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DOSSIER

Reality and Exoticism
in the African Landscape.
A Tale of the
Disappearing Mirage

Divinità ambientali e
creazione perdurante.
Un caso di sacralizzazione
della natura nel Ghana
nordorientale

Désertification.
Ré-interrogation du
concept à la lumière
d'exemples africains



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In copertina
Rive del lago Ciad a nord di N'Djamena.
Fotografia di Marzio Marzot

Indice

n.83

Editoriale

- 1 **Una questione di sguardi**
di Sandra Federici

Dossier

- 7 **Reality and Exoticism in the African Landscape. A Tale of the Disappearing Mirage**
di Dismas A. Masolo

- 15 **Il rapporto tra uomo e natura attraverso lo specchio del lessico in Kiswahili**
di Marina Castagneto

- 19 **Divinità ambientali e creazione perdurante. Un caso di sacralizzazione della natura nel Ghana nordorientale**
di Gaetano Mangiameli

- 25 **Obiettivi del Millennio e strategie di resilienza climatica in Mozambico**
di Elisa Magnani

- 31 **Désertification. Ré-interrogation du concept à la lumière d'exemples africains**
par Aude Nuscia Taïbi



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- 37 **Il sogno agricolo possibile di Bessie Head**
di Francesca Romana Paci

- 43 **Les urgences climatiques et les écrivains africains : changements de paradigmes ?**
par Dominique Ranaivoson

- 49 **FOCUS: The Mirage of Composting in Maghreb Becomes Reality in the Oasis of Dgache, Tunisia**
di Francesca Davoli



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52 FOCUS:

L'albero indipendente del Niger
di Mauro Armanino

53 FOCUS:

Tchikandji: da patrimonio naturale locale a bene economico internazionale.
Il passaggio simbolico dell'uso delle risorse minerarie nella Repubblica del Congo
di Lorenzo Orioli

58 FOCUS:

Il Progetto Russade: Relazioni sud-nord per l'inclusione sociale e ambientale di giovani saheliani
di Carlo Semita, Angela Calvo, Paolo Barge, Yacoub Idriss Halawlaw

Letteratura

63 1950-1985: Letteratura in Guinea Equatoriale
tra *consentimento* e consapevolezza identitaria
di Valeria Magnani

Fumetto

69 Un festival de la bande dessinée entre Afrique et Europe
Sandra Federici

Immigrazione

75 Bitter oranges: Underpaid labour, Unfair trade
di Sara Esposito

81 L'immigrazione in Italia: il rapporto IDOS / Confronti 2015
di Pietro Pinto

Eventi

83 La comunicazione interculturale nella cooperazione allo sviluppo
di Carla Pusceddu

84 Bellezza dal Congo alla fondazione Cartier
di Andrea Marchesini Reggiani

87 In and Out of the Studio: Photographic Portraits from West Africa. Cent ans d'Afrique de l'Ouest à travers l'objectif
par Flore Thoreau La Salle

90 The Lay of the Land: New Photography from Africa – Une Afrique de paysages urbains réels et imaginaires
par la rédaction

Libri

92 Produzioni mediatiche contemporanee in Tanzania

93 Storia, identità, narrazioni nella regione dei Grandi Laghi

94 Mia Couto e il mondo oltre il mondo

96 In breve

Inserto: Asylum Corner

Reality and Exoticism in the African Landscape. A Tale of the Disappearing Mirage

Representations of Africa have long been made through the lenses of the admiring outsider in search for the pristine and unadulterated. These representations are extensions of why the outsider was attracted to the belly of the continent in the first place: in search of the spicing product to satisfy the Westerner's taste.

di Dismas A. Masolo

From the journeys of Marco Polo and Vasco da Gama to the slaughter of Cecil the Lion, the taste of the outsider has driven how African landscapes have been painted, literally on canvas and socio-politically and economically in its occupation. These imaginations of the continent have left the impression that Africans themselves either do not exist or do not engage with their habitat in a significant manner. Hence the images of lone, scattered and untouched acacia trees strewn across the savannah idly waiting for the occasional adventurer and discoverer from abroad. I will argue in this paper that Africans have been colluders in bringing about the disappearance of the image of misrepresentation through a variety of activities and failures, both moral and political, that compromise the sustenance of Africa's environmental integrity and reproductive capacity.

