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**INYUVESI  
YAKWAZULU-NATALI**

**Ubuntu and Modernity in Africa:**

A Critical Examination of Ubuntu and its Challenges in  
Modern Philosophical Discourses.

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**This Dissertation is Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the  
Requirement for the Degree of Master of Arts in Philosophy, in the  
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Natal, Pietermaritzburg Campus.**

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*Ubuntu and Modernity in Africa:  
A Critical Examination of Ubuntu and its Challenges in  
Modern Philosophical Discourses.*

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**University of KwaZulu Natal**

**December 2020**

## Declarations

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I, Kwanele Protas Ndumiso Magoso, hereby declare that “*Ubuntu and Modernity in Africa: A critical examination of ubuntu and its challenges in modern philosophical discourses*” is my original work that has not been submitted for any form: degree/diploma or examination, at any other university. And all the citations, sources or references used in this dissertation have been duly acknowledged.

**Student Signature:**



**Date: December 2020.**

I declare that this dissertation, is a record of original work carried out by Kwanele Magoso under my supervision and has been submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts in Philosophy, University of KwaZulu Natal, Pietermaritzburg.

**Name of Supervisor:** Professor Bernard Matolino.

**Signature:** .....

**Date:** .....

**Dedication.**

*In loving memory of:*

*Siphelele 'Brother Gons' Goniwe.*

(06 February. 1992 - 20 April. 2019).

*And*

*Mthokozisi 'Babiza' Magoso.*

(06 October. 1993 - 11 October. 2020).

***May your souls rest in perfect peace Bafana Bakithi!!!!***

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## **Abstract.**

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The debate between Bernard Matolino and Wenceslaus Kwindingi's 'The end of ubuntu' and Thaddeus Metz's 'Just the beginning for ubuntu [..]' has been a major force to be reckoned with and a serious bone of contention at least for thinkers such as Matolino; Jonathan Chimakonam; Mojalefa Koenane and Cyril-Mary Olatunji; and Leonhard Praeg. Matolino and Kwindingi argue that ubuntu as an ethical theory and a recommended way of life has reached its end. They insist on its relevance as served only by small-scale and tight-knit communities. Not only is this so but they also argue that ubuntu is not relevant for modern African realities. On the contrary, Metz thinks that ubuntu is still relevant as an ethical theory and a way of life. He argues that its relevance is not limited to traditional and pre-industrial set ups. He thinks that ubuntu is open to the dictates and dynamics of modernity since those who reside in large-scale communities live up to its values. He suggests that scholarly inquiry into and political application of ubuntu must be construed as projects that are only now properly getting started.

However, this dissertation seeks to subject this on-going debate and its two contributors (Chimakonam and Koenane and Olatunji) to philosophical scrutiny. Its original contribution to literature is two-fold. Firstly, it argues that Metz's; Chimakonam's; and Koenane and Olatunji's arguments are neither compelling nor should they be adumbrated as standard replies to Matolino and Kwindingi. Secondly, it contends that ubuntu is not relevant for modern African societies.

**Keywords:** *ubuntu; the end of ubuntu; the beginning for ubuntu; the relevance of ubuntu.*

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# Introduction

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## Introduction and Background to the Study.

### **Preliminary Remarks.**

The question for the relevance of ubuntu in modern southern Africa is the main concern for this research project.<sup>1</sup> This project seeks to subject the Matolino-Kwindingwi-Metz debate and its two earlier commentaries [Jonathan Chimakonam (2016) and Mojalefa Koenane and Cyril-Mary Olatunji (2017)] to philosophical scrutiny. Its original contribution to knowledge seeks to subject this debate and its two contributors to critical scrutiny by using the question of ubuntu's relevance as its recurring motif. The sole business for my subjecting these to philosophical scrutiny is motivated by my questioning the relevance of ubuntu with specific reference to the debate. The debate rests upon two disparate postulations: "The end of ubuntu" – as initiated by Bernard Matolino and Wenceslaus Kwindingwi (2013); and just the beginning for it by Thaddeus Metz (2014). Central to the disparities between these debaters are certain adumbrations that illustrate the possibilities for the relevance and irrelevance of ubuntu in modern Africa. At the heart of these adumbrations lie certain contributions that are aimed either at continuing or revisiting the debate.

### **Outline.**

This chapter is comprised of nine sections. Sections one outline the Matolino-Kwindingwi-Metz debate. Sections two provide a preview of contributions to the debate. Sections three outline this project's original contribution to the debate. Sections four discuss the question of the relevance of ubuntu critically; ubuntu and its relevance. Sections five provide a brief overview of ubuntu and its problems of interpretation. Sections six introduce the main research question for this project, sub-questions, and objectives. Sections seven discuss the research methodology. The last section provides an outline of chapters.

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<sup>1</sup> Before anything else, a disclaimer should be made here, that ubuntu has been a subject of intense debates. The sole business for making such a disclaimer is a double-edged sword. Firstly, I do this to ease the text flow so as to avoid making the text harder to read or easy to undermine. Secondly, I understand that some of the views I will be criticising were important ones to have been voiced even though this project may, on some occasions, be opposed to them.

### **The Matolino-Kwindingwi-Metz Debate.**

The debate attempts to question the relevance of ubuntu (Matolino and Kwindingwi) and affirm its relevance (Metz) for modern Africa. It rests on two disparate postulations: “The end of ubuntu” (Matolino and Kwindingwi, 2013) and “Just the beginning for ubuntu [..]” (Metz, 2014). The former demonstrates that ubuntu ought to reach its end as an ethical theory and way of life. It argues that ubuntu is an outdated notion and does not have the capacity to shape ethics in the current South African context (Matolino and Kwindingwi, 2013). The latter affirms the beginning and relevance for ubuntu as an ethical theory and way of life. It seeks to argue that scholarly inquiry into and the political application of ubuntu should be viewed as projects that are only now properly getting started (Metz, 2014).

### **A Preview of Contributions to The Debate.**

The Matolino-Kwindingwi-Metz debate has received a great deal of notice from thinkers such as Matolino (2015); Chimakonam (2016); Koenane and Olatunji (2017); and Praeg (2017). For this reason, there are some perennial issues that are intrinsic to their contributions to the debate. Firstly, Matolino (2015) responds to Metz by arguing that his response poses no threat to their original position. He shows that his assessment of Metz’s position puts Metz in an unenviable position of defending the indefensible. He proves Metz’s position to be dogmatic and unphilosophical. Secondly, despite some agreements here and there in the process of endorsing Metz’s account, Chimakonam (2016) finds Matolino (2015); and Matolino and Kwindingwi (2013) more wanting. He thinks that proclaiming the demise of ubuntu or its end is not just a mere declaration, but it is a problem. The significance of this problem will re-define not only the sphere of ubuntu philosophy but also the history of African philosophy. He agrees with Metz that the arguments marshalled in support of it are indecisive. On the other side, he agrees with Matolino (2015) that Metz’s systematization of ubuntu may not be as impregnable as Metz envisages. He then argues for the re-invention of ubuntu using the tool of conversational thinking. Thirdly, in their attempt to uphold Metz’s account as more plausible, Koenane and Olatunji (2017), also find Matolino and Kwindingwi’s (2013) account more wanting. They argue that ubuntu, insofar as it is a moral theory, is competitive and will ultimately prove to be a desirable ethic which could contribute positively towards developing moral character in the contemporary socio-political environment in parts of Africa. Finally, of equal significance is Praeg’s (2017) account, which proves both sides of the debate [Matolino and Kwindingwi (2013); and Metz (2014)] to be unfounded though he does subscribe to the angle from which Matolino and Kwindingwi criticize ubuntu. Praeg (2017: 292) states his contribution “as an

outline of the basic minimum of conceptual moves any Ubuntu theorists has to make in order for their text to avoid the twin seductions of being either a contemporary variant for an outdated ethnophilosophy, or an ahistorical analysis of Ubuntu that remains oblivious to the historicity of the concept”.

### **This Project’s Original Contribution to The Debate.**

This project seeks to wade into the debate, and its two contributors in a manner that subjects them to critical scrutiny. As a result, I take this debate seriously not only because my calling into question the relevance of ubuntu is framed within its ambits but because I recognize it as one of the most outstanding debates in philosophical discourses. For this reason, this project is a starting point for what may be conceived of as giving this debate and its contributors serious philosophical attention. This philosophical attention is served by the question of ubuntu’s relevance as its recurring motif. It is this project’s contribution which demonstrates that to deal with this specific debate, especially for the purposes of addressing the question of ubuntu’s relevance for our own times, one has to start grappling with two crucial issues amongst others.

#### **The First Issue: An Interrogation of Metz; Chimakonam; & Koenane and Olatunji.**

I wish to suggest that one has to think carefully about Metz; Chimakonam; and Koenane and Olatunji not only by becoming aware of their arguments but in a manner that interrogates them philosophically. For this reason, I know none of the contributors (e.g., Matolino (2015); Chimakonam (2016); Koenane and Olatunji (2017); and Praeg (2017)) whose works have received considerable attention in philosophical circles.<sup>2</sup> Or at least this is one of the gaps to be identified and filled up in this project.<sup>3</sup> Thus, it does seem clear that contributors of the debate could only be counted on the fingers of one hand. But I hardly think that appealing to numbers as a means of brushing aside philosophical insights - of the said contributors - and citing this debate in passing will prove to be justifiable to everyone’s satisfaction. Reflecting on philosophical insights as opposed to appealing to numbers and years the debate and its contributions have survived is exactly what this current project seeks to contribute to knowledge. This is the kind of reflection that seeks to fill some of the gaps or underexplored areas from the debate: dealing with the question of ubuntu’s relevance and providing critical comments on some of its contributors. In doing so, this project seeks to unveil new grounds by interrogating Metz, Chimakonam, and Koenane and Olatunji thoroughly. It serves as a prime

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<sup>2</sup> Jonathan Chimakonam does engage with Matolino (2015) but that on its own does not mean that he (Matolino (2015)) has received considerable attention from other philosophers

<sup>3</sup> As mentioned above, I do not deal with Matolino (2015) and Praeg (2017) in this current research.

candidate for arguing that their arguments are neither compelling nor should they be adumbrated as standard replies to Matolino and Kwindingwi.

In other words, even if readers were to endorse Metz's; Chimakonam's and Koenane and Olatunji's views as I do not, but I will point them to the following outcomes. Firstly, I shall present a close examination of how ubuntu has been grounded in contemporary Africa. This examination is directed at scholarly inquiry into ubuntu. It relies on different scholars who interpret/ground the possibilities for ubuntu's relevance in the light of Western philosophical approaches. Moreover, I will then contest Chimakonam's (2016) approval of Metz's systematisation of ubuntu. No doubt, Chimakonam has credited Metz with the status of developing a philosophical system which represents a new version of ubuntu with theoretical sophistication (*Ibid.*). I will argue that Chimakonam's (2016) approval will not go very far if we consider thinkers such as Ramose (2007). On this way of thinking, I urge readers to doubt Chimakonam's approval of Metz's system as demonstrating ubuntu's 'proper mode of philosophising' for our own times (*Ibid.*). Secondly, I will argue that there is a logical inconsistency that haunts Metz's rejoinder. This inconsistency bifurcates between his justifications for: (a) The beginning for ubuntu; and (b) The beginning for its projects that he deems as properly getting started. Thirdly, I will then provide a response to Chimakonam's stand with Metz and Matolino on Metz's systematization of ubuntu. I will show that it is not clear where he stands in his: (a) Approval of Matolino's impatience with Metz's systematization; and (b) His rejection of Metz's systematisation. No doubt, Chimakonam seeks to provide a credible assessment of (or the "one way of credibly assessing") the debate. And he writes as if this were necessarily the case. On the contrary, I will seek to pursue a specific line of critique which shows that this 'one way of credibly assessing' the debate is not as credible as Chimakonam would have us believe. Fourthly, I will show that Koenane and Olatunji's contribution is vulnerable to significant flaws. Namely, I will provide an analysis which shows that the perspective they have adopted - in their reaction to Matolino and Kwindingwi - is not as different as they make it sound. Not only is this so but their perspective serves as a resuscitation of Metz's perspective with different justifications. I will also provide another analysis which shows that they have failed to provide a summary and an examination of Metz's rejoinder. Finally, I will then point readers to: their misreading of Matolino and Kwindingwi's anecdote; as well as their misinterpretation of Matolino and Kwindingwi's understanding of an ubuntu ethic.

These outcomes purport to demonstrate the kind of suspicion that a careful reader would have to foster towards understanding Metz; Chimakonam; and Koenane and Olatunji. For this reason, and in the process of engaging with these thinkers, I will show how my position fits in with the positions of philosophers with whom I aim to agree or disagree. I will show why my view is preferable to the ones I will be criticising especially on the issue(s) where I differ. I will also acknowledge why the views I will be criticising were important ones to have been voiced, even if I think they are up to scrutiny. I will also show what impact my original contribution has, if it is relevant, to the current debate to which this project contributes.<sup>4</sup>

### **The Second Issue: Exploring the Relevance of Ubuntu For Our Own Times.**

This project also serves as a prime candidate for delving into Matolino and Kwindigwi and Metz so as to search for ubuntu's relevance and its relationships with the facets of modernity. This second issue is informed by my own interrogation of Metz's (2014) rejoinder using Matolino and Kwindigwi (2013). This is precisely because I read these scholars [Matolino and Kwindigwi and Metz] as sparking a certain kind of investigation about ubuntu and its relationships with the facets of modernity, especially in its attempt to deal with the question of ubuntu's relevance for contemporary Africa. Matolino and Kwindigwi (2013) argue that ubuntu is not in tandem with the facets of modernity. I read them as attempting to spark a certain kind of investigation about the non-suitability or irrelevance of ubuntu for modern African societies. As for these thinkers, ubuntu ought to reach its end because it clashes with the dynamics of modernity. On the contrary, Metz (2014: 71) thinks that this is not necessarily the case. He contends that ubuntu is open for modern demands or "the desirable facets of modernity". I read Metz as insisting that ubuntu has some values that demonstrate its relevance for a place like Johannesburg in South Africa. On this view, he suggests that the question of ubuntu and its conflicts with the dictates and dynamics of modernity could be resolved by appealing to its (ubuntu's) values (*Ibid.*). No doubt, Africa must resolve its telling problems that are imposed by aspects of its traditions that are in conflict with the dynamics of modernity. And this is exactly what I urge readers to take notice of whenever they read the Matolino-Kwindigwi-Metz debate. This debate seeks to take modern realities very seriously: either by arguing that ubuntu is not in concord with the desirable facets of modernity, or by insisting that ubuntu is not vulnerable to the changes that unfold in modern African societies. However, for various reasons which I shall come to later in this project, I will argue that Metz's account fails

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<sup>4</sup> I drew this checklist from Brian Mogek's book (2008: 14 – 15) entitled "Writing to Reason: A companion for philosophy students and instructors" and modified it to suit my aims for this current research.

to account for ubuntu's relevance for our own times. And if this specific line of critique succeeds, readers would notice that ubuntu is cluttered with realities that makes it fail to account for changes faced by modern southern African societies.

### **On the Question for the Relevance of Ubuntu.**

From the foregoing, one may wonder why the question for the relevance of ubuntu is raised in this project. She/he may be convinced that there are reasons that could lead some readers to: reject my reading of the debate; or commit themselves to another reading they deem suitable. The point here is to anticipate the kinds of objections that can be raised against reasons which could reject my reading of the debate. Some may even doubt the significance of this question, despite that it is used with specific reference to the debate. This is because such attempts are certainly not new on the literature of ubuntu. Others may even insist that questions of this sort have been answered and affirmed by the sheer number of scholars. Or one may drag and dismiss this question as trivial or reject it in an outright manner. However, this section seeks to shed some light on why the question for the relevance of ubuntu with specific reference to the debate is central and worth discussing. This is not to suggest that questions such as this are neither open to rational, informed, and honest disagreements since they are more of an on-going pursuit rather than a dogmatic inquiry.

