

In The Mirror Game: Ubuntu Philosophy and Umbundu

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ABSTRACT: The Epistemologies of the South awaken our reflection to knowledge and practices of the traditional African culture which have been silenced in the historical unfolding. Such is the case of Ubuntu. In this philosophy of life, we have an existence which is only an existence because there are other existences. In this culture, which has an almost endless capacity for seeking consensus and reconciliation, a shift has taken place from an excluding notion of identity “I am because you are not” to an inclusive notion “I am because we are, and because we are then I am”. In this sense, we formulate as starting question to know how the concerns contained in the Ubuntu philosophy find expression in the oral heritage of Umbundu, given that they belong to the same linguistic matrix of Bantu. As core goal of this study we highlight: to interpret how Umbundu has integrated, preserved and disseminated the principles of the Ubuntu philosophy of life. We selected as sources of this research elements of the oral heritage (folk songs, folk poetry, proverbs, lullabies, chants). The methodology used focuses on the analysis of the structuring principles of the Ubuntu philosophy: 1) to live at peace with oneself (relation with self); 2) to live at peace with the other (relation with the others); and 3) to live in harmony with nature and the cosmos (relation with the universe). The findings of our research have led us to conclude that principles can be found in the oral heritage of Umbundu that have helped perpetuate and disseminate the Ubuntu philosophy. So, the oral heritage of Umbundu has contributed to renew the spirit of solidarity and the spirit of belonging to the universe and to the human community, through the belief that everything in the universe exists in full connection.

KEYWORDS: Ubuntu philosophy; Umbundu; oral heritage; ethics.

INTRODUCTION

The certainty that everything in the world is connected is apparent in the everyday life of beings within communities. This certainty shows us that Ubuntu is the most eloquent expression of the relation between humans. Since Ubuntu is ‘being because others are’, we are but for the others. A society grounded in the pillars of respect and solidarity is essentially part Ubuntu, the African philosophy which deals with interpersonal alliances and relations.

The modern world, under the auspices of materialistic utilitarianism and individualistic relativism, imposes a certain emptiness on the human being, as community and social being. Thus, all philosophy, especially from Socrates, is a bid for humanism. It is along these lines that Martin Luther King says: “I have a dream that one day men will rise up and come to see that they are made to live together as brothers”.¹

Africa is an integral part of humanity’s expectations and it contains moral principles. The African philosophy is presented, to a large extent, in the form of orally expressed tales, fables, and traditional myths. Within its moral principles is present the ethics which is the philosophical reflection on the best way to live. The ethical problem is historically loaded with opinions, whether with the exclusive goal of dictating norms, or with the exclusive goal of shaping man to what they should be. Obviously, ethics in all its framework derives from principles which regulate and standardize man’s life and society’s life as a whole. According to Mondin (1981), “the ethical problem takes on two main aspects: one relative to the foundation and value of already existing codes, principles, norms, moral convictions; (...) the other concerns the conditions which enable moral action in absolute; the criterion of what is moral and immoral for man; the ultimate end of human life and the more suitable means to achieve it”,

Among the philosophical problems, ethics has significant relevance in that it addresses daily human situations: what is good and what is evil, what is fair and what is unfair.

¹ http://www.pordentrodaafrica.com/artigos/Postagem_mais_recente_Postagem_mais_antiga_Página_inicial 2017.

In The Mirror Game: Ubuntu Philosophy and Umbundu

Questions of this kind merely afflict humans, since in this universe they are the only ones who seek meaning for themselves and their communities.

Ubuntu confirms that the basic aspect of ethics is not what is intended, such as in the theologies of Aristoteles and others, or acting for the simple sake of acting, as in the deontology of Kant and others; but rather the real understanding that no end can be achieved without the participation of others, and that one cannot proceed in perfect action unless the other 'I's are not the basis for that action. The Ubuntu ethics is based on action by and for the other. It is ethics oriented, not towards oneself, but rather towards the other selves. This ethics arises as a means to a better form of living, from a community context, in which the person acts by reason of another, be it known or unknown.

The Ubuntu ethics is a reflection of a common concern, in which the action is imposed by seeking good for everyone and for each one. We can say that the Ubuntu ethics is that whose focus lies in the dynamics of acknowledging the other, characterizing the search for the whole group's happiness. From the perspective of Altuna (2014), "participated life, vertical and horizontal solidarity, and the desired harmony in interaction are the foundations and poles of the Bantu ethics".

This ethical perspective is processed from an altruistic vision, whose rationale lies in knowing and accepting humanity, equality and each person's worth (Lundin and Nelson, 2010).