I try to argue in this paper that although the outsider's view of Africa as a *terra nullius* persists and drives the manner of engagement with Africans and Africa's natural resources as part of the global community, it has also caused Africans' complicity in the destruction of themselves and of their heritage, thus making attribution of ethical and political culpability a tricky enterprise. Ethnic and religious conflicts spurred by sectorial divisions and competitions for socio-economic control of national resources have turned African landscapes into mass graveyards, in some cases transforming previous savannah lands of acacia trees into open fields of skeletons. Not less important is Africans complicity in the destruction of its natural resources, including, but not limited to enabling and aiding the now-storied killing of Cecil the lion in Zimbabwe in the summer of 2015. The poaching of African wildlife is the latest version of the white man's search for Africa's exotic natural resources, the attraction that drove European explorers like Marco Polo and Vasco da Gama to sail eastward in search of supplies for the European markets. But this poaching happens with full support and complicity of African political elites, the local accessories to modern global imperialism. Finally, I make observations

about modern electronic industry. While it enables Africa to participate in global communication, it is also true that Africa gets the dirty end of this game in opening itself to serving as the dumping ground for Western and now Asian, particularly Chinese industrial relics. Without proper logistics for their safe disposal as these electronic gadgets quickly turn into junks. The African landscape, both rural and urban, is a vast graveyard for human, wild animal, and mechanical bodies, all spewing pollution and further destruction of Africa's quality of life.

In Who's interest?

The tale of nature and destructive appetite

European interests in Africa, and in other places farther down the exploratory horizons, were driven by commercial interests and have remained largely so to-date. The accounts narrated in *The Travels of Marco Polo* attest to these early European-Asian contacts as predominantly based on trade by merchants. The Polos were not the first Europeans to travel to the Far East, but the popularity of Marco Polo's accounts of the Far East, including India, China, Japan, and many places in-between spread through Europe, certainly helped to spread the excitement and curiosity of many others beyond the circle of merchants. As became the trademark of Europe, soon scholars, especially historians, and missionaries would follow the same or similar paths to expand Europe to the limits of the global map. Exploration, trade, missionary, and political interests often merged their paths or happened in sequence. It would, however, be a little more than two hundred years before another European trade expeditioner, Vasco da Gama, would connect Europe and the Orient, this time by sea, making da Gama the first to achieve that milestone. His voyage, directed at reaching India, would open up the African landmass to European awareness for the first time since the end of the Roman empire's control of the northern African regions bordering the Mediterranean Sea. Vasco da Gama led Europe's first successful voyage to India between 1497 and 1499, leaving landmarks at every port where he anchored. These port cities are still dotted with castles or,

as they have come to be known, forts, which became centers for amassing supplies and troops to withstand any challenges from competitors. He thus expanded and affirmed Portuguese empire's control over the trade routes from northern and western African coasts all the way to India across the Indian Ocean. Through him, the routes to Europe's global imperialism were opened, and Portuguese control over them would remain in place for many decades. Due to their superior military power under the advantage of heavy canons, the Portuguese arrival in the Indian ocean broke the trade between the Persian gulf, mainly the Omani empire, and the East African coast.

When slave trade escalated in later years, the forts built by the armies of Vasco da Gama would become holding forts for slaves awaiting transportation to go work in the plantations of the newly found lands in the Caribbeans and Americas. The routes established by da Gama soon attracted the English, French, and Dutch competition. At last, they broke the Venetian monopoly over the legendary spice trade between Europe and Asia that had made the Polo family from Venice so wealthy and famous. Except where they were met with some suspicion and resistance, such as happened in Mozambique in early 1498 and in Mombasa a few weeks later, these Portuguese intruders saw the ports as doorways to riches that could be accessed by use of military might rather than by conventional market negotiations. Short of direct military power, the Portuguese, and later European trading companies disbursed simple gifts to local rulers and warlords in exchange for their collaboration in providing access to African natural resources and, later, helping to get human captives for the infamous slave trade. Oceanic trade was a free for all terrain where those with bigger canons accessed and took hold of their hauls of spices, gold, slaves, or any other item considered valuable in the trade of the time. Piracy was rampant, thus underlining the emerging idea of Africa as an object of foreigners' material interest. Nowhere do the narratives include negotiations with African leaders as they were easily conquered and co-opted into the trade that quickly turned into a human tragedy in both its magnitude and nature of treatment of victims. It would be nearly three hundred and thirty years before slave trade was formally abolished by those who had most profited from it, and even much longer before the human and civil rights of Africans would be formally recognized. In fact, and ironically, colonialism, or, the second wave of European scramble for Africa, would start - following the infamous Berlin Conference of 1884-1885 - eighty years after the people of Haiti, an overwhelming majority of them former slaves and subjects of French colonization, had freed themselves from the French yoke in 1804 after forcing the French to announce in 1794 the abolition of slavery and slave holdings in their Caribbean colonies through the unstoppable revolution started in 1791, and some fifty years after the British followed the French in announcing in 1834 the abolition of slavery in their own territories, followed by the Dutch in 1863. What was the ground

for the rush to chop up and colonize Africans at home? Descendants of formerly captured and enslaved Africans could be free in the diaspora but Africans could not be free at home. When Hume criticizes the religion of theists, he fails to address the consistency problem as belonging to humans too. His problem with natural religion, as addressed in the *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion*,¹ was

aimed at identifying the inconsistency in believing, like theists do, in a God who is all powerful and benevolent, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, also allows all the evils in the world to happen. How could this god allow pedophiles to exist and have the opportunity to unleash suf-

fering on innocent children? How could this benevolent God allow such maladies like mental illnesses, cancers, polio, smallpox, malaria, and others to exist and to ravage existents like humans, cats, or any other animal causing them such suffering? Or, how could such a God create humans, like Hume himself, with such minds as to be able to philosophize correctly about the nature of human knowledge, and about human inconsistency in believing in this same God, and yet be so unable to see such evil in themselves as to allow them to enslave other some fellow human beings while at the same time talk about and defend the primacy and glory of freedom? The world is full of suffering indeed, but some of it does not have to happen.

