

Chapter Two

Information Ethics in the African Context¹

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1. Introduction

Since the second half of the twentieth century, computer scientists like Norbert Wiener (1918 - 1962) and Joseph Weizenbaum (1966) have raised public awareness of the societal challenges of computer technology. In the beginning, the academic discussion was focused on the responsibility of computer professionals. However, for scientists like Wiener and Weizenbaum, the impact of computer technology was understood to be something that concerned society as a whole.

Half a century after Wiener's seminal work, the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) developed the vision:

[...] to build a people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society, where everyone can create, access, utilise and share information and knowledge, enabling individuals, communities and peoples to achieve their full potential in promoting their sustainable development and improving their quality of life, premised on the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and respecting fully and upholding the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) (WSIS, 2003).

The WSIS proposed a political agenda, namely:

[...] to harness the potential of information and communication technology to promote the development goals of the Millennium Declaration, namely: the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger; achievement of universal primary education; promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women; reduction of child mortality; improvement of maternal health; to combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases; ensuring environmental sustainability; and development of global partnerships for development for the attainment of a more peaceful, just and prosperous world (WSIS, 2003).

The Geneva Declaration of Principles states:

56. The Information Society should respect peace and uphold the fundamental values of freedom, equality, solidarity, tolerance, shared responsibility, and respect for nature.

57. We acknowledge the importance of ethics for the Information Society, which should foster justice, and the dignity and worth of the human person. The widest possible

¹ This contribution is based on the following papers: [1] Information Ethics for and from Africa. Keynote address at the first Africa Information Ethics Conference (Pretoria 2007), published in the *International Review of Information Ethics (IRIE)*. Online: <http://www.i-r-i-e.net/issue7.htm> and reprinted in the *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology*, 59 (7): 19, 2008. [2] Digital Ethics, presented at the 2009 Global Forum on Civilization and Peace organised by the Academy of Korean Studies, Seoul 2009. Published by The Academy of Korean Studies (ed.), 2009 *Civilization and Peace*, Paju: Jimoondang 2010, pp. 2003-2014. Online: <http://www.capurro.de/korea.html>; [3] Information Ethics in Africa. Past, present and future activities (2007-2010). Report presented at the WSIS Forum 2010, Geneva, May 11, 2010. Online: http://www.capurro.de/wsis2010_africa_infoethics.html.

protection should be accorded to the family and to enable it to play its crucial role in society.

58. The use of ICTs and content creation should respect human rights and fundamental freedoms of others, including personal privacy, and the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion in conformity with relevant international instruments.

59. All actors in the Information Society should take appropriate actions and preventive measures, as determined by law, against abusive uses of ICTs, such as illegal and other acts motivated by racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, and related intolerance, hatred, violence, all forms of child abuse, including paedophilia and child pornography, and trafficking in, and exploitation of, human beings (Geneva Declaration of Principles, 2003).

The participants of the Tunis summit shared the Geneva vision with the following words:

2. We reaffirm our desire and commitment to build a people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society, premised on the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, international law and multilateralism, and respecting fully and upholding the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, so that people everywhere can create, access, utilize and share information and knowledge, to achieve their full potential and to attain the internationally agreed development goals and objectives, including the Millennium Development Goals (Tunis Commitment, 18 November, 2005).

The economy and public policy of modern societies rely heavily on digital networks. The importance of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) for the economy became obvious with the burst of the 2000 dot com bubble and was one of the main factors leading to the recent world financial and economic crisis. Beyond the individual responsibility of politicians, bankers and managers, there is a systemic issue that has to do with the digitalisation of financial and economic communication and information. Digital capitalism was and still is able to bypass national and international law, control and monitor institutions and mechanisms, as well as codes of practice and good governance, which lead to a global crisis of trust not only within the system, but also with regard to the system itself. In order to develop a people-oriented and sustainable world economic system and national and international monitoring agencies, as well as international law, self-binding rules are needed in order to establish a sustainable system based on fair play.

