness and the Bantu Mind”, *Environmental Ethics* 16(2):145-160 [<https://doi.org/10.5840/enviroethics199416229>].

12 Burnett and Kang’ethe, “Wilderness and the Bantu Mind”, 145.

13 Tausarira, “African Religion, Climate Change and Knowledge Systems”, 398.

14 Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*.

15 Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*.

African views and thoughts on ontology, cosmology, medicine and religious practices supported their moral attitudes towards conservation and preservation of nature.¹⁶ Nature is seen as holistic and an interconnected continuum of humans and objects in nature. Reality is seen as a composite unity and harmony of natural forces such as human communities, spirits, mountains, plants, rivers and other natural phenomena. Burnett and Kang'ethe explain that nature is interconnected, with power inherent in all objects of nature in the following hierarchy: God, ancestors, humans, animals, plants and non-biological things.¹⁷ When all things in nature are viewed as having some elements of divine power within them, it then becomes a divine responsibility that human beings should take care of nature, conserve and preserve it. To summarise the African worldview in relation to the environment, Ikuenobe explains that for most Africans the natural environment is divine, since "it is in such things in which gods, deity, spirits and ancestors are made manifest ... hence religious rites are performed with various natural objects".¹⁸ Mbiti expresses the same sentiments when he explains that due to the African worldview on the environment, natural objects have religious significance and are treated by humans with reverence.¹⁹

THE AFRICAN WORLDVIEW AND ENVIRONMENTAL PRACTICES

How does the African worldview see nature as divine in a way that translates to the everyday life of an African? The worldview is lived through different taboos and practices that are found in everyday activities.²⁰ These religious practices seek to maintain harmony and balance that exist in nature, reality and the natural community of things.²¹ They include taboos, healing practices and intangible heritage.

Totemism

This practice is popular in most African societies. Totemism is a system in which different families or villages respect different animals or plants and natural objects in which their ancestral spirits are believed to reside.²² Musa Dube, a biblical scholar, with her colleagues, points out that in an African setting, "most communities

16 Ikuenobe PA. 2014. "Traditional African Environmental Ethics and Colonial Legacy", *International Journal of Philosophy and Theology* 2(4):2 [<https://doi.org/10.15640/ijpt.v2n4a1>].

17 Burnett and Kang'ethe, "Wilderness and the Bantu Mind", 149.

18 Ikuenobe, "Traditional Environmental Ethics and Colonial Legacy", 5.

19 Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*.

20 Chemhuru M and Masaka D. 2010. "Taboos as sources of Shona people's environmental ethics", *Journal of Sustainable Development in Africa* 12(7):121-133.

21 Ikuenobe, "Traditional Environmental Ethics and Colonial Legacy", 5.

22 Burnett and Kang'ethe, "Wilderness and the Bantu Mind", 156.

identify themselves with particular animals – a totemic practice”.²³ They further give examples from Botswana ethnic groups, such as the Bakwena and Bakgatla, whose totemic animals are crocodile and monkey, respectively. This means that amongst the Bakwena and Bakgatla, a crocodile and a monkey, respectively, are respected and protected and therefore can neither be killed nor eaten. It is a taboo for one to either kill or eat their totem. One is further expected to respect their totem. Kindness towards totem was also expected. It is further believed that the totem may assist in times of need or desperation.²⁴ This practice, by limiting the populations that would kill a specific animal or destroy specific plants, contributed to the overall conservation and preservations of certain species.

On the same note, sociologist Elliot Assain Sibiri carried out a study in Nigeria in which he was exploring environmental indigenous practices that could promote environmental preservation amongst the people of Nembe in Bayelsa State.²⁵ The findings of the study show that totemism, as an indigenous practice, promotes species conservation, include amongst others pythons, eagles, sharks, zimbaerema and snails, with minimal threats or risks to the social environment. A similar study in Zimbabwe confirms that totemism is a traditional way of conserving the environment.²⁶ In this study, Clemence and Chimininge perceive totemism as an example of African beliefs and practices that are environmentally friendly.²⁷ Since most ethnic groups have specific animals and plants as their totems and are compelled to protect these species by not eating and killing them, each community contributes in the aggregate to the overall protection of the environment by preserving specific species. The African attitude towards health and healing is another angle through which belief in the sacredness of the environment contributed to the conservation of the environment.