What is unavoidable is the evil that arises out of the law of nature, the unpleasurable events that constitute the cycle of life itself such as surpasses the farthest limits of reason itself, such as is to be found in the so-called food chain. The fact that some existents have to feed on other living things cannot be pleasurable to those who find themselves on the victim side of this cycle, but it is an unstoppable law imbued in the very natural structure of those involved in this relationship. Since the European stumble on and scramble for Africa, global imperialism viewed Africans themselves as part of the natural habitat to be exploited for the tastes of the Western world and civilization. As Hegel infamously noted in his *Introduction to the Philosophy of History*, the continent lacked the transformative symbols of history and civilization. It was a *terra nullius*, a fair game for those wishing and willing to occupy and to create history and civilization there. Pictorial representation of Africa invariably depicted Africa as the vast land of contrasts: spaces occupied by lone acacia trees under the blue skies and separated from each other by vast stretches of emptiness dotted only occasionally by a shrub designed to support the abundant fauna. On the other hand, Africa was a mass of land teeming with wilderness like it was the last reservoir of the remainders from Noah's Arch.

Hume did not think that "the law of nature" was fair in itself. In fact, it was the very ground for his critique of the designer theory for god's existence. Why could a perfect and benevolent designer of a reality so complex not make room for self-sufficiency of every member without some thriving at the expense of others? Possible answers provide a spread of beliefs with two opposed ends. Jains believe in extreme justice in which all harm to sentient beings ought to be avoided. Thus, for them, hu-

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Since the European stumble on and scramble for Africa, global imperialism viewed Africans themselves as part of the natural habitat to be exploited for the tastes of the Western world and civilization.

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mans must strive to live with extreme devotion to preserving life. Veganism thus is the most just lifestyle that sustains this belief whose practitioners will go to such extent as to sweep their path ahead of their steps so they do not intentionally and unnecessarily cause harm. But while veganism has found wide following both in practice and in philosophy,² the Maasai of East Africa, on the other hand, believe that their God, Enkai, gave them cattle as their primary source of survival, thus making cows not only sacred but as having a special status at the top of the hierarchical ladder of all domestic hoofed animals. As a result, the Maasai consume or otherwise use every part of the animals they keep. Alongside this belief, the Maasai also believe that their god commanded them that, in return for cattle, they be keepers of the earth, especially as protectors of the environment with all its non-domestic occupants. It is taboo to consume wild meat of any kind. In the olden days, they also did not farm, as this would be destruction of the environment and a violation of the cycle that drives their survival and connection to their god. Perhaps living side-by-side with the rest of nature except when bending to the natural law of food chain made Africans the ideal custodians of the natural habitat. They domesticated, hunted, or gathered for food, and fed the remainder back to nature for its own replenishment and regeneration.

The ethics of environmental protection

The Maasai relationship with the environment may have variances from Peter Singer's ideals of environment-friendliness, or even differ from it significantly in respect to the principles and purpose of the norms of engagement, but it fits the exotic and mythical Western observer's image of a typical African landscape. To the European explorers first, and later to the traders and colonists, the African landscape was deemed to be virgin, unexploited and not needed by Africans themselves, at least not in the normal, pragmatic human way as a resource for livelihood supplies. When the Belgian missionary Placide Tempels dreamt of what he believed to separate Africans from Europeans in thinking about the world, he narrated in his now widely discussed and referenced work, *La Philosophie bantoue*, how African thought was mystical, focused on nature as a system of forces rather than on its materiality.³ However, despite its apparent positive reception, especially in the eyes of then-young African scholars seeking vindication from European racism, the Afro-Caribbean writer and critic, Aimé Césaire, thought it was one of the most dangerous books ever written by a European because it legitimized the European myth about Africans' idleness and unproductivity in their engagement with the material world - which, in Césaire's eyes, could not be true of any human history, let alone their survival.⁴ Even in the eyes of the Holy See, it was a *terra nullius* whose occupation was morally justified under the will of God. To the Western, Arab, and Persian adventurer in search of spices, the African environment

offered everything and more. He found African wild game and able African bodies, all of whom could be hunted and captured for both leisure and labor. To the trader, Arab, Persian, or European, everything African was a cargo whose commercial value depended on its material quality. Pirates fought over them in the high seas like vultures over carcasses in the African savannah itself. It surprises no-one that even in 2015, a white American dentist can bribe his way into murdering a protected Cecil the lion just because Cecil is part of the African landscape, the place where the killing of a revered lion under government protection is fair entertainment for the affluent American for whom law and Africans' heritage are part of the disregardable *terra nullius*, the land of lone acacia trees with only an occasional brush.

