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## Information Ethics for and from Africa

### Abstract:

This paper deals in the first part with some initiatives concerning the role of information ethics *for* Africa such as NEPAD, UN ICT and AISI particularly since the *World Summit on the Information Society*. Information Ethics *from* Africa is a young academic field. Not much has been published so far on the impact of ICT on African societies and cultures from a philosophical perspective. The second part of the paper analyses some recent research on this matter particularly with regard to the concept of *ubuntu*. Finally the paper addresses some issues of the *African Conference on Information Ethics* held in Pretoria, 3-5 February 2007.

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## Introduction

On behalf of the participants of the African Conference on Information Ethics let me thank President Thabo Mbeki and the South African Government for sponsoring this outstanding event. Let me also thank the Department of Information Science at the University of Pretoria, the School of Information Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and the members of the International Center for Information Ethics for their commitment in organizing this meeting. This paper deals in the first part with some initiatives concerning the role of information ethics for Africa such as NEPAD, UN ICT and AISI particularly since the *World Summit on the Information Society*. Information Ethics from Africa is a young academic field. Not much has been published so far on the impact of ICT on African societies and cultures from a philosophical perspective. The second part of the paper analyses some recent research on this matter particularly with regard to the concept of *ubuntu*. Finally the paper addresses the issues and outcome of the *African Conference on Information Ethics* held in Pretoria, 3-5 February 2007.

The theme of this conference, namely "The Joy of Sharing Knowledge," echoes the core ideas of the *World Summit on the Information Society* (WSIS), as stated in the Geneva Declaration of Principles as well as becoming a part of the Tunis Agenda for the Information Society. Let me recall you the statement of the Geneva Declaration concerning the "Ethical dimensions of the Information Society":

*"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 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, 18.11.2005)*

President Mbeki reaffirmed this commitment from an African perspective in his statement to the second phase of the World Summit on November 16, 2005:

*"Our country and continent are determined to do everything possible to achieve their renewal and development, defeating the twin scourges of poverty and underdevelopment. In this regard, we have fully recognized the critical importance of modern ICTs as a powerful ally we have to mobilize, as reflected both in our national initiatives and the priority programmes of NEPAD, the New Partnership for Africa's Development.*

*We are therefore determined to do everything we can to implement the outcomes of this World Summit on the Information Society and appeal to all stakeholders similarly to commit themselves to take action to translate the shared vision of an inclusive development-oriented information society into practical reality." (Mbeki 2005)*

The idea of this conference emerged in October 2004 during the international symposium "Localizing the Internet. Ethical Issues in Intercultural

Perspective" held in Karlsruhe (Germany) organized by the International Center for Information Ethics and sponsored by Volkswagen Foundation. All the leading international experts in the field of information ethics were invited to participate. It was the first of its kind, dealing with information ethics from an intercultural perspective. Themes discussed included issues such as the impact of the Internet for social, political, cultural and economic development, addressing particularly questions related to privacy, access to information, intellectual property rights, quality of information, security, advanced capitalism and the digital divide. All participants were aware of the intercultural challenge of such a meeting at which some fifty scientists from all over the world participated. During this symposium it became clear that the African continent was not well represented. There was one representative from South Africa, which happened to be Johannes Britz, one of the initiators of this conference, as well as Willy Jackson, a representative from Cameroon, and Issiaka Mandé, Burkina Faso (the latter two both live in Paris). There were of course many reasons why more African scholars were not present. Some were unknown to other international scholars, and lack of funding to attend international events was and still remains a serious stumbling block.

The participants of the ICIE symposia were well aware of the urgent need to thoroughly research the ethical challenges that the introduction of information and communication technology poses for the African continent. They include the problem of development, particularly the eradication of poverty, the protection and promotion of indigenous knowledge, the archiving of African websites, and especially rights to communicate and to access knowledge in a digital environment so that Africans can become part of the emerging knowledge economy. We can summarize these issues under the label information ethics *for* and *from* Africa.

