

Scherto R. Gill

Understanding and Addressing Harms of Inhumanity: Mogobe Bernard Ramose and Souleymane Bachir Diagne on Ubuntu

Abstract: This opening chapter examines the multidimensional harms of inhumanity—physical, psychological, relational, moral, and spiritual—and explores pathways for healing through the lens of Ubuntu. It is organized into three sections. In the first section, I trace the history of transatlantic slavery and investigate the paradoxical roles of Christianity in both helping justify the enslavement of millions of Africans and in advocating for its abolition. This section also highlights the emancipatory power of traditional African religions and ethical practices, such as those reflected in the notion of Ubuntu, which provided enslaved peoples with spiritual resources for resilience and resistance. The second section delves into Ubuntu, drawing on Mogobe Bernard Ramose’s articulation of Ubuntu ontology and Souleymane Bachir Diagne’s reflections on Ubuntu cosmology. It explores Ubuntu’s historical roles as a spiritual practice and its contemporary contribution as decolonial epistemology, ethics, and praxis. This analysis underscores how inhumanity harms not only the subjugated but also results in moral and spiritual damage on its perpetrators and beneficiaries. The final section discusses Ubuntu’s transformative potential in addressing transgenerational trauma and fostering collective healing, social justice and global flourishing. The chapter concludes by arguing that Ubuntu offers a profound antidote to systemic dehumanization, enabling humanity to reconcile, renew and regenerate.

Keywords: Ubuntu, spiritual harms of inhumanity, humanity, community.

Introduction

This opening chapter investigates the historical interactions between European, African and Indigenous peoples, highlighting how these encounters were marked by racialized constructs that were bolstered by religious justifications. It explores

Scherto R. Gill is Professor of Research and Director of Global Humanity for Peace Institute, University of Wales Trinity St David. She is also Senior Fellow at the Guerrand-Hermès Foundation, an international peace think tank based in the south-east of England. Scherto is Life Fellow of the Royal Society of the Arts (FRSA) and a laureate of the 2022 Luxembourg Peace Award.

the complex and controversial role of Christianity in legitimizing human hierarchies and profiting from practices of brutality. While dissecting how religion was complicit in instrumentalizing African bodies, it also reflects on how traditional African religions and cultural practices served as resources of spiritual resilience and empowerment in the face of oppression. It ultimately positions traditional African philosophical and spiritual frameworks, using the example of Ubuntu, as pivotal in addressing harms of inhumanity and contributing to collective healing and the well-being of all.

This chapter uses the word “dehumanization” carefully for two reasons: one is that, as argued elsewhere, all human beings already have their humanity, and no violence can sever that from us;¹ the other is to agree with Cederic Robinson that to say those subjugated were dehumanized is akin to suggesting that they must prove their humanity.² Therefore, inhumanity is the term used in this chapter to describe callous nature of violent acts, and dehumanization/dehumanizing is the term used to depict the systems designed to treat human beings inhumanely.

The chapter is structured into three sections. First, it traces the history of transatlantic slavery and critically examines the paradoxical roles of Christianity, including on the one hand, helping to legitimize racialized rhetoric and condone practices of brutality, and on the other, using Christian theology and mobilizing Christian communities to advocate for slavery’s abolition. Parallel to this analysis is the identification of the emancipatory power of traditional African religions and ethical practices, which provided enslaved peoples with resources for spiritual resilience to resist oppression. It then delves into one example of such traditional African spiritual worldview—the notion of Ubuntu—to explore its profound implications both as part of African spiritual practices in the past and as a contemporary philosophical framework for decolonial epistemology, ethics and praxis. Drawing on Mogobe Bernard Ramose’s characterization of Ubuntu ontology and Souleymane Bachir Diagne’s reflection on Ubuntu cosmology, Section 2 highlights African understandings of human interdependence and our mutual responsibility for being-becoming more human together. These perspectives on Ubuntu illuminate the dual harms of inhumane acts (e.g. enslavement, colonization and racist oppression) which not only devastate those subjugated but also cause moral and spiritual damage to those who perpetrate and seemingly *benefit* from such violence. Ubuntu is thus essential for confronting these harms by challenging institutionalized racism and promoting inclusive healing and social justice. The third section of this chapter discusses Ubuntu’s transformative potential in

1 Gill (2021). Mass atrocity and collective healing.

2 Robinson (1983). *Black Marxism: The making of the black radical tradition*.

addressing transgenerational trauma and fostering a collective path towards global human well-being, and our co-flourishing with other beings on the planet.

The chapter concludes that understanding the damaging impact of inhumanity from an African spiritual perspective is essential for moving beyond the Christian narrative of human hierarchies and the neoliberal ideology of progress. By integrating historical analysis, philosophical insights and decolonial praxis, this chapter demonstrates that Ubuntu can offer a unifying framework for fostering a reconciled humanity through structural justice and systemic transformation. As inspired by Ubuntu, man is truly the remedy of man, and humanity is truly the antidote to the spiritual harms of inhumanity.

The Paradoxical Role of Religion in Harms of Inhumanity

Although the long history associated with slavery and the importance of populations of African descent has been acknowledged in some part of the Americas, more than in others, full recognition of the harms caused by slavery and the Atlantic slave trade remains unachieved ... Ultimately, the reverberations of this past have remained alive in the present.³

Today, societies continue to confront persistent racism, polarization and marginalization. Although there are many forms of racism, this chapter concentrates on anti-black racism, which arose in a systematic form during transatlantic enslavement, and European colonialism and imperialism. These atrocities resulted in long-lasting legacies of injustice. Understanding the roots of these historical harms is essential for fostering healing, restoration and regeneration in affected communities.

Contemporary structural racism finds its origins in slavery.⁴ Some scholars trace the beginning of racialized hierarchies back to the 7th century when slavery was introduced in the Indian Ocean and the Red Sea/Arab-Muslim region,⁵ driven by demands for commerce, labour and warfare.⁶ This chapter focuses on the European invasion, colonization and transatlantic trade of enslaved Africans

³ Araujo (2024), pp. 17–18.

⁴ Gilroy (1993). *The black Atlantic: Modernity and double consciousness*.

⁵ These practices and institutions were the result of prior centuries of practice in the Christian, Roman and other empires.