As a result, I think it is crucial to set things straight here so as to avoid constant questions as to why one should accept my calling into question the relevance of ubuntu. These questions may come from different thinkers who hold dissenting views about the role and relevance of ubuntu for contemporary Africa. I aim to justify the claim that the question for the relevance of ubuntu in modern southern Africa is gleaned from my reading of the debate. This debate involves "anti- and pro-ubuntu" thinkers who frame their discussions with reference to the end of ubuntu and just the beginning for it. This is not to suggest that only after this debate did I [or should others] begin to seriously wonder about the question for its relevance. My reliance on its question does not mean that there is no heritage of thinkers outside the debate who have dealt with this matter in their discussions about affirming or questioning its relevance and the kinds of justifications they sought to rely on. Hence, I aim to exemplify this in two respects.

Firstly, Metz (2011) affirms its relevance by constructing an ethical principle that not only grows out of the indigenous understandings of ubuntu but also clearly amounts for the importance of individual liberty and is readily applicable to addressing present-day South Africa and other societies. His aim was to deal with grounds of scepticism that seek to contest

the relevance of ubuntu for the new South Africa (*Ibid.*). Secondly, others defend its relevance by showing a coincidence in its values and some of the values enshrined in the constitution of South Africa. For instance, Moeketsi Letseka (2012: 47) defends ubuntu against Penny Enslin and Kai Horsthemke's (2004) take on ubuntu in a manner that seeks to reveal its potential as a moral theory and public policy.

What is clear from the foregoing is that it was not until Metz's (2014) response to Matolino and Kwindingwi (2013) that the relevance of ubuntu for contemporary Africa was affirmed. A typical example of a prior affirmation is made manifest in Metz's (2011) submission and Letseka's (2012) defence of ubuntu against Enslin and Horsthemke (2004) who did register some grounds of scepticism. There are some thinkers (e.g., Mdluli, 1987; Marx, 2002) who even sound a sceptical note against ubuntu even before Matolino and Kwindingwi (2013). Wim van Binsbergen (2001) provides the most trenchant critique of the way in which ubuntu has been constructed and used in post-apartheid South Africa (McAllister, 2009). His was a recognition of the utopian and prophetic nature of ubuntu. He posits ubuntu as a creation of some African elites [academics] similar to other utopian ideals such as African communalism, Nkrumah's (1965) *Consciencism* and African socialism (van Binsbergen, 2001).

Another crucial point registered by Matolino (2019: 1) takes Emmanuel Eze (2008; 2008a) as providing an insightful critique of ubuntu that is targeted at its shortcomings as a philosophical tool that may inform how philosophy reflects on the political. This [Eze's] critique predates "The end of ubuntu" as advocated by Matolino and Kwindingwi. Here Matolino (2019: 1) reads Eze as demonstrating that "ubuntu as an extraordinary moral framework may be ill-suited to capture ordinary experiences and subsequently pass appropriate judgment".<sup>5</sup> It is precisely because of Matolino's (2019) own reaffirmations of Eze's critique that makes him to be critical of ubuntu as Eze is. Matolino (2015; 2019) is not a defender of ubuntu nor is Eze (2008; 2008a); and van Binsbergen (2001) etc. What this shows is that it was not after Matolino and Kwindingwi have critiqued ubuntu that other scholars began to subject it to scrutiny. But even a host of other scholars have made this state of affairs quite evident even after Matolino and Kwindingwi. Key amongst scholars who contest its relevance [especially outside this debate] we can identify Clive Zimunya, Joyline Gwara and Bernard Mlambo (2015) who question the feasibility of ubuntu in a modernized world.

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<sup>5</sup> I urge readers to notice that Eze's critique (especially his suggestion that ubuntu is 'too much' or relies on 'luck and miracles') has been undermined by Yuesf Waghid and Paul Smeyers (2012: 17 – 19).

There is also a cloud of witnesses who attest to its defence prior to/and after Matolino and Kwindigwi. For instance, it has been argued that the majority of South African population continues to be nurtured and educated according to the tenets of ubuntu (Ramose, 2001). Some insist that ubuntu should be considered foundational to the constitution of South Africa. Others also acknowledge its widespread use today, since it occurs in everyday speech and in most sophisticated contexts, and as a concept in management ideologies in the transitional stages of post-apartheid South Africa (van Binsbergen, 2001). The concept of ubuntu has also been construed as capable of playing a significant role in the process of reconciliation after the end of apartheid (Weidtmann, 2019). Its relevance is also demonstrated as the underlying moral framework of reconciliatory politics of South African rainbow nation (Mwipikeni, 2018).

My justification from the debate rests upon two considerations. Firstly, I consider the debate itself to be based on questioning ubuntu, its relevance and how ubuntu ought to reach its end in modern southern Africa. Matolino and Kwindigwi (2013); Matolino (2015) – [about its end and irrelevance]; and Praeg (2017) – [not about its end but its irrelevance] - are actually a good case in point here. Matolino and Kwindigwi (2013) sought to argue that the project of ubuntu ought to reach its end as an ethical theory and way of life. For this reason, they think that the concerted effort of reviving ubuntu in South Africa has occupied the centre stage since the dawn of democracy. The widespread, public, and concerted “ubuntuisation” of the intellectual, business, public and private lives are all there is to their arguments aimed at questioning ubuntu’s public display in South Africa. They posit that contemporary conditions in [Southern] Africa are such that there is no justification for appealing to an ethic associated with ubuntu (*Ibid.*)

They argue that there is a big disjuncture between the natural environs in which we can conceive ubuntu to have been a success and the current state of affairs in modern day Africa. Not only did they posit that ubuntu has largely disappeared because of irreversible effects of modernity and industrialization but insist that the disappearance of its favourable and natural conditions render it obsolete (Matolino and Kwindigwi, 2013: 203). They endorse its howling success as intrinsic to undifferentiated, small, and tight knit communities that are relatively underdeveloped (2013: 202). Matolino’s (2015) response to Metz (2014) is a demonstration of their surety and consistency to their “original position”: a position, which sought to question the relevance of ubuntu for contemporary Africa.

Their project flows from two main lines of reasoning. On the one hand, they seek to argue that the aggressive promotion of ubuntu in post-apartheid South Africa is an elitist project so conceived by the new black elites. They insist that black elites conceive of ubuntu as a restorative move as well as an attempt at securing the dignity of black masses as well as an attempt at forging a so-called black identity. This first line of reasoning draws on historical cases that sought to aggressively promote an African mode of being which coincided with both the end of colonialism and the rise of black elitism. These scholars note that such attempts ended in very public and political failures. On this view, there is a sense in which ubuntu is construed as the “aggressive promotion” or a revival project by black elites aimed at restoring and securing the dignity of black masses. The African mode of being is consumed by this aggression of ubuntu which ended in public and political failures on the continent. In their second line of reasoning, they question the desirability of ubuntu as a mark/guide of the spirit of the nation. Their critique of ubuntu concentrates on the disjunct that exists between the metaphysical conditions necessary for the attainment of ubuntu and the stark ontological and ethical crisis facing the new elites and “our people” (Matolino and Kwindingwi, 2013).

Secondly, I read Metz’s (2014) reply to Matolino and Kwindingwi (2013) as affirming – [Just like Chimakonam (2016) and Koenane and Olatunji (2017)], - instead of questioning, the beginning, and the relevance for ubuntu in his “reply” to these thinkers. In fact, just like Matolino (2015: 214), I read Metz as offering “a defence of the relevance of ubuntu theorists”. No doubt, only after Matolino and Kwindingwi had criticized ubuntu did Metz thought about its beginning. Central to Metz’s response to these thinkers is his argumentation that not only should scholarly inquiry into ubuntu be viewed as the projects that is only now properly getting started but even ubuntu’s political application. From this, I read Metz’s argumentation as imbedded in two-pronged strategies: (a) That of scholarly inquiry; and (b) Political application.

Metz’s reading of these thinkers depicts them as portraying dyadic equivalences. The first equivalence is sociological whereas the second one is philosophical. The former adumbrates them as insisting that political elites who have most influentially invoked ubuntu have done so in ways that serve nefarious social functions. Narrowing down the discourse about how to live is reminiscent of these nefarious functions. The latter adumbrates these thinkers as insisting that the moral ideals of ubuntu are appropriate only for a bygone era or pre-modern age.

Metz’s account proceeds from both the position of negativity and positivity. At the negative side of the spectrum is Metz’s view that considerations proffered by Matolino and Kwindingwi

(2013) are insufficient to draw their conclusion. The said insufficiency inaugurates Metz's negativity towards them. On the positive side of the spectrum, Metz provides reason to think that ubuntu as an ethical theory has a lot going for it as an account of how individuals and institutions should be moral in the twenty first century. Not only does Metz's "body of work" serve as his defence of ubuntu but he was generous enough to grant other "interpreters of ubuntu" the opportunity to air their views against Matolino and Kwindingwi (Metz, 2014). This can also be extended to contributors to the debate who take an affirmative stance as Metz does. For instance, Koenane and Olatunji (2017) contend that ubuntu as far as it is a moral theory is competitive and will ultimately prove to be a desirable ethic which could contribute positively towards developing moral character in parts of contemporary Africa. Therefore, this debate gives credence to my calling into question the relevance for ubuntu in modern southern Africa.

### **Ubuntu And Its Relevance.**

Things are not really that straightforward when it comes to ubuntu and its relevance. In this section, I proceed by way of asking a single question that gives birth to its sub-questions. The section strikes a note of caution by showing that readers must be alert to certain things when attempting to answer the question of ubuntu and its relevance. That is, up to a certain time the question of what ubuntu, and its relevance really is, was never of further reflection and serious speculative activity until it was laid open to a contested terrain or until its textual history was made manifest. Not only does a particular way of clarifying what ubuntu and its relevance are, emanate from the likes of different thinkers but it springs from the sheer number of interpretations, which are sometimes irreconcilable. In other words, I do recognise that ubuntu and its relevance has been and continues to be a major force to be reckoned with and a serious borne of contention at least for thinkers whose scholarship is based on Southern Africa. This is particularly because it has attracted their attention from a variety of disciplines such as law, politics, sociology, and philosophy, etc (Weidtmann, 2019: 98). The place where ubuntu seems to be very particular and construed as the root of African philosophy is Southern Africa (Ramose, 2003: 23). In addition, it is recognised as endogenous to sub-Saharan African indigenes (Matolino, 2015: 215). Even though it originated from Southern Africa, but its Pan-African and African nationalists give credence to its application as not limited to Southern Africa, let alone South Africa, write Koenane and Olatunji (2017: 267).

This section does not insist that proponents and opponents of ubuntu must not be listened to. It is common knowledge that ubuntu is perceived as a serious matter on which human lives

depend in the contemporary Southern African context (Gordon, 2014). The idea that ubuntu has much to offer to the wider world; particularly in southern Africa is taken seriously by some scholars (Magadla and Chitando, 2014). Advocates of an ethic of ubuntu insist that ubuntu has a tremendous contribution to make to a new understanding of a human being as originally a being in relations (Murove, 2014). The reality of the matter is that ubuntu is deemed relevant by a number of scholars (Munyaka and Motlhabi, 2009). But the opposite is also true and ought to be taken seriously since there exists some doubts about the efficacy of ubuntu in contemporary Africa. Some thinkers may insist that discussions on ubuntu will do us no good since it is fraught with many problems. The end results may prove such discussions as fruitless endeavours which manifest the politicisation of ubuntu in general. There are high chances that discussions such as these may be undermined right from the outset.

This section does not seek to answer the question of ubuntu and its relevance, but it may attempt brief answers to its sub-questions. The main question is: what is ubuntu and its relevance in modern Southern Africa? Its sub-questions go something like this: has ubuntu enjoyed its relevance in the past? Was the question of its relevance pondered in the past? Did scholars of ubuntu wondered about the question of its affirmation for modern Africa? How was the logic of its affirmation made possible? Can one affirm ubuntu as an ethic or way of life if it has never been of any relevance in the past? Why should one be concerned with the question of its relevance nowadays? Are these set of sub-questions worth asking in African philosophy? Or has this set of questions been of further reflection and serious speculation among many a philosopher in Africa?

#### **Sub-Questions.**

I wish to focus on the said set of questions before dealing with the first or main question asked in this section. In attempting to answer this set of questions tentatively, I think ubuntu has enjoyed its relevance in the past since it is shown that no one was truly human except when they were in full relationship with others. Everyone depended on the community to attest to his/her humanity. The true human potential was realised in partnership with others since one's humanity was bound up with the humanity of others (Ngcoya, 2015: 1). For this reason, ubuntu was based upon an ethic which recognises the community as primary. The individual in this community was completely constituted by their relationship with others (Bilchitz, Metz, and Oyowe, 2017: 157). The idea of brotherhood, welfarism, family atmosphere was all there was to indigenous African societies. What seems to be misleading for some thinkers is that Africans were held captives by some assertions that self-determination, personal ambition was non-

existent in traditional Africa. The collective purpose as opposed to individual purpose was cherished to show that the true and only African philosophy in traditional Africa was the philosophy of brotherhood, welfarism which is said to have prevented anyone from becoming more prosperous than anyone else (Anoba, 2018). It must be clear that these assertions aimed to demonstrate that communalism was the standard of ethical behaviour. It was based on these assertions that communalism was posited as the blueprint for restoring Africans to wholeness; organizing our social life; as well as a template for political re-organization across the continent (Taiwo, 2016 in Mosima, 2018: 48). This status of African communalism was popularized in the writings of the first wave of post-independence leaders: Julius Nyerere; Kenneth Kaunda; Kwame Nkrumah; Ahmed Sekou Toure; and Leopold Sedar Senghor. These nationalist-ideological politicians and “philosopher kings” were also doubled as Africa’s pioneer intelligentsia (Wiredu, 2004: 18; and Masolo, 2004: 488 in Mosima, 2018: 53). They were writing in response to the challenges of nation construction in the 1960’s. Not only did they produce political philosophies embedded in Marxist-Leninist thoughts, but they also appealed to their indigenous cultural heritage (Mosima, 2018). They were of the view that this new orientation of communalism could most authentically suit Africa’s moral merits and cultural specificities (*Ibid.*).

However, even before its articulation by these philosopher kings or political thinkers, African communalism was earlier articulated in Placide Tempels’ *Bantu Philosophy* (1959). Tempels was of the view that the human being or person in Bantu thought was defined through the community. And this collective ontology is also said to have been broadened by [John Mbiti; Ifeanyi Menkiti]; Mogobe Ramose who attest to the African notion of community (Mosima, 2018: 55). Kwame Gyekye rejects this collective ontology as radical communitarianism and advances his moderate account which recognises the community and the individual. Polycarp Ikuenobe (2006) also identified - beyond radical and moderate standpoints – multiple senses of communalism (Taiwo, 2016: 84). However, it is not my aim in this project to discuss other philosophers who have reacted to the debate between the community and the individual (Eze, 2008; 2018, Matolino, 2009; 2011a; 2011b; 2014; 2018a, Famakinwa, 2010; Oyowe, 2013; 2015, Molefe, 2016; 2017; 2019, Chemhuru, 2018; Ikuenobe, 2006; 2017 etc). What this shows – especially when one reads works by African nationalists and some thinkers - is that communal thoughts were all there was to traditional societies. Surely, there may be some traditional African societies that do not fit this description. Kwasi Wiredu (2008: 333) argues that they

must be rare since many of them were grounded on kinship relations, which began from the household and expand to lineage and clan proportions.

