Ubuntu and Citizen Diplomacy: A Panacea and Tools for Diaspora Organisation Engagement in Curbing Crime and conflict in South Africa

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Abstract

Conflict is part of human existence as there is hardly any relationship that does not become tense. However, conflict can become violent if it is not managed by the parties involved, especially when they are from different cultures. A typical case is the perennial xenophobic violence that has bedevilled South Africa because of migrants from other African countries. This paper probed into the

roles and efforts that diaspora organisations in South Africa are making in establishing a mutually beneficial relationship that can bring about peace and curb crime with the concept of citizen diplomacy and *Ubuntu* philosophy. Using a secondary data, the paper relied on text, websites and articles from Google Scholar and other search engines to aggregate literature to interrogate the subject matter. The paper used conflict theory to argue that, as long as groups exist and interact, they will always have struggles. The paper concluded that there was a need for an intentional approach for citizen and *Ubuntu* diplomacy, especially by African diaspora organisations by initiating and sustaining programmes that will look beyond conflicts by the group, and foster mutually beneficial friendship, and the foreign missions of the countries need to articulate the policy and support the efforts of the diaspora organisations.

Keywords: *Citizen Diplomacy, Conflict, Crime, Diaspora organisations, Ubuntu diplomacy.*

Contextual Background

In their work titled

> Evaluating and Measuring the Impact of Citizen Diplomacy: Current Status and Future Directions", Bhandari and Belyavina (2011) lays the groundwork for citizen diplomacy by quoting Senator Fulbright thus: "The shape of the world a generation from now will be influenced far more by how well we communicate the values of our society to others than by our military or diplomatic superiority (Senator J. William Fulbright, 1964).

From that thought by Senator Fulbright in 1964, it seems that today's world is interconnected and intertwined more with economics, politics and security among nations than ever before. However, Bhandari and Belyavina (2011) believe that the impetus for communicating across borders is increasingly coming from individual citizens who daily interact with the world through live and digital communication channels. Citizen diplomacy combines two seemingly disparate ideas: private citizens engaging in individual endeavours that serve their own interests, and diplomacy, which includes a framework for international cooperation. Citizen diplomacy refers to a variety of actions and activities that individuals can engage in to strengthen ties between individuals and communities and to advance the goals of public diplomacy.

Consequently, citizen diplomacy is an essential component of public diplomacy.

Tyler et al. (2016), in their own postulation, state that diplomacy's main functions include facilitating communication, negotiating agreements, gathering intelligence and minimising friction in the practice of international relations between states. Further, Tyler et al. agree that these functions promoted by institutions have long been the major channels for conducting relations between states. They also argue that, though the practice of diplomacy has always been adaptive, it has recently had to flex sharply to accommodate the changes brought by globalisation and technological change (Kerr & Wiseman, 2017). One change is the increasing discussion of citizen diplomacy. Generally defined, citizen diplomacy is about how citizens as private individuals can make a difference in world affairs (Tyler et al., 2016).

However, in this engagement and interaction by citizens of different countries, there is bound to be conflict, especially since one would have migrated to another's country. Sometimes, this conflict is a fall-out of perceived or real activities that might border on some interpretation of crime. An operational explanation of crime is that it is an illegal act for which someone can be punished by the government, especially actions like a gross violation of law. The website of the government of Netherlands[1] states that crime is any behaviour, act, activity or event that is punishable by law, and can involve violence, sexual harassment or illicit drugs use or trade, traffic offence and road rage, and burglary. When these crimes are committed by migrants' community, and reported in the media in a sustained manner, it can lead to conflict between the local community and the migrant community.

Conflict can then be said to be a serious disagreement or argument that often becomes protracted, and it is part of human existence. However, conflict can become more intense if it is between two different groups that are dissimilar socially and culturally like the migrant and the host community. In the heart of most of these conflicts is a perceived competition for economic and social space, and even civilisation, which in a complex society, is characterised by urban development, social stratification, a form of government and symbolic systems of communication (Williams, 2013).

One of Huntington's (1993) arguments in his work – *The Clash of Civilisations* – is that the world is shrinking because global interactions are

increasing, which intensifies "civilisation consciousness" and the awareness of differences between civilisations and groups within civilisations. This argument can further be stretched among migrants that live within a civilisation but still retain their original civilisation. This positioning tends to increase tension that leads to crises. Similarly, Haviland, Prins and McBride (2013) attempt to unravel what makes people different from one another, which often is the root cause of many conflicts in South Africa.

