

African Problem - African Solution: An Examination of the Application of the Ubuntu Conflict Resolution Systems to Prevailing Conflicts in Africa: A Case Study of the Democratic Republic of Congo and Namibia's Tension

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Abstract

The conflict within the Democratic Republic of Congo is demonstrably violent and primarily localized in the eastern region, formerly known as Zaire. In contrast, Namibia experiences tension between native and non-native African populations arising from inequitable land accumulation by the minority white-German population, which holds the potential for violent escalation. The protracted conflict in the eastern region of the Congo, which resulted in the deaths of millions of Africans and the loss of billions in property, along with the societal tension in Namibia, both trace their origins unequivocally to the Berlin Conference of 1884-1885. To mitigate the violent and deadly conflict in Congo and the potential for violent escalation in Namibia's tension, we propose the establishment of a centuries-old framework designed to provide permanent peace resolutions, given that these conflicts are occurring on African soil, in a broader context, we see it as an African problem thus requires primarily African solution – The Ubuntu system on conflict resolution – While the United Nations peace system has been employed to resolve numerous global conflicts, including those within the Congo, its efficacy in the Congolese context has been demonstrably ineffective. Thus, we argue that 'Ubuntu,' an African system of conflict resolution, has the potential to resolve both direct violence and structural violence that creates tensions not just in the case study countries but in the whole of Africa and beyond, as the system has no specific tribal or religious affiliation, it is just a human-centric philosophy that sees all humans as equals irrespective of races or social status. Lastly, this paper adopts a qualitative research design to explore the application of the Ubuntu conflict resolution system in addressing conflict.

Keywords: : Ubuntu, Conflict resolution, Democratic Republic of Congo, Namibia, Africa, Berlin Conference.

Introduction

The African continent is characterized by widespread instances of conflict or instability between native and non-native populations. Even though the notion of 'nativeness' within the African context is inextricably linked to the 'Berlin Conference of 1884-1885',¹ where European powers proceeded to partition the African continent. This coming month of February 2025 marks 140 years since Western powers sidelined Africans and carved up ownership of the continent among themselves. Notably, this occurred shortly after a period of internal conflicts within European societies that resulted in a significant loss of life. The Reign of Terror, commencing in 1793,² serves as a widely recognized historical example. Furthermore, despite the partitioning of Africa, two major conflicts, globally recognized as world wars, subsequently occurred within the European region. These conflicts resulted in millions of fatalities, a figure so vast as to be incalculable, with the precise number remaining a subject of historical conjecture. This devastating loss of life motivated the establishment of an organization dedicated to the prevention of future deadly wars, not only within Europe but also, ostensibly, on a global scale.

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¹ Read, The **Berlin Conference** of 1884–1885 by Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Kwame Anthony Appiah. An event that marked the climax of the European competition for territory in Africa, a process commonly known as the Scramble for Africa. Read, Oxford University Press. Encyclopedia of Africa. 2010.

² Read, Victor Hugo's 1874 novel titled: Ninety-Three, which detailed the Reign of Terror of 1793-1794 during the Napoleonic era.

After the dissolution of the League of Nations³, the United Nations was founded in 1945⁴, shortly after the cessation of hostilities resulting from Hitler's aggression against neighboring European countries. The United Nations was envisioned as a global forum for mediation and discussion of major international issues. However, its efficacy and credibility are increasingly questioned due to its rigid power structure, which affords ultimate decision-making authority to only five permanent members despite the organization comprising nearly two hundred signatory nations. Even though Africa is the continent with the largest number of sovereign countries, none of its conceivable 54 countries hold 'veto power'⁵ within the United Nations Security Council. The inability of the United Nations system to effectively prevent the prevailing conflicts in Africa leads to the conclusion that its efforts on the continent are largely unsuccessful, impeding socio-political progress in numerous nations.

Africa was historically perceived as a peaceful continent until the advent of colonial operators, who, despite initially presenting themselves as allies, ultimately adopted antagonistic postures. In his work, *"The Black Mother"*,⁶ Basil Davidson asserts that more than 100 million Africans were forcibly displaced from the continent and sold into slavery. Additionally, the arrival of Europeans on the African continent marked the beginning of a period characterized by some of the most egregious human rights violations in recorded history. The documented killings, systematic torture, and extermination of indigenous Africans are undeniable. The atrocities committed under the rule of King Leopold of Belgium in the Congo, resulting in the deaths of more than 10 million Africans, - as reported by Adam Hochschild in his widely known book titled: *King Leopold's Ghost*, and other reputable historians – represent a particularly appalling instance of colonial brutality.

Although the primary focus of this paper is not historical occurrences. However, to grasp the social fabric of pre-colonial Africa, one must consider the historical references mentioned earlier. Ironically, despite the physical demolition of colonization and the adoption of a Western system of government, African nations are still fighting one another, if the conflict is not internal, then it is surely regionally vivid. As of the present time of writing this paper, numerous regions of Africa are embroiled in conflict. Among the more recent instances are the M23 insurgency in Eastern Congo, the continuing internal strife in Sudan, the protracted conflict in Central Africa, the prevailing insurgency in West Africa, the tensions between Algeria and Morocco, and the descent of Libya into ungovernable status following the fall of Muammar Gaddafi.

