

Ubuntu diplomacy: Broadening soft power in an African context

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Abstract

Ubuntu is an African philosophical worldview that has increasingly gained prominence since South Africa's democratic transition in 1994. It places emphasis on the world's common humanity and its consequent interdependence. Through content analysis, the article examines the soft power that is inherent in South Africa's foreign policy, as codified in the 2011 *White Paper on South African Foreign Policy—Building a Better World: Diplomacy of Ubuntu*. In its findings, the article established a distinction between Joseph Nye's original conceptualization of soft power, formulated from a United States realist foreign policy perspective, and the one inherent in South Africa's humanist foreign policy guided by the philosophy of Ubuntu. This distinction is premised on the geopolitical disparities between the two nations. The article further examines South Africa's wielding of soft power within the African continent, the first audience of the country's diplomacy of Ubuntu.

1 INTRODUCTION

This article is prompted by a noticeable absence in African academic literature on an African conception of soft power, which in many ways speak to the limited study of Africa's soft power in general. Because of this absence, it is important to expand Africa's conception of soft power, since most African countries have been at its receiving end. Wesley stated that “the decolonisation and independence of Africa was part of an ideological scramble for Africa between the US and the USSR” (Wesley, 2013, p. 23). Even in the post-Cold War era, Africa continues to be treated as a battleground of ideology and cultural influence between great powers, with the most recent being China's soft power.

The projection of soft power in Africa has often been about which great soft power state can exert the most influence on the continent as a validation of its dominance in the international system. This projection occurs in the form of cultural, social, intellectual, and economic influence on the receiving nation's internal characteristics and values. From a constructivist perspective “it is important to investigate the influences of the structure of the international system and the relative power of states in order to understand the outcomes of foreign policy decisions” (Zondi, 2014, p. 131). When the concept of soft power was first coined in the 1990s, African states did not have the military capabilities to successfully use coercive or hard power against the dominant states, and they were in effect with the subordinate members of the international system.

However, times have changed and we have seen dramatic shifts in the international system, and theory must factor in those changes. From the post-Cold War era to an era of intense globalization, the international system has become more polarized, and the diversity that is inherent in the international system has become evident. Africa and the Euro-North American states have taken different historical trajectories that have had a direct impact on their

development. This has bearing on their use of the concept of soft power, as well as its success in achieving the foreign policy objectives of their respective states. In Asia, an analysis of China's soft power by Glaser and Murphy (2009) recognized that China's adoption and practice of soft power as an American concept was purposefully infused with Chinese characteristics. In this way, China is a successful example of the possibility of adopting indigenous ideas, philosophies, and values in conjunction with a mainstream theory in international affairs. The country has also emerged as one of the leading powers in the world. It is worth noting that its success is unique in the sense that “it is neither 'Western' nor predominantly Christian or even a child of the enlightenment. It developed independently of Western philosophies, recasting foreign ideas, including Marxism and capitalism, within its own template of thought” (Dellios, 2011, p. 65).

Given this background and the limited literature on soft power in Africa, this article adopted South Africa's foreign policy and the diplomacy of Ubuntu outlined in the White Paper (Department of International Relations and Cooperation [DIRCO], 2011) as its focus of analysis with a view to broaden the soft power concept within an African context. A skim reading of numerous government publications revealed limited engagement with the concept of soft power. This leads to opening up of speculation about Pretoria's acceptance of the concept in the frame, alongside a divergent perspective that finds resonance in the philosophy of Ubuntu. As such, Ubuntu diplomacy as underlined by the principle of Ubuntu is of interest to this article since it has been adopted as the guiding principle of South Africa's foreign policy. As a foreign policy tool, Ubuntu diplomacy, underpinned by the concept of a common humanity, is defined as “an approach to international relations that respects all nations and cultures ... it champions collaboration, cooperation and building partnerships over conflicts” (DIRCO, 2011, p. 4).

The concept of Ubuntu diplomacy is of interest since as a soft power tool, it does not conform to the normative foundations of international relations that are centralized on competition and the accumulation of power over others, but rather, it champions a harmonious coexistence between nations based on a notion of global interdependence. Its soft power potential and agency lie in its ability to persuade states to prioritize shared interests in the absence of any outright dominance by any state, and as such, it is less prescriptive and open to dialogue and the plurality of ideas. Through content analysis, the article seeks to broaden the concept of soft power by distilling the motivations and constitutive elements of South Africa's soft power that are implied in Ubuntu diplomacy.

