



## UBUNTU AND MAAT ON ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

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**Abstract:** *The global environmental crisis is fundamentally an ethical and philosophical problem rooted in a Western anthropocentric worldview. This paper argues that prevailing Western-centric models of environmental education (EE) are insufficient for fostering the deep ecological ethic required for sustainability. In response, it proposes a radical reimagining of EE grounded in the African philosophical frameworks of Ubuntu and Maat. Through a dialectical analysis, the paper establishes the transformative potential of the philosophies of Ubuntu and Maat, with their tenets of interconnectedness and communal responsibility. Also Maat fosters principles of cosmic balance and justice to provide an ethical foundation that repositions humans as part of an ecological community. However, significant barriers to integration exist, including epistemic injustice, institutional neglect, and methodological tensions between knowledge systems. We concluded by proposing a decolonial path forward, advocating for epistemic liberation, institutional reformation, and transdisciplinary dialogue to create a hybrid, and a culturally-grounded approach to EE. This synthesis contends that anchoring sustainability education in Ubuntu and Maat is imperative for cultivating the values and relationships necessary to create a more just and flourishing world.*

**Keywords:** *Environmental Education, Decolonization, Ubuntu, Maat, Indigenous Knowledge, Sustainability, Epistemology.*

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## Introduction

The planet is in deep crisis and human life is severely menaced, and there is an urgent call for some radical measures if we want to save this planet from the crisis into which we have plunged it. This current global environmental crisis is blamed and heaped on the anthropocentric attitude (Descartes, 2006) which human beings have had towards their relationship with nature. Such attitude manifested in advancement in science and technology which threatens the integrity, stability, beauty, and life of planet Earth. Insatiable human desire has led to population increase, and escalated the exploitation and degradation of the environment. There is therefore need for an education that is adequate to tame the present arrogance of humans by which they treat the rest of nature as a means to their ends. This global environmental crisis demands transformative educational approaches that move beyond Western-centric models (Le Grange, 2020). Ubuntu and Maat offer alternative frameworks that emphasize interdependence, ethical responsibility, and ecological balance. Ubuntu, rooted in Southern African traditions, asserts that human well-being is tied to

community and nature (Mugumbate & Chereni, 2020). Maat, from ancient Kemet (Egypt), represents cosmic order, justice, and harmony between humans and the environment (Karenga, 2004). Integrating these principles into environmental education can foster sustainable mindsets and practices.

### Clarification of concepts

The term Ubuntu possesses flexibility of meaning, understanding and interpretation that necessitates immediate and meticulous interpretation. The term Ubuntu derived from two words in the *Nguni Bantu* languages of Southern Africa, particularly Zulu and Xhosa. It comes from the root "-ntu" (meaning "person" or "human") combined with the prefix "ubu-", which denotes collective quality. Thus, Ubuntu roughly translates to "humanity," "humaneness," or "the quality of being human." Ubuntu in software engineering is widely used as an open-source Linux. Beyond technology, Ubuntu is an ethic, philosophy or worldview that explains how people are related to one another, if you are not a person, you are not part of the human connection. Thus, Ubuntu is



an African practice, belief, world view, ideology, and philosophy that promotes the common good of the society based on empathy, compassion, kindness, love, humility. Ubuntu is an African idea, ideology, philosophy, value system, and way of life that emphasizes the welfare of society as a whole and views humanity as a necessary component of human development. In other words, Ubuntu is a set of principles and behaviours that Africans and those of African descent believe define what it is to be a true human being. Diverse ethnic communities may adhere to diverse beliefs and practices, but they all emphasize that a true individual human being is part of a wider and more meaningful social, communal, societal, environmental, and spiritual world.