The difference among people is normal in humanity, but these people usually share common values prescribed by their values. One of such values, particularly among the Bantus descendants, is *Ubuntu* (Akpan & Mkhize, 2022). *Ubuntu* is best defined as an African philosophy that emphasises "being self through others". It is a type of humanism that can be expressed in Zulu as 'I am because of who we all are' and *ubuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* (Mugumbate & Nyanguru, 2013).

Ubuntu Diplomacy

This paper examines how *Ubuntu* and community diplomacy can be a panacea and tool for diaspora engagement in curbing crimes and conflicts in South Africa, and how diaspora organisations can use their structure to engage and communicate with the host communities with a view to resolving conflicts and curbing crimes in South Africa.

Peace among African groups is important because it promotes economic growth and social development. Therefore, the African Union is actively promoting these ideals through policy formulation and decision-making aimed at ensuring that Africa achieves Aspiration 4 of Agenda 2063 (African Union, 2015) whose framework aspires for a peaceful and secure Africa through the use of mechanisms that promote a dialogue-centred approach to conflict prevention and resolution, as well as establishing a culture of peace and tolerance nurtured in Africa's children and youths. The Agenda 2063 flagship initiative of Silencing the Guns by 2020 is at the heart of efforts to make Africa a more peaceful and stable continent. Agreeing with Flahaux and De Haas (2016), Akpan and Mkhize (2022) assert that Africa is a continent of mass migration, which is caused by poverty, violent conflict, and environmental stress.

In their seminal work on the subject matter, Akpan and Mkhize (2022) argue that, since many of these African migrants are descendants of Bantu, the concept of *Ubuntu* can be mobilised and deployed in managing the tension between them. Therefore, *Ubuntu* diplomacy,

which underpins the concept of a common humanity, is defined as an approach to international relations that respects all nations and cultures. According to Madise and Isike (2020), in agreeing with White Paper on South Africa's Foreign Policy titled "Building a Better World: The Diplomacy of Ubuntu[2], argue that *Ubuntu* champions collaboration, cooperation and building partnerships over conflicts. *Ubuntu* is generally used by Bantu nations across Africa, and it means literally "I am because you are" (Akpan & Mkhize, 2022). Nonetheless, Amadise and Isike (2020) opine that it is an African philosophy of worldview that emphasises the world's common humanity and its consequent interdependence.

Ubuntu core principles and values include communality, respect, dignity, value, acceptance, sharing, co-responsibility, humaneness, social justice, fairness, personhood, morality, group solidarity, compassion, joy, love, fulfilment, conciliation, etc. However, in recent history in South Africa, these values are in contradiction with the intermittent explosions of Afrophobia masked as xenophobia, Operation Dudula, an anti-undocumented migrant vigilante group against mostly black Africans, and harsh immigration policies against migrants including skilled workers and refugees and asylees.

Consequently, the migrants' community will need to evolve a system and programme to engage the local community, especially the black South Africans, using their diaspora organisations and mobilising the doctrine of citizen diplomacy.

Citizen Diplomacy

In his work on the implications of the African Union (AU) Agenda 2063, Tella (2018) argues that African governments must pursue vigorously a strategy of embedding the agenda's ideals in their soft power through the concept and application of citizen diplomacy. The Centre for Citizen Diplomacy based in Washington, District Columbia (DC), United States of America (USA) describes citizen diplomacy as a plank of building individual and collective global fluency which, in turn, creates economic opportunity, contributes to peace and stability and develops leadership skills through global problem-solving. The centre believes that every individual should appreciate the positive impact they have as a citizen diplomat and should use that skill to share information and ideas

instantaneously and work together to resolve common challenges. Often, individuals do not appreciate the ideals enunciated by the Centre for Citizens Diplomacy as human survival becomes imperative and, for some that are excluded from the formal society and economic opportunities, may resort to crime which, in turn, causes conflicts among the locals and the migrant communities in South Africa.

Citizen diplomacy is about how citizens as private individuals can make a difference in world affairs (Tyler et al., 2016). Further, Davies and Kaufman (2002), who call citizen diplomacy "second track" diplomacy, sees it as the gathering together of professionals and community leaders to resolve issues without the presence of institutional diplomatic apparatus. It is considered "new" diplomacy because it explains how society-centric citizen diplomacy differs from state-centric public diplomacy (Fulda, 2019). Citizen diplomacy is the idea that every global citizen has the right, if not the obligation, to engage across cultures and build shared understanding through meaningful person-to-person interactions. According to World Boston in their 2023 website of world affairs council, citizen diplomacy, or public diplomacy, is the grassroots of foreign relations. Traditional diplomacy takes place between states; public diplomacy involves person-to-person contact between citizens of different countries, whether by professionals, volunteers, students or travellers. This kind of contact is strategic because, if well harnessed, it can dowse tension between the migrant community and the host community since it is at that level that conflict exists the most.

