



The current issue and full text archive of this journal is available at <http://www.worldsustainable.org>

IJSR
2,2

183

ON LIBERAL INDIVIDUALISM, COMMUNITARIANISM AND UBUNTU SOCIETY IN SOUTH AFRICA

Khali Mofuoa¹

Vodacom Group Limited, South Africa

Abstract

Purpose: This paper aims to discuss the conflict between the philosophical traditions of liberal individualism and communitarianism as reflected in the Democratic Alliance's liberal and the African National Congress's socialist ideologies, and to shed some light on their implications for Ubuntu society in South Africa.

Design/methodology/approach: Using data mainly from desktop research, the theoretical or conceptual content of the paper was established to inform the discussions on the conflict between the philosophical traditions of liberal individualism and communitarianism in South Africa.

Findings: South African society has been bitterly locked in an ideological contestation between the philosophies of liberal individualism and communitarianism for its development path since the dawn of democratic dispensation in 1994. This ideological contestation has dire implications for the formation of Ubuntu society in South Africa.

Originality/value: the paper uses mainly secondary data that is considered to be the most relevant, valid and reliable to inform discussions on the conflict between the philosophical traditions of liberal individualism and communitarianism in South Africa.

Keywords: Liberal individualism, Communitarianism, Ideological contestation, Ubuntu society, South Africa, Development path, Democratic Alliance, African National Congress

Paper type: Research paper



International Journal of
Sudan Research
Vol. 2 No. 2, 2012

Copyright © 2012 WASD

¹Khali Mofuoa, Ethics and Compliance Division, Vodacom Group Limited, Johannesburg, Republic of SOUTH AFRICA, Email: Khali.Mofuoa@vodacom.co.za

INTRODUCTION

An ideological clash is on-going in South Africa between the two political heavyweights of South African politics, namely the African National Congress (ANC) and the Democratic Alliance (DA). The ideological clash concerns the role of government in the lives of its citizens. Broadly speaking, the DA believes in less government aka state, with individuals taking more initiative. In contrast, the ANC believes in government aka state assuming a proactive role in assisting citizens to rectify the socio-economic imbalances of the past. This ideological clash may be broadly understood as occurring between the individual and the community. This paper discusses the conflict between the philosophical traditions of liberal individualism and communitarianism as reflected in the ANC and DA ideologies and Ubuntu tradition and their implications for the formation of organised Ubuntu society.

On liberal
individualism,
communitarianism
and Ubuntu
society in
South Africa

184

THE POLITICAL SCENE IN SOUTH AFRICA – AN OVERVIEW

The prevailing South African popular view classifies the ANC (the ruling party) and the DA (the official opposition party) political positions into two complementary yet opposing ethical theories of liberal individualism and communitarianism respectively. Though not all the DA's party members are liberal individualists nor are all of the ANC's party members communitarians, this analysis traces the ideologies of the two South African majority parties to these two philosophical traditions given their contrasting views on the role of government aka state in the lives of its citizens in the South African context, as discussed below.

Until at least 1990, the DA (formerly the Democratic Party [DP]) was an anti-apartheid electoral front which included anyone from liberal capitalist to socialists. However, the party is now a straightforward liberal democratic party in its own right². The DA prides itself on its entirely consistent liberal principles heritage. Indeed, the DA's historical roots are broadly liberal democratic, and it remains associated with liberal values even today. Perhaps this explains why the DA joined Liberal International (LI) as a member. The LI is a political international federation for liberal parties founded in 1947, which has become the pre-eminent network for liberal parties and for the strengthening of liberalism around the world. From the ideological viewpoint, the DA

²See Tony Deon's interview published on South African History Online (<http://www.sahistory.org.za>) retrieved on 2012.04/30

sums up its political philosophy as the belief in an “Open Opportunity Society for All” (DA Manifesto, 2009). Party leader Helen Zille has argued that this stands in direct contrast to the ruling ANC’s approach to governance, which she maintains has led to a “closed, crony society for some” (DA Manifesto, 2009). This formed the basis of the philosophy underlying the party’s 2009 Election Manifesto, which seeks to build a society by linking outcomes to “opportunity, effort and ability”:

In such a society, everybody has the opportunities and the space to shape their own lives, improve their skills and follow their dreams. The government’s key role is to expand and promote equal opportunities for all. People are not held back by arbitrary criteria such as gender, religion, or colour, or the prejudice of those in power. In the open, opportunity society, outcomes are linked to opportunity, effort and ability, not special favours dispensed by a ruling clique in the ruling party (Business Report, 2008).

