



Journal of Intercultural Management and Ethics

JIME

ISSN 2601 - 5749, ISSN-L 2601 - 5749

published by

Center for Socio-Economic Studies and Multiculturalism
Iasi, Romania
www.csesm.warter.ro

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DEMOCRACY IN AFRICA AND UBUNTU

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Abstract

African democracy is often seen as an example of a failed democracy in a failed nation. The western and international organizations were lobbying for a long time to introduce Western democratic tools in the political and societal life of African Nations. This chapter is explaining how Ubuntu, its cultural values, principles and philosophy are an important core element in democratic transition. African social democracy was part of the political transition from the colonial administration to a specific democracy in Africa. The Bantu speaking countries count for almost one-third of the African Continent. The renaissance of Ubuntu values had African humanism as a compass and is based on the principle of "I am because we are". The center of political and societal life is not the Western atomized individual but the African social environment and the community.

The transition of democracy in Africa, following the Ubuntu principles, is not in all Bantu speaking countries the same as Africa is not "one" and many differences in governance and political evolutions are seen. Most countries do have a strong Civil Society with advocacy groups, Trade Unions, NGOs and Faith-based organisations with a strong communitarian approach. They have a political impact and function as a social corrector to the current political elite.

Democracy in Africa has many pitfalls and underwent many changes over time. The most important hindrance is abject poverty (the have and the have-nots) as they do not contribute to the people power or more participatory democracy. Ultra-poor people in Africa concentrate their lives on the survival and food security for the extended family.

Another negative element is the state corruption and "capture rife in all government and private sector organisations. Corruption, graft and fraud are the most negative aspect in the democratic transition and do not respect the most important Ubuntu value (ethics, moral leadership).

An important slow but important societal change is the introduction of social media and its impact during elections in Africa. Urban youth exposed by internet to Western life and its externalities are influenced by the thinking of more atomized individuals, but still believing in some values of Ubuntu.

Is Ubuntu a resistance culture with a future impact on societal and political changes?

Will the Ubuntu culture and values in African humanism and the resistance by Trade Unions and the Civil society be an important countervailing power to come to a new kind of African democracy with the salient and core elements of UBUNTU?

"If you do not take an interest in the affairs of your government, then you are doomed to live under the rule of fools". Plato

Keywords: Mandela, Ubuntu, Democracy, Hofstede, African Culture

1. Introduction

Ubuntu philosophy and culture are inherent to the Bantu populations and countries on the African continent. One-third of the African continent have Bantu tribes and are Nation-states (see map).

To understand the democratic rule, parliamentary democracy and the rule of law in new African states and nations, we have to consider that more than 50 years into independence is a short time to have a fully representative democracy installed. This paper will explain Ubuntu principles, the new African leadership and the importance of nation-building before the transition into a sophisticated, participatory democratic system (Western).

Two short stories of famous African leaders and Ubuntu and their presidential life: Mobutu Sese Seko Kuku Ngbendu Wa Za Banga and Nelson Mandela

1.1. Short stories of African leaders in post-colonial times

Mobutu was an African statesman/dictator/ Marechal of the Republic of Zaire. He came into power after the independence of the Belgian Congo by the Belgian authority. After the first parliamentary democracy installed in 1960, he came to power Nov. 25, 1965, by a military coup d'état. He became the new president and the Chief of Staff of the Army.

He was a bloodied military dictator and ruled for 32 years until he was driven out by Kabila and his Rwandan army in 1997. Mobutu changed the name of Republique of Congo into Zaire, called the huge Congo river Zaire.

He introduced the zaïrianisation (« zaïrisation »), l'authenticité (La révolution Culturelle). This cultural renaissance was based on the Bantu philosophy of the ancestors and the Ubuntu principles. The most important changes were the introduction of the old cultural values in the communities, changing Christian names of all "citoyens", even changing the loincloths (pagnes) of women with African motives and in inventing the "abacost (a-bas-costume)" for men. These changes were introduced to make a clear cut with the Belgian colonial times.