⁶ The Sub-Saharan practices of trade of enslaved people and slavery gave the impression that slavery originated in the African continent, and Europeans merely took advantage of an established tradition of exploitation. This includes condemning Africans to be the captors and traders of their own people.

starting in the 15th century. This is because this particular enslavement was carried out on an unprecedented scale, for an unparalleled extended period—well into the 19th century—and with unimaginable brutality.⁷ The industrialization of slavery distinguished the transatlantic trade, intensifying the commodification of human beings and embedding violence into the fabric of Western modernity.⁸ In essence, inhumanity was integral to the rise of Western capitalism.⁹ To understand the spiritual harm caused by slavery, it is necessary to examine the nature of inhumanity.¹⁰ For this book, this starts with the role of religion in slavery's perpetuation.

Christianity's historical role in slavery and colonization was marked by stark contradictions: it proclaimed love and salvation while sanctioning violence and inhumanity; and it was instrumental in constructing racialized hierarchies that divided humanity into binaries such as white/saved/civilized versus non-white/unsaved/uncivilized. On the other hand, Christianity's emphasis on equality and universal redemption laid the groundwork for abolitionist movements pioneered by Quakers.

To resist Western domination, the enslaved turned to traditional African religions for spiritual emancipation. Equally, recognizing Christianity's contradictions, enslaved Africans reinterpreted and reclaimed Christian teachings to align with their own values. The black church became a vehicle for resilience and liberation, alongside traditional African religious practices.

This section investigates Christianity's initial complicity in slavery as well as its later role in advocating for slavery's abolition; and explores the emancipatory potential of African religious and spiritual practices, including reinterpreted christianity.

Christianity in Slavery and Colonialism

Christianity has been regarded as the epistemic foundation for Western identity and self-construction.¹¹ Although advocating narratives of salvation to underlie the Western civilization, as an organized religion Christianity played a controversial role in the West's bloody histories. Given that there is no normative

7 Zulu (2016). Legacy of the trans-Atlantic slave trade.

8 Gilroy (1993).

9 Williams (1994). *Capitalism and slavery*; Virdee (2019). Racialized capitalism: An account of its contested origins and consolidation.

10 Gill (2021).

11 Dubuisson (2007). *The Western construction of religion: Myths, knowledge, and ideology*.

argument to support the claim of white supremacy, Christianity was part and parcel of the institution of slavery and its demonizing rhetoric and practices. In *Humans in Shackles: An Atlantic History of Slavery*, Araujo writes: “It is undeniable that the first Portuguese expeditions to West Africa had economic and religious motivations ... and this religious excuse at least initially justified their enslavement.”¹²

Christianity’s main function at the development of slavery as an institution was to substantiate human hierarchies. However, it is noted that:

[White supremacy] is nothing more than what we perceive of it. There is nothing beyond it to give it legitimacy, nothing beneath it nor outside of it to give it justification. The structure of its banality is the surface on which it operates. Whatever mythic content it pretends to claim is a priori empty. Its secret is that it has no depth. There is no dark corner that, once brought to the light of reason, will unravel its system. ... In other words, its truth lies in the rituals that sustain its circuitous contentless logic; it is, in fact, nothing but its very practices.¹³

To condone slavery, the Christian church was involved in practices of ethical contradictions. First, the church authorised and condoned enslavement and the institution of slavery. Papal decrees such as *Dum Diversas* (1452) and *Romanus Pontifex* (1455) explicitly sanctioned the enslavement of non-Christian peoples, laying the ideological groundwork for European colonial expansion. Christian teachings were then deployed to justify human hierarchies.¹⁴ Biblical doctrines, including interpretations of the “Curse of Ham” (Genesis 9:20–27), were manipulated to portray black Africans as morally inferior, effectively excluding them from the category of full humanity and validating their subjugation under the guise of evangelization.¹⁵ For example, in the early 1500s, enslaved Africans were shipped to the Caribbean “provided they be Christians”.¹⁶ Furthermore, European missionaries destroyed Indigenous and traditional religious practices while introducing Christianity. Schools established to teach Christian doctrine often erased local religious traditions, severing African communities from their spiritual and ancestral connections. This erasure mirrored colonial practices, which used religion to justify the commodification of land, labour and resources.

The contradictions went deeper. A Christian church was built atop the dungeons where captured Africans were confined before being shipped to the

12 Araujo (2024), p. 20.

13 Martinot & Sexton (2017). The Avant-garde of White Supremacy. In *Afro-pessimism: An Introduction* (p. 58).

14 Goldenberg (2006). *The curse of ham: Race and slavery in early Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*.

15 Chandler (2020). *Spiritual formation: Race, racism, and racial reconciliation*.

16 Donnan (1932). *Documents illustrative of the history of the slave trade to America, Vol. 1*.

Americas, demonstrating the callous indifference of Christian practitioners to the suffering of incarcerated Africans. Despite being forced to convert to Christianity, most enslaved Africans did not receive Christian funeral ceremonies nor burial services, and even those buried were subject to hierarchies.¹⁷ In addition to condoning and authorizing inhumanity, religious institutions actively participated in transatlantic slavery and financially benefited from its brutality, intertwining spiritual practices with economic exploitation. Both Catholic and Protestant churches owned and operated plantations, and religious leaders themselves were slave owners and enslavers.¹⁸ In Virginia, in 1838, Jesuit monks sold 272 enslaved Africans.¹⁹ Such inhumane acts have debased the spiritual nature of religious institutions by putting economic benefit above their evangelical mission. Reflecting on the brutality of chattel slavery in the United States, Frederick Douglass pointed out that these acts only demonstrated “the corrupt, slave-holding, women-whipping, cradle-plundering, partial and hypocritical Christianity”.²⁰

Alongside slavery, the Christian church also played a controversial role in the invasion and possession of Indigenous lands, and in European colonialism.²¹ Religious doctrines were mobilized to sever local people’s connection with their land, despite it being at the core of Indigenous identities. In a similar way to how religion established the moral superiority of Europeans upon the idea of “race”, European colonizers constructed a new identity marker based on racialized categories, whereby body-based identity was replaced by land-based identity.²² In this case, Africans and Indigenous peoples of the Americas were categorized together by their darker skin colours, in contrast to the lighter skins of Europeans. Once boundaries were demarcated around “race”, people of European and of African and Indigenous descent became “racially distinct” and hence relationally distant. Before long, people from other parts of the world outside of Europe were categorized as opposites to the Europeans, or as people of colour. The rhetoric of moral inferiority in people of colour further affirmed that it would be permissible to commodify, colonize, discriminate and instrumentalize them. In this way, religion was also deeply entangled in supporting the emergence of racialized capitalism and contemporary world order.²³ Aimé Césaire, former president of

17 Araujo (2024).

18 Hochschild (2005). *Bury the chains: Prophets and rebels in the fight to free an empire’s slaves*.

19 A part of the proceeds from the sales was used to establish the Georgetown University. Since 2016, the university has started a process of reparation to rectify this historical wounding.