At her 2009 State of the Province speech, party leader Zille described her party’s economic policy as pragmatic, thus: “We believe the state has a crucial role to play in socio-economic development. We are not free market fundamentalists. By the same token we do not believe that a state, with limited capacity, should over-reach itself” (News24, 2009). The party’s economic policy thus aims to create a society in which all South Africans enjoy both the fundamental freedoms guaranteed by the Constitution, and the opportunities to take advantage of those freedoms. In this regard, the DA believes that the role of the government is to provide every citizen with a minimum basic standard of quality services and resources with which to be able to provide citizens with a framework for individual choice and opportunity. In essence, the DA sees the government involved in the economy only to the extent that it can expand opportunity and choice for individuals. In its 2010 Federal Congress booklet, “The Open Opportunity Society for All”, the party describes this society in the following terms: “In the opportunity society, a young girl from a dusty township must have a fair chance of overcoming poverty and developing her talents by matching her opportunities with hard work and personal responsibility. It must be possible for a young boy, living in a child-headed household in a poverty-stricken rural village, to become a captain of industry. That is what the opportunity society means”. The DA thus perceives opportunity as the vehicle with which people are empowered to live their lives, pursue their dreams and develop their full potential as unique individuals.

Since the establishment of non-racial democracy in April 1994, the ANC has been South Africa's governing political party, supported by its tripartite alliance with the Congress of South African Trade unions (COSATU) and the South African Communist Party (SACP). It defines itself as a "disciplined force of the left" (Vulindlela, 2007). The ANC has been a full member of the Socialist International (SI) since 1999 (Vulindlela, *ibid*). It had observer status in the organisation from the 1970s. The SI is an organisation of social democratic, socialist and labour parties from all continents, whose origins go back to the early international organisations of the labour movement. In 2004, the ANC declared itself to be a social democratic party (Ludman *et al.*, 2005). The social democratic tradition can be said to have been the life blood of the ANC for decades. The social democratic programmes of Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), Growth, Employment and Redistribution (Gear) and the Shared Growth Initiative for South Africa (AsgiSA) are examples of strong roots of the social democratic tradition within the ANC. No wonder the ANC from its inception stood and stands for a social democratic society. It sets out to redress socio-economic differences stemming from colonial and apartheid eras. Hence, it defines its key objective as: the creation of united, non-racial, non-sexist and democratic society. This means the liberation of Africans, in particular black people in general, from economic and political bondage. It means uplifting the quality of life of all South Africans, especially the poor³.

From the ideological point of view, the ANC thus deems itself as a force of national liberation in the post-apartheid era; it officially defines its agenda as the National Democratic Revolution (NDR). Simply put, the NDR is described as a process through which the National Democratic Society (NDS) is achieved; a society in which people are intellectually, socially, economically and politically empowered. Hence, the ANC sees its central task as to build a developmental State with the strategic, political, economic, administrative and technical capacity in pursuit of the objectives of the NDR⁴. The primary objective of the NDR is to redress socio-economic differences stemming from colonial and apartheid-era policies as a central focus of ANC policy. In essence, the ANC commits itself to an activist state that puts the interests of all South Africans first, especially the poor. As an illustration, the ANC believes that South African

³See the ANC 2011 website by Unwembi <http://www.anc.org.za> retrieved 2012/04/30

