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CULTURE VERSUS RELIGION: A THEORETICAL ANALYSIS OF THE ROLE OF INDIGENOUS AFRICAN CULTURE OF UBUNTU IN SOCIAL CHANGE AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN THE POST-APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICAN SOCIETY

Introduction

Debate around the ubuntu/botho culture and its potential developmental role in SA occurred in the context of the post-colonial, post-apartheid era and the subsequent challenges it presented for the African countries (see Gyeke, 1997). The debate gained even greater momentum in the post-apartheid, democratic 1994 period and the end of the 20th century that marked the beginning of the 21st century as a new millennium. This is the period in which SA and most other African countries publicly declared the 21st century as the century for renewal and advancement of the African continent so that African countries become active and competitive players on the global stage. Within this context and underlying the debate on the African indigenous culture of ubuntu, are the widely held views and claims that this culture has a key role to play in the socio-economic growth and development of the post-apartheid democratic South Africa. Often such claims are made in a theoretical

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vacuum. This article reviews this debate, assessing the theoretical soundness of those claims. The article starts with a critical review of the latter debate in SA followed by an outline of the theoretical perspectives on culture and religion and their role in social change and economy. The implications for the ubuntu culture's role in the post-apartheid South African society are then drawn to inform concluding argument. I argue that while there are some potential constraints and concerns raised, there are however persuasive theoretical grounds in support of the claims that the ubuntu/botho values can positively influence the post-apartheid SA's socio-economic development.

Ubuntu/botho culture in South Africa (SA)

A. The concept of ubuntu/botho defined

The first intellectual attempt to define and explain the ubuntu culture, which brought to light those key defining, unique features and virtues, was made by Jordan K Ngubane in the 1960s and 1970s. Ngubane (1963) defined ubuntu/botho as a philosophy of life and the practice of being humane which gave content to life for African people long before the arrival of white settlers, and that it rests on the supreme ethical code which attaches primacy to human personality as a sacred being².

Further attempts at defining the concepts include that by Mbigi and Maree, according to whom, ubuntu is a "metaphor that describes the significance of group solidarity on survival issues amongst African communities that are subjected to poverty as a result of deprivation, and which is effected through brotherly group care as opposed to individual self-reliance" (Mbigi and Maree, 1995: 4). Its core defining values are respect, group solidarity, conformity, compassion, human dignity and humaneness, collective unity and solidarity, sharing, universal brotherhood, communalism, interdependence, and hospitality (see Mdluli, 1987: 66-71; Mbigi and Maree, 1995: 2; and Kamwangamalu, 1999: 25-26). These values are centred on the cardinal belief that "*motho ke motho ka batho*" (in seSotho language)/"*umuntu ngumuntu ngabanye*" (in isiZulu language)/"I am because you are and you are because I am" (English translation)³, which promotes communalism and interdependence. Kamwangamalu argues that communalism is one of the core ubuntu virtues according to which the interest of the individual is subordinate to

² Ngubane, 1979: 65-66. NB. To refer to this African person-oriented culture, I will in this study, employ both the Sotho word "Botho" and/or Nguni word "Ubuntu" interchangeably.

³ See Ibid, 1999: 29.

that of the group. Kamwangamalu however argues that although communalism is the opposite of individualism, the ubuntu culture does not negate individualism. Instead, he argues, "communalism is the recognition of the limited character of the possibilities of the individual, which limited possibilities whittle away the individual's self-sufficiency".⁴

B. *Ubuntu and Role in South Africa's Socio-economic Development after Apartheid: a Review*

The ubuntu values, its proponents argue, if strategically and innovatively tapped, could contribute positively to the socio-economic development of post-apartheid SA and even give it a competitive edge in the world markets. This, they argue, should particularly be so within economic and business enterprises whereby the Western and Eastern based techniques of management alone have been and remain inadequate to overcome the performance challenges. Hence if such techniques are not strategically fused with the innovative African practices and processes anchored in the ubuntu value system, they would only help to achieve competitive parity as opposed to competitive advantage (see Mbigi and Maree, 1995: 2 – 4 and Lessem, 1996: 187). Mbigi (1997) sees this, what he calls South Africa's "triple cultural heritage", as a source of strength that needs to be tapped to not only reconcile the historical differences and conflicts but also to enhance the achievement of improved efficiency, productivity, profitability and competitiveness. Similarly, Lessem and Nussbaum (1996:11) argue that "while management principles are universal, the context in which they are implemented is critical to the form and shape they should take in any particular environment".

These assertions are strengthened by the historical evidence presented by Ngubane (1963 and 1979) which points to the significance of the botho culture to the African people in South Africa and its historical role in the liberation struggle. Ngubane attributes this to the culture's resilience that saw it surviving some of the harshest historical conditions. Nzimande (1988: 4) too argues that in spite of the changes that the African traditional and cultural values and beliefs such as the explanation and conceptualisation of mental health and approach to treating mental disorders underwent, their core practices were maintained." The botho culture, Ngubane(1963 and 1979) argues, played an instrumental role in the historical struggle against white colonial conquest and control in South Africa. Its specific role was in unifying the African liberation front around a common goal which he calls the

⁴ Kamwangamalu, 1999: 29.