These protracted conflicts persist with no definitive resolution in sight despite several peace interventions by regional and international organizations, including the African Union (AU) and the United Nations (UN). The ongoing violence suggests that perhaps these African challenges necessitate uniquely African solutions. The concept of Ubuntu, which literally translates to 'I am because we are,' promotes unity and inclusivity, potentially offering a path towards resolving these differences, which are causing the loss of countless lives of innocent African women and children, and energetic African youths. The primary aim of this paper is to examine the following fundamental question: To what extent does the Ubuntu system offer a distinct and potentially more effective approach to conflict resolution compared to the UN system, based on their underlying philosophical and ethical principles? Consequently, the ultimate objective of this work is to present a more efficacious system of conflict resolution tailored to the needs of African populations.

³ The League of Nations (1920 – 1946) was the first intergovernmental organization established “to promote international cooperation and to achieve international peace and security”. It is often referred to as the “predecessor” of the United Nations.

⁴ The United Nations is an international organization founded in 1945. Currently made up of 193 Member States, the UN and its work are guided by the purposes and principles contained in its founding Charter.

⁵ See, WorldAtlas. Continent by number of countries.

⁶ Read, *“Black Mother: the years of the African slave trade”*. By Basil Davidson, 1961.

Literature Review

Ubuntu

The term 'Ubuntu'⁷ is widely known in Africa, it is derived from the Nguni languages, particularly Zulu and Xhosa, meaning that the concepts has its roots in the cultures of Southern Africa. Whenever South Africa is mentioned, our minds capture the image of one of the greatest men to have ever walked on this Earth, identified by his courage, wisdom and exceptional behaviour of patience and forgiveness – Nelson Mandela – who practices the concepts of Ubuntu during his lifetime, Ubuntu was conceivably the central philosophy of Mandela's life, he was reported to have mentioned Ubuntu in many occasions, but certain occasions such as 2006 in which he was recorded to have said:

*"In the old days when we were young, a traveller through a country would stop at a village and he didn't have to ask for food or for water. Once he stops, the people give him food, entertain 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 in order to enable the community around you to be able to improve?"*⁸ (Nelson Mandela)

Considering that the system of Ubuntu is very much aligned with African values in terms of unity, cooperation, collaborations, humility and peaceful coexistence, other African dignitaries within or outside of South African territory were known for their advocacy for the use of Ubuntu system since it is a system that Africans were using long before the arrival of colonial invaders. Desmond Tutu, a man of great integrity and honor was among the strong proponent of Ubuntu approach, as it is the core value of African society, Ubuntu literal meaning has already attested to the latter claim by Desmond Tutu because Ubuntu is – 'I am because we are'. In his book under the title *No Future Without Forgiveness*, Desmond reflected on one of the most historical atrocities in the continent of Africa – The Rwanda, Hutu and Tutsi conflict – which caused the death of thousands of lives, whereas if the Ubuntu system were properly implemented that conflict could have been prevented, as he presented a question on page 34 by writing "Why did the Rwandans not show forth this quality of ubuntu to one another and instead destroyed one another in the most awful genocide that overwhelmed their beautiful country?"⁹

However, Desmond's comprehensive explanation of ubuntu concepts on page 54 of the same book is what Rwandans have witnessed under the current administration of Paul Kagame. As Desmond puts it, "In the spirit of ubuntu, the central concern is the healing of breaches, the redressing of imbalances, the restoration of broken relationships, a seeking to rehabilitate both the victim and perpetrator, who should be given the opportunity to be reintegrated into the community he has injured by his offence (Desmond Tutu, 1999)"¹⁰. This is what Africans have witnessed in Rwanda although the impact was felt by Rwandese living within Rwandan societies. Unity, compassion, love and forgiveness were once among the greatest pillars of African societies, even though, in some corners of Africa these attributes were not directly named ubuntu, almost all the great leaders of Africa spoke with the spirit of ubuntu, besides from the aforementioned names, there are great African leaders like Thomas Sankara of Burkina Faso, Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, Patrice Lumumba of Congo, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf of Liberia, Haile Selassie I of Ethiopia, Abubakar Tafawa Balewa of Nigeria, Samora Machel of Mozambique, and in particular Julius Nyerere of Tanzania who wrote: "...In our traditional society, we were individuals within a community. We were responsible for the community and community was responsible for each one of us (Nyerere, 1968)"¹¹.

⁷ Nkem Ifejika, "What does Ubuntu really mean?" The Guardian, Guardian News & Media Limited, September 29, 2006.

⁸ Nelson Mandela. "Interviewed by Tim Modise. Experience Ubuntu Interview." 24 May 2006. Available online: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Experience_ubuntu.ogg

⁹ Desmond Mpilo Tutu "No Future Without Forgiveness" 1999.

¹⁰ Desmond Mphilo Tutu "No Future Without Forgiveness" p.54, 1999.

¹¹ Nyerere, Julius. Ujamaa. Dar-es-Salaam, Oxford University Press, 1968, pp. 6-7.