⁴See the ANC National General Council Discussion Document titled "Transformation of the state and Governance" July 2010

society has a duty to compensate for the legacy of discrimination through affirmative action policies, and argues that it is too early to end affirmative action policies in South Africa. The DA believes that affirmative action policies have not been effective to the extent that they have hamstrung individual initiative, and argues for a sunset clause for such policies. In the main, the ideological contestation between the ANC and the DA as captured herein tells the tale of how each party perceives the role of government aka state in the lives of citizens in the South African context. From the socialist democratic tradition standpoint, the ANC believes in an activist government aka state committed to the national democratic revolution. In this regard, the ANC view is that the government aka state must be felt by the people. It must have a meaningful impact upon the lives of the people so that they can feel and see in practice the concept of “the People Shall Govern” that the Freedom Charter spoke of in 1995. To achieve this, the ANC sees itself as having the responsibility to improve the role played by government towards building a national developmental state based on the principles of the Freedom Charter, which are enshrined in the constitution.

In contrast, the DA argues that the activist government is not the solution but a problem. It advocates for an “open opportunity society”, where government enables individual advancement on the basis of supposedly inherent talents and industriousness, measured usually through academic credentials, rather than on characteristics such as race, gender or political affiliation. For the DA, a competitive job-creating economy, supported by an efficient education system, are the main drivers of the society. The party advocates public sector rollback in the direct delivery of services as a backlash against the ANC’s strong developmental state. Rather, according to the DA, government aka state should facilitate service delivery, mainly by the private sector, in the classic neoliberal mode. The DA aims to provide what it refers to as a framework for choice of goods and services such as schools. The party bases its conception of choice on trickle-down economics – as global competitiveness drives economic growth and society becomes richer, its members will be able to exercise their rights and choices for services. It is no surprise therefore that the DA’s economic policy advocates the cutting of corporate tax and the reviewing of labour legislation to make it easier to hire and fire workers. These proposals are to the right even of the ANC’s GEAR plan. In a nutshell, it can be said that the political discourse of freedoms, rights and choices by the DA reflects an ideology of liberal individualism, whereas the concern for social justice (welfare)

by the ANC reflects an ideology of communitarianism. This brings us to the next section in which the competing philosophical theories of liberal individualism and communitarianism are discussed.

THE PHILOSOPHICAL PERSPECTIVES OF LIBERAL INDIVIDUALISM AND COMMUNITARIANISM

A parallel can be drawn between the DA's ideological position, discussed earlier, and the theory of liberal individualism, which appears to define the moral outlook of modern times for most people. Liberal individualism is one moral framework that provides orientation in moral space for individual freedoms, rights and interests. Beauchamp and Childress (1994: 70-71) defined it as a "conception that in a democratic society a certain space must be carved out within which the individual is protected and allowed to pursue personal projects". In a sense, individual rights and autonomy are prioritized over the common good, which is to say that liberalism is predicated upon a doctrine of individualism, which states that the individual right is a primary reality whereas the community or the common good is a second-order or an artificial construct. This specific conception of what it is to be an individual is presupposed by liberal understandings of morality. McCann (2002:6) succinctly puts the liberal individualism school of thought thus:

[The liberals perceive] the individual as antecedent to any social order, meaning that he is unencumbered by the influences of his community or his environment; as he is free to choose, he is also capable of situating himself as circumstances dictate. Man as a self-determinative, self-interpretive subject is relationally prior to purposes, so the right—defined to a large degree with respect to freedom of contract—is antecedent to the good, where the good is defined as an end to be pursued. As the individual is independent of social identity and can define the ends to be pursued—can question his very belief system—the liberal concern with right must be independent of any social conception of morality or ethics, which otherwise serve to define the good.

That said, however, liberal individualism counterbalances its emphasis on self-interest with an ethical view of human agents as having inherent value, dignity, and rights. The tension between self-interest and respect for the rights of others is regulated based on formal principles of procedural justice (Neal, 1990; Rawls, 1971). A major advantage of the emphasis on respect for individuals and their choices regarding particular ends in

living is freedom from imposition of choices by powerful or capricious outside authorities. Liberal individualism represents a genuine endeavour to do away with dogmatism and affirm freedom without abandoning our moral duties to others (Richardson and Zeddies, 2001). Thus from the liberal individualism perspective, the role of the government aka state is to ensure the freedoms, rights and interests of individuals. It argues that it is not the business of government aka state to promote or sustain any idea of the common good at the expense of individual's basic rights and freedoms.

