Ubuntu: A phantasmagoria in rural Kwazulu-Natal?

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Ubuntu is a value system that is known to be found in African communities. Like other values within African communities, it is perceived to have transcended the colonialist rule which changed the landscape of Africa including its socio-cultural makeup. Although KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) is credited for the initiation of Ubuntu, the erosion of certain cultural values has been found to be more acute in KwaZulu-Natal. That being the case, an empirical study into the existence of Ubuntu in rural KZN, Umgungundlovu District, was conducted and the results revealed that Ubuntu is an important cultural value in the community which is however perceived to be losing its importance in the younger generation.

Key words: Ubuntu, African value system, patriarchy, African worldview, African epistemology.

INTRODUCTION

Ubuntu….speaks of the very essence of being human. …..“Hey, so-and-so has Ubuntu.” Then you are generous, you are hospitable, you are friendly and caring and compassionate. You share what you have. It is to say, “My humanity is caught up, is inextricably bound up, in your………….. A person with Ubuntu is open and available to others, affirming of others, does not feel threatened that others are able and good, for he or she has a proper self-assurance that comes from knowing that he or she belongs in a greater whole and is diminished when others are humiliated or diminished, when others are tortured or oppressed, or treated as if they were less than who they are.” Desmond Tutu, No future without forgiveness

A study on the existence of Ubuntu was conducted in the rural areas of KwaZulu-Natal (KZN). KZN is the third smallest province out of the 9 South African provinces, and occupies only 7.7% of the country. Despite its size, it however has a population of 10.3 million which is the second largest amongst the provinces. The capital city of KZN is Pietermaritzburg and is located in the midlands, in the apartheid era it used to be Ulundi which is situated in the Northern part of the province.

During the apartheid era, KZN used to be separated into Natal and KwaZulu which had been named so in 1497 by Vasco da Gama. Natal was regarded as a province and KwaZulu which had been named so when amaZulu ‘the people of Heaven’ inhabited it, was regarded as a homeland. KwaZulu means the place of the Zulus and the offer of a ‘fully independent homeland’ was refused by Chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi who was the leader of the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) (sahistory.org.za). Buthelezi however received all
privileges of chief minister of KwaZulu and led its government. With KZN having gone through a colonial history, and various authors including Igboin (2012) condemning the attrition of moral values as a result of colonialism and the intrusion of other religions which are foreign, it therefore remains that there has been infiltration and possible transformation of values, including Ubuntu, in the communities of KZN.

According to Molefe (2014) ‘these are rich times for scholarship on Ubuntu, the Zulu, Xhosa and Ndebele word for humanness….’ hence this article seeks to investigate the existence of Ubuntu in the area of amaZulu, where it is perceived to have emanated. This article therefore provides the views of the participants in KZN on Ubuntu, and analyses the term as a philosophical imperative amidst the changing indigenous societies which have been affected by colonialism and modernity.

What is Ubuntu?

Societies are living organisms and are what they are because of the values that are found and utilised by their people. These values continue to define the communities throughout their existence, either in their indigenous locations or in other areas where they interact with others, their values either separate them from others or facilitate a communal spirit of co-existence with other communities. These values can however be influenced by external and at times internal factors that emanate within the different communities. The African communities and in particular South African communities in KZN are not immune to such influences.

Despite Africans being a collection of a multitude of communities, there is however an interconnectedness which is determined by their worldview. The conceptualisation of the African worldview by Lyons et al. (2011) is distinguished across the following elements:

1. Epistemology which for African people is affective and perceptive.
2. Ontology which recognises spirituality, existence and the universe.
3. Cosmology which has its roots on African values like communality, interdependence and harmony with nature; and
4. Axiology which highlights collaboration between humans.

Kanu (2010) states that colonialism and Western domination almost cost Africans their cultural trail. According to the author, in order for Africans to ascend and obtain some form of status they had to isolate themselves ideologically and physically from their culture. It could then be expected that Ubuntu would also suffer the same isolation.