Case study: The Democratic Republic of Congo and Namibia

The democratic republic of Congo (Zaire)

As briefly outlined in the introduction, the Democratic Republic of Congo endured exceptionally brutal colonization under the reign of King Leopold of Belgium. The actions perpetrated against the Congolese people were genocidal and constituted ethnic cleansing, akin to a holocaust that was not captured on film and lacks the same level of memorialization. However, some courageous Western historians have it recorded in their memoirs, the same as in the records of the victims and their descendants. It is important to note that Zaire, now known as the Democratic Republic of Congo was a peaceful region in Africa, as was any other part of the continent before the arrival of colonizers. The people were bounded by ubuntu philosophy and concepts, living next to each other in peace and harmony regardless of linguistic differences and looks, these differences were not even realized or considered a distinctive difference until the colonizers petitioned the continent and put borders between Africans. Since then, Zaire, now DRC has found itself in a constant on-and-off conflict that is mostly tribal. Thus, many reasons compelled us to mention Zaire (DRC) as a case study, but one more important reason was the ongoing conflicts between the M23 fighters and the DRC national army. In his widely broadcasted interview with Al-Jazeera correspondents, Mr Bertrand Bisimwa the leader of the M23 rebels, argues that “they are fighting for ethnic survival”¹². Among his reasons was that the central government in DRC was not fair and just towards his tribe.

The M23 and DRC Conflicts: A Concise Historical Background

The contemporary conflict among peoples of shared heritage but disparate linguistic traditions finds its historical genesis in the Berlin Conference of 1884-1885. Documented evidence supports the assertion of peaceful coexistence among the inhabitants of this African region prior to the colonial era. The principles of Ubuntu served as a unifying force for countless generations until the advent of colonisation; there was a time when Africans lived next to one another, during which linguistic diversity was regarded as an integral aspect of African beauty and identity.

Ben Shepherd, in his 2018 in-depth research about the formation of M23 rebels, asserts that “It was the product of a failed 2009 peace deal between the DRC and an earlier rebel group, which formed the nucleus of the M23”.¹³ but who are these M23 fighters? During the well-known Berlin Conference, when Europeans were petitioning Africa among themselves, Belgium took Congo, and Germans took Rwanda for a short moment until “Belgium took it from Germany after the (so-called) second world war”¹⁴, the story of how the rest of the Europeans divided Africa for themselves is available in all historical archives. In the process of partitioning Africa, European powers gave little consideration to existing tribal affiliations, resulting in the division of numerous ethnic communities. It is common to find the same tribe bisected by national borders, a phenomenon further explored by Dr. ‘Tasew Tafese Gashaw’¹⁵ of the Institute for Peace and Security Studies at Addis Ababa University, who has extensively documented the detrimental consequences of these colonial boundaries on African communities.

The European powers’ partition of the African continent demonstrated a disregard for existing tribal affiliations, leading to the division of numerous ethnic groups across newly established national borders. Their

¹² M23 Rebel leader Bertrand Bisimwa “Interviewed by Aljazeera English correspondents about M23 objectives (fighting for survival)” January 8, 2025. Available online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vMMmAZaQPJk>

¹³ Shephard, Ben “Elite Bargains and Political Deals Project: Democratic Republic of Congo (M23) Case Study” 2018.

¹⁴ Rwanda Basic Education Board “German and Belgian Colonisation (1897-1962)” Available online: <https://elearning.reb.rw/course/view.php?id=658§ion=8>

¹⁵ Tasew Tafese Gashaw “Colonial Borders in Africa: Improper Design and its Impact on African Borderland Communities.” Available online: <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/colonial-borders-in-africa-improper-design-and-its-impact-on-african-borderland-communities>

actions were primarily motivated by territorial acquisition without consideration for the humanitarian ramifications. As a result, the Tutsi tribe had its territory divided into the newly established countries of Rwanda and Zaire, now known as the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

M23 rebels are primarily Tutsi tribesmen, coming from the tribe whose territory was divided and shared by two countries, as mentioned above. As their leader mentioned 'they are fighting for ethnic survival', hence defending their territory, which in essence comprises most of the eastern part of the DRC. Although, according to the colonizers division, the Tutsi tribesmen living in DRC should be loyal to DRC but is DRC loyal and fair to them? if it were, then why should their leader, Mr Bisimwa, say: "They are fighting for ethnic survival?". According to the Amnesty International report of 2023, "Armed groups continued to carry out widespread attacks against civilians... and no meaningful progress was made towards accountability and justice for victims of crimes under international law and other serious human rights violations"¹⁶. This highlights that the conflict for 'ethnic survival' is not just between M23 and the DRC national army but rather amongst the existing ethnic groups within the eastern part of DRC, as there are about "250 ethnic groups in Congo and up to 700 languages and dialects"¹⁷ the eastern part is no exception, it comprises numerous tribes and ethnics however, the Tutsi still remains the majority. The fear of a lack of rule of law justified the formation of many rebel groups, including the most dominant one, M23, in what its leader asserted a "self-defence" because weaker tribes had been displaced, as reported by Amnesty International "Nearly 7 million people were internally displaced, and thousands of others fled the country".

Italian online newspaper "Nova.News"¹⁸, in its recent publication of January 2025, alleged that the United States of America, China and other European states are deeply involved in the ongoing war in Congo, asserting that these countries deliberately support the war by arming the rebel groups in exchange for the safe extractions of mineral resources. This highlights that those who have more arms tend to be stronger and can take more territory.

