UBUNTU PHILOSOPHY
MEMORY AND RECONCILIATION

by
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The Context

The African philosophy of Ubuntu (humanness) has recently come into focus. more especially, as a result of the political developments in South Africa and the call made by President Thabo Mbeki for an `African Renaissance.' The search for an African philosophical explanation of the experience gained under the Truth and Reconciliation Commission- (TRC) has also added momentum to this interest in the emergence of this philosophy.

In fact Ubuntu philosophy, in its different settings, is at the base of the African philosophy of life and belief systems in which the peoples' daily-lived experiences are reflected. In their struggles to survive and exist as a human society on this planet, Africans have had the longest experience since the Homo sapiens had his first home on this continent. The philosophy is used on a daily basis to settle disputes and conflicts at different levels on the continent and is therefore central to the idea of reconciliation. This testifies to the dynamism and vibrancy of this philosophy in whatever African linguistic expression it may be expressed.

However, it does not follow that all the African people propagate or are even consciously aware of the philosophy as such. Indeed, some of those who are aware of it sometimes dismiss it as a post-colonial `Utopia' invention and/or a `prophetic' illusion crafted by the African political elites in the age of globalisation. Some of the cynics even question the philosophy on the ground that, at best, it is a "Bantu" philosophy not related to the ways of life and outlook of other "tribal" groupings of Africa.

Dr. De Tejada, who studied the subject of Ubuntu in some depth, has argued that Ubuntu philosophy is practised by Africans in most parts of the continent, especially in those regions stretching "from the Nubian desert to the Cape of Good Hope and from Senegal to Zanzibar." Professor Mogobe Ramose of the University of South Africa has argued that even this geographical delimitation is problematic since it creates a barrier of the desert to be an Africa's birthmark and therefore obscuring the meaning and import of human interaction on the continent before the desert crept

in. In order to fully understand the essence and significance of the philosophy, one has therefore to approach the subject historically and comprehensively

.Professor Cheick Anta Diop of Senegal has traced the generic term for man or ntu, to be the same on other African languages with similar term nit in Wolf, nti in Egyptian, and neddo in Peul. He argues that the designation of a people by a generic term meaning man has been general throughout Black Africa, "starting with Egypt-[1974:198]. In this respect, Allistair Sparks in his book: The Mind of South Africa has examined the migrations of the Southern African peoples across the continent and analysed the cultures and philosophies they brought along With them.

He has explained that although Africa had lagged behind Europe technologically and economically, it was far ahead of Europe in terms of its social and political philosophies and systems. These systems, which revolved around communal relationships, had developed a deep respect for human values and the recognition of the human worth based on a philosophy of humanism that was far more advanced than that found in the European philosophic systems at that time.

Ubuntu as an African Philosophy

The rejuvenation of the philosophy of Ubuntu is, therefore, important because it provides Africans a sense of self-identity, self-respect and achievement. It enables Africans to deal with their problems in a positive manner by drawing on the humanistic values they have inherited and perpetuated throughout their history. Africans can thus make a contribution of these values to the rest of humankind through their conscious application.

However, it must be stressed that talking about African philosophy does not mean essentialising the African experience as being unique and valid outside actual lived experiences and histories. African philosophy in its current form is about a resistance to the Western philosophical discourse that denies Africa its contribution to world knowledge and civilisation [Masolo, 1994:1].

Professor Ramose in his book: African Philosophy through. Ubuntu argues that Ubuntu is at the root of African philosophy and being. He states that the African tree of knowledge stems from the Ubuntu philosophy. According to him, Ubuntu is a wellspring that flows within African existence and epistemology in which the two aspects Ubu and ntu constitute a wholeness and oneness. Thus Ubuntu expresses the

Generality and oneness of being human. Thus Ubuntu cannot be fragmented because it is continuous and always in motion.

As a creative being, Umuntu is a maker of his/her world, which constantly emerges and constantly changes. In his/her existence, Umuntu is the creator of politics, religion, and law. Through these creative activities, Umuntu gains experience, knowledge and a philosophy of life based on truth. An African philosophy of life that guides the thinking and actions of Africans must therefore be found in their lived historical experiences and not from philosophical abstractions that have very little meaning in actual life. This is where African philosophy differs remarkably from western analytical and continental philosophies.