20 Douglass (1945). *Narrative of the life of Frederick Douglass, An American slave*.

21 Jennings (2010). *The Christian imagination: Theology and the origins of race*.

22 Jennings (2010).

23 Wang (2018). *Carceral capitalism*. Semiotext(e).

the Regional Council of Martinique, referred to the doctrine of Christianity as “pseudo-humanism ... narrow and fragmentary, incomplete and biased and, all things considered, sordidly racist”.²⁴

Christianity in Slavery Abolition

Alongside its controversial role, the Christian Church was regarded, in part, as one of the first major forces to question and challenge the institution of slavery,²⁵ partly because, as one scholar put it, “the exposition of the Bible provided the ideological basis of the anti-slavery movements in Britain for a century and a half.”²⁶ For instance, John Woolman (1720–1772), an American Quaker, used the words of Christ and the meanings of the Golden Rule to disqualify slavery’s validity. In doing so, Woolman pointed out that the European system of slavery contradicted the principles underlying biblical ethics.²⁷ Other Quakers followed Woolman’s example and together they launched the anti-slavery campaign.

Essays and pamphlets were published throughout 1800s to use Christian teachings to challenge the institution of slavery and inspire anti-slavery movement. One well-cited essay is written Rev. Isaac V. Brown entitled “Slavery irreconcilable with Christianity and sound reason; or, An anti-slavery argument” published in 1858 in Trenton and New Brunswick. In this essay, Brown systematically dismantled any justification for slavery, whether it appealed to the teachings of the bible, to (divine or natural) law, or to economic necessity. He provocatively asked: “for what profit is it to a nation if it prospereth by trampling upon justice?” Published on the eve of the American Civil War, Brown’s essay contributed to the growing chorus of clergymen and laypersons who opposed slavery on Christian grounds. By blending moral, theological, and practical arguments, it exemplifies the deep religious convictions that underpinned the 19th-century abolitionism and underscores the legacy of faith-based activism against systemic injustice.

A good example of anti-slavery pamphlet is one written by Joseph P. Thompson, entitled “Christianity and emancipation, or, The teachings and influence of the Bible against slavery” published in 1863 in New York. In this systematic rebuttal of chattel slavery, Thompson offered a hopeful vision founded upon the moral and spiritual power of Christianity and urged freedom for the enslaved: “If we would be faithful to Christ, if we would uphold the honor of

²⁴ Césaire (1955). *Discourse on Colonialism*.

²⁵ Churchill (1846). *The influence of Christianity in promoting the abolition of slavery in Europe*

²⁶ Welch (2000). *The Role of the Bible in the British Abolition of Slavery, 1671–1824*, p. 177.

²⁷ Welch (2000).

our holy religion, let the oppressed go free. Let Christianity prove itself the herald of liberty, and the destroyer of bondage.”²⁸

Indeed, many faithful Christians followed the example of these pioneers in playing an active part in advocating for slavery’s abolition. Still, the historical entanglement of religion, the construction of race, and racial/racist capitalism accentuate the profound harm inflicted upon African and Indigenous communities. In the face of such harms, traditional African religions and religious practices served to empower the enslaved and enabled them to resist oppression.

African Religions in Spiritual Empowerment and Emancipation

Amid the violence of transatlantic slavery and European colonization, traditional African religions emerged as vital sources of empowerment, resistance and resilience.²⁹ The Americas, such as Brazil, owing to the large number of enslaved Africans being transported there, became important sites where “African culture and religions survived, evolved, adapted, mixed, and more than anything else developed a dialogue with European and Native American cultures”.³⁰ Thus Christianity never fully supplanted African religious and spiritual rituals and practices. Instead, Christianity and traditional African religions operated side by side. In some cases, Africans “could embrace Catholicism on their own terms”³¹; in other cases, enslaved people and their descendants “associated Catholic saints with Orisha, Vodun, and West Central African deities brought to Brazil and the Spanish Americas”.³²

Rooted in cosmologies (such as Ubuntu, see the next section of the chapter) that emphasized interconnectedness, shared humanity and reverence for life, traditional African religious thoughts and spiritual practices were often adapted to challenge the authority of enslavers and colonial powers. For example, syncretic religions such as Vodou in Haiti and Santería in Cuba combined African traditions with elements of Christianity, allowing those enslaved to practise their faith covertly while subverting the imposed religious order. These hybrid practices became powerful strategies for organizing resistance and inspiring liberation

²⁸ Thompson, Joseph P. (1863) *Christianity and emancipation, or; The teachings and influence of the Bible against slavery*.

²⁹ Fikiri (2024). Decolonizing religions in Africa: The profound role of African spirituality of Ubuntu.

³⁰ Araujo (2024), p. 14.

³¹ Araujo (2024), p. 365.

³² Araujo (2024), p. 372.

movements. A notable instance of this is the Haitian Revolution, where Vodou ceremonies, for example the famous Bwa Kayiman ceremony led by Dutty Boukman, galvanized enslaved Africans to rise against their oppressors. The invocation of deities such as Ogun, associated with war and strength, symbolized the spiritual foundation of the struggle for freedom. Another example is the Christmas Rebellion, where Samuel Sharpe, an enslaved Baptist lay deacon of Jamaica, organized “the largest slave revolt in Jamaica’s history” on Christmas Day of 1831, which “added more pressure for the passage of the abolition of slavery in the British Empire in 1833”.³³

Traditional African religions invited the enslaved to remain in a spiritual world where the soul and spirit dwell, and where humans are beyond commodification, objectification and alienation.³⁴ This spiritual perspective enabled enslaved Africans to embrace “soul values”, including the myriad ways “enslaved people fought for their lives and how they valued themselves by recognizing that they could be enslaved in body yet dignified and free in their souls”.³⁵ The enslaved Africans “understood their soul as a sacred space despite whether its spiritual underpinnings were linked to particular belief systems or not”.³⁶ Through soul values, the enslaved perceived and valued themselves as souls who were inherently dignified and free. The inner lives of the enslaved and their soul values were woven into cultural expression through “poems, folktales, spirituals, and religious conversion as well as secular, non-religious ways”.³⁷

For those enslaved, all religiously inspired events and cultural expressions also had subversive potential. Black festivals featuring rhythms, movements, dances, songs and other forms of African art had played a significant role in resurrection and resistance during slavery. Rhythms, for instance, were regarded as central to the lives of those enslaved as they are manifestations and expressions of the vital life force that defines humans’ being-in-the-world-ness as spiritual. According to Léopold Sédar Senghor, former President of Senegal, rhythm is “the architecture of being”, and “the manifestation of a ‘vital force’, or, more precisely, a vitalism of strengths”.³⁸ In Senghor’s words:

33 Araujo (2024), pp. 406/7.

34 Chukwuedo (2019). A comparative study of immortality of the soul in Christianity and African traditional religion.

35 Berry (2021). Soul values and American slavery (p. 202).

36 Berry (2021), p. 204.

37 Berry (2021), p. 202.

38 Diagne & Amselle (2020). *In search of Africa(s): Universalism and decolonial thought* (p. xvi).

[Rhythm] is the vibrating shock, the force that, through the senses, seizes us at the root of being. It expresses itself through the most material and sensual means: lines, surfaces, colours, and volumes, in architecture, sculpture and painting; accents in poetry and music; movement in dance. But, in doing so, it organizes all this concreteness toward the light of the Spirit.³⁹

The light of the spirit came through other art forms, including the spirituals (or Negro spirituals), blues, jazz, soul, hip-hop, and so forth, which were also sources of resilience. Take spirituals as an example. Created by enslaved Africans in North America, spirituals were a powerful form of resistance during slavery.⁴⁰ These songs, combining African religious and musical traditions with European influences, served as a means to express faith, longing for freedom and cultural identity.⁴¹ Spirituals have their roots in the informal meetings in which enslaved Africans would come together, sing, chant, dance and experience awesome ecstasy. They sang the sorrows (e.g. blues) and hopes, and they narrated their faith in the higher life forces, which helped to make them feel whole in their humanity.⁴²

African American religion has also informed black radical thought through biblical re-interpretations conducted by enslaved people, where the black subject was inserted into Christianity.⁴³

Black radical and theological thoughts defied the racialized caste system in Protestant America.⁴⁴ Churches became centres of resistance, providing not only spiritual solace but also organizational bases for anti-colonial movements.⁴⁵ Through the creation and development of the black church, black theology allowed Africans to connect to the freedom found in a spiritual world. Over time, through the black church, African and afro-descendent communities have become political actors whose transformative visions for a better world and better life are imbued with spiritual values. The civil rights movement, for instance, was built upon the spiritually inspired vision of non-violence and the dream of beloved community.⁴⁶

39 This extended quote is from Senghor's article on "Negro-African aesthetics", quoted in Diagne (2016). *The ink of the scholars: Reflections on philosophy in Africa*.

40 Omo-Osagie (2007). "Their souls made them whole": Negro spirituals and lessons in healing and atonement (p. 34).

41 Sebryuk (2020). Slave songs: Key features and hidden meanings of African American Spirituals.

42 Omo-Osagie (2007).

43 Johnson (2021). *We testify with our lives: How religion transformed radical thought from black power to Black Lives Matter*.

44 For more on the "caste" system, see Wilkerson (2020). *Caste: The origins of our discontents*.

45 Turner (1998). *Slaves and missionaries: The disintegration of Jamaican slave society, 1787–1834*.

46 King (2015). *The radical king*.

Spiritual strengths formed the basis for enslaved Africans' active resistance against inhumanity. Some made attempts to escape slavery, and even succeeded in freeing themselves and helping others to become free; some were defiant against the enslavers' cruelty and domination; others transcended physical and psychological torture as they held tight onto the inner reality of the soul/spirit. In his writing, Frederick Douglass recalled seeing an enslaved women defying her oppressor: "whipped—severely whipped; but she was not subdued ... her invincible spirit undaunted".⁴⁷

There were self-liberated enslaved Africans who succeeded in fleeing to remote areas (in Suriname, Jamaica and Brazil) and forming communities where they applied traditional approaches to their social, economic and political life, including endogenous governance.⁴⁸ The Maroon communities (established by escaped formerly enslaved Africans and their descents) lived closely with the spirits of their ancestors, deities and the divine, and pursued a spiritually rich and enriching life through ceremonies, rituals, feasts and other practices to honor the spirits.⁴⁹

In sum, the spiritual resilience and resistance embodied in traditional African religions and syncretic practices underscore the enduring significance of African ontological, epistemological and ethical frameworks in addressing spiritual harms of inhumanity. One such framework is Ubuntu, to which we shall now turn.

Ubuntu: Relational Being and Cosmic Interdependence

In both its philosophical and spiritual dimensions, Ubuntu can be considered as one of the few characteristics of African societies to have survived the six hundred years of slavery, colonialism and imperialism, phenomena that have otherwise destabilized the continent's societies and undermined traditional frameworks of knowledge transmission. Found in numerous African languages and cultures, Ubuntu thought persists in the conception of the place of the individual within the community, as well as in the links between different peoples. It structures a conscience and a vision of the world based on interdependence of relation.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Douglass (1855). *My bondage and my freedom* (p. 95).

⁴⁸ Moussa Iye & Hall (2024). *Beyond mimicry: African endogenous governance*.

⁴⁹ Price (2020). *Maroon societies in the Americas*.

⁵⁰ Palais de Tokyo (n.d.). *Ubuntu, a lucid dream* [Exhibition webpage].

Reviewing the histories of slavery and colonialism, and the double-edged role of religion, also calls attention to the continued racist legacies plaguing the planet, not least the widespread racism, extracting capitalist economic system, structural injustice and never-ending violence against humans and the more-than-human. As James Baldwin reminds us, “it is to history that we owe our frames of reference, our identities, and our aspirations”⁵¹; the past is important in providing analysis about the present challenges. In a similar vein, the past also offers wisdom that is key to transcending the current impasse and moving towards better futures. This requires a deeper understanding of inhumanity and its enduring harms. This part of the chapter turns to an ancient African concept of Ubuntu and explores the philosophical contributions of Mogobe Bernard Ramose, a South African philosopher, and Souleymane Bachir Diagne, a Senegalese philosopher, whose interpretations of Ubuntu have lent profound insights into the harms of inhumanity.

