

# Ubuntu: A Literature Review

A Paper Prepared for the Tutu Foundation

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November 2008  
London

This literature review was commissioned by the Tutu Foundation in the UK to help identify the key elements of the concept of ubuntu, and how it has been applied in the context of community development work and other related fields in South Africa and elsewhere. It is hoped that this review of relevant literature will:

- help clarify the Foundation's thinking around the concept of ubuntu
- help the Foundation think through how it might use ubuntu as an approach to shape and guide its work with communities
- inform the development of practical tools to be used for the purposes of planning, monitoring and evaluating community development activities
- provide material that can be used and adapted for purposes of the Foundation (papers, articles, website, etc).
- help the Foundation understand the characteristics of a community that is practising ubuntu, and what this looks like. In other words how does ubuntu manifest itself in practice?

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## **A. INTRODUCTION**

There is a wide cross-section of literature that sheds light on ubuntu - what it is, its role and its impact. This literature seems to have grown and diversified since the end of apartheid. While the bulk of this work is concerned with South Africa it also draws on the experience of cultures across sub-Saharan Africa and the wider debates around African humanism. There is no clear disciplinary focus to this work. Reference to ubuntu and its role and impact can be found in journals concerned with philosophy, biology, management, theology, community development, political sciences, linguistics, literary criticism, health care studies, and even engineering. Although surprisingly few in the area of international relations or development studies.

The term ubuntu is now possibly best known internationally as the name of the Linux-based operating system used to distribute software. Linux operating systems are open source, which means that anyone can do what they want with them - for free. It's a concept of sharing that is quite rare in the closed world of computer software distribution, but is one that has been inspired by the philosophy of ubuntu - thus the name. The speed at which this open, shared system has spread has given the word "ubuntu" much greater global prominence than might be expected for such an indigenous philosophy. In so doing it has created a global interest in the concepts and values that are implicit in the term ubuntu.

Finally one should also be aware that in South Africa ubuntu is one of those protean terms that has been adopted by a variety of institutions and events in their attempt to capture the spirit of ubuntu and give them greater credence. For example, the Ubuntu Food Distribution Company or the Ubuntu Training and Management Consultants. There are ubuntu leadership conferences and ubuntu loans. There is an Ubuntu School of Philosophy in Pretoria and the Ubuntu Wellness Centre in Cape Town, While the web-site of Ubuntu Records advertises regular "Ubuntu music events" which they run with resident "Ubuntu DJs".

## **B. UBUNTU: A DIVERSITY OF DEFINITIONS**

There is clearly a diversity of ways of understanding the meaning of the term ubuntu. This is well reflected in the contrasting definitions offered by different dictionaries. The Collins English Dictionary suggests that it is a noun describing humanity or fellow feeling, while the Oxford Dictionary portrays it as an activity that is characterised by sympathy, consideration for others, compassion or benevolence. The specifics of trying to define or translate the term ubuntu are formidable. Archbishop Desmond Tutu (1999) noted that ubuntu is very difficult to render into a western language other than to say it is "my humanity is caught up, is inextricably bound up, in what is yours".

Different approaches to defining ubuntu range from the official legalistic approaches as found in government documents to the highly personal. The latter is reflected in Archbishop Tutu's (1999) comment that "you know when ubuntu is there, and it is obvious when it is absent. It has to do with what it means to be truly human, to know that you are bound up with others in the bundle of life". He sees ubuntu as "the essence of being human, and that it is part of the gift that Africa will give the world". His approach to ubuntu suggests that his (or my) humanity is caught up and is inextricably bound up

in yours. “I am human because I belong. It speaks about wholeness. It speaks about compassion” (Tutu 2004). He sees a person with ubuntu as someone who is welcoming, hospitable, warm and generous, and willing to share. Such people are open, affirming and available to others. They are willing to be vulnerable, do not feel threatened that others are able and good for they have a proper self-assurance that comes from knowing that they belong to a greater whole.

Such a highly personal commentary can be compared with the more formal approach adopted in the South African Government’s 1996 White Paper on Welfare that identified ubuntu as “the principle of caring for each other’s well being... and a spirit of mutual support. Each individual’s humanity is ideally expressed through his or her relationship with others and theirs in turn through recognition of the individual’s humanity. Ubuntu means that people are people through other people. It also acknowledges both the rights and responsibilities of every citizen in promoting individual and societal well-being”. This definition, while couched in the formal language of a government document, still manages to capture the same spirit of ubuntu that Archbishop Tutu espouses.

From a linguistic perspective the term ubuntu comprises the pre-prefix u-, the abstract noun prefix buand, the noun stem -ntu, meaning person, which translates as personhood or humanness (Kamwangamalu 1999). The term “ubuntu” as commonly found in the Nguni languages of southern Africa, and words with a similar meaning are found throughout sub-Saharan Africa. For example: botho (Sesotho or Setswana), bumuntu (kiSukuma and Kihayi in Tanzania), bomoto (Bobangi in Congo) and gimuntu (kiKongo and giKwese in Angola), umundu (Kikuyu in Kenya), umuntu (Uganda), umunthu (Malawi), vumuntu (shiTsonga and shiTswa in Mozambique).

## **C. UBUNTU: THE PHILOSOPHICAL AND THEOLOGICAL UNDERPINNING**

Commentaries on ubuntu either see it in terms of a set of common characteristics or behaviours (valuing others, kindness, compassion, etc) or as representative of a wider value system or paradigm. It is increasingly used as a “catch-all” term used to characterise the norms and values that are inherent in many traditional African societies, and used to illustrate the way individuals in these communities relate to others, and the quality and character of their relationship. This section explores some of the different perspectives that have shaped the philosophical and theological underpinning of ubuntu as a concept or paradigm.

### **C.1 Ubuntu: Philosophical Perspectives**

One increasingly important perspective is that ubuntu represents a wider worldview or belief system rather than just a set of discernible characteristics. Nyathu (2004), for example, has written that ubuntu’s importance as a value system is seen in the way that it has “been the backbone of many African society” and it is “the fountain from which many actions and attitudes flow” (Nyathu 2004). He sees it as a statement of being that encapsulates the fundamental elements that qualify any person to be human.

Murithi (2006) talks of ubuntu as an African way of viewing the world. It is a worldview that tries to capture the essence of what it means to be human.

Even more ambitiously Dandala (1994) suggests that ubuntu is a “cosmology” that defines the “harmonic intelligence” that is an intrinsic part of local cultures in Southern Africa, and is at odds with the western ideas of communities that appear increasingly geared to individuality and competition. In this regard ubuntu can be defined as our humaneness. A persuasive spirit of caring and community, harmony and hospitality, respect and responsiveness that individuals display to one another. It is able to promote genuine harmony and continuity throughout the wider human system (Mangaliso 2001).

