A PHILOSOPHICAL REFLECTION ON TERRORISM AND THE SIGNIFICANCE OF UBUNTU HUMAN VALUES FOR GLOBAL PEACE

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Abstract

This paper examines terrorism and the Ubuntu imperative. Terrorism is a major impediment to world peace and security. Terrorism is evil, it brings pains, division, and suffering to man. This brings about the issue of values and morality – right and wrong. Thus, it is the argument of this research that terrorism is on the rise because of the lack or neglect of some priceless human values. Here lies the imperative of Ubuntu philosophy. Ubuntu is a value system that determines humane personal and social actions in the cultural, political, and economic domains of life in a society. It is about our interconnectedness as human beings. The philosophical basis of Ubuntu rests on the belief in, and realization of our common humanity, our sense of perception of being a part of a whole human family. The questions that this paper sets out to interrogate are: Can terrorism be justified within the framework of Ubuntu Philosophy? How can Ubuntu as an indigenous African idea help in solving the problem of terrorism? In order to provide answers to the aforementioned questions, this paper makes use of the method of analysis.

Keywords: ubuntu, terrorism, humanity, human values, ethics.

Introduction

According to John Locke and Thomas Hobbes, the purpose of coming together by the people in the hypothetical state of nature to form the social contract is for self-preservation and the protection of their rights. This shows and rightly suggests that the quest for integration and interconnectedness of man has been an age long idea in the hearts of men. However, the nomenclature globalization took the centre stage in global affairs only in the 1990's. Thus the idea of globalization is traced by some scholars to philosophers like Karl Marx and others who wrote in that era.

The nomenclature globalization, since the 1990's has become a household name among scholars within the international community. As an idea, globalization is a concept that denotes the growing interdependence of the world economies, culture and population, brought about by cross-border trade in goods and services, technology and flows of investments, people and information. According to Douglas Kellner, globalization involves both capitalist markets and sets of social relations and flows of commodities, capital, technology, ideas, forms of culture, and people across national boundaries via a globally networked society (Kellner). As a concept, there seems to be an imbalance in the practice of globalization – it seems to be in favour of the global North. Globalization raises the question of global justice on one hand, and on the other hand, because of its inherent nature as a carrier of values through technology, terrorism has leveraged on it.

By its nature terrorism is primarily domestic. That is, it starts with one man, a group of persons; it begins from a geographical location. However, in recent times, terrorism has become a global phenomenon that is threatening world peace. For example, and most significant, the shock brought by the September 11, 2001 terrorist attack on the World Trade Centre in New York brought to the open the global nature of terrorism and since then terrorist activities have gone wide. Globalization has helped and fast tracked the unveiling of terrorism as a global phenomenon.

In the world, terrorism has become a global problem, an impediment to world peace and security. This threat is a real existential because of the spread,

interconnectivity and sophistication of terror groups around the world: ISIS in Eastern Syria, al-Shaba in Somalia, al Qaeda in Maghreb, and Boko Haram in Northern Nigeria (Eyesan 2020: 102). The events of September 11 and subsequent terror attacks show that grievances can be exported and domination can be resisted. This inevitably has brought about crisis of domination, sovereignty and cultural conflicts. Some fanatics have tagged globalization as the Christianization of the world and this has brought about serious resistance from the Islamic world. This negative feeling has resulted in the rise of terror groups like Al Qaeda and others. In an attempt to resist the destruction of their cultures/traditions by the West through globalization, the Al Qaeda took up the Jihad mandate and this has brought first, the creation of the group as an attempt to resist Western dominion and second, the attempt to impose its Jihad on the rest of the world. Essentially, both groups (terrorist and the West) share something in common and that is, the push for domination.

Unfortunately, with the huge destruction of lives by terrorists around the world, and with the global war against terrorism, this evil menace is still flying high. This last assertion is true because the traditional military response/solution seems not to be yielding the desired and expected results. Consequent upon this, there is need for an alternate idea, an alternate idea of human relation and human conduct, an alternate idea that can grow in the hearts of men against terrorism. Here lies the imperative of *Ubuntu* philosophy. Hence, this research attempts to interrogate the following questions: Can terrorism be justified within the framework of *Ubuntu* Philosophy? How can *Ubuntu* values help to address global terrorism?

