



A Philosophical Critique of Possible Reasons That Lead to Barriers Against Social Cohesion

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Abstract

Social cohesion as a concept serves to bring all people together for social justice. Social justice in itself has some utility as it creates space for every voice to be heard in human deliberations. In the observation of human communities, many disasters whereby one group of people rises up against the rest have been experienced and left many victims. As such, social cohesion in communities has been disturbed over time by groups like; Taliban, Al Shabab, Boko haram, as well as Operation dudula. Although some research has been done on the harm that the rise of such groups does to the communities and how they operate, there seems to be an aspect that remains unraveled. It is our view that this matter has never been analyzed to the level of exploring possible reasons for those groups to have a desire to rebel against humanity. Using analytic theoretical framework, this paper seeks to explore the philosophy or rationale beyond the formation of these anti-humanist groups that have existed in Africa and middle East. Since this kind of discussions usually arise in political spheres, scholars have always found it difficult to comment about them. Perhaps, the difficulty arises due to the fact that the discussion becomes more emotional than philosophically theorizing which scholars are used to. However, this paper aims at finding the core of how people get to be so determined to inflict harm upon other members of the human community. The surprising factor is that such violent groups exist even in South Africa where Ubuntu is enshrined in the societal norms. This is in reference to Operation dudula, which aims at creating discomfort for other Africans living in South Africa.

Keywords: *Social Cohesion; Social Justice; Humanity; Deliberations; Ubuntu*

Introduction

Social cohesion can be defined as the means to build a shared sense of belonging through shared values and generally enabling people to have a sense that they are engage in common enterprise (Fronsesca, Lukosch, and Brazier, 2019). Zischka (2019) also defines social cohesion as the willingness

of the society members to cooperate with one another with the aim to survive and prosper over challenges that affect them. However, from these definitions it becomes clear that social cohesion cannot be achieved with respectful engagements and participation of all members of the society. It is from that background that in this paper we argue that human communities suffer greatly when governments get pressure from the international system and take decisions hastily without having engaged the community members. Both Weiss (2019) and Kurtzer (2019) argue that some of the challenges that confronts humanity include; (a) poverty, (b) government's immorality, (c) corruption, (d) cultural neocolonialism, and (e) instability in economy. These challenges create a situation whereby people get confused or frustrated to the extent that they have no other means to employ as response except violence. Albeit tersely, when people are faced with these social problems they seem to lose the whole concept of Ubuntu or humanity in them. By the way, lack of humanity forms a major part of this discussion because it is the core of what disturbs social cohesion and create destructive groups like; Boko haram, Al shabab, and operation dudula in Africa as well as in the middle East.

South Africa is the founding home of *Ubuntu* as the word itself is from the Nguni language (Ngomane, 2019). According to Ngomane (2019) as well as Clinton and Negus (2021) Ubuntu refers to humanity which encompasses; generosity, kindness, respect of all people, and good moral conduct. However, in the same South Africa there exists an anti-humanist group called Operation dudula which in actual fact causes more discomfort to other fellow African people living in South Africa (Chiwanya, Angu, and Muluku, 2022). The reality of the matter is that scholars usually get left out in such discussions due to the emotionality and politicization of this whole discussion. Orton (2018) and Heffernan (2019) argue that theorizing and putting things into academic perspective puts a slow motion to matters that need action. To some degree, political activism happens to fight for exclusion of academic perspectives and give rise to such activism that Hailu (2010) and Steven (2020) call terrorism or anti-humanism. The assumption in this paper is that in the political arena, under aristocratic leadership people get consulted to be merely informed, but no thorough deliberations really take place. According to Khisa (2019) politicians take matters into discussion tables that favor some people, with some elitist inclusion and exclusion of others. In that sense, it is arguable that deliberations do not really take place as they exclude poor people due to different reasons like; education, location, language, status and so forth. At the end, poor people get to face challenges that are caused by the decisions of the elite. At that point, elitism and exclusion of some people seem to be responsible for the anger of the poor people who end up harboring anti-humanist ideas.