ICT has a strong impact on public policy, leading to a transformation of 20th century democracy into a more participatory one. Interactive media weakens the hierarchical one-to-many structure of traditional hierarchic mass-media, giving individuals the capacity to become senders of messages and not just receivers of information. ICTs are widely used for political participation and grass-roots protest groups, as well as by liberation and peace movements. By the same token, online social networks make possible new structures of political surveillance, censorship and control of individuals and whole societies (Coenen et al., 2012). We live in message societies (Capurro & Holgate, 2011), where the Internet has become a local and global basic social communication infrastructure. Freedom of access needs to be brought to the forefront as it is a fundamental ethical principle similar to freedom of speech and freedom of the press. Some of the rights stated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, such as the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion (Art. 18), the right to freedom of opinion and expression (Art. 19), and the right to peaceful assembly and association (Art. 20), need to be explicitly interpreted and defined, taking the new and unique affordances of digital media into consideration. Lawrence Lessig envisaged a situation in which the universality of cyberspace is endangered by local codes of the market, the software industry, the laws of nation states, and moral traditions. He writes:

If we do nothing, the code of cyberspace will change. The invisible hand will change it in a predictable way. To do nothing is to embrace at least that. It is to accept the changes that

this change in code will bring about. It is to accept a cyberspace that is less free, or differently free, than the space it was before (Lessig, 1999:109).

A free Internet can foster peace and democracy, but it can also be used for manipulation and control. For this reason, I consider it a necessity to strive for a future Internet governance regime on the basis of intercultural deliberation, democratic values and human rights. I advocate for the expansion of human rights to include the rights of non-human life and nature (Capurro, 2008a). The present ecological crisis is a clear sign that we have to change our lives in order to become not masters, but keepers of our natural environment.

2. Information Ethics

Societal debates on ethical issues have rapidly increased, particularly since the rise of the Internet. I define Information Ethics in a narrower sense as dealing with the impact of digital ICTs on society and the environment, as well as with ethical questions about the Internet digital information and communication media (media ethics) in particular. Information Ethics, in a broader sense, deals with information and communication, including, but not limited to, digital media. The main topics of Information Ethics are: intellectual property, privacy, security, information overload, digital divide, gender discrimination, and censorship (Ess, 2009; Himma & Tavani, 2008). They are objects of ethical scrutiny not only on the basis of universal rights and principles, but also with regard to cultural differences, as well as historical and geographical singularities leading to different kinds of theoretical foundations and practical options. This field of ethics is called intercultural Information Ethics (Capurro, 2008; Capurro et al., 2007; Hongladarom & Ess, 2007; Capurro, 2006). It deals, for instance, with the question of how human cultures can flourish in a global digital environment while avoiding uniformity or isolation. The idea of intercultural Information Ethics emerged in October 2004 during the international symposium 'Localizing the Internet. Ethical Issues in Intercultural Perspective' (Capurro et al., 2007).

3. Privacy

An example of the relevance of the intercultural approach concerns the concept of privacy from Western and Buddhist perspectives. While in Western cultures privacy is closely related to the self, Buddhism relies on the tenet of non-self; therefore the social perceptions, as well as the concept of privacy, are different (Nakada & Tamura, 2005; Capurro, 2005; Capurro et al., 2013). However, a justification of privacy from a Buddhist perspective, based on the concept of compassion, seems possible and plausible (Hongladarom, 2007).

4. Surveillance

Digital surveillance of public spaces is supposed to ensure safety and security facing unintentional or intentional dangers, for instance from criminal or terrorist attacks. But, at the same time, it threatens the autonomy, anonymity and trust that build the basis of democratic societies. New technologies allowing the tracking of individuals through Radio-frequency Identification (RFID) (or ICT implants are similarly ambiguous with regard to the implicit dangers and benefits, therefore they need special scrutiny and monitoring (ETICA, 2011; ETHICBOTS, 2008; EGE, 2005 and 2012).