Ramose (1999) suggests that “African philosophy has long been established in and through ubuntu ... there is a family atmosphere, that is, a kind of philosophical affinity and kinship among and between the indigenous people of Africa” . He notes that the philosophy is not merely restricted to Bantu speakers but is found throughout sub-Saharan Africa including West Africa. For example, in Senegal the concept of “Teranga” reflects a similar spirit of collective hospitality and responsibility. More specifically Swartz (2006) calls ubuntu a “pervasive African philosophy” that has been part of the process of shaping concepts of citizenship and morality in post-apartheid South Africa.

Ubuntu can be seen as the underlying social philosophy in much of Africa. However, as Nussbaum (2003) points out there is much misunderstanding in the West as to the nature such an indigenous African construct. She suggests that this partly the product of the oral nature of traditional culture in Africa and the lack of written commentaries on ubuntu. But also because of the negative portrayal of African society in the western media.

There is a general agreement among writers on ubuntu that it represents an alternative voice to the European and North American philosophical and theological discourses that dominate so much of our thinking. It is not grounded in the dominant Cartesian epistemology that informs so much of our conceptualising and understanding in the West, and to some extent been quashed by the dominant techno-rationalist mindset that pervaded so much of our thinking in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

### **Ubuntu as African Humanism**

Ubuntu is also commonly referred to as African humanism. As Gaylord (2004) points out there is a history of humanistic thinking among African leaders commonly linked with the decolonisation process and African socialism. This can be traced back through Kuanda’s talk of “African humanism” in Zambia, Nyerere’s introduction of “ujamaa” in Tanzania, and Nkrumah’s concept of “conscientism” in the newly independent Ghana. These concepts all attempt to link spiritual and democratic values with the needs of economic development.

African humanism should not just be seen through a Western philosophical lens, but as an indigenous process, even an art, related to our humanity and the way our humanness is attained through our engagement with the wider community. It has also come to be associated with the idea of ubuntu ethics which because of its emphasis on the individual and the community differs from the dominant western ethical paradigm that is rooted in the Cartesian dualism of mind and matter.

Ubuntu serves as the spiritual foundation of many African communities and cultures (Louw 1998). It is a multidimensional concept that represents the core value of African ontology's - such as respect for human beings, for human dignity and human life, collective sharedness, obedience, humility, solidarity, caring, hospitality, interdependence, and communalism. While these are all values that are valued in the west they are not emphasised to the same extent. In the west we might talk of "I think therefore I am" whereas the ubuntu version would be translated as "I am human because I belong". Thus ubuntu can be seen as a radical reflection of our humanity, yet also has the universal appeal of traditional community values.

In conclusion, it is clear that Ubuntu is not a concept that is easily distilled. It permeates the life and thinking of many in Africa. It seeks to honour our humanity and the key role of relationships in all forms of social, communal or corporate activity. But as Louw (1998) suggests it also has a spiritual dimension that should not be underestimated and has been the source of inspiration to theologians and clergy alike.

## C.2 Ubuntu: Theological Perspectives

While ubuntu has been seen by some writers as African humanism or a cosmology, for others it is "resiliently religious" (Prinsloo, 1995), and expresses the "religiousity or religiousness of the religious other" (Louw 2001).

It is apparent that there is a natural synergy between Christian values and ubuntu. Archbishop Tutu, who is rooted in a strong Christian tradition and the broader Anglican Fellowship, has regularly preached about the closeness of this relationship. His work and that of other theologians in South Africa has given rise to the idea of "ubuntu theology" - where ethical responsibility comes with a shared identity (Louw 1998, Battle 2000, Tutu 2004). Thus if someone is hungry, the ubuntu response is that we are all collectively responsible for their hunger and have a shared obligation to alleviate his or her suffering. Tutu's political contribution must also be seen in the context of his theology of ubuntu. He would see this as a form of relational spirituality that connotes the basic connectedness of human beings as distinct from some form of godless system that emphasises either social instrumentality or individual competitiveness and selfishness (Battle 2000).

Battle (1997) sees Tutu as an "instrumental" theologian. He is not a passive or an academic theologian, but an active theologian who encourages discourse between African and Western voices through a liberation spirituality that emphasises mutual identity. This characteristic has become one of the hallmarks of ubuntu theology. Battle sees ubuntu as a traditional African concept that Tutu appropriated for his own purposes. His concept of ubuntu is one nourished by worship, and which clearly has a spiritual dimension. In biblical terms it begins with creation with its message our human identity is shaped in the image of God.

Tutu sees ubuntu as a theological concept in which human beings are called to be persons because they are made in the image of God. Ubuntu rests on the knowledge that human existence is inextricably bound up with God's creation and that a solitary human being is a contradiction in terms. This can be seen in the way that Tutu interprets the Adam & Eve story. He suggests that it wasn't good for man to live alone and that the creation of Eve was necessary to make man whole. In other words that we need each other, and

that “you and I are made for interdependency” (Battle 2000). Of the four vectors of Tutu’s ubuntu theology Battle suggests that the first is interdependence, and the way ubuntu theology builds interdependent communities in which we can only discover who we are through others. Second, it recognises individuals as having distinctive identities, and that we should rejoice that God had created people differently. Third, it has combined the best of African and Western cultures to produce a new and distinctive theology. And fourth, it was strong enough to address the issues raised by apartheid.

Tutu’s theological model is highly inclusive (2004). Relationships are central to his theology in helping us acquire our humanity. Ubuntu in this context represents the claim that human identities are uniquely made to be more co-operative than competitive. This is reflected in the African concept of “*seriti*” which identifies the life force by which a community of persons are connected to each other. Tutu’s ubuntu theology stresses that human means must be consistent with human ends. In practice this includes seeking to restore the oppressor’s humanity by enabling the oppressed to see their oppressors as “peers under God”. This sentiment is reflected in one of his favourite biblical texts “For Jesus himself is our peace who has made the two, one, and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law with his commandments and regulations” (Ephesians 2.14).

### **Ubuntu as a Transformative Theology**

The ethos of ubuntu has an influential transformational power that resonates across time and around the world. As a consequence theologians have begun to explore how the elements of ubuntu relate with the theology of others whose thinking has been shaped by extreme suffering and oppression. For instance, how the theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer (a German theologian, pastor and member of the German resistance against the Nazis who was hung in Flossenburg in April 1945) evolved in the face of Nazi persecution and seemed to reflect characteristics commonly found in ubuntu theology. Such analysis has highlighted the challenge of how to re-awaken the vision and practice of ubuntu in deprived and dysfunctional communities in Southern Africa (Barrett 2008).

The spiritual dimension that is inherent in much of our thinking about ubuntu has been shaped by the plurality of faiths and beliefs that can be found throughout Southern Africa. These draw on the long chain of human experience, both indigenous and colonial, which connects the present with both the past and the future (Battle 2000). A common thread that runs all these is the ubuntu and Christian ethos of treating others as we would like to be treated, and how the fortunate should lend a helping hand to the unfortunate.

## D. UBUNTU: ITS PRACTICAL APPLICATION

Researchers are increasingly aware of the value of ubuntu in facilitating practical developments in their area of study - whether it be in community relations, health care, engineering or management. One of the more imaginative uses of ubuntu as a way of analysing a particular phenomena was the way Fabian, as a cell biologist, used “cellular ubuntu” as a way to describe some of the challenges facing his fellow cell biologists (Fabian 2001).