Therefore in his existence and being, Umuntu strives to create conditions for his/her existence with other beings for, as the Zulu proverb says: "Umuntu ngumuntu nbabantu, which literary means: "a person is a person through other persons." This belief therefore prescribes Ubuntu as "being with others." The Sotho people have a similar expression, which is to be found in many- other African languages. For the Sotho `to be with others' is expressed philosophically as: Motho ke ntotho ka batho. To achieve this togetherness, reconciliation with those "others" becomes a continuous necessity of being.

Ubuntu, Metaphysics and Religion

Metaphysics is part of the Ubuntu philosophy and is very much at the centre of reconciliation in conflict situations. This is because, like all human beings, Abantu live in a world of uncertainty. The world of uncertainty includes the reality of death, which all human beings must suffer. But for most Africans, like Christians, death does not mean the disappearance of the dead from beingness. Africans believe that the dead continue to exist in a spirit form and as such they are recognised as the "living-dead" or ancestors.

African philosophy holds that the `living dead' can, when called upon by the living, intercede and advise them in certain circumstances. Such intercession is crucial in reconciliation rituals in which the ancestors, invisible beings, play a significant role. In addition to the "living-dead," there are also the "un-born" who are recognised to exist in the future. As such the living are required to ensure that the un-born are brought into the world and provided for. This also conforms to the law of creation, which the Ubuntu philosophy also takes account of.

Thus the transformation of the living from the un-born and the living to the "living-dead" occupy a continuous space, which Professor Ramose has calls "the ontology of invisible beings" or African metaphysics. It is a discourse about the unknown from the standpoint of the living. However, the fact that the unknown is unknown does not mean that it is unbelievable. The Africans, in this understanding, therefore believe in the existence and beingness of the unknown, which has a direct influence on their own being. It is this existence of the invisible beings that is the basis of Ubuntu metaphysics and the belief in the supernatural that play a role in African processes of reconciliation.

This, according to Ramose, explains why Ubuntu philosophy and religion have no separate and specific theologies. Through these invisible forces Africans seek explanations to certain happenings, which cannot otherwise be explained by `normal' or `rational' means. Conflicts are part of these uncertainties of existence and hence the role supernatural beings play in the reconciliation process in which the ancestors are implored to sanctify whatever is decided upon through rituals.

Religion provides another arena of belief in God-the Supreme Being. It is a belief in the immanent and the transcendental. Many Africans believe in one God, while others believe in a variety of gods and spirits. All have the same objective, which seek to explain where we come from and where we are going. Christianity and Islam have come to influence Africans spirituality, but this has not done away with African traditional religious beliefs. On the contrary, many African Christians and Muslims today continue to practise African religions in what has come to be called syncretism.

Professor Cheick Anta Diop has argued that in Islam, which he sees as a living religion than Christianity in Africa, the intermediation of the Marabout is essential in African Islamic beliefs. He notes: "despite the formal doctrines of the Koran, there are no believers who dedicate themselves only to God and his Prophet." He argues that in these (African) conditions, a third personage, the one known as his Marabout, is needed by all laymen, from the masses to the sovereign."

He emphasises that the action by which one entrusts his metaphysical lot, his fate in the hereafter, to a living saint, "is characteristic of the Marabout phase of Islam in West Africa." He describes the Marabouts as: "the living intermediaries between laymen and the Prophet who is in direct communication with God. After death, the Marabouts raise disciples to Paradise." Therefore, he regards this metaphysical

element in Islam as one of the reasons. Islam made much headway av in Africa because Islam in Africa "seems to reside in a certain metaphysical relations between African beliefs and the `Muslim tradition' [Diop, 1987: 165-67].

Thus the insistence by Africans to uphold certain metaphysical relationships to religion enables them to `straddle' worldly situations, including the embracing of different religions and invisible forces, without losing meaning in life. At the same time by adopting these different religious traditions to their own belief systems, they are able to synthesise them into one belief system that is coherent in their own understanding of the world around them. Archbishop, Desmond Tutu of South Africa, has, for instance, been quoted as having said the following in support of the African Ubuntu philosophy:

"Africans have this thing called UBUNTU... the essence of being human. It is part of the gift that Africans will give the world. It embraces hospitality, caring about others, willing to go the extra mile for the sake of others. We believe a person is person through another person. that my humanity is caught up, bound up and inextricable in yours. When I dehumanise you I inexorably dehumanise myself. The solitary individual is a contradiction in terms and, therefore, you seek to work for the common good because your humanity comes into its own community, in belonging." [Emphasis added].