2 JOSEPH NYE'S CONCEPTION OF SOFT POWER

Joseph Nye coined the term *soft power* in 1990 and defined it as, “when one country gets other countries to want what it wants—might be called co-optive or Soft Power—in contrast with the hard and command power of ordering others to do what it wants” (1990, p. 166). Soft power is essentially premised on the “power of attractive ideas or the ability to set the political agenda and determine the framework of debate in a way that shapes other preferences” (Nye, 1990, p. 166). The rationale behind soft power is further advanced that “if it (state) can support institutions that make other states wish to channel or limit their activities in ways the dominant state prefers, it may be spared the costly exercise of coercive or Hard Power” (Nye, 1990, p. 167).

Yukaruc (2017) challenged the originality of the concept of soft power, arguing that it is not an original idea and traced its roots/influences to other works within the discipline of

international relations. He related the concept to E. H. Carr's division of power into "military power, economic power and power over opinions" (Yukaruc, 2017, p. 496). He cited the three-dimensional power matrix by Steven Luke's as well as the Gramscian approach that espouses the reciprocal balance between power and consent as empirical evidence to this claim (Yukaruc, 2017). It can be argued that Joseph Nye's conception was largely premised on positioning the United States within these theoretical frameworks under geopolitical changes, leading to the broadening of the concept.

The concept is geared toward an increased desire for attraction, consensus, and cooperation in international affairs. War is no longer the most important strategy to achieve a state's interests. As such, Nye suggested that the "appropriate response in world politics today is not to abandon the traditional concern for the military balance of power, but to accept its limitations and to supplement it with insights about interdependence" (1990, p. 156). However, more importantly the "proof of power lies not in the resources but in the ability to change the behaviour of states" (Nye, 1990, p. 155).

The emergence of the concept of soft power was marked by the United States' decline in global power after the Cold War and the war in Vietnam. Wesley put it as follows:

"Soft Power was meant to give the US a positive international image, not that of an aggressor but that of a modern, progressive nation. Secondly, Soft Power was meant to counteract any negative consequences of US military power outside the US. (2013, p. 3)."

It was during this time the international system was characterized by an increased polarization of power that was not solely limited to military power. "At least five trends have contributed to this diffusion of power: Economic interdependence, transnational actors, nationalism in weak states, the spread of technology and changing political issues" (Nye, 1990, p. 160). Because of this diffusion of power and its tarnished national image, the United States had to find a way to reignite and sustain its hegemonic role in the international system through soft power. To this day, the United States is considered a soft power state, rated third in the top 30 global Soft Power Rankings of 2017: "Its culture is globalised; its political values are admired across the world and its foreign policies have global consequences" (Tella, 2016, p. 151).

Cognizant of the anarchical nature of the international system, Nye advanced that "military power remains the ultimate form of power in a self-help system, the use of force has become more costly for modern great powers" (1990, p. 157). After every war, the warring states have to undergo costly economic reconstructions, and not all recoveries are successful. As such, war has become unattractive and serves as a form of political instability that negatively affects the economy and fails to attract investments and capital flow in the global economy. In this context, soft power becomes a viable option to explore.

2.1 Cardinal pillars of soft power

Soft power resources can be categorized as political, cultural, or institutional. These intangible sources inform the identity of a state in the international system, and it is through them that the state can cultivate and wield its soft power. The instruments of soft power are adopted to create a positive image of the state, to propel it as an exemplary state, one that all other nations would want to be like or associate themselves with. "The attraction can be so

strong that other nations may even attempt to emulate the policies and actions of Soft Power nations” (Gallarotti, 2016, p. 7). These instruments affect almost all aspects of the state's social fabric in favor of the interests of the soft power nations, which is one of the reasons why the concept is challenged as being a form of cultural imperialism.

Globalization has resulted in transnational events that breed interdependence. Nye elaborated on the concept of interdependence and asserted that “contrary to some rhetorical flourishes, interdependence does not mean harmony. Rather, it often means unevenly balanced mutual dependence” (1990, p. 158). This argument advances the notion that interdependence as a foreign policy tool in effect depends on the imbalance of power: One state is stronger than the other, and the stronger one takes advantage of the weaker state's vulnerability to achieve its foreign policy objectives.

This is contrary to the soft power variant that is encompassed in South Africa's Ubuntu diplomacy, and which is discussed in the next section. Thus far, the basic tenants of soft power are as follows:

- It is premised on the ability of one state to dictate through persuasion the preferences of other states leading to synchronized values and interests among nations.
- The concept is further premised on the notion of interdependence among states because of globalization. Institutions of global governance serve as evidence.
- The interdependence is characterized by an imbalance of power among nations.
- Its resources can be categorized as either political, cultural, or institutional.
- It is adopted to complement a state's hard power capabilities.

While globally applicable anywhere, it is important for states deploying soft power in their foreign policy to not only position themselves within the mainstream use of the concept but to also tailor, cultivate, and adopt it in their context and from their vantage point.

