Ubuntu is under siege: a reflection on the challenges of South Africa then and now

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Abstract

Ubuntu is an African philosophy that has held together African communities for a millennium and its ethics ensures that law and order are maintained across different African communities. This philosophy ensured and still to a degree ensures that conflicts amongst tribal communities are resolved amicably. The poor, widows, and orphans have always existed in Africa. However, *Ubuntu* as a philosophy taught Africans how to treat others with dignity. *Ubuntu* taught Africans that their existence depends on one another. Having mentioned this, the African continent continues to experience a high level of corruption, ethnicity, xenophobia, and intolerance, especially for the LGBQI+ community. Hence, some scholars have concluded that *Ubuntu* is dead and no longer exists, paying more attention to high inter alia crime rates, corruption, xenophobia, ethnic wars, and homophobia. This research argues that despite the challenges Africa faces, *Ubuntu* still exists; however, it has and continues to be under siege due to the legacy of slavery, colonization and apartheid. The research argues that factors that destroy this African philosophy of Ubuntu are the socio-economic factors, which have cost Africans their way of life as they have to 'swim or sink' and, in the process, lose who they are as a people. The research is based on a desk research methodology. It concludes that due to the effects of colonialism and apartheid systems and the challenges that persist post-1994, the teachings of black consciousness the interventions of sectors such as education and religion can enforce the teachings that will enforce values of self-sufficiency. African patriotism, which this research argues can assist in keeping African values such as *Ubuntu* alive.

Keywords: Ubuntu, Africa, reflection, challenges, under-siege.

Introduction

According to African scholars such as Mugumbate and Nyanguru, (2013, p. 84), *Ubuntu* is an African philosophy that teaches that one is human through others. This is generally an African philosophy that exists throughout Africa. The Nguni people in Southern Africa use *Ubuntu* (Mligo, 2021, p. 6). In Zimbabwe, they use the word *Unhu* and *ubuthosi,* whereas Tswana/Sotho people in South Africa, Lesotho, Botswana and other African countries use the word *botho* (Mligo, 2021, p. 6). Other parts of Africa, such as Tanzania, Congo, Angola, Malawi, and Uganda, use the following terms: *bomoto, gimuntu, umunthu, vumuntu* and *umuntu* (Mugumbate & Nyanguru, 2013, p. 84). These different terms speak to one philosophy, *Ubuntu*; hence this research argues

that this is an African philosophy. All of these terms, which are found in different parts of Africa, refers to virtues of sympathy, compassion, benevolence, solidarity, hospitality, generosity, sharing, openness, affirming, availability, kindness, caring, harmony, interdependence, obedience, collectivity, consensus etc. (Mligo, 2021, p. 7). Ramose (1999, p. 35) further says that *Ubuntu* is the root of African philosophy. *Ubuntu* argues Ramose (1999, p.5), is the wellspring flowing from the African ontology and epistemology.

Mbiti (1976, p. 23) elaborates practical ways on how this philosophy of *Ubuntu* is lived out by different Africans when saying: "To visitors, strangers and guests, hospitality means that when a visitor comes to someone's home, family quarrels stop, the sick cheer-up, peace is restored, and the home is restored to new strength. Visitors are, therefore, social healers – they are family doctors in a sense." Mokhutso (2022, p. 6) further notes that the essence of *Ubuntu* is to promote the common good of society. Mokhutso (2022, p. 7) posits that at the heart of *Ubuntu* lies this critical thought which is well captured by Nussbaum (2003, p. 2) when saying:

> Your pain is my pain
> My wealth is your wealth
> Your salvation is my salvation.

In essence, *Ubuntu* is a philosophy that teaches individuals to focus on themselves, their peace, wealth and health. Broodryk (2002, p. 19) speaks about the core values of *Ubuntu* as follows; Humanness, caring, sharing, respect and compassion. These are values taught to children and expected to be lived out in African communities. *Ubuntu* instead says that when we are all well, that's much better for the common good of all. Nicolaides (2014; 2015) posits that in pre-colonial African society, *Ubuntu* sustained social unity managed peace and order for the beautiful life of everyone, including strangers. Nussbaum (2003, p. 23) furthermore expands on what *Ubuntu* is when saying that "Ubuntu is the capacity in African culture to express compassion, reciprocity, dignity, harmony, and humanity, to build and maintain the community with justice and mutual caring." This is on the backdrop that, for Africans, what matters is not necessarily an individual, by the family or community (Mokhutso, 2022:7). Masango (2006, p. 939) adds that this philosophy teaches African people that you cannot live your life on your own; to live life fully, one needs other people who will, in turn, make one live life to the fullest. Maris (2020, p. 315) further adds that:

> According to the African philosophy of life, the individual knows himself
> and the surrounding world through his community. He is, therefore, part of
> a larger whole. In order to reach the status of a person one has to go
> through a number of ceremonial rites of passage. As long as you have not
> yet been initiated into the community and its values, you are only an "it".