When the governance of Zaire, was a semi-parliamentary government, he changed it into a far-right totalitarian regime, amassed vast personal wealth, and attempted to purge the country of all colonial cultural influence through this program of "national authenticity".

The parliament was replaced by his Mouvement Populaire de la Révolution, the new party-state and the Senate and the Assembly were replaced by the Politburo and the Central Committee.

In mock "democratic elections", the president gathered always more than 100%. Meanwhile, the nationalised state enterprises were doing badly, the well-being of citizens dropped very low. Even when, Zaire benefitted from international aid and got the support of the IMF in having the structural adjustment of Public Finance, the country stayed almost bankrupt.

The Mobutu time was most of all known for his patrimonial system, a great group of tribal cronies having free access to resources and finances. Corruption was installed on every level of society and the administration. Mobutu, as an army Marechal had a broad and deep system of intelligence and security by only using tribal forces, educated by the Israeli security agencies.

In 1997, Mobutu fled the country as a new dictator Kabila arrived with his army, supported by Rwanda. A new era started with the new dictator and a semi-parliamentary democracy was restored. Ironically, the first thing the new President did was to change the names again into the "Democratic" Republic of Congo.

The second story of Ubuntu leadership is Nelson Mandela in the Republic of South Africa. He was the leader of the Africa National Committee (ANC), struggling for freedom and the end of apartheid. After 27 years of being a political prisoner of the apartheid's regime, he negotiated with the regime his release but more important a peaceful post-apartheid period. The "struggle" of the ANC and the actions of the RSA army were ruthless and many victims on both sides were counted for, also in the neighboring countries that supported the ANC struggle.

When Mandela came out, he surprised in his speech to call for peace and no revenge, to promote social inclusion for all citizens and to install a democratic parliamentary system with the 1994 multiracial general election.

Under the impulse of Bishop Desmond Tutu, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was insured under his chairmanship to investigate past human rights abuses committed by both pro and anti-apartheid groups.

The Commission examined all crimes done on both sides and to find an acceptable closure and even forgiveness of all crimes and acts of revenge that have taken place. Not all was OK under Mandela's government as the first black president of RSA, because social inclusion was still far away for all poor citizens at that time. The parliamentary system, based on all types of elections, brought the ANC as the only major governance party. A form of participatory Democracy still exists in RSA, even after the death of Mandela, but corruption rife on all state government and private level. The RSA faced a time of "state capture"(State capture, 2019).

1.2. Why these two stories on democracy in Africa?

Historically, it shows that democratic processes, the right based approach and the economic growth inclusion were difficult to install after the decolonization. The main reason is that the colonial administration system par excellence is still as of today the model for any administration in African nations.

It shows as in the case of Mobutu, that dictatorship in Africa always have the same sequence of events: the struggle for independence, strong leader, statesmanship interested in nation-building and governance, surrounded by cronies and corruption is later replaced by a military intervention by a new strong leader. This was the case with leaders as Adi Amin, Nasser, Nkrumah, Museveni, Kagame.

Historically is the case of Mandela different, as he opted for a third way by building the state on new premises, including changing the chapter of apartheid and having a new Constitution.

2. Ubuntu culture,

Both leaders included the Ubuntu cultural values in their approach.

Mobutu was a tribal leader and understood that during the post-colonial time, Congo needed to unite the nation-state by making it a cultural entity (proudness on the ancient name Zaire, the Bantu culture of the ancestors, the authentic clothing, the original African names. Secondly, he understood that his critical patrimonial system assisted in state-building and consolidation that followed independence. Even when under his governance, the government was not able to organize basic services for the population, that remained until now abject poor in the rural areas. He however sinned against Ubuntu humanism by killing many opponents, amassing great wealth and by concentrating on his tribal interest, neglecting other important tribal areas.

The "Enlightened Helmsman and the Father of the Nation", fostered a robust and pervasive cult of personality, which marked Zaire's descent into dictatorship. However,

his move to consolidate power necessarily included initiatives to unify the country and build a nation, an important tool was the cultural renaissance of the Ubuntu culture.

