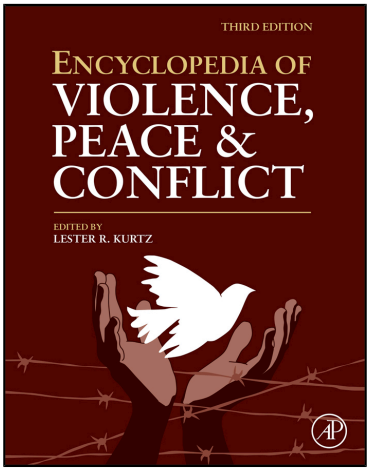
Author's personal copy

Provided for non-commercial research and educational use.
Not for reproduction, distribution or commercial use.

This article was originally published in Encyclopedia of Violence, Peace, and Conflict, published by Elsevier, and the attached copy is provided by Elsevier for the author's benefit and for the benefit of the author's institution, for non-commercial research and educational use including without limitation use in instruction at your institution, sending it to specific colleagues who you know, and providing a copy to your institution's administrator.



All other uses, reproduction and distribution, including without limitation commercial reprints, selling or licensing copies or access, or posting on open internet sites, your personal or institution's website or repository, are prohibited. For exceptions, permission may be sought for such use through Elsevier's permissions site at:
https://www.elsevier.com/about/our-business/policies/copyright/permissions

From Kurtz, M.M., 2022. Ubuntu as Peacebuilding. In: Kurtz, L.R. (Ed.), Encyclopedia of Violence, Peace, and Conflict, vol. 4. Elsevier, Academic Press, pp. 145–152.
https://dx.doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-12-820195-4.00305-8.
ISBN: 9780128201954
Copyright © 2022 Elsevier Inc unless otherwise stated. All rights reserved.
Academic Press

Author's personal copy

Ubuntu as Peacebuilding

Mariam M Kurtz, Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter School for Peace and Conflict Resolution, George Mason University, Arlington, VA, United States

© 2022 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Ubuntu as a Peacebuilding Tool 145
Origins of the Term 146
The Diffusion of Ubuntu 146
Ubuntu, Wars, and Peacebuilding 148
Ubuntu Encourages Proactive Peacebuilding 150
Conclusion 150
References 151
Relevant Websites 152

Ubuntu as a Peacebuilding Tool

Ubuntu is a core value in Sub-Saharan Africa, found in everyday practices as a tool for peacebuilding and conflict prevention because it is oriented toward restoring and maintaining relationships. It is the idea that "I am because you are" and vice versa. The roots of Ubuntu may be associated with a lack of formal institutions such as first responders, a welfare state, life and health insurance, funeral insurance, or credit cards, etc., providing support for human needs.[1]

Humans are fundamentally interdependent. Africans' understanding of this concept is embedded in key events of human life where people of Sub-Saharan Africa found they depended on each other for inescapable events like funerals, natural disasters. Ubuntu also reflects happy moments that also require interdependence, such as childbirth, rites of passage, and weddings. In these events, individuals gave each other support and promoted human consciousness of the need for one another. In these practices of Ubuntu, togetherness (*Ujamaa*) and peaceful coexistence are valued and security is ensured by investing in relationships at those times in life when humans thirst for support from another human's "hug" or "hand." In that context, actions tending toward conflict are more likely to be resolved based on restoring justice, rehabilitation, integration, forgiveness, reconciliation, and retribution.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu discusses Ubuntu in his book *No Future Without Forgiveness*.

> We say "a person is a person through other people" (*in Xhosa Ubuntu ungamntu ngabaye abantu and* in Zulu *Umuntu ngamuntu ngabanye*) I'm human because I belong, I participate, I share. A person with Ubuntu is open and available to others, affirming others, does not feel threatened that others are able to and good; for he or she has the proper self-assurance that comes with knowing that he or she belongs in a greater whole and diminished when others are humiliated or diminished, when others are tortured or oppressed, or treated as if they were less than who they are.
>
> (Tutu, 1999, pp. 34–35)

Kenyan founding father, Jomo Kenyatta, claims in a memoir *Facing Mount Kenya* (1965, p. 295), "According to Kikuyu ways of thinking, nobody is an isolated individual." Then he added, "first and foremost he is several people's relatives and several people's contemporary." Societies are usually organized around key relationships that include kinship groups as well as religious groups; political power comes with a clan structure in which clan membership is considered as central to personal identity (Ntohobari and Ndayiziga, 2003; Gluckman, 1956). "I am who I am" because I belong to a network of relationships, and my existence is vested in the group. Ubuntu also includes Ujamaa—togetherness or brotherhood—which some refer to as African socialism. Individual achievement comes from collective effort, it is the collective finger's theory, which can best be explained by the African proverb in Swahili, "Kidole kimoja hakivunji chawa," or in English, "A thumb, although it is strong, cannot kill aphids on its own."

Brock-Utne (2001) describes *Ubuntu* as a cultural worldview that tries to capture the essence of what it means to be human. But it "transcends beyond a narrow view of individualism to a holistic African outlook concerning everybody" (Fagunwa, 2019, pp. 4–5). The term is familiar in the eyes of many people around the world as the result of the Linux-based operating system by that name, which is used to distribute free open-source software for everyone to use.