Ideal of Nationhood in spite of differences between African-led liberation structures around issues of strategies and approaches needed to achieve this common goal. Also strengthening the above assertions are the studies conducted in the past on black workers which reveal the positive influence of ubuntu culture's virtues had on black workers' survival strategies under the harsh compound or hostels conditions, and their collective resistance to the apartheid-capitalist exploitation (see Gordon, 1977; Sitas, 1994; Shula Marks, 2001).

Also strengthening the claims that the ubuntu culture has a role to play in the socio-economic development of the contemporary SA society is the evidence of historical failure by white managements and governments under apartheid to successfully adopt and implement Western- and Eastern-based workplace strategies to improve working relations, work performance, efficiency, productivity (See Maree, 1985; Maller, 1992; and Mapadimeng, 1998). The failure of these strategies was mainly attributed to the system of apartheid capitalism characterised by political and economic exclusion and marginalisation of the black people. This was met by collective resistance from black workers, refusing to cooperate with the white owned and managed business enterprises on productivity matters. A further support of the pro-ubuntu arguments lies in the post-apartheid era which has seen SA re-entering the global world, exposing most local business enterprises to outside pressures and competition under the neo-liberal economic and political regime. In a rushed response to global competitive pressures, most SA major business enterprises adopted cost-cutting measures in the form of labour market flexibility (see Macun, 1997; Standing, 1999; Bezuidenhout & Kenny, 1999). This led to job losses due to retrenchments and also created a precarious labour market conditions for workers such as decline in secure permanent employment with benefits (see for instance Webster and Von Holdt, 2005). It also led to a widening of the gap between employers and workers, imposing further constraints on their ability to co-operate on issues of productivity issues.

While the above points to a rather strong case for ubuntu, there are however some serious concerns and potential constraints to its socio-economic developmental role and significance. One such major concern is that those in positions of power, as evidenced by past experiences, could manipulate and abuse the ubuntu values for advancement of narrow sectional ends e.g. to legitimise domination, repress dissent, and silence criticism (see Mdluli, 1987; Sitas, 1997). Another concern was highlighted by Kamwangamalu (1999) about attempts by business leaders to commercialise ubuntu values. While he believes that the ubuntu culture could contribute to socio-economic development, he however finds the approach used by managements to integrate its values into business practices and

employment relations problematic. This approach, which is based on the use of published literature, training manuals on ubuntu, seminars, workshops, and conferences, Kamwangamalu argues, “risks remaining a pie in the sky....” and would not help to achieve desired outcomes (Kamwangamalu 1999:35). This is so as ubuntu is first and foremost a social and not a business concept or “... a theory of business co-operation” as is claimed by amongst others Teffo(1999). For Kamwangamalu, a major challenge lies in what he sees as the historical erosion of the ubuntu culture under the apartheid system which has also erected walls between communities. Only once these social walls have been destroyed and ubuntu culture has been revived, he argues, can the business sector begin to make efforts to integrate its values into the business sphere. Hence “doing the opposite ... is tantamount to building a house without first laying a foundation.”(Kamwangamalu, 1999: 31-32)

The need for such revival was also raised by Memela (2003) in his criticism of the “monied former township blacks” who have left the apartheid created black townships. He attributes this to their selfish individualism, lack of appreciation of the political and philosophical ethic of communalism promoted by the ubuntu culture, and obsession with material success as well as lack of interest in establishing structures that promote and preserve the African spirit, heritage and culture. He notes with disturbance the absence of communal living or co-operative black communities in which Africans come together not only to “lift as they rise” but also to implement the philosophical meaning of ubuntu to build strong socio-cultural and economic blocks for self-help and empowerment. He sees this as a signal of the tragic waning away of the spirit of ubuntu which, in the past, united black people at the spiritual level and at the time when they should be consolidating their gains.

Writing in the 1960s, van den Berghe (1961) too found some traces of the waning away of indigenous African culture. Through a case study of Caneville, a small town in KZN, he discovered sizeable number of Africans who detached themselves from their traditional culture. These Africans, he argued, owing to the dominance of Western culture over Africa culture, and despite their lack of education, spoke a little of English and adopted Christianity as their religion as well as displaying a sense of *cultural shame*⁵ towards their own culture. This, he argues, was due to their perception of Westernisation as a process of cultural improvement (van den Berghe, 1961: 44-49).

Nzimande (1988) too made similar observations in his advocacy for the “progressive social services” and health services appropriate for the post-apartheid, democratic SA. Such services, he argued, would only be achieved through critical

⁵ My emphasis.

dialogue whereby progressive social service workers engage with African indigenous discourses on health, and also when people freely and unashamedly express their beliefs and practices. He however noted a potential constraint in what he observed as "...the contradictory attitude of the youth and sections of the African middle classes towards traditional practices" whereby "the urban youth for instance is finding many of the African cultural formations problematic and display a certain measure of ambiguity towards them..." while the educated middle classes publicly denounce much of traditional healing in spite of the fact that when faced with personal crises, they would secretly go for help to both *izangoma* or *izinyanga*, and faith healers (Nzimande, 1988: 9).