According to the United States Department of State, in an article in 2020 and titled "*You are a Citizen Diplomat*, citizen diplomacy, also known as people's diplomacy or public diplomacy, is the political concept of average citizens engaging as representatives of a country or cause either inadvertently or by design. Bhandari and Belyavina (2011) argue in their article on the impact of Americans working, volunteering and attending school in foreign countries that people-to-people contact is becoming one of the most important aspects of diplomacy, and citizen diplomats are increasingly supplementing traditional forms of political diplomacy. This is critical, especially since many countries have strained bilateral and state-level relations.

The concept gained popularity during the Cold War era between the United States and the then-Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) when physicist Robert W. Fuller visited the Soviet Union frequently in the 1970s and 1980s in an effort to alleviate the Cold War. David M.

Hoffman coined the term "citizen diplomacy" in an article about Fuller's work that appeared in *Co-Evolution Quarterly* in 1981.

The African Union (AU) consequently set up a department known as Citizens and Diaspora Organisations Directorate (CIDO) in 2000. The department is responsible for implementing the African Union's vision of a people-oriented and people-driven organisation based on a partnership between governments, civil society and diasporas. The directorate consists of the civil society and diaspora divisions, and their objective to encourage and coordinate diaspora and civil society engagement through Article 3 of the Protocol on Amendments (African Union, 2000). Although the focus is more on Africans in the diaspora, the goal is to mainstream civil society engagement into the AU's processes, departments and organs. Further, within the migration and development nexus, CIDO, through the diaspora division, is poised to build a global African family by ensuring African diaspora participation in the continent's integration and development agenda. However, these lofty ideals have not worked on the African continent, especially in South Africa that has witnessed a wave of xenophobic attacks on the migrants community, especially the Black African migrant community, accusing them of being involved in criminal activities and usurping their jobs. This shows not only a clash of civilisation but also the failure of an effective diaspora and civil society engagement through the use of citizen diplomacy in curbing conflicts exacerbated by allegations of crimes by local community against African migrants.

This study, therefore, explores the availability and activities of diaspora organisations in South Africa, the organisational structure, the support they receive from the diplomatic missions of their home country, and the role they play in curbing members of their communities to refrain from criminal activities, either real or imagined, that can trigger conflicts with the locals, and how they manage these conflicts.

Diaspora Organisations in South Africa and South African Diasporas in other Countries

Diaspora, as defined by *The Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, New Edition, 2022 dictionary, is the movement, migration or scattering of a people away from an established or ancestral homeland. It is a large group of people with a similar heritage or homeland who have since moved out to places all over the world. According to Globalisation Partners International (GPI), diaspora refers to people who have left their home

countries, usually involuntarily, and moved to other countries around the world. Examples of these communities include the expulsion of Jews from Judea, the enslavement of Africans and, most recently, the migration, exile and refugee status of Syrians and Ukrainians.

According to Shuval (2000) and Cohen (2022), there are different types of diasporas, and they in agreement describe them as victim diasporas; labour and imperial diasporas; trade diasporas; cultural diasporas; and global – deterritorialised (*a weakening of ties between culture and place, or the removal of cultural subjects and objects from a certain location in space and time*) diasporas. However, these diaspora types may overlap and change in character over time (Cohen, 2022).

These diasporas often coalesce into a community and collectively form associations among themselves called diaspora organisations which are simply organisations based on the origin of a certain people in a particular place or country. This is a norm in countries, including South Africa, and continents that are recipients of migrants. Stanford Libraries have a website that contains links to different African diaspora associations that demonstrate the importance of diaspora organisations, and to note how Africans have, just like the Jewish diaspora, formed numbers of organisations.

According to SA Goodnews, the South African diaspora consists of South African emigrants and their descendants who live outside of South Africa. The United Kingdom has the highest concentrations of South African emigrants, followed by Australia, the United States, New Zealand and Canada. According to Statistics South Africa's most recent data, the most popular overseas destinations for South African émigrés between 2006 and 2016 were Australia (26.0%), the United Kingdom (25.0%), the United States (13.4%), New Zealand (9.5%), Germany (6.0%), American Samoa (United States territory) (4.4%), the United Arab Emirates (4.2%), Cuba (4.0%), Canada (3.0%) and China (2.0%). Most of the South African Jews immigrated to Israel. These movements, especially by white skilled workers, started before the 1994 elections and continued as the economic decline of South Africa continued, especially from the medical field (Crush, Chikanda, & Pendleton, 2012).