Theoretical Framework

This study is committed to the analytical school of thought. Analytical philosophy emphasizes clarity and argument, that is often achieved through logical and linguistic analysis (McGinn, 2002). Gottlob Frege (1906) is considered as the father of analytical philosophy, a tradition that emphasizes on clarity of argument through the logical use of language in presenting thoughts. Within this framework Bertrand Russell found a space to argue for logicism and logical atomism (Soames, 2003). According to Soames (2003) Logicism and logical atomism refers to the practice of breaking the argument into basic propositions in order to understand its coherence as a whole. Similarly, Barry Hallen and John O Sodipo (1997) argue for the analytical breakdown of issues to the simpler and logical thoughts through the use of logic in a simple ordinary language. Soames (2003) seems to hold a view that philosophical problems arise from misunderstanding of language and all necessary truths are a priori, analytic and true in virtue if meaning of words depend upon how the world in fact is. Analytic theory helps in producing philosophy that is not ideologically motivated, but thought that is analytic and reflective (Hallen, 2005). Under Wittgenstein's (1937) inspiration, Rudolf Carnap (1961) sought to embed his analysis in logical positivism as a development to this tradition. Logical positivism holds that there are no specific philosophical truths and that the object of philosophy is logical clarification of thoughts (Soames, 2003).

Carnap (1937) and other scholars contributed to this tradition by rejecting the doctrines of their predecessors of constructing artificial language to resolve philosophical problems. They argued that the Vienna Circle was erroneous because the “quest for systemic theories of language worked as a misleading intrusion of scientific methods into philosophy” (Glock, 2008: 44).

The analytic framework in this research work helps in acquiring a deeper or adequate understanding of the research problem prior to forwarding our own views. Since it is the framework which guides us in our methodology, it also helps to critically apply analysis that cannot be accusable of any biasness. This theoretical framework enables a researcher to be reflective and at the same time be within guards of rationality while being critical of his or her thoughts. With the guide of logical positivism, we have been able to deal with dogmas and ideological speculations around the issue of social cohesion and violence while operating as a neutral being in the battle between parties against and parties for current barriers to social cohesion. As Soames (2003) argue that logical positivism holds that there are no absolute philosophical truths, but the object of philosophy is to clarify thoughts, this has helped us to simplify our thoughts. In this paper, we have used the ordinary language in producing our critical thoughts while at the same time analyzing the common thoughts that are currently existing in the world. Our use of the ordinary language is due to the fact that in this work we are dealing with real issues that involve real human beings in the world other than some metaphysical fantasies. Analytic framework is adequately relevant when dealing with the sensitive issues like this one of social cohesion and anti-humanistic violence, because many people talk about these issues at the emotional realm and not rationalize about them.

Research Methodology

100 articles were sampled on the issue of social cohesion at a global scale. Out of those 100 articles, 30 of them were later excluded in this study based on the fact that they were discussing issues of social security in specific countries that are not meant to be discussed within the scope of this study. Nevertheless, 70 articles were found relevant to this study because they discuss topics like democracy, majoritarian governments in Africa, westernization and colonization, neo-colonization, conflict management and resolution in Africa and middle East, politics as practice of power that is enjoyed by the elite, perpetration of social unrest by governments, corrupt government personnel in developing countries, and poverty as the cause of many social ills in developing countries. Therefore, those 70 articles were analyzed against the narratives of violence perpetrated by aggrieved groups like Al-Shabab, Boko Haram, and the South African ‘Operation dudula’. It may also be hereby stated that since data collection for conceptual research includes only the information available in the public domain, there was no need for seeking ethical clearance from the university of Limpopo’s research committee. However, all academic works used in this study are adequately acknowledged. In its entirety, this research study is conducted in a form of desktop research which is within qualitative research approach. The argument of the researchers then in this case is made through thorough reading and analyzes of the available works on this topic.

As an addition to analytic theoretical framework, this study also uses a triple interpretative approach whereby 3 levels of interpretations are adopted in order to understand issues. Interpretation of the subject matter (existence of violent groups and disturbance of social cohesion) is analyzed using 3 approaches, namely; (a) textual interpretation which analyzes the texts as they prima facie are, (b) contextual interpretation which analyzes the texts in relation to the context of what is really happening, and (c) substantive interpretation whereby texts and context is analyzed based on its necessity and relevance in terms of available knowledge as well as understanding. This triple interpretative method helps to understand the inner views of those violent group members and what they do in their spaces of existence in order to then create a relevant narrative in academic context.

The Main Objective of the Study

The objective of this study is to critically analyze the metamorphosis of violent groups in African states and the middle East in the neocolonial era. This helps in trying to understand why such groups exist and what can be learned about the theory of Ubuntu in Africa. In addition, understanding the thoughts that form such groups may even create deeper discussions of the dynamic conceptualization of Ubuntu in the African philosophy and politics.