Health and healing

Illness is caused in part by disequilibrium in the order of a person’s connection with the cosmic order of nature.²⁸ This belief is crucial, as it cultivates within humanity a respectful attitude towards the environment. The environment is the source of all products that are needed in the different modes of healing. Therefore, due to the interconnectedness between the divine, human and animal life, plants and

23 Dube MW, Modie-Moroka T, Setume SD et al. 2016. “Botho/Ubuntu: Community-building and Gender Constructions in Botswana”, *Journal of the Interdenominational Center* 42:1-21.

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

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

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

27 Clemence and Chimininge, “Totem, Taboos and sacred places: An analysis of Karanga people’s environmental conservation and management practices”.

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

non-living objects, spiritual worlds of Gods and ancestors, nature and natural objects are given due reverence by humans.²⁹ The natural environment that provides items for traditional medicine must be respected and taken care of. Concepts of sacredness have been one way of conserving both plants and water sources that are used for medicinal purposes in various ways.³⁰ The use of indigenous knowledge in the area of health and healing ensures protection of the features in the environment that were believed to be sources of healing, such as specific species of plants, water sources and animals.

The healing properties of plants in traditional religions and the preservation of traditional medicinal plants have already been noted by other scholars.³¹ Kennedy M. Kanene, a scholar of language and social sciences, carried out a qualitative study amongst the Tonga in Zimbabwe. The purpose of the study was to explore what role culture played in preserving the environment. Amongst other things, Kanene focused on the strategies that the Tonga community used to conserve medicinal plants. He discovered that the idea that some water sources and plants species are sacred was very important. That which is sacred is alive. For example, when cutting bark from a plant for medicinal purposes, the traditional doctor will “either cut the south or the east or the west facing side”.³² This way of harvesting parts of trees for medicine insures that the tree is largely left intact and can re-grow the bark soon. The same principle was applied when cutting roots and harvesting leaves. The idea is to leave the plant alive. The Tonga used this way of harvesting from nature, because they believed that cutting the whole tree will “lead to the cutting (death) of the patient”.³³ Taking care of the environment is a way of ensuring self-preservation by human beings. As human beings take care of the environment, they want nature to keep on providing much needed products, but at the same time they must ensure that nature is preserved and conserved.

Another study was carried out by a church historian Phillip Musoni in Zimbabwe who focused on two religious shrines, the Chivavarira hill and Gonawapotera pool

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

30 Kanene KM. 2016. “Indigenous practices of environmental sustainability in the Tonga community of southern Zambia”, *Jambá: Journal of Disaster Risk Studies* 8(1):331 [<https://doi.org/10.4102/jamba.v8i1.331>].

31 Magoro MD, Masoga MA and Mearns MA. 2010. “Traditional health practitioners’ practices and the sustainability of extinction-prone traditional medicinal plants”, *International Journal of African Renaissance Studies* 5(2):229-241 [<https://doi.org/10.1080/18186874.2010.534842>]; Chen S-L, Yu H, Luo H-M et al. 2016. “Conservation and sustainable use of medicinal plants: problems, progress, and prospects”, *Chinese Medicine* 11(37):2-10 [<https://doi.org/10.1186/s13020-016-0108-7>].

32 Kanene, “Indigenous practices of environmental sustainability in the Tonga community of southern Zambia”, 4.

33 Mavi S and Shava S. 1997. “Traditional Methods of Conserving Medicinal Plants in Zimbabwe”, *Botanic Gardens Conservation International* 2(8); Kanene, “Indigenous practices of environmental sustainability in the Tonga community of southern Zambia”, 3.

of Chirumhanzu, located in the Midlands Province of Zimbabwe.³⁴ The two shrines are regarded by the indigenous people as renowned and sacred. Both the pool and the hill are believed to have healing powers and are therefore treated with respect according to the rules to be observed at the site. Musoni notes that “the community members are not allowed near the pool; neither to do fishing nor laundry”.³⁵ These rules are meant to ensure that the pool and its surrounding area are kept as much as possible in its original state, thereby protecting the healing waters of the pool from possible misuse and pollution.