3 SOFT POWER FROM AN AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE

The available literature in Africa largely covers the application and enhancement of the concept of soft power based on Joseph Nye's conception of soft power. The prevailing literature tends to look at how soft power manifests itself within individual nations and how it is implemented (Gallarotti, 2016). A literature review of the different analyses of South Africa's soft power by Ogunnubi (2015) showed three strands of soft power literature, namely “prescriptive, utilitarian and comparative” (2015, p. 40). The common trend in the study of soft power is largely limited to its value and utility.

Ogunnubi and Ettang (2016) focused on South Africa's soft power capabilities, its agents, resources, and the subjects involved in its cultivation. They emphasized the need for synergy between these constitutive elements of the state's soft power capabilities to achieve its foreign policy objectives. Ogunnubi and Okeke-Uzodike (2015) stressed that South Africa is well endowed with soft power capabilities compared to other African nations, and this advantage can be used to catapult South Africa from its status as an emerging power to a regional power. The same sentiments were echoed in the comparative analysis on Nigeria and South Africa by Ogunnubi and Isike (2015). The prevailing argument was that the strength of South Africa's soft power capabilities served as part of the relative advantage the country has over Nigeria in the regional leadership contestation between both countries. Tellingly, the soft power literature in Africa is skewed toward mainly Nigeria and South Africa, and essentially

framed in terms of Nye's conception and applicability of soft power to foreign policy. Given its relative weakness in hard power terms, soft power presents a veritable avenue for Africa to express and exert itself in the comity of nations. However, this needs to be on its own term; hence it is useful for African states to adopt soft power within their contexts and produce a variant that will yield soft power advantages that could be useful in containing increasing soft power influence of powerful countries such as the US and China.

China for example has developed rapidly increasing links with Africa and much analysis in the literature is focused on its soft power projection in Africa. Paruk (2014) explored the success of China's projection of soft power in Africa through its provision of aid, diplomatic support, extended economic interests in Africa and how it stands to benefit from these efforts. Africa is largely considered a developing continent, and this has a direct impact on its relations with great powers. Bodomo (2009) acknowledged the asymmetrical nature of relations between Africa and other nations in the developing and developed world, such as China, in the field of cultural diplomacy as a projection of soft power. The potential of regional hegemons in Africa such as South Africa in engendering symmetrical relations with China through cultural diplomacy is underutilized. For example, South Africa missed an important opportunity to project its soft power on China and balance their soft power relations when it announced the introduction of Mandarin, a Chinese language, as a subject in public schools in 2015 without a Chinese commitment to learn South African languages in South Africa or in China. According to the Minister of Basic Education, "China is South Africa's biggest trading partners, it is important for our children to become proficient in the Confucius language and develop a good understanding of Chinese culture" (Nkosi, 2015). Impliedly, South African children will be socialized into Chinese culture, values and histories, but the same cannot be said for Chinese children in South Africa or China.

Lastly, conceptually, most of the analysis appear to have no rigorous engagement with the conception of soft power in an African context. While the concept and its meaning has been engaged with and broadened to suit the localities in other parts of the world such as in Canada, and more extensively, in China. African literature has not as yet actively engaged with the concept to reflect African realities, and the concept is often adopted in its entirety, and focused on its enhancement of Africa's international relations. According to Smith-Winsor (2000), the concept of soft power was developed from an American point of view and as complementary to US' military capability which is a form of hard power. However, Canada for instance, adopts a duality of its military capabilities as both a hard and soft power resource to maintain Canada's sovereignty and for humanitarian efforts of peacekeeping missions that serve as soft power. This kind of contextualization is useful for Africa produce a variant of soft power that will carry more weight in expressing and exerting its soft power with the international system, and it starts with a critical engagement with the concept itself. In this light, Zondi (2017) attempted to challenge the concept of soft power and concluded its impact is just as detrimental as hard power to nations that are at the receiving end of its projection. He argued that soft power "imposes one's worldview, culture and paradigms of life on others, thus disrupting their own way of life and being" (Zondi, 2017, p. 15). A rigorous engagement will provide a broader understanding of the concept, opening avenues for further research on the theory, its development and strategic application to Africa. This will produce a unique variant of soft power rooted in African realities; an Africanized foreign policy philosophy, resource, and tool with the potential to attract admiration and yield beneficial results for the continent. Does South Africa's Ubuntu diplomacy have the potential for this?

4 UBUNTU: AN AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY

Ubuntu as an African philosophy has been widely discussed in the literature to establish a concrete definition of the term and its implications. To that end, various interpretations of the philosophy have been presented. Within these discussions, the common thread that ties them together is that the fundamental premise of Ubuntu emphasizes the recognition of a common humanity among the people of Africa. For example, Ramose stated that within its variations “there is a ‘family atmosphere’ that is a kind of philosophical affinity and kinship among and between the indigenous people of Africa. The blood circulating through the ‘family’ members is the same in its basics” (2003, p. 271). The history of colonialism not only colonized states but also turned indigenous epistemology into inferior knowledge that was subsequently negated. Hailey deduced that “there is a general agreement among writers on Ubuntu that it represents an alternative voice to the European and North American philosophical and theological discourses” (2008, p. 4).