The picture of the lone acacia tree, sometimes with a lone cattle herder, is misleading,

then and now. Not only does it ignore Africa's productive activities in all sectors of Africa's economies, it also fails to appreciate Africa's problems, some disastrous, that population changes and their needs impose on the landscape. For example, not all Africans are custodians of the wild like the Maasai, nor are they all pastoralists like the Maasai. Africans are hunters, fishermen and fisherwomen, and they are agriculturalists as well. Secondly, African population growth takes place at one of the world's highest rates, putting both the rural economy and the urban infrastructure into a stranglehold as people who live and work in both of these situations cope with the fast growing demands for the daily supplies for life such as residential and communication needs, energy, clean water, and healthcare. In respect to some of these basic human needs, urban and rural conditions face and suffer from similar pressures that often make urban and rural conditions to be interconnected. Two examples: first, in rural spaces, population growth puts pressure on the small family land that once was the chief source of rural family food supplies either through peasant agriculture, or peasant pastoralism like the case of the Maasai. Secondly, due to the high costs of electric energy, large portions of society depend on cheaper alternatives like charcoal from wood for lighting and cooking alongside use of kerosene. Indeed, rural-to-urban supply of wood based fuel is one of the sources of Africa's deforestation. In these respects, not only does the rural land diminish in size, but also its exposition to the elements robs it of its qualitative ability to bear enough for the growing demand and to serve as a natural factor in the cycle of environmental renewal in rain catchment and irrigation.

The diminishing rural land in both its size and productive capacity is a major reason for Africa's perennial famines and food shortages. Lastly, because the entire national societies depend on a mixture of both small and relatively large-scale farming which supply both the formal and informal market outlets, the impending disappearance of the acacia tree cannot be underestimated. Thus, the lone acacia tree is no longer alone

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From the conflicts of Burundi in 1959 to the latest mass conflicts there just as recently as 2015, African conflicts and mass killings spurred by ethnic, political, and religious feuds, both internally and between nations, have left African forests, hillsides, valleys, and open plains littered with human skeletons in mass graves or with skeletons from bodies that were never recovered for proper interment.

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François-Xavier Gbré, *Baia di Mermoz II*, Dakar, Senegal, 2012. Courtesy The Walther Collection and Galerie Cécile Fakhoury, Abidjan. Esposizione The Lay of The Land, cfr. articolo a p. 87

because of the virginity of the landscape, but because others have been cut down due to demands for expansion of farmland and to supply cheap cooking energy to poor urban dwellers who cannot access or afford electric power.

Africa's killing fields

Africa's genocides, whether they are driven by ethnic and religious hatred, or by the decay and lawlessness of political disintegration, have turned many parts of Africa into killing fields. As a result, the fast changing decomposition of the African landscape includes the high number of discarded bodies and skeletons that it hides. Africa's years of nominal freedom from its former colonizers have not been exactly about cumulative progress defined as an ascending view of gains and improvements in the quality of life, resulting in peaceful conditions for the imagination, design, production, and use of knowledge. Instead, Africa's history during the past sixty years has been punctuated by the diminishing and, in many cases, the disappearance of the democratic space. Dictatorships have spawned internal conflicts that have disrupted education and research as well as performance in other sectors, thus resulting in stagnation in the hopes and expectations for self-reliance. Armed conflicts, on the other hand, have resulted in the high production of Africans' skeletons, many of them buried in mass graves deprived of markers and without the dignifying rituals of closure that many people across the globe observe for their departed relatives and friends under varying cultural prescriptions. These events disprove claims made by some African and Africanist scholars about Africans' purported

reverence for all like, especially for human lives.⁵ According to the Belgian missionary, Africans revere life, particularly human life which, in his view, they consider as the most holy gift from the creator. Life must, therefore, be guarded and enhanced through acts that are believed to give it more force or positive care so it may bear what it was meant to, that is, more life. Disciples of Tempels, both theological and secular, took this vitalist notion as a central piece of Africans' understanding of nature that distinguished them from the objectifying Cartesian reason of white Western people.⁶ According to Mbiti, it is this reverence for life, the clamor for the abundance of it in Tempels' parlance, that pull together the significance of rituals that focus on the unbroken and unbreakable link between the living and the dead as if time remains constant, ever in the *Sasa* (present) period, as he calls it, or as evinced by the grammar of tense in the evocation of ancestors' names and blessings.