Intangible heritage

Thus far, we have discussed examples of how traditional societies used their indigenous knowledge systems to preserve their environment in relation to tangible heritage. However, there are also ways of preserving intangible aspects of culture. These include beliefs systems and practices. In particular, this “soft heritage” is preserved through food, rituals, dance and music. Different practices offer an array of methods for preserving intangible cultural heritage, such as rites of passage, sacred places healing dances and festivals. All these were imbedded in religious rituals.

Ritual is natural to human beings and plays an essential role in building personal and cultural identity.³⁶ Turner says of rituals that they are a “stereotyped sequence of activities involving gestures, words and objects performed in a sequestered place and designed to influence preternatural entities or forces on behalf of the actors’ goals and interest”.³⁷ A very important component of a ritual is symbol, because “actors experience symbols as powers and as meanings”.³⁸ The rituals and their respective symbols play out in different cultural practices, such as religious dance, songs and artefacts, such as weaving and pottery. Religious ritual has generally been seen as indispensable in deepening spiritual insight. The repetition of rituals instils religious values and attitudes in the lives of the worshippers. The significance of rituals is essentially to renew, in a perpetual way, a kind of pre-existing act of god. The rituals are to revitalise and strengthen the forces of life that are threatened by degradation.

Through rituals, society also hands down cultural values and beliefs to younger generations for transmission to posterity from generation to generation. For example, music has been central to ritual and worship in any religion. Music reflects

34 Musoni P. 2016. “Contestation of ‘the holy places in the Zimbabwean Religious Landscape’: A study of the Johane Masowe Chishanu yeNyenyedzi Church’s sacred places”, *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 72(1):1-8 [<https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v72i1.3269>].

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

36 Turner V. 1973. “Symbols in African rituals”, *Science*, 179:1100-1105 [<https://doi.org/10.1126/science.179.4078.1100>]; Bell C. 1997. *Ritual Perspectives and Dimensions*. New York: Oxford University Press.

37 Turner, “Symbols in African rituals”, 1100.

38 Turner, “Symbols in African rituals”, 1102.

moods, can sustain and evoke emotions and ecstasy, and is primarily a corporate action. It is a corporate action, because in African context solo performance of music is foreign to us.³⁹ Over and above the rituals centrality in the preservation of cultural heritage, ethnically specific heritage, such as pottery, basketry and weaving are taught, as a process of socialisation. Younger generations, through observation and imitation, learn trades from the parents or significant others. Therefore, one way of preserving culture is through the demonstration of skills in making religious artefacts. In Botswana, most ethnic groups have developed annual cultural festivals in which different aspects of culture are demonstrated and sold. One way of ensuring that local communities benefit from the natural resources in their locality is through the sale of their skills through making crafts, music, hunting, healing and dance. In all these activities, rituals play a very important role.

Joseph Mbaiwa and Lolly Sakuze, scholars of cultural tourism, capture this concept of selling the soft heritage in their use the term “cultural capital”.⁴⁰ They explain that culture is part of a community capital, especially in areas that are tourist destinations. Cultural capital is explained as “consisting of symbols and language, festivals, celebrations and events”.⁴¹ It is also part of the identity of a people, their traditions and how they understand each other.⁴² A French sociologist and anthropologist Pierre Bourdieu further explains, cultural capitalism, in its embodied form, is a competence or skill that cannot be separated from its bearer, who is the person who holds it.⁴³ Intangible cultural heritage can be preserved by acting it out in different ways and for financial benefit.