Ramose (1999) stated that philosophy based on Ubuntu is a living philosophy, based on recognition of the perennial oneness and wholeness of the living, even the living-dead and the unborn. For him, in the pre-colonial African societies, the concept of Ubuntu was used in upholding social cohesion, peace and order for the good life of everybody in the society and even strangers (Mawere, 2012). The concept of Ubuntu translates 'humanity', 'humanness', or 'humaneness' which is not only a factual description of human nature, but constitutes also a rule of conduct and social ethic (Louw, 2001). We underline the fact that Ubuntu is like powerhouse for the destination of Africa in its three main dimensions; spiritual capital, physical capital, and ideological capital. It is on this understanding that Ubuntu is known as the collective respect for human dignity (Grade 2012). This emphasizes an African cosmology, where Ubuntu is that which gives people their humanity (Mandela, 1994). Ubuntu is thus a cultural and philosophical worldview that prioritizes community values over personal interests, inclinations, and biases.

The meaning of Ubuntu is encapsulated in the Zulu axiom, '*umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*', which translates to 'a person is a person through other people.' As an African concept, Ubuntu refers to a sense of humaneness and interconnectedness within a community (Nyaumwe & Mkabela, 2007). With roots in pre-colonial times, Ubuntu is part of a long oral tradition found in many African cultures. It is manifested in a person's moral qualities, such as generosity, empathy, forgiveness, and consideration. Some interpretations describe Ubuntu as a divine presence that guides individuals toward virtuous behavior. Ultimately, Ubuntu functions as a philosophical worldview centered on the fundamental interconnectedness of humanity.

Maat is a philosophical concept that flourished in ancient North Africa, particularly in Egypt and Sudan, and continues to be relevant today. Sometimes referred to as Kemetic or Egyptian philosophy, Maat is personified as a goddess depicted as a woman with an ostrich feather on her head, a scepter in one hand, and an ankh in the other (Budge, 1967). But what is the philosophy of Maat? According to Lesole (2002), Maat was an ancient Egyptian deity associated with the principles of human perfection. The philosophy, therefore, centers on truth and justice, as the word 'Maat' literally translates to "truth," "justice," or "that which is right." As Budge (1969) explains, the fundamental concept of Maat is "straightness," which encompassed meanings such as right, true, genuine, upright, righteous, just, steadfast, and unalterable.

As a concept, Maat represented justice, truth, balance, righteousness, and compassion. These principles governed the behaviour of the gods, who were sustained by Maat, a force that nourished, renewed, and upheld moral order. These elements were

fundamental determinants of social solidarity, integration, and order. In the ancient Egyptian worldview, this unified concept was central to the cosmos, the sun-god, the pharaoh, and humanity. As Ferguson notes, "in ancient Egyptian society, Maat was the central conception of the legal framework" (2016, p. 74), a system that denoted "order, honesty, and justice" (Shupack, 1993, p. 127). It was the pharaoh, as the representative of the sun-god, who was responsible for ensuring the continued maintenance of Maat and thus, justice among his subjects.

Environmental education (EE) is a structured process aimed at fostering awareness and knowledge of environmental issues, thereby enabling responsible individual and collective action (UNESCO, 2014a). It is defined as a holistic learning process that increases public knowledge and awareness of the environment and its associated challenges, develops the skills and expertise to address those challenges, and promotes the attitudes, motivations, and commitments required to make informed decisions and take responsible action (UNESCO, 1978).

As a multidisciplinary field, Environmental Education integrates principles from the natural sciences, social sciences, and humanities, including biology, ecology, chemistry, physics, and geography (Gough, 2013). It operates on the principle of lifelong learning and is not confined to a single branch of science but is rather an interdisciplinary endeavor directed towards the goals of environmental protection and the enhancement of human quality of life (UNESCO, 1978). While often implemented within formal educational systems from primary to tertiary levels, Environmental Education also encompasses informal education efforts directed at the public through various media and outreach campaigns (Ardoin et al., 2020).

A core objective of Environmental Education is to facilitate a societal transition towards sustainability by creating a citizenry that is not only knowledgeable about environmental problems but is also aware of solutions and motivated to implement them (UNESCO, 2014a). This process is bi-directional. Educators disseminate findings while simultaneously monitoring the efficacy of their communication to refine strategies and inform relevant stakeholders (Tilbury, 1995). Ultimately, environmental education is recognized as a critical instrument for fostering an inherent respect for nature, safeguarding future global developments, and ensuring sustainable development by protecting ecosystems, eradicating poverty, and minimizing inequalities (UNESCO, 2014a).