The question of its relevance was dealt with by appealing to what ubuntu was in indigenous African societies. It has been argued that some southern African scholars think of ubuntu as a key concept to evoke unadulterated forms of African social life before the advent of colonialism (Mosima, 2018: 52). It is this concept which is said to have survived even today especially in remote villages and intimate kin relationships (*Ibid.*, 52). In other words, what ubuntu was in these societies was a product of the unanimity of thoughts. What it was, was its usefulness as an ethic, moral or unifying worldview. Equally significant is the logic or assurance of its affirmation as an ethical/moral theory: (e.g. Metz and Gaie, 2011; Metz, 2007; 2009a; 2010; 2011; 2013; 2014; Blessler, 2008; Broodryk, 2002, 2005, 2006; Ramose, 1999, 2002; Shutte, 1993; Mokgoro, 1998; Sindane and Lienberg, 2000; Letseka, 2000, 2013a, 2013b, 2014; Tutu, 1999; Teffo, 1994); a public policy (Nkondo, 2007); (Letseka, 2013); a basis for African ethics (e.g. Murove, 2009; 2013, Mkhize, 2008); a way of life (e.g. Munyaka and Motlhabi, 2009; Metz, 2014, Koenane and Olatunji); a narrative of return (e.g. Gade, 2011, Matolino and Kwindigwi, 2013); an educational value (e.g. Letseka, 2000; 2013, Nkondo, 2007 and others); “an underlying motif of the bill of rights”<sup>6</sup> etc, in modern Africa by a number of scholars. It seems clear that ubuntu has received considerable attention in post-colonial/apartheid Southern Africa. Other thinkers like Mkhwanazi (2016) may even insist that its relevance should not be confined to traditional societies but acknowledgements to its dynamism ought to be taken seriously. In their acknowledgements of this dynamism, they may not read ubuntu as a concept that is fixed or monolithic but a practice of re-making, re-imagining things as people’s experiences change or as new challenges arise (Mkhwanazi, 2016). Hence, ubuntu has clearly taken on new meanings in contemporary African societies (*Ibid.*).

These sub-questions can be read as attempts by Africans at finding something better, relevant, and uniquely African, about ubuntu and how it must be seen in post-colonial/apartheid Southern Africa. The “need for ubuntu” as opposed to “victimization”<sup>7</sup> was demonstrated to restore the dignity and self-respect of the African person denied of his or her humanity by exploitation, and annihilation through slavery, colonisation, and apartheid (Mkhwanazi, 2016).

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<sup>6</sup> This assertion was made by the South African constitutional court.

<sup>7</sup> These utterances were used in the postamble of the 1993 interim constitution of South Africa.

The employment of ubuntu in the interim constitution of South Africa and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission exemplifies this call for a return to ubuntu. These attempts subjected ubuntu as something that ought to be used spatially to affirm, if not proving the point or trying by all means to establish a metaphysical grounding for the relevance of ubuntu in post-colonial/apartheid Southern Africa. The point I am labouring to achieve here is that the above set of questions is certainly worth asking and reflecting not only in philosophy but very much so even amongst thinkers of different persuasions who are keen about ubuntu and its relevance.

### **The Question of What Ubuntu Is.**

I wish to separate the main question for this section in two parts. This separation is necessary for analytical purposes. The first part: What is ubuntu? The second part: what is its relevance? The former captures ubuntu. The latter its relevance. The set of proceeding questions that followed were a direct result of the former and the latter. This is primarily because the above set of questions either stem from the question of ‘ubuntu’ or its ‘relevance’. The most pertinent fact is that the latter is in tandem with the research question for this project. But, before considering the latter as constitutive of this project’s examination, it is crucial that one understands what it is that makes the former worth discussing here. Namely, what is ubuntu?

There are different answers that could result from the “what is ubuntu or its relevance” questions. For this reason, an attempt for a justifiable answer to the first part of the question depends entirely on what one makes of what ubuntu means/might be. Christian Gade (2012) describes and systematises different answers to “What is ubuntu?” question. The conclusion he arrives at distinguishes between two clusters of answers to this “what is” question. He argues that answers that are loyal to the first cluster of “what is” question posit ubuntu as a moral quality of a person whilst answers to the second cluster depict ubuntu as a phenomenon (e.g., philosophy, ethic, worldview, and African humanism etc) according to which persons are interconnected (Gade, 2012: 484 – 501). What seems to be the problem, for some scholars, is that we are left with competing interpretations of “what ubuntu is” (Matolino, 2015). This is precisely because never before its written literature has one accounted for a clear and consistent expository explanation and description of what ubuntu was prior to what it is now. However, as Ramose (2005: 83) points out, this does not mean that “any supposed lack of writings on ubuntu is tantamount to lack of thought”. Unlike Europe or the Americas where sufficient texts written by generations of historians exist on the cultural and philosophical evolution of the

society, it rarely does in Africa (Anoba, 2017).<sup>8</sup> Surely, faint traces remained an obstacle for traditional African societies. Traditional Africans inoculated repetitions of the folk thoughts of their peoples. The results were such that some folk ideas tended to be swapped in the pool of communal thought since they were neither preserved in print (Wiredu, 1980: 37). The same problem applies to “what is ubuntu” question because - ubuntu has many meanings that are inexhaustible because it cannot be pinned down to have originated at a particular point in time in history (Murove, 2014).

### **The Question of Its Relevance.**

I am apt to think that the question of ubuntu’s relevance requires a close examination and attention to detail since some philosophers are sceptical about it in modern Africa. For instance, van Binsbergen (2001); Marx (2002); Enslin and Horsthemke (2004); Eze (2008; and 2008a); Matolino and Kwindingwi (2013) Matolino (2015); Zimunya, Gwara and Mlambo (2015); Matolino (2019) etc. However, this does not mean that it is only through this form of scepticism that one should frame, re-think, re-appropriate, or begin to seriously wonder about, the question of its relevance for our own times. For this reason, the question for ubuntu’s relevance rests upon two basic tenets in this project. Firstly, there is going to be a chapter that deals with ubuntu’s metaphysical grounding or the manner in which the possibilities of ubuntu have been grounded in post-colonial/apartheid (southern) Africa: Chapter two. Secondly, and as outlined above, I shall delve into the Matolino-Kwindingwi-Metz debate in order to address the question of ubuntu’s relevance and its relationships with the dictates and dynamics of modernity: Chapter five.

### **Ubuntu and the Problem of Interpretation.**

Anyone who is said to be very keen and curious about this place’s<sup>9</sup> philosophy, would have noticed that ubuntu is understood in different ways. Not only would this be the case, but she/he has to understand that ubuntu is contested in as far as its interpretations, and descriptions are concerned. At the heart of these deliberations lie certain disparities whose sole aims are to affirm or not to affirm its place in modern African experiences. The sole aim of affirming or not affirming its place is occasioned by how different thinkers, academics, legal practitioners, politicians, ordinary people, and others grapple with its relevance to modern Africa. For this reason, the term is said to have circulated through orality and tradition associated with no

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<sup>8</sup> This point is further clarified by Anoba Abraham (2017: 38). He argues that most knowledge on the evolution of African philosophy was preserved in arts, tales and other literatures passed from one generation to another.

<sup>9</sup> Southern Africa.

particular authoritative text. So, it automatically becomes open to interpretation especially in view of its application to contemporary southern Africa (Blaukenberg, 1999: 43).

It should come as no surprise that ubuntu is riddled with problems. The crux of the matter is that it is often used - in a mechanical way - to solve current problems (Venter, 2004). What appears to be forgotten, or not given the attention it deserves is that ubuntu comes from a feudal socio-economic system where Chiefs, clans, and extended families were providers of wealth and values (*Ibid.*). What Elza Venter (2004) points out is that African cultures and historic contexts should be taken cognisant of when using ubuntu [to re-appropriate it for modern or large-scale societies]. On this occasion, one should not uncritically accept everything that is said about African cultures. What one should refrain from is romanticising everything about what it is/means to be African. This is particularly linked to ideas expressed in the works of Placide Tempels, Alexis Kagame, and John Mbiti who, according to Bruce Janz (2008: 29), “anachronistically invented an idyllic pre-colonial past that allegedly and urgently needed to be resuscitated”. It is clear that there are problems of interpretation attributed to ubuntu in modern Africa. And even the previous section was somehow leading to this problem. No doubt, ubuntu has become so topical yet more elusive and tantalizing concept. I assume it is clear from the foregoing that designating the meaning of ubuntu with all the expected precision is a tantalizing and problematic activity (Mawere and van Stam, 2016).

### **The Research Question, Sub-Questions and Objectives.**

The main research question that governs this project is stated as follows: *What is the relevance of ubuntu in modern Southern African societies?* I wish to substitute it with four sub-questions which will enable and steers this research to provide answers to it. The project is concerned with sub-questions of the following sort: Firstly, what is ubuntu? Secondly, what are the challenges faced by scholarly inquiry into ubuntu in its (ubuntu’s) attempts to deal with the question of its relevance? Thirdly, what is the relationship between ubuntu and the dictates of modernity? Finally, is ubuntu still relevant for modern Africa? These sub-questions are legitimate forms of inquiry that will be in concord with this project’s examination. This project’s examination seeks to spark a certain kind of investigation about the relevance of ubuntu in modern Africa. These sub-questions are also aligned with this project’s objectives. This project’s objectives are fourfold and framed as a theoretical approach to: give a critical exposition of ubuntu in African philosophy; explore some of the challenges faced by scholarly inquiry into ubuntu in its (ubuntu’s) attempts to address what grounds the possibilities of its

relevance for contemporary Africa; give a critical explication of ubuntu and its relationships with the facets of modernity in Africa; and present a close examination of ubuntu's relevance for our own times.

### **Research Methodology.**

The research methodology for this project is desk-based. Various databases will be used to comprehensively research the topic. Through a review of the available literature or existing resources, this project will draw on articles, journals, textbooks etc. I will critically and carefully read, explicate, or analyse, examine, and evaluate and reflect on journals, articles about the debate in both primary and secondary texts. This project will be done and conducted through reviewing the philosophical literature from which modern debates on ubuntu are viewed, critiqued, and discussed. Specific texts and key concepts which are sensitive to this debate will be analysed textually, philosophically and contrasted critically from literature.

### **Outline of Chapters.**

In chapters one, I give a critical exposition of ubuntu. Chapters two set out to present a general critique of scholarly inquiry into ubuntu. It does this by (a) Foregrounding some of the dominant views/assertions that ground the possibilities of ubuntu's relevance/talk for contemporary (southern) Africa; and (b) Presenting a close examination for the logic behind a metaphysical grounding for some of the affirmative postures attributed to ubuntu's relevance/talk for contemporary (southern) Africa. Chapters three outline the nature of the Matolino-Kwindingwi-Metz debate. It provides a critical examination of Metz's intervention and Chimakonam's contribution to this specific debate. It argues that their arguments are neither compelling nor should they be adumbrated as standard replies to Matolino and Kwindingwi. Chapters four target Koenane and Olatunji's contribution for a philosophical interrogation. This chapter argues that their arguments are neither compelling nor should they be adumbrated as standard reply to Matolino and Kwindingwi. The final chapter gives a critical explication of ubuntu and its relationship with the facets of modernity with reference to the debate. It presents a close examination of ubuntu and its challenges in modern African realities/societies. It argues that Metz's current defence fails to account for ubuntu's relevance for contemporary Africa.

### **Concluding Remarks.**

This chapter sought to show that the question of the relevance of ubuntu in modern southern African societies is the fulcrum for this research project. It constitutes the key research question

for the entire study. It has demonstrated what is to be achieved with this question. Thinkers who are engaged in discussions about affirming and questioning the relevance of ubuntu will be taken seriously. This project subjects the debate to philosophical scrutiny. The sole business for subjecting it to philosophical scrutiny is motivated by questioning ubuntu's relevance with specific reference to this debate. The question for the relevance of ubuntu is gleaned from my reading of the debate. This chapter has outlined the debate; a preview of contributions to the debate; the project's original contribution to the debate. It has critically discussed the question of the relevance of ubuntu; ubuntu and its relevance. It has expounded on ubuntu and its problems of interpretation. And introduced the research question, sub-questions, and objectives; research methodology, and ended with an outline of chapters.

# Chapter 1.

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## A Critical Expositive Discourse of Ubuntu.

### 1.1 Preliminary Remarks.

In this chapter, I set out to provide a critical exposition of ubuntu. In other words, the present chapter considers views and postulations that expound or advocate for ubuntu by setting out its meaning in illuminating ways. However, I strongly suggest that if one fails to grasp whatever significance this exposition intends to unveil, one must read it as built upon two basic tenets at least. Firstly, she/he must read it as a steppingstone towards a critical examination of ubuntu and its challenges in modern philosophical discourses. Secondly, she/he must read it as a means of demonstrating the broadness of ubuntu's pertinent views that I discuss before I penetrate the vast recesses of the Matolino-Kwindingwi-Metz debate and how it addresses the question of ubuntu's relevance in modern African societies. In what follows, I aim to show forth critical analyses and interpretations born out of different perspectives on the subject of ubuntu. And I treat the subject matter in hand (ubuntu) with absolute impartiality.

#### 1.1.1 Outline.

The map for this chapter is three-fold and structured in the following fashion. Firstly, I provide a brief description of ubuntu. In this section, I shall appeal to ubuntu's linguistical and philosophical analyses. Secondly, I provide a brief construal of what ubuntu is as articulated by different thinkers. And I shall not give an exhaustive construal of what ubuntu is. Finally, I give an account for the African community in understanding ubuntu. This account springs from one crucial point: the role of the community in understanding ubuntu. But I will not consider standard views against the construal of this community in Africa since doing so is beyond the length parameters of this project.

### 1.2 A Brief Description of Ubuntu.

In this section, I wish to give a brief but analytic description of what ubuntu is before I set out its meaning in a novel manner. What I attempt to do with this analytic description is at two levels. I consider ubuntu's (a) Linguistical and (b) Philosophical analyses. This two-fold description seeks to break down the term "*ubuntu*" into its bare essentials. It analyses the term in its various parts, attributes, or properties separately [ubu- and -ntu] without reference to each other and dovetail its various parts together - ubuntu. I provide the linguistical and philosophical analyses of the term to make its descriptions "less disputatious and to escape from futile and deadlock arguments" (Williamson, 2018: 37). Hence, not only is ubuntu

captured by a wider linguistic rendering in the Bantu languages of Southern Africa, but it has gained considerable attention in Zimbabwe and South Africa since these countries needed home-grown philosophies to move forward after they were plagued by Apartheid and liberation war (Mangena, 2016).