Origin and Meaning of Ubuntu

Ubuntu is a term that originates from the Bantu language. It is a term that is widely used in the southern parts of Africa. Linguistically, many scholars have posited that *Ubuntu* is an Nguni concept that means 'personhood.' However, the term is not limited or exclusive to the Nguni people, instead it is found among some other African ethnic groups under different names. In Shona, for example, it called *unhu* and in Sotho it is *botho*. *Ubuntu* is made up of two words; *ubu* and *ntu*. In analyzing these two words, Ramose opines that 'Ubu evokes the idea of being in general. It

is enfolded be-ing before it manifests itself in the concrete form or mode of ex-istence of a particular entity. Ubu as enfolded be-ing is always oriented towards unfoldment, that is, incessant continual concrete manifestation through particular forms and modes. In this sense *ubu* is always oriented towards *–ntu*' (Ramose 2005:36). Consequently, ontologically, there is no division between *ubu* and *ntu. Ntu* is the concrete manifestation of *ubu*. Therefore, movement becomes the principle of being. The idea of *Ubuntu* is best captured in the popular maxim *umuntu ngumuntu nga bantu,* meaning '… to be a human being is to affirm one's humanity by recognizing the humanity of others, and, on that basis, establish humane relations with them," Ramose opined that "… *ubuntu* understood as be-ing human (human-ness); a humane, respectful and polite attitude towards others constitute the core of this aphorism' (Ibid.). Hence, *Ubuntu* becomes a metaphoric foundation and standard for ethical and social judgment.

According to Mbigi, '*ubuntu* is the essence of being human and it embodies a positive perceptive of African personhood' (Mbigi 2005:69). Central to the philosophy of *Ubuntu* is a unique-positive humanism that portrays the essence of humanness that is founded on interdependence and solidarity. Writing in this light, Richardson affirms that *ubuntu* 'refers to the collective interdependence and solidarity of communities of affection. *Ubuntu* is concerned with the welfare of everyone in the community' (Richardson 2008:19). Hence, in a way, *Ubuntu* is an African worldview or view of life. It is an expression of how Africans perceive and relate in the world. This is not to say that all Africans behave according to the values and principles of *Ubuntu*. But the point to take is that *Ubuntu* is predominantly an African humanism.

Furthermore, it is important to note that *Ubuntu* is a philosophical ethic. It is an African philosophy of life that pushes for some ethical values and principles. *Ubuntu* philosophy finds its key embodiment in the Zulu expression *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* which means a person can only be a person through others – often reduced to 'I am because we are' in English (Mbigi *et al.* 1995:1-7). Further, it also finds its root in the Northen Sotho aphorisms such as *motho ke motho ke batho* which is a simplification of *Ubuntu*. It means 'to be human is to affirm one's

humanity by recognizing the humanity of others and, on this basis, establish respectful human relations with them. In other words, my human-ness is constituted by the human-ness of others, and vice versa' (Hauvd). *Ubuntu* is a relational ethics. As a relational ethics it shows us how we ought to relate with others and how we ought to live in the society. It is a belief in the interdependence and interconnectivity of human beings. It therefore means that my humanity is caught up with the humanity of the next person.

Suffice it to state that the above discussed features of *Ubuntu* do not imply that *Ubuntu* philosophy is anti-individualistic. Instead, Ubuntu respect for the particularity of the other links up closely to its respect for individuality. This is because 'Ubuntu defines the individual in terms of his/her relationship with others' (Louw 2006:168). Hence, *Ubuntu* must not be confused with privileging or prioritization of the community over the individuals in the society. The community is relevant because it is the medium through which an individual fulfils potential. A crucial attribute of *Ubuntu* is interdependence. *Ubuntu* in this light is a social ethics.

Building An Ethics Of *Ubuntu*

Ubuntu aside being a factual description of the African worldview is also a social ethic, which is a rule of conduct or behavior. First, what is ethics and why is ethics needed by human beings? Ethics is important and needed in the society because it is one of the social instruments or structures for moderating human actions and behaviors in order to have a peaceful and meaningful society. Other social structures for moderating human actions are law and conventions. Basically, ethics is concerned about the rules for deciding wrongness or rightness of an action. There are several theories that have been propounded by scholars in this light. For some Africans, human experience can be promoted positively through the philosophy and ethics of Ubuntu (Ujomu 2015:1-14). What then is *Ubuntu* ethics?