This work positions the African philosophies of Ubuntu and Maat as foundational paradigms for environmental education in Africa. It argues that for environmental education to be truly transformative on the continent, it must be anchored in African worldviews. Currently, however, most environmental models in Africa are predominantly informed by non-African perspectives and multinational organizations. To counter these dominant Western paradigms (Ramose, 2002), this article constructs a theoretical framework for African environmental education grounded in the principles of Maat and Ubuntu. The study employs a hermeneutic approach (Gadamer, 2004) to interpret textual sources on these philosophies. This methodology facilitates an analysis that uncovers the underlying meanings and contemporary relevance of Ubuntu and Maat. Through this process, the study demonstrates how these indigenous philosophies can serve as alternative frameworks for environmental education, offering a

culturally resonant and ethically grounded model for the African context.

An ecocentric and holistic educational model is urgently needed to conceptualize Earth as an integrated ecological system in which humanity is but a single component. This necessity is underscored by a mounting ecological crisis, driven predominantly by human activity, which threatens life on a planetary scale. Current estimates indicate that over one hundred species become extinct daily, a rate projected to double or triple in the coming decades (Des Jardins, 2006). Concurrently, the essential resources that sustain life, air, water, and soil are being polluted and depleted at an alarming rate, exacerbated by desertification, flooding, and extreme rainfall events. The prevailing tendency to frame these crises as merely scientific or political challenges represents a profound misdiagnosis. As Des Jardins (2006) argues, environmental issues are fundamentally deeper; they force a critical examination of human values, our relationship with nature, and the conditions necessary for collective flourishing. In essence, ecological controversies are not just problems to be solved but raise fundamental philosophical questions concerning the very ends we pursue.

### **Formulation of the Problem and thrust**

This work holds that environmental educational initiatives should be steadfastly anchored in philosophies of Maat and Ubuntu despite its militating challenges. The question that arises is the tenability of Ubuntu and Maat in environmental education. Are the values of Maat and Ubuntu not anachronistic in addressing the present day environmental challenges in Africa in particular and the world at large? To answer the above question, our paper adopts a dialectical approach. The hermeneutic process involves a dialectical method (thesis, antithesis, synthesis) to critically assess whether these indigenous philosophies remain viable in addressing modern environmental challenges or whether they risk being dismissed as anachronistic. Via iterative interpretation, the study explores tensions between traditional African worldviews and contemporary environmental models, ultimately proposing a synthesized framework that integrates Ubuntu and Maat into sustainable development discourse and educational discourses (Wiredu, 1996). This approach does not only highlight the transformative potential of African philosophies but also challenges Eurocentric development narratives by foregrounding indigenous epistemologies (Nkrumah, 1964). The hermeneutic engagement thus serves as both a critical and reconstructive tool, enabling a reimagining of environmental education that is authentically African in its orientation

### **Ubuntu and Maat as Basis of Transformative Environmental Education**

The global environmental crisis demands transformative educational approaches that move beyond Western-centric models (Le Grange, 2020). Ubuntu and Maat offer alternative frameworks that emphasize interdependence, ethical responsibility, and ecological balance. Ubuntu, rooted in Southern African traditions, asserts that human well-being is tied to community and nature (Mugumbate & Chereni, 2020). Maat, from ancient Kemet (Egypt), represents cosmic order, justice, and harmony between humans and the environment (Karenga, 2004). Integrating these principles into environmental education foster sustainable mindsets and practices. Ubuntu promotes Ecological Consciousness via its core tenet "I am because we are" extends beyond human relationships to include the

natural world (Bowers, 2006). Its implications for environmental education include; Interconnectedness (teaching that human survival depends on ecosystems), communal responsibility (encouraging collective action in conservation) and respect for all life (Valuing biodiversity as part of a shared existence). Maat promotes Environmental Ethics and its principles of truth, balance, and justice aligning with sustainability (Asante, 2000). Maatian pedagogical applications consists of ecological balance (teaching the consequences of disrupting natural harmony), restorative environmentalism (emphasizing repair of ecological damage) and ethical consumption that is encouraging lifestyles that align with natural order.