It cannot therefore be argued that when Archbishop Desmond Tutu acted as the Chairperson of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, he was only guided by the law and the Christian concept of reconciliation He must have also believed that Ubuntu philosophy, alongside Christianity, could play a role in reconciling the people of South Africa, if we are correctly to understand what he is quoted as having said above. In any event, in African Ubuntu philosophy, there is an inextricable bond between Umuntu, the Ancestors and the Supreme Being. Ubuntu philosophy has therefore a deep respect and regard for all religious beliefs and practices. However, the African traditional beliefs are part of a wider milieu of practices in which reconciliation has a much wider implication than it is understood in Christian or Islamic theology because it also invokes invisible beings.

Ubuntu. Politics and Law

The act of reconciliation is based on African understanding of politics and law as they unfold in real life. As already indicated above, Umuntu is the maker of politics, religion, and law. In the philosophical domain, Ubuntu is the basis of law and politics. This is what makes the act of reconciliation, whenever it occurs, to have the full force of recognition, legitimacy and sovereignty of the people. This is because African legal philosophy only recognises the human subject to be a living and lived experience with full authority to regulate life on earth.

As a subject, Umuntu-the subject-makes the law and at the same time commands its obedience by all persons including him/herself. There is no one above the law. This explains why in Ubuntu political philosophy royal power is expected to spring from the people (expressed in Sotho dictum to mean "kgosi ke kgosi ka batho') or in modern parlance "power belongs to the people." Therefore all laws pronounced by the king or chief must express the will of the people who must respect and obey it in their own name since they make it together with the king in council. In Buganda, this is translated to mean that the king does not speak-Kabaka tayogera-he does so only through the Council (Lukiiko).

This is why the British jurist, Dr. Arnold Allot, commenting on Basuto law insists that Sotho law is linked to morality, reasonableness, and justice. Another Western jurist, J. H. Driberg, has also said of African law:

"African law is positive not negative. It does not say: `Thou shalt not,' but `Thou shalt.' Law does not create offence, it does not create criminals; it directs how individuals and communities should behave towards each other. Its whole object is to maintain an equilibrium, and the penalties of African law are directed, not against specific infractions, but to the restoration of this equilibrium."

Therefore African law based on Ubuntu is a living law, based on their recognition of the continuous oneness and wholeness of the living, the living-dead and the unborn. These laws are combinations of rules of behaviour, which are embodied in the flow of daily life. It is for this reason that African political philosophy responds easily and organically to the demands for reconciliation as a means of restoring the equilibrium of the flow of life when it is disturbed.

Today, the majority of African post-colonial leadership is guilty of despotic and authoritarian rule in their countries.]'his leadership is unaccountable and tends to

Promote nepotism. cronyism and kleptocratic rule. This is what has created a wide gap between the African people and their rulers resulting in the intensification of violent conflicts amongst the African people. It follows that for peace to prevail on the continent, the call for an African renaissance must include the demand for the cessation of repressive rule, exploitation and social exclusion of the post-colonial state and its imperialist linkages. It must put in place a politics of inclusiveness and human security for all.

In short, the African renaissance must lead to power being returned to the people if the renaissance is to be a reality. Without the empowering of the African people through their cultural heritages, which include the heritages of Ubuntu philosophy, political life in post-colonial African states can never bring about true reconciliation and lasting peace to the people of the continent. The process of historical memory should therefore contribute towards the re-empowerment of people so that they can face one another in dismantling ideologies of superiority and dominance that lead to conflicts and wars.

Ubuntu and Reconciliation

Reconciliation as a philosophy and practice is not peculiar to the African peoples alone. It is an essential element in most human relationships in all human societies. But here we are concerned with the manner in which reconciliation is conceived and practised in African societies under the philosophy of Ubuntu.   As pointed out in the introductory remarks, reconciliation is to be found in the daily practices of the African people of resolving conflicts at different levels that continue to afflict the continent.

The TRC in South Africa has become a beacon of light around the world for its attempt at bringing about peace and political reconciliation in the country. However, the TRC is also a particular and specific lived experience, which is undergoing problematisation and interrogation within the discourse of Ubuntu and other discourses. It by no means provides the only model of reconciliation in Africa. Many other examples of reconciliation are taking place on a daily basis throughout the continent at regional, national, village and community levels.