## Information Ethics for Africa

At the celebratory opening of New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) offices at the South African Council for Scientific and Industrial Research, CSIR President and CEO, Dr Sibusiso Sibisi emphasised the unwavering commitment to the work done by NEPAD. Dr Ivy Matsepe-Casaburri, Minister of Telecommunications of South Africa said on this occasion:

*"In this era of the Information Society, ICTs are regarded as tools for development. It is incumbent on us to commit ourselves to use these tools to create a better life and a more humane world (...) I have faith in NEPAD because it is a home-grown, ambitious but realisable project of the African Union. Gone are the days when people solved our problems for us and not with us," (Matsepe-Cassaburri 2005)*

The Presidential Commission on Information Society and Development (PNC on ISAG) has made major contributions to attain this goal in South Africa. It explicitly adheres to the WSIS vision of an information society as one

*"where everyone can create, access, utilize and share information and knowledge, enabling individuals, communities and peoples to achieve their full potential in promoting their sustainable development and improving the quality of lives." (ibid.)*

Another important promoter of a humane information society is the South Africa NGO Network SANGONeT, founded as Worknet in 1987 and devoted to involving civil society in the ICT process.

Since the *WSIS*, African societies have been keenly aware that sustainable socio-economic development requires appropriate information and communication technologies. This awareness was already evident at the African Information Society Initiative (AISI) launched in 1996 and coordinated by the UN Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA). Its goal is to create a pan-African ICT network giving Africans the means to improve the quality of their lives and fight against poverty. AISI's focus areas aim at promoting sectoral applications of ICT for eradicating poverty and improving quality of life.

This implies:

- E-Strategies: IC Infrastructure at national, sectoral, village and regional level, Scan-ICT programme
- Information & Knowledge: indigenous capacity to aggregate and disseminate information
- Outreach & Communication: involves all societal actors

AISI has already achieved some of these goals. It provided support to 28 African countries to develop their own national ICT infrastructure. There are periodic consultations starting with the Global

Connectivity for Africa Conference which took place in Addis Ababa in 1998, and the evaluation of ICT impact (Scan-ICT Project). AISI organized a Media Training Workshop at Addis Ababa as well as a forum on ICT's, Trade and Economic Growth in Addis Ababa in March 2006. Workshops on regional information and communication infrastructure have taken place since 2004 in Nairobi, Tangiers, Dar es Salaam, and Kigali.

The UN ICT Task Force published a report in 2003, edited by Joseph O. Okpaku (2003). His Excellency Kofi A. Annan, former Secretary-General of the United Nations stated in his contribution, "Communication Technologies: A Priority For Africa's Development":

*"Clearly, if we are to succeed, the process must engage all stakeholders: donors, the private sector, civil society organizations, governments, and especially those in the developing world itself." (Annan 2003, xvii)*

In the contribution to this report by Emmanuel OleKambainei, Chief Executive and Program Director for the African Connection Centre for Strategic Planning and Mavis Ampah Sintim-Misa, former Chief Executive Officer of this Centre, write:

*"(...) there is a need to promote general ICT diffusion and raise awareness and appreciation as well as e-literacy among our populations, especially children and youth. This should be coupled with efforts to demystify and de-demonise ICT for people to accept it as an everyday tool and not an end to itself. (...) This can be done by targeting and ensuring that basic education and literacy change from the traditional "3Rs" (reading, writing and arithmetic" to a higher standard that can be referred to as "LNCI" or Literacy – reading and writing, Numeracy – working with numbers, Communicacy – communicating effectively, Innovativeness/Initiative. Success in this (...) will give Africa's education, human resource development, as well as research and development the ability to "cheetah-pole-vault" so as to catch-up with the rest of the global community." (OleKambainei and Sintim-Misa 2003)*

Africa needs, indeed, a "cheetah-pole-vault" ICT strategy and not just a leap-frog one.