In an analysis of the literature on ubuntu it is possible to identify five general areas where has practical application. First, its role in helping us value ourselves through our relationship with a particular community. Second, is ubuntu’s role in community building, and third, its ability to encourage collective work and consensus building. Fourth, is ubuntu’s potential role in conflict mediation and reconciliation, and fifth, its impact on organisational effectiveness and productivity. The following review of the practical role and application of ubuntu demonstrate that it is more than a philosophical construct but is of practical value and benefit.

### D.1 Ubuntu: Valuing Individual Identity and the Community

One of the most commonly cited attributes of ubuntu is the way that it helps individuals value their own identity through their relationship with the community. Ubuntu is about developing your “fullness of being” through your relatedness and relationship with others. It identifies human beings as “beings with others” and prescribes what “being with others” should be all about (Louw 1998). Or what Shutte (1993) calls a web of reciprocal relationships in which subject and object become indistinguishable, and in which the western aphorism “I think, therefore I am” is substituted for “I participate, therefore I am”.

#### **Bill Clinton on Ubuntu**

One of the more memorable attempts to explain this rather complex, contradictory and ambiguous construct was during a speech at the British Labour Party’s Annual Conference in 2006 when Bill Clinton used the concept of ubuntu to emphasise the need for co-operation and community spirit. He argued that “society was important because of ubuntu”, and that any individual, whatever their race or gender, needs others to become fulfilled. That being the most intelligent or beautiful human alone on the planet would “not amount to a hill of beans” if there was no one else there to appreciate you. He argued that we need to relate to, and engage with, others in the community if we are to thrive and feel positive about ourselves and the way we lead our lives.

While the connectedness of all human beings beyond such differences as race, ethnicity, gender, or religion is central to the application of ubuntu in practice, it also acknowledges the importance of their individuality and independent identity. This is not in the Cartesian or modernist sense of the atomistic self which seem to exaggerate solitary aspects of the human

existence to the detriment of communal aspects. But more in terms of the multiplicity of relationships that any individual may have or the way they relate to others. This can be seen either in terms of personal behaviours (such as respect or compassion) or as a broader “rule of conduct or social ethic” that guides individual behaviour. Whichever way it is described there is a general acceptance that ubuntu is characterised by a preference for co-operation, group work or “*shosholozza*”, rather than individual competitiveness. It favours solidarity over solitary activities (Louw 1998).

### Ubuntu in Metaphors and Proverbs

Ramose (1999) notes that the term “*ubukhosi*” which is commonly used in Zimbabwe also metaphorically mirrors the statement “*umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*” which some translate as “*a person is a person through other persons*”. Nussbaum (2003) suggests that such connectivity is also portrayed in such indigenous aphorisms and proverbs as: “*Your pain is My pain, My wealth is Your wealth. Your salvation is My salvation*”, or the Sotho saying “*It is through others that one attains selfhood*”, or through the slogan “*an injury to one is an injury to all*”.

She argues that these metaphorically capture our interconnectedness, our common humanity, and our shared responsibilities. In other words it is the community rather than the self that is the essential part of our personhood. Such a greetings (or acknowledgements of identity) have a particular significance in South Africa where perceptions of “self” (the individual, the person, the human) were so diminished during the brutality and oppression of the colonial and apartheid years.

Such proverbs are not merely restricted to southern Africa, and Nussbaum (2003) cites examples from West Africa, including “*I feel the other, I dance the other, and therefore I am*” or that “*a tree cannot make a forest*” (a Bini saying from Edo State in Nigeria). Both of which illustrate the importance of community connectivity and harmony. But the real value of all these maxims, greetings or proverbs to how they illustrate a central tenet of ubuntu - that the human community is vital for the individuals' acquisition of personhood.

Another commonly cited way of explaining this phenomena is through the way that we greet each other. Nyathu (2001) emphasises that such greetings are an important affirmation of identity. Thus, for instance, people may greet each other with terms like “*sawabana*” or “*muse atse*”, both which mean “I see you” - rather than a mere “hi” or “hello”. Or in the Shona greeting: “*Mangwani, marari sei?* (Good morning, did you sleep well?), and the response “*Ndarara, kana mararawo*” (I slept well, if you slept well). Such greetings reflect the importance placed on being acknowledged by another, as well as acknowledging someone else’s presence. Such a greeting is not about demonstrating how sociable we are, but about how human we are. Our affirmation of others thus validates ourselves.

If you want to give high praise to someone we say “*Yu, u Nobuntu*” in other words he or she has ubuntu. This means they are generous, hospitable, friendly, caring and compassionate. A person with ubuntu is open and

available to others, affirming of others, does not feel threatened that others are better at something or more successful. They have the self-assurance of knowing they are part of the wider whole (Murithi 2006).

Ubuntu as an expression captures in one word the unifying vision of the world-view that is enshrined in the much quoted Zulu maxim "*umuntu ngumuntu ngabanye abantu*" (*a person is a person through other persons*). While this proverb lays down the principles and values of human interaction in Africa it has a particular African interpretation in that it captures both the singular and the plural, which the rather banal English translation does not really convey (Sanders 1999). More literally this phrase should read "a human being is a human being through human beings" or alternatively "the being human of a human being is noticed through his or her being human through other human beings". Louw (1998) suggests one could also interpret it as "to be human is to affirm one's humanity by recognising the humanity of others in its infinite variety of content and form". Such different interpretations emphasise respect for the particularities of the beliefs and practices of others, and in the case of South Africa valuing all the different cultures and beliefs that make up South African society. In other words this phrase has a more complex interpretation than is normally portrayed.

Such interpretations attempt to capture the evolving relationship between individuals with their community, and how, by exposing themselves to others, enables individuals to discover and enrich their own humanity. For some this is a purely secular relationship which emphasises how our identity and "personhood" is defined by our role and relationship with a particular community. Whereas for others, such as Archbishop Tutu, while recognising ubuntu's role in defining our identity through others also believes that such relationships are based on God's will and are consequently of a very different quality (Battle 2000). But whether coming from a secular or spiritual position there is general belief in much of the literature that ubuntu articulates a basic respect and compassion for others which is commonly reflected in the way we show respect, consideration, kindness, and are sensitive to the needs of others.

However, it is important not to overlook the negative consequences of this synergistic relationship between an individual and the community, and in turn how easy it is for community tensions to lead to violence. Communities with a strong, cohesive identity may result in individual members of a particular community or ethnic group supporting and sympathising with those that espouse evil acts. This is a grim reminder of the negative consequences of community cohesion, and how easy it is for different communities to be mobilised by evil. In recent years this dark side of African civil society has played itself out across Africa - in Rwanda, the Congo, Liberia, Northern Uganda, Sierra Leone, the Sudan, and Zimbabwe. It is a sad fact of life that all too often these events are rarely reported in the West. It is only recently that we have any real knowledge of the millions who have died as a consequence of communal conflict in the Congo. It was also striking how little media coverage there was of the hundreds who were killed in communal violence in Nigeria as I wrote this paper at the end of November 2008.

