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Violence against Women and Girls in Africa in the absence of Ubuntu

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Introduction: Violence against Women and Girls in Africa in the absence of *Ubuntu*

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Ubuntu is the African cultural propensity to display empathy, equality, integrity, peaceful coexistence, and humanism for the purpose of establishing and sustaining a fair and compassionate community. The word "Ubuntu" is derived from the Nguni (isiZulu) proverb *Umuntu Ngumuntu Ngabantu*, which means "a person is a person because of or through others" (Tutu, 2004, pp. 25-26). Across African cultures, the ideology of Ubuntu emphasizes interconnection, shared humanity, and the collective understanding that stems from a profound connection (Mbiti, 1969). Ubuntu is the awareness of a collective innate tendency to embrace fellow individuals and to cooperate and act with the greater purpose of collective betterment. The essential purpose is concerned with the establishment and preservation of positively reinforcing and strengthening relationships that respect the individual's right to dignity (Nussbaum, 2003, p. 2). In the absence of Ubuntu, sociocultural trajectories in Africa frequently fail to integrate and uphold equality, necessitating the establishment of a solid foundation for our shared humanity. Traditional African cultures are increasingly eroding. Violence against women and children is common to humanity regardless of culture, tradition, political landscape, or the environmental economic context. The focus on Africa in this issue of thirteen articles addresses how women and girls across the continent have become victims of violence. The articles argue that African cultures must embrace the philosophy of Ubuntu. This special issue aims to illustrate that an individual and communal adherence to the ethical norms of Ubuntu can be the path for accomplishing the desired expansion and reinforcement of realistic societal and human flourishing.

Tugume Benon uses a novel to illustrate how women are deeply embedded in patriarchy, arguing that male dominance is against the ubuntu philosophy that promotes the need to see women as human beings. Sinenhlahla Ngwenya uses a cultural approach to demonstrate how imbusa can be used as a tool to address gender-based violence. Sylvia Mukuka demonstrates how women with disabilities experience gender-based violence, arguing that the outbreak of COVID-19 worsened their situation. Segalo Puleng demonstrates how women make meaning of gender-based violence and the ways it manifests using embroidery and art. Abidemi Isola and Toluope Adeogun lament the government's failure to provide security for women during civil and military unrest, arguing that such a failure has worsened violence against women and children.

Lillykuty Abraham address the oppressive social structures that hinder women from experiencing their wellbeing and perpetuate gender-based violence. Baloyi Fanisa, Nene Jabulani and Mavhandu-Mudzusi Hellen call for ubuntu to address these structures. The authors demonstrate how widowhood rituals among the Vatsonga people (South Africa) affect women's health and recommend the removal of practices that are life threatening for

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women. Ranjit Singha and Yagesh Kanna call for a need to integrate the philosophy of ubuntu in the curriculum to fight substance abuse in school and colleges especially among girls.

The need to integrate the philosophy of ubuntu in the work force for the benefit of the discriminated minority especially African women is discussed by Surjit Sigha and Sivaretinamohan, while Telesia Musili explores cultural practices, such as paying of dowry among the Akamba people of Kenya, and its influence in averting spousal violence. Siwila Cheelo Lilian is of the appropriation of positive African morals to address violence against women and children. Goutam Karmakar interrogates how sexual violence under apartheid silenced and dehumanised women. Esther Mombo and Heleen Joziasee discuss how religious teachings are selectively used to normalise violence against women. The paper demonstrates how women have begun to empower themselves by challenging the *vumilia* theology. It is worth noting that authors in this issue have interchangeably used terminology such as tribal, indigenous, native, and ethnic groups. "Indigenous and tribal peoples" are the unifying factor for more than 370 million inhabitants in over 70 nations. Indigenous and tribal peoples have cultural identities, dialects, practices, and systems that set them apart from the rest of the society in which they reside. Ethnic communities are individuals who feel related through a complex combination of kinship, culture, language, history, and territory. Collectively, the members of an ethnic group construct their ethnic identity, or their notion of belonging to and participation in the group's culture. We as the editors believe that this special edition does not provide all the answers to gender-based violence in Africa, but it is an invitation to dialogue about and seek solutions to gender-based violence.

References

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