Ubuntu as an African philosophy emanates from IsiZulu ‘umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu’ which English equivalent is ‘a person through other people’ which puts value on human life as a philosophy (Oyeleye, 2011). In defining Ubuntu, McDonald (2010) articulates that Ubuntu places the interest of the community above that of individuals and has been used by the South African state, academics, private sector and non-governmental organisations post-apartheid. Gade (2012) perceives Ubuntu as portraying ‘human interdependence, solidarity and communalism’ whereas Idoniboye-Obu and Whetho (2013) has a more descriptive definition and have a list of factors that signify the concept which are:

Is the potential for being human.
Is to value the good of community above self-interest.
Is to strive to help people in the spirit of service.
Is to show respect to others and to be honest and trustworthy.
Ubuntu regards humanity as an integral part of the ecosystems that lead to a communal responsibility to sustain life.
Ubuntu shares natural resources on a principle of equity among and between generations.
Ubuntu is fair to all.
Ubuntu is compassionate.
Ubuntu is a collective respect for human dignity.
Ubuntu refers to people.
Ubuntu is one of the things that you recognize when you experience it.

This can then support the statement that it is ‘all things to all people’ whilst also being ‘different things to different people.’ Bennett (2011) also adds to the argument when he registers the lack of a clear definition of Ubuntu as one of the negative factors of the concept. The author further feels that the concept does not have much use in the contemporary world, that the constitution encapsulates human dignity in anyway, that cohesive privileges create hierarchies which corrupt traditional leadership and that Ubuntu denies an individual his independence.

What perceptions do we have about Ubuntu?

As a concept, Ubuntu seems to have entered the scene of public discourse in the 1920s when Inkatha, ‘a cultural movement’, used it in its drive to revive the respect of Zulu values (Bennett, 2011). The emergence of Ubuntu is perceived by Gade (2012) to have taken place in ‘African indigenous culture’ in ‘small-scale communities in pre-colonial Africa’. This assertion is vague and does not provide any knowledge of where the concept emerged. According to Matolino and Kwidningwi (2013) Ubuntu came to be the focus of politics during the ‘political liberation, from minority white rule to majority black rule in Zimbabwe and South Africa.

The concept transitioned the apartheid regime and has
found itself as part of a democratic South Africa and has become all things to all people whilst also being different things to different people (Idoniboye-Obu and Whetho, 2013). This transition and existence of Ubuntu in these contemporary times are supported by McDonald (2010) who confirms that Ubuntu has been used by the South African state, academics, private sector and non-governmental organisations post-apartheid, showing that it has become part of contemporary approaches. Nabudere praised the revitalisation of Ubuntu and its integration into the Western world as it provides a sense of identity and respect (Kochalumchu-Vattil, 2010). Ubuntu further plays a huge role in restorative justice and adds value to factors such as independence and responsibility. In its current state, Ubuntu is perceived to be an ideology, a worldview, a philosophy, ethic, mindset, culture and doctrine, that being so, its definition can be said to be evasive.

Mabovula (2011) also perceives Ubuntu as a fundamental ontological and epistemological category in the African thought whilst also defining it as an African value system. McDougal (2013) also observes that Ubuntu is an African philosophy which extends the person to others through the affirmation of their humanity. York (2014) perceives it as defining the unified and interconnected existence of Africans which is characterised by ‘love, caring, tolerance, respect, empathy, accountability and responsibility.

Although Ubuntu is, to a large extent, perceived in a positive light, there are also negative factors which are attached to Ubuntu by other authors. Bennett (2011) argues that there is a lack of a clear definition of the concept; that it does not have much use in the contemporary world; that the constitution encapsulates human dignity in anyway, that cohesive privileges create hierarchies which corrupt traditional leadership and that ubuntu denies an individual his independence. Keevy (2009) perceives it as personifying patriarchy and being oppressive to African women. The patriarchal hierarchy of Ubuntu which is depicted below, is believed to be based on an individual’s status and to embrace the spiritual and the living dimensions as seen to be existing in African communities (Figure 1).

If patriarchy is at the centre of Ubuntu and since Ubuntu is found in all disciplines in the community, patriarchy would therefore manifest itself in all spheres of the community including their livelihood. It would then drive all the disciplines including the economy of the area and the political realm which might be reflected in how women are involved in the governance structures and their participation in decision making processes within these structures. Mapaure (2011) however raises an issue which could be perceived as counter patriarchy when he states that central to Ubuntu is the value of ‘human dignity’ and that any treatment that is ‘degrading’ cannot be said to encapsulate Ubuntu.