Again, Ubuntu promotes environmental education through the value of interconnectedness. Mugumbate and Chereni (2019) underline this by proving that individuals are part of a family, as families are a part of a community, just like communities are part of the environment. The concept of interconnectedness suggests that both individuals and communities grow and thrive together, each contributing to the other's development and fulfillment. This reflects the Ubuntu principle that personal identity and achievement are deeply tied to collective existence, as captured in the saying: "I exist as I am because of who we all are". These interconnected relationships in ecological framework, draws our attention towards the relationships between the levels which is the key focus of Ubuntu. Mugumbate and Chereni (2019) builds a life cycle model of human development and an ecological model of the responsibilities of different layers of the ecosystem for the development and wellbeing of a child which they believed, rooted in Ubuntu world view. This African worldview, which is the "the bondedness, the interconnectedness, of all living beings" (Adesha, 2017, p.636) is underscored by Iji omah as African ontology in terms of "harmonious monism." It is in the same vein that Godfrey Tangwa calls it an "African eco-bio-communitarian outlook" (Adesha, 2017, p.636) which holds that the indigenous or pre-colonial traditional African metaphysical worldview indicates "recognition and acceptance of interdependence and peaceful coexistence between earth, plants, animals and humans" (Adesha, 2017, p.636). The African ontological perspective is fundamentally relational, characterized as "psycho-physical harmony" and "existence-in-relation, being-for-self-and-others." This worldview fosters a deep environmental ethic, as scholars note that human well-being is seen as inseparable from interdependence with the entire natural world (Adeshina, 2017). Within this framework, humanity is not separate from but is a part of nature, leading to a sense of community expressed through identity, kinship, and respect (Murove, 2017). This concept of universal interconnectedness is further emphasized by Bujo, who asserts that the African conviction is that all cosmic elements are interdependent, making harmony with the whole of nature essential for human life (Adeshina, 2017). Consequently, the Ubuntu worldview serves as the cornerstone of African environmental education by teaching that the natural environment is an integral part of our own being.

Again Ubuntu upholds that present life must be lived in a way that honours and ensures the wellbeing of those yet to come. Behrens (2017), highlights a key distinction between Western and African philosophical perspectives on environmental conservation, particularly concerning future generations. While Western thought often dismiss obligations to unborn beings due to their non-existence, African philosophy asserts that ancestors, the living, and future generations coexist in a shared temporal and spiritual reality

(Behrens, 2017). This worldview fosters a two-fold; stewardship responsibility toward both past and future communities encouraging environmental care as the land is seen as a collective resource held simultaneously by all generations, rather than inherited sequentially. Unlike Western notions of ownership, African thought frames humans as temporary caretakers rather than permanent owners, emphasizing Ubuntu's extension beyond present relationships to include ancestors and descendants. This interconnectedness reinforces sustainable environmental practices by grounding personhood in past, present, and future communal ties. This perspective extends beyond environmental stewardship to encompass all aspects of life including economic systems, political structures, social relations, and individual health and wellbeing. Then, Ubuntu philosophy aligns closely with the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (United Nations, 2015), which builds on the Brundtland Report's (1987) definition of sustainable development as meeting present needs without jeopardizing future generations' ability to meet theirs. The 2030 Agenda outlines a comprehensive vision for a world free from poverty, inequality, and environmental degradation, structured around 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 targets spanning economic, social, and environmental domains (United Nations, 2015). Lombard (2015) demonstrates how the Global Agenda for Social Work integrates with this framework, positioning social work as central to global sustainability efforts. Ubuntu enriches this approach by emphasizing interconnectedness not just within present communities but also across past and future generations a contrast to Western perspectives that often treat these temporal communities as distant or abstract. By recognizing this immanent connection, an Ubuntu approach to environmental education offers deeper leverage in fostering social, economic, and environmental progress; ensuring interventions are more holistic and culturally grounded.