Whenever conflicts arise, however, *Ubuntu* informs approaches to peacebuilding that focus on building better future relationships, tolerance between individuals and groups because we are by nature interdependent. In this view, no one is disposable, and everyone, young and old, women and men, the poor and affluent have a role to play.

[1]Thanks to Dr. Daniel Rothbart and Dr. Arthur Romano from The Carter School for Peace and Conflict Resolution, George Mason University and John Paul Lederach at the Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies, University of Notre Dame, for their encouragement and comments on this article.

Author's personal copy

Origins of the Term

The term *Ubuntu* comes from the Zulu and Xhosa languages in South Africa but is found in other Bantu languages like Swahili, the major East African language, which comprised 60% Bantu and 40% Arabic. There it is called "*Utu*," meaning "humanity"; a person who cares about humanity and serves others by giving of themselves is called "Mtu." It connotes not just philanthropy, where you give money and are not there physically for those in need; you have to be empathetically and personally involved. Tutu (1999) explains that "When you want to give high praise to someone we say, '*Yu, u no buntu*'; he or she has *Ubuntu*. This means that they are generous, hospitable, friendly, caring and compassionate."

Practices of Ubuntu also appear in advanced precapitalist African societies such as the Oromo people of Ethiopia, which had its "political and economic systems firmly rooted and structured in moralistic view of life in Ghana which has the similar principle as Ubuntu" (Fagunwa, 2019, p. 4). Akan people in Ghana use the term *Biakoye*, which connotes unity, respect, and communality. The Yoruba people of southwestern Nigeria have the term *Ebi*, which articulates the sociological meaning of *Ubuntu* (Fagunwa, 2019, p. 5).

This concept also appears in other languages, as "Umundu" in Kikuyu (Kenya), "Umuthu" in Chewa (Malawi), "Vumuntu" in Tonga (Mozambique), and many other languages in Sub-Saharan Africa. A white paper for social welfare in South Africa (Department of Welfare, 1997) described Ubuntu as promoting and looking after each other's welfare as humans and it is the right and responsibility of everyone to promote the well-being of others. "The principle of caring for each other's well-being will be promoted, and a spirit of mutual support fostered. Each individual's humanity is ideally expressed through his or her relationship with others and theirs in turn through a recognition of the individual's humanity."

The Diffusion of Ubuntu

Ubuntu principles are widely used in conflict and communal mediation, community reconciliation, and peacekeeping. Most strikingly, Ubuntu has provided the cultural roots and inspiration for perhaps more than fifty truth and reconciliation processes around the world. Shortly after it began, Rouhana and Korper claimed in 1997 that "reconciliation" was a new term in the conflict resolution field. The idea also has been used to broaden understandings of conflict and bring issues of justice and historical truth into the conversation. A policy of forgiveness and reconciliation such as that developed in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa has become an international example of conflict resolution and a trusted method of postconflict reconstruction (Truth and Reconciliation Commission South Africa, 1998).

Reconciliation was used in Rwanda, the Czech Republic, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Algeria, South Korea and spread across the globe to every continent but Antarctica. The approach was popular in regions experiencing protracted conflicts or conflicts characterized by animosity, fear, and severe stereotyping and ethnonational conflict in countries. It was especially significant in countries experiencing transitions from authoritarian regimes where simple mediation or sitting down at a negotiation table were insufficient, especially when power imbalances persist in the relationship and memories of atrocities persist. Reconciliation became a necessary intervention technique to improve hostile relationships by shaping people's perspectives as well as to address differences between groups and be able to move forward. If *Ubuntu* were embedded in the culture, that process is more easily accepted.

It is understood that forgiveness and repentance are not easy for some people, even in cultures that embrace *ubuntu*. In Uganda, the Acholi drink bitter herbs as symbolic of the difficulty but necessity of the process. Desmond Tutu (1999) provides a telling narrative for this situation. "A man who stole a beautiful golden pen from somebody and when after many years came back and said, 'I'm sorry. Please forgive me,' and the man embraced him and said, 'I forgive you,' but can I have my pen back?" Champnan and Spong (2003 p. 123). The archbishop often tells this joke in order to emphasize the significance of restitution in such situations, adding that those who benefited from the past should give something back to the victims of violent conflict such as the nonwhite citizens of the apartheid system. That is not simple, however; a study done by Kaminer et al. (2001) shows that survivors who tend to give public testimony are either very forgiving or very unforgiving.

Significantly South African President Nelson Mandela's assessment was that you could only transform a society or community by encouraging reconciliation and promoting understanding, even love, among all the constituents. He highlighted the interconnectedness and interdependence of all the people in any community—whether they be good or bad, the alienated or the oppressed. Most memorably he wrote that "the oppressor must be liberated just as surely as the oppressed …. When I walked out of prison, that was my mission to liberate the oppressed and the oppressor both. To be free is not merely to cast off one's chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others" (Mandela, 1994, p. 544).