These examples from Africa, the home of ubuntu, are a salutary reminder that strong cohesive communities may result in individual values being subsumed by community prejudice or hate. It is just because of this that there is an imperative to promote philosophies or world-views, such as ubuntu, that espouses values that are antithetical to violence, prejudice and hate.

## D.2 Ubuntu's Role in Community Building

Nussbaum (2003) suggests that ubuntu is more appropriately described as “the capacity in African cultures” to express compassion, humanity and dignity. As such it has a critical role in building communities that are marked by equity, justice, mutual support and care. In this regard ubuntu is therefore part of the process of promoting a community culture that emphasises commonality and interdependence. It recognises an individual's status as a human being who is entitled to respect, dignity and acceptance from other members of the community.

It is a concept that has particular resonance with those concerned about building civil society, enhancing community relations and promoting social cohesion. In this context ubuntu's role in community develop is about the “we” and our ability to accomplish things that we can only do with others. It is about building “a network of delicate relationships of interdependence”. These are networks that are marked by “affirmation and acceptance” of others. These relationships and networks are an organic and voluntary rather than the “associative instrumentalism” associated with many artificial or imposed community building initiatives found in many modern (western) societies (Battle 2000).

### **Ubuntu in Health Care**

In the area of community health care there have been a number of studies that explore the role and impact of ubuntu on how medical professionals engage with local communities and individual patients. Researchers have explored the way ubuntu could be used to help promote a culturally appropriate approach to mental health promotion (Edwards et al. 2002). Beuster and Schwar (2002) emphasised the importance of culturally congruent health care in community health care and the need to use culturally appropriate methodologies when assessing the health needs of communities. Their analysis concluded that culturally-congruent care in the South African context must incorporate the spirit of ubuntu - particularly the elements of ubuntu that encourages greater sensitivity to the needs and wants of others.

Ubuntu has an “extreme emphasis on community” (Louw 1998). The caring, sharing ethic that it promotes has enabled South Africa to cope with the difficult transition from apartheid years and has served a cohesive set of moral values in the face of adversity. It is significant that despite the loss of dignity and the suffering experienced by many in South Africa there was no lust for retribution. It is against this background that Archbishop Tutu (1999) talks of social harmony being the greatest good, and that anything that subverts such harmony is to be avoided. He notes that anger, resentment, lust for revenge, even aggressive competitiveness are corrosive and threaten social harmony.

According to African scholarship, African epistemology begins with community and moves to individuality, whereas Western epistemology moves from individuality to community (Battle 2000). As a result ubuntu has been put forward by a number of commentators as a mechanism to minimise self-interest, help community transformation and attain a degree of

inconnectedness at a community level. Most commentators emphasise the collective nature of ubuntu and the way that ubuntuism acts as a counter-weight to dominant ideas of individualism.

But, others such as Khoza (1994) point out that ubuntu should not simply be equated with a collectivism that merely stresses the role of the social unit to the point that it depersonalises the individual and their own humanity. Bell (2002) also usefully warns us against the easy adoption of clichés about how all Western values are driven by individualism and African values are driven by communalism. He points out that on the spectrum between individualism and communalism there are many different cultural types that are complex and multivariied.

Other studies into the working of ubuntu at a community level have pointed out the different cultural dimensions, and the crucial role of culturally-appropriate leadership styles in determining the success of community initiatives. Nussbaum's (2003) commentary on the role of ubuntu in communities concluded that successful "ubuntu communities" depended on sensitive and listening leaders. Thus we need develop community leaders that listens to all view points, facilitates discussions, is able to summarise the different points of view and makes a decision that is both just and reflects the group consensus. However, for this to work in practice we need a considerable investment of time and energy to reach such consensual agreements. Similar findings are found in Kirk and Shutte's (2004) critique of a particular community capacity building approach with socially excluded communities in South Africa. It is apparent that ubuntu has a clear role in building community cohesion, but that it can only be successfully implemented if its presence is acknowledged and local leaders are sensitive to the way it is implemented.

Recent analysis has also highlighted ubuntu's role in nation building. Swartz (2006) places ubuntu alongside a range of post-apartheid initiatives such the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the Moral Regeneration Movement in her analysis of efforts to reform and recover the concept of citizenship and morality in contemporary South Africa.

#### **Thabo Mbeki on Ubuntu**

President Thabo Mbeki regularly made calls to revive the values inherent in ubuntu to assist in community and nation building, and help in creating a new South African identity. In a speech on Heritage Day 2005 President Mbeki claimed that "ubuntu drives community members to act in solidarity with the weak and the poor, and helps members of these communities to behave in particular ways for the common good". Following this call the National Heritage Council South Africa held annual meetings called "Ubuntu Imbizo" in different provinces. These involved a cross-section of the population, and were intended to find ways to practice the values of ubuntu, and explore ways how it could be revived (Africa News 27/8/08).

In conclusion, one cannot but recognise that the values and attributes inherent in ubuntu can play a valuable role in both helping individuals but also in a range of community development and nation building initiatives.

### D.3 Ubuntu: Promoting Collective Work and Consensus

A third practical application of the spirit of ubuntu has been the way that has encouraged people to work together and build a consensus. Poovan et al (2006), in a wide-ranging review of the influence of the social values inherent in ubuntu, began their analysis by suggesting that ubuntu has been essential component in determining the survival of different African communities. Their analysis suggests that Africans have learnt to survive through collective action, mutual care and support, not by individual self-reliance. In order for this degree of mutuality to thrive they have developed a collective psyche which allows them to pool resources and communities to work together collectively. That personal interests are less important than community needs is a lesson learnt from an early age. This ubuntu spirit of solidarity is something that permeates every aspect of African life. As one of their respondents commented *“ubuntu is not having a brother but being part of the bigger picture of the community”*, or as another suggested *“it is basic neighbourliness... that’s one of the biggest things about ubuntu”* (Poovan 2006).

#### **Ubuntu: The Collective Finger Theory**

The work of Mbigi (1995, 1997) has emphasised ubuntu’s role in facilitating consensus building and promoting collective working. He refers to this as the “collective finger’s theory” which is best explained by the African proverb “a thumb, although it is strong, cannot kill aphids on its own. It needs the collective help and co-operation of the other fingers on the hand”. The lessons of this proverb are, first, that the fingers are individuals who need to work together to achieve a collective goal, and, second, the fingers represent core values that are interdependent and synergetic and need to come together to build and maintain the collective culture.

African cultures appear to have an infinite capacity of consensus and reconciliation. This is exemplified in the way that in traditional African societies every person at a meeting or gathering gets an equal chance to speak until some kind of an agreement or consensus is reached. This is expressed by words like *“simunye”* - we are one or unity is strength (Louw 1998). Ubuntu is also about building a collective understanding through the sharing of ideas between community members. This builds on the perception that ideas are not property that can be owned by individuals, but are instead a common resource that should be shared willingly.