Namibia and the tension in Namibia

As mentioned earlier, Belgium took over Rwanda from Germany after the Second World War, but the Germans managed to steal another territory from the Africans, which they named Deutsch-Südwestafrika, now known as Namibia. This was also part of the effects of the Berlin Conference of 1884-1885. Both "Rhino Africa, Britannica and Wikipedia"¹⁹ report that Africans were living within the land of modern-day Namibia for thousands of years, according to Rhino Africa there is plenty archaeological evidence that shows that African people inhabited Namibia at least 25,000 years ago. The Khoisan peoples of Southern Africa maintained a nomadic life, the Khoikhoi as pastoralists and the San people as hunter-gatherers. However, despite all the archaeological evidence and the factually documented incidence on the arrival of the Europeans into African territory, in this regard Namibian territory, the Europeans own the majority of the land in Namibia despite that they amount to about "2% of the total population of Namibia"²⁰. The accumulation of land by white German descendants in Namibia, whose arrival is historically linked to their colonial predecessors, generates tension between them and the indigenous inhabitants.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z-N9luQaXrE&t=385s>, this widely viewed documentary series on the Namibian land issue under the title *Namibia Apartheid Continued a Germans in Africa Story* depicts Namibians peacefully advocating for equitable land distribution. They vociferously condemn the extensive land

¹⁶ Read, the Amnesty International report on "Democratic Republic of the Congo 2023"

¹⁷ See, Footnote 16.

¹⁸ Nova News "Congo-Kinshasa: The US, China and the "Cobalt War". Available online: <https://www.agenzianova.com/en/news/congo-kinshasa-gli-usa-la-cina-e-la-guerra-del-cobalto-ecco-gli-interessi-in-gioco/>. 2025.

¹⁹ Rhino Africa. "Namibian History" Available online: <https://www.rhinoafrica.com/en/destinations/namibia/facts-and-information/history/77538>

²⁰ Google Scholar: Available online: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/German_Namibians#:~:text=Today%2C%20English%20is%20the%20country's,or%20Namibian%20Black%20German%2C%20respectively.

accumulation by German descendants, some of whom possess holdings equivalent to 14,000 football fields or 14,000,000 hectares. Namibia is not a densely populated land and as Devryn reaffirmed “Namibia has a population of 2.1 million people and is sparsely populated due to the vast Namib Desert, which covers most of the region. Despite its limited population, Namibia has a complex linguistic environment, with languages in ranging from the Indo-European, Khoisan, and Bantu families being spoken. The three languages in Namibia, English, German, and Afrikaans, were designated as official languages in Namibia during the apartheid regime (Devryn, n,d)”²¹.

Research Methodology

1. Research Design

This research adopts a qualitative case study design to explore Ubuntu's role in resolving conflicts in the DRC and Namibia. This approach is chosen because it provides a nuanced understanding of the conflicts' cultural, social, and political dimensions.

2. Data Collection Methods

The study employs a secondary data collection method to ensure a comprehensive documentary analysis: The researchers review existing literature, policy documents, and reports on Ubuntu philosophy, conflict resolution, and the specific conflicts in the DRC and Namibia. This includes academic articles, government reports, and publications from international organizations such as the African Union (AU), United Nations (UN), and Amnesty International.

3. Data Analysis

The data collected is analyzed using **thematic analysis**, a qualitative method that identifies patterns and themes within the data. The analysis focuses on:

- Identifying the core principles of Ubuntu and how they are applied in conflict resolution.
- Examining the successes and challenges of using Ubuntu to address conflicts in the DRC and Namibia.
- Comparing the two case studies to draw broader lessons for conflict resolution in Africa.

4. Theoretical Framework

The study is grounded in Ubuntu philosophy as its theoretical framework. It draws on the principles of interconnectedness, restorative justice, and communal well-being to analyze conflict resolution processes.

Discussion And Findings

Following an examination of the historical foundations of the Ubuntu system and the application of two case studies, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Namibia, it is evident that these two African nations present distinct challenges, necessitating differentiated approaches to implementing Ubuntu. Furthermore, this paper's findings substantiate the philosophical and ethical tenets of Ubuntu, encapsulated in the phrase 'I am because we are,' which broadly translates to humanity toward others. The Ubuntu concept emphasizes community, mutual care, and the interconnectedness of all people.

Historical Context of Ubuntu in Pre-Colonial Africa.

This paper's findings offer significant evidence of harmonious coexistence among diverse African tribes and ethnicities prior to colonial invasion. We posit that colonial powers' imposition of arbitrary borders, which disregarded humanitarian ramifications, constitutes a primary factor contributing to conflict on the African continent.

²¹ Devryn, P. “Languages in Namibia” Available online: <https://www.discoverafrica.com/safaris/namibia/languages-in-namibia/>

Prior to analyzing the application of Ubuntu within our case study countries, it is necessary to provide a thematic discussion of its core concepts for the benefit of our prospective audience. Drawing upon our research and referenced materials, we have categorized the concepts of Ubuntu into six distinct sub-themes. Justice and Conflict Resolution, Economic System, Community-Centric Societies, Spiritual and Cultural Practice, Education and Socialization, and Resilience and Adaptation.

1. Justice and Conflict Resolution:

The subsequent discussions provide a comprehensive explanation of Ubuntu, drawing upon the work of Desmond Tutu as cited in reference number 10 of this paper.