Ubuntu is thus an African word for the universal concept of the 'golden rule' of 'love thy neighbour' (Nicolaides, 2014, p. 19). Due to colonization, and apartheid, many cultural practices Africans upheld, were diluted, and some were lost as their worldview expanded by the suppression, domination and development that came with the colonizers. John (2014, p. 21) defines other factors that changed the way Africans lived when saying that the reins of exalted traditional government and institution were overwhelmingly taken from African rulers by European colonialists who appointed themselves as masters over the Africans. It is said that Africans who resisted the European infiltration and inhumanity were dealt with ruthlessly. Mbiti (1969, p. 128)

showcase the ruthlessness by adding that other African rulers were exiled and killed during this period.

John (2014, p. 21) adds to what made things worse for the African people when saying these European invaders to realize their objectives effectively; they had to establish themselves on the continent of Africa by introducing and imposing on Africans their religious, political, economic, social, linguistic and administrative systems, thereby upstaging the hitherto familiar, noble and enviable African institutions. Ziltener (2019, pp. 299 - 302) elaborates that amongst other things, the development brought by colonization is economic developments through trade, education, the building of property, roads and health system, to mention a few. Matolino and Kwindingwi (2013, p. 199) further say that during colonialism and the apartheid era, black people and their values were significantly undermined.

Critical but stable, the state of *Ubuntu* today

Scholars such as Matolino and Kwindingwi (2013:198) are well known in academia for their argument that African society has changed drastically over the years. They have concluded that *Ubuntu* values are outdated and not relevant anymore (Matolino & Kwindingwi, 2013, p. 198). Matolino and Kwindingwi's (2013, p. 198) is summarised in the following manner:

> Their main criticism of Ubuntu, based on a perception that it is a mere "narrative of return", comprises the view not only that Ubuntu has become obsolete, but also that there is nothing authentically African about it. Their criticisms of Ubuntu seem to run as follows: first; Ubuntu fosters conformity. By this they intend to argue that Ubuntu supports the framework of collectivism, and as a consequence any alternative frame of mind is automatically rejected (Koenane & Olatunji, 2017, p. 264).

Magoso (2020, p. 76), when summarizing this debate, highlights that criticisms on *Ubuntu*, amongst other things, is the fact that no system or ideology is ever perfect from inception. Masango (2006, p. 934) also adds to this debate that *Ubuntu,* despite it being such a beautiful African philosophy, many challenges persist in Africa when saying:

> As African people face these challenges of women and child abuse, they were forced to re-examine where the concept of Ubuntu broke down. In other words, they need to analyze the way they are raising their children in theses modern times. In today's society, the question they need to ask is, is the village failing or has it collapsed in its African structure of caring and nurturing children? They also need to dig deep into their African concept of spirituality, checking whether it is helpful in building the nation to its original way of living and respecting each other as they did before. The above challenges of abuse and violence in South African society are deeply rooted in the yearning of understanding that they are in relation to other human beings.

Africa faces many challenges, such as the high rate of corruption, violent crimes like rape, murder, xenophobia and homophobia, etc. All these bring to question whether *Ubuntu* exists and if it does, is it still a lived experience of the African people?

Ubuntu still exists but has evolved

Eliastam (2015, p. 5) argues that *Ubuntu* is in a state of transition and needs redefinition. Eliastam (2015, p. 5) argues that *Ubuntu* has gone through five stages of transition, namely:

> Stage 1: A period in which Ubuntu was defined as a human quality.
> Stage 2: A period in which Ubuntu was defined as something connected
> to, or identical to, a philosophy or an ethic.
> Stage 3: A period in which Ubuntu was defined as African humanism.
> Stage 4: A period in which Ubuntu was defined as a worldview.
> Stage 5: A period in which Ubuntu was defined as something
> connected to the proverb *'umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu'*

Eliastam ((2015, p. 5) argues that *Ubuntu* exists, and at the same time, it does not exist. Eliastam's (2015, p. 5) point is that *Ubuntu* is alive and dead too; it is seen and not seen. *Ubuntu* exists tightly interwoven with un-ubuntu. Eliastam (2015, p. 5) argues further that *Ubuntu* exists, although it has been deeply impacted by many challenges Africans have gone through. Eliastam (2015, p. 5) elaborates on these points when saying:

> The erosion of Ubuntu could be understood by referring to a number of
> forces that have impacted on traditional African culture. Colonialism,
> apartheid, globalisation, and the encroachment of materialism,
> individualism, and consumerism have all played a role in shaping
> contemporary African culture. Part of their legacy is surely this weakening
> and distortion of the meaning and practice of Ubuntu. Tragically, this
> erosion is part of and arises from a broader, sustained assault on African
> culture and identity from colonialism and racism. Within the fabric of what
> could be viewed as normal social change are woven the often-dominant
> threads of gross systemic evil perpetuated against black African people
> over sustained periods.