Ubuntu Ontology

Ubuntu philosophy “has existed since time immemorial”,⁵² and is a concept rooted in African religion and spirituality.⁵³ It offers ontological, epistemic and ethical frameworks for understanding what constitutes humanity. Ubuntu was regarded as a spiritual ontology by Desmond Tutu,⁵⁴ and this chapter acknowledges that Ubuntu entails interactions not confined to those between humans; it also involves “spiritual beings such as *Mwari/Musikavanhu/Unkulunkulu* (Creator God), *Midzimu* (ancestors) and *Mashavi* (Alien spirits)”.⁵⁵ In the writings of Ramose and Diagne, Ubuntu is regarded as an ontology and an epistemological paradigm, an ethical principle, and a humanistic praxis, all of which offer holistic perspectives on human existence, reality, striving and direction. It does so by “uniting the visible world of human relations with the invisible realm of the ancestors and spiritual beings”.⁵⁶ Ubuntu, therefore, stands at the junction of the cosmic, the political, the societal, the communal and the personal.”⁵⁷

51 Baldwin (1965). The white men’s guilt.

52 Mugumbate et al. (2023). Understanding Ubuntu and its contribution to social work education in Africa and other regions of the world (p. 1123).

53 Mbiti (1970). *Concepts of God in Africa*. Praeger Publishers; Mbiti (1977). *Introduction to African religion*; Mbiti (1990). *African religion and philosophy*.

54 Battle (1997). *Reconciliation: The Ubuntu theology of Desmond Tutu*.

55 Mangena (n.d.). *Hunhu/Ubuntu in the traditional thought of Southern Africa*.

56 Ramose (2002). African philosophy through Ubuntu (p. 235).

In *African Philosophy Through Ubuntu*, Ramose offers the framework of Ubuntu ontology.⁵⁸ He later writes:

Ubuntu is actually two words in one. It consists of the prefix *ubu-* and the stem *-ntu*. *Ubu-* evokes the idea of be-ing in general. It is enfolded be-ing before it manifests itself in the concrete form or mode of existence 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 of being. In this sense *ubu-* is always oriented towards *-ntu*.⁵⁹

This characterization of *ubu-ntu* suggests that there can be no separation between *ubu-* and *-ntu*, and that together they constitute the mutually interpenetrating aspects of reality as one-ness or whole-ness. Ubuntu ontology thus conceived seems to unite African philosophical and spiritual ideas, and offers insights into meaningful ways to respond to challenges beyond those encountered by peoples and communities in the African continent. Ramose uses Kwame Nkrumah's (Ghanian prime minister from 1952–1957) words: "the emancipation of the African continent is the emancipation of man"⁶⁰ to propose the interconnectedness of human beings "within and without Africa".⁶¹ For Ramose, "an African orientation in philosophy is of immediate relevance to the world".⁶²

Ramose calls this African orientation in philosophy "the African tree of ontology, knowledge and ethics", which "captures the authentic African view of reality because of its tie with the much adored holistic, interconnected and dynamic character of African traditional worldview".⁶³ The African tree of ontology, knowledge and ethics is indeed manifested in different regions of Africa, which tend to have their own words, proverbs, metaphors and stories to articulate the meanings and significance of Ubuntu. Ramose suggests that these are variations within a broad philosophical and spiritual "family". The idea of Ubuntu as the root of the African family tree of ontology is supported by claims that Ubuntu is found "from the Nubian desert to the Cape of Good Hope and from Senegal to Zanzibar".⁶⁴

⁵⁷ Ramose (2002), p. 235.

⁵⁸ Ramose (1999). *African philosophy through Ubuntu*.

⁵⁹ Ramose (2022). *Ubu-ntu ethics in dialogue with Kant's deontic ethics* (p. 41).

⁶⁰ Nkrumah (1970) *Consciencism, philosophy and ideology for decolonisation* (p. 78).

⁶¹ Ramose (2022), p. 41.

⁶² Ramose (2022), p. 35.

⁶³ Ojimba (2023). *Ubuntu's Ontological Account in African Philosophy and its Cross-Tradition Engagement on the Issue of Being versus Becoming* (p. 101).

⁶⁴ De Tejada (1979). *The future of Bantu law* (p. 304).

For instance, in the Zulu language, the expression is *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*, which means “a person is a person through other people”. In the Shona language, spoken by people in Zimbabwe, the phrase is *munhu munhu muvanhu*, bearing the same meaning. In Botswana, the word is *botho*, in Tanzania, *bumuntu*, Congo, *bomoto*, Angola, *gimuntu*, Malawi, *umunthu*, Mozambique, *vumuntu* and Uganda *umuntu*. In the Bantu languages spoken in East Africa, such as Kikuyu, Luhya and Swahili, the term is *umundu*, *omundu*, *utu*, respectively. Although in different linguistic forms, these give rise to same essential meaning—the interdependency and interconnection of human beings. In Ramose’s words, “without other human beings, one cannot speak of *umuntu* (person) at all”.⁶⁵ This relational ontology is “the wellspring flowing with African ontology and epistemology”, which contrasts with the Western worldview of autonomous will and individual rights and entitlement.⁶⁶

Within this family resemblance, Ramose captures three core aspects of Ubuntu that are fundamental to our understanding of inhumanity.

First, as illustrated by the interconnection between *ubu-* and *-ntu*, Ubu-ntu shifts our attention from entities, i.e. persons, or do-ers/actors, to the intertwining processes that give rise to them. For Ramose, the hyphenated be-ing is dynamic. Pointing out the limitation of subject–verb–object polarities embedded in our language,⁶⁷ Ramose suggests that such linguistic structure tends to bring forward “fragmentative” thinking, dividing the living, flowing and dynamizing existence into parts. Ramose suggests that rather than static, reality is constituted in movements or processes of *flow*. Accordingly, while *ubu-* characterizes be-ing, which “may be said to be distinctly ontological”, *-ntu* serves as “the nodal point” at which be-ing assumes concrete forms or particularities.⁶⁸ The latter, for Ramose, allows our be-ing to be located in the process of “continual unfoldment”, which is “distinctly epistemological” because *-ntu* constitutes “an inquiry into be-ing, experience, knowledge and truth”.⁶⁹

Second, and relatedly, Ramose posits that the be-ing-ness of humans is effectively become-ing-ness. With this understanding, the typical tension between being and becoming can be diffused in Ubuntu ontology.⁷⁰ In Ramose’s framework, be-ing and become-ing are not two separate processes. Instead, be-ing/become-ing is a continuum/flow, and to such an extent, be-ing is not given and can only “be

⁶⁵ Ramose (2002), p. 229.

⁶⁶ Ramose (1999), p. 49.

⁶⁷ Ramose (1999), p. 50.

⁶⁸ Ramose (2022), p. 41.

⁶⁹ Ramose (2022), p. 41.

⁷⁰ Ramose (1999), p. 51–52.

painstakingly achieved” in becoming.⁷¹ For Ramose, to facilitate the unfoldment, Ubu-ntu denotes not merely the mode of our human-ness, or “a humane, respectful and polite attitude towards others”, but also “describes a condition of be-ing becoming.”⁷² In other words, Ubuntu characterizes the kinds of society and institutions conducive for human be-ing becoming.