"In the spirit of ubuntu, the central concern is the healing of breaches, the redressing of imbalances, the restoration of broken relationships, a seeking to rehabilitate both the victim and perpetrator, who should be given the opportunity to be reintegrated into the community he has injured by his offence"

Thus, we find that in the Ubuntu system, justice is not about retribution but about restoring balance within the community. When conflicts arise, the goal is to address the underlying issues and heal relationships rather than simply punishing the offender. This approach is deeply communal, involving all stakeholders in the process. Elders, community leaders, and even the broader community play a role in mediating disputes, ensuring that resolutions are fair and acceptable to all parties. This participatory approach fosters a sense of collective responsibility and accountability. Conflict resolution in Ubuntu is often achieved through dialogue and consensus-building. Traditional practices such as 'indaba' (a gathering for discussion) or 'lekgotla' (a community court) are used to facilitate open communication. These forums allow everyone involved to voice their perspectives, ensuring that all sides are heard. The emphasis is on understanding the root causes of the conflict and finding solutions that promote reconciliation and unity. This process is often time-consuming but is seen as essential for maintaining long-term peace and cohesion within the community. Restorative justice is a key component of the Ubuntu system. Offenders are encouraged to acknowledge their wrongdoing, apologize, and make amends to those they have harmed. This approach not only addresses the immediate conflict but also seeks to reintegrate the offender into the community, reducing the likelihood of future disputes. The focus on forgiveness and healing contrasts sharply with Western legal systems, which often prioritize punishment and isolation.

In essence, justice and conflict resolution in the Ubuntu system are deeply relational and community-oriented. They prioritize the restoration of harmony over retribution, emphasizing dialogue, forgiveness, and collective responsibility. This approach not only resolves conflicts but also strengthens the social fabric, ensuring that the community remains united and resilient.

The principles of justice and conflict resolution inherent in Ubuntu provide contemporary justice systems with valuable insights into the importance of empathy, inclusivity, and reconciliation in addressing conflicts.

2. Economic Systems

The economic system within the Ubuntu philosophy is deeply rooted in the principles of community, reciprocity, and shared prosperity. Unlike Western capitalist systems that prioritize individualism and profit maximization, the Ubuntu economic model emphasizes collective well-being and the equitable distribution of resources. At its core, Ubuntu economics is guided by the belief that the welfare of the individual is intrinsically tied to the welfare of the community. This communal approach fosters a sense of interdependence and mutual support, ensuring that no one is left behind. Wealth is not seen as a means of personal accumulation in the Ubuntu system but as a resource to be shared for the benefit of all. This is reflected in traditional practices such as 'we are because of others', which creates communal labour and the sharing of resources. 'We are because of others' involves community members coming together to work on projects that benefit the entire group, such as building homes, cultivating fields, or repairing infrastructure. This collective effort not only strengthens social bonds but also ensures that essential tasks are completed efficiently and equitably. Similarly, 'sharing of resources' involves the redistribution of resources, such as livestock or crops, to support those in need. This practice reinforces the idea that everyone has a responsibility to contribute to the common good.

The Ubuntu economic system also strongly emphasizes sustainability and environmental stewardship. Resources are managed with a long-term perspective, ensuring that they are preserved for future generations. This approach contrasts sharply with exploitative economic models that prioritize short-term gains over environmental health. In Ubuntu, the land and its resources are seen as a communal trust, and their use is guided by principles of care and respect.

Trade and exchange in the Ubuntu system are often based on barter and mutual aid rather than monetary transactions. This fosters a sense of solidarity and reduces the risk of economic exploitation. Additionally, decision-making processes are inclusive and participatory, with community members having a say in how resources are allocated and used. This democratic approach ensures that economic activities align with the community's needs and values.

3. Community-Centric Societies

In pre-colonial African societies, particularly among the Bantu-speaking communities, the concept of Ubuntu was central to social organization. Communities were built around collective well-being, where individuals were seen as part of a larger whole. Decisions were often made through consensus, and the welfare of the group took precedence over individual interests. The well-being of the individual is inseparable from the well-being of the group. This contrasts with individualistic paradigms as regards the Western system that prioritizes personal success over communal harmony. Ubuntu fosters a culture of sharing, cooperation, and solidarity, where resources, labour, and responsibilities are distributed equitably. Practices such as 'communal work' and 'resource sharing' exemplify this ethos, ensuring that everyone contributes to and benefits from the collective good. These practices not only address material needs but also strengthen social bonds, creating a sense of belonging and unity. In Ubuntu societies, Decision-making is deeply participatory and inclusive. Leaders are not authoritarian figures but facilitators who seek consensus and ensure that all voices are heard. Traditional forums like 'community gatherings' or 'community courts' provide spaces for open dialogue, where conflicts are resolved through discussion and mutual understanding rather than coercion. This approach ensures that decisions reflect the collective will and promote the common good.

4. Spiritual and Cultural Practices

Ubuntu was also reflected in spiritual beliefs and practices. Many traditional African religions emphasize the interconnectedness of all life, including ancestors, the living, and future generations. Rituals and ceremonies often reinforce the values of community and mutual respect.

Spirituality in Ubuntu

Spirituality in the Ubuntu system is deeply relational and communal. It is rooted in the belief that life is a continuous cycle connecting the living, the 'ancestors' and the 'divine'. Ancestors play a central role in Ubuntu spirituality, as they are seen as intermediaries between the living and the Supreme Being, they are revered and honoured through rituals, offerings, and prayers, as they are believed to guide, protect, and influence the well-being of the community. Rituals such as 'bringing back the spirit of a deceased person into the family' and 'acknowledging the ancestors' are common practices. These rituals often involve the slaughtering of animals, the pouring of libations, and the sharing of meals, symbolizing gratitude and maintaining a connection with the spiritual realm. The living are expected to live in a way that honours their ancestors, as neglecting them can lead to misfortune or disharmony.