Having noted all the above, this research argues that *Ubuntu* still exists in Africa, and at the same time, it doesn't exist as argued by Eliastam (2015, p. 5) argues; how? It can be argued that *Ubuntu* doesn't exist when reflecting on the media reports on stories of ethnic conflicts, racial tensions, corruption, and high crime rates. Broodryk (2007, p. 45) argues that post-apartheid era, what led to a smooth transition to a democratically elected government was due to a strong presence of *uBuntu* which reigned in the hearts and minds of the black African people. Broodryk (2007, p. 45) says this was the case because *uBuntu* embraces peace and negotiation. Again, one may also argue that *Ubuntu* still exists. This is because, amid the negative stories in Africa, there are also many *ubuntu* stories experienced by many individuals. Solomons (2022) shares a story of a Cape Town man named Allistair Pedro who has volunteered to give them fresh haircuts cut 20 kids free of charge. Pijoos (2022) shares a story of a Warrant officer Roderick Middlekamp who went out of his way to assist a pregnant mother to deliver her at home around 04h20 am. Solomons (2022) shares another story of a Camps Bay named Struan Jamieson, who risked his life as a swimmer who was saved from the currents of Clifton beach. These are a few *ubuntu* stories that affirm that *Ubuntu* still exists. However, it remains a reality that *Ubuntu* is under siege, and that's a fact this research seeks to argue.

The formation and history of South African townships

The reality of the colonial and apartheid system is that it did not have the interests of black African people in mind. Colonialism is instead a system that was intended to promote the interests of the white minority at the expense of the black majority. This meant black African people's standard of living was of a lesser quality as they were 'squashed' into townships established mainly for the African black working class.

These townships were places where black people were overcrowded and lived in tiny government houses. Pernegger and Godehart (2007, p. 3) elaborates that townships were created initially as areas for blacks and were allocated outside towns and cities. These townships had low-income houses, which were generally not fully functional, and informal settlements. These areas are characterized by inadequate community facilities, commercial investment levels, a high rate of unemployment, low household incomes, and poverty. The name 'township' used in the discussions is deemed to include any of these target areas (Pernegger & Godehart, 2007, p. 3). The colonist's plan was intended to deliberately spatially segregate three classes of citizens, which generally coincided with race groups: the white, colonial elite (wealthy), the colonized middle-class, which are people of Indian descend and some Africans working in the colonial bureaucracy, (middle-class) the urban majority of Africans working for the elite (poor). The African working-class townships or 'locations' were deliberately planned away from the colonial towns. However, few townships were built (Pernegger & Godehart, 2007). Most large townships were built after 1950 by the apartheid government or saw significant expansion after this period.

The entire non-white urban population was forced to live in townships through the enforcement of the Group Areas Act of 1950 and other pieces of town planning legislation which determined the strict separation of race groups by stipulating, for example, that: "Each race group should have its consolidated residential area. Each residential group area should be separated by a strong physical "buffer" such as a river or ridge or by use of a buffer such as an industrial or commercial area. Should buffers of this kind not be available, then an open space or "buffer zone" was to be left between-group areas" (Pernegger & Godehart, 2007). These regulations and massive housing programmes undergird the creation of townships, as well as shaped South African cities. Townships, in their nature, were meant to be places of exclusion and control of African residents who were containment. How townships were built were generally linked to the city centre and industrial areas with a single deliberate road and possibly one railway line built to easily be blocked in cases of social unrest (Pernegger & Godehart, 2007). Hutchinson (2021, p. 19) shares the purpose of the Apartheid regime when saying:

> Apartheid, for instance, utilized multiple laws that prevented native Africans from marrying outside of their race, owning land, and even the amount of education that they could receive. These limitations existed beyond apartheid in South Africa and Namibia, and limited the process of development in many ways, including land ownership and access to health care in the twentieth century.

This is a backdrop in which townships were developed, which precisely demonstrates the aim of the colonizers and the apartheid system. This history is vital in understanding the argument this research seeks to bring forth that there has been, from the onset, a deliberate move by the colonizers and the apartheid system to uproot and undermine the identity of the black African people.

From enslavement to colonialism

Scholars such as Bertocchi (2016, p. 2) and Nunn (2008, p. 2) argue that better understand the challenges of underdevelopment, crime, bribery, and theft, one has first to investigate the period of the slave trade in Africa. Nunn (2008, p. 2) goes further to say that Africa's underdevelopment is characterised by two events, namely, the slave trade and colonialism.

Bertocchi (2016, p. 2) says four waves of slavery between 1400 – 19: the trans-Saharan, Indian ocean, Red sea, and trans-Atlantic slave trades. Nunn (2008, p. 4) argues that the largest and well known of the four waves of slavery is the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Bertocchi (2016, p. 2) explains the trans-Saharan slave trade having taken people from the sub-Saharan regions to Northern Africa, whilst the Indian ocean and the red sea trades took people from Eastern Africa and delivered them to different parts of Asia. The two scholars (Brtocchi 2016, p. 2 and Nunn 2008, p. 2) argue that slavery in Africa was the beginning of many challenges in Africa today, like weak and politically fragmented states and ethnic fractionalization and poor judicial institutions.

To give a few practical examples that led to the fragmentation of African communities, Africans raided other African communities during the days of slavery. In the process, relations between different African communities turned hostile and destroyed the established codes of conduct concerning warfare that had promoted peace during this period (Nunn, 2008, p. 5). Nunn (2008, p.6) argues that this was the beginning of ethnic animosity amongst different ethnic groups in Africa. Due to this rivalry, African communities looked for ways to protect themselves, which required knives, spears, swords, firearms, etc. They had to do so, and gave Europeans kidnapped slaves in exchange for needed weapons. As a result of this vicious cycle, African communities not only raided each other for enslaved people, but this included other members of the community raided and kidnapped by others within the same communities (Nunn, 2008, p. 6). Bertocchi (2016, pp. 2,3) further elaborates saying that enslaved Africans were collected by kidnapping by fellow Africans, and this led to local wars. Bertocchi (2016, p.3) expounds when saying that all of these practices were a result of a demand by the Europeans;

> The captives were then sold to foreign traders, together with gold and ivory, in exchange for imported goods including firearms, causing the so-called gun-slave cycle which fueled the perpetuation of the slave trade for centuries. In turn, the incentive to purchase slaves on the part of the Europeans rested in the need to collect manpower for the expansions of the plantation economies being developed in South and Central America after Columbus, to satisfy the quickly increasing taste in Europe for colonial goods such as tobacco and sugar.