Also, Ubuntu is understood as a philosophy that carries at its base surpassing the unrelatable I and you, to join them in irresistible depth, where both lose their separate senses to acquire a common, single sense. Thus, 'I' no longer exists, 'you' no longer exists. 'I' and 'you' mutually engage in the experience of 'us'. This practice is apparent in genuine African communities, where any decision making is not individual, but rather done in the family context; where the elders decide what is best for their children; where the desire for prosperity is community-oriented and not individual. This can be clearly seen in agriculture, where the members (*ovimbundu*) of the same neighbourhood help one another by going to the field of one farmer one day, and the field of another the next day, thus making it possible for all the elements of the community to have a better harvest.

This reciprocity stems from the acknowledged conception that I am because the other enables me to be. Following this line of thought, Reverend Desmond Tutu stated that Ubuntu "is the essence of the being human (...) that my humanity is caught up and is inextricably bound up in yours. I am human, because I belong to the community. A person with Ubuntu is welcoming, hospitable, warm and generous, willing to share. The quality of Ubuntu gives people resilience, enabling them to survive and emerge still human². The proposal of extended family, which encompasses the whole community made stronger because of mutual help, healing the others' suffering, brings with it the idea of overcoming different types of discrimination, related, for instance, with skin colour, gender, sexual orientation, and religion.

In today's world, individualistic relativism and materialistic utilitarianism impose a certain emptiness on humans as community and social beings. In various ways, attempts have been made to revive in the human being humanitarian ideas and feeling of being with the other, which are getting lost over time.

The African philosophy is based on the world view of a people, of a culture or of a civilization. Today, individualism is translated into overwhelming competitiveness. This contrasts with the African propensity for cooperation, team work, solidarity and to being-with-others. As claimed by Lipton (2005, p. 45-46), "we need to move beyond Darwinian theory, which stresses the importance of *individuals*, to one that stresses the importance of the *community*". As we know, the educational paradigm has been based on the struggle for survival, fundamental premise for evolution which is founded on "the war of nature, famine and death" (Lipton, 2005, p. 41). This presupposes competition, and from this relation we are led to see the Other as a threat.

Starting from this problem, the following questions were raised: how does the Umbundu community live Ubuntu? What features of Ubuntu are apparent in the life of the elements of the Umbundu community? Does the globalization factor contribute to the experience of Ubuntu? How does the oral heritage in Umbundu reflect the principles of the Ubuntu philosophy?

The central goal of this study was to interpret how Umbundu has integrated, preserved and disseminated the principles of the Ubuntu philosophy of life.

As sources of this research, elements were collected from speakers of Umbundu regarding the oral heritage (popular songs, popular poetry, tales, proverbs, lullabies, nursery rhymes).

The methodology to be used focuses on the analysis of the structuring principles of the Ubuntu philosophy: 1) living at peace with one self (relation with self); 2) living at peace with the other (relation with the others); 3) living in harmony with nature and with the cosmos (relation with the universe).

² [http://www.pordentrodaafrica.com/artigos/Postagem mais recente Postagem mais antiga Página inicial](http://www.pordentrodaafrica.com/artigos/Postagem_mais_recente_Postagem_mais_antiga_Página_inicial) 2017.

In The Mirror Game: Ubuntu Philosophy and Umbundu

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The person in African philosophy

To approach African philosophy as regards the person, it is possible to start from the following question: what idea does one have of the African person? Thus, our analysis focused on the reason that culture and tradition determine the concept of person. So, the person is shaped by the philosophy of life, by the environment, by the historical mindset of their people and by their culture. According to Mounier (2004, p. 15) "The person is not an object. Rather, it is exactly what in each man cannot be treated as an object (...). The person is not the most wonderful object in the world, nor anything else that we can know from the outside, like all others. It is the only reality that we know, and that we are at the same time fashioning from within. Present everywhere, it is *given* nowhere".

The term person is not new, it dates back to the Middle Ages, to the theatre, with the meaning of mask; it enters theology, philosophy, even legal language. From the perspective of Imbamba (2010, p. 212) "there are three criteria by which it can be defined. The first has the subject as the main reference; the second refers to the 'other', the 'you', the neighbour, and the third refers to God, in other words, to man as image of God".

The person in African philosophy is imbued with high honour, both from the somatic and the specifically spiritual points of view. However, the term "Bantu" means the evolution of the distinct understanding of the concept of person in that particular region. Nevertheless, there are common aspects between the various understandings of this concept, since, throughout its evolution, elements have been confirmed which, one way or another, imperatively characterize the human being, not in their cultural or regional specificity, but rather in their common originality.

In the opinion of Bono (2015), "justifying the African model of person requires the critical demonstration of how such model declares man's truth as such: a universal truth grounded in a historical and traditional truth, that is, on the concrete life of the African man such as it progressed throughout the centuries. Access to the universal truth of the African man is achieved through the path of history, of the concrete African man who has found his meaning in the millennial tradition which must be critically verified through the phenomenological-hermeneutic method.