Findings

Governments in developing countries face a pressure situation whereby they have to democratize and adopt international standards that are some kind of neo-colonization (Odijie, 2021). The issue within the neo-colonization standards imposed upon developing countries is that they tend to be forced to accept policies that agitate the citizens. According to Zulu (2022) in some states corrupt people become leaders due to the democratic votes and when they carry out their corrupt activities citizens become distraught. It is at that moment where the whole conception of 'Ubuntu' gets lost with all the goodness it teaches humanity. This actually strengthens Mncube's (2022) argument that anger brewed in poverty stricken people gets delivered upon those who seem to be beneficiaries of the system. In countries like Nigeria, Boko Haram members do not consider themselves as *terrorists* as the world makes people believe (Akingbade et al, 2022). According to Dele-Adeji (2021) the word Boko Haram itself means westernization forbidden, therefore Boko Haram members consider themselves as citizens who fight against neocolonialism and protecting their country.

Neo-colonization is the process whereby a powerful state or powerful states in the international system use their hegemonic powers to oppress a weaker or developing state without being directly involved within the state territory (Rapanyane, 2021). Neo-colonization with the democratic governments diminish the hope and moral and morally impoverishes people in the developing states, hence violence groups emerge. Alfano and Gorlach (2022) share similar views with Abikar (2023) in analysis of violence groups members as he argues that the word Al Shabab means youth in Arabic language. In this study such meaning as given by Abikar (2023) depicts that Al Shabab members consider themselves as angry youth that consider it their business to clean out neo-colonization plague in Africa and Middle East. In the same vein, Operation Dudula in South Africa is made of citizens that have been thwarted by corrupt government leaders to an unbearable level (Owen, 2022). According to Myeni (2022) when Operation dudula fights foreigners, including other fellow Africans, in their mind they are actually fighting overpopulation in the state of poverty. In addition, Mbiyozo (2023) takes the argument further to say that since South African people are faced with unemployment, poor infrastructure, and slow development due to corrupt government, it then becomes a nearest conclusion that the remaining resources must be only for South Africans.

To a greater extent, this study found that Ubuntu is better understood as humanness and philanthropism when there is food on the tables as Chigangaidze et al (2021) argue. Then when people are aggrieved and continually provoked by disappointing neo-colonial government leaders, the spirit/ understanding of *Ubuntu* disserts them. This study also found that while other violent groups like Al shabab, Taliban, and Boko Haram have some aspects of religion in them, Operation dudula is different because it has no religious aspect in it. By the way, it must be hereby declared that Taliban will not be much mentioned here because it exists more in the Arab world that is not Africa like the rest of violent groups centrally mentioned in this study. According to Tebus (2023) it seems that Operation dudula's mandate is clear on the thought that the remaining South African resources are only for South Africans. It is then from that thought that South African people believe that *Ubuntu* will only prevail when everyone has learned to stay in their own countries and face their own share of problems. Thus at this point South

African members of Operation dudula understand *Ubuntu* as protection of resources and utilization of them for the benefit of South Africans to their satisfaction before sharing with anyone else (Chigangaidze et al, 2021). However, it is not clear as to when will South Africans get satisfied to the level of sharing, as well as what indicators will be there to indicate that the state of sufficiency has been reached.

Analysis

Ubuntu is the theoretical framework in the African thought that speaks to humanitarian understanding that all humans need one another to live and exist (Ewoso, 2019). It is from this framework that Koh and Kwak (2021) used a phrased “*it takes a village to raise a child*”, and that is to argue that Africans understand human beings as naturally social beings. Being social in this case extends to the level that the disturbance of one person in community would not end as a disturbance or a problem of one person, but the disturbance of many people if not all. With that understanding, the role of government then becomes the overseeing in the community with an emphasis on ensuring that there is justice and order that prevails at all times. It is also at that very point that Panchia (2021) argues that in the traditional African system of thought democracy was understood as a consensual democracy than in the Western thought where democracy is commonly understood as the majoritarian democracy. The issues raises when African nations adopted the Western form of democracy with its standards that tend to transform the African norms of how leadership and government is perceived. Cheeseman and Sishuwa (2021) argue that with the voting system in place, leaders are no longer born but made by the majority votes of the community. When leaders are made by the majority, it remains clear that there is a remainder of the community that has reservations about the legitimacy of that leadership, and that creates some level of discomfort in the community.