Third, Ramose shows that human beings are never solitary, but always already relational and ontologically tied to our mutual communing. This, according to Ramose, is expressed in the maxim *umuntu ngumuntu nga bantu* (*motho ke motho ka batho*), which may be construed to mean that “to be a human being is to affirm one’s humanity by recognising the humanity of others and, on that basis, establish humane relations with them”.⁷³ He argues that Ubuntu ontology involves “the triadic relation” among persons, community and world that includes ancestors and future generations.⁷⁴ Any breach of the interdependence is “a contradiction of *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* and is tantamount to a denial of our humanity by failing to recognize it in others”.⁷⁵

Ramose’s Ubuntu ontology defines humanity as mutually constructive. It highlights community or communing as our way of being human together, connecting ancestors and future generations with those in the here-and-now. Implied here is interdependence and mutuality of human well-being. This means that no one can thrive alone, and our personal well-being is always already intimately bound up with communal and societal well-being. Ubuntu inspires the upholding of the value-pillars that nourish the communal life and facilitate structural conditions for the well-being of all. The ethical imperative of human relational process and our shared ways of be-ing/become-ing are part and parcel of fostering human bonds built on dignity, respect, solidarity and caring.⁷⁶ As we shall see, this has deep ramifications for our understanding of inhumanity.

(Ubu)ntu Cosmology

Souleymane Bachir Diagne adds further nuances to this relational ontology, epistemology and ethics. This section explores Diagne’s insights into three domains:

⁷¹ Ramose (2002), p. 231.

⁷² Ramose (2022), p. 43.

⁷³ Ramose (2022), p. 43.

⁷⁴ Ramose (2002), p. 229.

⁷⁵ Ramose (2002), p. 234.

⁷⁶ Agada (2022). The ethnophilosophical foundation of Ramose’s Ubuntu ontology of *be-ing becoming*.

Ubuntu/humanity's universality; Ubuntu/humanity as a remedy for our social malaise; and extending Ubuntu/humanity's universality to all beings in order to better understand harms of inhumanity, paving the way for meaningful antidotes.

So far, it has been established that Ubuntu, although rooted in Africa, offers philosophical and spiritual reorientation that is meaningful for within and beyond Africa. Hence, Diagne proposes that Ubuntu is a "promise" and ultimately a "gift" for humanity.⁷⁷ However, it can be extremely challenging for any wisdom beyond the European epistemic paradigm to be recognized as universal. Diagne's analysis on this goes directly to the critique of European brutality in slavery, colonialism and imperialism. It offers a profound insight into processes of inhumanity.

According to Diagne, European efforts in othering and denigrating non-European traditions and cultures started by positing European languages, which have roots in the Greek *logos*,—centred on rationality and reasoning—as the "norm". Consequently, all other languages were regarded as *lacking* rationality or deficient in reasoning. He writes:

In the colonial world, the imperial language imposes itself as the incarnation of Reason, and native languages (which cannot really have the status of languages) are defined in a negative way by their supposed shortcomings. So these languages will be described as lacking writing, as lacking abstract concepts, as lacking a future tense, as lacking the verb "to be".⁷⁸

Normalizing *logos* in language and incarnating Western language as the "absolute and pre-eminent model" were European strategies to justify anything Western as "universal", and anything non-Western as barbaric, primitive or belonging to the subalterns who, by definition, could not have a voice.⁷⁹ Colonial powers could do so because what is non-European could not be *Europeanized*, and could therefore only remain to be "the other". Take white privilege as an example. According to Diagne, it is "the privilege of seeing without being seen, of considering oneself to be the norm while the others are different or particular".⁸⁰

Diagne's major contribution here is to distinguish universalism from universality. He points out that the European approach to establishing universalism is in effect advocating the European exceptionalism/Eurocentrism constructed to enable Europeans to legitimize their invading, robbing, occupying, and even erasing traditional and Indigenous religions, languages, thoughts, concepts, cultures and peoples. In this way, systemic brutality, dispossession, occupation

⁷⁷ Cornell & Diagne (2024). uBuntu, nite and the struggle for global justice (pp. 106–7).

⁷⁸ Diagne & Amselle (2020), p. 21.

⁷⁹ Diagne & Amselle (2020), p. 21.

⁸⁰ Diagne & Amselle (2020), p. 136.

and oppression were linked with “epistemicide”⁸¹—the killing of non-Western knowledge systems. In view of the continued legacies of inhumanity through European domination on the contemporary global stage, Diagne proposes that such domination draws on:

[A]n out-of-date universalism whose discourse is nostalgia for a time when it was permissible to serenely view Europe alone as the stage of history where the drama of the universal was being performed—a drama that could then be expanded, by colonization, to the rest of the world.⁸²

For Diagne, the decolonial movement precisely started from the critique of the Eurocentric epistemological paradigm and its claim to universalism. Through such an analysis, Diagne also offers a way to transcend the Eurocentric universalism/exceptionalism by stressing Ubuntu’s *universality*, or “universal human experience”. The word “experience” is key here because, as Diagne writes, “by definition, experiences manifest an irreducible plurality as against the universalism that always aims to assimilate things to itself”.⁸³ Ubuntu as a universal human experience, according to Diagne, further “helps us understand and recognize that, yes, in truth, it is through each other and thanks to each other that we will reach our common destination”.⁸⁴ This collective destination embedded in Ubuntu is the next insight that Diagne introduces to our understanding of the harms of inhumanity.

Like Ramose, Diagne acknowledges Ubuntu’s emphasis on the interconnectedness of humanity and the idea that one’s humanity is intertwined with that of others. From linguistic perspectives, Diagne accepts Ubuntu to mean “humanity in general ... a universal bond, but also respect, human dignity, compassion, solidarity, loyalty and even consensus”.⁸⁵ As Diagne has argued, this is because humanity, and human experience, lies at the core of our universality. However, his view on *ntu* cosmology points to the direction/destination of Ubuntu as becoming more human. In a dialogue with Drucilla Cornell, Diagne writes:

[I]f you consider that all existing beings are forces, to “be” is to “be a force”. You are not in the logic of attribution. You are not saying that the being has force or that force can be attributed to the being. You are saying that “being” and “force” are one and the same thing. So you may

81 de Sousa Santos (2014). *Epistemologies of the South: Justice against epistemicide*.