As a peacebuilding and conflict prevention tool, social interdependence and interconnectedness show the significance of mutual relationships and solidarity that would protect humanity. The principles of Ubuntu are embedded within social, economic, and religious-spiritual aspects of social life, based on the traditions, customs, and the worldview of the society, and various aspects of social life, especially encouraged in collectivist culture. The focus of Ubuntu is to build and maintain future relationships and restore social harmony; it would promote negotiations, mediations, and reconciliation as crucial tools for conflict resolution.

In traditional African cultures, conflict practitioners are usually leaders of the community such as traditional chiefs, kings, priests, healers, elders, and other tribal leaders who understand the local history, customs, ethics, legal principles, and ritual of the community. Usually, the process is in the form of rituals involving the whole community. Wealth exchanges, prayers, and sacrifices to the gods or ancestors are performed, and there is often merrymaking (Bukari, 2013, p. 89).

Author's personal copy

According to Ubuntu, humanity always needs to be respected, even in times of war. The concept is often used to encourage diplomacy, including the use of marriages as a form of alliances, swearing of oath, or exchanging prisoners in order to mitigate conflict or to ensure lasting peace. Although rudimentary weapons such as assegais and shields may be used, the emphasis of Ubuntu is always to prevent human loss and to restore relationships after a conflict. The Yoruba in Nigeria have a proverb, "the fact we are quarreling does not mean that we want our opponent to die." Similarly, the Togolese have a principle, "if peace is necessary to preserve life, men have to be friends if they are to survive" (Kwam Kouassi, 2000, p. 68). Crimes against humanity are prohibited at all times.

To limit casualties in times of war, formal declarations were introduced, and the annexation of foreign territory was rare in precolonial societies. Social interventions are valuable to maintain relationships by transforming conflict in a more positive manner. Rituals are often performed during the reconciliation process among ethnic groups. The Acholi's *Mato Oput* ritual in Northern Uganda is a good example (Lanek, 1999). In the Acholi vernacular, *Mato Oput* refers to drinking the bitter herb of the Oput tree as a means of reconciliation. It is accompanied by a special ceremony where the guilt is acknowledged, wrongdoers repent, ask for forgiveness, pay compensation, build trust, and then reconcile with the victim's family by sharing the bitter herb from the *Mato Oput*. This functions as a psychological symbol of the difficulty but the importance of resolving a conflict for the good of the community as required by *ubuntu*.

In the case of a murder, "the bending of spears" follows the *Mato Oput* ceremony to symbolize a complete end to the conflict (Lanek, 1999). *Ubuntu* forbids punitive justice; therefore, the guilty would have to pay appropriate compensation, which is nominal, symbolic, and without commercial value (Mac Ginty, 2008). "Exchange and compensation were vehicles for the restoration of balance: restoration honors that the two groups could live in harmony" (*ibid; 43*). Compensation could range from monetary to goods such as chickens, goats, cows, milk, honey, or nuts. Chinua Achebe, the classic Africa novelist, described an occasion when Uzowulu had engaged in domestic violence and the priests were summoned to settle the case after his wife had fled to her parents. The leader of the priests told Uzowulu to go to his in-laws "with a pot of wine and beg your wife to return to you." He added, "It is not bravery when a man fights with a woman" (Achebe, p. 91). The point of the story was not to punish Uzowulu for his unacceptable behavior but to restore peace and harmony within the family.

Other creative forms of conflict intervention and resolution fostered by *ubuntu* include joking, singing, shaming, or ridiculing those harming individuals and the community. Sometimes elders or "joking partners," whom Radcliffe-Brown (1940, p. 196) describes as a peculiar combination of friendliness and antagonism, will pressurize parties into accepting a resolution in order to save relationships and restore mutual support, care, affection, and identity. Antisocial behavior of troublemakers is discouraged through ordinary conversation by ritual, shaming them, or poking fun at them in jocular ways (Brock-Utne, 2001, p. 10). The Luo in Kenya believed that if a woman said "no" to something, you should not do it; moreover, a woman only needed to stand between two men engaged in a fight for them to stop. If one sought refuge in a woman's hut, the opponent would be forced to abandon the fight, not only in domestic but also communal conflicts (Ineba Bob-Manuel, 2000).

A similar African practice is known as *Palaver*, which involves "word, speech, discussion"; it is a negotiation process with a similar purpose of Ubuntu in which people address a problem through a discussion aimed at saving relationships among the parties in the conflict going so far as reintegrating an offender. As with Ubuntu, the road to peace can be achieved by telling the truth and seeking forgiveness in order to reconcile adversaries. Mediators facilitate communication designed to lead to restoration of harmony rather than punishing the culprit. In Rwanda, the process is known as *Gacaca*, a grassroots institution built by the people from below, which became a tool for postgenocide reconciliation (Brock-Utne, 2004).

Ubuntu cultures nurture these values from childhood. They build consensus through learning from and adapting those principles to everyday practices. Ubuntu encourages communal cooperation, with collective action and collective responsibility that focus on long-term solutions. That behavior reflects the significance of peacekeeping through the principle of reciprocity and a sense of shared destiny among people. "It provides a value system for giving and receiving forgiveness. It offers a rationale for sacrificing or of letting go of the desire to take revenge for the past wrongs" (Brock-Utne, 2001, p. 5). Revenge and penalties are discouraged in order to preserve the future relationship between parties and the whole community because not all kinds of damages could be compensated. Ubuntu is not just a set of practices, but a way of seeing the world of which some external or international actors engaging in conflict resolution interventions may not be aware. Ubuntu became the center and influence of Sub-Saharan social interaction especially among those who are conscious of human interdependence. Humans engage in social interaction; they engage in dispute but restrain from violence. Conflict in one set of relations, over a wider range of society or through a longer period of time, leads to the reestablishment of social cohesion (Gluckman (1956, p. 2)). Everyday practices of *Ubuntu* aim to protect and build good relationships in the community because human security is invested in them.