President Nelson Mandela and Bishop Desmond Tutu embraced the Ubuntu principles, by choosing resilience and forgiveness to start the post-apartheid period. By organizing a general multi-racial election, by restoring the participatory democracy in promoting social inclusion and a right-based approach for the victims of apartheid (the Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment).

Nelson Mandela explained Ubuntu as follows “the recognition that we are all bound together in ways that are invisible to the eye; that there is a oneness to humanity; that we achieve ourselves by sharing ourselves with others and caring for those around us.”

"A traveler through a country would stop at a village and he didn't have to ask for food or water. Once he stops, the people give him food and attend him. That is one aspect of Ubuntu, but it will have various aspects. Ubuntu does not mean that people should not enrich themselves. The question therefore is: Are you going to do so to enable the community around you to be able to improve?" Nelson Mandela asked. (Sidane, & Lieberberg, 2000)

2.1.What are the Ubuntu philosophy and culture?

A first notion of the Bantu Philosophy (La philosophie bantoue in French) is a 1945 book written by Father Placide Tempels. (Mubabinge, 1980)

He analysed that next to the Western cultural idioms, African societies and communities had their own Bantu philosophy, culture and ethics. The analysis is, of course, outdated as by now and is written in times of colonial European ethnocentrism. But it leads to several new cultural researches on the Ubuntu culture and its impact on society and community development.

The Ubuntu culture can be defined as African humanism: "I am because we are". "We are non-individuals but part of a community with its own rules and practice".

2.2.Basic values and principles:

Ubuntu is the humanistic experience based on respect

Ubuntu is humanness: brotherhood, sisterhood. This is close to the ideals of the French revolution: Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité.

Ubuntu is Humanism; most important is the priority of being human

Ubuntu is the virtue of being human

Ubuntu is the humanity of the "I" and its reciprocity of the fellow human.

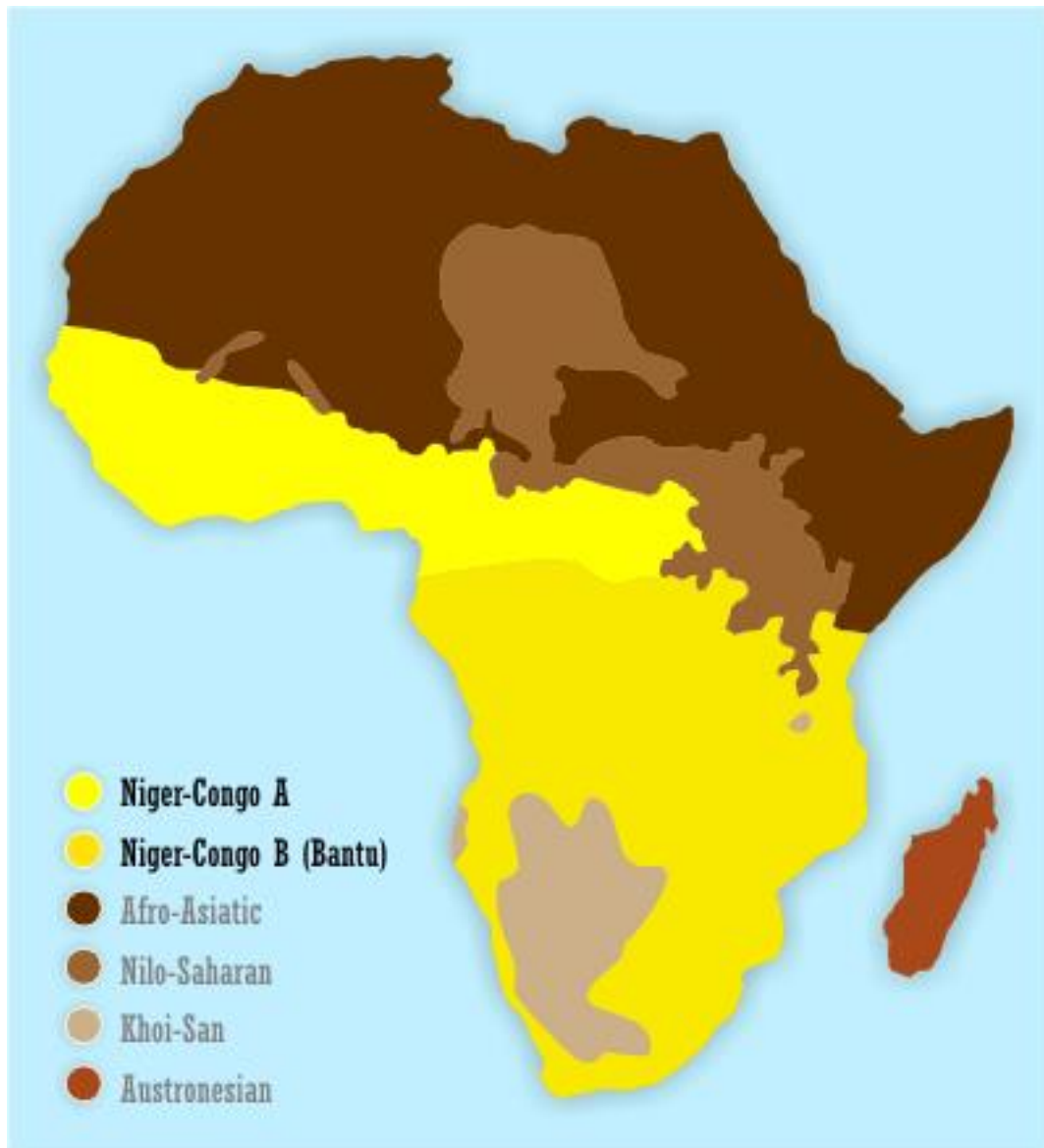
The Cardinal spirit of Ubuntu as expressed in Xhosa: as Umntu ngumntu ngabanye abantu, understood in English as "People are people through other people" and "I am human because I belong to the human community and I view and treat others accordingly.