Ubuntu could be considered as an ethical theory because it seeks to promote the social nature of man. Fundamentally, human beings are social animals because

they were created to live together. Also, 'human beings are social because they need to cooperate with each other, in order to attain the common good or purpose. Pursuing the common good is a central element of the social, ethical, or moral life' (Ibid.). Hence, *Ubuntu* is an African world view that has normative implications.

As a rule of conduct, *Ubuntu* does not only describe human beings as relational beings but also prescribes what this entails. A good example of the normative nature of *Ubuntu* is when we consider the Nguni and Sotho-Tswana aphorisms *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* and *motho ke motho ke batho babang,* which in plain English would simply mean our wellbeing or survival are dependent on others. However, when the native Nguni and Sotho speakers make such statements, they 'are rather in the first instance tersely capturing a normative account of what we ought to most value in life. One's ultimate goal in life should be to become a (complete) person, a (true) self or a (genuine) human being (Metz 2011:537). What this clearly shows is that the assertion that 'a person is a person' is a call to develop one's (moral) personhood, a prescription to acquire *ubuntu* or *botho*, to exhibit humanness (Ibid.). To develop and exhibit one's humanness entails displaying certain values in our everyday walk. *Ubuntu* ethics emphasizes some ethical values. According to Mokgoro,

> Group solidarity, compassion, respect, human dignity, humanistic orientation and collective unity have, among others been defined as key social values of ubuntu. Because of the expansive nature of the concept, its social value will always depend on the approach and the purpose for which it is depended on. Thus its value has also viewed as a basis for a morality of cooperation, compassion, communalism and concern for the interest of the collective respect for the dignity of personhood, all the time emphasizing the virtues of that dignity in social relationship and practices (Mokgoro).

From the above, it can be deduced that *Ubuntu* defends a unique conception of the human person that is based on an intrinsic worth of the human person and not an instrumental one. The worth of the human person is expressed in his dignity. This self-dignity is intrinsic and comes as a result one being a human being, and dignity requires that humans be addressed and treated in ways that demonstrate their

intrinsic worth, freewill, freedom, and responsibility to themselves and others (Ujomu 2015:5). Our deepest moral obligation according to *Ubuntu* ethics is to become more fully human. And the only way to achieving this is by entering community with others, which is by living out the values embedded in *Ubuntu*.

Ubuntu Ethics As Normative Foundation To Fighting Terrorism

The phenomenon of terrorism must be understood within its underlying ideological, religious and cultural make ups. Modern terrorists are products of culture. Culture here includes both ideological and religious undercurrents. The emphasis on religion is important because the major cultural dimension of terrorism in this century is found in religion. The plural nature of the world with its differences in religion, cultures, societies are helping in no small ways to fuel and sustain terrorism, especially at a global scale.

The cultural-religious nature of terrorism does not in any way becloud us of its political aspect. As opined by some Western scholars, terrorism is a rational choice and a reaction to political grievances. Hence the tendency from that perspective/school of thought is that once those grievances are addressed, terrorism would be a thing of the past. This is too simplistic considering that terrorism is more than political and economic reactions. A mere political solution would not be adequate to address the phenomenon. Most terrorist organizations (the type we are addressing here) have their roots mostly in radical Islamism which is a form of religious fundamentalism. Fundamentalism is an unwavering faith to a religious belief system (Rausch 2015:29). Groups like the ISIS, al-Qaeda, Boko Haram, Taliban, and Egyptian Islamic Jihad are all radical Islamist terrorist groups operating from mostly Islamic dominated areas, though having an international network (Eyesan 2020:107). It should be stated that radicalism is an integral part of the broad current, unpleasant and dangerous; it is, but a natural offshoot in the development of Islamism (Grinin 2019:2). However, Islamism is not synonymous with terrorism. Hence, Hooper is of the view that Islamism is a political movement that favors reordering government and society in accordance with laws prescribed by Islam (Ibid.). Islamism as an ideology and movement is not identical with terrorism, but its radical type is. This is not new because any

teaching, belief system or ideology, always has a radical wing, if it has enough followers and Islamism does. Radical Islamism aspires to a forcible transformation of society on the basis of Islamism (Ibid.).