Traditional African views on ontology and cosmology are manifested in beliefs and practices. Polycarp Ikuenobe explains that “there is no conceptual gap between human interest that is achieved by using natural objects and the respect of nature for its own sake: respect of nature serves human interests given that humans are an integral part of nature”.⁴⁴ Therefore, from an African perspective, the conservation and protection of the environment has always been central. It follows, from the point of view of traditional societies, that the religious sacredness of space was at the

39 Chapman G. 1974. *Christian Living Today, Book One*. London: Continuum Books, 62.

40 Mbaiwa JE and Sakuze LK. 2009. “Cultural tourism and livelihood diversification: The case of Gcwihaba Caves and XaiXai village in the Okavango Delta, Botswana”, *Journal of Tourism and Cultural Change* 7(1):61-75 [<https://doi.org/10.1080/14766820902829551>].

41 Jacobs C. 2007. *Community capitals: Cultural capital. Extension Extra* (ExEx 16007, Community Capitals, Series No. 3). College of Agriculture and Biological Sciences, South Dakota State Cooperative Extension Service (cited in Mbaiwa and Sakuze, “Cultural tourism and livelihood diversification”, 64).

42 Mbaiwa and Sakuze, “Cultural tourism and livelihood diversification”; Bourdieu P. 1986. “The forms of capital”, in Richardson JG (ed). *Handbook of theory and research for the sociology of education*. New York: Greenwood Press, 241-258.

43 Bourdieu, “The forms of capital”. See also Mbaiwa and Sakuze, “Cultural tourism and livelihood diversification”.

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

centre of their conservation strategies. However, with the introduction of tourism and commodification of natural products, the desire to make a has surpassed that of protecting and conserving such to meet the basic needs for humanity.

RELIGIOUS SACRED AND SECULAR “SACRED”: CONSERVATION BEYOND THE COMMUNITY

African societies were not to live as indigenous isolated self-sufficient ethnic groups found in specific geographical areas forever. With the introduction of modernisation in all its facets – urbanisation, migration and colonialism, to mention a few – change was bound to happen. These developments led to different ethnic groups living in large geographic areas to be consolidated into countries. These developments brought centralised governments, and management was eventually extended to the preservation of natural resources. From the perspective of governments, the preservation of natural resources has nothing to do with the sacredness of such places. This speaks very well to the notion of the “plurality of sacredness”.⁴⁵ Indeed some spaces are qualitatively different from others, depending on the economic natural resources that they possess. Examples in Botswana include places with mineral ore (Orapa, Jwaneng and Selibe-Phikwe) and areas with abundant wildlife (Chobe National Park and CKGR). The identification of such places has nothing to do with the perception of them being sacred.

The main objective for identifying such places is economic development and growth. For example, the animals that are protected at the national parks and game reserves have nothing to do with totems. The animals are protected to attract tourists and generate income for the Batswana. Therefore, “sacred” space can be qualitatively different with no reference to the sacred. That is, the conservation of wild animals in national parks is based on economic reasons, as opposed to totemism for example. Totemism carries the sacred notion. Such places are special, without necessarily carrying any religious notions. One set of critics of Mircea Eliade’s theory of the sacred has published a book titled *Is Nothing Sacred?*⁴⁶ The contributors to the book confess that the term “sacred” is a quasi-religious concept, but they try to utilise it in a non-religious way. The sacred in this context by no means signifies the meta-historical, as it did in Eliade’s analysis, but it signifies things that are intrinsically, categorically and inherently valuable. To understand what is inherently valuable is of significance for any kind of human ethics. Although the philosopher Nigel Warburton argues that the conception of the sacred inevitably has a religious connotation,⁴⁷ the contributors to *Is Nothing Sacred?* prefer to give it a secular nuance.

When applying the critiques of Eliade’s conception of sacred space, we indeed accept that some places are qualitatively different from other places, independent of the religious sacredness. Some places have precious stones, such as diamonds,