Cultural Practices in Ubuntu

Ubuntu cultural practices are deeply communal as well, hence serve to reinforce social cohesion, identity, and continuity. These practices are often passed down through generations and are integral to maintaining the collective memory and values of the community. Key cultural practices include storytelling, music, dance, and rites of passage.

1. *Storytelling*: Oral traditions are a cornerstone of Ubuntu culture. Stories, proverbs, and myths are used to teach moral lessons, preserve history, and instill cultural values. Elders, as custodians of knowledge, play a vital role in passing down these narratives, ensuring that the wisdom of the past informs the present and future.

2. *Music and Dance*: Music and dance are not merely forms of entertainment but are deeply spiritual and communal activities. They are used in ceremonies, rituals, and celebrations to express emotions, invoke ancestral spirits, and strengthen social bonds. Instruments like drums, flutes, and traditional songs often accompany these performances, creating a sense of unity and shared purpose.

3. *Rites of Passage*: Ubuntu societies place great importance on rites of passage, which mark significant transitions in an individual's life, such as birth, puberty, marriage, and death. These ceremonies are communal events that involve the entire community and serve to integrate individuals into their social roles. For example, initiation ceremonies for young men and women are crucial for teaching cultural values, responsibilities, and the importance of community.

4. *Communal Feasts*: Sharing food is a central cultural practice in Ubuntu. Communal feasts, often held during ceremonies or festivals, symbolize unity and generosity. Food is seen as a means of connecting people, and the act of sharing it reinforces the values of reciprocity and care.

The Role of Elders

Elders hold a revered position in Ubuntu societies, serving as spiritual guides, mediators, and custodians of cultural knowledge. They are often called upon to lead rituals, resolve conflicts, and provide counsel. Their wisdom and experience are seen as essential for maintaining the spiritual and cultural integrity of the community.

Ubuntu and the Natural World

Ubuntu spirituality also extends to the natural world, emphasizing a harmonious relationship with the environment. The land, rivers, and animals are seen as sacred and interconnected with human life. Rituals and practices often include elements of nature, such as using herbs, plants, or natural sites for healing and spiritual purposes.

5. Education and Socialization

Education and socialization in the Ubuntu system are deeply rooted in the philosophy of interconnectedness, community, and collective well-being. Unlike Western models of education that often emphasize individualism and competition, Ubuntu-based education focuses on holistic development, communal learning, and the transmission of cultural values. It is a lifelong process that occurs within the family, the community, and the natural environment, shaping individuals to become responsible, empathetic, and active members of society.

Communal Learning

In the Ubuntu system, education is not confined to formal schooling but is a communal endeavour. The entire community participates in the upbringing and education of children, reflecting the belief of the African proverb that says, "it takes a village to raise a child." Elders, parents, and other community members all play a role in teaching children essential skills, values, and knowledge. This communal approach ensures that education is practical, relevant, and deeply connected to the cultural and social context of the community.

Oral Traditions and Storytelling

Oral traditions are a cornerstone of education in Ubuntu societies. Stories, proverbs, myths, and songs are used to teach moral lessons, historical events, and cultural values. Elders, as custodians of knowledge, are highly respected and play a central role in passing down wisdom through storytelling. These narratives not only educate but also instill a sense of identity, belonging, and responsibility toward the community.

Learning Through Participation

Education in the Ubuntu system is experiential and participatory. Children learn by observing and participating in daily activities, such as farming, cooking, crafting, and communal work. This hands-on approach ensures

that knowledge is practical and directly applicable to life. It also fosters a sense of responsibility and interdependence, as children learn the importance of contributing to the community's well-being.

Socialization and Moral Development

Socialization in Ubuntu is centred on teaching values such as respect, empathy, humility, and cooperation. Children are taught to prioritize the collective good over individual interests and to resolve conflicts through dialogue and consensus. Rites of passage, such as initiation ceremonies, play a significant role in socialization, marking the transition from childhood to adulthood and teaching young people their roles and responsibilities within the community.

Education for Harmony

Ubuntu education emphasizes harmony with others and the natural world. Children are taught to respect the environment, view resources as communal, and live sustainably. This ecological awareness is integral to Ubuntu's holistic worldview, ensuring that education fosters not only social but also environmental responsibility.

6. Resilience and Adaptation

The Ubuntu philosophy, with its emphasis on interconnectedness, community, and collective well-being, provides a robust framework for resilience and adaptation in the face of challenges. Rooted in the belief that "a person is a person through other people," Ubuntu fosters a culture of mutual support, resourcefulness, and flexibility, enabling individuals and communities to navigate adversity and thrive in changing circumstances.

Collective Resilience

Resilience in the ubuntu system is not an individual trait but a collective strength. Communities draw on their shared resources, knowledge, and solidarity to overcome challenges. Practices such as 'communal labor' and 'resource sharing' ensure that no one faces hardship alone. For example, during droughts, floods, or other crises, community members come together to pool resources, rebuild homes, or provide emotional support. This collective approach not only softens the burden but also strengthens social bonds, creating a resilient network of care and cooperation.

Adaptive Knowledge Systems

Ubuntu societies are characterized by a profound tradition of adaptive knowledge, passed down through successive generations. Elders, serving as custodians of ancestral wisdom, play an indispensable role in imparting practical skills and survival strategies, including sustainable farming, water conservation, and natural medicine. This body of knowledge is inherently context-specific and undergoes continuous evolution, empowering communities to adapt to environmental changes and emergent challenges. As an illustration, traditional agricultural practices are frequently tailored to local ecosystems, thereby ensuring food security even amidst unpredictable environmental conditions.

