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Ubuntu Epistemological Principles and the Quest for a Better Africa

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ABSTRACT

This research evaluates the significance of Ubuntu epistemological principles for sustainable development in Africa. The paper argues that knowledge stems not just from personal reasoning or objective observation, but it is also influenced by cultural values, social relationships, and shared experiences within a community. It posits that Ubuntu, entailing the notion of "I am because we are", suggests that a person's grasp of the world is intertwined with their social context and relationships. Epistemology, in a philosophical context, is the examination of, or approach to, gaining knowledge. It addresses the questions: how do we know, or how is it possible for us to know? Or how can we be certain of what we understand? It deals with the connection between our thoughts and reality, as well as whether these relationships are valid or invalid. This study utilises the qualitative approach in form of a literature review to explore Ubuntu epistemological principles and the pursuit of an improved Africa. Africans, like any other community with a shared individual identity, had their distinct methods of obtaining understanding and tackling life's difficulties. The paper contends that Ubuntu epistemology offers a structure for forecasting, articulating, enabling, and expanding the pool of knowledge that contributes to improved comprehension for sustainable advancement. The study advocates retrieving of the shared cultural values of tolerance, compassion, respect, and various aspects of cultural heritage of Ubuntu epistemological principles. The paper concludes that Ubuntu epistemological principles symbolise African identity, along with political discourse. These two concepts embody African philosophy that is singular and characteristic of the African community.

Key Words: Ubuntu Epistemological principles, Community, Philosophy, Africa, Culture.

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INTRODUCTION

The idea of Ubuntu epistemological principles has developed considerably over the course of African history, influencing and being influenced by philosophy and cultural settings. Historically, Ubuntu played a crucial role in the governance and social structure of numerous African societies. Traditional African communities frequently depended on Ubuntu principles to influence decision-making, resolve conflicts, and establish systems of communal support. These principles were evident in practices like shared land ownership, joint labour efforts, and the distribution of resources (Sambala et al., 2019).

Given the intricate challenges that African political leaders must address, this paper examines the significance of Ubuntu epistemological principles in our political conversations. Ubuntu and African traditional wisdom represent African identity and political dialogues. These two concepts embody an African philosophy that is singular and characteristic of the African community and the epistemological values of Ubuntu, such as tolerance, compassion, respect, and several of the shared invaluable qualities of Ubuntu that the African communities used to cherish. The value framework represented in Ubuntu provides a philosophical basis for efficient administration, allowing a particular government to be directed by its ideology. Nevertheless, it is apparent that pre-colonial Africa was neither static nor inactive. It is surprising to acknowledge that nearly 200 years of colonisation not only ravaged the cultural legacy and principles for which Africa was celebrated before colonial dominance, but also significantly obstructed the continent, robbing it of countless years of opportunities for self-betterment and progress.

It is vital to emphasise that prompt and more determined measures are necessary to reorganise and combat this temporary trend of cultural emptiness. It is also essential to address the negative impacts of Western civilisation and culture on Africa through all available platforms, enabling policymakers to begin acknowledging the need to rethink their approaches that contribute to cultural deterioration in Africa or that hinder the goals of cultural revival. Culture includes more than just dancing; it is not limited only to music. It is not about costume alone. It is beyond the structure of community celebrations, customs associated with childbirth and matrimony, gastronomic habits or sport. It signifies the complete set of

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inherited concepts, belief systems, values, and norms that constitute the basis for widely-accepted social conduct. Every culture has its own unique identity and ways of perceiving the world. It is inherent to human nature to pursue knowledge; in essence, everyone wishes to gain understanding. Africans interpret this pursuit in accordance with their identity. For them, the focus is not solely on acquiring knowledge for its own case, but rather on knowledge that serves the well-being of humanity. The goal of knowledge is to promote human growth and to protect and nurture all forms of life in the universe.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The specific objectives of the study were to:

1. Comprehend Ubuntu epistemological principles in contemporary Africa.
2. Uncover the core principles of African perspectives, such as communal accountability and respect for human dignity.
3. Comprehend the evolution of cultural identity within the African philosophical concept known as Ubuntu.
4. Project the potential opportunities for incorporating Ubuntu epistemological principles into daily living.
5. Establish ways of recognising Ubuntu epistemological principles as a unique African epistemic identity.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In accordance with the objectives of the study, the following questions were developed:

1. What are the Ubuntu epistemological principles in contemporary Africa?
2. What are the core principles of the African perspective, including collective accountability and respect for humanity?
3. What is the cultural identity associated with the African philosophy known as Ubuntu?
4. What are the potential opportunities for incorporating Ubuntu epistemological principles into daily living?
5. In what ways can we recognise Ubuntu epistemological principle as a unique African epistemic identity?

METHODOLOGY

This study utilises the qualitative approach in form of a literature review to

explore the concept of Ubuntu epistemological principles and the quest for a better Africa. As the world grapples with issues such as inequality, social fragmentation, and cultural polarisation, the philosophy of Ubuntu epistemology offers a compelling alternative to the dominant Western paradigm of individualism.

KEY PRINCIPLES OF UBUNTU EPISTEMOLOGY

Battle (1996) notes that the concept of Ubuntu originates from the Xhosa expression '*Umuntu ngumntu ngabanye abantu'*, which means that each individual's humanity is ideally expressed in relationship with others. Ubuntu consists of the prefix 'ubu-'and the stem '-ntu' evokes the idea of being in general. Thus, Ubuntu is the fundamental ontological and epistemological category in the African thought of the Bantu-speaking people. Ubuntu epistemological principles articulate such important principles such as respect, human dignity, compassion, solidarity and consensus, which demand conformity and loyalty to the group. Other key principles include humanness, gentleness, hospitality, empathy or taking trouble for others, deep kindness, friendliness, generosity, and vulnerability.

Roux and Coetzee (1994) describe Ubuntu as an African view of life – an African world-view. He argues that the distinctive collective consciousness of Africans is manifested in their behaviour patterns, expressions and spiritual self-fulfilment in which values such as the universal brotherhood of Africans, sharing and treating other people as humans, are concretised. His basic idea of universal brotherhood is echoed by other African thinkers in ideas such as sensitivity to the needs and wants of others, the understanding of others' frames of reference, and man as a social being. In his recent groundbreaking work 'Let Africa Lead', Khoza (2005) defines Ubuntu as "an African value system that means humanness or being human, a worldview characterized by such values as caring, sharing, compassion, communalism, democracy and related predispositions." Khoza adds that "Although it [Ubuntu] is culturally African in origin, the philosophy can have universal application."

The collective consciousness advocated by Ubuntu thinkers involves notions such as universal brotherhood and sharing which, for Mbigi, means "participation". From this view, Mbigi (1997) develops a network of concepts such as "group solidarity", "compassion", "respect", "dignity", and

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"collective unity" to convey his idea of Ubuntu. This has been stated clearly in Khoza's view of "collective consciousness", which involves universal brotherhood, sharing, and treating other people with respect. The sharing characteristic is very important for most Ubuntu philosophers – an attribute which is also Mbigi's starting point in developing his views on Ubuntu.

Roux and Coetzee (1994) assert that Mbigi bases his model on four principles which he derives from the Ubuntu view of life:

- Morality which involves trust and credibility.
- Interdependence which concerns the sharing and caring aspect that is co-operation and participation.
- Spirit of man which refers to human dignity and mutual respect that insists that human activity should be person driven and humanness should be central.
- Totality, which pertains to continuous improvement of everything by every member.