This therefore raises a question on Ubuntu and its character, can it indeed be said to be patriarchal or is it grounded in treating people in a respectful and equitable manner void of class or gender? Taking from the definitions of Ubuntu that have been presented earlier, none have shown the perceived inherent discriminatory practices that can be found in Ubuntu, especially since Ubuntu is concerned about the group and its wellbeing rather than the individual. When one also reviews the definition which perceives Ubuntu to have elements of helpfulness, respect, equity and fairness amongst others, it therefore is unfathomable that Ubuntu will also consist of elements of patriarchy. Ubuntu and the related concepts are also largely dependent on the individual and how he views himself in relation to the community and how he perceives his identity. The manner in which a person views himself can transcend to how he perceives himself and his role within the group which can be influenced by his personality and character. This can then result in a person with a negative perception of himself and his role feeling that Ubuntu is patriarchal.

Is Ubuntu limitless?

As it presents itself in African philosophy, African value system, African worldview, culture and having its tentacles in the way that people live and behave, can Ubuntu be contained? Can we make any claims of understanding it fully? More to the point, can people of KwaZulu-Natal claim to know what it is and does it even exist in the area credited for its initiation? Ubuntu is found in various African cultures and languages. Below is a table depicting Ubuntu in other African languages (Table 1).

The existence of Ubuntu equivalents in other African languages bears testimony that it resonates within Africa and its people. There is however a notion by Gade (2012) that the meanings of these African equivalent terms have not been ‘sufficiently investigated’ and that there is a possibility of the terms having evolved over the years. One could also pose the question if ‘humanness’ as a seemingly accepted English equivalent of Ubuntu has been ‘sufficiently investigated’.

Grainger et al. (2010) present ‘humanity’ as an English version of Ubuntu when they articulate that the definition of ubuntu as ‘humanity’ can neglect to give the actual essence of ‘an ethical system concerned with the connectedness of each human being to others.’ This then shows that there are also doubts about the English definition of Ubuntu. If so, does ‘humanity’ or ‘humanness’ give a proper reflection of Ubuntu as an African philosophy or does it use a Westernised lens on a concept that is grounded on the African worldview? If humanness or humanity has not been ‘sufficiently investigated’ as a Westernised version of Ubuntu, why should the African equivalents be ‘sufficiently investigated’, especially when all these concepts are
 grounded on the African worldview and epistemology which transcends borders and culture. This could then show a colonialist attitude that African knowledge has to go through certain stages which are grounded in Westernised epistemology to be accepted.

In addition, McDonald (2010) highlights the simplicity and the complexity of defining Ubuntu. ‘It is simple in the sense that its general meaning and spirit are broadly understood in common practice and parlance throughout most parts of the continent. It is complex in the sense that there is no easy or direct translation to English, and there are unresolved debates about its ontological status.’ English translations are said to include ‘humanness’, ‘I am because you are’, ‘a person is a person because of others’ and ‘a spirit of neighbourliness’ amongst others.

It is however not only that Ubuntu exists in other countries as suggested by the existence of the philosophy in other African languages but it can also be linked to other concepts in various contexts which are central to communal efficacy and Africanness. Alcoff (2011) perceives a connection between Ubuntu and ‘linked fate’ which is a belief by African Americans that what happens in your community has an effect on you. Other concepts which are associated with Ubuntu are communitarianism, African communalism and kinship (Mabovula, 2011). Whereas communitarianism is defined as a philosophical viewpoint which focuses its definition on an individual in terms of the social bonds and traditions rather than personal characteristics, communalism has its focus on
the group and gives a perspective on ‘collective existence and intersubjectivity’ of humanity and how this creates a source for ‘supportiveness, cooperation, collaboration and solidarity’ (Mabovula, 2011).

Masolo (2012) however warns that communalism does not mean that ‘people ought to share everything’ as an element of individualism still needs to be maintained to allow for, amongst others, intelligence and creativity. According to the author, it is the belief of communitarians that since individualism is learned, so can caring and their drive is for an environment which nurtures a ‘good society’. Mabovula (2011) however also presents the notion of kinship which he perceives to be a state where an individual aligns his interests pertaining to various issues of existence and wellbeing to those of the group. When doing so, philia, which is another concept presented by Masolo (2012), plays a role. Philia is aptly defined as ‘getting along with others’. All these concepts can be linked to Ubuntu because their main element lies in the prioritisation of group cohesion and the needs of the group over individualism.

Negritude, a philosophy which is defined by its originator Senghor as ‘... the whole of the values of civilization – cultural, economic, social and political – which characterize the ...... Negro African World.’ (Mapaure, 2011) can also be perceived as another view which has ties with Ubuntu. The link between the two philosophies, Ubuntu and Negritude, can be perceived in terms of Ubuntu also being seen as a value system or a philosophy that transcends all disciplines and which characterises the African community.