Europeans took advantage of this community rivalry when slave merchants and raiders formed strategic alliances with key groups inside different villages or states with the primary purpose of extracting enslaved people. Accordingly, the alliances were with the younger men who were taken advantage of because they were generally frustrated by the control of power by the male elders in different communities. The consequences of internal conflict and insecurity increased the political instability and, in many cases, the collapse of pre-existing forms of government (Nunn, 2008, p. 7). Bertocchi (2016, p. 5) argues that perhaps the culture of mistrust in different ethnic groups in Africa started during this time when Africans raided each other, thereby breaking the bonds upon which trust was built. Lastly, Nunn (2008, p. 9) adds that the African judicial institutions were also manipulated by the demand of slavery when saying, "communities began

enslaving their own. Judicial penalties that formerly had taken the form of beatings, payment of compensation or exile, for example, were now converted to enslavement."

In many cases, leaders themselves supported or instigated this judicial system abuse. Nunn (2008) and Bertocchi (2016) highlight that many things started going wrong in Africa during colonialism, and way before that period, the values and unity in Africa started crumbling during this period of slavery. Nunn (2008, p.2) concludes that African countries that are the poorest are the ones from which the most enslaved people were taken.

Colonialism and apartheid's impact

Seroto (2018, p. 6) notes that colonization started between 1652 – 1910. One can only imagine the impact of this many years of colonization on the African mind and identity. Furthermore, Hutchinson (2021, p. 19) adds that the colonizers saw themselves as superior in all aspects, and their mission was to develop the 'inferior' natives. Hutchinson (2021, p. 47) further notes that the education system that was provided for the black people at the time was of an inferior quality.

Later on, black people were given what was called Bantu education after the famous speech of Hendrick Verwoerd in 1948 (Hutchinson, 2021, p. 46). The purpose of the Bantu education was:

> Bantu Education was the first to prioritize mass schooling for the general black South African population, however the institution was miserable in terms of funding, curriculum, and teacher/student retention.212 The lack of available classes to create a skilled labor force affected the number and quality of teachers. In 1961, a sheer 10 percent of black South African teachers possessed the equivalent of a high school diploma, and in 1967, the teacher student ratio was 58 to 1. In 1953, only 14 percent was spent on black education compared to that of white children, and by 1968, spending on black education dropped to 6 percent.215. By 1970, 79 percent of urban black South Africans and 93 percent of rural black South Africans had not finished standard six, or the American equivalent of sixth grade. The year 1976 marked a turning point for the advancement of education in South Africa (Hutchinson, 2021, p. 46).

Over the years, the legacy of colonization and apartheid has led to racial inequality and poverty, mainly amongst the black Africans. Buffet (2017, p. 9) elaborates on this reality when saying the poor are not poor because they are inherently lazy. Buffet (2017, p. 9) argues that poverty is entrenched in societal structures. Buffel (2017, p. 7) refers to this inequality as a reality of a divided country and economy. Turok (2011, p. 3) reflects on this reality when saying, "As you fly in, you see the impressively tall buildings, and then you land and see spaza shops, hawkers in the street and masses of impoverished people". The consequences of many years of colonialism and apartheid left black African people traumatized, illiterate and poor, also living with the scars still visible today when looking at the high rate of crime in the townships of South Africa. Overcrowding, recreation and lack of economic opportunities have become a breeding ground for crime, violence, drug and alcohol abuse in the townships of South Africa.

The Minister of Police Bheki Cele (2022) summarized crime report Crime stats in South Africa.

Crime Category	Figures
Murder From a sample of 5 176 cases it was determined that a total of 2 424 people were murdered in public places such as streets, open field, parking areas and abandoned buildings. Between July 2021 to end of September 2021, 6 163 people were killed in South Africa.	20.7%
Sexual Offences 9 556 people were raped between July and September 2021.	4.7%
Attempted Murder	4.4%
Assault to do grievous bodily harm 72 762 cases of common assault and assault GBH were opened with the police in the three months of reporting.	2.1%

*These are a South African Minister of Police Bheki Cele 2021/2022 Crime Stats
report snippets.*

Maluleke (2021) gives statistics of unemployment figures in South Africa in the following manner:
(BusinessTech, 2021) reports that Statistics South Africa reported that the number of employed
persons decreased by 660,000 a report presented in the third quarter of the year 2021 to 14.3
million. Despite the changes in the employment statistics, the number of unemployed has
increased drastically by 05% from 34.4% - 34.9%, the highest since 2008.