As stated above, the concept of person may vary depending on the cultural system and especially the linguistic code of each territory. Thus, the analysis of person in the African philosophy needs to comply with a series of patterns that confirm the validity of all arguments. The Muntuism (from Muntu) created by Bono enables us to make a cohesive elaboration and a more coherent and systematic approach in the terms to be applied to lead the readers to the idea of person in the African philosophy. Muntu is the term for person in the African philosophy. The human person (muntu) is the intelligent being, life with intelligence. God gave intelligence to humankind, who are God's creatures who must be in a relation with all the other participants in a similar life, the "bantu" (Altuna, 2014).

In this sequence, Tempels (1945) states that the person known as Muntu is the primal life force, next to God, major strength, and the things that are inner strength. In this sense, Bono (2015, p. 18) claims that "Muntu is the living strength, the personal strength, higher than that of all animated beings. Man, as Muntu, is the most vigorous among all forces created and regulates the other living forces. In the same line of thought, Kagame (1956, p.27) analyses the word "Muntu", formed by the root -ntu (being) and the prefix -um (intelligent), thus defining person as a being of intelligence".

The categories of being in the African philosophy proposed by Kagame are: Muntu – being of intelligence; Kintu – being without intelligence (thing); Kuntu –modal being (mode of being of the being), thus showing the equivalent of "being" defined by Aristotle, as man is constituted by two vital principles: shadow and intelligence. The latter, though, is considered to be exclusive of men, since animals also have shadow.

Speaking of the discourse on Africa, Ramose (2003, p.2) states the following:

"For centuries, discourses on Africa have been dominated by non-Africans. Many reasons account for this state of affairs and, not least, the unjustified violence of colonization. Since colonization, Africans have had almost an infinity of spokespersons. These claimed unilaterally the right to speak on behalf of the Africans and to define the meaning of experience and truth for them. Thus Africans were reduced to silence even about themselves. On the face of it, decolonization removed this problem. However, on closer analysis it is clear that decolonization was an important catalyst in the breaking of the silence about the Africans."

In this sense, we believe it is necessary to bring to light the wealth of the African philosophy. If Africa was reduced to silence, it is now necessary to show its potential. Colonialism was also epistemological dominance, it also established an unbalancing relation at the level of the knowledges considered valid.

Therefore, we argue that decolonization must also be made at the level of knowledge. It is clear that removing African knowledge from epistemological reflection has had very negative consequences for our way of thinking, feeling and acting. We need to overcome the limitations of historical chains.

In The Mirror Game: Ubuntu Philosophy and Umbundu

Although colonialism has been extinguished, much of what constituted its mentality remains active nonetheless. The deep-rooted nature of the colonialist project has lingered in several fields of culture. We are told by Sant'Ana (2016) that one of the ways of overcoming the barriers of prejudice against Africa lies in trying to understand the existence of original concepts and practices. According to N'Dri (2006, p.48) "Thus, even the institutions created after independence have been modelled in the form of the systems of the colonial powers and their extensions in the West." This means that colonialism is very much alive even after it was abolished.

Much theoretical production, particularly in the social sciences, is contaminated by myths spread by Eurocentrism. Afrocentricity must, first and foremost, set about demystifying that way of analysing natural, political, social and cultural phenomena (Castiano, 2010, p.131).

The Eurocentric lenses prevent us from interpreting the wealth of other cultural standards. In this sense, we will say that we must overcome the Eurocentric myths and follow what Santos proposes with the epistemologies of the South. As Santos (2009, p.12) states: "The South is conceived here metaphorically as a field of epistemic challenges which seek to repair the damages and the impact historically produced by capitalism in its colonial relation with the world." Indeed, it is precisely the dialogue between undervalued knowledges that we seek to carry out here.

UBUNTU: THE COMMUNITY IN THE AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY

Ubuntu is the expression which refers to the relation with the other. This study focuses on the ethical aspect of this concept, in other words, on the community; the relation between human beings. In the ethical Ubuntu philosophy, my existence is mine and of the others. I cannot exist without the others. My humanity cannot surpass my community. In this sense, "community" expresses "being" because the others are. Thus, Ubuntu can be summarized in the term community, so that 'existing' is 'existing in communion, that is, existing is being implicated with the other; it is feeling that the other is similar.

According to Lundin and Nelson (2010, p. 37), "Ubuntu is a philosophy which considers collective success to be above individual success. It says that we exist due to our connection with the human community. I am someone through others". It is in the community that the 'I' connects with a 'you' to complete it and to complete itself, with the union being considered more important than individualism.

The Bantu community in the African philosophy is manifest in each person's participation in the life of others. Feeling part of the life of another is to feel the presence of the other in oneself. Community life emerges as a force which fights all sorts of individualism (Altuna, 2014). Thus, Ubuntu reveals the community in a domain of complexity, where help is provided by the fact that we are all equal, and not as expression of an act of mercy aimed at those who have no support. For the community that is Ubuntu, help is naïve and at the same time engaged giving; I feel engaged with your life, therefore I help you.