Ubuntu carries profound linguistic and philosophical significance. The phrase which means "a person is a person through other persons", is the source of the name (Gade, 2013). This expression perfectly captures the spirit of Ubuntu, highlighting the interdependence of all people and the idea that a person's identity and even existence are inextricably linked to their interactions with others. The linguistic significance of Ubuntu extends beyond its literal translation. In various Bantu languages, similar terms reflect this philosophical concept. For instance, in Sotho, the term is "botho", while in Tswana it is "buthu." These linguistic variations highlight the widespread presence and importance of the concept across different African cultures and languages (Dube, 2012).

Ubuntu is founded on a set of core principles and values that emphasise communalism, empathy, and interconnectedness. Ubuntu's core tenet is that every person has intrinsic worth and dignity. This principle encourages acts of kindness, empathy, and compassion towards others, reflecting the idea that one's humanity is affirmed through relationships with others (Lefa, 2015). Also, Ubuntu stresses that individuals are inextricably linked to their communities. The well-being of one person is seen as directly affecting the well-being of others, thereby promoting a sense of solidarity and mutual responsibility.

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Respect for oneself and others is also a fundamental value of Ubuntu. This includes honouring elders, valuing diverse perspectives, and treating everyone with dignity, regardless of their status or background (Mugumbate & Nyanguru, 2013). Ubuntu also encourages collective responsibility and cooperation. It underscores the importance of working together for the common good, whether in familial, social, or economic contexts. Furthermore, forgiveness, reconciliation, and the restoration of harmony are vital aspects of Ubuntu. It promotes the resolution of conflicts through dialogue and understanding, aiming to restore broken relationships and achieve social harmony.

AFRICAN EPISTEMOLOGY

African epistemology signifies the insights, abilities, and beliefs cultivated by local communities through extensive histories and experiences with their natural environments. Flavier (1995) characterises African epistemology as the regional knowledge, distinctive to a specific culture or society. This stands in contrast to the global knowledge framework produced by universities, research organisations, and private companies. African epistemology is an alternative to conventional, Western-style, or contemporary interpretations of knowledge. African epistemology delves into the distinctive and communal knowledge of a group of people or community, which shapes their collective perspective. African epistemology is rooted in collective understanding and is influenced and shaped by the culture of the specific area in question. There exists a distinction in methodology between Western perspectives and African epistemic perspectives, which endows each with a unique character. This disparity is fundamentally philosophical, stemming from cultural evolution and differing worldviews. African epistemology refers to the exclusive traditional insight that arises and flourishes within the specific circumstances of local men and women native to a particular region. It represents the wisdom possessed by individuals within a specific community and which has evolved over time and continues to evolve; it relies on experiences that have frequently been validated through centuries of application, tailored to regional culture and circumstances that are dynamic and fluid. The notion of African epistemology outlines a mental framework where theories and views of both nature and culture are understood. It is rooted in the community, not documented in writing, but conveyed through

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oral traditions and collective memory, and shaped by traditions, practices, sayings, narratives, and it is fluid. While African epistemology plays a vital role in our political discussions, it is gradually obtaining recognition and significance within the African political, cultural, and academic landscape, yet there are obstacles that must be addressed, some of which stem from the effects of colonialism and continue into the post-colonial era. The colonial masters used brutal policies to marginalise and subjugate the African people in order to exert complete dominance over their territories and assets. Some of these policies involve a continual denigration of African cultures and deliberate actions to eliminate established systems of knowledge, substituting them with Western-centred belief and knowledge frameworks. The pre-planned policies were effectively implemented, resulting in the total subjugation of communities and the disparagement of their knowledge systems, leading to the outcome that many of the communities found themselves ensnared in the mechanisms of perpetuating their own subjugation through Western education, decline of relatively self-sufficient economies into reliant consumers by creating economic disparities for the expansion and supremacy of European capitalism and imperialism.

Nonetheless, the revival of African epistemology presents a significant challenge for decision-makers and researchers in Africa at present. There is a strong demand for safeguarding African epistemology against online infringements. Cultural globalisation is also playing a role in this predicament.