South Africa's **unemployment rate increased** by 0,5 of a percentage point to **34,9%** in Q3:2021 compared to Q2:2021.
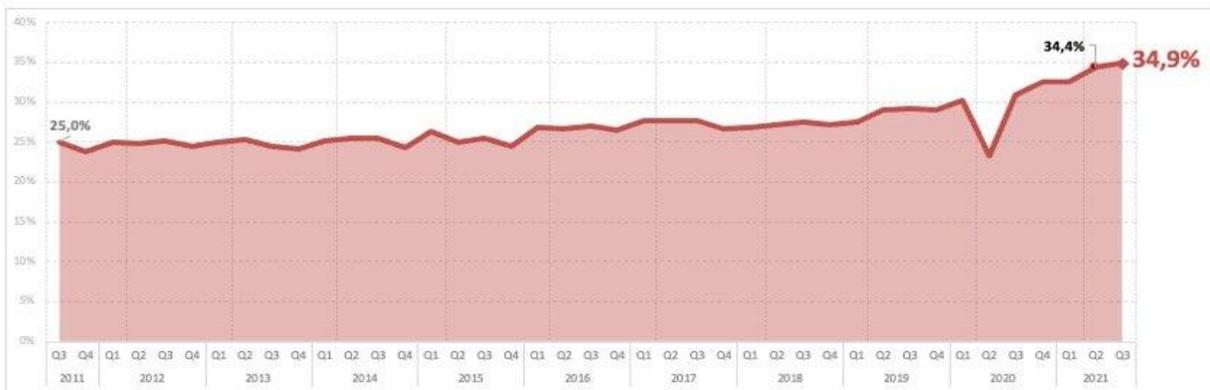
The table above shows the unemployment statistics in South Africa have reached their peak since 2008. However, what is interesting in these stats is that they are not specific in terms of gender and racial differences. Statistic South Africa (2021) records that unemployment amongst women is at 36,8%, which is much higher than that of their male counterpart, which is 32,4%. However, the unemployment amongst black African women is 41,0% compared to white women at 8,2%, Indian, Asian and coloured women 29,9% (Statistics South Africa, 2021). The graph below showcases different racial groups' unemployment statistics by different racial groups in South Africa (Statistics South Africa, 2021). The graph does showcase that the majority of the unemployed are black African people compared to other racial groups. Blackburn (1991, p. 20) attest to this when saying unemployment levels are higher among black people. This is caused by individual and institutional racism, which reduces the employment prospect of black people regardless of their qualifications and level of skills.
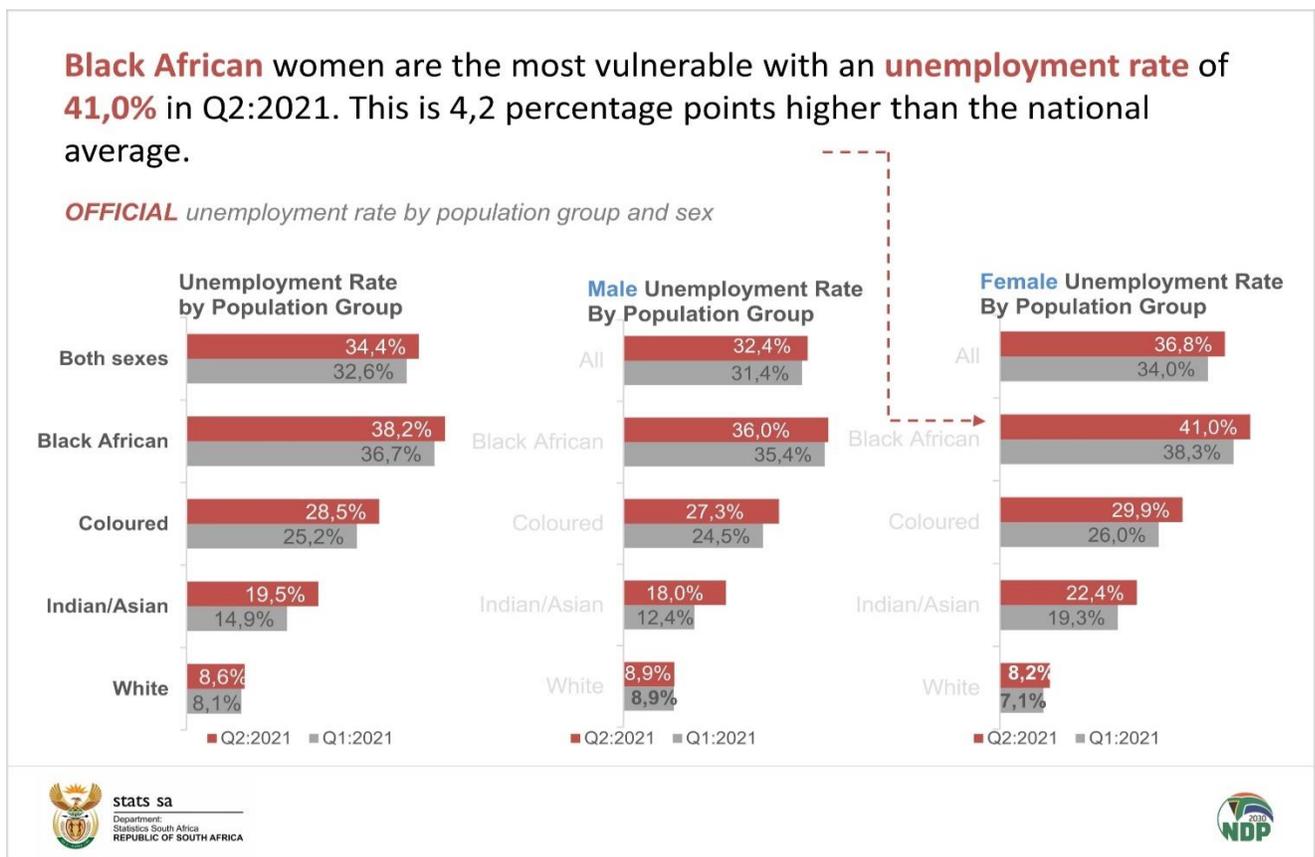
Lack of economic opportunities has led many black people to be desperate. Buffel (2017, p. 5) adds that this has led to the desperation of black Africans having been promised better life by the democratically elected government of South Africa. Buffel (2017, p. 5) explains the cause of this desperation, rage, and anger that many black people have post-1994 when saying:

> Since 1994 the government has repeatedly emphasised its 'pro-poor' policy focus and its determination to bring about a 'better life for all'. 41 Unfortunately promises of 'better life for all' have not yet materialised. The South African dream had failed to materialise, the dream had been deferred, as Mbeki stated in some of his speeches. Mbeki said: "We are

faced with the danger of a mounting rage to which we must respond seriously". He said that he was haunted by the nightmare of a seething majority that would boil over into rebellion because its liberation had been deferred rather than redeemed.

Buffel (2017, p. 6) elucidates that a better life for all that the democratically elected government promises remain an illusion for millions of the poor in townships, informal settlements and rural areas. This problem is twofold. Firstly, to survive, many resort to selling cheap drugs found in many townships of South Africa. Secondly, others succumb to the sad reality of lack of economic opportunities and resort to smoking away their sorrow by using cheap drugs found in different townships of South Africa. There is a growing number of drug users in black South African townships. Mthembi et al. (2019, p. 187) confirm this when saying that these cheap drugs that have eroded townships in South Africa have increased amongst the young black African and coloured communities. Mthembeni (2019, p. 187) further says that this often results in young males turning to theft, losing their jobs and dropping out of school. Cheap drugs are also known by different names within different townships of South Africa. Conway-Smith (2013) adds that these cheap drugs are called *nyaope,* and in some townships are also called "*whoonga*," which is the street drug ravaging South Africa's impoverished townships. Cheap and highly addictive, the drugs include marijuana, low-grade heroin and other additives like rat poison and antiretrovirals used to treat HIV. The *nyaope* users, primarily poor, often resort to criminal activities to sustain their drug habit, including stealing anything valuable to lay their hands on a fix. Mthembeni (2019, p. 187) says this *nyaope* is said to be a mixture that:

> …contains heroin in combination with cannabis and other adulterants which may include phenacetin (PNT), caffeine, efavirenz (EFV), dextromethorphan (DTM) and nevirapine (NVP) [5,6]. Street samples of heroin have been shown to contain diamorphine (DAM) together with acetylcodeine (ACOD) and 6-monoacetylmorpine (6- MAM)[5–7]. The combination of heroin, cannabis and antiretroviral (ARV) drugs may be prepared by the drug dealers or mixed together by the users of the drugs themselves resulting in a mixture of powder and plant material.

The poverty and desperation of many black African South Africans are also visible in the ongoing protests where people show their displeasure over lack of effective service delivery in areas such as clean, stable water supply, electricity, and economic opportunities to make ends meet. Vhumbunu (2021) argues that the continuous protests in South Africa result from frustrated South Africans with ever-worsening poverty, unemployment, crime, corruption, and food insecurity. Vhumbunu (2021) reflects on the July 2021 protests that engulfed the whole of Kwazulu Natal and some parts of South Africa, fueled by deep-rooted and acute socio-economic challenges facing poor, hungry and frustrated citizens, mainly in the townships, which provided fertile ground for social unrest. In South Africa, protests have become a constant occurrence, and during this process, foreign businesses are usually looted and burned, and at times some foreign individuals are assaulted. In some cases, foreigners are being murdered, arguing that they are in the country to take job opportunities away from South Africans. Human Rights Watch (2020) elucidated on the growth of the problem and based their report on interviews conducted with 51 participants in the Western Cape, Gauteng, and KwaZulu-Natal provinces. The report says xenophobic harassment and attacks by South Africans, including government and law enforcement officials, between March 2019 and March 2020 has been staggering. The report also says mobs of angry

rioters throughout South Africa have attacked and harassed non-nationals, blaming them for unemployment, crime, neglect by the government, among other things.

Politics and poor governance

Pillay (2004, p. 587 citing Kaufman *et al.* 1999) describe governance as:
- "traditions and institutions by which authority in a country is exercised for [the] common good". This includes: this comprises of the process by which governments are selected and replaced.
- The efforts by the government to formulate and implement sound policies effectively; and
- the respect and trust of citizens in the institutions that govern economic and social interactions.