Still following the perspective of Altuna (2014, p.207) "Solidarity is the death of nothingness; one's actions never remain absolutely in silence because they all reverberate in the community. Bantu 'lives with'. One's social life is based on a dynamic-vitalist, sacralized, seamless conception. (...). It can only live within a community, because only in it does it participate in life, preserve it and disseminate it. Only thus is it fully achieved. For this reason, it talks of 'our life', instead of 'my life'.

In this it can be noticed that we start from one another's existence; that one cannot be part of a community which is built from the existence of each individuality; in the empathetic whole which elevates the 'us' at the expense of the ego. In the Ubuntu ethics, community doesn't only mean being united by blood ties, but rather that we are all part of a single family, the human family. In this sense, Louw (2010, p. 7) states that "The community that is Ubuntu also includes 'strangers', that is, people who are not related by blood, kinship or marriage. Finally, to some scholars, the African concept of community, in its fullest sense, includes the whole humanity. All of us, in other words, (the living and the living-dead or ancestors) are family – no one is excluded". In this way, the notion of community goes beyond biological connections, enhancing humanness, what makes us similar; not because we belong to the same tribe and share the same customs; not because we share the same objectives; simply, because we have the same humanity, we are a community.

The actual community experience mirrors humanity with others which is translated into relationship, responsibility and solidary, friendly, loving, peaceful, compassionate, understanding, respectful, careful, humanitarian engagement. To live for the community is to live for personal fulfilment, since it is not possible to love one's neighbour without loving oneself, nor is it possible to live for the others without living for oneself. Our true surrender to the community makes us feel happy with the others and suffer when the others suffer. The community is revealed as affective and its fundamental basis is their ability to be capable of indescribable, love-filled union. According to Altuna (2014, p. 205) "The community provides existence, shape, meaning and enhances the individual who, from birth to death, submits to the group, the only entity which determines the guidelines of social life". These are the ethical bases which must be taken into consideration, because man is communion.

We need to capture the ethical potential that the ubuntu philosophy can bring into our social relations. This issue becomes even

In The Mirror Game: Ubuntu Philosophy and Umbundu

more pertinent because we are moving from a “post” era to a “hyper” era. As Lipovetsky and Charles (2013 p.64) state, the overall hedonist culture which embraces us has defeated the ideological-political heroism of modernity, and urges us at all times to a *self-service* of individual pleasures, exacerbated narcissism, the creation of false needs, frenzied consumerism, the depolitization of life, etc. This whole *gadgetization* of a meaningless life pushes us to a sort of social atomization which has been compressed in space and time, emptying all forms of socialization needed for the construction of a supportive society.

Opposing this fragmented view of reality, the ubuntu philosophy rests on the Zulu proverb *Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*, meaning, a person is a person through other people. The attitude it calls for is the harmonious coexistence with the other, the appreciation of what is human (*muntu*) and of nature (*kintu*). With the *Ubuntu* philosophy, there is a shift in identity from “I am because you are not” to “I am because we are”. This involves inverting the excluding rationale of western competitive thinking, which inevitably selects in order to rank. We depend not only on the others but also on other beings and cosmic entities. Value does not lie only on the other human beings but on everything that surrounds us. This means we must care for the relations we establish with human beings, with animals, with the land, the air, the water... Ignoring, neglecting or shunning this relation of respect towards the “Other” is to move towards dehumanization. It is precisely here that its ethical-political potential resides (Vasconcelos, 2017, p.103). To our mind, *ubuntu* can be seen as an ethics of caring. It implies seeking to understand and establish relations for human development. This involves our responsibility for leaving nothing and no one out. It is important to stress the issue of responsibility because this means enhancing an essential virtue. Etchegoyen (1995) tells us of the age of responsible people, warning that it is very much on the agenda. Indeed, *ubuntu* anticipated the times, having introduced the feeling of concern in all types of relations we establish. As Etchegoyen (1995, p.185) states “Responsibility is openness to others, integration of others in each one of our actions. It is an invitation of the Other”. Actually, this is in fact what *ubuntu* advocates

– seeking good relations with the world of the living, with those yet unborn, with the living-dead (ancestors), with the visible and invisible beings, striving to establish cosmic harmony. *Ubuntu* places us in the situation of being responsible for the “Others”. This is also a crucial aspect because the construction of humanity is made from the “Other”. When our relations are not responsible, they become destructive. To prevent this from happening it is important to be aware, and all awareness leads us to moral development. We only become responsible to our conscience. This sets us above any regulation, rule or legislation. Responsibility has the strength of the morality that feeds on conscience. Responsibility, Etchegoyen (1995, p.63) argues, “operates the synthesis of intention, of the action and its effects”. Responsibility makes this confrontation between intention and results, the main goal of which is to draw conclusions to improve our actions in the next attempt. It is this generosity that we find in *ubuntu*. It is the ability to be able to put ourselves in the place of the other.