African epistemology addresses the significance and understanding that an African conveys when asserting a claim of knowledge. The traditional African intellect is capable of obtaining and justifying the knowledge of reality. This is achievable due to the African mindset being filled with the practicality of holism, the dominance of poly-consciousness, inclusivity, the unity of realms, and interpersonal connections.

THE CONCEPT OF COMMUNALISM

Communalism is a concept that outlines the fundamental values and collective ideas of people and their personal view of the community. It can also refer to the way of living or engaging within the essence of a person's community (Ekennia, 1998). In Communalism, the collective is the central point of the endeavours of each

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member of the society. This philosophy highlights the importance of the collective's achievements and welfare over, although not at the cost of, the individual's well-being. Consequently, it is understood that the fulfillment and significance of a person's life rely on their affiliation with the community. Communalism enhances the welfare of all individual members of the community, who are expected to share a sense of responsibility equally among each individual to promote the collective well-being of the group. The social existence of Africans is rooted in the belief that all people belong to one human family.

Gyekye (1992) asserts that African communitarian philosophy signifies: (i) that the individual does not consciously decide to join a human community, meaning that the community life is not a choice for any single individual; (ii) that a human being is simultaneously a cultural entity; (iii) that a human being cannot – and perhaps should not – exist apart from other individuals; (iv) that a human being is inherently inclined towards others and requires connections with them; (v) that social connections are essential rather than optional; and (vi) that, resulting from (iv) and (v), an individual is formed, though only in part, by the social connections in which they exist.

An epistemology is communitarian if it views the process of acquiring knowledge within social and cultural frameworks. Kusch (2002) utilises communitarian epistemology to analyze epistemic practices from a specific viewpoint. This form of epistemology upholds two assertions: (1) That knowledge and related terms such as ‘know’ and ‘knower’ indicate a social ranking bestowed by the communities. Consequently, knowledge is reliant on the prevailing community that grants it. For a community, to bestow knowledge means that the individual understands, because the community asserts it. (ii) That the societal recognition of knowledge is generally given to, or associated with groups rather than individuals. The focus on generally is meant to suggest that this is not universally the case, but pertains mainly to typical and primary examples of knowledge (Kusch, 2002).

Epistemic practice is examined from the shared perspective in African communitarian epistemology. Central to African communitarian epistemology is the emphasis on the significance of society in knowledge practices. This perspective is grounded in the African perception of the individual, which is not based on physical or psychological traits; instead, it is intrinsically associated with the community, as the community serves as the

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foundational element in African philosophy (Menkiti, 1984). In this framework, nature and culture are seen as interconnected, each reinforcing the other while also maintaining their distinctiveness. Such a connection perspective comprises personal input grounded in the notion that 'as we exist, I exist'. This highlights the relationship between the individual and the collective, illustrating how the community shapes one's comprehension and affects the development of their beliefs. This holds true, as African epistemology is based on ontological issues and dedication. Ontological issues are the elements of existence that allow us to differentiate between what is genuine and what is not genuine or fictional. Ontological commitment refers to the inclination and readiness that allows us to adopt and employ particular conceptual frameworks or descriptions of reality to articulate the nature of the world we inhabit; the human individual is inherently social, thus, the African views interprets and derives meaning from interactions between being and reality (Jimoh, 2017). Mbiti (1969) believes that only through the lens of others does a person become aware of their own existence, their responsibilities, and their entitlements and obligations towards themselves and towards others. When one experiences pain, one does not endure it in solitude but alongside the corporate entity; when one experiences joy, one does not celebrate alone but together with one's kinsmen, one's neighbours, and relatives, whether they are living or deceased. Whatever befalls the individual affects the entire group, and whatever befalls the entire group affects the individual. The individual can only declare: "I exist, because we exist; and since we exist, therefore I exist." This is the fundamental principle in the comprehension of the African view of man. (Mbiti, 1969).