The existence of Ubuntu in communities seems to be a positive influence which brings communities together for common good. It also influences every aspect of the community and seems to be a common factor that could potentially go over indigenous boundaries and communities. The importance of the community amongst African societies, especially in light of Negritude, African communalism and kinship; cannot be seen only as resultant from Ubuntu but as a sum total of other philosophical or epistemological influences. The focus of every interaction in the African philosophy would then be valued in terms of its impact on the community, which can make Ubuntu’s influence seem inexhaustible.

**METHODOLOGY**

**What does KZN say about the existence of Ubuntu?**

Amazulu are a nation who have a noble history and opulent traditional values, and are currently reconstructing their cultural legacy (Adeyemi, 2012). That being so, the disruption and seizing of practising and development of traditional values in colonised territories is understood to be more acute in KZN. This is supported by Henriques (2013) who perceives the Zulu culture to be rich but, within the same breath, raises a challenge of how this culture can adapt to a modernised environment.

With culture being perceived to be dynamic, and Amazulu building their cultural legacy which was affected by colonialism and apartheid, the need to investigate how Ubuntu is being perceived in modern KZN was identified. The study conducted was specific to KZN where Ubuntu emerged in light of the influences that have affected cultural values in the African communities. These values were either eroded or changed to fit the modern world. With Ubuntu being a value system and a philosophy, it therefore can be expected that it has been influenced by modernity and even continues to be so.

A qualitative study was conducted in five areas of KZN to investigate if ubuntu still exists in the communities and how it is perceived by them. According to the 2011 census, KZN consists largely of Black Africans who total over 86, 8 million people (Statistics South Africa, 2011). The rest of the population is made up of 1.4 million Coloureds, 7.4 million Indians and 4.2 million Whites. This therefore means that 87% of the population is KZN is made up of Black Africans. Statistics further show that in KZN, 77% of the population speak isiZulu as a mother tongue.

Umgungundlovu has 1 017 763 residents who live in 272 666 households (www.localgovernment.co.za). The area was chosen for the study because it has a large contingency of rural areas which are divided into deep rural and semi-urban. These areas are governed through a constitutional democracy of South Africa but as part of the rural communities, are under the control of traditional leadership. Rural communities were chosen because these are areas which are grounded in culture and traditions and value the use of indigenous knowledge. There can however be ranges in the use of culture and traditions as deep rural areas are known to be far from towns and far removed from external influences and modernity, whereas semi-urban areas are close to towns and prone to western influences. The study therefore also looked at whether there were variances between the views of the participants from the deep rural areas and those from the semi-urban areas.

Traditional leadership in KZN consists of amakhosi (plural for Inkosi) and Traditional Councils (TCs) as promulgated through, inter alia, the Constitution of South Africa (Act 108 of 1996) and the KwaZulu-Natal Traditional Leadership and Governance Framework (Act 5 of 2005). Amakhosi are traditional leaders, known as chiefs a term which, post-democracy, is regarded as colonialist with indigenous terms like Inkosi being used even in literature. Amakhosi have been part of indigenous leadership pre-colonialism, during apartheid and during the democratic rule. Umgungundlovu also has functioning traditional leadership structures with both the Provincial House of Traditional Leaders (PHTL) as well as Umgungundlovu Local House of Traditional Leaders (ULHTL) being housed in Pietermaritzburg.

The study was in the form of a case study, and was
conducted in three deep rural areas of eMathulini with an estimated population of 15 000 individuals, eNhlazuka with 25 000 individuals and eMhlangandlovu with 3 000 individuals; as well as in two semi-urban areas of kwaManyavu which has an estimated population of 27 000 individuals and kwaMpuumuzu with 65 000 households. These cases were selected through a consultative process with ULHTL.

The study population within these cases consisted of Amakhosi, community members and Traditional Councils. Sampling was conducted through the snowball technique where each Inkosi was made aware of the sampling requirements for the study and appointed a coordinator for his area to arrange, in consultation with the researcher, study participants. The interviews and FG meetings took place in the areas of study. Interviews took one hour whereas FG meetings took two and a half hours. Interviews were conducted with Amakhosi and FGs were conducted with TCs and community members.

Results pertaining to the study are presented below per case as well as per participants. A brief analysis of the results of the study is done after the presentation of each data set from the participants.