In another South African language Zulu, the word Ubuntu means a distinctive worldview of the human community and the identities, values rights and responsibilities of its members.

2.3.Where are the Bantu speaking countries?

One-third of the African continent has a link with Bantu languages and share a great part of common cultural values and practices. (Arino, 2015; Boundja, 2019)

Map of Bantu languages



Ref: Bantu -New world Encyclopedia

The Bantu map goes from North DRC to RSA, from Kenya to Gabon and includes the following countries: Congo, Rwanda, Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, Zimbabwe, Angola, South Africa, Malawi, Zambia, and Burundi among other countries in the Great Lakes region.

3. Ubuntu: African humanism and its potential application on societal change, governance and democracy in Africa

The Ubuntu principles, values and system were the basis of the struggle against colonialism and for independence in most African countries. (Sidane, & Lieberberg, 2000) But in reality, it was an uphill fight as new African countries could not cope with newfound independence and tribal strife. Ubuntu values that for centuries were used in communities, the chieftdom, the villages, the tribes have been partly destroyed by the colonial system. These values were seen as not part of the process of Western civilization. Moreover, the new elite (les évolués) and former freedom fighters were not enough educated to govern the state and the public finances. Les Évolués "evolved" or "developed") is a French label used during the colonial era to refer to a native African who had "evolved" by becoming Europeanised through education or assimilation and had accepted European values and

patterns of behavior. It is most commonly used to refer to individuals within the Belgian and French colonial empires. *Évolués* spoke French, followed European (rather than customary) laws, usually held white-collar jobs (although rarely higher than clerks), and lived primarily in urban areas of the colony.

The main reason is that the new leaders were not prepared and had only the former colonial administrative system to organize the affairs of the state.

Some of the new leaders like Patrice Lumumba had a Marxist-Leninist vision on community and societal development and introduced new Ubuntu principles in their approaches (Khoza, n.d.).