It is easiest to observe Ubuntu in African funerals, where humans share common emotional bonds. When they grieve, they experience their interdependence and interconnectedness. That is where humans' urge for needing another person's support becomes obvious: kind words, hugs, flowers, and other means of support. Long before modern institutions like funeral, health, and life insurance and credit cards emerged to address those needs, the community was the insurer of those needs. When a loved one is lost, the neighbors are the first responders. You might take all of what is in your heart and scream. Your neighbors will abandon what they are doing and rush to your house, referring to the Swahili proverb, *fimbo ya mbali haiui nyoka*, a distant stick cannot kill a snake. The relatives might be far away. Upon the arrival of the neighbors, they will look for your needs. Food and water will be provided, and they will cry with you, comfort and support you, making sure that you are not alone. They will donate money for the funeral arrangements, and a mass of people will gather and camp in and around your house for several days, later accompanied by family members as they arrive for the burial. The person who has lost this

Author's personal copy

time feels obligated to do the same for others. People who do not show up might suffer the consequences of being alone when their time comes. Everyone will experience grief or face challenges at some times in their lives. As peacebuilding tools, Ubuntu practices encourage the maintenance of relationships.

The concept of Ubuntu addresses the human needs that Johan Galtung classified as "survival," "well-being," "identity," and "freedom" (Galtung, 1990a,b). Rubenstein (2001), Ted Gurr (2015), and John Burton (1990) add that human needs cannot be suppressed and are nonnegotiable. Some people are willing to use whatever means available to obtain these needs. When they are not met, people get frustrated and aggressive. The culture of Ubuntu addresses all of these needs by encouraging people to give of themselves to each other. When Ubuntu fulfills these needs, including survival (food, shelter, food, water, warmth, and rest, etc.), people feel that they belong; others are always there for them, and their identity is reaffirmed. People feel they are loved and have intimate relationships. In that context, the use of violence is costly because it can result in being disconnected from the caring community.

Ubuntu also addresses Maslow's hierarchy of needs from the basic to the higher level, such as feeling loved, having intimate relationships and friends, even prestige as well as feelings of accomplishment and self-actualization. As a peacebuilding, peacekeeping, and conflict prevention tool, Ubuntu functions through reciprocity, and when people do something to support you, you feel obligated to do the same for others in order to sustain those mutual relationships that are a foundation for sustainable peace. There is, therefore, a sense of shared destiny among people.

Ubuntu provides both social and economic support and care for those who may suffer from mental and psychological trauma. A breach of Ubuntu, however, could lead to sanctions, fines, or isolation (Faure, 2000). Among the Luhya in Kenya, in order to discourage suicide and self-harm people learn that they will face consequences from the community if they take their own life. The deceased will not receive the same burial procedures as those who have died from other causes. According to Kevin, it "used to happen in Maragoli, …in the event that you commit suicide," your life will not be honored like other members of the community. Your burial will take place quietly at night and "Nobody will make any effort to attend the funeral."[2]

The roots of Ubuntu could be also traced to customary land ownership practices in most of Sub-Saharan Africa especially in rural areas. Land was still communal property in many parts of the region until that approach was eroded by development and modernization (Kurtz, 2018). Meek (1946) notes that land was less individualized in most of Africa, in large part because it was not a scarce commodity. In precolonial Africa, land was administered rather than owned. It was held under "inclusive clan land ownership" (INCLO; see Kurtz, 2018). Land served the interests of large groups of clans and the community at large. During my interviews with widows of Kakola, Bulyanhulu, the largest gold mine in East Africa, they claimed that before their land was commodified by the discovery of gold, it was administered by male clan members. During my interview with Mwana Masahani, one of the senior widows in the village, about their land arrangements, she kept using the term "administered" instead of ownership of the land. When I asked why, she replied, "I use administered because we do not keep land forever."[3]

Ubuntu, Wars, and Peacebuilding

I cannot generalize so broadly as to claim that Ubuntu as peacekeeping exists everywhere as social practice in everyday life across the region or among all individuals. Individualism, exploitation, corruption, revenge, attacks, and other forms of violence and conflicts in some precolonial societies and postcolonial states contradicted the concept of Ubuntu. The Western emphasis on individual liberty and privatization has undermined Ubuntu values of collective social solidarity, but the practices persist and are used to maintain social harmony in communities.