Area of Emathulini

Emathulini is a deep rural area near the town of Dalton in the North of KZN. The area consists of 15, 000 people under the leadership of Inkosi. The area is 70 approximately kilometres away from Pietermaritzburg and is deep rural with roads being untarred and problems with basic services being articulated. The people in the area said that there is not much to appreciate about the area because they still did not have services like water and electricity. They however loved to stay there because that is all they know and they are able to live a life where they practice their culture and exercise their different belief systems uninhibited.

Data from Inkosi

According to Inkosi, ‘Ubuntu botho’ is a value that was taught by the homelands government pre democracy. He felt that ubuntu incorporates a sense of concern for others, being helpful, compassionate and creating peace within the community. These values are still important to Inkosi and, according to him, can still be found in his community. The extent to which they exist however was perceived to have decreased over time and having been affected by the modern lifestyle and the constitutional rights that have been afforded to individuals, especially the youth. From the response of Inkosi, the efforts to instil Ubuntu within communities commenced during the apartheid period with the homelands government, which then supports the notion by certain authors that Ubuntu was initiated by Inkatha. Ubuntu still exists within the Zulu communities but is threatened by contemporary issues.

Data from focus groups

Two FG discussions took place in this area. The first FG perceived Ubuntu as being an important value in the community. According to the participants, it still exists as, ‘a neighbour will never go to bed hungry’. It was also said that the community rallied around one another when there is a death in one of families within the community. To the participants, these are signs of Ubuntu where the burden of a family or of a person is shared with the whole group. The FG felt that Ubuntu is slowly losing its significance especially in the younger generation. ‘Children are modernised and have lost respect’.

The second FG which consisted solely of youth who perceived Ubuntu as ‘bubhaqana zonke izinto ezinhle’- a combination of all positive things. They also confirmed what was highlighted by other FGs in that it consists of respect, but also added ‘ukuphila nabanye abantu’- being able to live with others, ‘isimilo’ - good behaviour, ‘ukuchazela omunye umuntu’ – being able to explain things to other people and ‘ukuziphatha’ – how you carry yourself. The youth however felt that ubuntu and other values were slowly losing their importance in the lives of their generation because ‘asifuni ukulalela, sesinamalungela’ – we do not want to listen, we have rights now. They felt that it is difficult for parents to guide them and to enrench good morals and values through punishment as they would threaten them with incarceration if they beat them.

The constitution was also blamed for the state of affairs as it was felt that it goes against Ubuntu and respect, in support of individuals and their rights, which is the same as what was expressed by Inkosi. The description that Ubuntu as a combination of all positive things adds to perception that ‘it is all things to all people.’ Both FGs perceived Ubuntu as a positive value which is important in the community.

Data from the traditional council

The traditional council perceived Ubuntu to be ‘doing good things for other people’ which then shows a value of giving. It means that ‘umuntu ungumuntu ngabanye abantu.’ - a person is a person through other people. It is about ‘helping others.’ From the data obtained it would therefore seem that any act of kindness is regarded as Ubuntu.

Area of Enhlazuka

Enhlazuka is a rural area which is located near the small town of Richmond on the outskirts of Pietermaritzburg. It is approximately 70 km from Pietermaritzburg and has an estimated population of 25 000 people. People in the area said that they did not necessarily love the area because of its lack of development and basic services including water. Accessibility to other areas is difficult.
especially in rainy season as none of their roads are tarred. They however appreciate the lifestyle that is grounded in traditions and that they are able to plant crops in order to survive. They also like the environment which includes the mountain which they are very proud of.

**Data from Inkosi**

Inkosi spoke of ubuntu ‘botho’ which he recognised as an overarching traditional value which guides the behaviour of people, especially amaZulu. According to him, ubuntu is a concern for others, helpfulness, compassion and striving for peace. Ubuntu is still important to the community, however, it is getting lost especially with the youth. Ubuntu is seen as being part of the community where it is a value system and has an influence on the way people do things. It is focused on the needs of others, but also ensuring that the person’s actions do not cause any strife in the community.

**Data from the focus group (FG)**

The FG in the area perceived Ubuntu as humility with the following words used: ‘isizotha’- calm demeanour, ‘ukuzehlisa’ - humility, ‘ukungaphakam’ – not hold oneself in higher regard than others and ‘ukuba nenhliziyo enhle’ - having a good heart or being compassionate. One participant however felt that there is a difference between ubuntu and respect as a person can be respectful but ‘not have even a single ounce of ubuntu’. Ubuntu was perceived to go beyond just ‘mere respect’ but as touching on ‘ubuwena’ - your being. It was however stated that although ubuntu still exists in the community, it does not extend to the economical sphere as people are interested in only developing themselves and would not be willing to work with one another where money is involved.