Ubuntu is an African philosophy that has its origins from across the continent, mostly in the Southern and Eastern parts of Africa: “It is called Unhu among the Shona of Zimbabwe; Ubuntu among the Nguni speakers of Southern Africa; Utu among the Swahili speakers of East Africa; and Umundu among the Kikuyu of Kenya, among others” (Gathogo, 2008, p. 5). The direct translation of Ubuntu means “a person is a person through others” (Taringa, 2007, p. 190). Ubuntu is relied on to bring about unity, healing and continuity within a society, and it serves as “the force which defends against further collapse of society” (Spalthof, 2013, p. 4).

The philosophy of Ubuntu gained world recognition during South Africa's democratic transition, and the subsequent Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), where perpetrators of apartheid related crimes were tried for their offences. Central to this process was the concept of Ubuntu. Swanson stated that “the TRC's imperative of truth-seeking is underscored by a conception of African epistemology and Ubuntu, in its incorporation of personal or narrative truth, social or dialogic truth, healing or restorative truth” (2007, p. 53). Desmond Tutu who was one of the commissioners of the TRC interpreted Ubuntu as follows:

“A person with Ubuntu is open and available to others, affirming of others, does not feel threatened that others are able and good, for he or she has a proper self-assurance that comes from knowing that he or she belongs in a greater whole and is diminished, when others are humiliated or diminished, when others are tortured or oppressed”.(Gathogo, 2008, p. 5).

Ubuntu's communal values are a way of life for African communities. Mangena advanced this argument by stating the following:

“In almost every Southern African village; children are socialized to value the interests and needs of the group more than they would value their own individual interests. At a very early stage, boys are taught to head cattle as a group to foster the idea of group or community. (2016, p. 68).”

As such, communities ensure their survival through communion, interdependence, shared responsibilities, interests and values. Among these interests and values is the need to strive for harmony in all human relations. Ramose stated that “the concrete expression of African thought is the continual quest for consensus aimed to establish harmony” (2003, p. 276).”

Moreover, Ubuntu acknowledges the concept of power within communities. From this perspective, if power is to be wielded, Ubuntu prescribes that such a power is wielded based on consensus in accordance with Ubuntu's fundamental value of harmony within society. Ramose put it as follows:

“In the sphere of politics, the veritable arena for the making of law, Ubuntu is reaffirmed as the basis of judgement in the domains of human life by the maxim: Kgosi ke kgosi ka batho, meaning, the source and justification of royal power is the people. (2003, p. 273).”

Ubuntu then is a social construct and as such its definition is not static. However, “it makes a fundamental contribution to indigenous ‘ways of knowing and being.’ With differing historical emphasis and (re)contextualization over time and place, it is considered a spiritual way of being in the broader socio-political context of Southern Africa” (Swanson, 2007, p. 53). The philosophy also “represents a wider worldview or belief system rather than just a set of discernible characteristics. It is a statement of being that encapsulates the fundamental elements that qualify any person to be human” (Hailey, 2008, p. 3).

Its distinction from the Western worldview is that Ubuntu is created and defined by both the living and the living dead, and all members actively contribute to its definition. It represents a shared destiny among the people: “Ubuntu is not a philosophy or theory crafted by one person, as is the case with Aristotelian eudemonism, Kantian deontology or Platonic dualism” (Mangena, 2016:11). Rather, “Ubuntu ethics are dialogical, which means that the process of attaining the ideals of Ubuntu require dialogue between uNkulunkulu (Creator God), miDzimu (ancestors) and Abantu (human beings)” (Mangena, 2016, p. 68). This triangulated conception of Ubuntu is discernible from the way that Africans greet each other, cognizant of the presence and the influence of their ancestral lineage and its accompanying influence on their being: “When greeting one individual the Shona say: Makadini? (How are you?). The prefix maka- is always in the plural form to denote the value placed on the group as opposed to the value placed on the individual” (Mangena, 2016, p. 69).

Furthermore, the plurality in greetings emphasizes the value of the wellness of members of the community, as opposed to the individual; this is because of the interconnectedness of their wellness. An example of the application of this triangulation to international politics is *The Elders*, an organization co-founded in 2007 by Late South African iconic leader, Nelson Mandela. Its members serve as “independent voices, not bound by the interest of any nation, government or institutions” (The Elders, 2016). Many of them are former state leaders that have transcended the political realm to an independent global citizenry, but their collective knowledge serves as a fountain of wisdom from which those who come after them can draw from in the interest of the African comity of states.