This was not to the liking of the former colonial powers, with an important interest in the former colonies. The main interest was access to unlimited resources (mining), commodities, plantations, and cheap labour. The post-independence period was and still is a long transition from the colonial administrative model (by excellence) to an authentic African governance system. Africa's transition to democracy is an ongoing process as citizens of these countries were later introduced to the democratic principles or the participation process in decision making through elections.

Most countries in Africa had a long and painful way in coming to terms with the colonial heritage. A good example of neo-colonialism is the "Franc CFA" that is used by most West African countries and that is administered and regulated by the French National Treasury.

But 60 years of democratic transition is a short time, especially when the new African leaders no longer live following the Ubuntu principles. Most African presidents and their cronies have amassed a fortune, stealing from Public Finance and International donor funds.

What did not work on the central level, was still every day's life in the smaller communities, the villages, the clans and the tribes. Rural communities live still exactly as by the Ubuntu values of their ancestors. Ubuntu is for many societies a proven way of survival in times of unrest, war, Aids/HIV, natural disasters, migration and food insecurity. (Arino, 2015; Boundja, 2019)

The Ubuntu renaissance was perhaps first used by Mobutu in his "l'authenticité" process in an effort to unite and create a nation-state by abolishing the remanence of the colonial heritage. However, his "patrimonism" have rather destroyed the Congolese economy and society. An important aspect was that the poor areas of Congo went back to tribal leadership and the Ubuntu community principles.

4. Ubuntu and the Hofstede dimensions

Bantu-speaking countries are part of the Pyramid mental image (Wursten, 1997) with High Power distance, Low Individualism, middle to strong uncertainty avoidance. It is a system that accepts hierarchy but with the moral and tribal relations intact. A frequent reference point for the legitimation of actions is the "general interest", as formulated by the top people. There is a strong need to formalise the communication between the various levels in the community (palabra, respect for the elderly).

Leadership is defined in a "moral" way. (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010).

In the table below, the different 4D indicators are given for selected Bantu language countries:

Cultural dimensions	Pdi	Idv	Mas	UAI
Kenya	70	25	60	50
Malawi	70	30	40	50
Tanzania	70	25	40	50
Zambia	60	35	40	50
South Africa	49	65	63	49

4.1. Individualism vs Collectivism

The scores for Individualism are low in Bantu speaking countries. This is in contradiction to the Western democracy where one man/one woman equals one vote. In Western countries, people are seen as atomized individuals. Meaning that atomism assigns the individual as the basic unit of analysis for all implications of social life. In a representative democracy, you need a majority of the population to make decisions in the public domain.

Ubuntu and democracy in Africa is more appropriate than Western liberalism, the physical "individual" is part of the social environment, without the other there is no humanism.

The state of "failed democracy" in Sub Saharan countries is seen by the West as a democratic deficit, some countries are labelled as failed democracies by using Western criteria. Through the colonization and its aftermath, Africa has for a long time mirrored the values of the colonial system, the administrative system and even the democratic ways of general elections, making consensus governments and even introducing the rule of law and the right based approaches. But African reality shows that this process was not adequate for the African community values.

The difficulty of integrating Western democratic values can be explained by the low scores on Individualism. The rights-based approach, the human rights approach as in Western democracy, cannot be fully taken on board as it is not inherent to the collectivism of the Ubuntu society. Ubuntu means morality, ethics, social inclusion of the individual belonging to a group. "I am because we are" "without the other, I am not human". Despite all efforts of Western countries and the linking of development funds to human rights, is it a mistake of not understanding the concept of Ubuntu and its social morality. A good example is the non-acceptance of homosexuality in many countries, even when Western countries are withdrawing funds when human rights are not respected. The deep-rooted community-based Ubuntu way of life cannot accept that Western values are lobbied by giving development money under human right conditions.

Low individualism is one of the elements to understand how Africa is in the transition to their concept of participatory democracy.

However, some changes are seen in the urban younger generation with access to social media and their liking of the externalities of Western life. The introduction of social media, internet, ICT tools are changing the concept of Ubuntu. Urban citizens have much more information and are invited to *mimic* Western lifestyle.