Traditionally the interconnectedness in African communities that is commonly associated with ubuntu was nurtured by acts of compassion and care. However, there is some concern that ubuntuism has lost some of its influence as a guiding force in modern society - particularly when its ethos is subsumed or lost during times of political strife or communal violence (Poovan 2006). Despite such concerns politicians commonly called on the ethos of ubuntu in their attempts to encourage a new national identity or a wider humanitarian ethic. President Mandela commonly drew on the concept of ubuntu in his efforts to build a new consensus in post-apartheid South Africa.

Creating consensus also implies a degree of reciprocity and shared values. In all types of organisations ubuntu is helpful because of the way it emphasises that reciprocal relationships are important, that people contribute more to the common good if they are valued, and that goals are more likely to be met when consensus is achieved (Mangaliso 2001). This is well reflected in the success of the many different “stokvels” in South Africa. It is estimated that there are nearly a million of these informal joint enterprises or co-operatives (including burial societies and savings clubs). Many of which draw on ubuntu inspired values and communal relationships, and play an important role servicing the needs of local communities. They have been described as capitalism with “*siza*” (i.e. with humanness), and while geared to making a profit only do so if it does not involve the exploitation of others (Louw 2001).

#### **D.4 Ubuntu: Its Potential Role in Conflict Mediation and Reconciliation**

There are plenty of advocates for the role of ubuntu in conflict mediation, community reconciliation and peacekeeping. While some of this is concerned with its role in helping mediate immediate problems, much is about its longer-term role in resolving conflicts. Significantly President Mandela’s assessment was that you could only transform a society or community by encouraging reconciliation, and promoting understanding, even love, between all the different constituents. He highlighted the connectedness and interdependence of all the different people in any community - whether they be good or bad, the alienated or the oppressed. Most memorably he wrote that “the oppressor must be liberated just as surely as the oppressed .... When I walked out of prison, that was my mission to liberate the oppressed and the oppressor both.... For to be free is not merely to cast off one’s chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others” (Mandela 1994 p.544).

This sentiment is echoed in the words of Archbishop Tutu that those in power are “diminished when others are humiliated, diminished when others are oppressed, diminished when others are treated as if they were less than who they are.” More importantly in the context of this survey he goes on to suggest that “the quality of ubuntu gives people resilience, enabling them to survive and emerge still human despite all efforts to dehumanise them” (Tutu 2004).

Archbishop Tutu writes that “true reconciliation is a deeply personal matter. It can happen only between persons who assert their own personhood and who acknowledge and respect that of others”. After his time as the Chair of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) he argued that ubuntu had an important role in promoting social harmony and encouraging forgiveness and reconciliation - “to forgive is not just to be altruistic. It is the best form of self-interest. What dehumanises you, inexorably dehumanises me. Forgiveness gives people resilience” (Tutu 1999. 34).

To help our understanding of the processes involved in this difficult process he talks about the three different orders of truth that must be understood in any exploration of the practice of mediation and reconciliation (Tutu 1999). These are: first, forensic factual truth (that which is verifiable and documentable); second, social truth (that is established through interaction and debate); third, personal truth (that which is highly personal and private - what Judge Mahomed of the TRC called the truth of “wounded memories”). He concludes by suggesting that any form of reconciliation process needs to

factor in these different types of truth and their impact on the way people see their environment and the people they live with in their local communities.

Battle's (2000) analysis of Tutu's thinking emphasises that forgiveness is better than retributive justice. He highlights Tutu's atonement theory that assumes that all can be helped and the way he is sensitive to even a flickering ember of remorse (as in the confrontation with Winnie Mandela during the TRC). Tutu's role as national confessor was important in helping the country develop ways to come to terms with the past so that abuses of human rights are not concealed and a vulnerable new democracy is not threatened. At a personal level he marvelled at the magnanimity of those victims who appeared before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and that "after so much suffering instead of lusting for revenge they had this extraordinary willingness to forgive" (Tutu 1999. 76).

### **Tutu on Revenge, Forgiveness and Rehabilitation**

Tutu also states that ubuntu is something you say when someone has wronged you. You don't want revenge but a healing of relationships instead. The refusal to see or acknowledge related identities is Tutu's definition of sin, which is the converse of ubuntu. Sin thus affects the way an individual sees themselves to be and their relationship with creation.

In Tutu's eyes ubuntu means that in a real sense even the supporters of apartheid were victims of the vicious system which they implemented and supported. The lesson for those concerned about building community cohesion is that the spirit of ubuntu has a role in healing of breaches, redressing imbalances and restoring broken relations. It helps communities avoid destroying themselves in their search for retribution and punishment of the perpetrators. He sees such activities as a social and personal dead-end that need to be avoided. He argues that the emphasis should be on rehabilitation of both the victim and perpetrator and their speedy reintegration into the community.

It is notable that in the wider body of African literature on ubuntu there much emphasis on reconciliation and encouraging people to move beyond their immediate grievances. Ali Mazrui (quoted in Nussbaum, 2003) described this as being a characteristic of many African communities which seem to have a "short memory of hate". He suggests this is a consequence of the way African children were traditionally taught to reconcile their differences and let go of hatred, and that this was a necessary survival tactic in any isolated community.

Ubuntu should therefore be seen as part of the process of community healing, reconciliation and bridge building. Murithi (2006) goes further by suggesting that ubuntu is integral to the notion of peacemaking through the principles of reciprocity, inclusivity and a sense of shared destiny between peoples and communities. He points out that it provides a value system for giving and receiving forgiveness. It provides a rationale for sacrificing or letting go of the desire for revenge for past wrongs or engaging in petty vendettas. It is a way of culturally re-informing our efforts to promote reconciliation and facilitate the work of peacekeepers. He concludes by suggesting that a community in

which there is no trust is ultimately not viable and gradually begins to tear itself apart - unfortunately this is something that peacekeepers around the world are all too aware of.

### **Ubuntu's International Application: Turkey and Armenia**

In the field of peacekeeping and reconciliation the concept of ubuntu has taken on rather iconic status and commentators have attempted to apply it in the most unlikely circumstances. For example, a recent article in the Turkish Daily News (13/12/07) explored the possibility of using ubuntu-based reconciliation processes to try to heal the bitter divisions that still divide the Armenian and Turkish populations. These divisions were caused by the appalling loss of life of Armenians at the hands of the Turks early in the last century, and continue today in the long-standing campaign by Armenians to discredit Turkey.

To this day there is still deep bitterness around this issue and there is a renewed efforts to penalise Turkey for what are seen as acts of genocide. As a consequence there is some urgency to addressing this matter. It is proposed that the concept of ubuntu with its focus on forgiveness and reconciliation has a potential role to play in promoting a rapprochement between these two deeply divided peoples. The article suggests that if ubuntu was incorporated in some culturally appropriate processes, such as the Armenian tradition of tamadas whereby prominent men come together round a table, eat and drink, they could begin to open themselves to the process of mediation and reconciliation.