Joseph O. Okpaku, President and CEO of Telecom Africa Corporation, writes in the introduction:

*"To a large extent, wealth has a vertical structure in African society, with most families consisting of the entire range, from the well-off to the most needy. The structure of family obligations in traditional Africa makes the pursuit of the collective advancement of the entire community a norm. The disruption of this model, through "modernization", has been a threat to reaping the benefits of this tradition for contemporary African development." (Okpaku 2003, 11)*

Okpaku offers a vision of a society in which everyone has a central role to play. This vision corresponds to the original structure of African society based on the pre-eminence of the "extended family and its mutuality of care, concern and support." (Okpaku 2003, 13). In other words, Africa's scholars and politicians must retrieve their own social traditions in order to create a humane and authentic African information society. Some first steps have already been taken. The Africa preparatory conference for the WSIS in Tunis that took place in Accra in February 2005 specified that the goal of the African information society community must include all stakeholders:

*"Building the information and shared knowledge society will contribute to achieving the Millenium Development Goals to improve quality of life and eradicate poverty by creating opportunities to access, utilize and share information and knowledge." (Accra 2005)*

The African Internet Service Provider's Association envisaged in February 2005 the following actions:

*"Given that Africa is the most unwired continent in the world, and yet is part of the Information Society, action should be taken (...):*

- *A regional multi-stakeholder coordination body be mandated to co-ordinate and ensure collaboration among the numerous existing projects in Africa under the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD)*

- *Regulators adopt an open and transparent licensing and regulatory regime that propels the access to and building of ICT infrastructure.*

- *The private sector participates in the technological dynamics of the development and also provides hard investment.*



- *Civil society creates interest in consumers to demand and ensure service delivery quality and return for money.*

*Donors support this development by providing and facilitating access to soft financing and expertise where necessary for PASSIVE infrastructure*

- *Finally, that all the stakeholders above subscribe to the horizontal layering of the communication system in the manner of physical layer (infrastructure), followed by the logical layer, applications layer, content layer, etc." (AfrISPA 2005)*

A recent study on "Ethics and the Internet in West Africa" by Patrick Brunet, Oumarou Tiemtoré, and Marie-Claude Vettraino-Soulard, based on field surveys of five nations in West Africa two Anglophone, The Gambia and Ghana, and three Francophone, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, and Senegal, raises key ethical issues that, once identified, should ensure the adaptation of Internet technology and its integration into the development of African nations (Brunet, Tiemtoré, Vettraino-Soulard 2004). According to the authors, certain technologies such as the cellular phone might more readily and efficiently be developed in Africa and can contribute, for example, to the dissemination of medical information and to South-South cooperation. In order to avoid the digital gap within African societies, African governments could democratize telecommunications to ensure access for the most disadvantaged people. But, as the authors emphasise, the Internet is no panacea. Their work shows why information ethics matters, politically, socially and academically. It matters not only for Africa but from it.

## Information Ethics from Africa

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 ICT on African societies and cultures. Most research on ICT from an ethical perspective takes its departure from Western philosophy. Let us review very briefly some recent works on African philosophy that are relevant in a negative or positive sense to the subject of this conference.

African oral and written traditions of philosophy have a long and rich past, going back as far as 3000

BC with the Egyptian Maat-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 (Nkruma, 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), and feminism (Eboh, Oluwole, Boni, Ngoyi), to mention just a few names and schools. These traditions have been recently 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 has also edited the first comprehensive lexicon on Africa in German (Mabe 2001 and 2004), with more than 1000 keywords including "media" and "Internet" (Tambwe 2001).