Ubuntu did not emerge from some idyllic precolonial societies without conflict and exploitation, but those values supported the prevention and peaceful resolution of conflict. Some precolonial kingdoms conquered each other in precapitalist Sub-Saharan Africa and were as economically advanced as some parts of preindustrial Western Europe. Goody (1980) concludes that "except in the special fields of the wine and wool trade, the differences between the external exchanges of Africa and early medieval Europe appear to have been relatively slight" (ibid., p. 395). Individualism, the accumulation of wealth, political hierarchies, militaries and wars, social classes, a division of labor, and specialization existed as rival cultural paradigms to Ubuntu in those African empires. Social upheaval and conflict emerged within and between kingdoms even before colonialism and they persist today.

The Dahomey, Mali, Songhai, and Ashanti, and other interlacustrine kingdoms like Buganda and Bunyoro Kingdoms in East Africa were among the advanced empires in precolonial Sub-Saharan Africa. Their development and sophisticated social, political, and economic systems and strong military power guarding trade routes and putting down rebellions was evidence of violence, conflict, and wars within and between kingdoms.

Some of these empires came into power because they were able to develop new relations to their fertile land that encouraged them not to migrate like other agricultural and pastoralist societies. People in the banana agriculture zone like the kingdoms of Buganda, Busoga, Buhaya, and other interlacustrine kingdoms lived in permanent settlements because the banana was a perennial crop and thrived only in certain areas (Itandala, 1986). Despite Ubuntu practices, social and economic inequality existed, and some empires developed by conquering the weak. Other powers developed due to trade with taxes that were collected from merchandise passing through the empires, with the emergence of many centers of trade. Timbuktu, for example, became the center of luxury and

[2]Focus group organized by Mariam M. Kurtz, Yeonsu-gu, South Korea, March 19, 2021.
[3]Interview by Mariam M. Kurtz, Kakola, Tanzania, February, 2017.

Author's personal copy

Islamic learning in precolonial Africa, with a robust market and a famous university. Timbuktu was raided and burned following the death of Emperor Mansa Musa and his brother Mansa Sulayman but was later restored.

Ubuntu might bring up images of "primitive" hunting and gathering societies, but trade was well organized in the kingdoms of Dahomey and Ashanti and the savanna regions. It was left mostly in hands of individual Muslim traders; even the barter trade was replaced by more complex forms of exchange and not limited to subsistence (Goody, 1969). Individualist practices of the accumulation of wealth and food sometimes created a political hierarchy of power. The division of labor, specialization, and social classes existed in these kingdoms; hard work was celebrated and rewarded especially in farming, industry, and trade (Adebayo, 1994). In Yorubaland, social stratification is believed to have started early and have gone through several phases at "different times in the various states and kingdoms" (Adebayo, 1994 p. 384). At the beginning, social classes were "based on access to and possession of political power" (ibid.). In interlacustrine kingdoms, people developed complex relations of production and created dominant and subordinate classes; the dominant class monopolized political power and control of most of the productive land (Itandala, 1986).

Some of these kingdoms had currency in the form of gold and silver; others like the Yoruba used cowrie shells. Ubuntu did not prevent wealth accumulation by the dominant class in Mali, where gold accumulated to the king. In the Dahomey kingdom, a plantation system generated food surpluses that were traded for firearms with Europeans operating out of coastal enclaves. "These arms were sought, in turn, to support an expansionary impulse which derived from the ideological impulse to 'make Dahomey greater' again that developed during the 17th century" (Potter, 1993).

These features that contradict Ubuntu values did not erase an emphasis on mutual reciprocity that helped resist the more negative features of these advanced societies. These African empires had organized sophisticated political systems, some of which were centralized and others not. Wig (2016, p. 520) found that "groups with strong traditional institutions that are not in control of government are less likely to be involved in civil wars, because they have a high capacity for nonviolent bargaining." That is the kind of behavior that *Ubuntu* emphasizes, with reciprocity, mutual care, and reflexivity, as well as building relationships with an eye toward the future.

Ubuntu is an ethical foundation that counters negative pressures in a culture. Freud (2001 [1913]) observed that there are no taboos against behavior that people do not want to do—prohibitions are created to solve problems that are naturally occurring like greed, power struggles, and so forth. Ubuntu facilitates attitudes and behaviors that help people resist behavior that does not promote humanity. It is not surprising, therefore, that even cultures that embeds Ubuntu practices in their everyday lives could still have millions of deaths as the results of abuse of humanity and civil wars, conflict, and violence. Since independence in the 1960s, many Sub-Saharan Africa countries have experienced civil wars or were at the edge of war.

The Cold War and colonialism were among the external factors that contributed to postcolonial African civil wars and interstate conflicts. As "the two superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union, tried to undermine each other by arming rival African forces, whether governments or insurgents … The superpowers and their allies shipped many billions of dollars' worth of weapons to Africa, which increased the destructiveness and deadliness of conflict" (Stapleton, 2018, p. 6).

As a secondary factor, when the Cold War ended in the 1990s, many African regimes that faced budget deficits became weak and vulnerable, partly because they had lost financial support from the superpowers. Instead of applying the principles of Ubuntu to their policies to transform their differences, these states found themselves in the middle of civil or interstate wars, struggling over power and natural resources. Deadly conflicts erupted in Sierra Leone and Liberia (blood-diamond conflicts), Nigeria (Biafra war and crude oil), and also the genocide in Rwanda, the deadliest genocide since the end of World War II. The Democratic Republic of Congo conflicts over mining escalated to an "African world war" involving nine African countries and about 25 armed groups.