The above review, looked at holistically, suggests that in spite of some potential constraints and concerns raised, botho/ubuntu cultural values can play a crucial role in SA's socio-economic development. The central question though in this paper is: does this view on botho/ubuntu have theoretical backing? That is, at a much more abstract theoretical level, is there evidence in support of the notion that societal cultural values have a positive role to play in social change and economy? This is addressed in the next section through a review of theoretical perspectives on culture and religion. It is necessary to consider religion since both culture and religion, notwithstanding distinctions between them, do however share in common values and principles as their defining features. Hence, it is common to hear people speaking of religious values, cultural values, religious principles, cultural principles, religious practices, cultural practices, religious beliefs, and cultural beliefs. Often, these two concepts are confused and used interchangeably, without recognising the distinctions between them in spite of some common features. As will be noted below, the key distinction between religion and culture lies in the fact that unlike the latter, religion has central to it the notion of the existence of some supernatural force.

Below, I provide a brief review of religion as a concept and phenomenon in order to only clarify what it entails, but also to establish its role and influence within the society. As I have already indicated, this will be contrasted with culture as a concept in terms of its defining features and socio-economic role.

Theoretical perspectives on culture and religion and their role in socio-economic change and development

A. On Religion

Amongst the themes that feature strongly in the sociological literature on religion are that of seeking to clarify and understand what this concept means i.e.

what religion is and what it is not?, and its role and influence in society i.e. what determines its role and influence. At the definitional level, there is clearly disagreement. For instance, adopting a social constructionist approach, Beckford (2003) finds it difficult and conceptually problematic to come up with a single universal definition of religion.

This he argues is largely due to religion being a social construct founded in and informed by specific socio-political and historical context giving it diverse and dynamic unfixed meanings. Hence in his view, it is unhelpful for religion to be viewed as homogenous, simple, unitary practice and/or phenomenon. This analysis is in conflict with that by Bruce (2003) who provides a definition of religion as "beliefs, actions and institutions that assume the existence of supernatural entities with powers of judgment and action" (10)

Contrary to the differences over the definition of religion, at the level of examining its role and influence in society, there is some general consensus. Where differences exist, it is in how its role and influence is explained. It is agreed and understood that religion has a dual role. It could either help to foster or enhance social cohesion by binding people together under the name of God or common cosmology or morality, or could promote change and disruption to the existing socio-political order was the case in liberation theology (see Bruce, 2003). It should be noted though that the role of religion in fostering cohesion needs not necessarily be for the purpose of maintaining status quo only but could also be a cohesion and/or social solidarity necessary for collective action aimed at bringing about change to the existing order. That this is so can be seen from the argument led by Beckford (2003) that as a social construct, the role of religion would not be homogenous but rather complex and varied depending on the ends it is harnessed to achieve.

Religion's role in social change could, according to Bruce (2003), be enhanced by the belief held amongst religious radicals that in doing God's will on earth, one would be rewarded with far greater riches than mundane world can offer (i.e. that reward will be with eternal bliss). Those holding such religious belief, he argues, would act bravely and in extraordinary ways to change the existing order. That religion does indeed have a role in socio-political change can also be seen in Michael Hill (1973)'s argument, based on the study of the millennial movements in Europe, that these movements present evidence pointing to strong links between religious goals and broader social and political aspirations (207). Hill's argument is based on the works of Norman Cohn's 1957 study of millenarian movements in Europe during the Middle Ages; and of Peter Worsely on 'cargo cults' in Melanesia. Both Cohn and Worsely, although they differ in their understanding of the role and influence of religion on social change, they do however acknowledge this role. As Hill

points out, for Cohn, and contrary to Worsely's Marxist account that religious millenarian movements are pre-political and play the role of preparing the way for more realistic and radical social movements, they had in fact occurred where organised insurrections were already underway. Hence for Cohn, the millenarian movements only had 'limited and realistic aims' and corresponded to salvationist fantasies (in Hill, 1973: 210). Cohn's account suggests that millennial movements' role has been less of key determinant of change than complementary to the change process already underway.

Cohn's view is challenged by the Marxist analysts, according to whom, religious millenarian movements constituted a form of political protest, giving religious sanction to political and economic aspirations amongst the marginalised groups (see Hill, 1973: 211). One of these Marxists is Worsely for whom these movements, whose aspirations were associated with those of the lower classes, were potentially revolutionary as they rejected the dominant ideology and the ruling class (212). Hence, in his view, they helped to unite "the previously small, isolated social groups," mobilising them for change (212). This is best captured in the following observation by Hill that "for Worsely, the function of prophetic leadership in the Melanesian cargo cults, rather than diverting the existing 'realistic' goals of radical political movements, is to appeal above the narrower divisions of clan and tribe to a source of legitimacy which is supernatural and therefore transcends the existing social foundations" (Hill, 1973: 213).