The Department of Philosophy at the University of South Africa has published a comprehensive reader *Philosophy from Africa*, edited by Pieter Coetzee and Abraham Roux (Coetzee/Roux 2002). Of the 37 contributors 33 are Africans speaking for themselves on the topical issues of decolonization, 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 globalization, 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 dealing specifically with information and communication technologies from an ethical or even philosophical perspective, although Paulin Houtondji addresses the problem of "Producing Knowledge in Africa Today" (Houtondji 2002). The terms "information" and "communication" are absent, 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 analyzed 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 contribution to this reader (Coetzee/Roux 2002) that bears the title "Globalization and *ubuntu*" (Ramose 2002), but also, for instance, Kwasi Wiredu's contribution on the "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 criticized for instance by Houtondji (1998), 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 (Capurro, Frühbauer, Hausmanninger 2007). My position is related to Wiredu's and Oladipo's interpretation as a "third way in African philosophy" (Oladipo 2002) as well as to Oruka's "sage philosophy" (Oruka 1990). My view aims at a critical analysis of the oral and/or written African traditions, as analyzed for instance by Anthony Appiah in his article for the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Appiah 1998). I explicitly acknowledge modern reason without assuming that its manifestations are inviolable, particularly when they serve the purposes of colonialization. I locate ethical discourse between the particular and the universal. My aim, following the Kantian tradition, is universality, but I am aware, with Aristotle, that moral and political utterances are contingent, subject to different interpretations and applications based on economic interests and power structures. They are also objects of a critical analysis that 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 organization in African philosophy, particularly among the Bantu-speaking peoples. It consists of the principles of sharing and caring for one another." (Ramose 2002, 643). Ramose discusses two aphorisms "to be found in almost all indigenous African languages," namely: "*Motho ke motho ka batho*" and "*Feta kgomo tschware motho*." The first aphorism means that "to

be human is to affirm one's humanity by recognizing 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." (Ramose 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 other people through other people"? What is the relation between community and privacy in African information society? What kind of questions do African people ask about the effects of information and communication technology in their everyday lives?

One of the few detailed analysis 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 2005). 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 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/Britz/Olivier 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 (though 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/Britz/Olivier 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*. The Nigerian philosopher Simeon Onyewueke Eboh has written a profound study on "African Communalism" (2004). Olinger, Britz and Olivier remark critically 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, practicing *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 lot of theoretical and practical work to be done!

The authors translate the aphorism "*Umuntu ungumuntu ngabanye abantu*" (Nguni languages of Zulu and Xhosa) as "A person is a person through other persons" (Olinger/Britz/Olivier 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 (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 recognize 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 horizon and correspondingly to possible vistas for information policy makers, responsible community leaders and, of course, for African institutions.

Johannes Britz chaired a session on ICT 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 twenty-first century is a well-developed and maintained ICT infrastructure. Both Britz and Peter John Lor, former Chief executive of the National Library of South Africa, think that the present north-south flow of information should be complemented by a south-north flow in order to enhance mutual understanding. They plea 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). 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 Africa 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 Africa 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, agree-upon principles and values as well as effective interaction among all these elements."* (Coetzee 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 already mentioned study on "Ethics and the Internet in West Africa" (Brunet/Tiemtoré/Vettraino-Soulard 2004) the authors identify six types of ethical issues related to the development of the

Internet in Africa but also relevant for other countries, namely:

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

There is no such thing as a morally neutral technology. This is not to say just 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, 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 reflect critically 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 in South Africa as well as in other African countries, 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 Freedom Charter. The space of knowledge as a space of freedom is not, as Jolliffe rightly remarks, an abstract ideal. It has a history that limits its possibilities. It is a space of rules and traditions of specific societies, in dialogue with their foundational myths and utopian aspirations. We are morally responsible not only for our deeds but for our dreams. Information ethics offers an open space to retrieve and debate these information and communication myths and utopias.

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, vol. 5, 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*. 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 1999, vol. 3, 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 Maat, 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*.

I think that retrieving the African cultural memory with regard to information and communication norms and traditions is the main information challenge for African information ethics. It should recognize 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. But 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 thought about African information ethics be conducted from this broader perspective.