On the other hand, a parallel may be found between the ANC's ideological position highlighted earlier and the ethical theory of communitarianism. McCann (2002:24) describes communitarianism as a "social philosophy that identifies the individual as socially constituted". Thus, at the heart of communitarianism as a social philosophy is the socially-constituted nature of man: the individual is not taken to be asocial or pre-social, but rather it is recognized that society *defines* the individual (McCann, 2002:5). Communitarians challenge the primacy of the individual good and the picture of the free-choosing individual it embodies because it is premised on the mistaken form of individualism that views humans as individualized, solitary, "atomistic" beings that exist prior to society and remain unencumbered by social identity or communal ethics (Eze, 2005). They defend the view that persons derive their identity through their participation in community. They argue that the basic principles embodied in liberal individualism lead to morally unsatisfactory consequences, such as the impossibility of living a genuinely healthy communal life insofar as living such a life presupposes a certain degree of identification with one's community, and the identification in question is one that involves understanding that one's identity is constituted by the specific conduct in which one engages with one's community (Eze, 2005). In general, the communitarian message is that the ends define the conduct but they are not themselves the objects of choice (McCann, 2002:11). As a subject, the community is the basis of individual identity, whilst the individual is bound to the motives of the community as an object (McCann, *ibid*). In terms of the social collective and the moral conscience, the community is thus not a mere voluntary association but is a constitutive force defining individual purpose and existence (McCann, *ibid*). As Sandel (1984: 90) phrases it:

To imagine a person incapable of constitutive attachments such as these is not to conceive an ideally free and rational agent, but to imagine a person wholly without character, without moral depth. For to have

character is to know that I move in a history I neither summon nor command, which carries consequences nonetheless for my choices and conduct.

**On liberal
individualism,
communitarianism
and Ubuntu
society in
South Africa
190**

It is in this regard that "... abandoned children and elderly parents, social and familial fragmentation, the disappearance of meaningful democracy, and lack of communal programs are, according to communitarianism, the disastrous effects of the liberal individualism" (Linzer, 1997: 64). Hence, as Linzer succinctly puts it, "Communitarianism proposes that we give up the principles, politics and language of rights in favour of the principles, politics and language of common good and the community's way of life" (1997: 64). Indeed, the importance of traditional practices and the need for communal intervention to correct socially disruptive outcomes are standard themes in communitarian thought (Beauchamp and Childress, 1994: 81). In a nutshell, it can be argued that the two philosophical traditions – liberal individualism and communitarianism – reflect opposing views of the role of government aka state in the lives of its citizens or of the individual's role in society. As Linzer (1997: 64) succinctly summarises the core canons of liberal individualism and communitarianism thus: Liberal individualism aggrandizes the pursuit of individual goals and rights and insists that the political system guarantee them. Communitarianism promotes the central role of the community in social life and encourages individuals to become involved in mediating structures to facilitate the building of community and strengthening of society. In the South African context, liberal individualism thus obtains ideological support from the DA, and communitarianism obtains ideological support from the ANC. This brings us to the next section, in which the parallels in Ubuntu thought with liberal individualism and communitarianism are discussed.

THE UBUNTU PERSPECTIVE ON RIGHTS AND OBLIGATIONS IN AFRICAN JURISPRUDENCE

As alluded to in the previous section, liberal individualism emphasises rights, whereas communitarianism emphasises obligations. According to Linzer, "rights refer to what individuals claim from others, [whilst] obligations refer to what individuals owe others" (1997: 64). Although the Ubuntu perspective is communitarian in character, it does not predominantly reflect a simple-minded communitarian approach. In rights-obligations discourse, the significance of African values, which manifest themselves in Ubuntu, is summed up thus:

The ageless emotional and cultural maturity of Africa is less dramatic but not less significant or potentially powerful in influencing, in shaping and in formulating the constitutional ethos which must inform and define judicial responses to jurisprudential challenges arising from competing demands in a complex and rapidly changing society. That maturity expresses itself through a collectivist [emotion] of communal caring and humanism, and of reciprocity and caring.