The use of social media and especially WhatsApp have been influencing the outcome of several general elections. By sending specific individual messages on WhatsApp, in urban and rural areas, the voters are guided, mobilised and even protected. A good example is the 2019 General Election in Nigeria. Nigeria is partly a Bantu-speaking country and has the highest population on the African continent. It is a large country with a history of authoritarian rule and a questionable commitment to democratic norms.

WhatsApp is both known for the spread of disinformation and misinformation, but also has the potential of tackling fake news by individual encrypted messages.

Analyzing the effect of the use of WhatsApp in the Nigeria Election 2019 campaign (Hitchen et al., 2019) the authors concluded that the use of WhatsApp protected the voter to have more access to accurate information and to have a tool to strengthen accountability in an evolving democracy.

Africa in democracy will change, once the digital revolution has transformed the strong collective Ubuntu values in urban areas into atomized individuals.

The Bantu speaking countries in Africa have a strong collective sense of organizing life, politics and their way of life. As in most countries, there is a divide along the lines of urban life and the rural areas. Ubuntu collective life is also based on the social protection against food shortages, tribal strife and the natural calamities. New leaders and freedom fighters after independence were focusing on the Ubuntu values of the social and political organization. Individualism may be contrasted with collectivism in which the rights and interest of the social collective are given supremacy. The new leaders were inspired by Jean - Jacques Rousseau (Rousseau, 1762): the individual finds his true being and freedom only in submission to the "general will" of the community and by Karl Marx. Many leaders embraced the Marxist-Leninist dogmas of collectivism.

As Marx provided a good description of humanism and the Ubuntu principles: "It is not men's consciousness which determines their being, but their social being which determines their consciousness" in "Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy.

Collectivism has many faces like socialism, communism and fascism. Different African leaders choose the socialist way of development like Patrice Lumumba of Congo, Julius Nyerere of Tanzania, Modibo Keita of Mali, Léopold Senghor of Senegal, Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana and Sékou Touré of Guinea. They are called the fathers of African socialism with the belief in sharing economic resources in a traditional African way.

In that way, Ubuntu is close to all forms of social democracy with African humanism as its compass.

A good example of social democracy is the "Stokvels". Stokvels are invitation-only clubs of twelve or more people serving as rotating credit unions or saving schemes in South Africa where members contribute fixed sums of money to a central fund on a weekly, fortnightly or monthly basis. These popular societies have monthly meetings where members made monthly contributions. Meetings are held with the simple principles that everybody is equal, that simple deliberations are made with clear resolutions in consensus. The leadership is based on trust and morality, even when members never heard about the democratic principles of voting for their leaders.

African socialism in some countries has been close to "popular democracy" which is close to concepts used in socialist countries in Asia (North Korea, Vietnam and China). The governance is in the hands of a single strong party, where all citizens are automatically member for life. Mobutu had introduced popular democracy by introducing his Mouvement Populaire de la Révolution, as a new party-state. Other African leaders followed his popular democracy model and some leaders became perfect dictators: Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gabon, Libya.

4.2. Power Distance and African leadership.

The Bantu traditions before colonization had a Bantu chief following divine right, natural law and customs. The traditional chief's roles are the direction of religious ceremonies, the arbitration of the palavers, the conduct of the war, the organization of commerce. The Bantu chief of tribes, of the chiefdom or communities, are protecting their population, also covering human rights. It has the authority to determine and specify the rights of each, the authority to defend the rights and to sanction violations. The morality of these African leaders is important to understand that in this pyramidal societies' corruption, graft and stealing is a no go for Bantu leaders. The actual "state capture" and the many corruption cases in South Africa are contrary to the Ubuntu principles, following strict rights and eventually sanctioning these crimes against the community. The Zulu tradition had strong punishment for members of the tribe or clan for stealing community goods. Thieves were cut off a hand or an ear in public.

The new African leader is attuned (Khoza, n.d.):

It is: “an insightful person who stresses the importance of human relationships, empathising and identifying with the followership, winning their trust and producing results in line with the needs of the followers”. Nelson Mandela embodied all characteristics of an enlightened leader having Charisma, a long view, diplomacy, effective communication and passion.