82 Diagne & Amselle (2020), p. 23.

83 Diagne & Amselle (2020), p. 43.

84 Diagne & Amselle (2020), p. 45.

85 Cornell & Diagne (2024), p. 105.

ask yourself, what is a force for? What is the goal of a force? The goal of a force is to become more force.⁸⁶

In traditional African worldview, it is the vital force that pervades and animates all things in the universe, from God to a grain of sand; and as living beings on Earth, humans are able to increase humanity.⁸⁷ Diagne's idea that "the goal of the human force is to be more force" suggests that human beings have inherent responsibility to be more human. Diagne thus writes: "humanity is not a state, but ... a task"; through Ubuntu, we help each other achieve more humanity.

Diagne also stresses the mutuality of being human, whereby when some people suffer, be they close or distant from us, all suffer. He attributes much of the suffering to capitalism and injustice. For Diagne, "achieving it (humanity) is going against the forces of fragmentation and division".⁸⁸ To challenge the legacies of continued systemic injustice and the symptoms of the current structural malaise affecting all humanity, Diagne proposes that *ntu* cosmology already has the meaningful response embedded in itself. To this end, drawing on the Wolof language spoken in West Africa, Diagne introduces the concept "Nite" to add a further dimension to Ubuntu. The Wolof proverb Diagne refers to is *Nit, nitay garabam*, which means "the human is the remedy for the human".⁸⁹ Why remedy? According to Diagne, *Nit, nitay garabam* highlights the fact that part of our collective malady is our "not being human enough yet".⁹⁰

In the context of global crises, which can be seen as the extension of ever-present discriminative legacies, the notion of remedy reminds us that there are times when systems permitted institutions to perpetuate inhumanity and inflict wounds upon people, these systems are "unwell" owing to structural malaise underlying them. Transatlantic slavery, colonialism, imperialism and industrialized capitalism are no doubt part of the malady with inhumane acts as the symptoms which have resulted in transgenerational trauma. A malady demands a cure, and trauma requires healing. Hence being-becoming more human also offers the antidote to the ills of our society.

For Diagne, Ubuntu cosmology ought to include both humans and the more-than-human. Brutality against humans, and the continued legacies of inhumanity (manifested in the global refugee and migrant crisis, the growth-centred extracting

⁸⁶ Cornell & Diagne (2024), p. 110.

⁸⁷ Kelland (2023). African Perspectives on Personality.

⁸⁸ Cornell & Diagne (2024), p. 117.

⁸⁹ Cornell & Diagne (2024), p. 105.

⁹⁰ Cornell & Diagne (2024), p. 106.

economy, and widespread violence in Africa and the Middle East) also result in irreversible harms to the more-than-human. Diagne writes:

“ntu”, the vital principle, goes beyond the human being. In other words, if there is any centrality of human life, it is the centrality of responsibility. Not a centrality as kind of ontological priority, however, as the only priority would come from the particular responsibility of the living human being to maintain the chain of forces from the force of forces to the pebble. If you go back to the vital principle, that is what makes it naturally beyond simple entanglement of humans.⁹¹

Ubuntu, according to Diagne, invites us to enhance the vital forces in all lives on earth. Rather than perceiving Ubuntu as applying merely to person-to-person and person-to-community mutuality, Diagne suggests that the universal vital principle ought to involve all beings (human and the more-than-human) on the planet. As human beings turn to the earth for nourishment and healing, they have a duty to take care of the earth and the more-than-human. Ubuntu inspires radical solidarity which is inclusive of all. Thus Ubuntu cosmology’s emphasis on humanity also highlights the ethical responsibilities that come with it—through the task of being-becoming more human we can ensure mutual respect, mutual care and mutual belongingness amongst all beings.

Humanity as Antidote to Spiritual Harms of Inhumanity

Ubuntu is the ultimate philosophy of good governance. Ubuntu ... underlies other moral pillars of our societies: love, respect, forgiveness, understanding and justice.⁹²

In a BBC documentary, *What we can learn from the African philosophy of Ubuntu*, South Africa scholar James Ogude suggests that “the answers to the future always reside in the past”. He adds that this is why the ancient knowledge system of Ubuntu rooted in traditional African religion and spirituality becomes extremely relevant now. As this chapter shows, although Christian doctrines were mobilized to justify slavery and colonialism, traditional African religions and cultural practices were key to inspiring spiritual resilience and resistance against inhumanity.

⁹¹ Cornell & Diagne (2024), p. 116.

⁹² Tutu (2016). Foreword. In S. Gill and D. Cadman (Eds.), *Why Love Matters: Values in Governance*.

At the core of Ramose's Ubuntu ontology is the proposal that life is always in motion or in flow through being-becoming. The motion is both temporal and ethical. It is temporal as it brings past–present–future generations in one continuum. The experiences of our ancestors have shaped how we are living our life now, and how we engage the current challenges and enrich human interdependence and solidarity will determine the experiences and relational dynamics of those yet to be born. Human interdependence and solidarity must thus also be intergenerational interdependence and solidarity. The motion is ethical as it invites collective inquiry into what is good for individuals and communities, and how we ought to take responsibility together for collective being-becoming well. The ethical orientation of Ubuntu ontology ensures that what is good for one must be constituted in what is good for all. Ubuntu contains in its system evaluative criteria, for instance it could show that any economic gains solely benefiting one group of people cannot be good, especially when such gains are achieved through exploiting other people and groups of people's work and depriving them of well-being.

For Diagne, Ubuntu motion is directed towards being-becoming more (fully) human, which holds the answer to our overcoming historical and present structural malaise and related legacies of injustice. Indeed, when applying Diagne's Ubu-ntu cosmology in our discussion of spiritual harms of inhumanity, we can see that being enslaved, colonized, brutalized and dispossessed is being denied the opportunity to be *the force* for collectively being-becoming more human. More importantly, *ntu* cosmology suggests that violence does not only harm the enslaved, the Indigenous, the colonized and the dispossessed, but the inhumanity involved also causes moral and spiritual damage to those who directly and indirectly inflicted atrocities upon others, who perpetuated injustice in the society (i.e. the colonial regime and white supremacist ideology), and who benefited financially from the brutality. Not taking responsibility for supporting others' being-becoming more human equally prohibits their becoming a force for themselves and for their community. While those oppressed have had opportunities to confront oppression and seek emancipation through embracing spiritual resilience and reinforcing humanity, the perpetrators remain stuck in the cycle of inhumanity and the moral vacuum of self-interest.