Other sources of conflict existed in cultures within which Ubuntu was woven were due to division and conquest of ethnic groups by the colonial powers, which became a primary cause of civil wars in the region. They had drawn boundaries that divided some traditional ethnic groups that had thought of themselves as nations, kingdoms, or chiefdoms. Nation-states were created that included multiple ethnic groups. Postcolonial Nigeria, for example, split into three main regions, each dominated by one or two ethnic groups: Hausa-Fulani in the north, Yoruba in the west, and Igbos in the east (Heerten and Moses, 2014).

In dividing to conquer, privilege and educational institutions were implemented in some areas that educated local people in the area, but not in others, driving wedges between ethnic groups. Missionary schools, for example, were built in the cooler climates in the highlands where the Europeans settled because they "were recognized to be much healthier" for colonists than the lower-lying regions (White Settlement in East Africa, 1944, p. 18). As a result, the Africans living in those areas were educated and internalized individualist culture of the colonizers, running counter to Ubuntu values. Many became Christians and were employed by the colonial government. After the colonial systems ended, power was vested in those with education who had been favored by their colonial rulers. Social divisions embellished by colonialism fueled many Sub-Saharan African civil wars and incidents of election violence.

Those divisions narrowed the social boundaries of those who were supposed to be cared for under the values of Ubuntu. Traditionally, one was supposed to care for all of humanity in reciprocal relationships, but the favoritism of the colonial system encouraged privileged local people to have an "us versus them" attitude toward other social groups. Ubuntu was undermined because individuals started caring only for themselves and those in their own social group.

In Tanzania, tensions among ethnic groups were diffused because of President Nyerere's universalistic values of Ubuntu and his strong commitment to unity and equality. In his first years in office, he ensured that all ethnic groups in the country were educated, and they were scrambled geographically to get an education outside of their home regions. They were then assigned employment in

Author's personal copy

the postcolonial government elsewhere in the country. Within a relatively short period of time, the gap between those areas with more education and those without narrowed and there was no dominant group with more education than the others. Today, Tanzania is enjoying interethnic marriages as a legacy of Nyerere's Ujamaa policies.

Ubuntu Encourages Proactive Peacebuilding

While the challenges of colonialism, internal contradictions that led to resource consolidation and a host of other challenges limit the reach of Ubuntu, this radical notion of interconnectivity continues to influence locally led approaches to peacebuilding on the continent. In order for the community to thrive and meet its basic needs, Ubuntu encourages collective resource ownership and self-reliance rather than individual success. USAID (1976, p. 3) argues, African land has always been recognized as belonging to the community; "the right to land was simply an African's right to use it." In Ghana, for example, chiefs were the trustees of the land "they hold allodial title to lands vested in their stools, which are inalienable but not exclusive" (Berry, 2009, p. 1371). All members of the community were entitled to use any portion of unused "stool land," that is, land for which the chief with his stool was the custodian. Ubuntu extends the land use to people outside the community, "Strangers," but they must obtain permission to use stool land.

Jomo Kenyatta and Julius Nyerere, the founding fathers of Kenya and Tanzania, believed in communal land ownership; they believed land is a basic resource for human beings. It is serving survival and security needs; therefore, it should be available to everyone to fulfill their needs. They both claim that individuals have a right to use land when they need it, but then should pass it on to someone else who needs it. The labor put into developing the land grants someone the entitlement to occupy that land but not to own it. To show the significance of land to humans, Nyerere extended the idea further by arguing that land—like air—should not be possessed by individuals. His private secretary Samwel Kasori explained that Nyerere himself "was involved in agriculture … using village land, which he believed to have right to use and not to own. Then he returned the land even before he got seriously sick."[4]

Nyerere believed that the prerequisite for development in the country with a face of humanity is unity, freedom, and the country's resources, including land, should be owned and controlled by the masses, and Nyerere's stance on land ownership was intended to prevent inequality and exploitation. It was influenced by the African principle of Ubuntu as well as his Roman Catholic beliefs and other faiths such as Islam he embraced.

Nyerere's *Ubuntu* policies were expressed in the idea of *Ujamaa na kujitegema*, which might be translated as "Togetherness and Self-reliance," although it was a collective rather than individual self-reliance (Nyerere, 1962, 1968, 1979). The Arusha Declaration of 1967 explained the implications of Ujamaa na kujitegema: the major means of production would be owned by the people to insure equality and freedom from exploitation. Nyerere's Ujamaa brought peasant producers together in villages for cooperative production. They successfully united the country across religious, racial, and ethnic divides; Tanzanians enjoy those fruits of ujamaa today while their neighboring countries face ethnic conflicts. Nyerere's economic approaches failed, however, to liberate Tanzanians from poverty. Increasingly bureaucratic implementation of the policy acted as a barrier to political mobilization and to the release of productive forces (Raikes, 1975).