5. Robotics

Recent advances in robotics show a wide range of applications in everyday lives beyond their

industrial and military applications. Robots are mirrors of ourselves. What concepts of sociality are conceptualised and instantiated by robotics? An intercultural ethical dialogue – beyond the question of a code of ethics to become part of robots to make them ‘moral machines’ (Wallach & Allen, 2009) – on human-robot interaction is still in its infancy (Capurro & Nagenborg, 2009).

6. Information overload

The issue of information overload has a major impact in the everyday lives of millions of people (Capurro, 2005b). We lack a systematic pathology of the information society (Capurro, 2012). Similarly, the question of Internet addiction, particularly in young generations, is worrisome. For example, there is a growing need for cell-phone-free times and places, in order to protect ourselves from the necessity of being permanently available.

7. Digital divide

The so-called digital divide should not be considered just a problem of technical access to the Internet, but an issue of how people can better manage their lives using new interactive digital media while avoiding the dangers of cultural exploitation, homogenisation, colonialism, and discrimination. Individuals, as well as societies, must become aware of different kinds of ‘assemblages’ between traditional and digital media, to be able to relate them to their needs, interests and cultural backgrounds (Ong & Collier, 2005; Scheule et al., 2004). The vision of an inclusive Information Society, as developed during the WSIS, must be global and plural at the same time. Concepts like hybridisation or polyphony are ethical markers that should be taken into account when envisaging new possibilities of freedom and peace in a world shaped more and more by digital technology.

8. Electronic waste

Electronic waste (e-Waste) has become a major issue of digital ethics (Feilhauer & Zehle, 2009). It deals with the disposal and recycling of all kinds of ICT devices that already, today, have devastating consequences on humans and the environment, particularly when exported to Third World countries. Issues of sustainability and global justice should be urgently addressed, together with the opportunities offered by the same media to promote better shelter, reduce hunger and combat diseases.

The ethical reflection on these issues belongs to a theory on the art of living, following some paths of thought by the French philosopher Michel Foucault, who distinguishes the following kinds of technologies: ‘technologies of production, which permit us to produce, transform, or manipulate things, technologies of sign systems, which permit us to use signs, meanings, symbols, or significations, technologies of power which determine the conduct of individuals and submit them to certain ends or domination, an objectivising of the subject’, and ‘technologies of the self, which permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality’ (Foucault, 1988:18). How can we ensure that the benefits of information technology are not only distributed equitably, but that they can also be used by the people to shape their own lives? (Capurro, 2005a).

In a report on *Being Human: Human-computer interaction in the year 2020*, the result of a meeting organised by Microsoft Research in 2007, the editors write:

The new technologies allow new forms of control or decentralisation, encouraging some forms of social interaction at the expense of others, and promoting certain values while dismissing alternatives. For instance, the iPod can be seen as a device for urban

indifference, the mobile phone as promoting addiction to social contact and the Web as subverting traditional forms of governmental and media authority. Neural networks, recognition algorithms and data-mining all have cultural implications that need to be understood in the wider context beyond their technical capabilities. The bottom line is that computer technologies are not neutral – they are laden with human, cultural and social values. These can be anticipated and designed for, or can emerge and evolve through use and abuse. In a multicultural world, too, we have to acknowledge that there will often be conflicting value systems, where design in one part of the world becomes something quite different in another, and where the meaning and value of a technology are manifest in diverse ways. Future research needs to address a broader, richer concept of what it means to be human in the flux of the transformation taking place (Harper, Rodden, Rogers & Sellen, 2008:57).

This remarkable quote from a meeting organised not by anti-tech humanists, but by one of the leading IT companies, summarises the main present and future tasks of digital ethics as a critical interdisciplinary and intercultural on-going reflection on the transformation of humanity through computer technology. Humanity is experiencing itself, particularly through the digital medium, as a totality or system of interrelations. Who are we and what do we want to be as humanity? This question asks for a historical, not a metaphysical, answer. A negative vision of such unity is balkanisations and imperialisms of all kinds, including digital ones.