But it is important to consider that the potential of *ubuntu* is connected to *umuntu*. On this topic, Ramose (1999) tells us that the African philosophy is consistent with the philosophical position that movement is the principle of being, considering this “being-coming-into-being”. *Ubuntu* describes not only a condition of being, but also the coming- into-being. Being and coming-into-being do not oppose. They express two important aspects of reality. It is crucial to consider the flow of the dialogical relation between being and coming into being, the sense of the movement between order (being) and chaos (coming into being). It is at the same time *gerund* and *gerundive*. Order is built in chaos. Order is a provisional balance which feeds on the disorder of chaos which in turn leads to a new order. It is an order which is slowly being built in a perpetual motion. *Ubuntu* has a reomodal nature. The *gerund* is the ontological basis of the reomodal language.

The particularity of morality in the African thought and its relationship with the community can be understood as referring to what Coetzee (2003, p.322) states:

“The idea of mutual provision suggests the following definition of *community*. A community is an ongoing association of men and women who have a special commitment to one another and a developed (distinct) sense of their common life. The *common life* is any public discursive space which members construct through action-in-concert. It is constituted by a particular set of social meanings—i.e. shared understandings and interpretations of events to which members have access through their participation in the creation of their commonality. A communal or social identity is the community community’s characteristic way of life, one which members have sustained over some considerable period of time as an integrated cultural whole and to which members stand in a dialogical relation.”

This dialogical relationship introduces a context of interactive dynamics that serves to construct social identity and guide choices. But it is also necessary to consider that the accumulated capital resulting from this interactive context helps to steer choices. It is in this interactive process of group culture that the identification and the construction of identity (individual/collective) are produced. On this subject, Kakozi (2018) maintains:

“The “I” finds its interests inside the “we”. The “we” means life in community with the presence of several “I”. The will of a single

In The Mirror Game: Ubuntu Philosophy and Umbundu

person, however, should not prevail, rather the will of the community. This particular emphasis on the community does not emerge only in Africa. There is a Canadian philosopher, Charles Taylor, who also addresses the issue of communitarianism, from the perspective of the west. Germans, too, gave a lot of prominence to this idea of community. Senegalese thinker Léopold Sédar Senghor said that, although the western culture considers communitarianism, the individual ends up prevailing over the “we”. In Africa, even though there is the idea of individual as well, the “we” eventually prevails. Besides, in this vision, the individual that does not fit within a “we” represents social death. If you don’t see yourself as belonging to any community, you do not exist. Destitution is not having no money or wealth, but rather not belonging to any community.”

Belonging to this “we” which Ubuntu appeals to is tantamount to incorporating the human qualities that characterize and distinguish it. The “I” and the “Other” are incomprehensible outside the relation of reciprocity and interdependence. The key values of Ubuntuism, as stated by Castiano (2010, p.164) are:

“Humanism (associated values: warmth, tolerance, understanding, peace, humanity), kindness (associated values: empathy, gentleness, mutual assistance, charity, friendship), altruism (associated values: unconditional offer, redistribution, openness, «open hand» attitude), respect (associated values: commitment, dignity, obedience, order, predisposition to comply with social norms) and compassion (associated values: love, cohesion, informality, forgiveness, spontaneity).

Education plays an important role in children’s development. The culture of sharing and compassion is a referential that starts in the early years in an interactive process which extends beyond the family. As Bourdieu (1997) would say, this whole process of socialization penetrates the individual in the shape of dispositions, making each one of us feel, think and act according to the group’s cultural standard. The group’s culture is made present through said dispositions, or *habitus*, which, to Bourdieu (1997, p.26) correspond to principles of vision and division, of lasting cognitive structures and of action schemes that guide one’s perception of the situation and the adapted response. They are propensities that make us think, feel and act in a particular way. To put it in other words, Bourdieu states that the *habitus* is a sort of practical sense. Using the language of sports, Bourdieu calls it a feel for the game. Living according to Ubuntu is to search for one’s feel for life.

Ubuntu is a cultural matrix which predisposes individuals to act in a particular way. The action is conditioned by the categories of perception, by the social reality governing it. So much so that social becomes mental. Still using Bourdieu’s perspective, we will say that *habitus* is developed in marked out spaces, which the author calls fields. To a certain field corresponds a specific *habitus*, which is none other than a true language shared by all the individuals subject to the same cultural matrix. This sharing enables *ubuntu* to institutionalize and sediment in time.

Still, *ubuntu* should not be understood as a single place of autopoiesis. It is by relationality and not by closeness

Ubuntu exists and remains in time because it is a language. The form of thinking that is *ubuntu* finds in language its mode of expression. As Wittgenstein (1968, 5.61) tells us “What we cannot think, that we cannot think: we cannot therefore say what we cannot think.” The limits of the world which correspond to the limits of language of *ubuntu* go far beyond the limits of other languages. The boundaries that *ubuntu* establishes are much more extensive, have more world than the other worlds. The language shows itself by saying what it says.