Consequently, it would be wrong to deal with the terrorist threat purely from military angle without recourse to its intellectual, cultural and religious undertones. The position of this research is not that terrorism is purely cultural in nature, but that modern terrorism has significant religious, ideological and cultural features. The terrorist attack of September 11, 2001 in New York brought to the open the cultural, religious and ideological dimensions of terrorism and it further enlarged the suspicious mode and divide between the West and the Muslim world. Thus, while terrorism – even in the form of suicide attacks – is not by definition an Islamic phenomenon, it cannot be ignored that the lion's share of terrorist acts, particularly the most devastating, in recent years has been perpetrated in the name of Islam (Serefim 2005:66). This study is not an argument for or against any religion/culture, but this clarification is important in setting the stage for an effective solution to terrorism.

What then is the alternative way to address terrorism having seen that it is culturally, ideologically and religiously charged? It therefore becomes rational and practical to consider the possibility of a non-military approach in the fight against terrorism. Thus, religious-ideological level becomes the take off point for an effective counter-terrorism agenda. An answer to this is *Ubuntu* philosophy.

The imperative of *Ubuntu* philosophy is priceless giving the ideological and religious underpinnings to terrorism. To counter terrorism effectively, there is the need for us to focus on our common humanity. We need more proactive ways of managing the different cultural and religious groups to live together as a community by co-existing in peace and mutual respect for the common good. In this light, *Ubuntu* values become relevant in tackling terrorism in this century. The point is, some actions can enhance human conduct and relation for peace and security while some actions can endanger human life thereby increasing insecurity, chaos and instability. In addressing societal problems effort must be targeted at developing ways of moderating human behavior and their ways of

thinking. Specifically, to solve the problem of terrorism, *Ubuntu* values should be used to moderate human behavior and human relation.

Essentially, *Ubuntu* can be viewed as a conception of humanism. That is, a philosophy that is centered on the well-being of human beings. According to Ujomu, The ethical basis of ubuntu rests on the belief in and realization of our common humanity; our sense or perception of being part of the whole human family (Ujomu 2020:112). This sense of our common humanity is what is missing in the thinking and ideology of the terrorist, in their thinking and use of violence as a tool towards the attainment of their goal(s). When the reality of our common humanity is emphasized, then respect for human life and human dignity takes the center stage in the hearts of men, terrorists inclusive. Related to the idea of common humanity is identity and solidarity. By identity, we mean for people to think of themselves as members of the same group, that is, to conceive of themselves as a 'we', for them to take pride or feel shame in the group's activities, as well as for them to engage in joint projects, co-coordinating their behavior to realize shared ends (Metz 2011:537). Here the idea of "group" is extended to mean the human race. Hence, to identify with others means showing brotherhood and excluding extremist tendencies. In essence, to show brotherhood is to show solidarity. This simply means for people to act in ways that are reasonably expected to benefit each other. Solidarity is also a matter of people's attitudes such as emotions and motives being positively oriented towards others (Ibid.). Terrorist activities are not positively oriented towards others. By others we mean the whole human race. The principles of identity and solidarity are needed in our world to decrease the exclusionist and extremist tendencies of terrorism.

The essence of *Ubuntu* philosophy is the interdependency of human beings; that is, the idea that human beings are social beings. Succinctly put, it is the idea that a human being is a complete being to the extent that the society gives him or her recognition as a person, and allows him or her realize the full potentials and benefits of being a human person (Mwase 2013:12). Our lives are intricately and inextricably linked to the lives of other human beings. Hence there is need to cherish this interconnectedness and interrelation. To undermine this reality by the

radical and unlawful use of violence and the threat of violence is a negation of the social nature of human beings. Sadly, terrorism is an attempt to disengage and weaken the common cord that binds human beings together. At the heart of *Ubuntu* is the emphasis on the fact that such interconnection should be guided by values such as kindness, respect, compassion, consideration, cooperation, openness, accommodation and willingness to go beyond selfish interest and work for others' interests (Ujomu 2874). The emphasis on accommodation based on our common humanity is instructive giving the cultural-religious undercurrents of terrorism that aims at basically differentiating the human society along ideological lines. In this sense, *Ubuntu* becomes a strong normative system aimed at defining the social character of human beings and the relational nature of the human society. By embracing these values, we can manage the differences that come with cultural universals and cultural particulars. Our argument is that those factors that divide human beings' cultural-religious universals and particulars needs to be diminished for higher values of *Ubuntu* to be enthroned and highlighted.