On the occasion of the presentation of 'In your hands: A Guide for Community Action for the Tenth Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights' on 27 March 1958 at the United Nations, Eleanor Roosevelt said:

Where, after all, do universal human rights begin? In small places, close to home – so close and so small that they cannot be seen on any maps of the world. Yet they are the world of the individual person; the neighbourhood he lives in; the school or college he attends; the factory, farm, or office where he works. Such are the places where every man, woman, and child seeks equal justice, equal opportunity, equal dignity without discrimination. Unless these rights have meaning there, they have little meaning anywhere. Without concerned citizen action to uphold them close to home, we shall look in vain for progress in the larger world (Roosevelt, 1958).

Sixty years later, we are much more aware of how important this declaration was and how difficult it is to put into practice – to make human rights come alive 'in small places, close to home'. This Declaration was not only the right ethical and political answer to the atrocities of World War II, but it was also the start for a new kind of international policy based on common ethical values and principles facing the challenges of a digitally globalised world. Nevertheless, today we are facing additional global challenges expressed in the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDG), namely:

- Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
- Achieve universal primary education
- Promote gender equality and empower women
- Reduce child mortality
- Improve maternal health
- Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases
- Ensure environmental sustainability
- Develop a global partnership for development

These goals begin 'in small places, close to home' too. They can be achieved only if we continue and expand the freedom campaign towards nature, i.e. if we expand the goals of human rights to nature as well. Digital globalisation should make us aware of the human interplay with each other in a

common world instead of making the digital perspective over our lives, and over reality, a kind of digital metaphysics or (political) ideology. I call this relativisation of the digital perspective 'digital ontology' (Capurro, 2006).

Who are we in the digital age? As human cultures become digitally hybridised, this process affects social life in all its dimensions, as well as our interplay with nature. The key task of Information Ethics is to make us aware of the challenges and options for individual and social life design. The digital medium is an opportunity for the subjects of the 21st century to transform themselves and their relations in and with the world (Capurro, 2005a; 1996). This implies allowing each other to articulate ourselves in the digital network, while taking care of historical, cultural and geographical singularities. An ethical intercultural dialogue is needed to understand and foster human cultural diversity, therefore we must look for common ethical principles so that digital cultures can become a genuine expression of human liberty and creativity. In the next section I deal briefly with the history of Information Ethics in Africa.

9. Information Ethics in the African context

Information Ethics in Africa is a young academic field. Not much has been published on the role that African philosophy can play in thinking about the challenges arising from the impact of ICTs on African societies and cultures (Brunet et al., 2004; Okpaku, 2003). An important landmark was the first African Conference on Information Ethics, which was held in Pretoria, 3 - 5 February 2007, under the auspices of United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO). The conference was sponsored by the South African Government and the Department of Communications and organised by the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, the University of Pretoria, the University of Pittsburgh, and the International Center of Information Ethics. The following issues were discussed²:

Topic 1: Foundations of African Information Ethics (Top facilitator: Dennis Ocholla, South Africa)

- Respect for human dignity – information-based rights
- Freedom of expression
- Freedom of access to information
- Information wrongdoings, information corruption, information injustice

Topic 2: Cultural Diversity and Globalisation (Top facilitator: Peter Kanyandago, Uganda)

- Protection and promotion of indigenous knowledge
- Global security, human security, privacy, transparency
- E-Government and related topics
- Cultural diversity and development

Topic 3: Development, Poverty and ICT (Top facilitator: Kingo Mchombu, Namibia)

- Using ICTs for a better life in Africa: case studies
- Internet and exclusion (socio-political and economic exclusion)
- North-South flow of information and information imperialism
- Flight of intellectual expertise from Africa

The conference produced tangible results such as the Tshwane Declaration on Information Ethics, which was adopted by the participants of the conference as a genuine African contribution to the UNESCO Code of Ethics for the Information Society, and the creation of the African Network for Information Ethics (ANIE), which gives African scholars a platform to exchange and realise their ideas in the field.