It is an institution which makes the past present, which materializes the past while at the same time opening itself to the future. As Saussure (1999, p.233) puts it, “language is like a river which flows without interruption; it is secondary whether its course is calm or turbulent.” This is tantamount to saying that absolute immobility does not exist. All the elements of the language, at phonetic or grammatical level, are subject to change. There are moments (periods) when there is greater intensity, and others when some degree of quietness predominates, but this does not question the principle itself. Diachronic linguistics studies these relations of contamination-coexistence and the substitution of some terms by others throughout time.

UBUNTU IN UMBUNDU

The Umbundu community is located in the central-southern region in Angola; specifically, it comprehends the provinces of Bié, Huambo, Benguela, one part of Huíla and another of South Cuanza. This being a Bantu community, the experience of Ubuntu is apparent. In this context, Imbamba (2010, p. 194) states that “in our daily experience we become aware that man is prone to living with others to constitute a family, an association, a community, a nation, etc; he is always a being in relation: he feels a vital need to find himself in a relation with the other beings of the same species, to communicate with them, share with them the same emotions and the same goods, making them participant of his own experiences and longings”.

This Umbundu community, like almost all African communities, is bilingual, using Portuguese in administration and in education. So, Ubuntu, in this community, is experienced in a bilingual context. As has already been mentioned, Ubuntu is not limited to blood relations; indeed, in the Umbundu community, the neighbour is treated as family, the passer-by is received with warmth, the visitor is welcomed with much joy and respect, regardless of race, colour or nation. They are offered the best one has.

In The Mirror Game: Ubuntu Philosophy and Umbundu

Next, we present the lexicon used in this context (Ubuntu), which shows the relation between the members. Decoding is done in Umbundu and Portuguese, since this community is bilingual, as mentioned above.

Table 1: Ubuntu's semantics in the lexicon of Umbundu.

Umbundu	Portuguese	English
ohuminho	Aceitação	Acceptance
Okutambuluya	Acolhimento	Welcome
Esanju	Alegria	Joy
Otchisola	Amor	Love
Unjali	Benevolência	Benevolence
Uwa	Bondade	Kindness
Otchilembelembe	Carinho	Affection
Okulivalela	Coesão	Cohesion
Eyevelelo	Compreensão	Understanding
Ekongelo	Congregação	Congregation
Eliñgilo lyovitima	Convívio	Conviviality
Ulinale	Covivência	Gregariousness
Etavo	Crença	Belief
Esapelo	Diálogo	Dialogue
Eyevelelo	Escuta	Listening
enhamu	Felicidade	Happiness
Ungavi	Generosidade	Generosity
Eliwewo	Harmonia	Harmony
Ohenda	Humanidade	Mankind
Elitululo	Humildade	Humility
Umbombe	Mansidão	Meekness
Otchituwa	Natureza	Nature
Unavenave	Obediência	Obedience
Elyavelo	Partilha	Sharing
Ombembwa	Paz	Peace
Elinaliso	Reconciliação	Reconciliation
Ulembwe	Relação interpessoal	Interpersonal relationship
Efendo	Religião	Religion
Otchisumbiso	Respeito	Respect
Utima	Sentimento	Feeling
Uhayo	Sensibilidade	Sensitivity
Undumbawa	Simplicidade	Simplicity
Elitokeko	Solidariedade	Solidarity
Etulumuho	Tranquilidade	Calm
Etokekiso	União	Union
Otchili	Verdade	Truth
Ombili	Zelo	Zeal

Source: author's own table.

UBUNTU IN UMBUNDU'S ORAL HERITAGE

In 2003, the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, adopted by UNESCO, includes «oral traditions and expressions», to which the linguistic- discursive devices of the early poetic sources belong. The phrase oral literature was coined by Paul Sebillot (1846-1918), to indicate a miscellany of narratives and manifestations of a cultural nature, orally transmitted, i.e., by non-graphic processes, without resorting to graphemes (Guerreiro & Armindo, 2011, p154). These narratives include tales, legends, myths, riddles, proverbs, chants and prayers. This identity *corpus*, characteristic of the memory of a people, is an extremely effective way of ideological dissemination as well as of transmission of knowledge and values, the cultural basis of the peoples. This *corpus*, which gathers records of the “ancestral memory”, integrates the microsystem of the practices of popular culture. The texts of oral literature, of more or less remote origin, whose authors are anonymous, endure in the memory of the peoples and are an integral part of their traditions, usages and customs.

Oral literature, as well as popular literature in general, is related with social life. In this way, oral heritage has the ability to instil in us feelings, wishes, community values, community being understood here as human group which shares a defined territory and a common culture and conviviality relations.