The emergence of African philosophies such as Ubuntu negates Eurocentric claims that Africa does not have any philosophies. With China's success in mind, the African philosophy can be viewed in a different light, in the sense that it is applicable to theorizing, policy formulation and implementation. The philosophy has been applied in the fields of corporate governance (Khomba, Bakuwa, & Cindy, 2013), social work (Mugumbate & Nyanguru, 2013), education (Le Grange, 2011), environmental sciences (Chemburu, 2013), and many other fields as a guiding philosophy in practice, policy formulation and conduct, which place emphasis on the recognition of a common humanity. Therefore, Ubuntu serves as an alternative worldview that indiscriminately values the concept of a common humanity,

equality and harmony. It also values collective effort, cognizant of the interdependence that exist within members of the same community. The values that underpin the philosophy have the utility to be a valuable addition to South Africa's international affairs.

5 UBUNTU, SOFT POWER, AND SOUTH AFRICA'S FOREIGN POLICY

South Africa's 2011 *White Paper on South African Foreign Policy—Building a Better World: Diplomacy of Ubuntu* pronounced that:

“As a beneficiary of many acts of selfless solidarity in the past, South Africa believes strongly that what it wishes for its people should be what it wishes for the citizens of the world. Its national interest can thus be articulated as people-centered, including promoting the well-being, development and upliftment of its people; protecting the planet for future generations; and ensuring the prosperity of the country, its region and continent. In pursuing our national interests, our decisions are informed by a desire for a just, humane and equitable world order of greater security, peace, dialogue, and economic justice. (DIRCO, 2011, p. 9).”

These values and principles encompassed in South Africa's foreign policy are permeated by the philosophy of Ubuntu. Nanjira stated that “Foreign policies are political concepts of national interests. They are the means of a nation's effort to promote and maintain its interests. They are the overall course of action a country proposes to follow in its foreign relations” (2010, p. 305). For South Africa, developing a national identity is regarded as important groundwork for formulating and enacting a successful foreign policy, which should flow from domestic policies such as the National Development Plan 2030 (National Planning Commission, 2012). Alden and Schoeman argued the following:

“It plays a much more fundamental role in developing countries as a key tool for defining the ideational (who we are) and spatial (where we are in relation to others) boundaries of the state, and the accompanying imperatives to action (what should we do). (2016, p. 2).”

Through Ubuntu diplomacy, South Africa defines its history and informs its national identity, which it projects to the rest of the world. For instance, according to the White Paper, “South Africa is a multifaceted, multicultural and multiracial country that embraces the concept of Ubuntu as a way of defining who we are and how we relate to others” (2011, p. 3).

Ubuntu is evoked to position South Africa in the international system, cognizant of the environment in which it operates and the history that shapes it. However, Mafeje noted that “while we are free to choose the role in which we cast ourselves as active agents of history, we do not put on the agenda social issues to which we respond. These are imposed on us by history” (Mafeje, 2011, p. 41). In the same vein, Zondi stated that Africa's historical injustice “gave prominence to values of solidarity, unity, justice, fairness, peace, harmony, Pan-Africanism and independence” (2014, p. 109), and as Mangena (2016) advanced, these values became a way of life for people of African descent, and the present day democratic governance derives its mandate from that.

The White paper advances that South Africa's “destiny is inextricably linked to that of the Southern African region. Similarly, “regional and continental integration is the foundation for

Africa's development and political unity, and essential for our own prosperity and security” (2011, p. 19). As such, South Africa's approach to foreign policy is “an approach to development that does not require the underdevelopment of others in order for South Africa to prosper, but which produces progress or development for all” (Zondi, 2014, p. 110). In this way, South Africa's development links with Africa has been central to its foreign policy, and manifested in South Africa's foreign policy since 1993 as reflected in Mandela article titled “South Africa's Future Foreign Policy”. He noted that “South Africa cannot escape its African destiny. If we do not devote our energies to this continent, we too could fall victim to the forces that have brought ruin to its various parts” (Mandela, 1993, p. 89). Seemingly, South Africa's foreign policy and its diplomatic relations often represent these interests. Minister Nkoana-Mashabane (2011) stated that South Africa's foreign policy “must show the symbiotic relationship between our national priorities and South Africa's regional, continental and international engagements”.

5.1 South Africa's multilateralism and Ubuntu

South Africa's foreign policy is largely characterized by a common thread of multilateralism rooted in the philosophy of Ubuntu. According to Minister Nkoana-Mashabane (2011), “the world is experiencing the practical necessity of making the philosophical paradigm shift from *power to partnership* in international relations”. Qobo and Nyathi advanced the utility of multilateralism by stating that “for many developing countries, the importance of multilateralism as a principle and as an institutional mechanism rests on its potential to temper the extent to which decision-making in global institutions follows the structure of power distribution than the principle of parity” (2016, p. 429).