On 6 - 7 September 2010, the second African Conference on Information Ethics was held in Botswana and dealt with teaching Information Ethics in Africa, the current status of Information Ethics,

² The proceedings were published in the International Review of Information Ethics (IRIE) <http://www.i-r-i-e.net/issue7.htm>.

and the opportunities and challenges. It was organised by the University of Botswana, the University of Zululand, the University of Pretoria, the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, and the International Center of Information Ethics, under the auspices of UNESCO, and co-sponsored by UNESCO, the University of Botswana, the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, the South African Government (Department of Communications) and the software company SAP.

On 5 - 7 September 2012, the third African Conference on Information Ethics was held in Pretoria (South Africa). It dealt with Online Social Networks (OSN) in Africa (Capurro, 2012a). The conference was preceded by two workshops, one from 2 - 3 June 2012, taking place in Nairobi (Kenya) on information for sustainable development and another one on 3 - 4 September 2012 in Pretoria, dealing with basic concepts of Information Ethics.

Most research on ICT, from an ethical perspective, takes its point of departure from Western philosophy. Let us briefly review some recent works on African philosophy that are potentially relevant to the development of Information Ethics in Africa. African oral and written traditions of philosophy have a long and rich past, going back as far as 3000 BC, which includes the Egyptian Ma'at-Philosophy of ancient Egypt; the Afro-Hellenic tradition of Greek and Roman Antiquity and the early Middle Ages (Amasis, Plotinus, Philon, Euclid, Apuleius, Tertullian, Augustine); the Afro-Islamic tradition (Al-Farabi, Averroes, Ibn Battuta); the colonial break with contributions in the Amharic language (Zara Yoqob, WaldaHawat, Amo, Hannibal); the anti-colonial philosophy (DuBois, Garvey, Césaire, Senghor); the ethno-philosophy of the 70s (Kagame, Mbiti); Afrosocialism (Nkrumah, Nyerere); universalistic theories (Houtondji, Wiredu, Towa), and contemporary representatives of different schools such as hermeneutics (Okere, Ntumba, Okonda, Serequeberhan, Kinyongo); Sage philosophy (Oruka, Kaphagawani, Sogolo, Masolo) (Oruka & Masolo, 1983); and feminism (Eboh, Oluwole, Boni, Ngoyi); to mention just a few names and schools. These traditions have been analysed by Jacob Mabe in his book on oral and written forms of philosophical thinking in Africa (Mabe, 2005:276-278; Ruch & Anyanwu, 1981; Neugebauer, 1989; Serequeberhan, 1996). He also edited the first comprehensive lexicon on Africa in German (Mabe, 2004), with more than 1000 keywords, including entries on 'media' and the 'Internet' (Tambwe, 2004a).

The Department of Philosophy at the University of South Africa published a comprehensive reader entitled *Philosophy from Africa*, which was edited by Pieter Coetzee and Abraham Roux (Coetzee & Roux, 2002). Of the 37 contributors, 33 were Africans speaking for themselves on the topical issues of decolonisation; Afrocentrism in conflict with Eurocentrism; the struggle for cultural freedoms in Africa; the historic role of black consciousness in the struggle for liberation; the restitution and reconciliation in the context of Africa's post-colonial situation (Eze, 1997); justice for Africa in the context of globalisation; the pressures on the tradition of philosophy in Africa engendered by the challenges of modernity; the reconstitution of the African self in its relation to changing community; the African epistemological paradigm in conflict with the Western, and the continuity of religion and metaphysics in African thought. The second edition contains themes on gender, race and Africa's place in the global context. Although the book addresses a broad variety of themes, there is no contribution specifically dealing with information and communication technologies from an ethical or even philosophical perspective, although Paulin Houtondji does address the problem of "Producing Knowledge in Africa Today" (Houtondji, 2002). The terms 'information' and 'communication' are absent, and are not even listed in the index.