Some Case Studies

Thus. what is called Ubuntu. as spelt out above. is not restricted to "Bantuspeaking' Africans, but the essence of the spirit of humanism and humanness that characterised reconciliation in African societies, can be found in most of them. Expressions such as Ajokis or Nandoch Bunia" carry the same meaning as Ubuntu in different cultures.

A few case studies here will suffice. selected as they are from different cultural-linguistic communities.

A, The pastoral ist-Karamoj on
The Karamojong social structure is based on generational lines and age sets where elders form the senior generation set. According to Joshua Osamba [1998], in their role as political and spiritual leaders of the society, the African Elders laid down rules and procedures to initiate warriors, settle disputes, sanction raiding expeditions and determine grazing areas in their transhumant pattern. The society therefore relied on their wise guidance, prayers and blessings to perform their roles in society. Their advanced age and experience was seen as indicating their close relationship with the spiritual world. Thus their decisions on any issue could not be disobeyed or challenged.

The warriors constituted the junior generation set. Their role in society was to execute decisions agreed upon by the elders. However, today this respect for the Elders and the traditional hierarchy of authority has been undermined because of the changes that were brought about by the colonisation of the pastoral peoples and the subsequent hostile policies continued by the post-colonial order against them. Much of the hostilities generated in pastoral communities, either by one community against another or by the state in their response to cattle raids, is a product of contested historical memories. The shift in relationship between Elders and the warriors have seriously undermined the traditional basis for raiding, the raiding process and cordial relationship, which existed among some pastoral communities and their agricultural neighbours.

The capitalist motive that the colonialists introduced has strengthened certain social groups some of which have become economic classes, working against collective community ethos of the pastoralists. The economic rationale is profit, which is oriented at private and individual accumulation instead of the ethos of communal living. This aspect has led to a profound disregard for alliance among pastoral communities that were once allies as well as their agricultural neighbours.

This in turn has created an atmosphere of animosity- and vindictiveness. Among the pastoralists and agriculturalists.

It is clear that these radical changes in pastoral life were brought about by the transformations in the mid nineteenth century that marked a significant turning point in the history of violence in the pastoralist borderlands.   It heralded force inter territorial conflicts because of the new weaponry that were introduced in the area, which overwhelmed the traditional instruments such as bows and arrows, spears, sticks and shields. Later the Arab-Swahili traders introduced firearms in the region, joining the earlier incursions of the Ethiopian empire in the north. The European colonial entry attempted to manage and resolve conflicts among pastoral societies through the use of imperial law and brute force. It ignored the traditional dynamics that followed a path of well-defined social, economic, cultural and political directions in conflict resolution and reconciliation.

Competition for water and pasture among the pastoral communities has intensified conflicts due to scarcity or dwindling resources, brought about by colonial policies of containment of pastoralism. Climatic factors also play an important role in conflicts within and between ethnic groups, but these climatic factors were themselves the result of economic and political policies that.

As already pointed out above, traditionally the Elders played an important part in defusing tensions and conflicts. The Elders had procedures for settling disagreements in which all the parties to the conflict got a chance to put across their views. The Elders were recognised as having authority to act as arbiters and give judgement on the rights or wrongs of a dispute submitted to them and suggest a settlement though they may have no power of physical coercion by which to enforce them. In their book on African Political Systems, Fortes and Evans-Pritchard observed that in this case the state did not exist, but an organisation- a collection of individual human beings connected by complex system of relationships. Within the organisation, the different individuals occupied different roles, with some possessing special powers or authority [Fortes & Evans-Pritchard, 1940: xviii).

The authority of the Elders was based on the role that individual played in society and certain ethos, some of which derived from metaphysical sources, such as the belief that the ancestors or the living-dead could be implored to assist in resolving disputes and conflicts. This belief system is deeply rooted in African philosophy of life.

The negotiation or reconciliation in the traditional setting was seen as a reestablishment of relationships between people and also with their God and spirits- who were regarded as witnesses and active participants. There is a holistic approach to the process, in which the community gets involved, invoking spiritual forces to be present and accompanying the community towards peace where necessary. The responsibility of the elders was to guide the negotiation towards an agreement, which would reflect as much as possible the consensus of all the parties involved.