Conversely, while South Africans, primarily white skilled workers, are leaving the country; other nationals, particularly from Asia and Africa, are migrating to the country. According to Akpan and Mkhize (2022), citing Dodson (2010), the origins of immigrants in South Africa include many African countries, including Angola, Botswana, the Democratic Republic

of the Congo, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Somalia, Sudan, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

These countries have had to organise themselves into diaspora organisatons to manage the affairs of their compatriots, protect them and intervene in situations when their nationals are in conflict with the local laws, and ensure that they live in harmony.

Conflict Theory

Conflict theory – first developed by Karl Marx – emphasises the role of power struggles between different groups in shaping society. It argues that societies change as a result of conflict between a dominant group and a subordinate group (Marx, 1973). According to the theory, society is in a state of perpetual conflict as a result of competition for limited resources, in this case, the local community and the migrant community. Coser (1957) notes that conflicts usually occur during any social change, and this is why class formation and conflicts have long been some of the most focused themes in social change and research (Güçlü, 2014).

According to Omer and Jabeen (2016), social class inequality is deeply rooted in societies. They argue that all spheres of life are subjected to this disparity. They agree with Marx (1973) who believes that the two classes (ruling and the subject) are constantly in a struggle. However, the first one (ruling class) remains in the same positions due to economic superiority over the years compared to the proletariat (the second one or subjects) who experience restricted social mobility. According to conflict theory, domination and power, rather than consensus and conformity, maintain social order. Those with wealth and power, according to the theory, try to keep it by any means possible, most notably by oppressing the poor and powerless. One fundamental premise of conflict theory is that individuals and groups in society will strive to maximise their own wealth and power. Karl Marx (1973) maintains that the antagonistic relationship between social classes, particularly the relationship between the owners of capital he calls the "bourgeoisie "and the working class which he calls the "proletariat", will continue. The former will see the actions of the latter from the perspective of crime, while the latter sees its struggle as a means of surviving the oppressive tendencies of the former.

Conflict theory is also applicable to crime. According to Black (2014), crime, or criminal behaviour, reflects the conflict between social, economic and political interest groups. It can be the result of either cultural conflict or of group conflict. When it occurs in the domain of

culture, it means that people are acting within the normative parameters of their own group; however, this behaviour conflicts with the norms and standards of the dominant group who make the laws. In context, conflict theory focuses on crime as a result of intergroup conflicts over scarce resources.

In relation to this paper, this theory manifests sufficiently in the struggle between the host or local community and the diaspora community where the former sees the latter as stealing their jobs and upsetting the social class and order. Similarly, the latter (diaspora community) believes that the former is oppressive. In trying to justify and displace the migrant community, the host community has labelled the migrants as criminals and has mobilised nationalists' tendencies of the other locals to war against the migrants, and this has resulted in Afrophobic attacks masked as xenophobia (Akpan & Mkhize, 2022), and many times go on street protests to force the government to initiate anti-immigrant policies.

However, the diaspora community can organise themselves and initiate citizen diplomacy, using the concept of *Ubuntu* to create an atmosphere that will encourage interactions and programmes between each other, and reduce the element of conflict, though it may not totally disappear. The migrant community must realise that they live in the communities of their host and, in the event of conflicts, will be early casualties before the law enforcement officers arrive. Therefore, in being proactive and investing in efforts to manage conflict, either induced by crime or inter-personal disagreement, the migrant community, through their diaspora organisations, must be deliberate in reaching out and engaging the host – South African community – to prevent any xenophobic attack. The dual approach of *Ubuntu* and citizen diplomacy must be applied.

The Intersection of Ubuntu and Citizen Diplomacy by Diaspora Organisations

Davies and Kaufman (2002) argues that citizen diplomacy falls more within the premise of private individuals that are community-spirited who wish to engage with the host community for prosperity. This is also corroborated by Tyler et al. (2016) that citizen diplomacy is the rallying of private individuals and organisations to create a mutually beneficial relationship. However, the effort cannot be left entirely to the diaspora organisations, but the home government must get involved, not only for

diplomatic reasons but also for economic considerations as a good citizen relations will boost trade and commerce among the people. Tella (2018) insists that African governments must factor in the concept in their diplomatic doctrines and be intentional in supporting the diaspora organisations in this regard.