In other terms, it is crucial within African communities to engage in actions that maintain and enhance order within the communal framework, as this maintenance and enhancement of order are the means by which individuals acquire significance, can follow their interests, and guarantee their survival. It is the community that shapes the identity of an individual as a person. A human being cannot, and perhaps must not, exist in solitude from others; the human being is inherently inclined towards other individuals, who are essential, and must have connections with them. Those social connections are not optional but vital.

Nevertheless, the conceptualisation of African epistemology has focused on

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validating it as an authentic and credible area of study (Chemhuru, 2019). The pivotal inquiry has been whether it is appropriate to discuss an African epistemological system, suggesting a specific African epistemic identity. This can be positioned against the backdrop of Africa's colonial history, presenting African philosophy with the challenge of creating a distinct framework of knowledge that is both African and philosophical (Higgs, 2010).

UBUNTU AND COMMUNALISM

Ubuntu and communalism suggest that knowledge is mainly owned by groups rather than by individuals; it relies on the present community that bestows it, serving as a form of social status (Kusch, 2002). Communitarianism is reflected in various African proverbs. Menkiti (1984) asserts that it is the community that characterises the individual as a person, rather than a mere unchanging attribute of rationality, will, or memory. In the African perspective, the human community is essential in the individuals' attainment of complete personhood. The person is entirely shaped and formed by his or her surrounding community (Menkiti, 1984).

A person's experiences and engagements within a culture or society are accountable for defining the person's sense of self. These experiences and the individual's identity are so closely intertwined that it is unfeasible for the individual to separate from these experiences. Gyekye (1997) elucidates that the community bestows the individual with his or her identity. The community serves as the backdrop for the formation and evolution of an individual's identity, as one understands who she is through her interactions with others, rather than as a solitary, desolate entity in a social universe; an individual's identity originates, at least partially, from a cultural backdrop, specifically, a community (Gyekye, 1997).

The community serves as a structure through which an individual's identity is developed. This identity is shaped by each person engaging in it through the process of social connections with others. Therefore, the societal value of knowledge is usually assigned to, or associated with, groups rather than individuals. When an African asserts an epistemic claim, she confirms that she comprehends, believes, and regards as warranted the assertion of being the situation. Comprehension is a crucial component of knowledge that starts with the recognition of

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what is familiar. Recognition is an attentive consciousness that entails a mutually dependent application of: (i) the subject of recognitions upon awareness and (ii) awareness upon the subject of consciousness. In this manner, there exists a reciprocal relationship between the knower and the known, where the knower gains a comprehensive understanding of the known. The assertion that comprehension starts with awareness should not be confused with the notion that comprehension and awareness are synonymous. Awareness does not equate to understanding, and understanding encompasses far more than simple awareness.

The comprehension of our awareness allows us to remain situated in what we comprehend within the framework of reality. This is where the African ontological communality is significantly influential. While knowledge encompasses the facts and insights regarding a specific topic, understanding denotes the grasp of the intended significance or reason behind a particular occurrence. Although these two ideas are intimately connected, and it is nearly practically impossible to distinguish between them, knowledge is more extensive than comprehension. Nevertheless, both knowledge and understanding are unfinished without the other. It is unfeasible to detach the human being from nature in African ontology. To try such a division is to shut out human comprehension of reality, as knowledge emanates from the relationship between the interaction and unity of elements in the African perspective.

In African communalism, epistemology, testimony and oral tradition serve as means of interaction among individuals that entail the sharing of information between the person giving the testimony and the listener. This is viewed as a method of conveying knowledge where the individual sharing insights imparts understanding through various forms of communication (primarily verbal, linguistic, and propositional), to the recipient. The latter gains insight into the conditions depicted in the account of the former. Within African communitarian epistemology, the accounts of elders are considered as a source of insight and validation. In the African traditional context, experimentation is not employed when a dispute occurs between two sides about what one asserts to perceive. Instead, the account of an outside observer is requested to resolve the disagreement. The third-party testimony in this context pertains to trustworthy elders

who share the responsibility of safeguarding knowledge, values, and customs, alongside the community head/leader.