45 Mirdamadi, “The Plurality of the Sacred”.

46 Rogers, *Is Nothing Sacred?*

47 Warburton N. 2004. “Is Art Sacred?”, in Rogers, *Is Nothing Sacred?*, 42-50.

other minerals, oil reserves or tourism potential – all of which are activities that are guided more by profit making than by sacredness. According to Polycarp, Western ontology perceives a dichotomy between reality from the perspective of humans and reality from the perspective of objective reality.⁴⁸ This dichotomy perpetuates the thinking that human life supersedes any other form of life. This notion that is consistent with the biblical scripture in Genesis 1,²⁸ which reads: “And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth”.⁴⁹ This scripture seems to suggest that the earth was created to serve human beings; however, such a dominionist attitude needs to be reinterpreted in order to create a positive attitude towards the environment that is in line with African traditional attitudes on the environment. In order to satisfy both the needs and wants of human life, the dominionist approach to the environment might lead to the exploitation of the environment. Comparatively, Western ontology becomes more susceptible to the destruction of nature as compared to the African worldview. The following section discusses how the commercialisation of conservation inevitably leads to a paradox in conservation strategies in which the same mechanism that is aimed at conserving the resource leads to its destruction.

MODERN CONSERVATION STRATEGIES OF THE BOTSWANA GOVERNMENT

As the world experiences growth in population, the need to protect wildlife and other natural resources intensifies. For example, as conflicts between wildlife and local communities become evident, communities occasionally must relocate to give way to wildlife, and as populations grow, the rate of the exploitation of other resources also grows. This then makes it necessary for the governments to regulate the use of natural resources. Over time there was an understanding by different governments that effective conservation strategies need to involve the local communities. This usually involved a financial benefit to the local community. Many countries developed strategies to manage natural resources against increasing populations by involving the community through financial incentives.

For the purpose of this chapter, we focus on those aspects of cultural heritage that have a tourist potential. Even though the traditional African religious notion prescribes that humanity should not take from Mother Earth more than we can give back to her, this should not be construed to mean that ATR is to be “perceived as a consecutive cultural element that works to resist change hence is a barrier to development”.⁵⁰ Some scholars, informed by reductionist theories, have posited a

48 Ikuenobe, “Traditional Environmental Ethics and Colonial Legacy”.

49 Bible, King James Version (KJV).

50 Tarusarira, “African Religion, Climate Change and Knowledge Systems”, 402.

negative relationship between ATR and development.⁵¹ A reductionist approach will attempt to define religion in terms of certain aspects of religions and in much more simple terms than what the explanation is meant to convey⁵² such as reducing religion to magic. In terms of the care of environment, a reductionist approach will, as asserted by G.W. Burnett and K.W. Kang'ethe, wrongly conclude that "Africans lack an emotional experience with romanticism and transcendentalism, they do not possess the philosophical prerequisites necessary to protect wilderness".⁵³ However, more recent scholars, such as Tarusarira, poignantly point out that caring for the environment and the climate is not something foreign to the peoples of Africa, "Human motivations, such as caring, have always had religious and spiritual roots."⁵⁴ This important aspect is very much lacking in modern Western conservation of the environment, where the conservation is more for profit making than for conserving the environment for its own sake. Once business and profit making are embedded in conservation strategies, it is given that business and profit making will eventually surpass the conservation aspect. In his book, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, Walter Rodney (1972) clearly demonstrates the importance of the relationship in development between African culture and the European culture.⁵⁵ What Rodney and Tarusarira bring forth is the understanding that ATR is not against any form of development, but that the rate at which this development takes place is worrisome. In Tarusarira's view, "each element in the superstructure interacts with other elements in the superstructure as well as with the material base" and the "religious belief that a certain forest is sacred" is the "kind of element in the superstructure that affected economic activity since that forest will not be cleared for cultivation. Thus, he argues that "it is also to be borne in mind that peculiarities in the superstructure of any given society have a marked impact on the rate of development".⁵⁶ Indeed, any economic activity that is devoid of superstructure as its basis is most likely to eventually lead to human self-destruction. Scholars in the field of tourism studies are noticing if tourism bodies do not put in place measures that will ensure sustainability of the cultural heritage over profit, eventually there will be no profit, as there will be no heritage to buy and sell.⁵⁷

51 Tarusarira, "African Religion, Climate Change and Knowledge Systems", 404.

52 Fenton JY. 1970. "Reductionism in the study of religions", *Soundings: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 53(1):63.