As a philosophical and ethical concept, Ubuntu relates to questions of the meaning and understanding of rights and obligations in African jurisprudence. Murungi (2006, 525-6) has beautifully described the heart of African jurisprudence thus:

Each path of jurisprudence represents an attempt by human beings to tell a story about being human. Unless one discounts the humanity of others, one must admit that one has something in common with all other human beings. To discount what one has in common with other human beings is to discount oneself as a human being. What is essential to law is what secures human beings in their being. The pursuit and the preservation of what is human and what is implicated by being human are what, in a particular understanding, is signified by African jurisprudence. Being African is a sign of being human. African jurisprudence is a signature. In this signature lies not only what is essential about African jurisprudence, but also what is essential about the Africanness of African jurisprudence. To learn how to decipher it, which, in a sense, implies learning how to decipher oneself, paves the way to a genuine understanding.

Thus Ubuntu's rights-obligations discourse is somewhat different from that of Kant. For Kant, basic understanding of right is that individuals are allowed the greatest possible space for their freedom as long as it can be harmonized with the freedom of all others in the social contract. In Ubuntu, human beings are intertwined in a world of ethical relations and obligations. It contends that an individual comes into the world obligated to others, and in turn others are obligated to the individual. It is only through the engagement and support of others that individuals are able to realize their true individuality and rise above their biological distinctiveness into a fully developed person whose uniqueness is inseparable from the journey to moral and ethical development. Menkiti (2006, 326) captures this very well thus, "if the community is committed to individuation and the achievement of a unique destiny for each person, the person in turn

is obligated to enhance the community that supports him or her". This is not simply as an abstract duty that is correlated with a right, but as a form of participation that allows the community to strive for fidelity to what Masalo (2006) calls "participatory difference". For Masalo, this participatory difference recognizes that each individual is different, but also that each one is called on to make a difference by contributing to the creation and sustenance of a humane and ethical community.

Wiredu (1983) has extended Masalo's argument by developing it to include a principle that he calls "sympathetic impartiality". For Wiredu, the principle of "sympathetic impartiality" is one that individuals develop in association with others by, amongst other things, putting themselves in the shoes of others and is part of their cognitive and moral training in personhood. In Ubuntu, development of such a connection to otherness is explained by the fact that individuals are ethically intertwined with others and therefore they are in a profound sense part of others. The continuum between individual and society and vice versa in Ubuntu thought is a point aptly made by Arthur Koestler (1978) thus:

No man is an island; he is a "holon." Like Janus, the two faced Roman god, holons have a dual tendency to behave as quasi-independent wholes, asserting their individuality, but at the same time as integrated parts of longer wholes in the multileveled hierarchies of existence. Thus a man is both a unique individual and a part of a social group, which itself is a part of a larger group, and so on . . . thus polarity between the self-assertive and integrative tendencies is a universal characteristic of life. Order and stability can prevail only when the two tendencies are in equilibrium. If one of them dominates the other, this delicate balance is disturbed and pathological conditions of various types make their appearance.