As with multilateralism, Ubuntu diplomacy does not presume nor seek to establish a homogenous world order, but instead seeks to bring about mediation between different national identities through consensus building. Qobo and Nyathi also noted, “Ubuntu places premium on the collective, while at the same time acknowledging what Sacks calls the dignity of difference” (2016, p. 426). Additionally, Nelson Mandela laid the foundation for South Africa's foreign policy by stating that “a central goal of our foreign policy will, therefore, be to promote institutions and forces that, through democratic means, seek to make the world safe for diversity” (1993, p. 89). It is for this reason that South Africa has, without discrimination, formed relations with various nations that are different and has essentially adopted an independent role conception which Holsti defined as “a role conception that emphasises independence, mediatory function and active programmes to extend diplomatic and commercial relations to diverse areas of the world” (Holsti, 1970, p. 262).

Qobo and Nyathi in their analysis adopted Ubuntu as a political rhetoric in South Africa's foreign policy and criticized it by saying, “there is a weak alignment between rhetoric and diplomatic behaviour” (2016, p. 432). The authors further made the following statement:

“Foreign policy approaches, such as the elevation of Russia, are inexplicable given the absence of a broadly shared normative outlook. Even on economic grounds this would also be hard to justify given the fact that Russia and South Africa do not share strong economic ties. (Qobo & Nyathi, 2016, p. 432).”

This criticism gives further credence to the utility of adopting African indigenous knowledge to explain foreign policy behavior. In this instance, South Africa's independent role conception influenced by the Ubuntu philosophy embraces all of humanity. It is important to

note that South Africa's nondiscriminatory policy of universalism does not denote the endorsement of other state's domestic or international policies, but rather seeks to position itself as a go-between for the industrialized North and the developing South, and as such it is distinguished as a bridge builder and accommodator (Van Wyk, 2004).

Echoing the above sentiments, Minister Nkoana-Mashabane (2011) stated that “ours is a foreign policy that is guided by UBUNTU, and a commitment to the establishment of mutually beneficial international partnerships that contribute to the achievement of the national development priorities of our continental, and international partners as well”. In line with those priorities, South Africa has memberships in several multilateral organizations of states it is not geographically contiguous with such as “the Middle East, Asia/Oceania, Western Europe, Central and Eastern Europe, North America, Latin America and the Caribbean. South Africa maintains membership in the British Commonwealth, Non-Alignment Movement, The Group of 77, and the Diplomatic and Foreign Service” (Nanjira, 2010, p. 309). It is also a member of the BRICS group made up of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS). This multilateralism is underpinned by the philosophy of Ubuntu.

Furthermore, there is no reference to South Africa's wielding hard power in pursuit of national interests, regardless of its endowment. The country unequivocally rejects the use of hard power based on self-interest: “It favours negotiation and inclusivity, and paradoxically (given the role that sanctions played in its own transformation) opposes the use of sanctions unless authorized by the United Nations” (Sidiropoulos, 2014, p. 198). The UN exception is based on the idea that the UN is an extension of its communal relations and represents a global community; a platform that is used to establish consensus on global issues, which is essentially one of the core values of Ubuntu. South Africa's ambassador Mxolisi Nkosi put it as follows:

“Acting unilaterally through the projection of Hard Power will undermine efforts to preserve stability. The best safe guard for our security and prosperity is to consolidate rather than erode the rule of law and embed the principles of cooperation over conflict and collaboration over confrontation (Nkosi, 2016, p. 17).”

In orthodox foreign policy this can be described as a foreign policy framework of internationalism, which ambassador Nkosi argued is one that “advocates for greater political economic cooperation among nations and peoples of the world. It enjoins people of the world to unite across national, political, cultural, racial and class boundaries to advance their common interests” (2016, p. 15). In this context, South Africa often acts as the voice representing African interests in multilateral organizations and engenders unity among nations. For example, South Africa's National Planning Committee advanced that “particular emphasis should be placed on the role that South Africa can play in mediating the role and influence of the BRICS group and African countries” (NDP, 2012, p. 235).

Subsequently, when “South Africa hosted the 2013 BRICS summit with the theme *BRICS and Africa: Partnership for Development, Integration and Industrialization*, it invited African leaders to attend, and participated in a range of discussions on the margins of the summit” (Alden & Schoeman, 2016, p. 13). The same invitation was extended to African leaders when the country hosted another BRICS summit in 2018, leading to talks about the establishment of what is called BRICS Plus; an extension of BRICS officially inclusive of other African states.

The values that underpin multilateralism and internationalism find resonance in South Africa's Ubuntu diplomacy. Its soft power lies in its ability to persuade other states to priorities shared interests in the absence of any outright dominance by any state. It is less prescriptive and open to dialogue and the plurality of ideas. Ubuntu is essentially a soft power philosophy, resource, and agency that carries with it an alluring moral authority that permeates all sectors that form South Africa's and Africa's social fabric.