53 Burnett and Kang'ethe, "Wilderness and the Bantu Mind", 145.

54 Tarusarira, "African Religion, Climate Change and Knowledge Systems", 406.

55 Rodney W. 1972. *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. London: Bogle-L'Ouverture.

56 Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (cited in Tarusarira, "African Religion, Climate Change and Knowledge Systems", 407).

57 Mbaiwa JE. 2011. "Changes on traditional livelihood activities and lifestyles caused by tourism development in the Okavango Delta, Botswana", *Tourism Management* 32(5): 1050-1060 [<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2010.09.002>]; Keitumetse SO and Nthoi OU. 2009. "Investigating the impact of world heritage site tourism on the intangible heritage of a community: Tsodilo Hills World Heritage Site, Botswana", *International Journal of Intangible Heritage* 4:143-150.

As elsewhere in the world, Botswana embraced tourism as a potential area to diversify its economy. This led to the zoning of land into national parks, as well as the development of such legal entities as the Botswana Tourism Board. The Ministry of Wildlife and National Parks plays an important role in the protection of wildlife in Botswana, while the Botswana Tourism Board oversees the growth of tourism in Botswana in all its totality. Tourism is an area in which both the international community and the government of Botswana have seen the importance of embracing local communities for sustainable management of the environment.

LOCAL COMMUNITIES AND THE CONSERVATION STRATEGIES

In order to involve local communities, the Community-Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM) strategies were introduced.⁵⁸ Through the CBNRM, local communities are involved in order to fully participate in the tourism business, while protecting the same natural resources and the intangible cultural heritage. The desire to expand tourism has also led to designation of community religious sacred places as tourist sites. All of these were under the auspices of such bodies as the National Museum and Art Gallery of Botswana. One relatively successful approach that the government used was the introduction of CBNRMs.

CBNRM is a concept used to explain “the way in which communities organise themselves to sustainably manage their natural resources”.⁵⁹ Joseph Mbaiwa explains that the CBNRM programme in Botswana aims at achieving conservation and rural development.⁶⁰ Mbaiwa points out that CBNRM “became one of the leading concepts in African conservation in the late 1980s”.⁶¹ CBNRM is, therefore, an incentive-based conservation philosophy that links conservation of natural resources with rural development.⁶² The basic assumption of CBNRM is that for a

58 Mbaiwa JE. 2015. “Community-Based Natural Resource Management in Botswana”, in Van der Duim R, Lamers M and Wuik J (eds). *Institutional Arrangements for Conservation, Development and Tourism in Eastern and Southern Africa*. Dordrecht: Springer, 59-80 [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-017-9529-6_4].

59 Department of Wildlife and National Parks (DWNP). 1999. “Joint venture guidelines”. Gaborone: Department of Wildlife and National Parks (cited in Mbaiwa, “Community-Based Natural Resource Management in Botswana”, 60).

60 Mbaiwa, “Changes on traditional livelihood activities and lifestyles”, 1051.

61 Mbaiwa, “Community-Based Natural Resource Management in Botswana”, 60.

62 Swatuk LA. 2005. “From ‘project’ to ‘context’: Community based natural resource management in Botswana”, *Global Environmental Politics* 5:95-124 [<https://doi.org/10.1162/1526380054794925>]; Twyman C. 2000. “Participatory conservation? Community-based natural resource management in Botswana”, *The Geographical Journal* 166(4):323-335 [<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-4959.2000.tb00034.x>]; Thakadu OT. 2005. “Success factors in community-based natural resource management projects’ mobilization in northern Botswana: Lessons from practice”, *Natural Resource Forum* 29(3):199-212 [<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1477-8947.2005.00130.x>]; Blaikie P. 2006. “Is small really beautiful? Community-based natural resource management in Malawi and Botswana”, *World*

community to manage its natural resource base sustainably, it must receive direct benefits arising from its use. These benefits must exceed the perceived costs of managing the resources. The assumption is that when community livelihoods are improved, community members would be incentivised to address conservation ideals.⁶³ These assumptions are based on three conceptual foundations, namely, economic value, devolution and collective ownership. Economic value refers to the value given to wildlife resources that can be realised by the community or landowner. Second, emphasis is put on the need to devolve management decisions from government to the community or local land users in order to create positive conditions for sustainable wildlife management. Third, collective proprietorship refers to “collective use-rights over resources by groups of people, which then are able to manage according to their own roles and strategies”.⁶⁴