Armed with this orientation, and support by the home government, the diaspora organisations can, therefore, mobilise *Ubuntu* as the fulcrum of their citizen diplomatic activities. *Ubuntu* is roundly described and emphasised as being yourself through other people: live-and-let-us-live philosophy. It is African and a form of humanism which can be expressed and adopted to build a brotherly or kinsman kind of community (Mugumbate & Nyanguru, 2013) and keep activities that could be interpreted as crimes from the community, thereby keeping unnecessary conflicts at bay. This role of diaspora organisations can play a big role in reducing xenophobia (Akpan & Mkhize, 2022). It, therefore, behoves the various migrant communities to form organisations to act as watchdogs on their members not to be involved in crimes that can enable conflicts, but to also initiate intentional activities that will create an atmosphere of camaraderie between the two communities who are related as Bantus.

Nigeria has a large number of population in South Africa with many skilled professionals in the academia, medicine, law, business etc. and have often being stereotyped by the local community who has refused to separate the skilled professionals and their contributions to the society from the unskilled ones. As a response to this stereotyping and to oraganise themselves, an organisation known as the Nigerian Union in South Africa (NUSA) was formed but was weakened by internal wrangling, and another organisation called the Nigerian Citizens Association South Africa (NICASA) was borne. Currently, NUSA and NICASA are existing, but the latter seems to be prominent as its election was held inside the premises of the Nigerian consulate and witnessed by the Consul General. There is, however, a need for both diaspora organisations to merge so that they can address the issues bedevilling their members in South Africa. The Nigerian Consulate can facilitate this reconciliation and merger.

The Ghanaian diaspora organisation is also not active and are not known to have engaged in any meaningful citizenship and *Ubuntu* diplomacy. According to DW online, the German media group research by the Peace and Development Centre Ethiopia at the University of Cape Town shows that Ethiopians make up a large number of the 67,000

refugees, 230,000 asylum seekers and other undocumented migrants who enter South Africa, but there is also a dearth of information on their diaspora organisations. A study, "Migration and Tourism: The Challenges of Zimbabwean Diaspora in South Africa", done by Serumaga-Zake and Unisa (2017) is quiet on any Zimbabwean diaspora organisation, though the country has the highest population of African migrants into South Africa due to the countries' economic challenges, and it being contiguous to Zimbabwe.

Many African diaspora organisations seem to have more presence on social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter (now X), Instagram and LinkedIn than on functional websites. However, despite that, there is a dearth of contents on their activities on citizenship and *Ubuntu* diplomacy. In an online zoom lecture organised by the Nigerian Citizens Association South Africa (NICASA), titled "Rebranding Nigerian image in South Africa", the need for citizen diplomacy based on the *Ubuntu* philosophy was emphasised as a way forward in building a relationship that will mutually benefit the host community and the migrant communities.

Suffice to state that all immigrants, including the African migrants, can settle in South Africa if they meet the requirements put in place by the Department of Home Affairs. However, the Indian diaspora is more organised and focused. Although there are Indians that came to South Africa through the indenture programme in 1860, they have since settled and integrated into the society. There are, however, the other Indian migrants that came at a later stage with work visas or short stay visas, but ended up settling in South Africa, and have made a mark through their diaspora organisation which is not only structured, but also has a programme on citizenship diplomacy. Dickinson (2015) argues that the following strategies, overseas missions and consulates are central to the successes of diaspora engagement strategies; India's diaspora strategies in South Africa involve articulatory practices of a wide range of actors; articulatory practices are informed by economic, political and identity trajectories; articulatory practices resolve tensions and contestations of diaspora engagement were mobilised to make the Indian diaspora organisation successful.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Dijkzeul and Fauser (2020) argue that diaspora organisations are strategically placed to leverage the social capital of diaspora communities

to influence citizenship regimes in both countries of origin and destination. They conclude that diaspora organisations could build strong transnational advocacy networks by connecting local and national organisations, partnering with domestic institutions and learning from other ethnic or migrant groups on how to integrate with the host communities, and be active by promoting person-to-person activities with the domestic communities.

Therefore, there is a need for African diaspora organisations in South Africa to organise themselves so that they can engage the locals more constructively, using the *Ubuntu* and citizen diplomacy approach which is, indeed, a panacea and tools for diaspora organisation engagement. This engagement will help in educating their members to minimise crime and conflict situations with the host communities, and they can also initiate business and mentorship programmes where necessary to empower members of the host communities. Diaspora organisations need to be deliberate in converting conflicts into opportunities for mutually growth and friendship.

Further, diaspora organisations should also engage in organising cultural, entertainment and sporting events that will create sustained interactions with their host communities and promote a person-to-person relationship which is the basis of *Ubuntu*. There is a need for the home countries, through their respective foreign missions, to support diaspora organisations in articulating an enduring citizenship and *Ubuntu* diplomacy with a view to reducing conflicts and curbing crimes by the migrants.

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