Flexibility and Innovation

The Ubuntu philosophy encourages flexibility and innovation in problem-solving. When faced with new challenges, communities rely on dialogue, consensus-building, and collective decision-making to find solutions. This participatory approach ensures that diverse perspectives are considered, leading to creative and inclusive strategies. For example, in response to modern economic pressures, some Ubuntu-inspired communities have adapted traditional practices like barter systems or communal savings schemes to meet contemporary needs.

Emotional and Spiritual Resilience

Ubuntu places significant emphasis on emotional and spiritual resilience, cultivated through a profound sense of belonging and purpose. The fundamental belief in the interconnectedness of all life, encompassing ancestors and the natural world, serves as a source of strength and guidance during periods of adversity. Rituals, storytelling, and communal celebrations play a pivotal role in facilitating the processing of grief,

commemorating victories, and sustaining hope. This spiritual dimension cultivates inner resilience, empowering individuals to endure hardship with dignity and optimism.

Ubuntu in Modern Contexts

In the context of contemporary global dynamics, the principles of Ubuntu continue to serve as a source of inspiration for resilience and adaptive capacity. From community-driven disaster recovery initiatives to grassroots movements advocating for social justice, Ubuntu's emphasis on solidarity and shared humanity provides a compelling model for addressing pressing global challenges such as climate change, inequality, and conflict.

The Application of the Ubuntu System as a Framework for Conflict Resolution in the DRC (Zaire)

Notwithstanding the protracted presence of United Nations peacekeepers in the Democratic Republic of Congo, the conflict has not abated. On the contrary, it has escalated in intensity and lethality, resulting in the loss of countless innocent lives. In light of the philosophical tenets of Ubuntu, as previously discussed, the question arises whether it could serve as a viable framework for resolving the ongoing conflicts in the Democratic Republic of Congo. As these conflicts are intra-African in nature, they may necessitate an African-centered solution. Given the daily loss of African lives, and noting the M23's relative strength among other armed groups in Eastern DRC, their successful capture of Goma, the region's largest city, serves as a testament to their power and coordination. This implies that if the resolution of this conflict is exclusively entrusted to the United Nations peace system, it may become an indefinite conflict with no foreseeable end.

Considering the inefficacy of the United Nations system in resolving these decades-long conflicts, we posit that the Ubuntu system offers a viable alternative. This conflict, which involves individuals who previously coexisted harmoniously with one another for unknown centuries, originated with “The Curse of Berlin,”²² a term used convincingly by Adekeye Adebajo, a former Rhodes scholar at Oxford University and Executive Director of the Centre for Conflict Resolution (CCR) in Cape Town, South Africa. Given that both the victims and the accused are of African descent, the repercussions of this conflict extend beyond the Democratic Republic of Congo and impact the entire African continent. Consequently, we are confident that the application of Ubuntu-based conflict resolution could facilitate a permanent resolution to the war. The Ubuntu system was comprehensively discussed, its philosophy underscores the interdependence of individuals within a community, prioritizing collective well-being, mutual respect, and restorative justice over punitive measures. In the context of conflict resolution, Ubuntu advocates for dialogue, forgiveness, and the restoration of relationships, rendering it particularly pertinent to the complex and multifaceted conflict in the DRC. By focusing on healing and inclusivity, Ubuntu provides a culturally resonant framework for addressing the grievances of all involved parties. The following details the Ubuntu system's methodologies for conflict resolution and peacebuilding, with a particular emphasis on its potential application to the resolution of the DRC conflict.

Restorative Justice and Acknowledgment of Grievances

A core tenet of Ubuntu is **restorative justice**, which seeks to repair harm and restore relationships rather than punish offenders. This approach would involve acknowledging the historical and structural grievances that fuel the conflict in the DRC. For instance, the M23 rebellion is partly driven by perceptions of marginalization and exclusion among certain ethnic groups in Eastern Congo. Similarly, the Congolese government has legitimate concerns about territorial integrity and national security.

Applying Ubuntu principles, a truth-telling process could be established to uncover the root causes of the conflict, including atrocities committed by all parties. This process would allow victims to share their experiences and perpetrators to acknowledge their actions, fostering a sense of accountability and mutual understanding. By addressing these grievances through restorative measures – such as reparations, community

²² Read, Adekeye Adebajo “The Curse of Berlin: Africa after the cold war” 2013.

rebuilding, and psychosocial support – Ubuntu can help break the cycle of violence and create a foundation for lasting peace in the DRC.

Inclusive Dialogue and Consensus-Building

Ubuntu emphasizes **inclusive dialogue** and **consensus-building**, ensuring that all voices are heard and respected. This would require involving all stakeholders in peace negotiations, including local communities, civil society organizations, and traditional leaders in the DRC. These groups, often excluded from formal peace processes, possess valuable insights into the conflict's local dynamics and can contribute to crafting sustainable solutions.

Traditional leaders and elders, respected within their communities, can play a pivotal role in mediating dialogue between the M23 rebels and the Congolese government. Drawing on Ubuntu principles of mutual respect and shared humanity, these mediators can facilitate discussions that address the conflict's root causes, such as ethnic tensions, resource competition, and political exclusion. By prioritizing consensus over coercion, Ubuntu fosters a sense of ownership and commitment to the peace process among all parties.