B. On Culture

Like religion, culture has been extensively researched whereby not only its definition ignited debate, leading to some general consensus on what its key defining features are, but also its role was subjected to extensive analysis and assessment. Perhaps one of the contributors to debates on culture who provides a much more helpful definition of culture that highlights its key defining features is Bocock (1992). According to Bocock, and based on his historical review of definitions of culture as a concept, it can best be defined as referring to a "distinctive way of life, shared values and meanings common to different groups and historical periods." This definition, which has been widely accepted, suggests that cultures vary from one society or social group to another as they share common meanings that are however different from those shared by members of another group. It also suggests that cultures and the meanings associated with their practices and values differ in various historical contexts. What needs to be carefully considered though is that while cultural meanings may differ historically, it would however be erroneous to

suggest that there is a complete break up in cultural meanings as there is also continuity. This explains the continued interest shown in traditional and indigenous practices. Bocock also argues that culture should be understood as a social practice through which meanings are produced and shared, citing language as an example of cultural social practice. This point brings to light the question of the culture and its role and influence in human society, which as should be appreciated in the review below, has led to intense debate. My entry into the review of this debate is through the monumental and historic works of Karl Marx which have led to subsequent intense debate and numerous reviews on culture-economy-social change links.

Marx's ideas on the subject of the relationship between culture and economy lie mainly in his materialist conception of social change and history, also known as the base-superstructure thesis, whose main focus is on how social production is organised (Fine, 1989). This conception of social change is best explained by Marx's life-long friend, Frederick Engels as quoted below:

"The materialist conception of history starts from the proposition that the production (of the means to support human life) and, next to production, the exchange of things produced, is the basis of all social structure; that in every society that has appeared in history, the manner in which wealth is distributed and society divided into classes or orders is dependent upon what is produced, how it is produced, and how the products are exchanged. From this point of view the final causes of all social changes and political revolutions are to be sought, not in men's brains, not in man's better insight into internal truth and justice, but in changes in the modes of production and exchange. They are to be sought, not in the *philosophy* but in the *economics* of each particular epoch. The growing perception that existing social institutions are unreasonable and unjust, that reason has become unreason, and right wrong, is only proof that in the modes of production and exchange changes have silently taken place with which the social order, adapted to earlier economic conditions, is no longer in keeping. From this it also follows that the means of getting rid of the incongruities that have been brought to light must also be present, in a more or less developed condition, within the changed modes of production themselves. These means are not to be *invented*, spun out of the head, but *discovered* with the aid of the head in the existing material facts of production." (Engels, 1975: 317)

This thesis was developed as a reaction and a critique of non-materialist accounts which underplayed the significance and role of economic forces in social change. Leading such non-materialist accounts was Hegel with his dialectic and

idealistic thesis which asserts that society is best understood through human consciousness and that the source of change in the society lies in ideas (see Fine, 1989). According to Fine, Marx not only challenged the Hegelian perspective, but also Feuerbach's materialist theory which asserted that rather than human consciousness having a determinant influence on life, it is in fact human needs/being that shape human consciousness. Note his argument in the *Preface to a Contribution to a Critique of Political Economy*:

"In the social production of their life, people enter into particular, necessary relations independently of their will, relations of production which correspond to a particular stage of development of their material productive forces.

These productive relations as a whole form economic structure, the real base upon which a legal and political superstructure rises and to which particular forms of social consciousness correspond. The mode of production of material life conditions the social, political and mental life process in general. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their social being but ... their social being that determines their consciousness." (see Jakubowski, 1990: 30 and Williams, 2002: 56)

This materialist approach does not however imply that Marx's theory is necessarily narrowly deterministic. Rather, Swingewood (1998) argues that Marx never underrated the importance of the idea elements within the superstructure. Instead, he argues, Marx did acknowledge that the relationship between the economic base and cultural superstructure is dialectical and reciprocal in nature, rather than one having dominance over the other. Similarly, Jakubowski (1990: 58-59) argues that although for Marx both thought and/or human consciousness and being are distinct from each other, they are however dialectically united with human consciousness serving as an active influential factor of historical change. This dialectical relationship has been ignored by those he calls vulgar Marxists. Jakubowski (1990) thus cautions that while economic structure predominates in all instances, for a comprehensive understanding of social being and consciousness to be developed, it is imperative that the whole range of other factors (including those within the superstructure) are taken into account.

A similar review of Marx's theory is provided by Swingewood (1998) who argues that although Marx placed great emphasis on the primacy of the base over the superstructure, within his and Engels' theoretical analysis of culture lies a subtle, flexible, bold dialectical model. This, Swingewood argues, could be seen in Marx's analysis of practical situations within specific historical contexts whereby he ac-

knowledged the active role that ideas and culture played within the economic and political structure. This was particularly so with the case of the revolutionary crisis in France during 1848 whereby Marx noted a complex balance of forces at play within the economic and political structures as well as the differentiation and plurality of social classes (see Marx, 1851 in McLellan, 1977: 300; also see Swingewood, 1998: 2). Engels too used a dialectic, non-materialist account acknowledging the importance of humans as agents of change in his analysis of the crisis of the capitalist order (Engels, 1975: 335-336). This was highlighted by Williams (2002) showing the dialectic nature of Marx's theory in his criticism of tendencies by some to impose abstract separation of "areas of thought and activity" (i.e. separation of consciousness from material production). Arguing that Marx "was at once specific and flexible in his use of own terms", Williams cites Marx's 1857 observation of arts (the latter constituting part of the superstructure):

"As regards arts, it is well known that some of its peaks by no means correspond to the general development of society; nor do they therefore to the material substructure, the skeleton as it were of its organisation" (see Williams, 2002: 58).