Conclusion

Ubuntu as a cultural phenomenon is widely used in everyday practices and conflict resolution with its focus on restorative justice that facilitates conflict prevention and peacebuilding with an eye on future relationships and coexistence for the good of individuals and the community as a whole. Conflicts are inevitable, but they cannot be allowed to destroy that community. When conflict happens, Ubuntu should be used to transform and resolve them peacefully, like the aim of the postapartheid Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa and the Gacaca in Rwanda after the genocide. The everyday practices of Ubuntu provide a foundation for conflict prevention and peacebuilding according to the restorative justice approach. Ubuntu principles are a profound part of the culture that these practices reflect and also require people to live in a certain way by reflecting their interdependence, understanding that their security is rooted in the community.

How can we scale up Ubuntu from micro level everyday practices to larger social issues at the macro level and policies of international relations to transform conflicts? How could Ubuntu address racial divides and police brutality in the United States and elsewhere? How can *Ubuntu* address conflicts within feminism between radical individualism and the ethics of care (see Cornell and van Marle, 2015)? In countries like the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), which are rife with protracted conflict, rape, and violence over natural resources, what kind of lessons do Ubuntu provide? What can Ubuntu offer Americans for addressing structural racism and police brutality toward people of color? How could it help resolve conflicts in Myanmar and other nations facing military dictatorships and authoritarian governments? Does it offer any solutions to the climate crisis or widespread poverty and malnutrition? Are grassroots practices of Ubuntu applicable to many long-term conflicts such as the Israeli–Palestinian dispute, natural resource extraction issues in the DRC, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Angola, and Mozambique, ethnic power struggles in Ethiopia and Somalia, water conflicts along the Nile river, and much more?

[4]Nyerere's private secretary Samweli Kasori interviewed by Mariam Kurtz, January, 2017.

Author's personal copy

When John Paul Lederach (2014) called for conflict transformation, he noted that approach to conflict "provides a clear and important vision because it brings into focus the horizon toward which we journey—the building of healthy relationships and communities, locally and globally." He cautioned that "This goal requires real change in our current ways of relating." That vision may require looking to the future, but it could also involve examining the past; for centuries, African cultures have promoted *Ubuntu* as a peacebuilding tool for shaping relationships that contribute to conflict prevention, but also its transformation and resolution when interests clash. By emphasizing common humanity, interdependence, and a reciprocal support system—and including them in daily practices—Ubuntu values promote peacebuilding before, during, and after a conflict.

References

Achebe, C., 2017. Things Fall Apart. Penguin Publishing Group, New York, 1959.

Adebayo, A.G., 1994. Money, Credit, and Banking in Precolonial Africa the Yoruba Experience. Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft mbH.

Berry, S., 2009. Building for the future? Investment, land reform and the contingencies of ownership in contemporary Ghana. World Dev. 23, 1370–1378. http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0305750X09000527.

Bob-Manuel, I., 2000. A Cultural Approach to Conflict Transformation: An African Traditional Experience. Term Paper. Written for the course: "Culture of Peace and Education" Taught at the European Peace University Stadtschlaining Austria. Fall Semester 2000.

Brock-Utne, B., 2001. Indigenous conflict resolution in Africa. In: A Draft Presented to Week-End Seminar on Indigenous Solutions to Conflicts Held at the University of Oslo. Institute of Educational Research. URL: https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Birgit-Brock-Utne-2/publication/238729189_Indigenous_conflict_resolution_in_Africa/links/549421a40cf2e1b6095f9a3f/Indigenous-conflict-resolution-in-Africa.pdf.

Brock-Utne, B., 2004. Peace research with a diversity perspective: a look to Africa. Int. J. Peace Stud. 9 (2), 110–123. URL: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/249773599_PEACE_RESEARCH_WITH_A_DIVERSITY_PERSPECTIVE_A_LOOK_TO_AFRICA.

Bukari, K.N., 2013. Exploring indigenous approaches to conflict resolution: the case of the Bawku conflict in Ghana. J. Socio Res. 4 (2), 86.

Burton, J.W., 1990. Conflict: Human Needs Theory. St. Martin's Press, London.

Chapman, A., Spong, B. (Eds.), 2003. Religion and Reconciliation in South Africa. Cluster Publications, Pietermaritzburg.

Cornell, D., Van Marle, K., 2005. Exploring ubuntu: tentative reflections. Afr. Hum. Right Law J. 5, 195–220.

Department of Welfare, Republic of South Africa, 1997. White Paper on Social Welfare. Republic of South Africa, Pretoria.

Fagunwa, T., 2019. Ubuntu: revisiting an endangered African philosophy in quest of a pan-Africanist revolutionary ideology. Genealogy 3 (3), 45.

Faure, G.O., 2000. Traditional conflict management in Africa and China. In: Zartman, I.W. (Ed.), Traditional Cures for Modern Conflicts: African Conflict "Medicine". Lynne Rienner Publishers, pp. 153–166.

Freud, S., 2001. In: Strachey, J. (Ed.), Totem and Taboo. Routledge, London.

Galtung, J., 1990a. Cultural violence. J. Peace Res. 27 (3), 291–305.

Galtung, J., 1990b. International development in human perspective. Why a basic needs approach? In: Burton, J. (Ed.), Conflict: Human Needs Theory. MacMillan Publishing Company, Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, pp. 301–335.

Gluckman, M., 1956. Custom and Conflict in Africa, vol. 4. Blackwell Oxford. URL. http://library.wur.nl/WebQuery/clc/505591.