Again, the other challenge many South Africans face is a lack of service delivery and governance. Corruption cases in the country are growing by the day. Pillay (2004, p. 586) argues that South Africa is quickly learning that corruption is one of the major impediments to effective development. It seems like as long as there is money, someone will always want to have a piece of it, says Pillay (2004, p. 586). This was the case during Nelson Mandela's funeral and ex-wife Winnie Mandela, who are hailed worldwide as icons. The other period was during the early days of the Covid-19 pandemic when people were dying like flies, monies that were meant to bring relief were stolen.

Governance has been a challenge in South Africa; hence Pillay (2004, p. 590) says corrupt practices threaten and undermines the growth and stability of the global trade and financial system. This is especially applicable in emerging and developing economies. Corruption tends to thrive when emerging economies open their doors to foreign investment and trade. There are many service delivery protests due to a lack of service delivery. This is evident with the roads full of potholes and is generally in a bad state. The quality of drinking water is low, health facilities are overwhelmed, and there are still areas where the former apartheid bucket system is still used. Corruption and lack of service delivery add to the high unemployment level as businesses close down and low investor confidence.

A disfigured African identity

Disfiguring the African identity did not start with only the colonial and apartheid systems (Bertocchi, 2016, p. 2 and Nunn, 2008, p. 4). The aftermaths of colonialism and apartheid have been inequality. Many African black people in South Africa are still experiencing the evil that the colonial and apartheid system aimed to achieve, which is to uplift the lives of white minority people and degrade the lives of the majority African black people. Again, post-1994, the democratically elected government is infused with a lack of governance, service delivery, corruption, and greed, which further disfigure the African identity. African people find themselves left with nothing else to do but to survive. Odendaal (2012, p. 13) posits that indigenous people had been subjugated, enslaved, deprived of their land and freedom, even in places exterminated, all in the name of Western civilization and progress. Black African people are just surviving in their land of plenty, but their lives leave much desired. Mtose (2008, p. 207) elaborates on the disfiguring black African identity when saying:

> From the empirical work, black identity has firstly been constructed in binary opposition to whiteness. In this historical encounter black identity discourses of the past have been used to construct black identity as inferior to white identity. For example, discourses of blacks as poor, lazy, dirty, failures, and so on have been used. These discourses create an inferior black subject positioning in relation to the superior white subject positioning. This dichotomy of black/white has also been carried through by the use of stereotypes in black identity construction. The stereotypes in this analysis play a major role in maintaining this dependency and inferiority in black identity construction.

The spirit of *Ubuntu* is slowly dying because those who have opportunities want to eat with their friends and families alone. Again, when hungry, who will think of others? As taught by Ubuntu, in eating with friends and family, others don't matter anymore. Greed is reflected through many corruption cases, where individuals want to accumulate as much as they can irrespective of how many are disadvantaged in the process. It is no longer about community, and *I am because you belong*. It is more about looting as much as I can to fill my stomach. The growth of cheap drugs in townships has nothing to do with destroying the nation, and it is about making ends meet at whatever cost. Cases of xenophobic attacks show that humanness, caring, respect is declining; worse, when talking about xenophobia, it is often towards black African foreigners, not of Asia or European origin. Dolamo (2017, p. 1) adds that in the 400 years of colonialism, black South Africans have experienced significant losses: life and limb, land, dignity and pride, self-respect, *botho/Ubuntu*, culture, religion, political freedom and self-determination, self-reliance, and so on. Rao (2019) concludes that African people hate themselves. Rao (2019) refers to a phenomenon of skin bleaching when sharing the following staggering statistics;

> Statistics compiled by the World Health Organisation in 2011 showed that 40% of African women bleach their skin. In some countries the figure is higher: a staggering 77% of women in Nigeria, 59% in Togo, 35% in South Africa, 27% in Senegal and 25% in Mali use skin-lightening products. The skin-lightening phenomenon is a nuanced one, says Ms. Mtero, adding that "whiteness has been elevated and presented as a universal standard of progress. When people say it's about whiteness, it's not necessarily to physically be white, it's about wanting to access things white people have easy access to—privileges, economic and social status.

Rao (2019) highlights how intense Africans have internalised hate towards themselves. Again this speaks to Africans trying to survive because, amongst other benefits of skin bleaching, it is said that in some quarters, the lighter your skin is, the higher the prospects of finding a job. The reality is with all the challenges black African people have experienced they have become individualistic, and violent because of a small pie they all want a piece of. With an empty stomach and lack of favourable conditions the majority of black Africans finds themselves with low or no wages, poor water quality, unreliable electricity, lack of suitable sanitation, sewarage running everywhere, poor health, education, and poor schooling facilities. *Ubuntu* is slowly becoming a thing of the past, and an irrelevant way of life under these conditions. The teachings of *ubuntu* of sharing, care, and being considerate of the other are slowly eroding as black Africans adjust their lives to the unberable challenges they are faced with in the current status quo. Nonetheless, Nicolaides (2016, p.3) argues that:

> Ubuntu is a plausible African moral theory and is compatible with various ethical theories including the common good approach, the utilitarian approach, the rights ethical or deontological approach, the justice or fairness approach and the virtue approach. The greatest parallel is with the common good approach which is endorsed collectively in a range of common values and moral or ethical principles that exist in virtually all societies.