All participants perceived Ubuntu as a value system consisting of various values. The comment however by one of the participants where respect is considered to be an action whereas Ubuntu is seen as being part of a person’s character, presents another view which however is not dissimilar to others. Basically, what the participant brought across is that one can fake respect for others, but not ubuntu as it is part of the personality of a person. Ubuntu as a value influences actions and is seen through a person’s behaviour or actions. Although Ubuntu is said to influence every aspect of life in the community, however, it did not exist in areas where money is concerned thus meaning that community members can choose whether they exercise Ubuntu and where it will be applicable.

**Area of Emhlangandlovu**

The area of Emhlangandlovu is situated near the small town of Dalton in Northern KZN. The area is about 70 approximately km from Pietermaritzburg, and is estimated to have 3000 people. The people in the area are proud of their area because they are able to live a traditional lifestyle. They however have to contend with daily struggles for lack of services. The lack of water is a ‘huge problem’ and affects the potential of agriculture in the area. People obtain water from water tanks which are filled ‘maybe once a month.’ These tanks are few and far from some people. They end up going to the river to fetch dirty water which is also used by livestock. There is no electricity in the area and the terrain for the roads is in a poor state.

**Inkosi**

Inkosi in the area felt that there is a great need to take care and protect those who are incapable of taking care of themselves. This to him resonates with Ubuntu which reflects the way he was raised. Ubuntu is paramount to Inkosi as it encapsulates respect and general caring for everyone, irrespective of their social or financial status. According to him however, the constitution has created a situation where Ubuntu has been lost to rights as the focus is on individual rights rather than what is right, what is respectful and generally, what would show Ubuntu. The importance of Ubuntu is shown from the articulations of Inkosi as it is seen as a value that guides the way people live. The perceived patriarchal nature of Ubuntu is negated by the comments of Inkosi who perceives it to be general caring which is void of class, which means that people are treated fairly and equitably. There is however a perceived relationship between Ubuntu and the rights of individuals which are seen as clashing with Ubuntu. This could be resultant from the individualistic nature of rights which places an individual’s needs above those of the group.

**Data from the focus group**

According to the FG Ubuntu resonates in helping others like ‘ukuphana, ukunanelana’ – giving to others and giving food to those who need it, which they said was now difficult to find. Working the soil was also seen as a value related to Ubuntu as, through agriculture, people are able to give their neighbours or whoever is in need, produce from their gardens. ‘We like working the soil and it also gives us a chance to share the fruit of our labour with others which is a joy to all.’ The good behaviour of ‘izintombi’, maidens, is also considered as a value attached to Ubuntu.

Izintombi, besides preserving their virginity, are also expected to show Ubuntu to everyone. Ubuntombi is not only about virginity, but also about behaviour including humility, respect and helpfulness amongst others. The constitutional values were seen to be incompatible with
traditional values as, according to the participants, respect and Ubuntu is paramount in the Zulu tradition, whereas the constitution gives rights to children which make it difficult to ‘control’ them and they become susceptible to bad influences.

Caring for others seems to be a prominent element for this FG with ubuntu meaning that people are observant of those who are around them and their circumstances and, where necessary share what they have with them. This requires a spirit of giving as people share their crop as well, not necessarily because the others are in need, but as a practice. Virginity is not regarded as a mere physical trait but as being linked to behavioural traits of intombi including the values of respect, humility which are also found in ubuntu. The negative effect of the constitution was also highlighted where rights were perceived to influence children negatively.

Traditional council

The traditional council in the area perceived Ubuntu to be an important value to the community and to include respect and humility. Modernity was however perceived to have a negative influence on Ubuntu as ‘children do not want to listen, they have rights now.’ Ubuntu is then tied to the willingness of the person, in this case, children, are to listen to guidance, which, if not done, negatively affects its transmission.

Area of KwaManyavu

KwaManyavu is situated near Cato Ridge, a small industrial area under uMkhambathini Municipality. KwaManyavu is about 45 km away from Pietermaritzburg with a population estimated at 27 000 people. The people in the area said that they love their area because there is a sense of neighbourliness, people know one another and ‘we love our neighbours.’ Although they have electricity and have main roads which are tarred, the area is contending with water problems which have been ongoing for a number of years. Whereas they used to make a living out of small scale agriculture, this is no longer the case because of lack of infrastructure to support agriculture.