If Africans revere their dead, then recent African social and political history would suggest that there must be a great hurry to get the numbers of the dead as high and as quickly for this reverence. From 1959 to the present, African landscapes have been turned into killing fields. From the conflicts of Burundi in 1959 to the latest mass conflicts there just as recently as 2015, African conflicts and mass killings spurred by ethnic, political, and religious feuds, both internally and between nations, have left African forests, hillsides, valleys, and open plains littered with human skeletons in mass graves or with skeletons from bodies that were never recovered for proper interment. In some cases, riverbeds and lake bottoms hide evidence of crimes that the outside world never got the opportunity to take note of, or

bodies that were incinerated or dissolved in acids and reduced to nothingness except for the indelibility of the historical fact of their once presence. The numbers become metaphysical entities whose reality lies solely in the imagination of statistical historians or in the memory of their survivors and descendants. The completeness of the African landscape must extend to the horizons of the memories of the living. Perhaps Mbiti was right about this after all. Death from political conflicts or as a result of cultural, ethnic, or religious hate is not an African uniqueness, but neither the global spread of the phenomenon nor the historical antecedents of the occurrences elsewhere should be Africans' excuse. Walter Palmer's audacity to march into Zimbabwe and to lure out of protection and slaughter Cecil was made possible and also aided by uncaring individuals due to what is known to be Africans' callous attitude toward life, both human and wild. It is not unusual that our government officials assigned to secure and protect our natural heritage are constantly compromised by little bribes or by morally shallow rhetoric of ethnic or religious entitlements into complicity to decimate our double heritage, both human and wild.

The perils of the state of nature, or, put differently, for lack of ideal theory

There are two categories of African accomplices to the destruction of African heritage, and both of them are made possible by, and operate under a vacuum of vision. They are utterly unconcerned about such questions as "What are the goals of human life in general? How can these goals be attained by everyone? And what are the best conditions under which they are most likely to be attained?" This does not mean that people in these two categories of life are not aware of their immediate duties and responsibilities. They sure are, but only within the limits of their individuality and relations to other individuals and groups to whom they are connected

in their immediate lives. Neither of them ever thinks of the larger ideal configurations which the immediate socio-political organizational structure is a service of. For both, life is about scrambling to bring back the goods for self, family and friends and, by extension, their people, their community, mythical or real, which is measured by the sustainability of loyalty within the networks. In other words, both the little villager guy and the political or the professional functionary live and work in the absence of any ideal theory of the state. What, then, are some of the consequences of this, especially in relation to the management of our landscapes?

First, there is the everyday guy whose moral knowledge is limited to believing that morality is a regulatory modus of only human-to-human relations, and that even this can be overridden by special circumstances such as when his family, ethnic, or religious group is threatened by those from outside such groups. The animal world, for him, is fair game because animals of the wild are there to be hunted and killed – primarily for food, but also when there is need such as when they present a threat to the human domain. In the latter circumstances, the call to action is only one: to kill! There are no alternatives, and if there are any, he probably neither knows nor cares about them. This guy often has enviable knowledge of his landscape. He knows at least most of the species in his territory complete with their behavior patterns of movements under different environmental conditions, so, over time, and as part of his culture, he has devised perfect tracking and hunting skills and tools. His perfect herbal knowledge avails to him one of the most valuable assets: working as a scout for big-time poachers, he can fell several elephants with little but potent poison without making the kind of sound that accompanies the big gun-fires of national-and-international-level poachers. The downturn is that he is often ignorant of the illegal market value of his catch, so his own action falls into

Albero di Acacia in un tramonto africano. © Pixabay



the category of vane destruction because he commits crime in return for as little as US \$ 50.00, or, in worse cases, just for the carcass of the innocent elephants who frequently leave behind helpless calves who end up dying from depression and starvation from loss of a mother. The ordinary but lethal guy would not care less, as acceptance of the paltry returns without a fight or argument is also his only guarantee to his own life since his collaboration in crime makes him a danger as a potential witness in the case of a rare arrest.

The poacher of the second category is the person or group of persons with positions of political influence, usually a politician with good connections in the upper ranks of the political ladder, or an administrator who, also because of his or her political patronage, can operate largely without regard to the law because he or she is after all the *de facto* law itself at the local level by virtue of his or her connections. This criminal does not hide his or her actions, either directly or by delegating power to junior officers to provide protection to the actual criminal. Based on the extortionist political and legal oversight for this kind of crime, the actual poacher often has to pay what the protector demands, which the local protector shares with his or her superiors. Many times, he or she enjoys the freedom of taking the law into their own absolutely powerful hands to enrich themselves at the expense of national interests at large. Nobody can stop him, her, or them, because nobody and nothing else matters. This is the insatiable impunity of African politicians' amoral sense to service: it is driven by the politics of destruction, and it is goalless beyond the interests of self, family and friends of convenience. In terms of political theory, and all criticism of colonialism notwithstanding,⁷ one may ask whether African politics is driven solely by the impetus of the state of nature.

