

THE CURRENT STATE OF THE VALUE OF UBUNTU PHILOSOPHY IN NIGERIAN SOCIO-POLITICAL SITUATION

*** Ignatius Nnaemeka Onwuatuegwu PhD**

Philosophy Department, Faculty of Arts
Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka, Nigeria
in.onwuatuegwu@unizik.edu.ng

&

Sandra Chimuanya Eke

Philosophy Department, Faculty of Arts
Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka, Nigeria

ABSTRACT

The exponential rise of the threats to peace and unity in Nigeria has opened up an urgent discourse to salvage the situation, thus it becomes very necessary to ask questions like: is there a way to restore peace and unity in Nigeria, and if so, what could it be? What exactly the main constituents of the deplorable state of Nigeria are in terms of inter human relationships? Is Ubuntu the right step to take in solving the problem, and if so, how can it help? Will Nigerians accept this worldview if it is implemented? What would the effects and consequences of Ubuntu if it is implemented in Nigeria? These questions are the problems to be tackled in this paper. In an attempt to answer these questions, therefore, the researcher analyses the Ubuntu philosophy in a Nigerian perspective. The primary purpose is most importantly to demonstrate its relevance to the Nigerian society and, hence, providing a new outlook on nation building, through mutual respect, transparency and all that the Ubuntu philosophy provides. The researcher primarily presents the idea of the study in an expository methodological approach, using critical and analytical formula.

KEYWORDS: Social value, Politics, Judicial system, Corruption, Terrorism, Religion.

1. General Introduction

Right from the 1914 amalgamation of Nigeria by Governor Fredrick Lugard, peace and unity have been on a very delicate balance, this is owing to the fact that Nigeria is but a fusion of different cultures, worldviews and peoples. More so, in recent years, this balance has been stretched beyond its limits, it now appears to be hanging loose on a tiny thread, its fall imminent. This is evident in the visible dilapidation of almost every sector and department of the socio-political, socio-cultural, economic and even religious set up of Nigeria. There is an ever-increasing unrest in the country as a whole and this has led to the emergence of different factions taking different sides of an endlessly depressing argument that has become Nigeria.

There is therefore the need for one more faction, one that not only appeases, but also regulates and if necessary, shuts down all other factions. There is need for a restructuring, a re-education, a worldview- a unified one- and an altogether new approach that serves as a means of *sanatioinradice*. However, in order not to fall back to the mistakes of the precolonial era, where alien methods were erroneously used in problem solving, this new approach must be one that is neither alien nor uncommon among the people. It must be one that the people can readily relate to.

2. Philosophy of Ubuntu as the Way Out

It is based on this backdrop that the Ubuntu philosophy has become a necessary tool in the Nigerian worldview. Ubuntu is a value system that is known to be found in African communities. Like other values within African communities, it is perceived to have transcended the colonialist rule which changed the landscape of Africa including its socio-cultural makeup (Makoba, 2016). It is also described as the capacity in an African culture to express compassion, reciprocity, dignity, humanity and mutuality in the interests of building and maintaining communities with justice and mutual caring (Makoba, 2016). In the idea of Onwuatuegwu & Okeke (2020), it is the relatedness, the participatory nature of the African that sums up the entire meaning of the African worldview. According to Desmond Tutu, a person is a person through other persons. None of us comes into the world fully

formed. We would not know how to think, or walk, or speak, or behave as human beings unless we learned it from other human beings. We need other human beings in order to be human (Makoba, 2016). This being so, Ubuntu is therefore an imperative for an ailing country like Nigeria.

Consequently, this work is concerned with evaluating the Ubuntu philosophy and how it can serve as a panacea to the socio-cultural, socio-political, economic and religious problems ailing Nigeria as a nation. It also serves as a means to educate the people on the need for mutual love and respect and in so doing curb the menace of terrorism, corruption, religious violence and other insecurities that have besieged Nigeria. This work is a call for unity.