The Luo have a proverb. which states: "kinship is strengthened through friendship." This also leads to mixed marriages leading to many individuals having divided loyalties and interests in any conflict. This adds to the process of peace making as it enables pressures for a quick settlement of any dispute. As Gordon points out" when people of different descent groups must marry, live among, and cooperate with one another, their cross cutting ties together with the pervasive fear of feudconstitute an important mechanism for the maintenance of social order" (Gordon, 1996:235). This also promoted the ethic of war, which held that women, children and the elderly were not to be harmed during conflict. All this had religious and metaphysical consequences.

After conflict the question of reconciliation was put on top of the agenda. It was usual for the two protagonists to meet in the presence of an arbitrator from a neutral community. In many cases, treaties or agreements were entered into solemnly and were usually regarded as binding and sacred. The beliefs behind oaths were that God or some supernatural power would punish any individual who breaks the requirements of the oath [Mbiti, 1970: 212.]

Following any serious conflict among the Turkana the elders would call a traditional peace conference. The whole community would gather with one common objective i.e. to restore the broken relationship and invigorate the process of healing. Such a meeting would be open-ended so that all the people had time and opportunity to air their views. The meeting would be held in a "carnival" atmosphere punctuated with stories, songs, dance, proverbs etc. The name of God, the ancestors and the spirits would be invoked during the meeting. A bull would be slaughtered and its blood collected and sprinkled into the air as a way of binding the community to the peace covenant. As a gesture of reconciliation the whole group would share and eat the meat together. Thereafter, feasting, singing, dancing and celebration would

continue for several days. The whole society would thus be part of the agreement and anybody who violated it could suffer some calamity.

Prof. Wim van Bmsbergen has argued that the act of accompanying reconciliation with the consumption of food and drink is aimed at demonstrating the symbolic importance of the reproduction of the human body: "Collective consumption in this manner is an expression of the same shared humanity which is implied in reconciliation." He also adds that the holding of a public gathering to witness the reconciliation is because the act of reconciliation "revolves on the explicit verbalisation of the termination of a conflict." Such verbalisation also depends on the intercession of a third party in the role of a mediator, although this is not universal.

Thus in the traditional society reconciliation was characterised by the implicit involvement of the whole society formally and informally. The peace message would then be conveyed and become incorporated in the people's oral tradition. The community therefore serves as the repository within which conflict resolution was performed.

In the traditional set up the mediation (Elders) represented the norms and values of the society especially on moral issues. They thus advocated a settlement that would accord with commonly accepted principles of justice in terms of custom, virtue, and fairness and reflecting community judgement about appropriate behaviour. Thus to flout such a settlement was regarded as defying the moral order of the society. Conflicts and their resolution therefore were viewed as events in the comprehensive continuation of social life.

The pastoral societies are currently undergoing transformation. The authority of traditional elders has dwindled as warrior youth acquire more prominence. The incorporation of the pastoral communities into the market economy in the form of sale of livestock and livestock products has had adverse effect. It has contributed to the emergence of `cattle warlords' thereby exacerbating a state of conflict and insecurity as they compete to acquire livestock for sale. Thus the primordial causes of cattle raids have been compounded and exacerbated by the effects of the modern economy in tandem with the unfolding and changing nature of social relations.   The current struggle is waged using new-sophisticated firearms and verges on ethnocide, where neither women nor children are spared. Since colonial "modernisation" has introduced instruments of destruction without the necessary instruments of production

and dispute resolution. the traditional techniques of conflict management must be revisited.

In the traditional setting, the Elders were expected to have some moderating influence over the aggressive tendencies of the youth. The breakdown of social and economic order has led to destitution of many families, especially the youth. Such youth are therefore amenable to manipulation by the `cattle warlords' for their own selfish ends. Today there have emerged new trends, tendencies and dynamism leading to commercialisation and internationalisation of raids and arms proliferation. It is no longer a cultural practise of testing a person's bravery and prowess to a bloody warfare between various groups. All these pose serious challenges to societal structure, security, survival as well as moral foundation, which require a reformulation of the state, which empowers communities rather than destroying them.