### 1.2.1 Ubuntu's Linguistical Analysis.

Ubuntu is derived from proverbial expressions [aphorisms] found in several languages in Southern Africa (Le Grange, 2013: 331). Its linguistic and descriptive analysis heralds that the origins of “*ubuntu*” requires one to separate it so as to understand the term accurately. This separation proves that it must be understood as prefixes; and suffixes that surround the roots “-*ntu*” (Nguni languages), “-*tho*” (SeSotho language) or “-*nhu*” (ChiShona language). It is this root which not only refers to “being or thing” but does not change in singular and plural. It is said that “*ntu*” is reserved to a human being or person (Ntibagirirwa, 2018: 115 – 119). I think we can also analyse both prefixes *ubu-* and *umu-* using for instance, noun class categorizations found in one of the Nguni languages. In linguistics the term “*ubuntu*” grammatically combines *-ntu* “person” or “human being” with the class 14 *ubu-* prefix used to form abstract nouns so that the term is parallel in semantic content to the abstract noun “humanity” (Oduor, 2014: 76). The IsiZulu noun classes is exemplary here.<sup>10</sup> Both prefixes *ubu-* and *umu-* may be conjoined with *-ntu*. The word *ubu-* originates from what is known as *isigaba* 14 or the 14<sup>th</sup> Class of IsiZulu nouns. This class is constitutive of abstract concepts. Nouns in this class are always in a singular form and I am not aware of any attempt aimed at pluralizing them. This is similar to other African languages: “*u-*” [Chi-Shona]; “*u-bu-*” [Kinyarwanda]; “*o-bu-*” [Luganda] (Byamugisha, Keet, and DeRenzi, 2018). When they are conjoined with *-ntu/nhu* or *tho* they become *ubuntu/unhu/obuntu* or *botho* and automatically belongs to the ‘essential noun class’<sup>11</sup> which is a class of abstract concepts. The prefix *umu-* originates from what is known as “*isigaba*-(1)” or the 1<sup>st</sup> class of Zulu nouns which contains people and kinships. Similarly, in other African languages one gets the following prefixes “*mu-*” [Chi-Shona]; “*mu-*” [Kikuyu], “*u-mu-*” [Kinyarwanda]; and “*o-mu-*” [Luganda]. When it is conjoined with *-ntu;-nhu;* or *-tho* it becomes *umuntu/omuntu/munhu* or *motho* and automatically belongs to the ‘human noun class’.<sup>12</sup> On the other side, it is said that the prefix *ubu-* refers to the abstract whilst the suffix

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<sup>10</sup> I use IsiZulu because it is one of the languages, I am most familiar with:

<http://www.whitezulu.wordpress.com/izigaba-zamabizo/>.

<sup>11</sup> Here are examples of nouns that belong to this class: *ubusika* (winter); *ubuthi* (poison or venom); *ububi* (evil) and *ubuhlungu* (pain).

<sup>12</sup> Here are examples of nouns that belong to this class: *uMakoti* (a wife); *uMvukelambuso* (a terrorist).

*-ntu* is an ancestor who got human society going. This ancestor is depicted as the one who gave us a way of life as human beings (Munyaka and Motlhabi, 2009). This way of life is depicted as the communal way of life which recommends that society must be run for the sake of all. It is this “communal” way of life that requires cooperation, sharing and charity. As a result, not only is ubuntu seen as the quality of being human but it is the behaviour or quality of the “*-ntu*” society (Mfenyana, 1986: 18 – 19).

### **1.2.2 Ubuntu’s Philosophical Analysis.**

Mogobe Ramose (1999; 2002; 2005) recommends that the best way to do this analysis is to approach the term “*ubuntu*” from the angle of philosophical discourse. He approaches “*ubuntu*” as a hyphenated term: *ubu-ntu*. His analysis depicts *ubu-ntu* as a compound word that emerges from the prefix *ubu-* and the stem *-ntu*. He suggests that the former is a denotation of the idea of being in general. To be more precise, the ‘*ubu-*’ prefix denotes the highest level of generality in its ontological standing. He insists that this prefix stands freely and ontologically to be conjoined with a number of suffixes (Ramose, 2005). This prefix is understood as enfolded being before it manifests itself in the concrete form or mode of existence of a particular entity since it is always oriented towards unfoldment: *-ntu* (*Ibid.*) On the other side, Ramose (2005: 34 – 35) notes that *umu-* shares an identical ontological feature with the prefix: *ubu-*. When it comes to these ontological features, he argues that the “*Ubu-*” denotes the widest generality and the idea of motion whilst *umu-* tends to be more specific. In addition, *ubu-* implies the idea of perpetual motion which cannot be halted unless motion ceases to exist, writes Ramose (2005). Not only does Ramose construe this motion as verbal but it is always moving towards *-ntu*, which depicts the temporary place where one has become (Ramose, 2002; Robinson-Morris, 2018). Moreover, it is common knowledge that whenever *umu-* is intermingled with *-ntu* something else comes up: *umuntu*.<sup>13</sup> *Umuntu* shares the same *-ntu*-suffix with *ubuntu* (Ramose, 2005). Accordingly, *ubuntu* is conceived of as a derivative of the word *umuntu*: meaning a person, or a human being (Munyaka and Motlhabi, 2009: 64). Both *ubu-* and *umu-* can be coupled with many suffixes.<sup>14</sup>

The suffix ‘*-ntu*’ is distinctly epistemological. It is posited as the nodal point at which being (*ubu-*) assumes a concrete form or mode of being in the process of continual unfoldment (Ramose, 2005). For this reason, *-ntu* stands not only for the epistemological be-ing but it also

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<sup>13</sup> A human be-ing.

<sup>14</sup> As for *ubu-*, we can couple it with *-vila*, and this literally means laziness in IsiZulu. And as for *umu-*, we can couple it with *-sangano* in order to get *umusangano*. *Umusangano* literally means madness in IsiZulu.

means the process of life as the unfolding of the universe by manifestation in different forms and modes of being (Ramose, 1999). Of central importance here is also the inseparability of *ubu-* and *-ntu* (Ramose, 2002: 231; and Robinson-Morris, 2018). This inseparability all comes down to *ubuntu* as an African onto-epistemology. On this view *ubuntu* becomes the indivisible one-ness and whole-ness of an African ontology and epistemology (Ramose, 2002: 230). The indivisibility of being-becoming (*ubu-*) towards the very temporary location where one has become (*-ntu*) situates *ubuntu* as a gerund, a “-ness” and not an “-ism”. An “-ism” according to Ramose (2002; 2004: 150) falsely gives the impression of entities as existing, as fixed, independent, and separate. The view that Ramose is concerned with rests on a distinction between humanism and humanness. Humanism places humans at the centre of everything whilst humanness does not prioritise the human self but recognises the human being as connected to other human beings and features of the natural world (Bilchitz, Metz, and Oyowe, 2017: 215 – 216). It has been argued that whether one associates him/herself with humanism or humanness, there is a bottom-line that he must take into consideration. It is in recognition of both humanness and humanism as definitive aspects of the African philosophy of ubuntu that one may have truly seen this bottom-line (Mangena, 2016). Therefore, when one dovetails *ubu-* and *-ntu* what she/he gets is *ubuntu*. And it is this kind of philosophical yet descriptive analysis for ubuntu couched in Afro-ontological (*ubu-*) – and epistemological (*-ntu*) terms which Ramose saw fit to qualify as the root of African philosophy (Ramose, 2002; 2005).

### **1.3 A Brief Construal of What Ubuntu Is.**

This section endeavours to give a broad but not exhaustive construal of what ubuntu is as articulated by many an African thinker residing in sub-Saharan Africa. It does this since ubuntu harbours an array of logical, ethical, epistemological, and metaphysical value-laden manifestations (Mangena, 2016). It is said that it provides a well-established and highly advanced moral compass for the embodiment of human character with direct application in business; religion; politics; law; education; and management among other spheres of life (Mawere, and van Stam, 2016). It is posited as an old philosophy and way of life that has sustained African and particularly southern African communities for centuries. It represents the kind of behaviour that is inculcated in the individual by society through established traditional institutions over a period of time. It is attained through socialisation. It is also construed as a spiritual foundation, an inner state, an orientation, disposition towards good motives. It challenges and makes individuals perceive, feel and act in a human way towards others (Munyaka and Motlhabi, 2009: 63 – 65).

Ubuntu is a traditional value that has attained a universal status not only in southern Africa but also in Africa (Ntlama, 2014). Not only is it a lived but is also a living philosophy of the “Bantu-speaking peoples”<sup>15</sup> of Africa (Bhengu, 2015: 17). It is a philosophy with a past, a present, and a project in the future. That ubuntu is the lived and living experience of human beings denotes that the human dignity of the Bantu-speaking peoples demands recognition, protection, promotion, and respect on the basis of equality with all other human beings, wherever they may be on planet earth (Ramose, 2014: 121). It refers to the moral attributes, or human quality, character or conduct, and the essence of being a person who is known as *umuntu/munhu/muthu* or *omundu* in the Bantu languages (Mangena, 2016). *Umuntu* is known as the agent or doer of ubuntu. Not only is he/she a spacio-temporal being, but he/she participates in the perennial “doing” of ubuntu (Ramose, 2005). Without *abantu* there can be no ubuntu. Thus, ubuntu is a denotation of a “-ness” not an “-ism” (Ramose, 2004: 150), It points one to a “family atmosphere” or environment which points one to a kind of affinity and kinship among the indigenous people of Africa. This kind of affinity is expressed in the following aphorisms: *motho ke motho ka batho* [Sotho] and *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* [Zulu, Xhosa, and Ndebele]. Both aphorisms mean one and the same thing. They reveal that to be human is to affirm one’s humanity by recognising the humanity of others, and on that basis establish humane relations with them. What these aphorisms have in common is that they price communal relations with others in virtue of the values that are placed on humanity/personhood. They are best known as the basic tenets of an ethic of ubuntu (Munyaka and Motlhabi, 2009: 65). What this shows is not only that ubuntu underlies the significance of related-ness, but it suggests that to be human is to be in relationships with others (Ramose, 2005: 40 – 42, and Mkhwanazi, 2016). The concept of “humanity” “humanness” or “personhood” is at the core of ubuntu. It is about human kindness and what it is that makes a person, a person. It is the interdependence of persons for existence, development, and fulfilment of their potentialities to be both individuals and the community (Mangena, 2016). On this view, it advocates a profound sense of interdependence and emphasizes that our true human potential can only be realized in partnership with others. It is about the group or community more than it is about the self (*Ibid.*).

Ubuntu has a communal character instead of an individual character. Further, it does not succumb to any individualistic or egocentric outlook since its emphasis is the significance of a

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<sup>15</sup> According to Mfuniselwa, J. Bhengu, the ‘Bantu-speaking people’ of Africa consists of more than 100 Negroe people who live in Southern and Central Africa, ranging from Nigeria and Uganda to South Africa and who speak about 700 languages, and this includes many dialectics (2015: 17).

group or community. It is associated with a whole range of positive values and attitudes such as respect for human life and elders; passion for community; helpfulness; conviviality, sharing, caring, trust and unselfishness. It seeks to harmonise the past with the present and the future (Mawere and Mubaya, 2016). It describes a particular way of life: a life that is central to communal relationships, a life that promotes and manifests itself and is best made evident in harmonious relations within society (Munyaka and Motlhabi, 2009: 65). In other words, ubuntu is known to be associated with the following expressions: humanity towards others; a universal bond of sharing that connects all humanity; one's humanity only comes through the humanity of others; and everyone's humanity is tied to everyone's humanity (Etieyibo, 2017). On this occasion, this depicts that a human being is the *telos* or ought to be the *telos* of human activities and all ethical or normative considerations. This rightly conjures up a good image of a human being that is at the end, centre, and beginning of all ethical considerations (Etieyibo, 2017: 140 – 143). On this view, ubuntu is deemed as averse to anything that is harmful to a human being. It flourishes in respect and honour for others and without it there is no peace. Hence, it refers to certain values [generosity; respectfulness; understanding; kindness etc.] expected of a person since one is human and not anything else just as we expect the heat to express heat-ness or a dog its dog-ness (Ntibagirirwa, 2018: 121).

#### **1.4 An Account of The African Community in Understanding Ubuntu.**

What I wish to achieve in this section is structured in the following fashion. I expound more on the idea of the community simply because it is said to have inoculated, prolonged, and sustained how and what we understand ubuntu to be. The community is at the nerve of things that constitute the individual and ubuntu. This individual person is portrayed as an agent of ubuntu (Ramose, 2005: 36). Hence, the manner in which ubuntu has been understood or articulated cuts across the community and the individual in Africa.

##### **1.4.1 The Role of the Community in Understanding Ubuntu.**

It is common knowledge that the community is a constitutive element of understanding ubuntu (Munyaka and Motlhabi, 2009, Ramose, 2005) Not only is the community the context for the manifestation of ubuntu, but the *umuntu* also. It is this human community that is used by an individual to realise himself/herself as a person (Munyaka and Motlhabi, 2009: 68 – 72). She/he is expected to validate her/his humanness in terms of life in accordance with certain values that the community cherishes (Ntibagirirwa, 2018). Before venturing into the details of the role of the community in our understanding of what ubuntu is, it is necessary for one to understand its relationship with the individual person.

On this occasion, in Africa man is defined with reference to the community (Menkiti, 1984). In fact, the community always comes first. The individual is born out of and into this community, and she/he will always be part of the community (Venter, 2004). It is the reality of the communal world that takes precedence over the reality of individual life histories. It is in rootedness in an ongoing human community that this individual comes to see himself as a man. It is also by knowing this community that the individual also comes to know himself as a durable, more, or less permanent, fact of this world (Menkiti, 1984). On this view, it is the community that defines the person as person, not some isolated static quality of rationality, will or memory. In this sense, not only is personhood conceived of as something which has to be achieved but at the same time it is not given because one is born of the human seed (*Ibid.*). What this shows is that the idea of personhood proceeds from the belief that a network of social relations defines the social nature of a human being. Ontologically speaking, a person neither proceeds nor is he/she posterior to the community (Ajei, 2016: 231). Moreover, a community is viewed as the oneness of a living triad that is constitutive of the living, the living-dead [ancestors] and the yet-to-be-born. The living had an obligation to the yet-to-be-born by participating in sex with the intention to have children. This is primarily because having children is considered as a very important responsibility in marriage (Ramose, 2016: 202 – 204). Not only does sex in this community serve to procreate so that the family will be expanded but the individual duty has to contribute to the growth of the family and the community. Failure to procreate and enhance the growth of the community is perceived as a very bad light. Hence, sexual intercourse is limited to married heterosexuals, and can never be entertained if it is done with the intention to give oneself or someone possible pleasures since it is done for a specific purpose (Matolino, 2011: 76).

Another crucial point is that traditional African social organisations or communitarian thinking project individuals as inherently relational in the sense of their being natural members of community. They have an inherent need to be dependent since human life is social by nature as it commences and progresses within a web of well-defined social affiliations (Ajei, 2016: 230 – 231). Indeed, in this sense, the community takes priority over the individual (Menkiti, 1984). This community or belonging to a community is part of the essence of traditional African life which renders man as inseparable from it (Venter, 2004: 151 – 153). It is this community that is always in a state of flux. That is, the community gains its strength if mutual obligations are fulfilled (Mkhize, 2008). What weakens the community is moral transgressions which cause separations within the community. But separations from moral transgression are

rectified if this community works interactively to re-establish social connection, interdependence which results to communal unity (Mkhize, 2008: 41). Elders are projected as contributors to the community's stability and cohesion. The status of these elders is an "earned-status". This status is usually earned, as Polycarp Ikuenobe (1998: 37) writes, through a "number of practical life experience". And when these elders display their wealth of knowledge in moral judgments, children get the opportunity to learn the proper behaviour expected of them (Ikuenobe, 1998).