In short, Ubuntu thought brings about some very important insights about people in society. such insights reveal that new paradigms of the individual and society need to show that for the well-being of the individual in society, we need a new conceptualization that emphasizes that happy and healthy individuals, enjoying personal freedoms and human rights can exist only in happy and healthy societies where the ethos of the community is conducive to the protection of rights and freedoms. This brings us to the next section, in which the implications of liberal individualism and communitarianism perspectives for the formation of Ubuntu society in South Africa are discussed

In modern day South Africa, the emphasis on rights in lieu of responsibilities is pervasive. It is the South African Constitution which has given impetus to this pervasiveness of rights in lieu of responsibilities. However, there is considerable disagreement about what is meant precisely by the term “rights”. For the purposes of this paper, the term “rights” is used to mean “that which a person has a just claim to, power, privilege etc; that belong to a person by law, nature or traditions” (Webster’s New World Dictionary, 1957). As Linzer (1995) writes:

The ethic of rights presupposes a concentration of the self and satisfaction of individual want. The focus is on the individual’s claims on others, on entitlements owed by others to oneself. The “I” comes first, as the ethic of responsibility is negated. With the negation of responsibility comes the diminution of caring.

Linzer’s avowal rings true of South Africa when one looks at the history of the country, which has been bedeviled by the culture of rights with the corresponding negation of responsibility. Unfortunately, the post-apartheid Constitution of South Africa has not helped much in arresting the evils of the culture of rights. “While the previous South African Government observed universally recognized fundamental rights in breach, constitutional framers in the new democratic dispensation sought to correct that situation by entrenching the Bill of Rights in the new Constitution” (Kgosimore, 2000:1). The Bill of Rights, according to Basson (1994: XXVII) entrenches the fundamental rights of every South African. In fact, the Bill of Rights as contained in the Constitution of South Africa is regarded as the cornerstone of democracy that enshrines the rights of all the people of South Africa, and indeed, affirms their democratic values of human dignity, equality and freedom to each of them in the scheme of things under the umbrella of the Constitution.

In South Africa, the ethos of rights has repeatedly shown that they can be destructive to building and strengthening Ubuntu way of life. The recent moments of *The Spear* portrait of the South African President with genitals exposed are a case in point. *The Spear* saga is currently the subject of national anxiety in the press and in society. But what is the fuss about *The Spear* presidential portrait? Jonathan Jansen succinctly captures the problem with *The Spear* presidential

portrait thus: “the entire saga around *The Spear* [i]s not a clash of racial cultures, as some inferred; it [i]s, at its roots, a clash of values of *liberal individualism and that of communitarianism as discussed earlier* [my emphasis]” (The Citizen, 2012:17). Put differently, *The Spear* saga can be said to be a product of the unintended consequences of the culture of rights espoused by the Bill of Rights in the South African Constitution and/or as Jansen puts it, “What has become crystal clear from *The Spear* saga is that our [culture of rights] legacy, from apartheid and from the struggle, is deeply untransformed in the practice of democracy” (The Citizen, 2012:17).

To counteract the ethos of rights which negate the ethic of responsibility, there is a need to connect rights to responsibilities in South Africa if Ubuntu society is to be borne. There is a need to acknowledge that making the Bill of Rights a reality in the lives of South Africans has presented challenges. “We need to pay attention to the misunderstandings of what human rights mean *as depicted by The Spear saga* [my emphasis]. It must be stressed that human rights should be supported by responsibilities” (Department of Basic Education, 2010:4). According to the Department of Basic Education, “Acting only on the basis of what I think is my right is potentially a self-motivated way of looking at life. Thinking about myself does not reflect the culture of ‘Ubuntu’ which should characterize the way people in our country relate to the world and one another” (2010: *ibid*). The Department of Basic Education goes further to say, “Enjoying individual freedoms cannot be separated from the freedoms of the whole community. We do not live our lives in isolation from one another. Our lives interface on a daily basis. To be constructive, positive and enabling, it needs to be based on a culture of human respect and responsibility” (2010: *ibid*).

According to Jonathan Jansen, *the Spear saga* is an “extraordinary event” that offers “the teaching moment” for South Africans as to “how we bridge the important values of human dignity and the respect for elders, on the one hand, and freedom expression and the right to criticism, on the other hand”(The Citizen, 2012:17). It is in this regard that, despite opposing public opinion, the recently launched Bill of Responsibilities is hailed as an important step towards building Ubuntu society in South Africa. The Bill of Responsibilities is perceived to be impressing on South Africans that the Bill of Rights has a flipside – that with every right comes a responsibility. As the Department of Basic Education (2010: 4) puts it:

The Bill of Responsibilities was developed to remind [South Africans] that human rights cannot be real without human responsibility. [It] is a reminder for [South Africans] that even though we all have and should enjoy rights..., this cannot happen unless we also take responsibility to act in ways that protect, ensure and uphold these rights.