Most analysis suggests that ubuntu encourages consensus-based mediation (as seen, for example, in the indigenous processes found in indabas or imbizos of South Africa) as distinct from the more confrontational litigious processes commonly found in the American legal system. The logic of ubuntu suggests that each member of a community is in some way linked to each other - in other words to other disputants in the community. If everyone is willing to acknowledge this (i.e. accept the principles of ubuntu) then people may feel a sense of having been wronged, or a sense of responsibility for the wrong they may have committed. There is a link between the victim and perpetrator that exists, which is tangible, and which can be built on and developed. This process is not just about individuals but also includes their wider family and kinship groups. It is clearly not an easy process but one that, if worked at, can succeed.

## **D.5 Ubuntu: Supporting Organisational Effectiveness and Productivity**

One of the sources of the growing awareness of the significance of ubuntu has been the way it has been publicised as a new management concept in the popular management literature in South Africa (see Mbigi & Maree, 1995; Mbigi, 1997; Swartz & Davies, 1997; Karsten & Illa, 2005; Poovan, 2006). It has also attracted the attention of internationally respected management researchers. For example in Peter Senge's seminal work on Organisational Learning (1990) it is clear that ubuntu-based work practices are present in his description of the key characteristics of an effective learning organisation.

While Jackson (2004) in his overview of African management practices concluded that ubuntu is a key element of a culturally-appropriate humanistic management style that is common throughout Africa in which employees are seen not just as a strategic asset but are valued in their own right.

Such management commentators base their analysis on the way that ubuntu has the potential to shape the relationship between individuals and the wider whole (whether it be at a team or an organisation level) and promote a shared vision. Most also recognise that ubuntu has an ethical dimension and strong moral overtones. The general conclusion is that organisations that reflect ubuntu principles are marked by their humanity and team spirit. This in turn can give a business its competitive advantage in the way that it helps promote effective team working, helps the transfer of information and the adoption of new ideas. It influences the way we communicate and converse amongst each other and the way this helps establish and reinforce effective working relationships. In such organisations unity and understanding is valued more than the overly-structured systems common in Taylorist or Fordist organisations (Poovan et al 2006). Linked to this is an appreciation that ubuntu has some degree of cultural specificity and as such cannot be translated into a commodifiable management tool.

The work of Mbigi and Maree (1995, 1997) has been influential in bring the concept of ubuntu to the attention of management researchers. Their central thesis is that organisations in Africa must draw on indigenous cultural practices in order to improve their management, effect transformation and make themselves more competitive. In this context they define ubuntu as the sense of solidarity or brotherhood which arises among people and is a collective shared experience. The principles of ubuntu that impacts on management effectiveness include: the spirit of unconditional African collective contribution, solidarity, acceptance, dignity stewardship, compassion and care, hospitality and legitimacy.

Karsten & Illa (2005) see ubuntu somewhat differently. They see it as an instrumental concept that has been introduced into the management vernacular to revitalise business, improve co-ordination, and help the transfer of ideas and information. In their judgement ubuntu offers a philosophical basis for a more consensual management style. In practice it has led to the development of a hybrid management system that incorporates a variety of management styles that has been adopted by such diverse companies as South African Airways or Durban Metrorail. However, they see it is more than just a programme for employee participation. It covers the way employees interact and share experiences or knowledge. It has some similarity with Japanese management practices with their emphasis on empowerment, service and shared leadership. It does not depend on coercive power, and is instead is built on a process of consensus building, dialogue, discussion, conversation, and even storytelling.

Karsten & Illa's (2005) analysis suggests that ubuntu organisations place greater emphasis on informal or conversational communication as compared to more formal bureaucratic approaches. In other words ubuntu favours a more participative interaction between management and staff in which inventive ways of resolving conflict can occur. But fundamentally they see the way managers use ubuntu as part of the discourse that management has developed to persuade people to work together more productively. In other words that it has become merely an "instrument to improve productivity"

## **The Impact of Ubuntu on Productivity and Management Practices**

It is argued that those organisations and firms that adopt ubuntu practices will reap the benefits in terms of, first, increased competitive advantage and greater efficiency. Second, improved productivity through better management practices; and third, quality of leadership. Others have identified the lack of ubuntu at a management level being a major constraint and we need to see better implemented at an organisational level.

Rwelamila et al (2002) identified the major blocks to the successful completion of major public building projects in Southern Africa and the particular problems caused by the dysfunctional relationship between different project stakeholders. The authors concluded that one of the major causes of failure was the lack of “ubuntu” between key project stakeholders - particularly in the area of procurement which lead to misunderstandings, delays and cost-over runs. They argue that developing the spirit of ubuntu is essential for promoting real co-operation, and as such is a prerequisite for all major public building projects in Southern Africa.

### **Implementing Ubuntu: Some Practical Guidelines**

Mangaliso (2001) has identified some practical guidelines when implementing ubuntu. These include:

- Treat others with dignity and respect (this is a central element of ubuntu and its role in creating the appropriate environment)
- Be willing to negotiate in good faith (taking time to listen when negotiating because listening is essential in the process of acknowledgement - which in turn can then lead to real trust and co-operation)
- Provide opportunities for self-expression (honour achievements, affirm values etc)
- Understand the beliefs and practices (different cultural perspectives, understand different belief systems, also be careful not to suppress a specific culture in favour of the dominant culture)
- Honour seniority - especially in leadership choices (age, experience, etc)
- Promote equity (ensure that recruitment decisions are clear and fair)
- Be flexible and accomodative (acknowledge the organic nature of ubuntu which itself is a balanced blend of different approaches and ideas etc.

Poovan et al (2006) have taken this analysis further by highlighting the role of ubuntu in team effectiveness and also as providing an alternative management ethos. They explore the way ubuntu values can lead to greater team effectiveness and increased productivity, their impact on the way leaders motivate staff, and how they motivate teams so that they can be more effective and innovative. The values inherent in ubuntu have the capacity to create bonds between team members, and encourages a shift in thinking from “I can” to “we can”. This collective spirit is reflected in the way teams sit together, focus attention on each other, show signs of mutual affection and display co-ordinated patterns of behaviour. But team members not only value working with each other they also trust each other. Trust in this context

can be seen as a positive expectation that another will not - through words, actions, decisions - act opportunistically to the detriment or upset of another team member.

There is also a growing awareness of the relationship between leadership and the values inherent in ubuntuism. There is talk of ubuntu or value-based leadership. This is similar to Hailey's concept of catalytic leadership which incorporates a strategic, value-driven, change-oriented and developmental style of leadership. This can be distinguished from authoritarian, paternalistic, or charismatic leadership styles, and is more akin to South Asian models of "empowered leadership". The relationship between leadership and ubuntu was well exemplified at a recent British Council sponsored Leadership Conference in Livingstone, Zambia which was intended to bring together African leaders in the spirit of ubuntu. The Times of Zambia (29.10.07) quoted the conference convenor saying that: "the spirit of ubuntu is so strong that there is no such thing as a self-made man in Africa for everyone who has ascended to great heights has done so with the help of others in the community".