Notwithstanding this flexible, dialectical thesis which recognises the equally significant and influential role of the superstructural elements within Marxist theory, Marx and Engels failed to adequately address and theoretically engage with problems associated with those superstructural elements e.g. culture and its autonomy from the economic base. They also failed to explain the persistence of some cultural forms in widely differing societies and historical times where the mode(s) of production on which they were dependent had disappeared. Examples here are the absence of direct links between the French Enlightenment's radical and critical philosophy and its largely agrarian, pre-modern economic system and also between Ibsen's modern theatre and its economic undevelopment (Swingewood, 1998: 8). Their failure in this regard blinded many in the later generations of Marxists who continued to present Marxism as a functionalist, reductionist theory.

Thus, for those Marxists, culture formulates part of the superstructure which is subordinate to the economic base. Culture and its forms are presented reflections and expression of socio-economic interests of the dominant classes, as well as being instrumental to the production and reproduction of the conditions under which those interests are advanced and sustained. Culture is seen as not isolated from the material life processes of society but imbricated in their structures. It is seen as not only a realm of values and meanings but also of ideology, whereby the latter serves to legitimise the capitalist institutions and structures to achieve social stability, cohesion and integration (see Swingewood, 1998: 6-7). Further evidence of this can

be seen in Harvey (1989)'s argument that capital-driven post-modern trends spill over into the wider cultural life determining its broad contours. He argues:

“We live in a world where the media, fads, fashions, and images are increasingly important. The result is a culture characterized by superficiality in which products relentlessly replace each other and where the pursuit of empty style has replaced the search for authenticity, history, and narrative.” (see Smith, 2001: 224).

Similarly, dependency neo-Marxist theorists today provide deterministic functionalist account, using the concept of “cultural imperialism”, of the role that culture has played in the expansion of global capitalist system. Central to this account is the view held by theorists such as Herbert Schiller, Flora and Flora, and Salinas and Paldan that communication and media technologies are used as capitalist agencies to spread the modern capitalist system and its culture. Particular reference here was made to a culture of consumerism as a product exported to developing and underdeveloped Third world societies through cultural imperialism. (Tomlinson, 1991: 103-104)

In terms of this perspective, culture serves as an ideological tool of capitalism. This is premised on the understanding of cultural imperialism as being “the sum of the processes by which a society is brought into the modern world system and how its dominating stratum is attracted, pressured, forced, and sometimes bribed into shaping social institutions to correspond to, or even promote, the values and structures of the dominating centre of the system.” (Tomlinson, 1991:103)

The consequential impact of cultural imperialism on the underdeveloped Third world societies, as understood by the neo-Marxists and dependency theorists, is seen as two-fold. First is the argument that it gives rise to ‘dependent development’ that creates class divisions in developing societies, resulting in the subordination of their (i.e. Third world countries') cultures. Part of this dependent development is the resultant cultural practices of consumerism in the less developed societies resulting from aggressive marketing of capitalist products -‘world brands’- through advertising by trans-national corporations. Such consumerism is considered by some theorists such as Hamelink (a neo-Marxist) and the Frankfurt School's critical theorists as constituting part of the exploitative capitalist system. The Frankfurt School provides a critique of consumerism through what appears to be more of incorporation theory according to which “the working classes are seduced by the superficial attractions of the culture of capitalism into acceptance of the terms of its economic structure: their subordinated and exploited class position”. Hence that the

working class masses develop "false consciousnesses under the manipulative power of the media." (See Tomlinson, 1991: 126)

Secondly and closely tied to the idea of dependent development leading to subordination of Third world indigenous cultures is the argument that capitalist culture changes the cultural practices of those that come into contact with it. Note, for instance, Salinas and Paldan's claim, as observed by Tomlinson (1991), that the indigenous cultures of the dominated class are shaken by both the change of their objective situation in the sphere of material production and the imported cultural-ideological elements from the developed world. This view echoes the criticism by Hamelink (1983) of multinational capitalism and cultural imperialism captured in his notion of "cultural synchronization" or cultural homogenisation. Hamelink developed this argument, based on his personal observations and experiences as a tourist in countries such as Mexico, Singapore and Saudi Arabia that along with the spread of global capitalism are processes of cultural synchronization or homogenisation.

The above-outlined orthodox and neo-Marxist theorists' accounts of culture and its role in human society came to face strong criticism that revealed their serious conceptual limitations. Criticism came from Tomlinson amongst others who, while broadly in agreement with Hamelink's notion of cultural synchronization, finds Hamelink and other neo-Marxists' pre-occupation with the class and class struggle implications of cultural imperialism and globalisation of capitalism problematic as they fail to examine the capitalist culture itself. Their failure resulted in their inability to recognise and acknowledge the ambiguous and contradictory nature of this culture. Tomlinson attributes this to the method of personal observations Hamelink used to arrive at his conclusions. Central to this method is the perceived threat of cultural synchronisation to diverse indigenous cultures. Tomlinson's criticism of such personal observation methods is that they tend to be paternalistic leading to claims which suggest those in the West "know better" the needs of other cultures than members of those cultures themselves (hence that they need be protected from predatory multinationals). Hence, tending to impute "irrational" false consciousness onto the Third World consumers of capitalist products.