Given the histories of enslavement and colonization and the ever-lasting global legacies of injustice, Ramose identifies Ubuntu as spiritual ontology and inclusive cosmology that can offer theories and practices "conceived and fashioned" by *the conquered peoples* for the interests of the whole of humanity.⁹³ By conquered

93 Ramose (2002).

peoples, Ramose refers to the Indigenous, Africans and others who have been subjugated through slavery, dispossession and colonization, but who had the experiences of focusing on the inner life and being guided by soul value.⁹⁴ As Ramose argues, an African orientation is key to humanity's liberation because it is the conquered peoples who are "still engaged in the continuing struggle for the realisation of the ethical exigencies of reparations, restitution and restoration in the name of truth, justice and peace".⁹⁵ Truth, justice and peace are global objectives that all peoples are striving for. Amidst epistemic manipulation, structural injustice and systemic violence, for Ramose the journey towards these noble common objectives must not be led by those who have perpetuated the world (dis)order. Instead, it is time that the conquered peoples articulated and engaged in *philopraxis* captured in Ubuntu to lead humanity out of the current impasse.

However, while the philosophies of Ramose and Diagne provide ethical exigencies of healing, restoration and regeneration, a typical critique of Ubuntu is that it seems to be offering a mere "lyrical illusion", as provoked by Diagne.⁹⁶ Indeed, global society has long been contaminated by structural malaise that, like a pandemic, threatens to penetrate all aspects of life on earth. Within such global systems, despite the abolition of slavery and the end of overt European colonialism, capitalism has continued as an extractive enterprise and inhumane exploitation of human creativity and labour to feed into the consumptive economic engine. Capitalism depends on the same structural injustice currently plaguing the entire planet. Everyone is now compelled to participate in the inhumanity, such as through the (unconscious) consumption of abstract commodities that tend to hide the violent systems of their production.⁹⁷

Instead of "lyrical illusion", Diagne argues that Ubuntu is fundamental to uncovering these structural ills and demonstrating how fragmentation and alienation have spread invisibly in the current hegemony; more significantly, as discussed, Ubuntu ethics provides an evaluative framework for considering what kind of unfoldment is desirable and what kinds of system are better to ensure justice, mutual respect and solidarity. Thus Diagne's offering of the Wolof wisdom *nit nitay garabam*—humanity is human's remedy—is extremely timely when considering our response to the current inhumane systems. As pointed out by Desmond Tutu, the cure for the malady lies in redesigning global governance guided by the architectural blueprint outlined by Ubuntu.

⁹⁴ Ramose (2002).

⁹⁵ Ramose (2002), p. 35.

⁹⁶ Cornell & Diagne (2024).

⁹⁷ Mintz (1985). *Sweetness and power: The place of sugar in modern history*.

Another critique of Ubuntu is connected to the relational dynamic between the individual and the collective, with Ubuntu seen to overly stress the collective and neglect the individual. To this, Diagne says:

Unlike the stereotype of African societies being essentially collectivist totalities where the individual is absolutely nothing and only has duties toward the group, which is the sole bearer of rights, what ... “nit nitay garabam” says is that the function of the group is to accompany and to aid the individual in becoming a person, becoming human.

Contrary to individualism, where each person defines themselves as an atomic individual first who then relates to other individuals through *inter*-subjectivity, Ubuntu’s relational ontology defines the individual through the greater humanity that each person is embedded in, and the greater whole we are already a part of.

By centring Ubuntu in broader ontological, epistemological, ethical and ecological terms, Ramose and Diagne’s philosophies have successfully shown how these aspects of Ubuntu flow into each other, forming a tapestry of human beings interrelated and interdependent existence. While Ubuntu does not dismiss human rights, both thinkers have highlighted the risk of placing individual autonomy as the only conceptual foundation of the ethical framework for a just world. Similarly, as Ubuntu refuses any attempt to obscure the indispensable communal dimension of human flourishing,⁹⁸ they also remind us that Ubuntu challenges reductive, purely collectivist readings of human community.

It seems that Ubuntu as *an antidote* to the spiritual wounds and structural malaise of inhumanity may serve both as a critique and a corrective. It is a critique because Ubuntu reveals the ruinousness of the Western hyper-individualist paradigm and associated socio-economic-political systems at the root of inhumane acts of slavery, colonialism, imperialism and consumerism. It is a corrective as Ubuntu offers “philopraxis” to move beyond the “epistemicide”, confront Western epistemic colonization and domination, and centralize ubu-ntu as “a voice in the construction of human relations globally”.⁹⁹

Conclusion: Towards Politics of Humanity

Ubuntu offers a lens through which humanity can confront its shared wounds. Ubuntu’s emphasis on interconnectedness, “cosmic harmony”,¹⁰⁰ and collective

⁹⁸ Ramose (2014). Ubuntu: Affirming right and seeking remedies in South Africa.

⁹⁹ Ramose (2022), p. 43.

¹⁰⁰ Ramose (1999).

flourishing dismantles the binaries perpetuated by racist mentality, colonial logics and structural injustices. As articulated by Ramose and Diagne, Ubuntu presents a relational vision of being-becoming centred on human's responsibilities for co-creating a world imbued with dignity, justice and respect for all beings. It advocates intergenerational commitments to acknowledging multidimensional harms inflicted in the past, addressing prolonged trauma sustained by legacies of inhumanity, transforming current social systems, and laying the groundwork for thriving futures.

Ubuntu praxis is a call to action for collective healing, social justice and communal well-being that involves all—not only those directly sabotaged by inhumanity, but also those who have imposed oppressive systems to gain power and economic advantage. Intergenerational solidarity emphasizes that each generation holds an ethical obligation to address inherited wounds and dismantle systems of oppression that perpetuate suffering. Ubuntu reminds us that humanity is an unfolding process and a collective journey.

In a world grappling with interconnected polycrises, not least ecological degradation, systemic inequality, racialized capitalism and social fragmentation, Ubuntu urges us to reimagine an architecture of global governance that is centred on what Diagne calls “a politics of humanity”.¹⁰¹ It can inspire a blueprint for systems that are rooted in relational justice and ecological integrity, where human flourishing aligns with the equal thriving of the more-than-human world. Globally, Ubuntu praxis evokes co-creative well-being economies, community-driven policymaking, caring institutions, and ecological stewardship and guardianship.

Ultimately, Ubuntu invites us to recognize past inhumanity and connected woundedness, embrace ancestral strengths and resilience, regenerate human/humane communities, and care for collective futures that are imbued with possibilities of the co-flourishing of human and more-than-human. As proposed by Ubuntu and other African worldviews, the remedy for humanity's ailment lies precisely in humanity itself, and living out our shared humanity is indeed an antidote to harms of inhumanity.

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101 Cornell & Diagne (2024), p. 106.

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