However, the accounts of trustworthy elders serve as both an epistemic resource and a basis for justifying knowledge. The foundation of knowledge is often what preserves and transmits the fundamental identity and cultural heritage of a group or community across generations, partly through dependence on elders. In a community, elders fulfill various functions in the unofficial process of preserving and passing down knowledge. On one side, they serve as the guardians, origins, and storage of knowledge, history, beliefs, and values within African cultures by supervising the transfer of traditions. Conversely, elders bear the collective duty of offering justifications for promoting and ensuring the upkeep and commitment to cultural beliefs and customs, for the benefit of the community. To be elder demands a considerable amount of knowledge, experience, sound judgment, and strong ethical awareness. Epistemological authority is also found in the interplay of age, experience, wise judgment, character, and practical insight. The goal of communal epistemology is to achieve collective consensus by sharing cognitive and epistemic responsibilities. Collective agreement is not merely all a simplistic concept of likeness in viewpoints; it refers to the idea that the beliefs of different individuals regarding facts are consistent with one another, and that this consensus is aligned with, or substantiated by, the actual facts or experiences. Additionally, it suggests a concept of knowledge that is comprehensive and inclusive, encompassing diverse knowledge bases, various viewpoints, and the value of experiential expertise. Communitarian epistemologists operate within the context of societies and their traditions, faiths, languages, ideologies, principles, passions, and favoured professions of individuals, along with the collective knowledge that is transmitted to the population through proverbs, esteemed customs, legends, and folklore. Additional aspects encompass rituals and procedures related to religion and legal systems.

UBUNTU EPISTEMOLOGICAL PRINCIPLES AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

The Ubuntu philosophy is fundamentally democratic as it incorporates mechanisms that safeguard both individual and communal rights. The notion that a person is a person because of others implies that one cannot consider infringing on the

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rights of others (Tambulasi & Kayuni, 2005). Ubuntu is defined by essential values such as humanity, kindness, generosity, respect, compassion, warmth, empathy, altruism, commitment, and love, along with sensitivity to information from human actions in relation to how individuals are treated by others, particularly how political leaders interact with the governed. It has also been characterised as a philosophy that fundamentally embodies personhood, humanity, compassion, and ethics (Black, Hill, Edwards, Grootboom & Lassiter, 2003).

While African cultures are diverse, there are shared elements across them in aspects such as value systems, beliefs, and practices. These are principally represented by the African perspective. The idea of Ubuntu exists in various manifestations across numerous cultures in Africa. Specifically, it is present in the Bantu languages spoken in East, Central, and Southern Africa. Ubuntu represents a cultural outlook that seeks to encompass the fundamental nature of humanity (Murithi, 2009). It can also be characterised as a sense of humanness, an all-encompassing spirit of compassion and community, balance and generosity, as well as reverence and attentiveness that individuals and groups show towards each other. It serves as the basis for the fundamental principles that are reflected in the manners African individuals interact and conduct themselves with one another and with all others they meet (Sulamoyi, 2010). From a political viewpoint, Ubuntu demands that leaders show the path for others. By embodying Ubuntu values, the leader validates his/her authority through dedication to these African principles.

Relatedly, Motsei (2007) views Ubuntu as a philosophy that can aid in the restoration within and among various communities. Ubuntu signifies the contrary of being selfish and self-centred. It encourages collaboration among people, cultures, and countries, thereby enabling everyone to be esteemed in order to achieve their complete potential in harmony with those around them. An Ubuntu form of governance signifies a compassionate approach to leadership grounded in shared unity and community instead of individualism and specificity (Fox, 2010).