## Prospects

The final goal of ethics is not just to speak about the good but to do the good and to dream about it. We owe this insight about the relation between ethical thinking and action to Aristotle, the founder of ethics as a scientific discipline in the Western tradition. Our



conference brings together scientists and politicians to discuss what could and should be thought and done to create a good African information society. This conference is unique in several respects. First, it deals with information ethics in Africa from an African perspective. Second, it encourages African scholars to articulate the challenges of a genuine African information society. Third, our conference is devoted to fundamental ethical challenges as listed in our programme:

#### Topic 1: Foundations of African Information Ethics

- 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 globalization

- 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

- Using ICT 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 expected outcome of the conference can be summarized as follows:

- To agree on the **Tshwane Declaration on Information Ethics in Africa**.
- The establishment of the **Africa Network for Information Ethics (ANIE)** ANIE will cooperate with international partners such as the International Center for Information Ethics (ICIE), the International Society for Ethics and Information Technology (INSEIT) and the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. ANIE will be housed at the School of Information Technology, Department of

Information Science at the University of Pretoria, South Africa. It will act as a platform for exchanging information about African teaching and research in the field of information ethics. It will provide the opportunity for scholars around the world who have a shared interest in African information ethics to meet each other and to exchange ideas. It will provide news on ongoing activities by different kinds of organizations that are involved in African information ethics and related areas.

- The establishment of the **Information Society and Development Advisory Council** to advise the South African government and other stakeholders on ethical issues pertaining to the development of an African information society.
- To publish a **Reader on Africa Information Ethics** that can be used as a textbook for students and scholars. It will contribute to the development of a distinct field of African information ethics.
- To ensure that **African scholars** in this field are part of the international scholarly community. This outcome will be achieved by the creation of a **virtual research network** linking disparate scholars. It will be coordinated and maintained by the African Center for Information Ethics.
- The initiation of **research projects with the focus on grant proposals**. During the conference scholars and practitioners from around the world will have the opportunity to meet in smaller groups to discuss and identify possible research opportunities in the field of African information ethics. It is envisioned that foundations such as the Gates and Ford foundations will be approach for funding. The focus of the research will specifically be on the practical implications of the ethical challenges associated with the use of information and knowledge sharing on the African continent.
- The establishment of a **Summer School** on Information Ethics that will be hosted at the School of Information Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. The main purpose of such a Summer School will be to train African practitioners and scholars on relevant issues pertaining to African information ethics.

- To publish the **proceedings** of this conference in the *International Review of Information Ethics* (IRIE).

There is a short and a long history of information ethics in Africa. In the second part of my presentation I have pointed briefly to the short one. 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 based on dynamic and complex processes of cultural hybridization. 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. An information ethics opens a space of critical reflection for all stakeholders on established moral norms and values, it provides the catalyst for a social process, and is a space for retrieving the rich African cultural memory necessary to our field. This cultural memory permits to reshape African identities and contribute to the world's information and communication cultures.

Let us start this fascinating debate on information ethics for and from Africa with a well-known insight of Sir William Arthur Lewis: "The fundamental cure for poverty is not money but knowledge" Information and communication technology can, certainly, contribute to the goal of sharing knowledge in Africa. Let us think together about how to share knowledge using ICT in Africa for the sake of African people. I am convinced that the best way to do it is in a mood of joy. By this I mean the kind of joy that is uniquely African. The South African Coat of Arms, written in the Khoisan language of the /Xam people, has a wonderful phrase in its motto:

!ke e: /xarra //ke

The /Xam people did not use abstract words such as 'unity' or 'diversity.' The motto can be translated as "diverse people unite" (Smith 2006). It addresses each individual effort to harness the unity between thought and action in and for an African community: Today, the /Xam language that once was spoken in a large part of Western South Africa no longer exists. Fortunately, it was recorded by a German linguist, Dr. Wilhelm Heinrich Immanuel Bleek, who was born in 1827 in Berlin. Dr. Bleek wrote the famous *Comparative Grammar of South African Languages* published in London in 1862 and 1869 (Bleek 1862/1869). By appointment of Sir George

Grey, Governor of the Cape, Dr. Bleek was elected as curator of the South African Public Library in 1862. He occupied this position until his death in 1875. Thanks to Dr. Bleek the /Xam language survived in 12,000 pages taken down word-for-word from some of its last speakers, who gave us the gift of their myths, beliefs and rituals. Let us follow the example of Dr. Bleek by retrieving, saving and re-shaping the rich African cultural memory so necessary to our field.

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