6 SOUTH AFRICA'S SOFT POWER IN AFRICA: THE UPS AND DOWNS

During the apartheid era, the African National Congress (ANC) developed strong diplomatic ties with African countries. Guided by the principles that undergird the philosophy of Ubuntu, many independent African states rallied behind the ANC. According to Ogunnubi & Ettang (2016, p. 305). “even before the ANC gained power, South Africa was invited to join the Southern African Development Community (SADC)”. South Africa's 1994 democratic transition catapulted the nation onto the world stage because of the nature of its eventual peaceful transition, dubbed a *miracle*. The country assumed a darling imagery in the international system and “gained significant international credibility, acceptance and moral identity as a major African Leader” (Ogunnubi & Ettang, 2016, p. 305). However, this reputation in the African continent did not last long as the country soon took positions against African states that were met with strong criticism.

Living up to its international image of a human rights vanguard, in 1995 South Africa under the leadership of Nelson Mandela voted for Nigeria's suspension from the Commonwealth of Nations. This action was due to Nigeria's execution of political prisoners, dubbed the Ogoni Nine (Game, 2013). This diplomatic action backfired within the continent as it was met with a lot of criticism and doubt about South Africa's intentions within the region. This essentially led to the decline of South Africa's image within the continent and many of its foreign policy actions were viewed with suspicion. It was from that point on that South Africa's relations with Nigeria and the rest of the African states became a paradoxical relationship, characterized by a tense cordiality.

Following the incident, South Africa instituted a soft power-driven policy by lessening its immigration conditions for African immigrants. As desired, the policy resulted in an influx of African nationals into the country looking for greener pastures. Paradoxically, it became the most enduring challenge to the potency of South Africa's Ubuntu as a soft power tool and its African renaissance rhetoric given the now incessant violent xenophobic attacks against African nationals living in South Africa which came to the fore in 2008. Many of these attacks were dismissed by government as criminal activities, but at the heart of the dilemma lies a human security crisis and a culture of violent intolerance that contradicts Ubuntu.

Le Pere advanced that “migratory welfare pressures and settlement patterns since 1994 have been compounded by the harsh existential realities experienced by black South Africans. Most migrants and refugees find themselves caught in a Darwinian cycle of competition with local populations in meeting their basic needs” (2017, p. 48). As such, South Africa's domestic challenges of inequality, a high unemployment rate, poverty etc. create a breeding ground for hostility towards immigrants and have had a damaging impact on the country's image within the continent and beyond.

However, South Africa has nonetheless continued to deploy its soft power as a foreign policy tool to repair and strengthen its relations with African states, often shying away from the domineering history that comes with it. It is for this reason that the state is yet to fully embrace its leadership position within the continent. Ramose (2003) stated that from the perspective of Ubuntu, leadership is conferred through consensus within the community, and up to this point, the continent's leadership position has been conferred to it by outsider states or in academia, whose epistemology is largely influenced by the Eurocentric thought of competition and contestation within world politics.

To further improve its image within the continent, South Africa was part of championing reformation of the African Union (AU), it led the formation of the New Partnership for Africa's Development, and continues to represent Africa's interests on international platforms that it has membership in (Van Wyk, 2004). This extension of political goodwill is an effort to regain trust and solidarity with its neighboring countries and to demonstrate its commitment to the development of the continent. Through many such efforts and diplomatic engagements, "South Africa has literally been able to transform a hitherto pariah state under the apartheid era underlined by racial discrimination, to be a state widely accepted as Africa's regional power on the strength of a Soft Power modelled foreign policy" (Ogunnubi & Isike, 2015, p. 164). The country also established the African Renaissance Fund (ARF) in 2004 under the leadership of President Thabo Mbeki to contribute to a peaceful and prosperous Africa that is less dependent on foreign aid. According to the Mail and Guardian (2010) by the year 2010 "the ARF had, since 2004, allocated over R1.2-billion to fund projects in over 17 African countries".

Despite the abovementioned efforts, South Africa's foreign policy has continued to be criticized over its diplomatic actions. Viewing some of these controversial cases through the lens of Ubuntu offer a different perspective. During the country's first tenure in the United Nations Security Council in 2007/2008, there were speculations about the country's foreign policy and its possible disjuncture from its human rights orientation. "Western expectations that South Africa would take a leading role in criticising human rights violations in Zimbabwe and Myanmar/Burma were misplaced as Pretoria sought to carve out a position in defence of national sovereignty." (Le Pere, 2017, p. 39). Furthermore, in 2015 South Africa bestowed Sudanese president Omar Al-Bashir with diplomatic immunity, enabling his attendance of the AU summit hosted in the country. This was well after the International Criminal Court had issued a warrant for his arrest under the Roman Statute to which South Africa is a signatory (Qobo & Nyathi, 2016).