Therefore, I think I have attempted to paint a picture that conjures up a relationship between the community and individual. This relationship between the community and the individual shows that the self is rooted in the community. In other words, one attains selfhood through others since it is with reference to the community that a person is defined (Mkhize, 2008: 21; and Ntibagirirwa, 2018: 123). It is this picture which projects an individual as only a person when she acts and presents herself as part of the group. And at the point where she sees herself as an individual that is independent of the group and whose being is understandable outside the group, she automatically becomes a non-person (Taiwo, 2016: 94). So conceived, ubuntu offers a language through which once's "individual rights" derives from group membership (Oyewumin, 1997: 45 in Chitando and Magadla, 2014: 185).

I now endeavour to expound more on how the community's role is understood in as far as its usefulness and depictions of what ubuntu is are concerned. In the African tradition the word "community" signifies some existing society or group and is used to refer to an ideal regarding the way the members of a group ought to relate to each other (Metz, 2013: 81). It turns out to be the case that many communities that are still living in accordance with traditional values and principles adhere to the dictates of ubuntu. Some may even argue that one cannot speak of ubuntu outside of community. Be it at birth/conception and death Africans are always in community (Dolamo, 2013). What this shows is that the significance of the community is at the heart of understanding the usefulness of ubuntu. It is in this community of similarly constituted selves that a human being defines herself/himself with respect to the quality of his/her participation. Even personhood is defined with reference and in relation to the community. For this reason, ubuntu speaks into the interrelationship that exists between the individual and the community in which she/ lives or vice-versa (Ntlama, 2014). The community breeds a strong and binding network of relationships. For instance, not only do children belong to their respective biological parents, but they are under the control and authority of any adult

in the community. It is for this reason that even kinship terms attest to the nature of the relationships that bind members of a community together (Kamwangamalu, 1999).

On this view, the member of a community constitutive of ubuntu uses words such as “sister, brother, father, mother, or uncle etc” to any member even if they are not siblings or members of the same clan (Kamwangamalu, 1999: 28). The sense of community exists if and only if people are mutually responsive to one another’s needs (Mkhize, 2008: 39). Within this community, an individual is natured into becoming a mature and responsible human being that would embrace values, norms, principles or dictates of ubuntu. One becomes fully human if she/he goes through a progressive process of integration into society (Dolamo, 2013). What this claim essentially amounts to is that interdependence in a community affirms the very essence and existence of ubuntu. This is chiefly because an individual in this community owes her/his existence to the existence of others. This gives credence to the cardinal belief of ubuntu as asserting that a man can only be a man through others (Kamwangamalu, 1999: 29). The aphorism “*umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*” unveils the significance of group solidarity on issues so central to the survival of communities. It is said that this aphorism envelops values which are key to group solidarity: compassion, kindness, patience, respect, human dignity, humanness, caring, sharing, harmony, balance, reciprocity, truth, justice, order, and conformity to basic norms, collective unity, and being sensitive to the needs of others (Ntlama, 2014).

Ubuntu is not a “throat clearing exercise” but it signifies human interdependence and group solidarity which are central to the survival of communities, writes Ntlama (2014: 83). The best model for these community is the family. It is said that the family has no function outside the community. Not only does the family serve as a means of personal growth for its members but interactions, conversations and companionship between the growing and full-grown members are also an end in themselves. The extended family, for Shutte (2008), is deemed as capable of extensions to include anyone. This is partly because ubuntu is infused within the concept of inclusivity. So, the extended family does not only include those related by blood, kinship, or marriage but even strangers. On this view, humanity itself is construed as a family that one joins at birth and does not leave by dying (Shutte, 2008: 28). This may be linked to the sense of relationality since ubuntu is itself a relational matter that involves living a life comprised of morally praiseworthy behaviour. And it is this moral praiseworthy behaviour that is at the centre of the unity and harmony of a community (Tshivhase, 2018: 198).

## **1.5 Closing Remarks.**

This chapter has sought to give a critical exposition of ubuntu. In doing so, it has managed to achieve three things. Firstly, it has provided a brief description of ubuntu. This section appealed to ubuntu's linguistic and philosophical analyses. Secondly, the chapter has provided a brief construal of what ubuntu is as articulated by different thinkers. It did not aim to provide an exhaustive construal of what ubuntu is. Finally, it sought to give an account for the African community in understanding ubuntu. This account emanated from one crucial point: the role of the community in understanding ubuntu.

## Chapter 2.

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### **The Logic for And Behind the Possibilities of Ubuntu's Relevance: A Critique of Scholarly Inquiry into Ubuntu.**

#### **2.1 Preliminary Remarks.**

The preceding chapter gave a critical exposition of ubuntu. Not only did it aim to demonstrate the broadness of ubuntu's pertinent views, but it served as a steppingstone towards a critical examination of ubuntu and its challenges in modern philosophical discourses. However, this chapter challenges the logic behind affirming the possibilities of ubuntu's relevance in modern Africa. No doubt, most pro-ubuntu scholars did foreground its assertions that brought to the surface ubuntu's affirmative postures for its place in modern Africa: scholarly inquiry into ubuntu. These affirmations for ubuntu's relevance shall be used as a foil for a critique I wish to make. They span from different interpretations. This critique does not cast the entirety of ubuntu's assertions into doubt. Instead, it shall be at the level of detail that draws from a metaphysical grounding for the following postures which manifest reactionary frameworks and an affirmative zeal for ubuntu's relevance/talk: ubuntu and metaphysics; ubuntu as African education; ubuntu as African law/jurisprudence; ubuntu as humanism; ubuntu as cosmopolitanism; ubuntu as African ethics; and ubuntu as environmental ethics. This critique seeks to penetrate the recesses of ubuntu's affirmations, a little bit. It shall be at the level of detail that suffices to build a foundation for thinking harder about ubuntu and its relevance in the subsequent chapters. And I shall not make a case for it being the best critique that one could offer in reaction to the logic for ubuntu's affirmative postures.

##### **2.1.1 Outline.**

The aim of this chapter is two-folded. Firstly, it foregrounds some of the dominant views/assertions that affirm the possibilities of ubuntu's relevance in contemporary southern Africa. This is done with the intention to foreground different ways in which the possibilities of ubuntu's relevance/talk have been grounded in Southern Africa: scholarly inquiry into ubuntu. It will not be concerned with which of them will best account for plausible answers to the question of ubuntu and its relevance. Hence, it foregrounds some but not all thinkers who [or views that] did establish a metaphysical grounding for the relevance of ubuntu. Secondly, it presents a close examination for the logic behind a metaphysical grounding for some of the affirmative postures attributed to ubuntu's relevance in contemporary (southern) Africa.

## 2.2 The Logic for the Possibilities of Ubuntu's Affirmations.

This section aims to provide a brief discussion of the manner in which the possibilities of ubuntu's relevance have been grounded by individual scholars. No doubt, ubuntu has become a powerful draw for many intellectuals within and beyond (Southern) Africa (Eze, 2008: 230). However, this section is limited to a number of scholars who have grounded the possibilities of ubuntu's relevance in the light of Western or other philosophical approaches of the world. In other words, it falls within the ambits of those who attribute an identical meaning to ubuntu using other Western philosophical approaches: *ubuntu as something(x)* or *ubuntu and something(x)*. This is linked to scholarly inquiry into ubuntu. For instance, there is a growing tendency from the existing literature that understands ubuntu from the prisms of *metaphysics; humanism; cosmopolitanism; formal education; law/jurisprudence; environmental ethics* etc. For this reason, some scholars embark on this enterprise so as to devise other modes of reflecting on ubuntu in ways that might suit their proclivities. It is this enterprise which some scholars invoke in order to ground other affluences of understanding ubuntu using their own interpretations informed by their training and proclivities (Matolino, 2015: 215 – 216). And I aim to exemplify different interpretations as they appear in the literature in the following table.

**Table 1: ubuntu and Western philosophical approaches**

An indigenous African Philosophy	Western Philosophical Approaches	Western Philosophical Approaches as Grounding the Possibilities of Ubuntu's Relevance or Ubuntu Talk for contemporary southern Africa	Some Candidates for Scholarly Inquiry into Ubuntu
1. Ubuntu	Metaphysics	Ubuntu and metaphysics	Ramosé (2002; 2003: 236 - 237; 2005); Nabudere (2005: 3 - 5); Mangena (2016); and Ntibatirwa (2018) etc
2. Ubuntu	Humanism	Ubuntu as/and (African) Humanism	Samkange and Samkange (1980); Letseka (2000: 188); Eze (2011); Gade (2011, 2012); Mangena (2016); and Praeg (2017: 295) etc.
3. Ubuntu	Cosmopolitanism	Ubuntu as/ and Cosmopolitanism	Ramosé (2014); Ngcoya (2015); Eze (2017); Etieyibo (2017); Graness (2018); and Umezurike (2020) etc.
4. Ubuntu	Formal education	Ubuntu as/and (African) Education	Letseka (2000; 2012; 2016); Higgs (2004; 2012); Venter (2004); Waghid (2004; 2014; 2020); Piper (2016); Bondai and Kaputa (2016); Shanyanana and Waghid (2016); Oviawe (2016); Etieyibo (2017); Viriri and Viriri (2018: 104 - 107) Walton (2018) and Waghid, Waghid and Waghid (2018) etc.

5. Ubuntu	Ethics	Ubuntu as/and (African) Ethics	Ramose (2002; 2004); Metz (2007; 2010; 2014); Shutte (2008); Mkhize (2008); Murove (2009: xvi; 2009a: 14 - 15); Metz and Gaie (2010); Dolamo (2013); and Mangena (2016 and 2016a) etc.
6. Ubuntu	Law/or Jurisprudence	Ubuntu as/and (African) Law/Jurisprudence	Mokgoro (1998); Ramose (2005); Cornell and Muvangua (2012); Keevy (2014: 56 - 57); Furman (2014: 150 - 166); Cornell (2004; 2014: 167 - 175); Ndima (2015); Bennett (2018); and Kamga (2018) etc.
7. Ubuntu	Environmental ethics	Ubuntu as/and (African) Environmental Ethics	Murove (2009: 315 - 330); Ramose (2009); and Chibvongodze (2016) etc.

As a matter of fact, I conceive of all the propositions (*ubuntu as something(x)* or *ubuntu and something(x)*) enshrined in the above table as grounding the possibilities for ubuntu's talk/relevance for our own times. This manner of grounding ubuntu emanates from individual scholars who are keen about ubuntu and its relevance for post-colonial/apartheid (southern) Africa. No doubt, this is linked to what Metz (2014: 64) construes as 'scholarly inquiry into ubuntu'. Metz's views scholarly inquiry into ubuntu as the project that is only now properly getting started. He suggests that we have come to an era where thinkers and writers must reclaim 'talk of ubuntu' to contest its misuse since he thinks that scholars must not stop expounding ubuntu (Metz, 2014: 64 - 67). In fact, scholars must 'keep spreading the word', writes Metz (2014: 67). Koenane and Olatunji (2017: 273) find this stimulating. They suggest that from whichever angle 'talk of ubuntu' or 'ubuntu talk' is likely to continue as suggested by Metz. Matolino (2015: 215) on the other side, thinks that "this could be viewed as an innocuous scholarly activity, one that has to be encouraged even, for competing interpretations of ubuntu may be seen as a mark of sensible scholarship". Surely, this is a positive direction especially when one understands ubuntu as flexible to 'future constructive thinking' (Agada, 2013: 244). These propositions (*ubuntu as something(x)* or *ubuntu and something(x)*) take a rather specific posture since they form an intermingle that grounds the possibilities of talking about ubuntu's relevance for post-colonial/apartheid (southern) Africa. They demonstrate different layers of creativity and originality that necessitates how ubuntu must be understood and interpreted. I think, Western philosophical approaches that are enshrined in the above table, aim to build some relations/ similarities or differences; distinctions or comparisons with ubuntu. Hence, it is clear from the foregoing that some scholars interpret ubuntu in the light of

its relations, similarities or differences, distinctions, or comparisons with Western philosophical approaches of the world.

### **2.3 The Logic Behind the Foregoing Affirmative Stances: A Critique.**

I wish to present a close examination of a ‘*metaphysical grounding*’<sup>16</sup> for the possibilities of ubuntu’s relevance linked with the foregoing affirmative stances attributed to ubuntu’s scholarly inquiry for post-colonial/apartheid southern Africa. It is my view that not even a single instance of this examination could be found in the existing literature of ubuntu since at no point was a critique such as the following attempted. No doubt, adherents of ubuntu hardly ever criticize it in a manner anticipated below. Never had scholarly inquiry into ubuntu received such a critique targeted at its (ubuntu’s) metaphysical grounding that prizes Western philosophical approaches of the world as its sponsors. However, mine is open to further fruitful interrogation, critical scrutiny as well as rational, informed, and honest disagreements. In other words, I shall present but not make a case for it being the best critique that one could offer in reaction to ubuntu’s metaphysical grounding for post-colonial/apartheid (southern) Africa. And if there are Western philosophical approaches which metaphysically ground the possibilities of ubuntu’s relevance or ‘ubuntu talk’ for our own times, would that metaphysical grounding count as ‘the proper mode of philosophising’ about ubuntu’s relevance for post-colonial/apartheid southern Africa? (Chimakonam, 2016).<sup>17</sup>

Here is a grounding claim that I think can be formulated when one looks at the preceding sections so as to investigate the logic behind a metaphysical grounding I wish to target:

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<sup>16</sup> My usage of ‘*Metaphysical grounding*’ is drawn from Bruce Janz’s (2009) *Philosophy in an African Place*. He talks about the ‘metaphysical grounding’ of the field of African philosophy or African philosophers who are ‘in the service of searching for a metaphysical grounding’ to legitimate the field of African philosophy (2009: 26 and 29). Although I am inspired by Janz’s usage of ‘metaphysical grounding’, but I wish to designate its specialised context to thinkers/scholars who write on ubuntu for post-colonial/apartheid southern Africa. This is simply because there can also be a discussion about ubuntu’s metaphysical grounding: the manner in which ubuntu has been grounded. To be more specific, my critique of ubuntu is based on its (ubuntu’s) depictions as understood (and discussed in the light of or grounded upon) Western philosophical approaches of the world. For example, in this chapter I propose to argue that some Western philosophical approaches (cosmopolitanism, metaphysics, formal education, environmental ethics, humanism, law/jurisprudence etc) are used by scholars of ubuntu to search for its metaphysical grounding that will end up legitimating its (ubuntu’s) talk, or possibilities for post-colonial/apartheid (southern) Africa. Unlike Bruce Janz (2009) my critique of ubuntu’s ‘metaphysical grounding’ is going to be framed by a specific ‘*grounding claim*’ that I am about to formulate in order to ease my investigation for the logic behind ubuntu’s metaphysical grounding: *ubuntu and something(x)* or *ubuntu as something(x)*.

<sup>17</sup> Surely, Chimakonam (2016) is the prime candidate for arguing for what he calls ‘the proper mode of philosophising about ubuntu’. This is based on his argument in support of Metz’s systematisation of an ubuntu ethic. But I borrow his phrase not for the sake of defending scholarly inquiry into ubuntu but for registering my impatience with scholarly inquiry attributed to ubuntu’s relevance/talk for contemporary (southern) Africa

The fact that there is cosmopolitanism; humanism; formal education; law/jurisprudence; and metaphysics in general and elsewhere not only grounds the possibility of, but also affirms the fact that ubuntu is this and that or is something related to cosmopolitanism; humanism; formal education; law or jurisprudence; environmental ethics; and metaphysics etc.<sup>18</sup>

As from now onwards, I will refer to *cosmopolitanism; humanism; formal education; law or jurisprudence; environmental ethics*, and *metaphysics* etc, as *x*'s in plural or as *x* [e.g., *cosmopolitanism*] in singular. I use them because they seem to have grounded ubuntu's affirmative postures or the possibilities for 'ubuntu talk'. By *x* or *x*'s, I mean Western philosophical approach [es] of the world.