One important *Ubuntu* value that can help diminish the divisive elements that is at the heart of terrorism is dialogue. Dialogue is emphasized in *Ubuntu* philosophy as way of showing respect for others and the community at large. It is the recognition of the communal and relational attribute of man. By dialogue we mean the focused conversation, engaged intentionally with the goal of increasing understanding, addressing problems, and questioning thoughts or actions (Romney 2012:2). The African value of dialogue is hinged on the end product of understanding the other person and finding a way out of any situation. Dialogue in this sense is founded on the idea of community which encourages deliberation and participation. In a wider sense, it involves a utilitarian thinking: that is, taking decisions/actions that will be of the greatest good of the greatest number of people. The method employed by terrorists is not dialogical. They operate an enclosed method that gives no room for dialogue with others. Hence there is a need to change from an enclosed ideological lining to a more embracing social construct. This will entail an all-embracing dialogue between the Muslim and the non-Muslim worlds with a view to bring about a better and accurate understanding of each other's goals and interests. The emphasis on Muslim and

non-Muslim world is to ensure effectiveness in dialogue and because of the role religion/culture plays in terrorism discourse as highlighted before. That said, it merits emphasis to state that dialogue/soft means of mitigating terrorism does not mean that the various security agencies will stop carrying out their constitutional duties – because the primary responsibility of a state is the protection of life and property. As such, dialogue does not cancel the use of force to check mate terrorist attacks, especially when there is an offensive from the terrorists.

Having seen the role *Ubuntu* values can play in curbing the menace of terrorism, the logical question that follows is, what method should be employed to achieve these ideals? This point is vital because speech without action is empty. The application of these ideals to terrorism must be from the angle of education. A close look at the originating countries/regions of most terrorist organizations show a high level of illiteracy and lack of proper education. Nigeria is a good example. The Northern Nigeria which has the highest number of illiterate and poor citizens is the base of the Boko Haram group. Consequently, if you link a lack of education and attendant lack of opportunities to a high male youth population, you can imagine that some areas are actually a breeding ground for terrorism (Agbiboa 2013:52). The lack of education can lead to so many societal ills. No wonder a very high percentage of those recruited by the Boko Haram group are illiterates. Most of them do not understand the immediate and long term consequences of their actions. These young illiterate terrorists are ruled by emotions and sentiments, and not by the critical part of their being which education helps to unlock. Thus, the place of education is a priceless idea considering what education can do to an individual and to the society at large. It is through education that citizens will be exposed and taught *Ubuntu* values: which in turn will help them see the reasons for peaceful co-existence and harmony. Education brings about the refinement of the mind. A refined mind will most likely do more good to the society than harm. Real education involves facing and solving practical existential problems, and not just theoretical issues. The beginning of citizen education is the family. Thus, children are taught humane values and ideals early and as they grow, they practice those principles. Accordingly, it is the conviction of this research that for the society to reap the seed

of education, which will bring about a more peaceful and humane society, there is need for the teaching of core humanistic values at the level of the family and school. Parents must see it as a duty to teach and instil in their children humane values of human dignity and respect for others. Also, education should be fashioned to instil humane habits in both the old and the young. To solve the problem of terrorism, education must be used as a vital tool for human development. In the words of Lipsit, education presumably broadens men's outlook, enables them to understand the need for norms of tolerance, restrains them adhering to extreme and monistic doctrines, and increases their capacity to make rational electoral choices (Acemoglo *et al.* 2005:44). To this end, there is an urgent need for an educational revolution in the world, so as to create an educated citizenry that will understand the need for the norms of tolerance, equality, deliberation, unity and dialogue.