Ubuntu is captured in the phrase *umuntu ugumuntu ngabantu*, meaning a person becomes a person through the existence of others. This signifies that an individual relies on their connections with others to express,

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nurture, and realise the qualities that define one as a person. At the start of life, one exists merely in a state of being potentially a person. A person's life, if everything aligns perfectly, is a continuous journey of evolving into a fuller individual through interactions with others. The essence of personhood is bestowed as a gift from another person (Shutte, 2001).

Every person genuinely becomes a complete human being through their relationships with others in society. This highlights the essential requirements of human life within the political community of Africa. Ubuntu serves as a crucial force in Africa, which embodies the values of reconciliation, mutual respect, inclusiveness, democracy, and humanism. It represents a comprehensive approach to unifying all individuals within the community. Therefore, to thrive in the community, one must embrace the principles of Ubuntu in their lives. One cannot exist as an independent entity, as an individualism, where the self is seen as isolated. Instead, all interacting influences, both internal and external, are connected and shape the individual. (Bhengu, 1996). An individual is connected to their community through involvement and interaction with others, both within and beyond their community.

UBUNTU EPISTEMOLOGICAL PRINCIPLES AS INSTRUMENT OF IDENTITY

Ubuntu epistemological principles serve as significant means for cultivating identity. These principles can play a role in enhancing political advancement and societal development within the African context. Ubuntu epistemological principles can be utilised beneficially in initial formal education, campaigns, conflict resolution, peace building, adult literacy, mass communication, boosting confidence, and improving self-esteem. Political elites present various arguments to attempt to bolster their stance.

Employing Ubuntu epistemological principles for significant political discussions within the community can empower individuals to have confidence in themselves and maintain high levels of self-esteem and assurance. The boosted self-worth and assurance result in the unleashing of their creative potentials, whose expression will bring about inventive methods for addressing their physical and social surroundings, and consequently lead to enhanced productivity (Wa Mberia, 2004). Ubuntu epistemological principles for the discussion of significant

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societal matters carry substantial political advantages. This holds the community in high regard, the community members inherently value themselves. The self-respect has the effect of raising some self-esteem and assurance.

Consequently, Ubuntu epistemological principles are crucial for the liberation of African minds. Ubuntu possesses significant potential for the continent's progress. Ubuntu epistemological principles serve as powerful instruments for mobilising around developmental political matters, particularly at the community level (Moodlet, 2000). Ubuntu epistemological principles are among the most treasured assets of humanity, as they serve as the key element that allows people to integrate as active participants in the community they are born into.

UBUNTU EPISTEMOLOGICAL PRINCIPLES, CULTURE AND GOVERNANCE

The pre-colonial African communities were highly structured and well-established systems of governance among indigenous peoples that maintained and upheld social order, where laws were established and upheld, and where disputes between communities and tribes were mediated and resolved. Ubuntu epistemological principles serve as a foundation for a comprehensive understanding of our present governance challenges. In order for culture to advance democracy and effective governance, efforts must be made towards cultural reorientation, with the objective of making culture beneficial for our democracy. There exists a natural connection among culture, democracy, and effective governance, which, if thoroughly examined and assimilated in the political and socio-economic realities of the African populace, could result in peace, stability, and progress for the continent.

Ubuntu epistemological principles and traditional cultural practices are interconnected; they are inseparable and can be utilised interchangeably. It is colonialism that broke the umbilical cord which connected the African people with their natural and cultural surroundings. With Western education, Africans lost touch with their cultural practices, community and family. Cultural community knowledge is not confirmed in learning. It has taken many years of struggle to remove the Eurocentric viewpoint and understandings that have been embedded in African thinking (Dei, 2012).