Tomlinson dismisses this attendant argument on the grounds that it fails to acknowledge that there may be other factors irreducible to irrational false consciousness that have influence on consumers' preferences and choices. In his criticism, Tomlinson employs the notion of notion of "sovereign consumer," which emphasises the need to recognise that consumers as agents are capable of making conscious, informed, independent decisions and choices about what they purchase. Not only were problems found with the method of personal observations, but also with the assertions that capitalist culture alters the cultures of Third world societies. This

argument has, according to Tomlinson, been challenged in view of the evidence which points out that contrary to the claims about cultural homogenisation, transnational corporations had to adapt their strategies and products to the cultural frameworks of Third world societies in which they operated, in order to gain competitive advantages.

Swingewood thus finds Gramsci's later Marxist thesis of *hegemony*, according to which change in the society lies in an interaction between economic, political and ideological structures, to be rather non-restrictive and constituting a step beyond the crude base-superstructure model. This view suggests that historical processes are not products of impersonal and dominant economic forces but of creative agents and workings of what Gramsci calls 'human will' organised into collective forms such as trade unions and political parties. Such collective institutions are for him a driving force of the economy and effectively shape the objective reality. The role of culture and its institutions is here understood as being to legitimise and enhance consent by agents and collective institutions to the dominant ideologies and structures.

For Gramsci, such legitimation and consent help to ensure that hegemony works, and also enable both the active civil society to exist side by side with the political society or the state. This view highlights Gramsci's recognition of pluralism within society and his argument that the dominant forces cannot rule by exclusion of the subordinates. He argues that for stability to be achieved, it is necessary to have a balance between consent and coercion (in Swingewood, 1998; 14-15). As Barker (2003) points out, for Gramsci, hegemony is "a continuous process of formation and superseding of unstable equilibria ... between the interests of the fundamental group and those of the subordinate groups ... equilibria in which the interests of the dominant prevail, but only up to a certain point". Deriving from this Gramsci's concept of hegemony, Barker argues that hegemony "opens up the possibility of a challenge to it ... the making of a counter-hegemonic bloc of subordinate groups and classes" (in Barker, 2003: 82).

Arguing along the same lines as Gramsci, which avoid narrow reductionist determinism, is Stuart Hall. This can be seen from his critical examination of classical Marxist conception of ideology, whereby he identifies weaknesses, limitations and strengths in that conception (Hall, 1996: 25). Based on his review, Hall adds to the critique that has been levelled at classical Marxists' tendency to reduce and ascribe ideas, practices, meanings and concepts (or simply ideology) to the dominant class and material conditions. He argues that rather than presenting the economic or concrete material conditions of existence as having a determinant influence on ideology, the former should be understood as only establishing parameters with

constraining and limiting effects on the latter. Hall's argument reinforces Raymond Williams (1981)'s earlier view that the relationships between the economic and the cultural should be understood in terms of "setting limits", whereby the former only "sets limits on what can be done or expressed in culture" without determining "the meaning of cultural practices in a direct one-to-one relationship" (in Barker, 2003: 72).

Gramsci's emphasis on the importance of creative agents, human will and culture in socio-economic change and development is best evidenced by several of his writings. Note, for instance, in his piece entitled *Socialism and Culture*, where he defines culture as "... the organization, the disciplining of one's inner self; the mastery of one's personality; the attainment of a higher awareness, through which we can come to understand our values and place within history, our proper function in life, our rights and duties"(see Bellamy, 1994: 9-10). He argues that this role of culture is not fulfilled through spontaneity beyond control of human will, but through social awareness marked by "intelligent reflection" and "a long process of intense critical activity, of new cultural insight..." (See Bellamy, 1994: 10-11)

However, while the above highlights Gramsci's recognition of the autonomy of culture, it does not fully capture his main concern, which was to show the equal significance of culture to the working class consciousness and socialist struggle against capitalism. This is noticeable from Gramsci's support for the creation of cultural association informed by his understanding that "...political and economic action presupposes moral, religious and philosophical problems which the economic and political bodies cannot discuss...nor disseminate the proper solutions..." giving rise to what he termed spiritual crisis (in Forgacs and Nowell-Smith, 1985: 22).

Arguing from a different ideological perspective and with a different motive to that of the Marxist Gramsci, Weber too acknowledged the autonomous and functional role of culture and idea elements in the society, as well as the idea that agents are non-passive. For Weber human action is informed and influenced by cultural values and beliefs. Social change and development, he argued, are the result of the 'internal rationality' of the human personality, its continuous, systematic self-control and discipline (see Weber, 1930).

While Weber's conception seems to have moved beyond the Marxist reductionist model, some conceptual problems were identified in his theory. Swingewood argues that Weber, in emphasising the autonomy of culture as a 'higher sphere' unaffected by other societal forces, failed to acknowledge that culture is imbricated in power relations (see Swingewood, 1998: 28-29)

Weber's emphasis on the autonomy and plurality of culture and the active role of agents was reinforced by other classical theorists such as Durkheim. Durkheim's model is premised on the understanding that society is comprised of

both the material basis and institutional structure, and that within the latter there are commonly shared beliefs and practices, collective organisations and forms of actions informed by moral concepts, legal rules and religious motions embodied in ideologies. Thus for Durkheim, it is within institutional structures that a common culture exists whose values and beliefs are shared and internalised by individuals organised into collective structures. Its role, as an autonomous element within the society, is to enhance communication between individuals and to influence their collective actions as well as to enhance social solidarity/integration or cohesion. Hence his argument is that social solidarity is not externally imposed but is achieved through a socially mediated inter-subjective action (see Swingewood, 1998: 54-56. Also see Smith, 2001: 11).