Hume's writings and views on the inferiority of black people can be inserted into the general scheme of his ideas on such imperfection in nature as to render any idea of a perfect creator untenable.⁸ His argument against the tenability, from reason alone, of the idea that the world as we see it is the creation, and proof of the existence of, a perfect being was based on observation of the sheer contrasts and imbalance in nature between the different inhabitants of the earth in which some could not attain their survival and fulfillment without causing injury to others, perhaps less powerful, or less endowed with such powers as may be required for their own autonomous survival and self-fulfillment. In relation to the different groups of people, Hume thought of race as a distinguishing proof of the natural contrasts between them, and claimed that black people were naturally inferior to their white counterparts. Writing from the perspective of a member of slave-owning relatives, Hume cannot be trusted as starting his remarks from a rational position, just like one would not trust his peers writing on the same subject at that time from across Europe. With the suspect exception of some respect accorded Wilhelm Anton Amo of Axum, Ghana, during his unplanned yet brilliant sojourn and academic achievements in Europe, general European attitudes toward black people of the time were based on individuals who were either still in social states of enslavement or just recently released from such yokes, individuals with crippled minds and broken spirits, individuals whose worth was only in the labor of their bodies. They were easy prey for the irrational generalizations.

But the contemporary local villager out in the savannah, and

the politician, or the government administrator, are neither the lone, disoriented, and heart-broken former slave walking the streets of London with no memory of a past or heritage to identify with, nor do they reflect the agonies of the domestic worker still in household bondage, or toiling in the ship yards, farms, or horse stables in Scotland. Neither is he or she the (imaginary) black person that Immanuel Kant never met but was nonetheless convinced was inferior to any white person he knew or imagined. By contrast, the African villager, politician, and the administrator, all stand free before the vast plains of free range liberty if you wish. In other words, she or he has an unfettered mind, but lacks the unfettered reason to envision fully the ethical untenability of his or her unfettered desire for destruction. According to Mbiti, when some Africans wake up on a morning of a hunting expedition, they ask their god thus:

O Mutalabala, Eternal One... We pray Thee,
Let us kill today before sunset...

O Chief, today let us kill!...

I thank Thee for the meat which Thou givest me.
Today Thou has stood by me.⁹

Hume's concern was precisely about this tilted sense of reality: how can this god have made both the killer and the victim just so the killer may succeed in the killing and still be called a perfect being? This attitude is not limited to Dr. Walter Palmer the killer of Cecil and his likes, it is also the attitude that drives the actions of his African accomplices. In Peter Singer's view, in contrast to the convictions of all poachers of the world, it just can't be morally right that some inhabitants of nature are made to suffer. What sets the poacher ethically apart, however, whether it is Walter Palmer, the villager, or the government administrator, is that they kill for pleasure. How does reason account for this as a sort of ethically perfect order?

While Peter Singer argues that we can rectify the human impulse for destruction by extending our utilitarian sense of good to the environment and its other, non-human occupants, we in Africa will need to view utilitarian environmental ethics as a means to the following:

- developing a grand scheme of nationhood that includes the protection of the environment and its natural resources;
- stemming our complicity with foreign destroyers of our environment;
- stemming the use of Africa as a field for unethical labor practices by foreign companies, especially mining companies, which would not do the same back in their home countries;
- stemming the use of Africa for experimental and ethically questionable production or distribution of genetically modified foods and other organisms.

Africa in the electronic age

Finally, any discussion of the African landscape cannot be limited to considerations of biological life or to its management and abuses in different spatial settings. The catch is, of course, that any discussion of any space is done from a human perspective, and so, generally speaking, all discussions, any discourse, is essentially about how human life is affected by its surround-

ings. In that regard, there is a new horizon and a new element of concern in the general consideration of African landscapes and spaces. Africa is part of the global community that is highly inundated by modern electronic technology. Electronic products are part of nearly every household, with the cell phone the most popular among them, and computers are not far behind. The ethically urgent issue with modern electronic manufacture and use is that the life span of these gadgets is extremely short, therefore causing a high rate of turnovers for newer gadgets. Cell phones are popular in Africa where their use is far more significant in terms of cultural transformation, but their manufacture and general communication and industrial impact still takes place predominantly in the Euro-American West and Asia. Africa is only a consumer. The ripple effect of the short life span of electronic gadgets results in a high rate of exportation to Africa of obsolete electronic gadgets, finally resulting, as a consequence of continued or sustained high rate of these exportations, in the high rate of accumulation of electronic “dead bodies.” The question is: where are these radioactive tools being “buried”? Are these exportations turning African landscapes into radioactive electronic graveyards? During the now defunct cold war, Africa became the battleground of wars by proxy, where intra-and-inter-national conflicts were clandestinely encouraged and ignited by Western powers, mainly the United States and the Soviet Union and their respective European allies as convenient dumping grounds for their obsolete arms and warplanes. As informal extensions of WW I and WW II, Africans continued to fight Western wars, largely fighting each other on behalf and on the behest of those who gave them “military aid.” Where are the unused and unusable warplanes? With the cannons silent in many parts of the once hot red African bloodbath fields, where are the tanks, and the nineteenth-century guns? The same can be asked of the radioactive electronic gadgets finding their way today into the African market by ton loads of daily shipments. What laws and policies do African governments have for regulating the disposal of the discarded or replaced electronic materials and machinery? In other words, unlike the scrap metal that bodies of machinery implements like motor vehicles and other metallic tools are easily convertible into for reuse - whatever equally questionable implications this may have - electronic materials use, and therefore bear, radioactive materials, some with fairly dangerous levels. It is a fact, for example, that relatively cheap computers available on African electronic markets are “cleaned up” outdated versions exported out of European markets where they became obsolete and replaced with newer and more advanced versions. These electronic tools go into disuse quickly and replaced by other relics. How and where are they disposed of? How many people get exposed to the radiological transmissions from these materials as they scavenge through the piles of these materials like they do through other mountains of waste? The African landscape is not only a wasteland of unwarranted biological carcasses, it is also becoming a wasteland for an even more dangerous kind of carcass: that of radiology-laced electronic hardware.