Moreover, the widening of the Ubuntu community in time, that is, to include those who have gone before us is linked to sustainable development, because the word 'sustainable' refers to the maintenance of something over a long time. Current discourse on Ubuntu predominantly focuses on present relationships, largely overlooking the vital role of ancestors in African spirituality. Mupedziswa et al. hold that "the concept of community as an organising principle" ((2019, p.30). The notion of 'community' is not an impersonal structure or system, but a living collective or network of people, whose well-being and functioning are inextricably intertwined. According to Ubuntu, no individual's rights are greater than another's; thus every individual in a community, including both children and adults, for example, is important and should be heard and respected. Ubuntu emphasizes norms for interpersonal relationships that contribute to social justice, such as "reciprocity, selflessness and symbiosis" (Osei Hwedie, 2014, p109). Traditional African belief systems maintain that ancestors remain active members of the living community (Mndende, 2016; Nyaumwe & Mkabela, 2007), serving as spiritual intermediaries who influence daily life through protection, healing, and moral guidance. This ancestral connection fosters historical consciousness and accountability, particularly significant in post-colonial contexts where liberation struggles involved tremendous sacrifice. While descendants of oppressed communities draw strength from ancestral legacy, those with colonial heritage must critically engage with their ancestors' harmful actions. Importantly, African spirituality's temporal perspective encompasses not only the ancestral past but also future generations, creating a continuum

of communal responsibility that transcends conventional Western temporal boundaries. This holistic worldview fundamentally expands conventional understandings of Ubuntu by integrating past, present and future into a unified moral framework. Mbiti (2015), explains:

Marriage is the meeting-point for the three layers of human life according to African Religion. These are the departed, the living and those to be born. The departed come into the picture because they are the roots on whom the living stand. The living are the link between death and life. Those to be born are the buds in the loins of the living. Since the unborn are regarded as family members who are merely residing "in the loins of the living", they are a vital and present part of the family. The present generation thus has a responsibility not only to themselves and their ancestors, but also to future generations (p. 104).

The Ubuntu community in both space (a larger and more inclusive definition of community) and time (incorporating both ancestors and future generations)

The Ubuntu holds the humanness or personhood takes its essence within the universe or community of "beings" which is fundamentally different understanding of personhood compared to Western individualism. At its core is the principle that human identity is formed through relationships as expressed in the maxim "I am because we are". This contrasts sharply with Cartesian philosophy's "I think, therefore I am," which grounds existence in individual consciousness rather than communal bonds. Where Descartes' cogito emphasizes radical independence of thought, Ubuntu sees personhood as inherently interdependent. As Archbishop Desmond Tutu famously articulated, this worldview recognizes that our humanity is inextricably tied to others, we become fully human only through our connections within community. The Cartesian model views the self as autonomous and self-sufficient, while Ubuntu understands identity as relational and contextual. This distinction has profound implications for how we conceptualize human nature, social responsibility, and ethical frameworks in different cultural contexts:

A person with Ubuntu is available and open to others, affirming of others, does not feel threatened that others are able or good, for he or she has a proper self-assurance that comes from knowing that he or she belongs in a greater whole and is diminished when others are humiliated or diminished, when others are tortured or oppressed (Tutu, 1988, p.4-5)

Highlighting the above, environmental sustainability relies on the Ubuntu value of common good which focuses on meeting the resource and service needs of both current and future generations without harming ecosystems. Achieving this goal requires human-environment interactions guided by principles of the common good. Since environmental sustainability is a global concern, solutions must prioritize collective well-being, where individual prosperity is interconnected with the welfare of all (Bujo, 1998). Ubuntu, with its emphasis on caring, sharing, and communal values, offers a valuable framework for addressing sustainability challenges. Unlike the Cartesian view, which promotes individualism and self-interest, Ubuntu fosters a communal understanding of personhood, emphasizing humane relationships. This perspective cultivates attitudes such as civility, cooperation,

solidarity, tolerance, and reconciliation qualities essential for both individual and communal flourishing. Those who embrace Ubuntu's values are more likely to prioritize mediation over conflict, collaboration over competition, and reconciliation over division, fostering a culture of mutual understanding and sustainability.