Goody, J., 1969. Economy and Feudalism in Africa. The Economic History Review 22, 393–405. https://doi.org/10.2307/2594117.

Goody, J., 1980. Technology, Tradition and the State in Africa. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Gurr, T.R., 2015. Why Men Rebel. Routledge.

Heerten, L., Moses, A.D., 2014. The Nigeria–Biafra war: postcolonial conflict and the question of genocide. J. Genocide Res. 16, 169–203.

Itandala, B., 1986. Feudalism in East Africa. Utafiti J. Fac. Arts Soc. Sci. VIII (2).

Kaminer, D., Stein, D., Mbanga, I., Zungu, N., 2001. The truth and reconciliation commission in South Africa: relation to psychiatric status and forgiveness among survivors of human rights abuses. Br. J. Psychiatr.: J. Ment. Sci. 178 (May), 373–377. URL: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/12050450_The_Truth_and_Reconciliation_Commission_in_South_Africa_relation_to_psychiatric_status_and_forgiveness_among_survivors_of_human_rights_abuses.

Kenyatta, J., 1965. Facing Mount Kenya: The Tribal Life of the Gikuyu. Vintage Books.

Kwam Kouassi, E., 2000. West Coast diplomacy among the Akan and their neighbors. In: Zartman (Ed.), Traditional Cures for Modern Conflicts: African Conflict "Medicine." Lynne Rienner Publishers, pp. 67–77.

Kurtz, M.M., 2018. Land Acquisition for Mining: A Case Study of Tanzania. PhD Dissertation. George Mason University, Arlington, VA.

Lanek, R., 1999. Integrating Indigenous approaches with national and international mechanisms for conflict resolution and reconciliation. In: Paper Presented to the All-Africa Conference on African Principles of Conflict Resolution and Reconciliation. November 8th - 12th 1999 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

Lederach, J.P., 2014. The Little Book of Conflict Transformation. Good Books, New York.

Mac Ginty, R., 2008. Indigenous peace-making versus the liberal peace. Cooperat. Conflict 43 (2), 139–163.

Mandela, N., 1994. Nelson Mandela's address to the people of Cape Town, Grand Parade, on the occasion of his inauguration as state president, 9th May 1994. Black Scholar 24, 2.

Meek, C.K., 1946. Land law and custom in the Colonies. Geoffrey Cumberlege. Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Ntahobari, J., Ndayiziga, B., 2003. The role of Burundian women in the peaceful settlement of conflicts. In: UNESCO, Women and Peace in Africa: Case Studies on Traditional Conflict Resolution Practices. UNESCO, Paris, pp. 11–26.

Nyerere, J.K., 1962. " Ujamaa": The Basis of African Socialism. Tanganyika Standard, Dar es Salaam.

Nyerere, J.K., 1968. Freedom and Socialism: Uhuru Na Ujamaa; a Selection from Writings and Speeches, 1965–1967, vol. 2. Oxford University Press Dar es Salaam.

Nyerere, J.K., 1979. Ujamaa: Essays on Socialism. Oxford University Press. http://afrilib.odinafrica.org/handle/0/23463.

Potter, G.A., 1993. An Investigation of Pre-capitalist Economic Formations: An Enquiry into the Burgeoning Nation State of the Kingdom of Dahomey, 1620–1740. dissertation. The Graduate Faculty of Political and Social Science of the New School for Social Research University Microfilms International A Bell & Howell Information Company.

Radcliffe-Brown, A.R., 1940. On joking relationships. Africa. J. Int. African Inst. 13, 195–210.

Raikes, P.L., 1975. Ujamaa and rural socialism. Rev. Afr. Polit. Econ. 2 (3), 33–52. https://doi.org/10.1080/03056247508703255.

Rubenstein, R.E., 2001. Basic human needs: the next steps in theory development. Int. J. Peace Stud. 6 (1), 51–58.

Stapleton, T., 2018. Africa: War and Conflict in the Twentieth Century. Routledge, New York.

Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 1998. Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report. The Commission, Cape Town. https://www.justice.gov.za/trc/report/finalreport/Volume%201.pdf.

Tutu, D., 1999. No Future Without Forgiveness. Doubleday Image, New York.

USAID, 1976. Development Assistance Program. USAID, Washington, DC.

White Settlement in East Africa, 1944. (Hansard, 1 February 1944) [WWW Document], n.d. URL. https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/lords/1944/feb/01/white-settlement-in-east-africa (Accessed 5.17.2021).

Wig, T., 2016. Peace from the past: pre-colonial political institutions and civil wars in Africa. J. Peace Res. 53 (4), 509–524. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343316640595.

Author's personal copy

Relevant Websites

Global Citizen: What is the Spirit of Ubuntu?. https://www.globalcitizen.org/en/content/ubuntu-south-africa-together-nelson-mandela/.
South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission. https://www.justice.gov.za/trc/.
Ted Blog: Further reading on Ubuntu. https://blog.ted.com/further-reading-on-ubuntu/.
Truth Commission Digital Collection. United States Institute of Peace. https://www.usip.org/publications/2011/03/truth-commission-digital-collection#