At this point, being a minority does not matter because a bitter heart can cause sufficient destruction to make more hearts never experience peace. The group in Africa and the Middle East that are currently considered as terrorist groups are the minority groups who suffer discomfort and anger caused by state governments (Answer et al, 2020). Nowadays, the special groups like Al Shabab, Boko Haram, and Operation dudula are from the painful hearts that have negatively impacted by the decisions of the majoritarian governments. According to Svoray et al (2022) since every human is a social beings, the decision made by the majority impact everyone including the very minority that did not vote for that particular government or leadership. The important issue to note is that while African and Middle East nations struggle to transform from the African forms of government towards Western democratization, they also had to deal with problems that come with it. From the concern about the whole humanity, African[ly] known as *Ubuntu*, Africa had to transform towards the majoritarian humanity that comes with its own baggage (Metz, 2021). In actual fact, some middle East nations also face the same problem of having to deal with dislocated form of leadership that at times fails to represent the wills of the community.

While the community suffers the problems of transitioning towards the Western lifestyle and Westernized leadership, government itself suffers from the international impositions that sometimes undermine the will of the governed nation (Ayiotis, 2021). Some minorities within the African nations and middle East nations have decided to move from pain and make action. According to Drury (2021) a disturbed and troubled nation tends to do acts of chaos in order to show their discomfort and trigger governments’ attention. The leadership that came into power through the Western democratic means sometimes lacks means to balance their nation’s demands or expectations with those of the international system that is dominated by the West (Arocena et al, 2022). Pinto (2020) argues that African nations and middle East nations sometimes end up seeing their leaders as corrupt and not representing the people, and all that might be due to the fact that they are trying to fulfil the demands of the West. In some way, one

would argue that there are some remnants of coloniality that the West still pushes in the formation of governments, hence some mentioned notions like neocolonialism.

The world is divided into three types of countries according to Khan et al (2022) which entails; (a) first world or developed countries, (b) Second world countries or semi-developed countries, and (c) third world countries or underdeveloped countries. Some middle East countries and other African countries fall within the classification category of second world and third world which refers to their economic global rating (Katsakioris, 2022). The international system initially classified countries into two categories which basically include core states and periphery states which respectively refer to developed and underdeveloped (Madi-Sisman and Sisman, 2018). This happened until Wallerstein wrote a narrative that there are those countries that are in the semi-periphery. Being in a semi-periphery in this study means being at a developmental stage that is between being developed and underdeveloped, which then creates a second world or the commonly referred to as “*developing states*”. Most of the developing countries like South Africa, Nigeria, and Somalia are poor in terms of the global system’s rating but they are trying to develop. Minga (2021) argues that African countries like Nigeria, South Africa, and Somalia got badly affected by colonization to such an extent that they are still trying to recover from the aftermaths of it. Colonization did not leave countries to be free and continue their existence in an easy path, but second world and third world countries still face problems that were invented by colonization which include poverty and lack of means to catalyze development.

In the struggle to decolonize, first world countries of the international system devised a system that must serve as the model for all states to adopt. The international system ensures that all states adopt one model known as “*democracy*” in this study (Fiala and Diamandi, 2019). The fundamental issue with democracy that the international system sells is that it is Western and it comes with injunctions that tend to either undermine states’ sovereignty or serve as neocolonial system over the state (Kratou and Laakso, 2021). Therefore, with the ousting of colonial governments of states, independence came in a sense that citizens will elect and vote for their governments, but that all happens at a cost of adopting the Western democratic system with its unfavorable terms. Mwambari (2019) argues that the whole democratization project was meant to be used as a tool of ‘checks and balance’ on the developing states by global hegemonies of West. In other words, democratization of in some form of westernization which in this study will be used interchangeably with neocolonization, as Byrne (2022) does in his work with the argument that both these concepts share the idea of exploitation of the weaker by the powerful one. Democracy being a foreign thing in both the middle East and Africa creates some problems like having corrupt governmental leaders, poverty and unemployment, protest and unrest, frustrated and hungry citizens, short life expectancy, and despair (Sessay, 2022). All the problems brought by democracy in addition to those difficulties of transitioning from colonial to decolonial states sometimes arouse the question of what should ordinary citizens do to help themselves.