Is there a specific African philosophic and ethical perspective with roots in African languages, social experiences and values as analysed, for instance, by John Mbiti (1969), Chyme Gyekye (1996), Mutombo Nkulu (1997), Luke Mlilo and Nathanael Soédé (2003) and Jean-Godefroy Bidima (2004)? Yes, there is, if we follow Mogobe Ramose's work (Coetzee & Roux, 2002) that bears the title 'Globalization and ubuntu' (Ramose, 2002), but also, for instance, Kwasi Wiredu's contribution of 'Conceptual decolonization in African culture' through an analysis of African languages and

terminology (Wiredu, 1995; Weidtmann, 1998).

I am not making a plea for ethnophilosophy as criticised, for instance, by Houtondji (1983), but for a dialogue between both cultures and languages, and the global and the local as envisaged in the 2004 symposium of the International Center for Information Ethics. My perspective concerning Information Ethics in the African context is close to Wiredu's and Oladipo's "third way in African philosophy" (Oladipo, 2002), as well as to Oruka's "sage philosophy" (Oruka, 1990). A critical analysis of the oral and/or written African traditions is needed, as done, for instance, by Anthony Appiah in his article for the Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Appiah, 1998). We can explicitly acknowledge modern reason without assuming that its Western manifestations are inviolable, particularly when they serve purposes of colonisation or oppression. The ethical discourse is located between the particular and the universal. Following the Kantian tradition, ethical discourse aims at universality, but it must be aware, with Aristotle, that human action is contingent and subject to different interpretations and applications based on power plays. It envisages the good and seeks a humane world free from the dogmatic fixations of norms that merely reflect, implicitly or explicitly, particular points of view. In other words, ethics reflects on the permanent flow of human life and its modes of empirical regulation that make possible, on the basis of mutual respect, manifestations of humanity in unique and multiple forms. We are all equal, and we are all different.

According to Ramose, ubuntu is "the central concept of social and political organisation in African philosophy, particularly among the Bantu-speaking people. It consists of the principles of sharing and caring for one another" (Ramosé, 2002:643). Ramosé discusses two aphorisms "to be found in almost all indigenous African languages", namely: 'Motho ke motho ka batho' and 'Feta kgomo tshware motho'. The first aphorism means that "to be human is to affirm one's humanity by recognising the humanity of others and, on that basis, establish humane, respectful relations with them. Accordingly, it is ubuntu which constitutes the core meaning of the aphorism". The second aphorism means "that if and when one is faced with a decisive choice between wealth and the preservation of life of another human being, then one should opt for the preservation of life" (Ramosé, 2002:644). Following this analysis we can ask: what is the role of ubuntu in African Information Ethics? How is the intertwining of information and communication technology with the principles of communalism and humanity expressed in aphorisms such as 'Motho ke motho ka batho', which can be translated as 'people are people through other people'? What is the relation between community and privacy in an African Information Society? What kind of questions do African people ask about the effects of information and communication technologies in their everyday lives?

One of the few detailed analyses of the relationship between ubuntu and Information Ethics or, more precisely, between ubuntu and privacy, was presented by H.N. Olinger, Johannes Britz and M.S. Olivier at the sixth International Conference of Computer Ethics: Philosophical Enquiry (CEPE). They write:

The African worldview driving much of African values and social thinking is 'Ubuntu' (Broodryk, 2004). The ubuntu worldview has been recognized as the primary reason that South Africa has managed to successfully transfer power from a white minority government to a black majority-rule government without bloodshed (Murithi, 2000). The South African government will attempt to draft a Data Privacy Bill and strike an appropriate balance within the context of African values and an African worldview (Olinger et al., 2005:292).