## **E. UBUNTU'S SHADOW SIDE: CHALLENGES & CRITICISMS**

The great majority of the literature concerning ubuntu takes a neutral to positive stance on its role and value in the contemporary world. However, it is important to note that there is a small but significant body of literature that has a more critical perspective on ubuntu and its genesis, and which highlights some of the negative consequences of promoting ubuntuism and adopting its values. Thus, commentators like Louw (1998) talk about how ubuntu reflects elements of "totalitarian communalism" which "frowns upon elevating an individual above the community" and so can be "overwhelming". He talks of the consequences in communities where tradition is venerated, continuity revered, change feared and difference shunned. Individualism is not tolerated. In a similar vein Themba Sono talks about the "constrictive nature" or "tyrannical custom" of a derailed African culture which "frowns upon one beyond the community" (quoted in Louw, 2001).

The dark side of ubuntu implicitly demands an oppressive conformity and group loyalty. Failure to conform can be met by harsh punitive measures. Archbishop Tutu himself says that the strong group feeling has the weaknesses of all communalism in the way that it encourages conservatism and conformity (Battle, 1997). Marx (2002) was alarmed at way ubuntu has been co-opted to serve the interests of a new cultural nationalism that promotes conformity and stifles dissent. He argues it is an "invented tradition" that appeals to the "idealised, ahistorical, precolonial Africa" and which attempts to paper over "historical chasms and fractures". He sees as glorifying "an imagined past and with its emphasis on community values it promotes an attitude of conformity".

Interestingly some of the most powerful critiques of the old order from which ubuntu is derived can be found in recent South African literature. Es'kia Mphahlele and Phaswane Mpe are representatives of two generations of black South African writers, and in two of their best known books they both highlight the changing nature of indigenous societies in South Africa partly as a consequence of apartheid and partly because of increased urbanisation.

Es'kia Mphahlele's novel *Down Second Avenue* (1959) is one of most widely read novels by black South African writer. It tells of how an ordinary family tries to keep their family together and affirm basic decent human values - in other words ubuntu values of caring, compassion, etc. It explores the dynamics of black urban life in 1950s where some vestiges of African humanism (or ubuntu) manage to survive in the "collective memory". The book explores evolving family relationships in the new black townships that grew through the 1950s and how the odds were stacked against them succeeding in creating a place and a community for themselves. Thus by implication that the values associated with ubuntu begun to be lost, and could only be maintained in the "subdued voices" of the family sitting together around the fireplace or in brief conversations around the communal water tap.

Phaswane Mpe's novel *Welcome to Hillbrow* (2001) develops this theme of the loss of ubuntu through urban dislocation, and he challenges any easy invocation of ubuntu or African humanism. The novel reveals the extent to which prejudice, intolerance and xenophobia are rife in communities in both rural and urban areas in contemporary South Africa. It lays bear the myth of rural innocence, and examines the suspicions, fear, prejudices and intolerance that are part of rural life - an intolerance that manifests itself in its most extreme form in witchcraft accusations and killings. The story explores mans capacity for inhumanity and suggests that people in all kinds of societies (rural, urban, rich, poor, whatever) construct an opposition between self and others - particularly those in the wider community and our immediate family or peers. The prejudices and intolerance explored in this book are a precursor to the tensions and xenophobic violence demonstrated in many South African townships in mid-2008 when local communities turned aggressively on new migrants from Zimbabwe and other African countries.

One of the tensions that runs through much of black literature is the tension between the violence of society and the sense of communalism in many black communities. This resonates for those who directly experience the growing levels of violence and break down in the traditional social order in many different African communities. Even back in 1991 Archbishop Tutu was warning of the consequences of the losing the traditional values of ubuntu. He was fearful that "we in the black community have lost our sense of ubuntu - our humanness, caring, hospitality, our sense of connectedness, our sense that my humanity is bound up in your humanity" (Sunday Times 26/5/91).

Symptomatic of such concerns are the growing calls to revive the spirit of ubuntu. For instance, the way that the National Heritage Council of South Africa (NHCSA) launched a campaign in August 2008 intended to revive awareness of ubuntu in schools and other government institutions. They cited recent attacks on people from other countries as a symptom of a society that does not live up to ubuntu. Those who know Africa well are concerned that the values ubuntu embodies are in decline. One only has to look at the suffering in Zimbabwe, the Congo, the recent xenophobic violence in Johannesburg, and the rising levels of crime and violence throughout Southern Africa to understand their concerns. It is no consolation that such concerns come at a time when there is growing awareness of, and sympathy with, the principles of ubuntu in western societies

Finally some commentators, such as Enslin and Horsthemke (2004), question the uniqueness of ubuntu, and its value and efficiency as a practical guide to action and policy. Their study highlights some of the contradictions inherent in ubuntu and explores how conflict between the principles and values implicit

in ubuntuism can be resolved - if at all. This article is based on the premise that many of the elements of effective communities - democracy, citizenship and civil society - are in fact universal. They are not culture specific and as a consequence one must not over-emphasise ubuntu's role in community development or nation-building and that it has a cultural specificity that limits its wider application.

### **Ubuntu & Management Practices: A Critique**

There is some concern that ubuntu's use in the management literature has been somewhat reduced to the status of a management fad - in other words reducing its significance to "flavour of the month status". Karsten & Illa (2005) feel that this undervalues its true worth. Ubuntu should be seen more than merely an economic process to promote productivity - it has a deeper more significant role at a personal and community level.

Swartz and Davies (1997) question whether the application of ubuntu leads to greater productivity and efficiencies. They are concerned that many authors "idealise ubuntu without being aware of the potentially negative aspects of the process". They highlight the negative consequences of when an individual employee forsakes personal needs for the good of the wider group or some imposed change process. They talk of the "shadow side of ubuntu" - particularly where an individual has to give up personal needs to fit the role expected of them. One consequence of this is that resentment festers and inappropriate behaviours, while suppressed, appear in different guises. The dominant group starts to use shaming as a control mechanism which inhibits an individual's potential, constrains innovation, and may lead to dysfunctional group dynamics. There is also concern at the punitive nature of group control processes and the negative consequences of the blame/shame culture that it creates.

Such "psychosocial control mechanisms" are inherently dysfunctional and can lead to a range of negative consequences and behaviours that begin to shape the informal dimensions of an organisations culture and the fuel shadow side of organisational life. There are also questions about the impact of such ubuntu-based controls on attitudes to innovation and individual entrepreneurship, as well as on incentives designed to promote productivity and organisational excellence. Such analysis provides a useful counterbalance to the analysis of the dominant voice of advocates of ubuntuism and useful warns about some of the consequences, problems and potential contradictions associated with its use as a management tool.

There is therefore a strand of thinking that should not be discounted that ubuntu is anti-modernist, represents out-dated values and stands in the way of efficiency. Whereas others suggest it is a pastiche of the original idea, and we now only see "the remnants of ubuntu". Although a common response to criticism is that what has survived are the best elements of ubuntuism - the fundamentals that are worth keeping alive.

## **F. TUTU FOUNDATION IN UK: THE WAY FORWARD?**

This final section merely acts as an end-piece that draws of some of the diverse body of literature on community development to provoke some thoughts as to the future direction of the Tutu Foundation's work in the UK.