3. Politics

This is probably the most notable sector that needs fixing in Nigeria. The socio-political arena is one that has been in perennial peril and under the siege of selfish and unpatriotic individuals who would rather fatten their wallets and leave the nation and her people in disarray than do the right thing. The point here is that, Nigeria, as Desmond Tutu said must be a 'Rainbow Nation'; this phrase that encapsulates a vision for the future of a Nigeria that is full of possibility and hope. Thus, following up the notion of *ubuntu* which has been central to attempts to build a transformed, just society (Internet source: 2021), this paper looks at the judicial system, terrorism and corruption as case in points when addressing the political situation of Nigeria in the light of Ubuntu

3.1 The Judicial System/Law

Restorative justice is a tradition proper to every indigenous community. In Africa, it is grounded in the moral philosophy known as Ubuntu. It is therefore apt to say that with the reinstatement of distributive justice in the Judicial system and within the spirit of the laws of Nigeria, that justice which ubuntu offers will logically follow.

Furthermore, it is no gainsaying that an effective criminal justice system is fundamental to the maintenance of law and order. But the main shortcoming of the judicial system in Nigeria, especially criminal justice is that:

criminal justice, because it addresses behavioural issues, must be dynamic and proactive. Consequently, many of the provisions are outdated and, in some cases, anachronistic. Besides, the loopholes in the laws and procedure have become so obvious that lawyers are especially in dilatory tactics. It has thus, become increasingly difficult to reach closure of any kind in many criminal cases. Convictions or acquittals have become exceedingly rare (Internet source: 2021).

In the light of this, it is clear as daylight that an urgent reform is necessarily needed in the system. Attorneys and Judges are to stand by again, the oaths of serving justice when and where right, without fear or favour and certainly without any form of bias. This is exactly what ubuntu is about. This is restorative justice. A justice that considers equally, the person, the crime, common good and above all a justice that gives each man what his due is. This is what ubuntu teaches.

3.2 Terrorism

Ubuntu as a way of life and a philosophy is ontologically self-preservative, this means that it has ways of preserving what it entails and doing away with anything that threatens its smooth implementation which include encouragement of human co-existence, spirit of orderliness and co-belongingness. Terrorism in Nigeria is one such threat. In fact, terrorism is at the fore front of what ubuntu is not. However, in Nigeria, terrorism (in the form of Boko Haram and Herdsmen) have frustrated peace and national unity and the government and ruling power have remained so complacent that even the people have lost hope in the government. More so, terrorism has gone on to be used as a political weapon in Nigeria, where getting rid of terrorists is used to earn campaign points, and terrorism is equally used by the very same government to punish the people who they swore to protect.

However, Ubuntu can be the united front that Nigeria needs in the fight against terrorism. Professor Yusef Waghid of Stellenbosch University in his lectures on *Combating Terrorism through Ubuntu* outlines how this is can be done. He said:

This particular case study is to show how one can use the notion of ubuntu, which is very prominent in the idea of an African philosophy of education. In fact, it is the guiding principle of an African philosophy of education, and I want to show how this notion of ubuntu can help us to address the problem of terrorism. So, what does the ubuntu mean? Ubuntu means that through human coexistence and interdependence, which includes the recognition of the other and otherness, we can foster what is understood as co-belonging in a deliberative spirit whereby people engage with one another to resolve the most challenging cases that we are confronted with on the African continent.

And I specifically refer to the Boko Haram issue in northern Nigeria, which is, in fact, an act of terror, because terror is geared towards instilling in people fear. And when people are fearful, they cannot act autonomously, they cannot act independently or think independently, because they are obliged to do certain things which others expect of them to do against their will. So, what the Boko Haram example points out and how is that through inculcating the idea of

human fear in people, their autonomy is undermined. Their sense of authority to exercise their will is being sidelined (Internet source, 2021).

He further explicates:

And how can ubuntu help to combat the notion of human terror or violence is to say that we make a case for human coexistence on the basis of peace and understanding, because it is only through peace and understanding that you can resolve issues and there is no need for violence. So, we will have to confront terror with speech. And speech that is deliberative implies that you would listen to what the other has to say, even if you disagree with the other, even if you might find the other's views condescending or repugnant. By merely listening to people, you would give them an opportunity to engage.