If effectively used, CBRNM has the potential to contribute meaningfully to the conservation of the environment. However, studies have demonstrated the ineffectiveness of the concept, because it has been found that the communities end up focusing on the monetary benefit, as compared to the conservationist advantage of the same leading to the destruction of the same resources that it aimed to protect. The study will use two examples to demonstrate how the sale of the natural resources through adopting the “plurality of the sacred” has led to the destruction of the same resources it initially set out to protect.

Tsodilo Hills

In 2001, the Tsodilo Hills were listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site for their unique religious and spiritual significance to local peoples, as well as their unique record of human settlement over many millennia. Mircea Eliade says that one way by which a place is made religious sacred is through the mythology that is attached to it. Myths such as these give the local community a responsibility to protect the sacred place. Historians Campbell, Robbins and Murphy explain the origin of the Tsodilo Hills as follows:

The cave was used by my ancestors when they needed help in hunting. They Zhu (local San) hunted with them, but it was only my ancestors who used the cave. Sometimes, they would go hunting and would not be successful. Then they used to come to this cave. The hunters entered and

Development 34(11):1942-1957 [<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2005.11.023>]; Mbaiwa JE and Stronza AL. 2010. “The effects of tourism development on rural livelihoods in the Okavango Delta, Botswana”, *Journal of Sustainable Tourism* 18(5):635-656 [<https://doi.org/10.1080/09669581003653500>].

- 63 Leach M, Mearns R and Scoones I. 1999. “Environmental entitlements: Dynamics and institutions in community-based natural resources management”, *Wildlife Development* 27:225-247 [[https://doi.org/10.1016/S0305-750X\(98\)00141-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0305-750X(98)00141-7)]; Tsing AL, Brosius JP and Zerner C. 1999. “Assessing community-based natural resource management”, *Ambio* 28:197-198.

- 64 Mbaiwa, “Community-Based Natural Resource Management in Botswana”, 59.

one would take a stone and tap several times (indicated) on this ledge to attract the attention of the ancestors. He would then ask for help in the hunt. They would go out again to hunt and now they could be successful.⁶⁵

In addition to such myth, the Tsodilo Hills were burial place for the ancestors of the local populations. The community used the hill to communicate with their ancestors to ask for assistance as they went hunting. What is of relevant here, with respect to Tsodilo Hills, is the intangible heritage of its value to the community. To assess this, Susan Keitumetse and Olivia Nthoi, both researchers in cultural tourism, carried out a two-month study in June and July 2007. The purpose of the study was to “make a qualitative analysis of the changes in cultural values which represent the impact of tourism has had on the communities”.⁶⁶ They found out that “a significant number of respondents produce crafts solely for sale with no respondents producing solely for traditional or cultural purposes as was the case in the past”.⁶⁷ People in the Tsodilo Hills traditionally produced crafts (bags, baskets, woodwork necklaces, bows and arrows) for traditional uses, such as storage and decoration, including jewellery for young women in menstrual and marriage rituals or as part of bride price. The uses of these crafts carried many religious aspects. Since these items were produced for specific community needs, the production was friendly to the environment. The findings of this study “show a gradual trend in mass production of crafts for tourism” and the sale of products to tourists. In concluding their study, Keitumetse and Nthoi explain that the “authentic cultural experience that the tourist is seeking is likely to be destroyed or blurred by the host community” in the course of this mass production.⁶⁸ That is, before the introduction of the CBNRM the belief in ancestors limited human activity at the Tsodilo Hills, there was no sale of items at the hill. However, with the arrival of CBNRM, the need to make turned an otherwise sacred place into a business centre.