Conclusion

The combination of African politicians’ insatiable desire for materiality with the Europeans’, and now also Asians’ desire for the exotic African natural resource - the elephant ivory, the rhi-

Realtà ed esotismo nel paesaggio africano. La storia di un miraggio che scompare

La rappresentazione del paesaggio africano come spazio idilliaco deriva dalla fascinazione che da subito le popolazioni europee hanno provato nei confronti del continente. Territori incontaminati che sono diventati *terra nullius*, tanto nell’immaginario popolare quanto nella speculazione filosofica e politica. Per quanto ricche di fascino esotico ed estetica inusuale, le grandi lande africane, interrotte solo a tratti da alberi d’acacia solitari, hanno contribuito a produrre una raffigurazione errata e fuorviante: tener fissa quell’immagine vuol dire ignorare coscientemente, da una parte, le problematiche disastrose che affliggono l’Africa, dall’altra, le attività produttive che, seppur a fatica, sono sorte e continuano a fiorire nel vasto continente. Con la stessa apprensione, Aimé Césaire faceva risaltare la sua (solitaria) critica contro l’acclamato testo di Placide Tempels *La Philosophie bantoue*, in cui il missionario belga tracciava una linea di demarcazione netta tra l’orizzonte di senso occidentale e quello africano, dove la natura è intesa più come sistema di forze che nella sua materialità. In questa dicotomia mistico/magico e razionale/materiale Césaire intravedeva una pericolosa legittimazione del mito europeo dell’Africano come individuo indolente e improduttivo.

La definizione del continente africano come *terra nullius* ha fatto sì che gli Africani potessero essere catturati e diventare merce per opera di commercianti arabi, persiani ed europei. Si continua a permettere a Europei e Nord Americani, oggi incalzati dai Cinesi, di disporre delle risorse e dei territori africani come fossero vergini e in attesa di qualcuno che li sfrutti: l’esempio del celeberrimo leone Cecil, ucciso nell’estate del 2015 durante una battuta di caccia illegale in Zimbabwe da un dentista americano, mette in luce come ancora oggi si tenda a considerare questo territorio come privo di leggi, di guardiani, di cittadini responsabili e attivi. Nell’individuazione del colpevole, tuttavia, il filosofo keniano D. A. Masolo punta il dito anche contro gli Africani. Senza *élite* compiacenti, facilmente corruttibili e totalmente prive di amore per i loro Paesi, l’“uomo bianco” avrebbe dovuto lottare molto di più per raggiungere i livelli di sfruttamento e devastazione inflitti all’Africa. Non a caso, l’uccisore di Cecil ha potuto agire grazie alla compiacenza di un ufficiale non proprio incorruttibile.

Così, in una parabola declinante, il tanto agognato paesaggio rappresentato dell’albero di acacia sta piano scomparendo sotto la pesante realtà di un’Africa che si trasforma in discarica del pianeta, che pullula di telefoni cellulari e altri strumenti tecnologici non più utilizzabili.

no horn, the leopard skin, the lion mane - has produced the world's most lethal anti-conservation movement, making it the last frontier in the fast disappearance of Africa's present. To paraphrase Peter Singer, the imbalances of power in nature, including the convenience of the powers of politics and the gun, or of the lethal herbal poison, are not legitimating grounds for waging war against each other and against the environment. His ethics of restraint, I believe, calls for a triangular ethical approach to integral interdependence between self, other, and the environment. To guarantee the future, we need to tame our desires and to re-educate ourselves about the ethical limits of a good life. The utilitarian principle, not only as espoused by John Stuart Mill but also as once pursued by the late president of Tanzania, Julius Nyerere, in his unfairly derided political policy of *Ujamaa*, ought to be extended to, and to be seen as coterminous with, care for the environment with all its contents of natural riches, including wild life. Then, hopefully, we would see the value of protecting Cecil, or any other lion, and all other animals. Even more urgently, we would prevent other Walter Palmers from walking into our territories and slaughtering Cecils, or his lionesses, or cubs, or exercising impunity to destroy our heritage.