So, through this kind of deliberative inquiry or deliberative engagement, people would be able to listen attentively to what the other has to say, and in this way, you connect with the otherness of the other. And only through that kind of deliberative engagement and expressing your sense of belonging in the same territory, for instance, or belonging to the same cultural tribe, for instance, or belonging to a particular human identity, you can resolve the issue of violence against humanity. So, the Boko Haram terrorism can be resolved if one uses the notion of ubuntu, implying that use the tenets of ubuntu to show as to how fear and a disregard for human agency can be condemned or violated (Internet source: 2021).

3.3 Corruption

Apart from Terrorism, corporate crime and corruption are another canker worm that has continued to bully Nigeria as a nation. This has led many politicians and scholars to have their say on the matter in a bid to at least curb the excessive menace of said corruption in Nigeria. Notably, it was Oby Ezekwesili who, in a roundtable on anti-corruption with Transparency International Nigeria, CISLAC, in Abuja, 2018, said that "Anyone who wants to tackle corruption must be willing to go all the way. There are no shortcuts. Also, as if with Nigeria in mind, Ulla Tonaes opined that corruption in the form of bribery and misuse of public funds is a major obstacle to democracy and economic development in many of the world's poor countries (Internet source; 2021).

Ironically, Nigeria has become even more corrupt under the leadership of a government that has its campaign maxim as "war against corruption." In fact, it was President Muhammadu Buhari (then General Muhammadu Buhari) whose government has ironically overseen the greatest spike of the corruption index, who in his 1984 addresses to members of the Diplomatic corps on the dangers of corruption who said:

The economic plight of the country arising in part from the global economic recession but greatly accentuated by mismanagement and rampant corruption (of the dismissed administration) could not have escaped notice... the ordinary Nigerian who certainly has the fundamental right to live in dignity had become enslaved by a handful of Nigerians whose main interest was not only to perpetuate themselves in office at any cost but also to share among themselves the wealth of the country while the ordinary man wallowed deeper and deeper in misery (Soba; 1996).

This assertion in 1984 by the then General Buhari begs the questions; what could be done to eliminate corruption from the rank and files of Nigerian politics? Why does nothing seem to work in the fight against corruption? In an effort to provide a response to these daunting questions, the words of Segun Osobaprovide a critical perspective thus:

But the main reason for the loss of steam of the Buhari regime's campaign against corruption and indiscipline was the regime's inability to deal effectively with the problem of economic and social decline inherited from the preceding regime. The regime also shot itself on the foot by trying to arrest the country's economic and social decline by doctrinaire and anti-people policies like massive retrenchment of workers in the public service, introduction of many new taxes, levies and fees on citizens, drastic reduction in public expenditure, especially on social welfare and agricultural subsidies, and the widespread destruction of the means of livelihood of small privately employed persons like motor mechanics, food vendors and petty traders by pulling down their makeshift sheds, kiosks and bukas in the name of urban environmental sanitation (Soba; 1996).

From the foregoing, it is immediately clear that while the government may have tried to rid the country of corruption, they have also neglected a large chunk of the people, namely the poor and ordinary people for whom the government must be most compassionate. This is not the ubuntu way. Ubuntu by its very nature leaves no one behind, it has everyone in view, so too its policies. This is why it is the best means through which a reform should be enforced. With Ubuntu, all inclusive policies can be implemented to combat the menace of corruption.

4.0 Religion

It is important to note that among other things, Ubuntu is resiliently religious. The maxim "A person is a person through other persons" has a deeply religious connotation. Thus, at the baseline of Ubuntu, there is a respect and

compassion for others that is not merely courtesy but also religious because the other is not merely seen as an “other”, but as a *religious other* (Internet source; 2021).

In Nigeria, the two major religions are Islam and Christianity. While these two are not exactly African traditional religions, both have within them principles and beliefs that concurrent with the rights of Ubuntu. More so, by virtue of cultural ecumenism they have assimilated African traits. Thus, it is not out of place to say that with them an Ubuntu community can be achieved.