According to the authors, ubuntu ethical principles have been applied in South Africa in the following areas:

- Politics (the African Renaissance)
- Business (through collective learning, teamwork, sustainability, a focus on local community, and an alternative to extractive capitalism)

- Corporate governance (through the attitudes of fairness, collectiveness, humility)
- Restorative justice (through the use of dialogue, collective restitution and healing)
- Conflict resolution and reconciliation (through the Ubuntu ethos of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, TRC) (Olinger et al., 2005:295)

The authors emphasise the specificity of the ubuntu worldview as a community-based mindset, opposed to Western libertarianism and individualism but close to communitarianism. For more on this topic, the Nigerian philosopher Simeon Onyewueke Eboh has written a profound study on *African Communalism* (Eboh, 2004). Olinger, Britz and Olivier critically remark that the population of Southern Africa has to rediscover ubuntu because many have not experienced it, and also because many live in two different cultures – practising ubuntu in the rural environments and Western values in the urban environments. If this is the case not only in South Africa, but in other African countries, then there is a great deal of theoretical and practical work to be done. The authors translate the aphorism ‘Umuntu ungununtu ngabanye abantu’ (Nguni languages of Zulu and Xhosa) as ‘A person is a person through other persons’ (Olinger et al., 2005:293). According to Broodryk (2002), ubuntu is an African worldview “based on values of intense humanness, caring, respect, compassion, and associated values ensuring a happy and qualitative human community life in a spirit of family”. This means that personal privacy – being a key ethical value in Western countries – might be considered as less important from an ubuntu-based perspective, even if we accept that there are several conceptions of privacy in both the West and the East (Capurro, Eldred & Nagel, 2013; Buchmann, 2012; Ess, 2005; Capurro, 2005). In a comparative study of ethical theories in different cultures, Michael Brannigan addresses African ethics with the utterance “To Be is to Belong” (Brannigan, 2005). An analysis of this thesis could lead to a foundation of African Information Ethics based not upon the abstract or metaphysical concept of ‘Being’ of some classical Western ethical theories, but upon the experience of ‘Being’ as communal existence. The task of such an analysis would be to recognise the uniqueness of African perspectives, as well as commonalities with other cultures and their theoretical expressions. This analysis could lead to an interpretation of ICT within an African context and, correspondingly, to possible vistas for information policy makers, responsible community leaders and, of course, for African institutions.

Johannes Britz chaired a session on ICTs in Africa at the Ethics and Electronic Information in the Twenty-First Century (EE21) symposium at the University of Memphis (Mendina & Britz, 2004). He said that an important condition of Africa’s finding a place in the 21st century is a well-developed and maintained ICT infrastructure. Britz and Peter Lor, former Chief Executive of the National Library of South Africa, believe that the present North-South flow of information should be complemented by a south-north flow in order to enhance mutual understanding. They plead for a shift toward the recognition of the ‘local’ within the ‘global’, following the idea of ‘thinking locally and acting globally’. In ethical terms, this means respect for different local cultures and strengthening their active participation in intercultural dialogue (Lor & Britz, 2004:18; Britz, 2004). Although Africa is still far from a true knowledge society, there is hope of success on certain fronts, such as investment in human capital, stemming the flight of intellectual expertise, and the effective development and maintenance of IT infrastructure (Britz et al., 2006). Dick Kawooya (Uganda Library Association) stresses the ethical dilemma confronting librarians and information professionals in much of sub-Saharan Africa, namely concerns about general literacy, information literacy and access to the Internet on the one hand, and ‘dwindling budgets’ for educational institutions, particularly libraries, on the other (Kawooya, 2004:34). Michael Anyiam-Osigwe, chief executive of the African Institute for Leadership, Research and Development, stresses the importance of ICT towards attaining sustainable democracy in Africa (Anyiam-Osigwe, 2004). According to Coetzee Bester, a former member of parliament in South Africa and co-founder of the African Institute for Leadership, Research and Development, the problem of

ICT in Africa includes all stakeholders. He writes:

A program to reconstruct communities as holistic entities is necessary. This should include leadership, followers, agreed-upon principles and values as well as effective interaction among all these elements (Bester, 2004:12).

A value-based reorientation implies personal awareness, an understanding of information, effective interactions between leaders and their communities without limitations of time and space, and mutual confidence in representative leadership.