Swingewood argues however that Durkheim's theory fails to transcend the Marxist reductionism which subordinates culture to material forces. Referring to Durkheim's theory as a "modified base-superstructure model", he argues that this theory provides a new form of reductionism whereby culture is understood in functional, instrumentalist terms of helping to enhance social solidarity and integration for collective interests. For him, Durkheim's theory tends to "elide the cultural and the social." (Swingewood, 1998: 56)

Tilly (1981, quoted in Smith 2001) finds Durkheim's theory as tending to privilege the role of culture in bringing social stability and patterns of social interaction over other equally significant forces i.e. social agents posited as being passive, non-creative and non-active. Note for instance, Parsons's critique through his voluntaristic theory of action. In terms of this theory, and contrary to Durkheim's, human action is not made possible by internalised cultural values nor is it constrained by external social factors, but is enhanced by the social agents' conscious selection of those values and norms they consider to be legitimate (Swingewood, 1998: 57-58 and Smith, 2001: 12).

However, notwithstanding the emphasis on culture's autonomy and creativity of agents, Parsons' theory suffers some serious limitations as it tends to suggest that culture is tied to a dominant ideology of the triumphant capitalist system. This can be noticed from Swingewood's argument that Parsons conceded to the idea of common culture that serves as a normatively integrating structure (Swingewood, 1998: 58). Another limitation in Parsons' theory, also found in Durkheim's, is that he tended to be ambivalent on the question of the production and reproduction of cultural values. This failure has, according to Swingewood, resulted in teleological accounts which suggest that in the production of cultural values, agents only realise the existing values rather than actually creating the new ones.

To address the limits of teleology in Parsons and Durkheim's theories, Jurgen Habermas developed a theory of communicative action according to which culture must be theorised in terms of action and communication (Swingewood, 1998: 63). Understanding humanity as "both a tool making and speaking agent", Habermas argues that social development and the production of culture are achieved through language or "linguistically mediated social interaction" which occurs in the life world. By the life world, he refers to a "differentiated structure closely bound up with cultural values and communicative practices" characterised by solidarity, face-to-face contact, family, community, and substantive value commitments (see Swingewood, 1998: 63-64 and Smith, 2001: 50). Hence that it is within the life-world that verbal communication and social interaction occurs.

Clearly Habermas' theory, like those of Weber, Durkheim and Parsons, is functionalist in orientation. Note, for instance, his view that action enhanced through verbal communication is instrumental to the maintenance of the social system as a whole since it is aimed to achieve narrowly defined goals within the existing institutions. Hence that cultural reproduction works through the life-world to secure continuity of tradition and coherence of knowledge for daily practice (Swingewood, 1998: 64). However, despite this obvious functionalism in Habermas' theory, Swingewood (1998) finds it to be non-restrictive as the idea of the co-existence of various communicative practices within the life-world suggests the possibility for open, free discourse among active agents. This argument has dual implications. One is that there exist differences within the life-world which could enhance social interaction and communication necessary to achieve consensus and help reconcile those differences. Another implication is that of possibility of events and developments within the life-world that could destabilise the existing social system and pave way to changes.

Concluding Remarks

It is clear from the above reviews that scholarly debate on religion and culture, whereby efforts were made and continue to be made to provide a better understanding of these concepts and phenomena as well as their role in society, has been marked by intensity that led to both consensus and significant differences. What can be noticed from the debates is that both religion and culture's influences on society are dualistic in nature i.e. they could either help to foster social cohesion and solidarity to achieve different ends or could be divisive. In South Africa's history, for instance, Christianity was used by the apartheid white minority regime to legitimise

and justify separate development policies which promoted racial and ethnic segregation and discrimination. The oppressed black masses and sympathisers from amongst the white community, in the form of the Mass Democratic Movement and the United Democratic Front led by amongst others the eminent Arch-Bishop emeritus Desmond Tutu and the anti-apartheid struggle activist, Reverent Alan Boesak, gave a different and liberatory interpretation of the Bible, challenging the apartheid regime's by presenting of Christian principles as contradictory to apartheid discriminatory practices of white supremacy, as it instead advocates equality before God and social justice.

Similarly it was noted that culture's influence on the society's socio-economic life could either serve to enhance consensus and social cohesion through shared values or generate conflicts and instability, leading to either regressive or progress change. This is particularly in the light of the criticism of the crude Marxist base-superstructure model and the argument that the original theory of Marx and Engels on culture was never narrowly deterministic and functionalist, but instead constituted a subtle, flexible, bold dialectical model. Other theoretical but also empirically-based contributions such as Weber's and Parsons' also suggest that culture, like the economic material base, constitutes an autonomous force. That culture and its values play dualistic role is informed by the critique advanced by amongst others Lockwood, Swingewood, Parsons and Habermas, of the teleological accounts that tend to overemphasise the socially integrative role of culture whereby agents either submit to the existing values or make selection from amongst those dominant values. Such teleological accounts tend to ignore the active role of the agents in the production of culture with the likelihood of effecting changes to the existing dominant value system as new values are being created. This implies the existence of an active, dynamic relationship between culture and the human agency with determinant influence on the socio-economic life of society that could either lead to reinforcement of the existing dominant system/s through promotion of social consensus or to conflicts, disruption and significant changes. Thus culture and its values could act upon human agents by influencing their actions and choices or be acted upon by human agents using cultural values to either advance their interests or legitimise the existing order. They could also generate new values consistent with pursuance of new goals.