Underscoring the importance of the Bill of Responsibilities in transforming the Bill of Rights as a practical guide for South Africans to build Ubuntu society in South Africa, the Department of Basic Education (2010: 4) notes, “Focusing on the Bill of Responsibilities tries to shift us all away from a belief that freedom means doing what I like. It moves us towards a way of life [aka Ubuntu life] based on the idea that we need to take responsibility for the way we live together. It affirms that we should give back to our communities and our country so that human rights become real for everybody”. In a nutshell, the Bill of responsibilities is about creating a caring and humane Ubuntu society in South Africa where the culture of rights and responsibilities is ubiquitous. Fighting for Ubuntu society in South Africa, as *The Spear* case has shown, means that South Africans should deal with the demons of fundamentalism that continue to bedevil them. As Jonathan Jansen in his analysis of *The Spear* saga eloquently puts it, “our entire society is fundamentalist in character. On almost any contentious issue, the world is divided neatly into black and white, right and wrong, good and evil. Evidence comes second to emotion. Logic gives way to anger. There are no grey areas, no room for doubt. When this happens, it is difficult to teach otherwise, as in the case of *The Spear*, what followed was a dialogue of the deaf “as defenders of liberal individualism and communitarianism beat the hell out each other [my emphasis]” (The Citizen, 2012:17). The attitudes of South Africans toward *The Spear* portrait across the board thus symbolize the crux of the conflict in South Africa between liberal individualism and communitarianism.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In explaining why he painted *The Spear*, artist Brett Murray in his affidavit to defend his portrait from being removed from the Goodman Gallery in the Johannesburg High Court writes, “I do not produce art with an intention to hurt, humiliate or insult*The Spear* is satirical piece (satire) ... can be seen as a political contestation as it opens a political debate” (The Times, 2012: 1-2). Murray’s statement adumbrates a conception of the paper that (i) there is a smouldering

conflict between the philosophical traditions of liberal individualism and communitarianism in South Africa, (ii) that South African society is bitterly locked in an ideological contestation between the philosophies of liberal individualism and communitarianism for its transformative development path, (iii) that South African society's "warm-heartedness" towards the ethic of rights and its "cold-shoulderedness" towards the ethic of responsibility is a recipe for moral crisis in South Africa. In essence, it is not far-fetched to conclude that *The Spear* saga that set tongues wagging in the public discourse can be located in the ideologies of liberal individualism and communitarianism. The ideological clash between these two philosophies, as in the case of *The Spear*, has dire implications for the formation of and the future of a viable Ubuntu society in South Africa. Hence, South Africans should heed Jonathan Jansen's plea that, "it is especially important when such social calamities [as *The Spear* saga] face us, that [we] should create the space for dialogue to happen *within our shared democratic dispensation and Ubuntu values to give direction to transformative development path* [my emphasis]" (The Citizen, 2012:17).

REFERENCES

- "DA promises to reinstate Narcotics Bureau". Cape Times. 12 August 2008. <http://www.capetimes.co.za/index.php?fSectionId=3531&fArticleId=nw20080812133009575C367672>.
- "DA Unveils Energy Policy". News24. January 13, 2009. http://www.news24.com/News24/Technology/News/0,,2-13-1443_2452524,00.html
- "DA's prison work plan is slavery with new name". Business Report. 15 August 2008. <http://www.busrep.co.za/index.php?fSectionId=559&fArticleId=4559694>
- Basson, D.A., 1994. *South Africa's Interim Constitution*. Cape Town, Juta.
- Beauchamp, T.L. and Childress, J.F. (1994), *Principles of Biomedical ethics*, 4th ed. Oxford, New York.
- Business Report, 2008, DA Manifesto 2009, available at: <http://www.da.org.za/docs/6674/21941%20DA%20Manifesto%20Eng.pdf>
- Chief Justice Hails New Const and African Values; DE REBUS: THE SOUTH AFRICAN ATTORNEYS' JOURNAL, Feb. 1997, at 78.
- Democratic Alliance Manifesto, 2009, available at: <http://www.da.org.za/docs/6674/21941%20DA%20Manifesto%20Eng.pdf>