Reconciliation and Forgiveness

Reconciliation and forgiveness are central to the Ubuntu philosophy. In the DRC, where decades of conflict have left deep scars, these principles are essential for healing and rebuilding trust. A “truth and reconciliation commission (TRC),”²³ inspired by South Africa’s post-apartheid model, could be established to promote accountability and forgiveness. This commission would provide a platform for victims to share their stories and for perpetrators to acknowledge their actions, creating a shared narrative of the conflict.

Forgiveness, as advocated by Ubuntu, is not about condoning wrongdoing but about breaking the cycle of violence and fostering social cohesion. For M23 combatants who renounce violence, reintegration programs—such as vocational training, education, and community acceptance—can facilitate their transition to civilian life. By promoting forgiveness and reconciliation, Ubuntu can help transform the DRC’s conflict-affected communities into spaces of healing and coexistence.

Community-Centric Solutions and Long-Term Development

Ubuntu’s community-centric approach ensures that solutions are grounded in local realities and values. In the DRC, this would involve empowering local communities to lead peacebuilding efforts, such as establishing community peace committees or organizing inter-ethnic dialogues. These initiatives can address the micro-level tensions that often fuel broader conflicts.

Additionally, Ubuntu calls for addressing the structural inequalities that perpetuate violence. In the DRC, this includes promoting equitable resource sharing, particularly in mineral-rich regions like Eastern Congo. Revenue-sharing agreements and investments in infrastructure, education, and healthcare can address the economic grievances that drive rebellion. By prioritizing long-term development and community well-being, Ubuntu can help create the conditions for sustainable peace.

The Ubuntu philosophy provides a culturally resonant and ethically grounded framework for resolving the ongoing conflict in the DRC. By prioritizing **restorative justice**, **inclusive dialogue**, **reconciliation**, and **community-centric solutions**, Ubuntu addresses both the symptoms and root causes of the conflict. Its emphasis on healing and interconnectedness offers a transformative alternative to traditional, punitive approaches to conflict resolution. The practical application of Ubuntu principles within the Democratic Republic of Congo would serve to demonstrate the enduring relevance of African wisdom in the context of contemporary conflicts and the pursuit of sustainable peace. Through the adoption of Ubuntu, the DRC has the potential to transition towards a future characterized not by division and violence, but by unity, healing, and a shared sense of humanity.

The Ubuntu System and Tension Management in Namibia

²³ <https://www.justice.gov.za/trc/>

The findings of this paper reveal notable distinctions between the cases of the Democratic Republic of Congo (formerly Zaire) and Namibia. In contrast to the full-fledged war in the eastern DRC, Namibia's conflict was characterized by tension arising from inequitable land accumulation by individuals of colonial origin, resulting in discord between native and non-native African populations. The remaining German population, constituting less than 1% of Namibia's total population, holds ownership of more than 70% of the country's land. This disproportionate land ownership grants them considerable control over wealth and resources. It is widely acknowledged that land is a source of power, enabling cultivation, mining, and development. Consequently, permanent development on land not under one's ownership is rendered impossible. The issue of land accumulation in Namibia generates significant tension, with the potential for violent escalation. We contend that the application of Ubuntu principles can mitigate this tension, irrespective of the involvement of non-African natives, due to Ubuntu's inherent emphasis on equitable wealth distribution. This commitment to justice and fairness was historically misconceived as an African weakness, Namibians welcomed the German strangers with open arms and facilitated the settlement of the ancestors of the 1% white German population. Yet, now, this 1% of Germans in Namibia claim ownership of the majority of the land and refuse to share any of its portions with the indigenous populations who, by natural settings, are the rightful owners of these lands.

Should the white German population in Namibia be willing to set aside their aspirations for greed and dominance, we firmly believe that peace can be attained through the just and equitable principles of Ubuntu. Land could be distributed fairly, even among the descendants of colonizers, in accordance with the African tradition of extending hospitality to strangers.

Conclusion And Recommendation

Ubuntu was a foundational philosophy in pre-colonial African societies, shaping social, economic, and spiritual practices. Its emphasis on community, mutual care, and interconnectedness remains a vital part of African cultural heritage and continues to inspire efforts towards social cohesion and justice in the modern era. The arrival of colonial powers in Africa disrupted many traditional systems and values, including Ubuntu. Colonialism introduced individualistic and exploitative economic systems, disrupted communal land ownership, and imposed foreign legal and political structures. Despite these challenges, the Ubuntu philosophy has persisted and continues to influence contemporary African societies, serving as a foundation for post-colonial identity, social justice movements, and efforts to rebuild communal ties.

While the two case studies present distinct social issues, namely direct and structural violence, both can be effectively addressed through the application of the Ubuntu system, potentially yielding positive results. Given that the principles of Ubuntu ensure inclusivity within its justice system, we recommend its use in resolving conflicts and tensions across Africa, which are often driven by a complex interplay of historical, political, economic, and social factors.

Conflicts are prevalent across the African continent. The M23 conflict in the DRC and the tensions in Namibia served as case studies in this paper, yet Africa in its entirety requires the application of the Ubuntu system to address its prevailing conflicts. The tension between Ethiopia, Egypt, and Sudan regarding the Nile River, for instance, could be resolved harmoniously through the judicious application of Ubuntu conflict resolution principles.

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