Recommendations

African Patriotism

Black Africans should not only be observers or consumers in the world. It is high time the black African people stop giving over their lives to others to do as they please. Black Africans should be proud of their culture, heritage, their pigmentation and find ways to preserve their African culture. Having been exposed to colonialism and apartheid, it is time for Africa to reclaim their heritage as Africans. The narrative about decoloniality is amongst other ways African scholars argue that Africans have a worldview that deserves to be heard, known, and contribute to the world. African people should note that no one can or will seek to preserve and embrace their cultural practices other than themselves.

Self-reliance and black consciousness

The reality is that no one else from anywhere will best intervene in the challenges that face Africa today. The economic, political and other challenges facing Africa are busy disfiguring the identity of the African people. Instead, Africa has become a 'beggar of the world' and seems helpless to solve its own problems. Africans should know that nobody will face their issues head-on other than Africans themselves. An example is vaccines for Covid-19; Africa waited for the European countries to produce vaccinations instead of producing vaccines for themselves. In the process, billions of dollars were spent on procuring Covid-19 vaccines, and many Africans have not vaccinated the majority of their citizens. Pillay (2004, p. 590) adds that eradicating corruption depends on impartial democratic institutions, open elections, and unfettered access to information. Success also requires leadership and active participation by citizens in all the affairs that affect them. This should be done by promoting integrity in government and the marketplace to improve the global governance climate, nurture long-term growth, and extend prosperity benefits to all people. Perhaps this calls for a renewal of the teachings of black consciousness, which aim to revive a positive attitude in the minds of black African people who have undergone horrendous oppression, and who were taught to hate their languages, culture, religion, skin colour, and hate anything black and African. Black consciousness teaches black Africans to embrace their blackness and rid themselves of servitude and inferiority complex (Biko, 1978, p. 92).

Contributions of other sectors of society

African people are very religious, and the religious sector, which is still influential and essential in Africa, can play a role in sensitizing as well as coming up with programs that can equip communities to safeguard their African identity which will keep those African values that have kept

Africa, its forefathers/mothers going over the years. Buffet (2017, p. 10) adds to the role the Church and other religious groups played during the Apartheid days when saying:

> The role that black theologians and clergy played in the past enhanced the relevance of the Church in a context of political repression, poverty and oppression. As they opposed apartheid and ministered to victims of apartheid they had strong organisational links with the masses and with organisations of the masses, as they held hands with masses and endured the teargas that was unleashed on the demonstrating masses and those who were grieving their deceased at funerals. The prophetic activists, clergy and theologians were fearless in the face of possibilities of detention, torture, banning orders, exile and even death. It is the prophetic role of these church leaders and theologians that helped in the process of articulating black theological reflection in the context of racism and oppression. Some of these prophets joined the civil service, some retired, some became managers of academic institutions and others joined BEE companies. The departure to different sectors robbed South Africa of its most articulate liberation theologians and public theologians who could appeal to people of all persuasions.

Buffet (2017, p. 10) argues that post-1994, organizations such as the South African Council of Churches (SACC) became weak, ecumenical bodies stopped being prophetic but instead focused on forming relationships with the ANC government. That, according to Buffet, has cost the black African masses and have contributed to the ruling government doing as they please. Active citizen participation is an essential ingredient in any democratic dispensation because it ensures that the country's government remains "on track" and that public officials serve the general welfare of society (Auriacombe, 1999). To this end, the South African constitution contains several mechanisms to ensure that government will be part of the solution than being part of the problem African people are facing. The education sector, as well as the program of decolonization, is paramount. The educational sector should equip Africans with the tools they are familiar with by drawing from their African indigenous knowledge system. This is more so as argued by Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013, pp. 177 - 195) when saying schools, colleges, universities, and churches in Africa are sites for reproducing every kind of coloniality. The narrative and worldview in many of these institutions Ndlovu – Gatsheni (2013, pp. 177 – 195) which is Eurocentric and not fully embracing the African context. Again, the education sector can equip Africans to be critical of what is happening in their environment and contribute meaningfully. Traditional leaders also, have a role to play in society as well. Township and rural community dwellers are also citizens of South Africa and deserve the best services and opportunities, just like any other citizen.

Conclusion

Ubuntu is under siege because it is one of the fundamental values that underpin African identity. However, this research has attempted to demonstrate that black African people are 'gasping for air' to survive the impact of colonialism and apartheid. Again, to live with the empty promises the democratically elected government of South Africa keeps on making is unbearable. The black African identity is being disfigured, and the black African people have been taught to hate themselves, look down and undermine their languages, culture and way of life by the prior colonial and apartheid systems. Post-1994, the democratically elected government has continued to not

only disappoint but make their socio-economic factors even worse. A disfigured black African identity breeds self-hate, which manifests itself in corruption, resulting from entitlement irrespective of who else is disadvantaged in the process. High rates of violent crimes occur in townships, and xenophobia has a black African face. During service delivery protests, essential infrastructures such as schools, hospitals, clinics, even University infrastructures and libraries are destroyed. All these are manifestations of a wounded society; hence other scholars have argued that *Ubuntu* is dead. This research views this; differently, *Ubuntu* is still well and alive; however, the perpetual pain, lack, and poverty that black African people have faced 27 years into democracy is the main culprit that puts *Ubuntu* under siege.

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