Further, environmental sustainability seeks to preserve the Earth's ability to meet human needs while respecting ecological limits. This avoids jeopardizing the future generation. As Robert Goodland (1995) notes, it imposes constraints on human economic activities, particularly in resource use and waste management, to prevent over-exploitation. Human interactions with the environment can either support or undermine sustainability. Unsustainable practices deplete natural resources, as reflected in the global ecological footprint, a measure of human demand on ecosystems. According to Etieyeibo (2017), it is alarming as current estimates indicate that humanity's ecological footprint exceeds the planet's regenerative capacity by 30%. It means we are consuming resources faster than they can replenish. This imbalance underscores the urgent need for sustainable practices aligned with principles like Ubuntu, which promote responsible stewardship and collective responsibility for the environment. Hence, Ubuntu fosters African environmental education.

Aldo Leopold's concept of "Land Ethics" represents one of the foundational expressions of eco-centric thought. Troubled by environmental degradation, Leopold (1949) emphasized the need for humanity to recognize its interdependent relationship with the Earth and to appreciate the intrinsic worth of the land, or the biotic community, independent of its utility to humans. He urged a shift in perspective from viewing ourselves as dominators of nature to understanding our role as equal members within the broader ecological community (Leopold, 1949). From an eco-centric standpoint, humans bear ethical responsibilities towards all living beings, not only because they are among the most resource-intensive species, but also because their unique cognitive abilities allow them to comprehend and reflect on the Earth as an interconnected whole (Naess, 1989; Callicott, 1999). These rational capacities make humans moral agents, accountable for the impact of their choices on the natural world (Taylor, 1986).

In addition, Oruka's *Parental Earth Ethics* (1997) provides a compelling moral framework for rethinking humanity's relationship with nature through two central principles: the Parental Debt Principle (PP) and the Individual Luck Principle (IP). Using the metaphor of a family with six children, Oruka argues that all members regardless of status are bound by a shared origin and interdependence, encapsulated in the *Family Security Rule*, which asserts that individual fate is inseparable from collective well-being. In this model, the family represents the Earth, and the children symbolize the global human community. Oruka (1997) critiques anthropocentric and exploitative attitudes particularly those found in affluent nations or individuals warning that apparent independence from nature is an illusion, as human survival remains inextricably tied to the ecological system. Responding to Garrett Hardin's "Lifeboat Ethics," Oruka's PP insists that neither prosperity nor suffering is wholly self-earned but is instead shaped by historical and communal contexts, underscoring a moral duty toward ecological and intergenerational justice (Oruka, 1997, pp. 146-150). In contrast, the IP, which prioritizes individual autonomy and entitlement, is ethically overruled when the well-being of the ecological "family" is at stake. Thus, Oruka asserts

that in matters where personal gain conflicts with collective environmental security, common sense ethics and the Parental Debt Principle demand that the latter must prevail.

### Maat as means for Environmental Education

Apart from Ubuntu, Maat is also a means to cater for caring for future generations. The ancient Egyptians believed in living in harmony with nature (Maat) and felt a deep moral duty to protect the future. This meant caring for both coming generations and the environment they would live in. Historical records show this belief was upheld for centuries, with leaders and individuals making commitments to uphold these values: "speaking to the future, acting for the future, looking towards or into the future, thinking for the reel what is good for the future, searching for that which is useful for the future" (Karenga, 2004, p.480).