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Culture is a vague collection of fundamental beliefs and values, approaches to existence, convictions, guidelines, practices, and social norms that are collectively held by a community of individuals and that affect each member's conduct and his/her understanding of the significance of other people's behaviors. People engage with their cultures in various ways, yet there exists a shared comprehension of their cultural frameworks and the expectations that oversee them and the responsibilities of every reliable participant in their societies are recognised. In this context, culture might be defined as a system of shared knowledge. Dei (2012) observes that culture encompasses a broad spectrum of human experiences, tangible accomplishments, standards, convictions, emotions, manners, morals, and others. It is the patterned lifestyle embraced by a specific community that asserts a common ancestry or lineage. Bello (1991) notes that culture is the entirety of the lifestyle developed by a group as they strive to address the challenge of living in their environment, which provides structure and significance to their cultural, political, economic, standards thereby differentiating a people from their neighbors (Bello, 1991).

Western education served as a colonial instrument aimed at undermining the traditional cultural practices and values of African communities. Ubuntu epistemological principles can steadfastly uphold specific positive cultural values deemed essential and crucial for the effective operation of human society and the well-being of individuals, such values as family hood, community essence, camaraderie, and collaborative unity; the person exists in mutual supportive service with other individuals in the community (Nyerere, 1966). Ubuntu is a principle that aids in addressing the instinct for unsociability in individuals, fostering inclusivity and reducing divisions, segregation, and an over-attachment to personal interests within the community.

Regarding governance, a highly valued cultural aspect in Africa's sociopolitical structure is the significant emphasis it places on strong leadership and ethical integrity in the management of public trust, which fosters accountability and credibility among those in public positions. In addressing and overcoming the challenges of societal life, African individuals rely on, and develop, the benefits and services of different members of

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the community to accomplish specific objectives of the community.

Nonetheless, when we examine democratic principles, there are inherent cultural values that support democracy as a governance system in which political authority is distributed among the populace, either directly or through representatives they choose. In general, democratic values include popular sovereignty or self-rule, to the government of the citizens, from the citizens, on behalf of the citizens, freedom of worship, and freedom of expression and viewpoints that encompass not just the political sphere but also the economic and social sphere. When we talk about democratic ideals, we refer to the beneficial tenets and stipulations of democracy as a form of governance that is believed to aim for the welfare of the members of a nation. These principles were crafted to benefit the entire polity. For instance, the principle of law, which is the defining characteristic of democracy, guarantees that every citizen is treated equally under the law, regardless of their noble lineage or elevated social standing; it acknowledges no untouchable privileges and no individual is above the law (Omoregbe, 2007). In a democracy, human dignity is upheld by honouring and safeguarding the inherent rights of individuals, particularly the rights to liberty and equality. The community as a whole, therefore, gains from the cultivated skills of its individuals. Development of a state here focuses on the people. This process involves continual transformation and adaptation to achieve greater societal standards aligned with their own decisions and principles. African nations have the potential to improve if they find leaders who have the will, the ability and the vision to make Africa prosper by harnessing effectively Ubuntu epistemological principles.

The resolution to the challenge of advancing African nations lies in blending Ubuntu epistemological principles with democratic principles and African cultural and socio-political communal ideals that are inherently integrated into the fabric of the life orientation of the African people, in the administration of an African nation. People engage with their cultures in various ways, yet there exists a shared comprehension of their cultural frameworks and the expectations that oversee them. The responsibilities of every reliable participant in their societies are recognised.

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CONCLUSION

Ubuntu is an all-an inclusive, deeply embedded African viewpoint that pursues the fundamental ideals of profound humanity, compassion, selflessness, and understanding, along with related values, ensuring a vibrant and quality communal existence within a familial setting and spirit. Ubuntu is a concept originating from Africa that represents a communicative exchange of people's cultures. It represents love, harmony, a human-focused, holistic method to building a political community and promoting peace. It also encompasses the notion of acknowledging mistakes: pursuing and offering forgiveness, along with reconciliation. It embodies a philosophical concept of fundamental energy that epistemologically influences each person's life to reflect humanity. Ubuntu symbolises a bond of unity among the people of Africa. The emergence of colonialism and the later enforcement of Western beliefs and political frameworks disturbed the customary traditions and societal structures rooted in Ubuntu.

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