B. Mozambique and Zimbabwe

The Study by Tyrone Savage and Zola Sonkosi [2002] has noted that the innovation of Mozambique's transition from war to peace occurred at the community level. Ritual, and in particular ritual cleansings, formed an integral part of the reintegration process, incorporating traditional methods of healing, reconciliation and restoring into the demobilisation and reintegration process. They note that specifically, it was widely believed that people who had engaged in the wrongdoings of war had experienced what was described as "soul pollution". It was feared that reintegration would bring the threat of disruption and contamination to the receiving community. This is the case on the discussions that have characterised the search for a peace process in northern Uganda.

But Elders in northern Uganda have insisted that the traditional technique of reconciliation is the best to deal with the Kony "pollution" of the Acholi culture. The innovation they may have to adopt could be drawn from the Mozambican experience. In the case of Mozambique traditional leaders, in response to their own crisis, developed rituals known as "soul cleansing". The rituals generally entailed demobilised soldiers confessing to community assemblies about the gross misdeeds they had committed during the civil war. Moreover, they would agree to pay reparations to their victims or to render community service in cases where they had no material means to pay reparations. Symbolism also played a significant part in tire process as well.

According to Tyrone Savage and Zola Sonkosi, "soul cleansing" rituals were widespread and played a crucial role in developing reconciliation and reintegration "from below" - processes that took place at grassroots level in ways that addressed the needs of the individual, the family and the wider community. A climate of relative peace and reconciliation was created. In this context. demobilising soldiers were also encouraged to use the formal support they received to engage in community building exercises, such as constructing houses and roads. In short, the material benefits many received were used to help make reparations to the war-impacted communities to which they returned.

The study also revealed that traditional ritual also played a role in the conflict in Zimbabwe to redress contested memories and bring about reconciliation and rehabilitation following political conflict between the government and the opposition Movement for Democratic Change. These endeavours arose both as a response to the impact on community life of the Matebeleland massacres perpetrated during the "Dissidents War" (1983-1987) as well as a strategy of non-violent resistance amidst ongoing prolific political violence at the grassroots level on the part of the ZANU government to exert control throughout the country.

In response the community in Matebeleland a particular focus has been on preventing public honouring of deceased loved ones and with that, any public discourse about the causes of death. This is because during 'the Matebeleland massacres, the notorious Fifth Brigade had made a point of forbidding mourning, and on occasion forced people to take part in grossly disrespectful behaviour, such as dancing and singing on the graves of those who had been murdered by the soldiers. In other cases, it is said; people were threatened with death and were in fact killed, if they cried for the dead. Others were forced to leave bodies where 5 Brigade chose to leave them, on pain of death. This could include burial in ant bear holes, anthills, rubbish dumps and any other handy hole in the ground.

The communities conducted the ceremony, known as "umbuyiso," some time after the femoral, after an interval of waiting, during late winter, ahead of the first signs of springtime. At nightfall, the spirit of the deceased would be brought back to the homestead in symbolic form as a goat. At the threshold, a ritual introduction of the deceased to the living is made, and the deceased would be welcomed as an ancestor. According to the authors: "This process brings the person's soul out of the wilderness

and into the home to rest. And watch over the living. The following day. The ceremony widens to encompass the entire community. Everyone in the village is now able to visit and pay their respects to the family. The goat is then ritually slaughtered to honour the dead person and the meat is share in a common meal.

Such ritual provides communities the means of collectively witnessing the truth about the past, together mourning with dignity and then finally laying their beloved to rest in ways that restore moral order and social cohesion in the community. This in turn allows the community to find healing for dysfunctional behaviours resulting from the ungrieved loss and answers to questions about why the death occurred. These acts of a negation of the consequences of the powers that refuse to acknowledge their dead victims, as if they had never existed and were mere wraiths in the memories of those left behind.

This denial, and the impunity of those who maintain it, must be challenged if survivors are to make sense of their losses and the social fabric is to mend. According to the two authors, amidst the resurgence of repression that has marked Zimbabwe since April 2000, exhumation and re-burial ritual have thus become a means of addressing the past, a source of restorative justice within communities and a counterstrategy against the deliberate weakening of community life in the latter days of Mugabe regime.