From an ancient Egyptian Maatian tradition, one finds an emphasis on a profound moral responsibility toward future generations. This reveals framing ethical action as both emulation of the Creator's benevolence (Amon-Ra's care for creation) and a sacred duty to transmit wisdom. Texts like Ptahhotep's teachings and the Declarations of Virtues (DOV) explicitly instruct individuals to speak and act for posterity, ensuring moral and practical knowledge with enduring figures like Harwa and Khaemhat address their lessons to those "who will come after" (Karenga, 2004, p.480), while Kheti's Sebait underscores proactive planning for the future, warning against complacency; "One day is a donation to eternity" (Karenga, 2004, p.480). This intergenerational ethic where present actions "endow" the future reflects a sustainability paradigm. This Maatian principle directly aligns with the core tenet of sustainable development: meeting present needs without compromising future generations' capacity to thrive (Brundtland Report, 1987). The emphasis on foresight "working for the future" mirrors modern sustainability frameworks like the UN SDGs, which prioritize long-term ecological and social balance. Kheti's admonition to "plan for the good" resonates with contemporary calls for climate action (SDG 13) and responsible consumption (SDG 12), rejecting short-term exploitation. By viewing time as a continuum where today's choices "contribute to eternity," Maatian ethics offers a model for intergenerational equity, a gap treated differently in Western sustainability discourses. Reviving such indigenous wisdom could strengthen holistic approaches to global challenges, bridging moral stewardship with policy.

The Maatian worldview establishes an environmental ethics rooted in the holistic unity of existence, where all life: humans, animals, plants, and cosmic elements are interconnected through the principle of Maat (divine order and balance). Ancient Egyptians revered nature, seeing their societal well-being (justice, prosperity) as tied to ecological harmony, such as Nile floods or harvest cycles. This monistic ontology, as noted by Finnstad (1989), rejects rigid separations between species or animate/inanimate entities, instead emphasizing affinities. Unlike Eurocentric dualism, Maatian philosophy frames humans as transient manifestations of a unified "life total," ethically bound to all existence. This perspective aligns with sustainable development by offering a cultural framework for interconnected stewardship. Maat's emphasis on balance mirrors the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 15 (Life on Land) and SDG 13 (Climate Action), which stress harmony between human and natural systems. By viewing humans as co-participants in rather than dominators of ecological systems, Maatian ethics

counters exploitative resource use. Its focuses on justice and reciprocity and also resonates with indigenous sustainability models, advocating for policies that integrate ecological, social, and economic equity as a core tenet of the 2030 Agenda. Thus, reviving Maatian principles could inform inclusive, culturally-grounded approaches to global sustainability challenges.

### **Epistemic, Institutional, and Methodological Hurdles to Integrating Ubuntu and Maat in Environmental Education**

A primary impediment to integrating African philosophies like Ubuntu and Maat into environmental education is the entrenched dominance of Western environmental paradigms within global academic curricula. These paradigms, often rooted in anthropocentric and techno-scientific worldviews, frequently marginalize non-Western perspectives by framing them as anecdotal or unscientific (Horsthemke, 2015). The prevailing frameworks for understanding sustainability, conservation, and resource management are predominantly informed by Eurocentric models that prioritize individual rights, quantitative metrics, and technological solutions over relational and communal ethics (Shiva, 1993). This hegemony creates an epistemological barrier, where indigenous knowledge systems are not merely overlooked but are systematically devalued as inferior or irrelevant to modern environmental challenges (Odora-Hoppers, 2002). Consequently, even well-intentioned educational initiatives struggle to move beyond tokenistic inclusion, failing to provide a genuine epistemological shift that would allow Ubuntu and Maat to be understood on their own terms rather than as peripheral supplements to a Western core.

Beyond theoretical dominance, the practical integration of Ubuntu and Maat is hindered by a significant lack of institutional support at multiple levels. Effective integration requires dedicated funding for curriculum development, teacher training, and the creation of pedagogical resources that accurately reflect the complexity of these philosophies. However, educational policies and funding priorities often remain aligned with globalized, Western-standardized models of education, leaving little room or resource for the de-colonial work required (Le Grange, 2016). Furthermore, there is a scarcity of educators who are formally trained in both environmental science and indigenous knowledge systems, creating an expertise gap that institutions have been slow to address (Keane, 2018). Without formal mandates from ministries of education, accreditation bodies, and university leadership, efforts to integrate indigenous knowledge remain isolated and dependent on the advocacy of individual champions, thereby lacking the sustainability and scalability needed for profound systemic change.