### **F.1 The Tutu Foundation in the United Kingdom**

The Tutu Foundation in UK exists to ensure that Archbishop Desmond Tutu's work for truth and reconciliation continues. Its vision "is of a world in which we are human in fellowship, in community, in peace". Its mission proposes that it will focus on encouraging "activities that seek to enhance tolerance, encourage interfaith dialogue, celebrate diversity and give the world faith that it is possible to cohere as a community".

The Foundation's original business plan highlights the proposal that "by empowering young people with the Tutu vision of peace and reconciliation - by transforming and developing their leadership skills - we will counter the trend of increased separatism, extremism, racism, violence and increasing intolerance of difference.

The Tutu Foundation in the UK has highlighted certain elements of ubuntu which it sees as central to its work. These include the positive aspects of relationships, attitudes, and behaviours. More specifically relationships in terms of belonging, community and interdependence; attitudes in terms of tolerance, respect and dignity ; and behaviours in terms of listening, truth telling, and conflict transformation. It intends to apply these elements in the way that it works "to reclaim and transform the lives of young people who are involved in violence, gangs and anti-social behaviour" (Tutu Foundation's Matrix and Diagnostic Tool, 2008). In light of this some of the findings from recent research which are outlined in this last section, and which highlight the importance of community leadership, bridge building and community cohesion, may usefully feed into the Foundation's deliberations about how it should work with local communities in the United Kingdom.

### **F.2 Community Governance and Community Violence**

Recent research in South Africa into the recent xenophobic violence in South African cities has highlighted the central role of community leadership in either provoking or containing the levels of violence on foreign nationals. The interim findings of an ongoing study being currently undertaken by the Forced Migration Studies Programme of Wits University in Johannesburg suggests that the violence against foreign nationals was community inspired. It was perpetrated in communities where formal institutions were weak or considered illegitimate. These official structures were either pushed away or hijacked by informal groups that in turn became the legitimate representatives of the community.

These preliminary findings echo similar findings in the UK and should feed into the Tutu Foundation's strategic thinking. They suggest that there is a need for government and other community agencies to focus on developing effective, responsive and accountable governance structures at a community level. Linked to this is a recognition of the need to mobilise links and promote

collaboration between all the different organisations working at a community level. Whether they be local government, voluntary community-based organisations, faith-based organisations, or local chapters of national bodies (Scouts and Guides, Lions and Rotary, or different sporting bodies, etc). As the Foundation has already proposed the ubuntu framework could be used to assess the attitudes and behaviours that affect relations between such actors and frontline community institutions.

### **F.3 Bridge Building & Community Cohesion**

A review of some of the recent literature on community development and contemporary debates about building effective community relations has highlighted some important findings that could feed into the Tutu Foundation's strategic thinking. This literature highlights such issues as building trust, developing effective local leadership, provision of relevant information, and the creation of safe-spaces where dialogue and understanding can begin to be nurtured (Young, 2008). There is clearly a role for the principles inherent in ubuntu to help shape such processes, and the Foundation should not be scared of using the spiritual dimensions of ubuntu to help inform dialogue between peoples of different faiths or beliefs.

Running through much of the literature was a concern that the more diverse a community the less likely it is that the different groups in the community feel that they can trust each other. In the UK the concern is that multiculturalism has led to greater fragmentation and segregation at a community level. This is reflected in a degree of "economic ghettoisation" and the growth in mono-ethnic schools which in turn has led to greater separation between community groups.

There is much talk in the literature of the need to promote interaction between community groups and need to work proactively towards "community cohesion". This was defined in a 2002 Home Office Report as being "a shared sense of belong, based on common goals and core social values, respect for differences, and acceptance of the reciprocal rights and obligations of community members working together for the common good" (Denham, 2002). This definition clearly echoes the salient features of ubuntu and suggests that the concept of ubuntu has a role in developing new community cohesion strategies in the United Kingdom geared to mediating conflicts, reduce prejudices and misunderstandings and helping eliminate discrimination of all kinds.

The 2006 White Paper "Strong and Prosperous Communities" (DCLG 2006) suggested that there were eight guiding principles for building community cohesion which included, amongst other things, the need to: ensure strong leadership and engagement at a community level; the development of shared values across different communities; the identification of local "flash points" and the development of contingency plans to deal with public unrest; the inclusion of young people in social cohesion and bridge building activities; and the involvement of faith groups and the importance of interfaith activities. There is potential role here for the Tutu Foundation in trying to facilitate the practical implementation of some of these principles in efforts across the United Kingdom to promote community cohesion.

The Foundation also has a potential role helping transform the perception of diversity from a "social bad", to a strength, a "social good" that is valued

across the community. The provision of appropriate information and development of local channels of communication that are helpful in breaking down barriers and stereotypes, overcoming long-held prejudices, and helping change the relational dynamics in entrenched conflict systems. Also, because of the spiritual and inter-faith dimension of the Foundation's mission it has the potential to engage with faith based organisations and associations in promoting community values. There is a growing body of opinion that faith communities and faith based organisations can, and should, play a more direct role in promoting community cohesion and building social capital (Holden 2006, Dinham 2007, Jochum 2007).

There is a general recognition that moves to promoting social cohesion and encouraging bridge building initiatives are an important element in efforts to develop a healthy civil society. This is particularly so if one sees civil society as a space within which people can freely associate and communicate with one another and where a web of associations can flourish. It is a space in which conflict and opposition within society can be peacefully accommodated. Although one must manage expectations as to how effective such interventions can be. The evidence from Northern Ireland is that while there is a critical role for community development processes mediating conflict that were there are entrenched patterns of segregation that at best such processes can help facilitate dialogue and "massage the interfaces" but not overcome years of deeply held prejudice and suspicion (Gilchrist 2004, Acheson 2006, Thomas 2007). In this context it should be noted that intergroup hostility is the flipside of strong local networks and the strong associative spirit that one finds in elements of a vibrant civil society.

#### **F.4 A Conclusion**

In conclusion, it is apparent from the findings and policy recommendations and conclusions identified in the literature that the Foundation has a valuable role to play - particularly if it maintains focus and does not spread itself too thinly. The Foundation not only brings resources and valuable international experience to this work, but it also brings the credibility and goodwill associated with the name "Tutu", as well as the philosophical and theological underpinning associated with "ubuntu".

In practical terms ubuntu represents a particular worldview, an ethos, a philosophy that draws on crucial community values and ideals. These seem to have a universal appeal and resonate with peoples of all cultures at a very deep level. But it is also clear that ubuntu is not something that can be imposed but is a set of values that has to be nurtured through an evolving organic process.

Ubuntu is clearly a living ethos. It is not just to be found in academic commentaries and policy reviews. Moreover because of the Archbishop's espousal of ubuntu and ubuntu theology the ideas and principles that are inherent in ubuntuism must inform the work of the Foundation. As such promoting the values inherent in ubuntu must be one of the core activities of the Foundation. It is therefore both an asset and a philosophy that lies at the heart of the Foundation's work.

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