4.1 The Divide Between Christianity and Islam

However, in Nigeria, there is a great rift between Muslims and Christians that make Ubuntu almost impossible. This is down to the division between the two groups wherein both see themselves as different and or less on accounts of their religious affiliations. This has led to various incidents of religious violence, intolerance and outright hatred among members of one nation. Some prominent examples of this violence include those of the KasuwamMagani in 1980, ZangoKataf and Gure-Kahugu in 1987, Kafanchan and Lere in 1987, Ilorin and Jerein 1989, Tafawa Balewa in 1991 as well as that of ZangoKataf in 1992 (Sulaiman) This level of religious conflict requires a remedy that seeks to appreciate and highlight the beauty in both camps and in so doing, find a common ground for both to grow peacefully on.

Ubuntu, being a philosophy that is deeply religious and peace seeking is the perfect remedy to this malady. Christians and Muslims are therefore implored to seek togetherness rather than division as this will be to the benefit of the two groups and also more in keeping with the teachings of both religions. Furthermore, wrong religious orientations, where people are taught differently under different religions, and erroneous indoctrinations must be replaced with mutual respect and tolerance together with the right teachings and indoctrinations. Also to be done away with through Ubuntu, is the mutual suspicion that exists among Nigerians. People must stop thinking that Christianity is an agent of American and European imperialism, or that Muslims have close ties with Saudi Arabia and thus have hidden agenda detrimental to the other.

5.0 Ethnicity

Having more than 200 different ethnic groups and as much different indigenous languages perhaps makes a case for Ubuntu fruitless in Nigeria. These ethnic groups have different ideologies, orientations, spirit of self-preservation that makes them selfish, different cultural and religious beliefs and so many other distinguishing factors. In the spirit of Ubuntu, these differences are not what divides a community but what unifies it. Simply put, these ethnic factions have, at the base of their cultural worldview, the oneness of all people and the spirit of collegiality. Thus, where selfishness and human cruelty does not come into play, these factions love more readily than they hate. This therefore proves that in the midst of the ontically perceivable, there is something that ontologically unites all culture – Ubuntu. This is exactly what Onwuatuegwu I. N. implies in his statement, thus:

The fully human person is in deep and meaningful contact with the world outside of him. He not only listens to himself, but to the voices of the world. The breadth of his own individual experience is infinitely multiplied through a sensitive empathy with others. He suffers with the suffering, rejoices with the joyful (Onwuatuegwu, 2021).

5.1 The Tension Between Different Ethnic Groups

Observably, most developing countries are ethnically diverse, and Nigeria is not an exception. Ethnic diversity may lead to increased civil dissonance and this is clearly the case in Nigeria. While this is the case, it has also been generally agreed that ethnic conflicts are one of the greatest obstacles to meaningful development in African and Nigeria particularly, due to the general negative outcome of the division it causes (Oluwaseun; 2012).

In Nigeria, there is mutual distrust between ethnic groups with everyone seeking to be superior to the others or even to eliminate the other. Confer the genocide of July 1966 which led to the Nigeria Biafra Civil War. In fact, in the aftermath of the war, there has continued to be a deep sitting grievance in the heart of many Nigerians and in recent years, these grievances are cropping up in the forms of incessant terrorist attacks and formation of different armed and terrorist groups the Boko Haram and Fulani Herdsmen.

Ubuntu philosophy is one that propagates community living. As a matter of fact, its very meaning entails a community life. It has the incredible ability of enhancing self and others, erasing all negatives of humane threats. It is a very powerful tool to strengthen community, to communicate through community support, dignity, and identity achieved through mutualism, empathy, generosity, and community commitment (Jolley; 2011). Thus, with ubuntu, Nigerians can gradually grow to embrace the rich diversity in their culture and see one another more as brothers than as traitors, oppressors, victims or enemies.

6. Education

Education is perhaps the surest way to inculcate the spirit of ubuntu in the hearts of every Nigerian citizen. This can be done by making the study of Ubuntu philosophy a necessity in school curriculums. This should start from as

early as the primary level of education. Every child must grow with the maxims of ubuntu always on their lips and a clear understanding of these maxims must always be reiterated.