The country received a lot of criticism around these issues, but as explained by Mangena (2016), the philosophy of Ubuntu as a social construct does not prioritize the individual over the community. If anything, the wellbeing of the community comes first, because it follows the logic that when the community is secure, the individual is most likely also secure. The disregard of the International Criminal Court warrant was related to the notion that the International Criminal Court was biased in its application of international law and had strongly targeted African states, which further perpetuates their marginalization in the international system. The same normative framework was adopted in the United Nations Security Council by challenging the lack of transformation and biases inherent in the organization (Isike & Ogunnubi, 2017).

At a macro level, it was aimed at protesting the lack of transformation in institutions of global governance. It was further motivated by the need to establish a more equitable international

system, moving away from what Ali Mazrui (1990) referred to as a “dialogue of the deaf”, where marginal states are passive participants in global governance. The fundamental goal is to engender transformation in the international system, which fosters an equal and harmonious coexistence of heterogeneous identities, inherent in the geopolitical system. Based on the above criticisms and the correspondent logic found in the philosophy of Ubuntu, South Africa uses its soft power capabilities not only to enhance its image in the international system but also as an instrument of influence, which can be characterized as offensive soft power when the need arises, based on regional solidarity with African nations.

It was thus rewarded in some ways with the election of Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma as the AU Commission Chairperson in 2012 and this is seen as evidence of the success of its soft power projection (Ogunnubi & Isike, 2015). South Africa was also given the go-ahead by AU member states in January 2018 to be the only African state to bid for the 2019 UN Security Council nonpermanent member seat (Institute for Security Studies Africa, 2018). This is a clear indication of the drive toward dismantling the tensions of contestation within the continent and reinforcing African solidarity in the international system.

7 CONCLUSION

The soft power embedded in South Africa's foreign policy is identifiable through a content analysis of the 2011 White Paper and other relevant official government publications that espouse the state's foreign policy. Undergirded by Ubuntu, South Africa's soft power context provides a broader understanding of the concept of soft power within an African context, by positioning South Africa within the concept as a different geopolitical location from the United States, on which the initial conceptualization was based.

The soft power inherent in Ubuntu shares a common objective with Nye's original conceptualization in terms of the ability to shape the preferences of other nations. Also, they both acknowledge the inherent interdependence within humanity. The disjuncture is in the conditions and methods that are conducive to establishing their preferred policy outcomes. Unlike the realism that undergirds Nye's notion of soft power, Ubuntu does not seek an imbalance of power between two nations, rather it seeks a balance of power between nations. Additionally, the soft power inherent in Ubuntu does not utilise the concept as a supplement to the state's hard power capabilities in pursuing its foreign policy objectives.

Focused on the African continent as the first audience of South Africa's soft power projection, the article established that Pretoria has persuasive power that is not acquired or wielded through ambivalence and force against differing views or the use of propaganda. Rather, its soft power lies in its ability and willingness to seek consensus with other nations through multilateralism to achieve the global good. South Africa's soft power strategy appeals to the continent's internal values, as opposed to fostering a new set of values. Evidently, when the Ubuntu philosophy is adopted as a soft power philosophy and tool, it is a progressive approach to foreign policy that fosters equitable and just development for all.

In this way, through formulating its foreign policy, undergirded by the soft power inherent in Ubuntu, South Africa has essentially managed to create a sense of global communal relations around itself. It is also Pretoria's ability to use shared interests as a unifying factor that enables it to set the agenda and enact its foreign policy objectives, which has been interpreted as giving it moral authority within the continent.

However, if South Africa seeks genuine regional leadership, it must be from the inhabitants of the African continent themselves. This requires South Africa to establish consistency in its foreign policy rhetoric and action guided by the philosophy of Ubuntu. For example, Pretoria can create an enabling environment that is conducive to a successful foreign policy engagement with Africa and its nationals in South Africa. To do so, the government must prioritize economic development and uplift its citizenry, reducing the dire competitiveness among citizens and with African nationals in the country over basic needs. Over and above that, the government should formulate programs that are oriented towards cultural exchange to foster goodwill, understanding and hospitality toward African nationals. Such remedial actions can effectively change the image of South Africa as an inhospitable *South Holland* to other people of African descent.

Finally the philosophy of Ubuntu will play a pivotal role in achieving the AU's Agenda 2063 aspirations, enabling African nations to selflessly work in unison to liberate the continent from its political, social and economic challenges and for the rest of the World, Ubuntu as a soft power variant, resource and tool also provides an opportunity to establish unity and solidarity among nations to combat numerous transnational challenges, where states will act not solely on national interests but also in the interest of the global community this will be even when the initiating state does not stand to reap immediate and direct rewards from a particular action.

Biographies

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