Restorative justice measures, arising from traditional techniques of healing, according to the two authors have also begun to play a significant role in nongovernmental demobilisation and reintegration efforts in South Africa. In keeping with South Africa's commitment to developing structures of unity in the aftermath of apartheid's divisions, initial efforts went into integrating the seven armies active in the country into a national defence force. This resulted in 50, 000 personnel in excess of South Africa's defence needs and of these only 7 238 ex-combatants were formally demobilised, leaving tens of thousands of war veterans either discharged or simply left to their own devices.

Among various responses to this national problem, the South African government, a formerly white commercial farmers organisation called Agri South Africa and some 7 000 demobilised soldiers from Umkhonto we Sizwe and the Azaman People's Liberation Army together developed a collaborative commercial farming project, the basis of which is restitution of land rights, agricultural training and co-operatives that link the project's produce to markets.

The project makes manifest a number of reintegration "best practices". It acknowledges demobilising combatants as a special group, facing particular challenges - such as lack of resources and skills - as they endeavour to return to civilian life. Rather than denying the past, the project affords veterans of the liberation war preferential treatment and places upon them the particular responsibility of learning to live and work with their former enemies. As such, it bestows on the demobilising soldiers a special status as leaders in grassroots processes of dialogue, reconciliation and transition. Having fought for a new order, veterans are now asked to help shape and construct it. In turn, the initiative gives a community much privileged under apartheid, namely the agricultural sector, an opportunity to be confronted by the views and needs of people disenfranchised under the system from which they drew their benefits. And above all, through its commitment to land restitution and re-distribution, the arrangement is grounded in the wider transitional mechanism of reparations, thus applying the basic tenets of Ubuntu in new contexts.

In conclusion, Southern Africa provides a kaleidoscope of ritual, reparations and reintegration strategies integral to tackling the challenge of reconciliation in post-conflict African societies: ritual that allows for perpetrators to acknowledge their role in past atrocities and return to community; exhumation, re-burial and ancestor rites of passage that promote restorative justice in community and community in the midst of repression; reparation and economic re-distribution as integral components in reintegration and post-conflict reconciliation.

The Southern African experience also reveal that thoroughgoing demobilisation needs to go beyond the simple dismantling of military units to develop military, political, social and psychological components. Demobilisation, in short, needs to be situated and framed within a larger commitment to establishing peace through reintegration processes linked to economic development, political transition, community healing and social transformation. Although fully repairing the fabric of a war-torn society may be impossible, learning to live together in the aftermath of war is to weave anew the social threads of our shared humanity and Ubuntu philosophy provides a sound philosophical basis for these processes.

C. Acholi- Mato Oput

According to Dennis [1998], the principle of conflict resolution in Acholi is to create reconciliation, which brings the two sides together. Between individuals this

involved Elders, particularly the moral authority of the Rwot of kaka. Investigating the circumstances, leading to an acceptance of responsibility for carrying out a wrong action and an indication of repentance. Then terms were laid down by the elders such as 10 cows or a girl for compensation implying potential for a future marriage, possibly elsewhere, producing replacement in the case of death and restoring a nexus of relationships. Then reconciliation occurred with the simultaneous drinking of a bitterroot extract drink from a common calabash set on the ground - "Mato Oput".

Between groups the process required a delegation of Elders to investigate the fault and identify the cause and for those concerned to accept their responsibility. The acceptance of responsibility is a group acceptance of what was wrongly done. Then the compensation is determined. Traditionally this is in terms of cattle or girls, and lastly reconciliation occurs with the "bending of two spears" and the performance of the mato oput ritual.

In spite of their marginalisation from political authority, the Rwodi-mo continues on occasion informally to carry out reconciliation with a compensation element to the victim in addition to court decisions. This is to ensure restoration of relationships, which modern court proceedings neglect. Although rebels are seen to have rejected society, nevertheless, the Elders hold that: "if society now establishes the means of reconciliation, the rebels will accept that authority". A representative of the LRA has confirmed such acceptance in their meetings with the Elders in recent attempts made to find peaceful solution to the conflict.

From the church point of view, the Roman Catholic Church as a positive institution has historically recommended Mato Oput rituals. Fr. Vincent Okot, has written on traditional reconciliation as a "moral therapy" for Uganda, and Pastoral Coordinator, Fr. Santo Ojok, has worked closely with colleagues from other churches, such as Bishop Ochola of Kitgum and Pastor Geoffrey Ocan of the Gulu NGO "COME" to work with the Rwodi-mo, the LC5s and the people to prepare them for the whole process of reconciliation. Such a mutual involvement helps to heal the felt disparagement of traditional institutions by the churches in the past.