Ubuntu is especially important in education because, as Nelson Mandela in his *Ubuntu: (Human Kindness) I am, Because you are* said: "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world." Thus, it is not a gainsaying that without education, both formal and informal, no one can learn to be truly human. This point is further accentuated by Bishop Desmond Tutu when he says: "you cannot be human all by yourself." With this in mind, it is now left for parents and teachers to offer to their wards the gift of an unbiased mind in a world filled with bias and unjust prejudices. And for them to do this effectively, they too need to accept, abide and live by the tenets and principles of the Ubuntu philosophy because in the end, no one can give what one has not.

7. Conclusion

The 1999 birthing of a democratic Nigeria created hope for healing and transformation in the nation. However, what has followed since then has been a miserable disintegration of the nation into a politically incompetent, morally bereft and patriotically unwilling nation. Also, rather unwontedly, Nigeria has climbed the infamous ladder of corruption, recently being ranked as one of the most corrupt countries in Africa.

The principles of *ubuntu* which resonate with universal values of human worth and dignity, therefore, provides avenues through which the ubuntu spirit can be used to re-educate the nation. Its application in different areas of the Nigerian lifestyle is sure to provide practical and lasting solutions to the Nigerian worldview.

The significance of Ubuntu philosophy cannot be overemphasized in a country such as Nigeria where humanity seems to be on a constant decline. Hence, this work is offering an approach that could bring about a turnaround in fortunes for the country. It is also not a stopgap measure as it goes all out to address the problem from the roots. This work also offers availability to credible intellectual resources that can direct and educate anyone who reads it. Finally this work provides measures that can be implemented to address pressing national needs in so many sectors of both government and non-governmental settings. It provides measures that can help solve the problems in inter-human relations, cultural differences, insecurities, religious violence and much more.

8. REFERENCES

- <https://intervention.ng/16219/> assessed 22 February 2021.
- <https://voice.transparency.org/10-quotes-about-corruption-and-transparency-vol-2-802020c68574> assessed 21 February 2021.
- <https://www.bu.edu/wcp/papers/afri/afrilouw.htm> assessed 20th February 2021.
- <https://www.futurelearn.com/info/courses/afri-philosophy/0/steps/18268> assessed 20th February 2021.
- https://www.google.com/amp/s/www.capetownmagazine.com/whats-the-deal-with-rainbow-nation/125_22_17853/amp/ assessed 21 February 2021.
- Jolley, D. R. (2011) "Ubuntu: A Person is a Person through Others", Masters Degree Thesis, Southern Utah university.
- Makoba, N. (2016) "Ubuntu: A Phantasmagoria in Rural Kwazulu-Natal" in *Academic Journal of History and Culture*, Vol. 8(5), South Africa, Nov 2016, 41. Online source: <http://www.academicjournals.org/AJHC>
- Oluwaseun, O. (2012) "A Historical Analysis of Ethnic Conflict in Nigeria", Postgraduate Research Paper.
- Onwuatuegwu, I. N. (2021) "An Overview of the Dialogicality of the Interpersonal Relationship With Reference To Martin Buber's Philosophical Approach", *Journal of Research in Humanities and Social Science*, Volume 9, Issue 4, pp: 06-09.
- Onwuatuegwu, I. N. & Okeke, B. T. (2020) "Senghor's Negritude as Foundationalism: A Key to the Affirmation of African Identity", *Sapientia Foundation Journal of Education, Sciences and Gender Studies (SFJESGS)*, Vol. 2, No.3, pp.349-358.
- Soba, S. O. (1996) "Corruption in Nigeria: Historical Perspectives", in *Review of African Political Economy*, Vol. 23, No. 69 (Assessed on 22 February 2021) <https://intervention.ng/16219/>.
- Sulaiman, K. O. in "Religious Violence in Contemporary Nigeria: Implications and Opinions for Peace and Stability Order", *Journal for the Study of Religion*; ISSN: 2413-3027, Vol. 29, p.12.