The focus of this educational drive in the fight against terrorism should be in reforming the educational system in the Muslim world where there is a high level of extremist teachings. Responding to a question on the best way to know whether you are winning or losing a war on terrorism, Donald Rumsfeld said the best measure is to monitor whether the numbers we are killing and deterring are greater than the number the Madrasas are producing and Al-Qaeda is recruiting (Serefim 72). This immediately draws out the difference between the two approaches used by the state and the terrorists: "hard" – military approach and "soft" method used by the terrorists. Hard approach refers to the use of core offensive strategies such as military force or defensive strategies such as customization and reinforcement of buildings and so on as security measures (Ujomu 2018:35). This dissertation argues for a change of approach from hard to soft method in countering terrorism. As a philosophical approach, it concentrates on the development of people's minds and thoughts.

An important question that arises at this point is about the practicability of the approach we are proposing. Specifically, can initiatives based on soft method of counter-terrorism really work in Muslim dominated societies? Truth be told, it is not easy to use soft method where there are cultural/religious differences.

Radicalization and fundamentalism are hard noughts to crack. But our focus here is not on the already radicalized terrorists but on the larger Muslim communities that are not yet radicalized and the larger populace that are uneducated. These groups are the easiest to recruit and manipulate and they form a large chunk of the society. For a more pragmatic and effective enthronement of these ideals we recommend a curriculum reformation to accommodate the values of *Ubuntu*. This will aid the systematization of the fundamentals of *Ubuntu* thereby building a global humanistic populace.

In addition to the above, we recommend legalizing certain aspects of *Ubuntu* philosophy as a practical way of ameliorating terrorism. This will involve enacting new laws at the state, national and international levels. At the international stage, the United Nations as a strategic player in the quest for global peace and security has an important role to play in ensuring that certain key aspects of *Ubuntu* values are integrated and enshrined in its laws and charters. In this regard, emphasis should be on: the belief and realization of our common humanity; the interdependence of human beings; social harmony as the greatest good; human life as the highest principle of living; inter religious dialogue and tolerance as basis of social order. Enshrining these principles in the constitutions of nations and states will help in the enforcement of *Ubuntu* philosophy and in turn bring about reduction in terrorist activities.

Conclusion

This paper examined the problem of terrorism and the imperative of *Ubuntu* philosophy. Its focus was specifically on terrorism from below. In this research, we discovered that some factors contributed directly or indirectly to the rise and spread of terrorism around the world. Some of these factors are grievances (political or religious), existing or perceived injustice, religious cum cultural fundamentalism, and globalization.

To mitigate terrorism, we discovered that the "hard" military approach is not effectively enough. This is because terrorism is fundamentally ideological and cultural in nature. Based on this, we recommended a change in approach from

"hard" to "soft" power approach. The "soft" approach that we adopted in this study entails the application of *Ubuntu* philosophy in solving the problem of terrorism. *Ubuntu* philosophy, we discovered, was basically a push for peace, togetherness and humanistic values. The value for human life, human dignity and harmony are at the heart of *Ubuntu*. This positive view of human life and human existence is the contrast of the negative view of human life as expressed by terrorists. Hence the point of philosophical disagreement is on what value we place on human life and how best to manage differences and diversities. *Ubuntu* philosophy emphasizes our shared humanity and the place of communal values in the life of an individual. In this light, we argued for the embrace of *Ubuntu* values such as: dialogue, identity, sense of a common humanity, solidarity, sense of interconnectedness and justice. In order to achieve significant result(s) arising from the application of the aforementioned values, we argued for the role of education in countering terrorism. To this end, we advocated for a reform of the global education system in general and the Muslim education system in particular.

The use of unlawful violence as a reaction to injustice, exploitation, and as a means of liberating oneself or group from the shackles of oppression was deemphasized and rejected. This is because violence does not effectively solve social problems. Instead, it has led to the destruction of lives and properties and has brought huge humanitarian crisis in so many parts of the world. The preference for soft approach to countering terrorism in this work is not a total rejection of hard – military strategies. Hard- military power is needed to eliminate concrete terrorist threats, while soft-value based approach is needed to promote *Ubuntu* humanistic values and to advance a true alternative to Bin Laden in the world where he originated. In conclusion, it is our position that with the application of the values embedded in *Ubuntu* philosophy to the world, there will be reduction in terrorism and in turn, the world will be more stable and peaceful.

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