Okavango Delta

Joseph Mbaiwa carried out a study in the Okavango Delta in the Mababe, Sankoyo and Khwai villages.⁶⁹ The purpose of the study was to compare the livelihoods of people in the Okavango Delta before and after the introduction of tourism. All three villages are involved in CBNRM and have adopted a wildlife-based tourism approach, which includes consumptive (e.g. safari hunting) and non-consumptive (e.g. photographic, music dance) activities. Mbaiwa’s longitudinal study made it easy to analyse livelihood changes caused by years of tourism development. Results indicate a shift from traditional livelihood activities to a cash-based economy driven

65 Campbell AC, Robbins LH and Murphy ML. 1994. “Oral Traditions and Archaeology of the Tsodilo Hills Male Hill Cave”, *Botswana Notes and Records* 26:37-54.

66 Keitumetse and Nthoi, “Investigating the impact of world heritage site tourism”, 145.

67 Keitumetse and Nthoi, “Investigating the impact of world heritage site tourism”, 146.

68 Keitumetse and Nthoi, “Investigating the impact of world heritage site tourism”, 148.

69 Mbaiwa and Stronza, “The effects of tourism development on rural livelihoods”, 635-656.

by wildlife-based tourism through CBNRM. Before tourism was introduced in the area, the inhabitants depended on crop farming, subsistence farming and gathering of wild fruits and vegetables. These activities were done to meet basic needs. However, after the introduction of the CBNRM, the livelihoods changed to sale of crafts to tourists, crop farming and sale of thatch grass. That is, though the aim of introducing the CBNRM was to conserve the environment, the monetary benefit was more attractive for the local communities. The desire to have money led to more production and harvesting of the local goods. For instance, the thatch grass now being harvested for sale, led to mass harvesting of the product and depletion of wild animals, since the local population started hunting for sale and not to meet their basic needs.

CONCLUSION

Without proper caution, modern conservation strategies present a paradox in which the conservation strategy leads to the depletion of the same resources it aims to protect. On the surface, the adoption of the local indigenous cultural heritage conservation strategies was very appealing to the local communities. However, the commodification of the animals and the culture in its various facets, such as weaving pottery and jewellery, leads to unprecedented mass production that overtime destroys the intrinsic value of the products. The commodification of such strategies led to the decline of the very heritage that they set to promote. This is indicated in the drastic changes that occur due to availability of money, such as the desire for modern houses and utensils that end up killing the skills in different crafts over time. For example, thatching skills will disappear as thatch is harvested for sale and few people use it after adopting modern ways of roofing. People begin to turn away from the very culture the CBNRM set out to preserve.

Tarusarira explains that “difficulties encountered in the development including efforts to reverse global warming ... directly speaks to the relegation of the African cosmovision and conversely of the need to adopt new epistemologies, concepts that do take religion into consideration”.⁷⁰ Therefore, the continued depletion of natural resources and cultural heritage are a result of commodification of these aspects of culture, precisely because commodification compels mass production for profit making. This approach is very detached from the traditional African worldview in which the society was religiously conscious not to take from Mother Earth more than what it could give back and especially not to take anything beyond that which is meant to meet our basic needs.

We have demonstrated through the Tsodilo Hills case how the introduction of the CBNRM gradually eroded the sacredness that was traditionally associated with the place by giving way to the commercialisation of the sacred place. This led to the depletion of natural resources at the Tsodilo Hills and the loss of the soft heritage, as people became less interested in for example pottery and basket weaving. The same

⁷⁰ Tarusarira, “African Religion, Climate Change, and Knowledge Systems”, 398.

occurred with soft heritage skills produced for sale. Production for sale implies mass production of goods in order to produce surplus goods that can be sold. This leads to the depletion of the same resources that the CBNRM were introduced to protect.

The recommendation of this chapter is that development that encourage eco-conservationist strategies and be done with respect for nature. Effective natural resource-based tourism should not divorce sacredness from the natural resources and cultural heritage. Furthermore, CBNRM communities should be taught responsible natural socio-economic relations. The present study underlying this chapter recommends an evaluation of such initiatives from the perspective, first and foremost, of the environment and the preservation of the natural resources, as opposed to mere profitmaking. We therefore argue that the notion of sacredness should always be taken into consideration when the governments introduce new ways of conservation.