What I wish to point out with this grounding claim is that when one reads the preceding section, she/he may suggest that these *x*'s can be said to have grounded ubuntu metaphysically as opposed to ubuntu grounding any *x*. She could argue that only when the above affirmative postures are shown to have done some tricks will one attest to ubuntu's relevance in modern Africa. Indeed, she might say it appears that technical terms sponsored by Western forms of thinking are often the clearest and most salient markers of the archive within and against which the African theorist thinks or talks and writes or as Praeg (2017: 293) would have us believe. She might insist, quite seriously, that nowhere before ubuntu's textual history was there such a metaphysical grounding for its relevance in traditional African societies.

When she looks at these *x*'s, she may ask questions of the following sort: Why is it that the possibilities of talking about ubuntu's relevance was for the first time, at least in its textual history, grounded upon 'other philosophical approaches' such as *cosmopolitanism, formal education, humanism; metaphysics, jurisprudence/law*, etc? Surely there are things she might end up attesting to. Whilst she could recognise and attest that adherents of ubuntu did manage to respond, "to the pressure of living up to the rigours and demands of Western philosophy" (Matolino, 2018: 348) but there are different kinds of oddities and questions that might lead her to think that this manner of grounding ubuntu is worth thinking through seriously. This is chiefly because it may not be entirely clear why did scholars of ubuntu search for new ways of saying "Yes" to Western philosophical approaches of the world in their affirmation for a traditional philosophy they deem suitable for our own times.

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<sup>18</sup> This is not a direct quote from someone. But it is a grounding claim that I have formulated for this chapter.

All in all, what (*ubuntu or Western philosophical approaches*) grounds what (*Western philosophical approaches or ubuntu*)? Is ubuntu grounded on these approaches or are these approaches grounded on ubuntu? In other words, can one be justified in believing that it was ubuntu that universally grounded the possibilities of talking about *metaphysics, law or jurisprudence, cosmopolitanism* and *formal education* given the fact that its textual history is quite recent unlike that of these *x*'s? I do not want to think that this is the case. Or can one be justified in believing that it was the idea of *metaphysics, law/jurisprudence, formal education, and cosmopolitanism* inherited from elsewhere that drove scholars of ubuntu to ground the possibilities of talking about it in modern Africa with specific reference to these *x*'s? Does this metaphysical grounding reiterate and perpetuate the epistemic violence of the disciplinary grid imposed and historically inflicted on the continent in order for it to speak back in a language already familiar to the Western scholar? (Praeg, 2017: 294). Well, it seems like adherents of ubuntu had some of these *x*'s in mind when fabricating, by way of interpretation, the possibilities of talking about ubuntu and its relevance for post-colonial/apartheid southern Africa. No doubt, this is another way of talking about ubuntu as scholarly inquiry.

Most importantly, some interpretations of ubuntu purport to find comparisons and contrasts, similarities and relations with certain *x*'s: ubuntu as cosmopolitanism (Ngcoya, 2015; Eze, 2017; and Etieyibo, 2017), ubuntu as jurisprudence (Furman, 2014: 150 – 165) ubuntu as humanism (Samkange and Samkange, 1980), ubuntu as environmental ethics (Murove, 2009) ubuntu and Kantianism (Metz, 2007); ubuntu and Christianity (Praeg, 2014: 37, and Koenane and Olatunji, 2017: 267); ubuntu and Hobbessianism (Metz, 2007); ubuntu and law (Mokgoro, 1998; Ramose, 2005; Furman, 2014; Keevy, 2014: 54 – 78) etc. In fact, it reads as if only in this way a number of scholars can be sure that ubuntu is relevant for contemporary Africa. Or what my reading of ubuntu's affirmative stances shows is that it is absorbed in the grounding claim formulated above. The reason why it seems to be absorbed in the grounding claim hitherto formulated is simply because ubuntu (as scholarly inquiry) in post-colonial/apartheid southern Africa is somewhat perceived from the standpoint of Western philosophy.

However, I do recognize that some African scholars articulate, for example, African "metaphysics from the standpoint of Western philosophy" simply because of a lack of a better word in most African cultures (Mangena, 2016). This does not mean that African thinkers may not follow this path or use it to think differently and in a manner that is sensitive to the realities Africa is conditioned under. No doubt, Western philosophical approaches of the world can inspire and be used to penetrate certain discussions that demand further philosophical

interrogations even on the African continent. As things stand, it turns out to be the case and it certainly is true that Western philosophical approaches are somewhat perceived as the gateways to our philosophising about ubuntu's talk and relevance in modern Africa. It reads as if the most interesting part from this perpetuation somehow gives birth to an obsession to "draw the line between what is African from what is fundamentally Western" (Mangena, 2016). But this does not mean that I read pro-ubuntu scholars as insisting that the relevance of ubuntu in modern Southern Africa would have been inconceivable without them building relations, contrasts, making us realise some relations and comparisons with ubuntu to some Western philosophical approaches.

Hence, I wish to focus on the question of '*Western philosophical approaches*' grounding ubuntu metaphysically as opposed to ubuntu grounding any Western philosophical approach. The sole business for my questioning this metaphysical grounding which seems to register the talk or relevance of ubuntu in modern southern Africa as of vital necessity is simply to make sure that no one grants it "[the] status of unquestionability" (Kresse, 2005: 03). If ubuntu's metaphysical grounding is granted any status of unquestionability it may stand a better chance of being "shield[ed] [..] from further fruitful interrogation" (*Ibid.*). In addition, this section raises some questions which cut across the motive or logic behind such a metaphysical grounding that can be deduced from a grounding claim hitherto formulated. This section will not be worried about the challenges and prospects of any of the above *x*'s linked to ubuntu in African philosophy. Neither will the entire section interrogate various angles from which ubuntu's affirmative stances as metaphysically grounded upon some *x*'s have been registered. Nor will it suffice to interrogate how good or dodgy are certain relations and comparisons, similarities and contrasts attributed to ubuntu's relevance or talk from the above *x*'s.

For this reason, it seems like one may find him/herself trying "to find a way of adjudicating between the competing interpretations of ubuntu to see which one is correct or most plausible" (Matolino, 2015: 215). In this case, these are interpretations of ubuntu that are metaphysically grounded upon Western philosophical approaches. What if some of these competing interpretations ("*ubuntu as/and*": *cosmopolitanism, humanism, environmental ethics, jurisprudence, and formal education*) rested on a mistake even though they are now endorsed as normal? However, this is not to suggest that there are no occasions in which one can deploy this metaphysical grounding ("*ubuntu as/and*"-propositions) or see its usefulness. Neither does it suggest that this metaphysical grounding should not count as a necessary criterion that must be satisfied in understanding what it is like to talk about the possibilities of ubuntu (as scholarly

inquiry) for contemporary Africa. Nor does it suggest that this manner of grounding ubuntu (*ubuntu as (or and) x*) should count as a sufficient criterion for affirming ubuntu's possibilities. In fact, I am tempted to think that it should not count as a sufficient criterion for affirming the possibilities of its relevance if this metaphysical grounding is not exhausted and defended with sustainable positions. In addition, one must not forget to ask when it is necessary to make this deployment (*ubuntu as (or and) something*), and what the occasions are for and behind grounding ubuntu in this manner. Or what necessity does this deployment occasions ubuntu to be in contemporary Africa.

Though I admit quite strongly that these patterns of thinking were important ones to have been voiced by thinkers who saw fit to voice them interruptedly or uninterruptedly, but unfortunately, I think they are up to scrutiny. For this reason, it is no hidden fact that the "first generation" -: [e.g. Samkange and Samkange (1980); Ramose (1999, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004; 2005); and Tutu (1999)] and "second generation" -: [e.g. Prozesky (2003); Metz (2007); Battle (2009); Eze (2011); Gade (2011; 2012); Mangena (2012a; 2012b; 2013); Praeg (2014)] – of ubuntu scholars did break new grounds since ubuntu is now one of those things which have become a pop culture for many a professionally trained African philosopher. In pursuing this line of reasoning, I think ubuntu as a pop culture for many an African philosopher resonates well with what Nyasha Mboti (2015: 129 – 130) conceives of as a "bottomless magical bag". He argues that if ubuntu were a bag, it certainly would resonate with a magical one "without a bottom". It is this magical and bottomless bag that carries anything put into it since it never gets filled up nor will it ever overflow in abundance. The problem Mboti identifies with this magical bag is that the longer it takes to fill up, the further it postpones tasks of defining its objects (Mboti, 2015). For the purposes of this critique, one of the tasks this bag of tricks postpones is to account for the logic behind its metaphysical grounding with some *x*'s as its sponsors to affirm its possibilities for contemporary Africa: *ubuntu as/and x*. But for some thinkers, it is beyond any shadow of doubt that *talks of ubuntu* did produce some of the most vibrant exchanges among scholars of African studies (Koenane and Olatunji, 2017: 263).

Thus, it is for these reasons that I suggest that if one refutes the said metaphysical grounding, she may not find herself in this "awkward position" (Matolino, 2015) of adjudicating between competing interpretations of ubuntu's relevance or talk that are in tandem with this manner of grounding it: *ubuntu as (or and) something(x)*. Of course, this manner of grounding ubuntu's relevance and talk finds its proper place in post-colonial/apartheid southern Africa. This is not to say that it is wrong to form an interpretation of something with reference to its metaphysical

grounding if there seems to be a good justification for the logic behind it. But the extent to which ubuntu has been interpreted by some thinkers especially in post-colonial/apartheid southern Africa establishes the necessity to inquire. This is partly because some existing interpretations of ubuntu (as scholarly inquiry) may weaken either ubuntu itself as a publicly known practice or simply show that scholars and other elites bend ubuntu to their own purposes or develop its attractive parts to their own logic (Matolino, 2015 and Metz, 2014a: 447 – 448).

Nevertheless, some adherents of ubuntu may contest this line of thought for the logic behind the foregoing affirmative postures: *ubuntu as something(x)/ubuntu and something(x)*. The point I am getting at before any criticism can be levelled against this critique is that even some of these *x*'s were developed by certain individual thinkers who were not even worried about the traditional and communitarian set ups of places where “ubuntu was said to be a root of African philosophy” (Ramose, 1999; 2002; 2003; 2005). These *x*'s, one may argue, are somewhat constitutive of the logic for its [ubuntu's] possibilities in modern Africa. Metaphysics, cosmopolitanism, jurisprudence, environmental ethics, and formal education etc are actually a good case in point here since not only were they developed by individual thinkers, but their pioneers and early commentators were never even bordered with an African “community that takes precedence over an individual” (Menkiti, 1984).

On the other side, it appears as if some scholars of ubuntu adopted a comparative method. That on its own shows that I am not reluctant to acknowledging that some scholars insist that the effectiveness of something [African ethics] for example, can only be effective when it is comparative and context specific (Murove, 2009: xv). Murove (2009: xv) for instance, acknowledges that a comparative approach to ethics should sensitise students to the fact that no tradition is superior to any other but that all contribute equally to common world ethics. What this shows is that there are those instances where one may find this in the literature of African ethics. But this does not mean that the same Murove (2009) accounted for this comparative method even in philosophy, cosmopolitanism, metaphysics, and jurisprudence etc. What is more worrying, are the grounds on which ubuntu's metaphysical grounding rest.

To be more specific, it appears as if ubuntu (as scholarly inquiry) is somewhat grounded by these *x*'s: *cosmopolitanism, humanism, metaphysics, jurisprudence, environmental ethics, and formal education* to name a few. I claim, quite seriously, that ubuntu's relevance or talk is often posited and adumbrated under the auspices of this metaphysical grounding. For this reason, it remains unclear as to what it is that makes ubuntu to be grounded on “something” for it to

prove its existence and relevance for the post-colonial/apartheid southern Africa. Can one be justified in believing that this metaphysical grounding was invoked so as to establish spatial philosophy? Meaning this metaphysical grounding had and still has the tendency to regard certain  $x$ 's as establishing/legitimising and defending an intellectual territory (Janz, 2009: 213). Was it because adherents of ubuntu were prepared to respond to European's denial with their affirmative stances or reactionary frameworks attributed to the philosophy of ubuntu? It remains unclear as to what it is that makes this metaphysical grounding a fog that must always blur and complement our thinking about ubuntu's relevance and its "proper mode of philosophising" especially in post-colonial/apartheid southern Africa (Chimakonam, 2016).

This is precisely because when one invokes ubuntu as  $x$  it automatically becomes a secondary citizen from its communitarian thinkers or its traditional African set ups: from *ubuntu as worldview version* to *ubuntu as (cosmopolitanism; Law/Jurisprudence; Formal education) or as a "modern philosophical system"* (Matolino, 2015; and Chimakonam, 2016: 228). Metz (2014a: 447 – 448) suggests that scholars do this to develop ubuntu's attractive parts using 'their own logic': scholarly inquiry into ubuntu. This is exactly what is perpetuated by a number of scholars when articulating or theorising about ubuntu so that whatever they do with ubuntu will somehow silence it by morphing some  $x$ 's into a privilege. This privilege is somewhat aligned to a metaphysical grounding which not only inaugurated ubuntu's textual history but the one that makes the relevance of ubuntu with reference to it to persist. This renders ubuntu to be at the margins of whatever it is a scholar wants it to be because it is reduced as relative; comparative to; if not contrasted with  $x$  or strengthened to be a certain theory. Therefore, is that all there is to a proper mode of philosophising about ubuntu's relevance in contemporary (southern) Africa?

Even though I attempt to appeal to the logic behind grounding ubuntu as (or with) something( $x$ ), but I recognise that there seems to be another cluster of defining and grounding ubuntu as a human quality at least for Gade (2012) and other 'traditionalists' (Metz, 2014a: 447). And it must be clear from the foregoing that I deal with the former: scholarly inquiry into ubuntu. The reason why the letter is not subjected to philosophical scrutiny here is primarily because scholars invoke ubuntu as a human quality or [what has always been "there",<sup>19</sup> unlike the above  $x$ 's, to tie people together even before ubuntu's textual history] to affirm its relevance

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<sup>19</sup> Things that were already there in Southern Africa before ubuntu's textuality are its community, the relationships between humans and the living dead, or traditional African customs and belief systems etc.

for modern Africa. Hence, my point of contestation aims at leaving aside a transfiguration of ubuntu as a human quality or way of life from traditional to modern Africa to ground the possibilities of its relevance.

For this reason, I think we need to see this metaphysical grounding for what it is now, since what it establishes is that “ubuntu as an indigenous way of life”<sup>20</sup> alone was not sufficient but needed a certain *x* to speak on behalf of it before anyone can see its relevance for contemporary Africa. Is it possible to think about ubuntu with specific reference to the community but outside of these *x*’s? An immediate response is a “yes” since it was not after its textual history that ubuntu was somewhat metaphysically grounded upon as a human quality or worldview. But why does ubuntu not only rely on folk/communal thoughts of African communities<sup>21</sup> especially those that are “not affected by modern intellectual influences” (Wiredu, 1980: 37) to ground and affirm its relevance for modern Africa?<sup>22</sup> Was this an attempt to create a balance between traditional and modern Africa: by appealing to Western philosophical approaches of the world? Was it because advocates of ubuntu are no longer interested in its ethnophilosophical commitments and its relations with narratives of return? Is it because most scholars of ubuntu have managed to develop it “beyond the confines of ethno-philosophical myopia”? (Bewaji and Ramose, 2003: 388). If it is true that some of them (e.g. Chimakonam (2016) and Metz (2014a: 447 – 448)) have sought to escape its ethnophilosophical commitments and its relations with narratives of return or its relations with ‘ancestors/invisible beings’ as ‘providing moral guidance’, then why certain *x*’s (*Kantianism, Hobbesianism, cosmopolitanism, jurisprudence and humanism*) are used as an “escape” to advance its relevance for modern Africa?<sup>23</sup> Is it possible to have a talk about the relevance of ubuntu that maintains a proper distance towards its ethnophilosophical commitments, relations with narratives of return and some Western philosophical approaches? Is there something wrong about the idea of the traditional community in which one finds ubuntu and its relations with ancestors as providing moral guidance for human beings? If there is nothing wrong with the primacy of this community, in

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<sup>20</sup> Here I mean ubuntu as grounded upon human qualities.