NOTES

1 - See D. Hume, *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion*, (eds.) J. C. A. Gaskin, Oxford University Press, New York 1998.

2 - The work of the Australian bioethicist Peter Singer comes to mind. In a scholarly and practical commitment to expanding the principle and meaning of utilitarianism - the greatest amount of happiness for the greatest majority - to its broadest limits as inclusive of animals and the environment at large (see, for example, his *In Defense of Animals*, Blackwell, New York 1985; *The Way We Eat: Why Our Food Choices Matter*, with Jim Mason, Emmaus, Pa., Rodale; *Animal Liberation: The Definitive Classic of the Animal Movement*, New York, Ecco, and imprint of Harper Collins Publishers, 2009, among his other influential titles in bioethics), Peter Singer argues in and through these works that the utilitarian principle should not be limited to guarding human interests. If the principle, viewed negatively as the avoidance of causing pain to the largest number of those who would suffer from it, then this should be applied to all creatures that feel pain, and that includes animals. Humans may not be able to effectively increase animals' happiness, or to determine which actions exactly would bring them happiness, but at least it can be known which actions cause them pain and therefore be avoided.

3 - See Tempels, Placide, *La Philosophie bantoue*, Lovania, Elizabethville, 1945, with later editions by Presence Africaine, Paris, 1949 and 3rd. edition 1965.

4 - See Césaire, Aimé, *Discours sur le colonialisme*, Paris, Reclme, 1950, and a Présence Africaine edition, 1955 (English translation by Joan Pinkham, *Discourse on Colonialism*, New York, Monthly Review Press, 1972).

5 - See, for example, Tempels, Placide, *Notre rencontre*, Léopoldville, Centre d'Etudes Pastorales, 1962.

6 - Among the disciples of the school founded by Tempels and who espouse this idea include John Mbiti (*African Religions and Philosophy*, 1969) and other African theologians and some philosophers who came out of ecclesiastical colleges, mainly in Europe, during the great march in search of African political and cultural autonomy with concentration in the years between 1960 and 1980. Although Senghor's idea of African humanism (see *Liberté I: Négritude et humanisme*, Paris, Seuil, 1964, and *Les Fondements de l'Africanité our négritude et arabité*, Paris, Présence Africaine, 1967) is fundamentally philosophical as opposed to being an exposition of religious beliefs, and also both predates and stands alone from Tempels' ideas of the foundations of a Bantu philosophy (see *La Philosophie bantoue*, Paris, Présence Africaine, 1949 [1965]), his

view of the contrast between Africans' epistemological orientation and that of their counterpart white Westerners belongs to the same school of thought, later branded pejoratively by Hountondji as "ethnophilosophy" (see Paulin J. Hountondji, *African Philosophy: Myth and Reality*, Bloomington, IN, Indiana University Press, 1983). Its basic proposition is that Africans' epistemic attitude toward its object is more accommodating in embrace of it than the rationalist trend of white Western people which separates itself from its object by reifying and freezing it at a distance.

7 - See Mills, Charles W., *The Racial Contract*, Ithaca, NY., Cornell University Press, 1997. Mills argues forcefully that the apparatus of the colonial state was the result of a deliberate and racially driven application of laws and principles of engagement in the set-up and administration of the colonial state by white Europeans contrary to the norms of the "social contract" in operation in Europe since the times of European enlightenment. The same *principium operandi* is what drove the making and application of policies of racial segregation in white-dominated nations well into the twenty-first century. The South African apartheid policies existed until 1994, while similar policies still remain today the de facto institutional norms of operation in the United States of America. All these historical policies, laws, and structures of inequality serve, Mills argues, as proof that the so-called "social contract" was never set as a universally applicable right view of any *polis* anywhere. Rather, it was set up as only applicable to white people to whom the freedoms, equalities, and rights of citizens applied. Thus the injustices of colonialism, and of racial subjugation, were never deemed injustices, but rather, as Thomas Jefferson infamously supportingly argued, the naturally and morally right thing to do (see *Notes on the State of Virginia*, ed. William Peden, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1955).

8 - See his pieces, "Of the populousness of ancient nations" and "Of national characters", in *Essays Moral and Political*, 1748.

9 - *African religions and philosophy*, p. 63.

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ABSTRACT | EN

The Western fascination with the pure and uncontaminated African landscape has strongly contributed to the recognition of the African continent as a *terra nullius* that could be conquered and exploited. At the same time, the belief that the African culture is based on mystical assumptions, as opposed to the materialist and rationalist Western background, strengthened the perception of freedom in invading and exploiting the continent. But the West is not exclusively responsible for that: generations of African élite have colluded with the "white man" in this race to exhaust the African resources and harm the African landscape.