According to Oberndorfer et al (2022) when people find themselves in some problems like governmental corruption, unemployment, and poverty, they tend to consider it clearly that they must help themselves. This situation of self-help when faced with different forms of atrocities is what has given rise to those violent groups like Boko Haram, Al Shabab, and Operation dudula. Then, when such groups have come to existence and operation, the response in the international system is to label them as ‘*terrorists*’ while they are actually angry protestants against the unfavorable system (Ras, 2023). According to Schmid (2023) the common feature in all these groups is that they are made of angry people who have decided to voice out their frustrations upon everyone who seems to be benefitting from the system. It is at this point where Nzo et al (2023) argue that Ubuntu gains effectiveness as an African concept of generosity, togetherness, philanthropism, and general goodness when there is food on the table. However, in this study the argument is not that members of violent groups have lost Ubuntu, in contrary though, the argument here is that in a problematic state of lack of resources *Ubuntu* tends to

change in meaning or understanding. In other words, *Ubuntu* is not merely a hanging concept that does not get affected by the real life vicissitudes in the real world.

The understanding of *Ubuntu* changes due to existential circumstances. For instance, when there are resources *Ubuntu* may mean that everyone is welcome to take enough for themselves and leave some to share with others while in absence of resources *Ubuntu* may mean preventing others from coming and overpopulate the space of poverty and suffering. This makes sense because if the state citizens are already feeling the pressure and frustration due to unemployment and governmental corruption, then there remains no one to help, except citizens themselves. In a case whereby government seems to be the addition to the problem, nothing makes sense besides citizens taking action by themselves in any direction they deem fit (Shoduke et al, 2023). However, one may understand this argument as justifying the state of chaos or anarchy due to issues like corruption, poverty, and slow development. The truth of the matter is that violent groups exist due to people's frustration over the real issues that democratic governments fail to address. According to Vines (2023) although it is not a written law that when government fails to address issues, citizens themselves must devise means to address those issues. Therefore, the actual existence of violent groups like Boko Haram, Al Shabab, and Operation dudula bears witness to the unwritten law that Appel (2022) gives a narrative of.

Conclusion

The creator of violent groups in Africa and middle East is neo-colonialism which then brings poverty, pressure on governments, and corruption. Members of violent groups like Boko Haram, Al Shabab, and Operation dudula do not consider themselves as terrorists, but protectors of their countries neo-colonization. The aspects of religion in groups like Boko Haram and Al Shabab is just an accidental feature caused by the fact that members are traditionally Muslims and that forms their apparent identity. At the same time, the lack of religious aspects in Operation dudula is caused by the fact that South Africa is religiously diverse and people identify themselves as South Africans before any religious affiliation. The understanding of *Ubuntu* changes in times of affliction to suit the political interpretation of the status quo. However, in this study it has been clearly argued that *Ubuntu* in African people does not get lost because Africans are communitarians by nature. Violence that gets internationally misunderstood as terrorism is the outburst of dismay from citizens whom their expectations by the state are not met, and therefore are protesting against the unfavorable systemic conditions that neo-colonialism subjects them to. When citizens feel like there is no one to help them, they tend to deem it proper to stand up and fight for themselves. Furthermore, at the state of fighting for themselves, everyone deemed to be somehow benefitted by the system becomes a victim of the struggle.

Recommendations

More psychoanalytic research needs to be done on how to restore the philanthropic definition of *Ubuntu* and respect for human dignity against all odds. There must be some way to restore African concept of democracy in order to avoid the feeling of falling into victimization by neo-colonialism in African developing states. Perhaps deeper readings from Wiredu's (Soyemi, 2022) concept of consensualism may help if it gets revisited with a desire to find solution to this problem of neo-colonization which brings about the necessary conditions that create violent groups. The international system must have a way of helping developing states without subjecting them to pressurizing demands that provoke citizens and make them feel neo-colonized. There must also be a system of checks and balance that keeps state governments accountable in order to guard against corruption which exacerbates discontent and unrest on the citizens. Governments must be comprised of compatriots that are willing to uphold the values of *Ubuntu* which would remind them that as leaders they are entrusted with

guardianship of social resources that belong to the people/ citizens. In cases like South Africa, government must create programs that will educate citizens about the benefits that may accrue from accommodating the foreign nationals. While the government runs these programs, researchers must find ways in which government leaders could be advised about the possible outcomes of their actions as well as citizens' reactions to those actions. International system should find ways to analyze and assist members of violent groups rather than responding with violence to what they call 'terrorists'. Perhaps, if the international system may revise the approach to the problem of violent groups "Terrorists", their grievances could be amicably resolved and threats of failing states be stopped.

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