- Department of Basic Education, (2010), *Building a culture of responsibility and humanity in our schools: A guide for teachers*. Pretoria: Department of Basic Education.
- Eze, M.O. (2005), "Ubuntu: A communitarian response to liberal individualism?" MA dissertation, University of Pretoria, Pretoria, viewed 2012/05/28 at: <http://upetd.up.ca.za/thesis/available/etd-11092006-161825/>
- Kgosimore, D. (2000), "The Bill of Rights in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa and its Application within the Criminal Justice System", *Crime Research in South Africa*, Vol.1, No 1, pp. 1-10.
- Koestler, A. (1978), *Janus, A Summing Up*, Random House, New York.
- Linzer, N. (1995), "Self and other: the Jewish family crises", in *Crisis and continuity: the Jewish family in the 21st century*, Hoboken, NJ: KTAV.
- Linzer, N. (1997), "Liberal Individualism and Communitarianism: Whither the future of Jewish life?" *Journal of Jewish Communal Service*, Fall 1997.
- Ludman, B. Stober, P. and Haffages, F. (eds.) (2005), *The Mail and Guardian A-Z of South Africa Politics*, Jacana, Johannesburg.
- Masalo, D.A. (2006), "Western and African communitarianism", in *A Companion to African Philosophy*, ed. Kwasi Wiredu, Blackwell Publishing, Oxford. p. 483 and 493.
- McCann, Jr. C.R. (2002), "F.A. Hayek: The Liberal as Communitarian", *The Review of Austrian Economics*, Vol. 15 No. 1, pp. 5-34.
- Menkiti, I. (2006), "On the normative conception of a person," in *A Companion to African Philosophy*, ed. Kwasi Wiredu, Blackwell Publishing, Oxford, p. 326.
- Murungi, J. (2006), "African Jurisprudence: hermeneutic reflections," in *A Companion to African Philosophy*, ed. Kwasi Wiredu, Blackwell Publishing, Oxford.
- Neal, P. (1990), "Justice as fairness", *Political Theory*, Vol. 18, pp. 24-50.
- News24, 2009.
- Rawls, J. (1971), *A theory of justice*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts.
- Richardson, F. and Zeddies, T. (2001), "Individualism and modern psychotherapy", in *Critical issues in psychotherapy: Translating new*

ideas into practice, edited by B. Slife, R. Williams and S. Barlow, Sage, Thousand Oaks, California, pp. 147-164.

Sandel, M. (1984), "The Procedural Republic and the Unencumbered Self", *Political Theory*, Vol. 12, No. 1, pp. 81-96.

The Citizen, Friday May 25, 2012.

The Times, Friday May 25, 2012.

Vulindlela, M. (2007), "The ANC and the Socialist International", *Umrabulo* (African National Congress) Number 30.

Wiredu, K. (1983), "Mortality and Religion in Akan Thought," in *Philosophy and Cultures*, Odera, H.O. and Wasola, D. (eds.), BookWise Publisher, Nairobi, pp. 6-13.

**On liberal
individualism,
communitarianism
and Ubuntu
society in
South Africa
198**

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Khali Victor Mofuoa is an ethicist by training and is currently a Senior Specialist Ethicist at Vodacom Group Limited, South Africa and a PhD Student at the Centre for Applied Philosophy and Public Ethics, Charles Sturt University, Australia. Khali's PhD thesis is on the topic of corporate social responsibility in the light of an African moral theory. His areas of research interest include professional and business ethics, applied ethics, leadership, public administration and management.