Inkosi

Inkosi held ubuntu in high esteem and felt that it is an important value in the Zulu tradition which continues to guide the interaction of individuals with others. ‘Hlonipha abantu nawe qobo’ – respect other people, yourself included, Inkosi said. To him, ensuring that women have a voice in his area was part of ubuntu as ‘ukuhlonipha kuyefana’ – respect is the same. According to Inkosi ‘children these days are modernised’ but the extent of modernisation is different across ‘izigodi’. They take on westernised ways of life which go against ubuntu and the African way of life. Inkosi further articulated that ubuntu means that ‘wazisa umuntu oyisahambi, ukukwelana, ukunanelana, ukulapha izinkomo, intandane ayikho emakhaya, wamukeleka yonke indawo.’ – respect of a stranger, empathy, giving to those who lack, taking care of cows, rural areas do not have orphans and a person would be accepted everywhere.

Ubuntu in this instance is seen as not only general caring for people but also for animals. Cows in the Zulu culture are perceived as wealth and are a man’s pride and are also considered to be linked to ancestors and to have the ability to provide behavioural symbols which denote the ancestor’s moods. Ubuntu also includes caring for those in need, in this case, orphans. Strangers are also seen as being important and deserve respect, which goes against the patriarchal hierarchy presented in Figure 1 where strangers are placed at the bottom of the hierarchy. The respect that is also said to be afforded to women also challenges patriarchy especially since people in rural areas tend to be loyal to traditional leadership and to respect it. The probability would then be that the community would follow the actions of Inkosi in the treatment of the different groups, including women, within the community. The existence of modernity and its negative influence is recognised although the ranges of the phenomenon are perceived to be different in each area.

Focus group

In the FG, ubuntu was perceived to be a value in the community. In defining ubuntu, the participants said that it relates to ‘ukuvuselela inhlonipho, ukusiza abanye, ukunanelana, isise, ukulelelela umuntu osenkingeni, ukungalwi kodwa ube unavo amandla okulwa noma unambophi umuntu ngoba ucasabangela izingane.’ – restoration of respect, helping others, giving to those who lack, kindness, helping those who are in trouble, not fighting even when you have the strength to fight or not opening a case against a person because you are considering the impact of such on his children. It is however felt that ubuntu is slowly dwindling or is not present in the younger generation. This is caused by the extent to which the youth have accepted the western way of life which goes against the values of ubuntu. With ubuntu being the sum total of various values within the community, it therefore could be a concern that, if the youth stops practicing ubuntu, that could affect the practice of other values as well.

Traditional council

The traditional council defined ubuntu in terms of it
encompassing ‘inhlonipho, uzwelo, uthando, isihawu, ubugothe’- respect, empathy, love, kindness, being principled. Ubuntu was said to exist in the community and is commonly used, however, it is affected by modernity and the Constitution which affords rights to people.

Area of Empumuza

Empumuza is an area which is approximately 9 kilometres away from Pietermaritzburg with an estimated population of about 65 000 households. The area has basic services including water and electricity. The main roads are tarred allowing for easy access. The people in the area loved living in the area because it is close to town but that they are also able to live a traditional lifestyle. The transport system was said to be good thus allowing them to travel easily. They are able to bury their family members within their household thus eliminating problems of lack of space in cemeteries which people in towns experience.

Inkosi

Inkosi perceived ‘Ubuntu, botho’ as an important component of any community, a way of life. Ubuntu was seen as showing the way people behave and how they socialise. It is still found in the older generation as it had been part of how they were raised, but is slowly losing its importance with the younger generations. Inkosi felt that although there has been development in the area, there is a lack of development of the minds of the people in line with the infrastructural development that has taken place. Ubuntu would also then be part of this development teaching people respect, not only of others but also of self and of the environment which surrounds them. Inkosi sees ubuntu as not relating to people as a group or as individuals only, but also in terms of exercising sustainable development.

Data from the traditional council (TC)

The TC defined ubuntu as encompassing ‘inhlonipho, uzwelo, uthando, isihawu, ubugothe’- respect, empathy, love, kindness, being principled. These are prominent in the area but not as much as in the olden days. People no longer do things for others as in the previous years, it could be as a result of economic meltdown, but people are more focused on themselves than on others. The exercising of values in this instance is tied to financial ability. It would be difficult for people to help others even if they wish to if they do not have the means to do so. This then reveals that values and their continuation are negatively affected by the state of the economy in the community.