<sup>21</sup> I recognise that there are some scholars who interpret ubuntu with reference to traditional Africa.

<sup>22</sup> This is not to suggest that no one sought to ground ubuntu in this manner.

<sup>23</sup> Chimakonam’s contribution to the Matolino-Kwindingwi-Metz debate shows that Metz has managed to develop ubuntu (*as a worldview version/narrative of return*) into a new version (*modernist interpretation of ubuntu*) which represents ubuntu’s present state: theoretical sophistication and proper mode of philosophising. He argues that Metz’s new version has managed to develop ubuntu beyond the confines of narratives of return (Chimakonam, 2016: 227 – 230). He contends that Metz’s system is a ‘philosophical system’ that breeds ubuntu’s theoretical sophistication and proper mode of philosophising (Chimakonam, 2016: 228).

which one finds ubuntu, then what was the significance of, and the logic behind executing a specific  $x$  to ubuntu's relevance for most thinkers in contemporary Southern Africa? And why since there is nothing wrong with this community? Or is there something new about the idea of the community for modern Africa that makes any talk of ubuntu with reference to traditional societies and its relations with invisible beings but devoid of its interpretations relative to certain  $x$ 's highly questionable? The same question thus remains: is that how each individual thinker must properly philosophise about ubuntu's relevance in contemporary Africa?

These are the kinds of questions that may also spark a certain kind of investigation about the possibilities of the relevance of ubuntu for contemporary Africa. The reason for raising such questions is to pin down the significance of, and logic behind grounding ubuntu with Western philosophical approaches of the world. In addition, it is no hidden fact that this metaphysical grounding does communicate something about ubuntu's relevance or talk when one reads the existing literature of ubuntu. These Western philosophical approaches seem to make this communication effectual so that one may attest to ubuntu's relevance by also acknowledging their presence. For instance, ubuntu *and* Kantianism/Hobbesianism; ubuntu *and* Christianity; ubuntu *as* or *and* Formal education; ubuntu *and* or *as* Jurisprudence. Or ubuntu *as* or *and* Humanism; ubuntu *as* or *and* Cosmopolitanism; ubuntu *as* or *and* Law; and ubuntu *as* or *and* Environmental ethics. Though I might not be correct but what I suspect is that this metaphysical grounding rested upon building relations, constituting relations that will somehow manifest comparisons or contrasts and making us realize these relations. And I do suspect that it cannot go beyond making us realize these relations. But this critique does not concentrate on things that could inspire philosophical interrogation after going beyond what makes us realize these relations. Rather, the point I am toiling to achieve with this examination is that the manner in which ubuntu was grounded especially after colonialism and apartheid rests upon breeding and constituting relations, similarities, comparisons, and contrasts with certain things so that one may realise the possibilities of talking about its relevance with reference to or as related to (or contrasted with) something( $x$ ). This attests to Matolino's (2015: 216) claim that "whatever individual scholars do with ubuntu, the outcome is their own interpretation informed by, among other things, their training and proclivities". For this reason, if ubuntu is interpreted in this manner, it may be argued that it is somehow boxed-in by this ('*ubuntu as/and-propositions*') metaphysical grounding. Thus, my questions at this stage are: Does understanding ubuntu through the prisms of breeding and constituting relations, similarities, comparisons, and contrasts with Western philosophical approaches of the world sufficient enough to demonstrate

the possibilities of its relevance for our own times? Why does ubuntu's relevance have to be occasioned; constituted and interpreted in this manner, and what was the logic behind all of this? And can these occasions, interpretations or propositions constitute the hallmarks of the relevance for ubuntu together with its proper mode of philosophising for our own times?

However, a reasonable person of the opposing view might be tempted to object that my argument is not convincing at this stage since it would be ethnocentric, if not silly to suggest that ubuntu is uniquely African. This temptation might even lead her to suggest that I have sought to identify a problem where there is none. She might argue that the mere fact that the tenets which underpin ubuntu are intensely expressed by Africans, does not make its values exclusively African. She might say the refusal to register a comparative method or acknowledge the similarities between ubuntu and other humanistic philosophical approaches reflects parochialism of southern Africa and a refusal to learn from others. And conclude that we must have the humility to acknowledge that we are not inventing unique problems in southern Africa nor are we likely to invent entirely new solutions (Munyaka and Motlhabi, 2009: 67; Enslin and Horsthemke, 2004: 548 in Praeg, 2014: 108 – 109). Just in case there are some readers who may be wondering, this is the kind of objection that one finds in the existing literature of ubuntu (Teffo, 1998: 4; Enslin and Horsthemke, 2004: 548; Praeg, 2014: 108 – 109; Koenane and Olatunji, 2017: 269). Since this is an objection that scholars of ubuntu might appeal to, I shall demonstrate that it is not convincing.

In response, I think this objection misses my point of contestation at least in two respects. Firstly, I am not against the idea that ubuntu may have some similarities with other humanistic philosophical approaches of the world. Indeed, there is an interesting coincidence of insights even between African (ubuntu) and (Greek) Western philosophies (Ramosé, 2014a: 75 – 76). Hence, my point of contestation is not grounded by the idea that ubuntu is “a peculiarly African way of thinking” (Wiredu, 1980: 39). Secondly, neither does this examination purport to demonstrate that thinking about ubuntu “with a mindset that has a place for all possible relations as the ingredient of authentic philosophising” amounts to no good (Asouzu, 2007: 64). In fact, making us realize some relations, similarities, comparisons and contrasting views does hold some water. But a curious mind may also be interested in knowing what will happen after one has realized these relations, similarities, comparisons, and contrasting viewpoints. Such a mind may acknowledge that there is something going on about ubuntu and its relations with certain philosophical approaches. But it may strike him as problematic, (a) To be satisfied with only understanding these relations as things that could constitute the hallmarks of ubuntu's

relevance for our own times (b) How thinkers who rely on these relations manage to demonstrate this appeal to the said metaphysical grounding as the proper mode of philosophising (c) And how those engaged in this pursuit (of grounding ubuntu with Western philosophical approaches) fail to penetrate and reveal the vast recesses of the logic behind ubuntu's metaphysical grounding which somehow serves as a template for its relevance for post-colonial/apartheid (southern) Africa according to some scholars: (Metz, 2007; 2014; Chimakonam, 2016; and Koenane and Olatunji, 2017: 266). On top of that, one might insist that we must test; relate; or compare ubuntu to other philosophical approaches of the world instead of testing it in isolation to demonstrate its proper mode of philosophising. And I am prepared to sympathise with a view which says the said metaphysical grounding (*ubuntu as or ubuntu and something(x)*) has been appealed to in accounting for different answers to the question about what the relevance of ubuntu is.

For instance, I admit quite strongly that ubuntu can relate or be comparable to other contexts of Western forms of thinking with reference to its values such as brotherhood, sharing, dignity and trust (Prinsloo, 1998: 48). In fact, I do not have an issue in accepting that ubuntu shares some features with Kantianism and *imago Dei*-inspired ethics (Matolino, 2015: 220). I am also aware of Augustine Shutte's (1993) Thomistic approach to philosophy that he implements to systematise ubuntu for post-colonial/apartheid South Africa. Elsewhere he argues for ubuntu's relevance in contemporary South Africa. It is high time, Shutte (2001) argues, that ubuntu is exported to the international arena to demonstrate its relevance (Shutte, 2001 in Matolino and Kwindinwi, 2013: 199). But Augustine Shutte does not fall within the parameters of this examination since Ramose (2003) has dealt with his "*Philosophy for Africa* (1993)" decisively. I do recognise that Metz (2007) has attempted to develop a general ethical principle informed by values that could be compared to dominant Western theories such as Hobbesian egoism, or Kantian respect for persons. To be more precise, he concurs that "no one" has made this a primary aim that has been pursued in a systematic, and analytic way (Ramose, 2007: 347 – 355 and Metz, 2007a: 37 – 38). Metz's (2007) systematic and analytical approach is used to unveil one of the thinkers who compare ubuntu to other Western philosophical approaches of the world here. For this reason, Metz's goal was to present an ethical principle that does not only grow in Africa and differs from the west, but one that is specific; complete; has more of these qualities than what one finds in the literature of African ethics (Metz, 2007).

Metz, on the other side, confirms that there are ways in which *ubuntu and Confucian ethics* tend to prize harmonious relationships. Not only is this so but he offers reasons for thinking that harmony is central to both *ubuntu and Confucianism* (Metz, 2016; 2017; 2017a). Furthermore, some thinkers have spoken approvingly of Metz's systematised version of ubuntu. To exemplify this, Chimakonam (2016: 228 – 229) is amongst those who have credited Metz with the status of “developing a philosophical system” which he [Chimakonam] deems as the “modern version of ubuntu”. He concedes that Metz's systematised version is philosophical. He holds the view that the project of systematising ubuntu especially the one carried out in the ethical dimension by Metz represents “a new version of ubuntu with theoretical sophistication”. And he takes very seriously the view that Metz's project of systematising ubuntu is the proper mode of philosophising. Chimakonam (2016) registers this point in reaction to Matolino (2015). Next, I turn to reasons as to why readers may doubt Chimakonam's approval of Metz's systematisation as demonstrating ‘the proper mode of philosophising’ for our own times.

Philosophers such as Ramose; Douglas Farland; Jason Van Niekerk; and Praeg etc, have also spoken disapprovingly of Metz's version of ubuntu (Ramose, 2007; Metz, 2007a; Matolino, 2015; Praeg, 2017). Metz acknowledges Ramose as the most critical commentator of his work. Ramose reads Metz's claims as “questionable”; “tenuous”; “exaggerated and unsustainable”; “far-fetched and problematical”; “neither credible nor substantiated”; “neither illuminating nor convincing”; “lacking a clearly identified and specific standpoint”; “relying on dubious credibility”. And best of all, “addressing a cadaverous caricature of ubuntu” (Ramose, 2007 in Metz, 2007a: 375). Praeg (2017: 296) on the other side, does not only argue that Metz's moral theory has not grounded any influential contemporary ethical theory, but he reasons that it (Metz's theory) is subverted by two things. Firstly, it is subverted by the fact that values Metz associates with ubuntu are but fleeting, historical associations [functions of a nationalist matrix] of ubuntu with values derived from a historical and *glocal* interference with Christianity and human rights discourses. Secondly, it is subverted by the fact that his moral theory is premised on a simple confusion of cause and effect. Thus, he aptly thinks that the real African moral theory is yet to be theorised (Praeg, 2017: 296).

Indeed, these are one of the grounds which could show that Chimakonam's (2016) approval would not go very far.<sup>24</sup> For instance, it would be interesting to see how he could escape Metz's critics before he approves of his philosophical system, in another paper: all of them. In his contribution to the Matolino-Kwindingwi-Metz debate, Chimakonam (2016: 229) does insist that "Matolino's invocation of Ramose (2007) [...] is merely a solidarity argument". He thinks that the invocation of Ramose makes Matolino's argument to be less glamorous. He takes it to be the case that Ramose's take on Metz does not "vitiolate Metz's attempt" to develop a philosophical system that represents ubuntu's current state: theoretical sophistication and proper mode of philosophising (*Ibid.*, 229). In this instance, I read Chimakonam as suggesting that Metz's attempt could not be tossed to and fro by Ramose's sceptical note. This is precisely because, for Chimakonam (2016: 229), "the edifice of philosophy is never completed and exhausted in any number of theories". But Chimakonam seems to have misunderstood Ramose's take on Metz (2007) deliberately. For this reason, it is my view that Ramose (2007) is one of Metz's critics who could show that Chimakonam's approval would not go very far. On this view, I think it was not Ramose's purpose to sidestep Metz on the grounds of "completion" and "exhaustion" of any theories.

For me, Ramose was trying to point Metz to other realities about his "no one" claim. Ramose must not be read as arguing that what Metz attempts has been exhausted and completed by other theories. Key amongst Ramose's impatience with Metz was the "no one claim". Ramose (2007: 349) argues that "the first problem with Metz's comment on this [no one] claim does not serve to provide evidence that there is indeed "no one"". He contends that there is no evidence that supports Metz's claim. He aptly thinks that Kwasi Wiredu and Benezet Bujo's works would surely undermine Metz's claim. In his appeal to Wiredu's article, Ramose (2007: 350) contends that Metz's claim could be placed into doubt. Ramose (2007: 351) argues that "Bujo's works [would] counter Metz's exaggerated and unsustainable "no one" claim. It is this "no one" claim that Ramose (2007: 350) deems as "neither credible nor sustainable". Thus, Ramose makes an appeal to theories by Bujo, and Wiredu to assure that what Metz does is certainly not new on the African continent: Metz was not the first one to do this. Therefore, if my reading of Ramose (2007) were correct, then it certainly would be clear that Chimakonam

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<sup>24</sup> In the next chapter, I revisit his contribution to the debate and conclude that his assessment of the debate is neither compelling nor should one adumbrate it as standard reply to Matolino and Kwindingwi.

did not take heed of Ramose's "no one claim" objection in his insistence that Metz's attempt could not be vitiated by Ramose (2007).

Moreover, even if Metz's modern version of ubuntu represents theoretical sophistication and proper mode of philosophising as Chimakonam would have us believe, but it is somewhat boxed-in by the said metaphysical grounding. But my point of contestation should not be confused with one's [e.g., Metz's] logical form of grounding ubuntu with *something(x)* - *Kantianism*, and *Hobbesianism* - so as to build relations, contrasts and making us realise certain comparisons or similarities. Indeed, the above objection is not yet a strong one that a reasonable person might level against my point of contestation. Hence, the only issue that remains and strikes me as problematic is the motive and logic behind a metaphysical grounding responsible for interpreting ubuntu's relevance or talk using or by building relations; contrasts; similarities; and comparisons with a number of *x*'s as if only in this way can we be sure that this manner of grounding ubuntu constitutes the hallmarks of its relevance for contemporary Africa. Thus, the logic from which this metaphysical grounding is grounded establishes the necessity to inquire and must not be given the status of unquestionability.