Finally, a critical methodological challenge lies in navigating the relationship between traditional knowledge embedded in Ubuntu and Maat and contemporary scientific approaches to sustainability. Proponents of a purely scientific worldview may dismiss indigenous knowledge as myth or superstition, while some traditionalists might reject scientific findings that appear to contradict cultural tenets (Battiste, 2005). This false dichotomy obscures the potential for a synergistic relationship. The challenge, therefore, is not to choose one over the other, but to develop a dialogical framework that respects the integrity of both systems. This involves identifying points of convergence such as the shared emphasis on balance and harmony in Maat and ecological science

while also acknowledging and respecting points of divergence without automatically privileging one epistemology over the other (Chibvongodze, 2016). Successfully navigating this balance is essential to avoid the commodification or oversimplification of Ubuntu and Maat and to forge a strong, transdisciplinary approach to sustainability that is both scientifically sound and culturally grounded.

### **Towards A Hybrid, Culturally-Grounded Approach to Environmental Education**

In the above arguments, we saw that Ubuntu and Maat central to African environmental education and on the other hand, we saw its limitation based on the lack of institutional support and universal applicability. To overcome the above controversial positions, we propose multifaceted strategy. First, it requires epistemic liberation, which involves the active dismantling of knowledge hierarchies that systematically privilege Western scientific paradigms (Odora-Hoppers, 2002). Central to this is recognizing Ubuntu and Maat as critically relevant epistemological systems in their own right, rather than treating them as peripheral cultural artifacts to be grafted onto a dominant Western core (Horsthemke, 2015; Le Grange, 2016). Second, institutional reformation is essential. This entails advocating for concrete policy shifts within governmental education ministries, securing dedicated funding for de-colonial curriculum design, and implementing comprehensive teacher training programs. Such initiatives are crucial for equipping educators with the competency to navigate and integrate diverse worldviews effectively (Keane, 2018). Finally, fostering a trans-disciplinary dialogue is key to moving beyond the reductive binary that pits science against tradition. This process involves mapping areas of synergy for instance, the shared emphasis on balance and harmony found in ecological science and the principle of Maat, while also respectfully acknowledging points of divergence. The ultimate objective is to co-create a hybrid knowledge framework that is both empirically rigorous and culturally resonant (Chibvongodze, 2016; Battiste, 2005)

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the environmental crises of the Anthropocene are not merely technical challenges but are deeply rooted in an anthropocentric and individualistic worldview, shaped in large part by Western Cartesian philosophy, which has proven inadequate for nurturing the ecological ethic required for true sustainability. In response to this paradigm, a radical reimagining of environmental education (EE) is a necessary one grounded in the African philosophical traditions of Ubuntu and Maat. Through a dialectical method, it is argued that Ubuntu with its emphasis on interconnectedness, communal responsibility, and intergenerational equity and Maat with its principles of cosmic balance, truth, and justice offer profound ethical and ontological foundations for a transformative EE. These philosophies re-situate the human being as an embedded participant in a wider biotic community, cultivating a deep sense of care, responsibility, and relationality that extends to ancestors, the unborn, and the natural world. Yet, this vision is not without obstacles. The antithesis highlights persistent structural barriers such as epistemic injustice, institutional neglect, and methodological dissonance between Western and indigenous knowledge systems, all of which hinder the full integration of indigenous frameworks into mainstream education. In light of these challenges, the proposed synthesis calls for a de-colonial and transdisciplinary approach to environmental

education. We find one that does not simply reject Western science nor romanticize tradition, but seeks to dismantle hierarchical knowledge structures, validate Ubuntu and Maat as rigorous epistemologies, reform institutions to support this integration through policy and training, and foster sustained dialogue between diverse ways of knowing. Ultimately, education for sustainability must also be education for humanity, rooted not just in knowledge acquisition but in the cultivation of values, ethical responsibility, and meaningful relationships. By anchoring EE in the wisdom of Ubuntu and Maat, it becomes possible to envision a more just, balanced, and life-affirming future for all beings, human and non-human alike a future whose realization demands courage, commitment, and a profound shift in how we conceive both education and our place in the world.

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