Also noted from the earlier review in the preceding sections is that in the current modern and post-modern world characterised by complexities brought about by globalisation, and in view of the idea of cultural defences owing to active as opposed to passive human agency, the notion of a single dominant and stable global culture becomes difficult to sustain. Thus diversity of cultures, practices and

approaches is a reality that cannot be ignored. This is in line with the idea of cultural defences that are said to be blocking tendencies towards cultural homogenisation as capitalism expands at the global level. In short, culture, in its relationship to and like other aspects of human society such as religion, the economic system, the legal system and ideology, constitutes an autonomous force that has a role within the socio-economic life of society.

These findings, I would argue, reinforce the claims that the ubuntu values have a role to play in socio-economic development and advancement of the post-apartheid South Africa. This is even more so in the light of diversity presented by the end of apartheid, the system that thrived on repression of black peoples' cultures, and also by globalisation as well as theoretical evidence that points to autonomous nature of culture from the material base. A point of concern though lies in what has been recorded as cultural shame displayed by some black Africans. Theoretical evidence suggests that culture's influence is enhanced where human agents actively identify with and act on the culture's values. The resilience of the ubuntu culture, as proven by historical experiences (see Ngubane, 1963 and 1979, and Nzimande, 1988) however counters the cultural shame element. This is likely to be enhanced by the post-apartheid, post-colonial initiatives such as the African Renaissance and/or Renewal project led by the African governments with SA's government being amongst those in the lead. The role of statutory bodies such as the Pan South African Language Board (PanSALB) in promotion and support of cultural and linguistic diversity should also add value in helping to inject pride amongst black Africans in their own indigenous cultural values, especially those centred on ubuntu philosophy.

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Abstract

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CULTURE VERSUS RELIGION: A THEORETICAL ANALYSIS OF THE ROLE OF INDIGENOUS AFRICAN CULTURE OF UBUNTU IN SOCIAL CHANGE AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN THE POST-APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICAN SOCIETY

The question of the relationship between social values and beliefs (be them religious or cultural) and the economy has always been a subject of intense scholarly inquiry and debate. To this day, it continues to receive greater attention, especially in the contemporary era where intensifying globalisation processes have brought to light questions such as religious and cultural diversity and the challenges as well as opportunities that they present. As Ray and Sayer (1999) pointed out, there has since the dawn of the twenty first century, been a 'cultural turn' characterised by strong interest in questions of links between culture and economy. This article provides a critical review of perspectives on the links between culture, religion, economy and development. While greater attention is drawn to cultural values, some contrast between religion and culture is however provided to avoid tendency to confuse both concepts. Including religion is also necessary as its values, like cultural values, have social significance. Thus understanding their role has bearing on understanding that of cultural values. The central purpose of the review is to provide a basis for examining claims about the role of the indigenous African culture of ubuntu in South Africa's post-apartheid development.

Key words: Indigenous culture, Religion, Ubuntu, Economy, Development.

Резиме

Моконг Сајмон Мападименг

**КУЛТУРА ВЕРСУС РЕЛИГИЈА: ТЕОРЕТСКА АНАЛИЗА УЛОГЕ УБУНТУ
АФРИЧКЕ ДОМОРОДАЧКЕ КУЛТУРЕ У ПРОЦЕСУ ДРУШТВЕНЕ ПРОМЕНЕ И
ЕКОНОМСКОГ РАЗВОЈА У ЈУЖНОАФРИЧКОМ ДРУШТВУ У ПЕРИОДУ
НАКОН АПАРТХЕЈДА**

Питање односа друштвених вредности и веровања (било верске или културолошке природе) и економије је одувек било предмет интензивног научног истраживања и расправе. Данас, ово питање поприма веће интересовање, поготову у ери када су интензивни процеси глобализације изнедрили питања везана за верску и културолошку разноликост, као и питања везана за изазове и могућности које ова разноликост поставља. Као што су Реј и Сајер (1999) показали, са почетком двадесет првог века, јавља се одређени „културолошки помак“ којег карактеришу интересовања везана за питања односа културе и економије. Овај чланак доноси критички преглед могућности које се односе на везе између културе, религије, економије и развоја. И док је већа пажња посвећена културолошким вредностима, приказане су одређене супротности између религије и културе како би се избегла тенденција да ова два термина замене места. Слично друштвеним вредностима, неопходно је обухватити религију и њене вредности, будући да су и оне од важности за друштво. Главни циљ овог приказа је да обезбеди један основ за истраживање важности значаја улоге *убунту* афричке домородачке културе у развоју Јужноафричке републике у периоду након апартхејда.

Кључне речи: домородачка култура, религија, *убунту*, економија, развој.