Data from the focus group

To the FG, Ubuntu is an important value in the community. This is however slowly dwindling because of westernisation. Ubuntu was perceived to be important and to provide a foundation for respect. The participants described it as ‘inhlonipho, ukusizana, ukwazi imvelaphi, ukungahlekani, ukwenza ofisa ukukwenza, ukuzwelana.’ – respect, helpfulness, knowing your roots, not laughing at others, the ability to do what you wish to do, empathy. The FG said that when a person knows his roots he will know his clan names which are part of history and will also familiarise himself with clan names of others in the community. As a show of respect, people do not call each other by names but by their clan names. Another value attached to Ubuntu was of ‘doing things without expecting monetary rewards.’ With the youth being exposed to various influences, the FG felt that certain values, including Ubuntu and respect, are no longer important to the youth. These however, should be taught to them at home from the young age. Teaching of values is seen as important but also gaining knowledge of each other’s history and clan names. This then touches on indigenous knowledge which should be transmitted to younger generations.

REFLECTIONS FROM THE STUDY

It was the observation of the researcher that the participants struggled to define Ubuntu. This is not because the value is foreign to them or they do not understand it but the concept is so ingrained in their being that defining it has never been required. When defining Ubuntu, different values are used, and these revolve around caring for and respecting others. Respect was the most common value amongst all participants in all cases. When reflecting on this, one also needs to understand the intricacies of African epistemology and that it is not as unpretentious as the Western epistemology. Definitions are then not necessary for knowledge to be considered as such because knowledge is not abstract but perceives various factors including the cosmic world, the interaction with the knowledge and the source of knowledge.

Data from all participants show that Ubuntu still exists in rural KZN and is perceived as an important value system which brings together different values which are important for amaZulu. This is a general finding irrespective of the areas being divided into deep rural and semi-urban. No differences could be found in the responses that differentiate between the two types of areas in the study, neither were there differences based on age. The variation in the rate of development in the cases had no influence on the findings neither was modernity linked to development by any of the participants. There is however a general concern from all
the areas that the use and importance of ubuntu is being affected by modernity, especially amongst youth.

The need to teach Ubuntu within the families and communities which was highlighted by some participants is a worthy intervention. This does not only apply to Ubuntu, but to all indigenous values which still drive modern communities amidst the impact of colonialism, apartheid and other perpetual western influences. A study can be conducted on how various indigenous communities in South Africa preserve their cultural values including Ubuntu.

The responses from the youth FG reflected the same notions on Ubuntu, its importance in the community and also its attrition by modernity, however, the articulation of their unwillingness to listen could impede such efforts. Such articulations raise the impact of the willingness to learn as important in raising them. They also perceived punishment and in their case being beaten up as a form of correcting wrong behaviour and instilling good behaviour. Physical punishment is however against the constitution and, in the absence of knowledge of any other form of punishment, parents would then rely on the willingness of their children to learn these values if they are to be successful in such an endeavour. This then impacts on the survival of a community lifestyle which is grounded in Ubuntu and other indigenous values. This could be a topic for further studies where the views of youth on the long term effects of their attitude to cultural values can be investigated.

The views of the participants on the impact of the constitution on ubuntu were surprising in the light of it being generally considered to embrace the spirit of Ubuntu, and it being purported as the best. The Bill of Human Rights however seems to be considered to go against Ubuntu as it elevates rights of individuals and individualism whereas Ubuntu is more concerned about an individual in relation to his community, with its focus being on the community wellbeing. This then reflects the link of Ubuntu to such concepts as communal efficacy and linked fate.

**Conclusion**

The need to conduct this study and the choice of area of focus were explained. The question that sought to be addressed was the continued existence of Ubuntu in KZN amidst the impact of modernisation. The study contends that ubuntu still exists, and that it is regarded as a value system in the community. Although its definition ranges across the different cases and even different study participants with different values being attached to its definition, its importance as a value system amongst amaZulu in the KZN communities cannot be over-emphasized. It can indeed be a sum of all positive behaviour of people in the area which needs to be harnessed in order to build generations of people who will strive for harmony, peace and co-existence. The responsibility of transmission of the values of ubuntu lies with families, the immediate community as well as external roleplayers including government and its institutions as the makers of law which affect communities and their values. The influence of Ubuntu can assist in addressing contemporary issues in different areas for the benefit of the country at large.

**Conflict of Interests**

The author has not declared any conflict of interests.

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