In The Mirror Game: Ubuntu Philosophy and Umbundu

According to Nogueira and Silvia-Semik (2016, p. 25):

“oral literary communication constitutes an important universe of conviviality by facilitating, through the aesthetic fruition of the text, the educational process which ensures social balance, ethical-political organization and the continuity of a specific world view. The oral text incorporates the world in which it is (re)created, and, when it is vocalized in a space/time, it manifests its stability and flexibility grounded in tradition”.

In paremiological studies there emerges, most notably, the conceptualization, analysis and stocktaking of proverbs. Semiotics, as the theory of meaning (Greimas & Courtès, 1979), enables us to understand the form of a conceptual construction, the conditions of perceiving and producing meaning and thus to interpret and decodify the semantics of proverbs, be it in literal or figurative language. Albeit generally of erudite origin (Mimoso, 2008, p.156), proverbs were eventually consecrated by the people who preserved them from oblivion and disseminated them. For Casares (1969, p. 92), a proverb is: “a complete and independent sentence, which in direct or allegoric sense, and for the most part in a sententious and elliptical form, expresses a thought – made of experience, knowledge, admonishment, etc. -, in the manner of judgment, in which at least two ideas are linked”. Proverbs, in the shape of judgment, encase millennial knowledge. Discursively, by the sharpness of thinking, by the beauty of their metaphors, they remain, amid constant historical change. The fruit of experienced knowledge and common sense, they embody a people’s worldviews. No wonder, then, that in ubuntu philosophy, proverbs should have such expressive relevance.

Let us consider, by way of example, the Ubuntu world view in the following proverbs in Umbundu:

Table 2: Proverbs in Ubuntu

Umbundu	Portuguese	English
Mbeu kalondi katchisingui, omanu vokapako	Um cágado não sobe ao tronco a não ser que alguém o ponha	A terrapin doesn’t climb up a tree unless someone puts it there
Ehui lyamwile ovita	O louco alerta pela iminência da guerra	The madman alerts by the imminence of war
Konheñgo kobili	Entusiasmo no trabalho	Enthusiasm at work
Nda ñgo kwasumbile usutu, sumba ñgo u olalemo	Se não respeitas a selva, ao menos respeite quem lá vive	If you don’t respect the jungle, at least respect those who live there
Wandelapo	É servido (refeição)	Help yourself (meal)
Nda ilu lya otchipepi lambako	Enquanto há oportunidade, aproveite	While the opportunity lasts, take it
Ulika ukupanda ñgo osongo ko may kaukupi otchinene viso	Sozinho apenas consegues tirar um pico do pé, mas não consegues soprar um lixo do olho.	Alone you can remove a thorn from your foot, but you can’t blow a speck from your eye
Ukombe elende opita obamba	Uma visita é como uma nuvem que passa	A visit is like a passing cloud
Vomela yo sekulo vutunga ñgo eyo lyavola, kavutundi ondaka yavola	Da boca de um velho só sai um dente podre mas não uma palavra podre.	From the mouth of an old man only a rotten tooth comes out, but not a rotten word
Apa paswa vavali, paswa vatatu	Onde cabe dois cabe três.	Where two can go, three can go
Tumala vondjali imosi, tuli ekuta	Comamos juntos, pois somos filhos do mesmo pai.	Let’s eat together, for we are children of the same father
Tchipepa tchipwa, tchivala tchilimba	As coisas boas acabam; a dor passa	Good things end; pain fades away
Kahunlunkai nda olonga okanekulo kahe, ove okasipo yevelela	Se alguém aconselha o seu neto, tu que estás ao lado aproveite	If someone gives advice to your grandson, you who are standing beside him make the most of it

In The Mirror Game: Ubuntu Philosophy and Umbundu

Kwatoko lukwene, likalyove tchikuponla	A união faz a força	Unity makes strength
Nda wamola kahañgo, katchiho kukawinasi	Não desprezes o antigo ao alcançares o novo	Don't snub the old as you achieve the new
Ombolo ipepa yei tulitimbwila	O pão saboroso é o partilhado	Delicious bread is shared bread
Ove kuyevayeva olondunge vyakulu, wenda la kasala	Quem não ouve os mais velhos está perdido	Those who don't listen to their elders are doomed
Sindaka kaneñge, otcho henla kaneñge akusindikevo	Cuide da criança, para que amanhã a criança venha a cuidar- te também.	Take care of the child so that tomorrow the child will take care of you too

Source: author's own table.