In the study *Ethics and the Internet in West Africa* (Brunet et al., 2004), the authors identify six types of ethical issues related to the development of the Internet in Africa but also relevant for other countries:

- Exclusion and inequity
- Culture (Internet content)
- Internet costs and financing
- Sociotechnical aspects of Internet integration (resistance, uses)
- Political power
- Economic organisation

There is no such thing as a morally neutral technology. This is not to say that technologies can be used and misused, but to express the deeper insight that all technologies create new ways of being. They influence our relation with one another, and they shape, in a more or less radical way, our institutions, our economies, and our moral values. This is why we should focus on information technology primarily from an ethical perspective. It is up to the African people and their leaders to question how to transform their lives by these technologies. African educational and research institutions should also critically reflect on these issues. As Bob Jolliffe, senior lecturer in computer science at the University of South Africa, has pointed out, there is an implicit connection between free software, free culture, free science, open access, and the South African Freedom Charter (Jolliffe, 2006). A major task of Information Ethics is to align such ideals with concrete social, political, economic and technical processes. ICT in Africa should become a major contribution for opening “the doors of learning and culture”, to use the wording of the South African Freedom Charter. The space of knowledge as a space of freedom is not, as Jollife rightly remarks, an abstract ideal. It has a history that limits its possibilities. It is a space of rules and traditions of specific societies that is in dialogue with their foundational myths and utopian aspirations. We are morally responsible not only for our deeds, but also for our dreams. Information Ethics offers an open space to retrieve and debate these information and communication myths and utopias.

10. Prospects

The main moral responsibility of African academics is to enrich African identities by retrieving and re-creating African information and communication traditions. From this perspective, cultural memory is an ethical task if we want to create a humane community based not just on the number of people, but on the relations between them, as the German Egyptologist Jan Assmann remarks following Friedrich Nietzsche in his *Genealogy of Morals* (Assmann, 2000; Nietzsche, 1999:294-300). Cultural memory must be re-shaped again and again to build the core of a humane society. This means no more and no less than basing morality on memory and communication, thereby establishing Information Ethics at its core. The function of cultural memory is not just to express what belongs to the collective memory of a community, but to engage the will of its members to connect themselves through the task of creating it. Cultural memory is connective, therefore it is related to our myths and to our dreams. We remember Nietzsche’s ambiguous warning: “You want to be responsible for everything! But not for your dreams!” (Nietzsche, 1999a:117). I call this warning ‘ambiguous’ because Nietzsche,

no less than Sigmund Freud, was well aware of the limits of human will and our tendency to repress or forget what we consider painful. The Egyptian god Thot is a symbol of cultural memory as a social task. He is the god of wisdom and writing, as well as messenger of the gods, particularly of the sun god Re, and is associated with the goddess Ma'at, the personification of justice. Thot, the Greek Hermes, was represented as an ibis- (or a baboon-) headed man with a reed pen and a palette, known in the Western tradition through Plato's criticism of writing in his *Phaedrus*.

To retrieve the African cultural memory with regard to information and communication norms and traditions is the main information challenge for African Information Ethics. It should recognise the different strategies of social inclusion and exclusion in the history of African societies, including traumatic experiences such as slavery and apartheid. Since the emergence of the Internet, this challenge is discussed under the heading of the digital divide. However, African Information Ethics implies much more than just the access and use of this medium. The problem is not a technical one, but one of social exclusion, manipulation, exploitation, and annihilation of human beings. It is vital that African Information Ethics be developed from this broader perspective.

There is a short and a long history of Information Ethics in Africa. The long history concerns Africa's rich oral and written traditions, throughout many centuries, about different kinds of information and communication practices, using different moral codes and media, and based on dynamic and complex processes of cultural hybridisation. Critical reflection on this history promotes greater awareness of Africa's cultural legacy, which provides the foundations of the digital Information and Communication Technologies that will create unique and genuinely African Information Societies for the future. Information Ethics opens a space for the critical reflection on established customs and values. It works as a catalyst for social change. It is a space for retrieving the rich African cultural memory that allows the reshaping of African identities and contributes to the world's information and communication cultures.

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