Dennis questions the assertion that for reconciliation to be effective today in Acholi, justice must prevail between the parties which are within the constitution and principles of human rights, such as excluding any arbitrary transfer of girls, and which is culturally acceptable and realistic. He argues that while many suggested that the Acholi, for the sake of peace and a return of their children, were ready to forgive the

LRA fighters without their paying compensation. This was recognised as being a breach of tradition and also potentially seen as not applying a sense of justice which might leave former rebels open to private action in the courts. It was suggested that it would be better if the government instead gave the rebels resources to meet the compensation in order to meet the requirements of Mato Oput.

According to an LRA representative, it is clear that "there must be traditional reconciliation". As one of the most senior Acholi priests said: "The rebels are bound to go through reconciliation. They are known to their families and therefore they are obliged to go through reconciliation". Therefore there is no short cut to the process of reconciliation for those fighters who have committed violence of any kind. Thus the process of Mato Oput is widely acknowledged and it is clear from the proposals made to apply it to existing conditions that the traditional techniques are quite open to dynamic change in society.

In summing up, the case studies cited above reveal varied experiences in the practice of reconciliation under different conditions. Nevertheless, these practices derive their validity from an African ethos that has their deep roots in African way of life and philosophy of life. These experiences also reveal a number of principles that characterise these practices. These are:

1.   Reconciliation requires the creation of a consensus about the existence of the conflict. Conflict is not taken for granted for it sometimes obscures underlying stakes, which are partially expressed and which may not be clear to some of the conflicting actors, but which must nevertheless be resolved;

2. Reconciliation goes beyond established normative rules, institutions and procedures, which may be inadequate to deal with the conflict. Reconciliation is therefore a creative and a flexible human activity that is undertaken for the sake of humanity as a shared community;

3.   Reconciliation is about accepting responsibility for wrongs committed
since guilt is not the main point of the process. What is important is the recognition of the problem, acceptance of the responsibility for what has happened and the willingness to be part of the search for a solution. In Christian theology reconciliation demands confession as a

basis for integrity and authenticity of the faith. Ubuntu relies on other sources of authenticity, including invisible beings;

4.   Reconciliation is about the transformation of the conflict into a nonconflictual situation for the good of the larger humanity. Reconciliation is not an alternative to conflict but a transformation of the conflict. Both parties must define the stakes involved and relativise these stakes for the sake of the wider Community as well as for the future of the unborn.

5. Reconciliation requires the performance of ritual and the explicit public verbalisation of the termination of the conflict by all parties. This may be in the form of a public oath followed by ritual such as sharing of a meal or drink, which may invoke the supernatural beings and the living-dead to intercede and assist the process of reconciliation. In the Acholi practice of the Mato Oput reconciliation process, reconciliation occurs with the simultaneous drinking of a bitterroot extract drink from a common calabash set on the ground.

Conclusion

Reconciliation under the African philosophy of Ubuntu offers different approaches of overcoming and transforming conflicts of different kinds at different levels into a peaceful situation. This is what has made many of Africa's conflicts manageable. At first reconciliation involves a few people, but eventually it leads to the reorientation of the relations between the conflictive parties to include a wider community. Even critics of Ubuntu such as Prof. Wim van Binsbergen, agree that where the conflict recurs, the act of reconciliation constitutes, "a reordering of time" in which the central idea of such a transformation "is implied in reconciliation." He concedes that Ubuntu "contains an effective precept for conflict management" in which "the secret of the village headman's skill who, while lacking all formal sanctions, yet through the imaginative power of reconciliation manages to safeguard the conflicting interests of the members of his community, without destroying any of them."

It follows that reconciliation under Ubuntu philosophy can be invoked to deal with conflicts in other countries, including international conflicts such as that raging for years between the Israelis and the Palestinians. `Eye for eye' and `tooth for tooth'

is a philosophy that is bound to lead to everyone involved in the conflict to become blind and toothless! This conflict can be turned into a Joking Relationship between the two communities to the benefit of all. The global community of the 2I" century can draw inspiration from this archaeology of African philosophy for the benefit of all humanity. In that way Africa can claim the 21 st century to be an African century and the African Renaissance to be a humanising experience for all humanity.

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