Again, s most Bantu speaking countries belong to the Pyramid type of societal organization. (Wursten, 1997).) They score mostly very high on PDI. But Africa and the Bantu states are not "one" place.. In Ubuntu, there is high respect for the "moral" leader (the Prince, the Chief) as he is the protector of all in the community (including thieves, criminals). Governance is done in a "top-down" way and the decisions on the community level are taken and implemented following strict communication and implementation. The higher hierarchy level is accepted as the population accepts that "Some people are more equal than others"

Leadership is defined in a "moral" way. In return for their loyalty, the population expect their Chief to take care of them, to be like a good father (or mother) of the family. Therefore, is Power distance the strength of the social hierarchy and an important principle in Ubuntu.

5. Ubuntu as a resistance culture in democracy

It was the dream of a new political and societal life in RSA after the end of apartheid. But as shown in recent developments in RSA, many threats to Democratic nation-building by using the Ubuntu principles are common.

Most African countries have strong trade union organisations with an impact on all those who are oppressed and their appeal for worker solidarity. ("An injury to one is an injury to all") With other Civil organisations, they promote the principles of sharing and the equitable distribution of wealth.

Other civil organisations are the development NGO, the advocacy groups (gender, minorities, albinos), the Strong Faith-Based organisations with a broad interest in societal and political life. They emphasize black communal experiences, social inclusion and affirms a commitment for sharing. (Freedom charter RSA: "The people shall share").

Ubuntu as a state of mind is also introduced in the corporate business and can resolve some conflicts in economic processes.

As the free flow of information in the community is important in collectivism, the role of all types of free media is important to have Ubuntu as a “resistance” culture.

Ubuntu has also been branded as free and open software by the name of " Ubuntu" with a Linux distribution based on Debian and widely used in less rich communities and users.

Also, the Apartheid regime used special ghettos (called Bantustan) in implementing their policies of social exclusions of nonwhites in special areas. This was an insult as Bantu philosophy and the African humanism is socially inclusive.

6. Threats to democratic nation-building in Africa

As was made clear, not all elected African leaders act by Ubuntu principles and values. The most important threat is "greed" by African leaders, their cronies and tribe. When corruption and fraud in the colonial times were seen as a patriotic deed, nowadays corruption is an act of “selfishness“ as it is taken resources away from the community. Population expect to be protected by the chiefs as a good family father and do have trust in a moral leader.

A second threat is a large population that lives under the poverty line and who are not inclusive in political life. Their only frustration is that security, social needs for their extended family are no longer secured by the Chiefs and the responsible.

A third threat is tribal strife and continuous conflict in some regions. A great part of Africa encounters armed conflict and war, where strong human rights abuses and discriminations are no longer punished. These fragile states are far away from the Ubuntu values and impact on large migrations, health disasters and war crimes like the raping of women, girls and babies (see 6)

7. Conclusions

Ubuntu principles do have an impact on the transition of democracy in Africa. The difference of African humanism is based on the community, social inclusion and the acceptance of hierarchy and collectivism. It is different from Western humanism where the atomized individual is the center of economic democracy.

The ethnocentrism of the colonizers and later the international cooperation ignored Ubuntu principles and values. The introduction of combining fundamental rights with the funding of development projects proved not adequate. Africa is in a democratic transition and the Western models are no longer an example. The young African leaders chose for social democracy with a collectivistic societal model after independence. But recently some new African democracies are opting for a participatory and representative democracy, based on the black communal experience and solidarity.

Most important in the cultural values of a pyramidal society is the free flow of information to tackle “fake news”. The countervailing power of civil society and strong trade unions ensure the flow of information and restore confidence in the cultural heritage.

The free media sector and the digital revolution are also important to guarantee Ubuntu principles in the democratic transition of all nations on the African continent.

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Website Ubuntu: <https://align4profit.com/develop-an-inclusive-organizational-culture/>

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