The same message conveyed in the proverbs is put across in legends. Let us consider, for instance, in this tale, "The Lion, the Fox and the Spider", the very explicit moral lesson: don't do unto others what you don't want done unto you:

Once upon a time, the Lion invited the Fox for a journey to visit his family. On the way, they came across weed used to weave baskets and the Lion told the Fox: when we get to my family and we are given *quiçângua* (drink made from corn screenings), you will come here to get these weeds so that we can stir it. They continued and came upon a *jindungo* (a spice) and again the Lion said: when my relatives serve us chicken you will come here to get *jindungo* to season it. They finally arrived at the house of the Lion's family and were warmly welcomed. They were served *quiçângua* and the Lion told the Fox to go get the weed he had indicated. While the Fox was getting the weed, the Lion drank all the *quiçângua*. For lunch, they were served chicken stew. The Lion told the Fox to get the *jindungo*. While the Fox was getting it, the Lion ate the whole chicken. So, the next day, the Lion, seeing the Fox weak with hunger returned to their village. A short time later, the Lion invited the Spider to visit his family again. On the way, they came across weed used to weave baskets and the Lion told the Spider: when we get to my family and we are given *quiçângua* (drink made from corn screenings), you will come here to get these weeds so that we can stir it (the Spider picked the weed and put it in her pocket). They continued and came upon a *jindungo* and the Lion once again said: when my relatives serve us chicken you will come here to get *jindungo* to season it (the Spider picked the *jindungo* and put it in her pocket). They arrived at the house of the Lion's family and were warmly welcomed. They were served *quiçângua* and the Lion told the Spider to get the weed he had indicated. The Spider gave it to him. The Lion didn't appreciate the Spider's gesture because they had to drink the *quiçângua* together. For lunch they were served chicken stew. The Lion told the Spider to get the *jindungo*. The Spider gave it to him. The Lion was very sad because he hadn't expected to share the meal with the Spider. And he said that from then on only those who were called by their names would eat. The Spider blocked the door with her web. The following day, the person who brought breakfast said: there's the Spider. And the Spider said: Thank you. She ate alone. Then she again locked the door with her web. For lunch and dinner, they said the Spider's name. While the Spider was just fine, the Lion was dying of hunger. So, the Lion said they should return to their village".

Regarding usages, we collected a solidarity agricultural practice from the oral tradition: "At the time of sowing, the people of a village are supportive of one another. One day they will sow the field of one of them, on the following day they will sow the field of another, and, in this way, they will sow everyone's field. When it is time to hoe the corn, participation is greater. Everyone's fields are well prepared for a good harvest, provided there's rain. Those who host the others prepare lunch made up of *cangica* (corn with beans)³.

Grasping the meaning of proverbs expresses the very identity of a people and, as such, they must endure in time. According to Hanania (1993), one of the most serious cultural problems of the west is the absence of a common reference and the subordination of usages and traditions to ensure that legacies are transmitted:

There are no longer classics for us: either Homer, or the Bible, or proverbs

... (...). The Eastern man feels backed, safe, under the protection of the truth of a millenary past which he accepts, which is characteristic of him, which guides him, which supports him and does not leave him at the mercy of the bewilderment of one who is in a world where everything is lived for the first time, without roots; which is impertinent to him (Hanania, 1993, pp. 26-27).

Contrarily to the western world, in Umbundu the oral literature still predominates. As Nogueira (2011, p. 92) argues, side by side with a children's oral poem, a riddle, proverbs, too, "are places of creation, discovery and exploration of identities and intersubjectivities".

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CONCLUSION

The results of our research lead to the conclusion that, in the oral heritage of Umbundu, principles/messages can be found which have helped perpetuate and disseminate the philosophy of Ubuntu. Thus, the oral heritage of Umbundu has contributed to renovate the spirit of solidarity and the feeling of belonging to the universe and the human community, through the belief that everything in the universe is closely connected.

Ubuntu is projected to conquer a world where love for one's neighbour is a belief deeply rooted in the spirit of humanity. In the Ubuntu community, as was demonstrated, sharing, solidarity, respect, acknowledgement, otherness, mutual assistance, communion, reciprocity, responsibility for the universe and for humanity are clearly visible. In a globalized world, where competition and individualism seem to dominate, Ubuntu proposes an anthropocentric philosophy, but one which bears the other and the community as faces of basic grounding. In this line, Lipton (2005, p. 46), defends that the Earth and all the species constitute a living, interactive organism. "Those who endorse the hypothesis argue that tampering with the balance of that super-organism called Gaia

– whether it be by destroying the rainforest, depleting the ozone layer or altering organisms through genetic engineering, can threaten its survival and consequently ours". This author also emphasizes the group's propensity for survival. Interestingly enough, recent studies in quantic physics are demonstrating that the universe is an integration of interdependent energy fields which are intertwined in a web of interactions.

As Júnior (1982, p.26) states, "proverbs, tales, riddles, chants, yarns, rhymes, free communities. By «pronouncing», «saying», «singing» their emoticons and their frustrations, communities also preserve in the memory their identity, their customs, their culture".

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³ In Umbundu: "Ondjuluka – Pokulima okulikwatisako.Okukakunla kepya Iya yu, neka Iya yo. Pokusodjola imbo lyosi lyenda kepia Iya umwe, eteke lyakamukwavo vanda kepia likwavo toke valima apia osi. Oku vakalima oko vakalia ohañgu (asola).(Vosi vongula, nda yaloka).

In The Mirror Game: Ubuntu Philosophy and Umbundu

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