Nevertheless, as from now, I provide a third reason as to why the potential objection hitherto invoked is not convincing and cannot rebut the forgoing critique about ubuntu's affirmative stances: scholarly inquiry into ubuntu. The third reason must not be read as a contradiction. The third reason seeks to avoid the danger of being accused of committing a red herring fallacy in as far as the potential objection I did invoke is concerned. Some might insist that the above-mentioned objection might somewhat divert readers from what is at stake by choosing to address what I have already justified in the course of this critique. Indeed, another reasonable person of the opposing view would not be satisfied with it to some extent. If I appeal to it as an objection that can be raised against this critique what she/he might point out is stated below. Key to the first philosophical gesture that she/he thinks might prove to undermine it is the persuasiveness of the objection itself with reference to what I have already justified in the course of this critique. Her philosophical gestures might point out that I took the weakest argument for an opposing view to this critique because that potential objection was already addressed before I even started to think about it. This is why she might think it serves as a side issue now. Hence, a need for another strong objection is necessary. This is what she might point out to readers so as to show that I took an objection that is already undermined by some justifications for my critique:

This is not to suggest that there are no occasions in which one can deploy this metaphysical grounding or see its usefulness. Neither does it suggest that this metaphysical grounding should not count as a necessary criterion that must be satisfied in understanding what it is like to talk about the possibilities of ubuntu in modern Southern Africa. Nor does it suggest that this manner of grounding ubuntu should count as a sufficient criterion for affirming its possibilities.<sup>25</sup>

By quoting these lines, she might insist that the persuasiveness of the objection itself is neither fascinating nor insightful since I have already addressed this issue above. Hence, this is exactly why the objection itself is not a strong one that can be formulated against the foregoing critique of ubuntu's affirmatives stances. If it is probably the case that the above objection cannot undermine my critique, at least based on three reasons hitherto advanced, then I will not consider "another one"<sup>26</sup> in this main text. Rather, I will strengthen my point of contestation so as to establish another persuasive argument in favour of this critique that even a reasonable person of the opposing view will somewhat be sure to accept. On this way of thinking, strengthening my point of contestation demonstrates that thinking harder about ubuntu with reference to its metaphysical grounding - reminiscent of some *x*'s as its sponsors - is all there is to this critique.<sup>27</sup>

From the above chain of reasoning, we can situate ubuntu as occupying a "*B-status*" instead of an "*A-status*" [*x*]. Both "*A and B*" statuses may be conceived of as properties of some sort.<sup>28</sup> The former is construed as an "accidental property", whilst the latter is to be understood as an

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<sup>25</sup> This is not a direct quote from someone. But it is a repetition of a direct passage that I draw from pages 35 of my dissertation.

<sup>26</sup> Another strong objection can be targeted at my use of "metaphysical grounding" or "grounding claim" and show that this critique is also trapped by a Western epistemological order on an African subject [ubuntu]. I think this objection can be proved to be weak since my critique is not targeted at ubuntu. But it is targeted at how ubuntu has been developed and articulated by different thinkers in post-colonial/apartheid southern Africa. Hence, I have formulated a grounding claim so as to deal with ubuntu's metaphysical grounding as developed by individual scholars. I saw fit to use the same epistemological order that is somewhat invoked by modern scholars in their proclivities about ubuntu to question their perceived proclivities. Moreover, I think this objection cannot refute the manner in which my critique has been developed. Therefore, that is the reason why I said this objection will not be considered in the main text.

<sup>27</sup> I read ubuntu as sponsored by Western philosophical approaches of the world in modern Africa especially in matters concerning its relevance.

<sup>28</sup> There is a specific text that I borrow particularly from the Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy to express the force of my argument in this section. This source emanates from analytic metaphysics and it discusses what is currently most commonly understood in terms of modal terms: essential versus Accidental properties (Teresa Robertson and Philip Atkins, 2013).

“essential property” of ubuntu’s relevance.<sup>29</sup> By an “A-status” I mean, a primary source component which is an essential property of ubuntu’s relevance. In this component or property, one finds certain *x*’s, for grounding the possibilities of the relevance of “something”. In this case, this “something” accommodates ubuntu, which then falls into a “B-status”. By a “B-status”, I mean, a secondary source component which must be read as an accidental property that does not prove the relevance of something. This secondary source component is grounded by an “A-status” or *x*, which attempts to attest to “something’s” relevance. In this case, I am referring to ubuntu’s relevance. This simply means that this metaphysical grounding gave birth to ubuntu’s scholarly inquiry [(B-status)] as defined and grounded by *x* [(A-status)].<sup>30</sup> That is to say, it is by virtue of being contrasted with, related if not comparable to something universally recognizable [Law and jurisprudence; formal education; humanism; cosmopolitanism; environmental ethics; metaphysics etc], that ubuntu then becomes automatically relevant for contemporary Southern Africa. If one has read the previous section properly, she or he must have understood that an “A-Status” is an essential property that must be possessed and married by ubuntu (B-status) in order for its relevance to thrive or be made manifest. Hence, advocates of ubuntu situated it as a secondary component [(B-status)] to affirm its relevance by grounding it with certain *x*’s [(A-status)] – which I deem as an essential property for ubuntu’s relevance.

If it were to be the case that none of these *x*’s existed, then one may be rest assured to insist that a metaphysical grounding for ubuntu which registers certain *x*’s would not even be possible. Or it would be different. The reason why *x* resonates with an [(A-status)], at least here, is simply because it is that which grounds “something’s” relevance - [(B-status)].<sup>31</sup> That is the reason why ubuntu - [(B-status)] - is not at the forefront but the margins of its communitarian thinkers, because it needs an [(A-status)] or *x* to attest to its existence and

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<sup>29</sup> An essential Property is an object or something is a property that it must have, while an accidental property of an object or something is one that it happens to have but that it could lack (Robertson and Atkins, 2013). In other words, A property is essential for a thing if the thing must have the property to exist and be the kind of thing that it is. We say a property is accidental if the thing has the property but does not have to exist (A glossary for philosophical terms, p. 839, <https://global.oup.com>).

<sup>30</sup> This is not to suggest that any talk of ubuntu was made possible after it was grounded upon *x*’s. I recognise that ubuntu has been a lived philosophy for traditional societies for years. What I mean is that scholars of ubuntu write as if any talk of ubuntu was realised after they invoked their metaphysical grounding for the possibility of ubuntu in modern philosophical discourses.

<sup>31</sup> But if it were to be the case that ubuntu had grounded something elsewhere especially outside Africa, I could have situated it at an A-Status or *x*.

relevance for it to be recognised as *philosophy, humanism, cosmopolitanism, law or jurisprudence* or even a remedy to a number of telling problems facing modern day Africa.

However, this does not mean that ubuntu is not open for other interpretations. This is far from saying a form of thinking proper to ubuntu in post-colonial/apartheid southern Africa is only through a comparative method or the said metaphysical grounding. As demonstrated above, I do recognise that ubuntu can be interpreted as a way of life, publicly known practice, or human quality in small-scale and tight knit communities. The only thing that strikes me as problematic for now is the logic behind the affirmation for ubuntu's place in modern Southern Africa: ubuntu [(B-status)] as "something" or  $x$  – [cosmopolitanism]- [(A-Status)]. Or "something" [(A-Status)]: *Humanism, Law, Jurisprudence* as ubuntu [(B-Status)]. Or scholarly inquiry into ubuntu in general. Sometimes some scholars (e.g., Biney, 2014: 29; Gaylard, 2004: 265; or Eze, 2011, and Samkange and Samkange, 1980) adumbrate ubuntu or *humanism* to mean one and the same thing: [(B-Status)] and [(A-Status)] connote one and the same thing.<sup>32</sup>

The most important thing to note here is that the motive and logic behind this metaphysical grounding is hardly contested and exposed. I think, this may be due to reasons unbeknownst to some readers of African studies in general and philosophy in particular. For this reason, it seems unclear as to why this metaphysical grounding is left hanging and unattended since it is amenable to philosophical scrutiny. Maybe this should not be taken as a telling problem since some scholars might insist that testing ubuntu in isolation or without other rival  $x$ 's [which are granted an "A-status" by its sympathisers] is meaningless. Some may even insist that I am raising a side issue that can only be dismissed as a pseudo-problem since most advocates of ubuntu seem not to be worried about it. But what if the motive or logic behind this metaphysical grounding rests on a mistake? What if this metaphysical grounding ruins projects of ubuntu considerably? Does it [metaphysical grounding to ubuntu] really rest on a mistake? What is that mistake? What if there is nothing more interesting about this unexamined metaphysical grounding since what it does is only to build relations, contrasts, comparisons, and similarities that justify its own method of executing  $x$ 's or what falls under an [(A-Status)]? Does this mean that we can no longer go beyond any scholarly interpretation of ubuntu [(B-status)] as grounded upon "something"/ $x$ ; or an [(A-status)], if we push its *B-statuses* to its own limits?

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<sup>32</sup> Even if this is the case, but I do recognise that Ramose (1999; 2002; and 2005) contrasts ubuntu with humanism. For some clarifications, see "ubuntu's philosophical and descriptive analyses" in chapters one.

Although advocates of ubuntu confidently support and theorise about ubuntu [(*B-status*)], the logic behind its metaphysical grounding by way of building relations, contrasts, comparisons, and similarities with an [(*A-status*)] or a number of *x*'s remains a mystery that is not yet revealed to literature. Is it because this is a mystery that must not be revealed, but be left unscrutinised since it served as some sort of ritual from which to establish a number of possibilities for ubuntu in contemporary Africa? Is it because there was no logic behind this manner of going about things since southern Africa was desperately in need of a common and shared humanity which was not only antithetical to dehumanisation but also relevant for restoring the dignity of the black majority? Therefore, I think that we need to rethink our thinking about the relevance of ubuntu attached to the said metaphysical grounding especially in modern philosophical discourses. That is why the motive and logic behind a metaphysical grounding responsible for interpreting ubuntu using or by building relations, contrasts, similarities, and comparisons with a number of *x*'s - as if only in this way can we be sure that this manner of grounding ubuntu constitutes the hallmarks of its relevance and proper mode of philosophising for contemporary Africa - strikes me as problematic.

#### **2.4 Concluding Remarks.**

The aim of this chapter was two-folded. Firstly, it sought to foreground some of the dominant views/assertions that affirmed the possibilities of ubuntu's talk or relevance in the post-colony/apartheid regime. This was done with an intention to foreground different ways in which the possibilities of ubuntu's relevance have been grounded in Southern Africa: scholarly inquiry into ubuntu. In discussing this logic for the possibilities of ubuntu's affirmations, this chapter was not concerned with which of them best accounts for plausible answers to the question of ubuntu and its relevance. Thus, it has foregrounded some but not all thinkers who [or views that] did establish a metaphysical grounding for the relevance of ubuntu for contemporary Southern Africa. Secondly, it sought to present a critique for the logic behind a metaphysical grounding for these affirmative postures attributed to ubuntu's relevance in southern Africa. Therefore, it is this critique which was at the level of detail that sufficed to build a foundation for thinking harder about ubuntu and its relevance in the subsequent chapters. And this chapter did not make a case for it being the best critique that one could offer in reaction to the logic for ubuntu's affirmative postures: scholarly inquiry into ubuntu.

## Chapter 3.

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### **The Matolino-Kwindingwi-Metz Debate: Reflections and Recommendations.**

#### **3.1 Preliminary Remarks.**

The preceding chapter has challenged the logic behind affirming the possibilities of ubuntu's relevance in modern Africa. It did register a critique of a metaphysical grounding responsible for interpreting ubuntu so as to set the tone for a thorough examination for it and the Matolino-Kwindingwi-Metz debate. However, a critical examination of ubuntu in modern philosophical discourses is precisely what this chapter's central aim seeks to contribute to literature. In demonstrating exactly what its usefulness is, this chapter outlines the nature of the debate; targets Metz's (2014) intervention and Chimakonam's (2016) contribution for critical scrutiny. Not only do I refrain from reading this specific debate with exaggeration as it deserves absolute impartiality, but I endorse it as one of the most outstanding debates in philosophical discourses. For this reason, the present chapter is a strong demonstration of how I go about convincing the reader, in the subsequent chapters, that my main position on this debate is correct and most plausible.<sup>33</sup> These chapters must be read in this light since they contribute constructively to the main thesis I defend in this project. Though this chapter is a strong demonstration, but in no way should these chapters' baseline degrees of correctness and plausibility be read, or skim read as exhausting the entirety of ubuntu's philosophical issues, as I remain neutral on the other ones below.<sup>34</sup> So, my position on this debate, together with grounds for its defense, rest upon examining ubuntu under its auspices. In providing some hints as to what this chapter's position will be, together with grounds carried out in its defense, I shall appeal to what the problems are with reflections and contributions to the debate. Therefore, the defense for the position I articulate below shows that reflections and recommendations by Metz (2014); and Chimakonam (2016) are neither compelling nor should they be adumbrated as standard replies.

##### **3.1.1 Outline.**

I map out the overall structure of the chapter in a three-fold manner. Firstly, I outline the nature of the debate. Secondly, I review and respond to Metz's (2014) intervention. Finally, I revisit Chimakonam's (2016) contribution and raise two objections against it.

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<sup>33</sup> The plausibility of this position must be read as limited to three papers only. In this chapter it targets [(Metz (2014); Chimakonam (2016); and in the next chapter it targets Koenane and Olatunji (2017)] and it excludes Matolino (2015) and Praeg (2017) since interrogating them is beyond the scope of this current research.

<sup>34</sup> I refer to issues that are raised outside this debate.

## **3.2 The Nature of The Debate.**

### **3.2.1 Matolino And Kwindingwi's Account.**

As outlined in the introductory chapter, I conceive of Matolino and Kwindingwi's essay as based on questioning ubuntu, its relevance and how ubuntu ought to reach its end in modern southern Africa. The end of ubuntu that these thinkers wish to articulate rests upon two basic tenets:

- (a) The end of ubuntu in both academic and
- (b) Political circles.

In order to articulate their view on the end of ubuntu they “argue that the aggressive promotion of ubuntu in South Africa is an elitist project so conceived by the new black elites” (Matolino and Kwindingwi, 2013: 197). They insist that black elites conceive of ubuntu as a restorative move; an attempt at securing the dignity of black masses as well as an attempt at forging a so-called black identity. This first line of reasoning draws on historical cases that sought to “aggressively promote” an African mode of being which coincided with both the end of colonialism and the rise of black elitism (*Ibid.*). These scholars note that such attempts ended in very public and political failures. On this view, there is a sense in which ubuntu is construed as the “aggressive promotion” or a revival project by black elites aimed at restoring and securing the dignity of black masses. In addition, even the African mode of being is consumed by this aggression of ubuntu which ended in public and political failures on the continent. In their second line of reasoning, they question the desirability of ubuntu as a mark/guide of the spirit of the nation. Their critique of ubuntu concentrates on the disjunct that exists between the metaphysical conditions necessary for the attainment of ubuntu and the stark ontological and ethical crisis facing the new elites and “our people” (Matolino and Kwindingwi, 2013).

They understand ubuntu as a narrative of return that could be linked to other narratives that were once propounded by African political leaders such as Julius Nyerere; Leopold Senghor; Kwame Nkrumah; and Kenneth Kaunda. They contend that narratives of return did not register their success, because the continent has been compromised by their ideals and pursuits. They point readers to their ill-functionality as guides and inspirations of what it was to be authentically African (Matolino and Kwindingwi, 2013: 198). These narratives were construed as providing a perfect interpretation of reality (*Ibid.*, 202). They insist that Africa's search or promotion of its lost identity did fail to take note of detailed guidelines of the nature of person, her social standing, and responsibilities as an individual. African leaders understood narratives

as an awakening to the authentic African life that ought to be desired by everyone. This is exactly what undermined “space for the possibility of other interpretations that could be at variance with their preferred narratives” (Matolino and Kwindingwi, 2013: 199). The most problematic aspect of these narratives is that they view African life as monolithic both in its interpretation and how it is lived.

As a result, Matolino and Kwindingwi aim to articulate a critique of ubuntu that is two-fold. The first one rests upon two points that are of “greater” and “less” significance (Matolino and Kwindingwi, 2013: 201 - 202). Of less significance is their point that readers must not negate the existence of other competing or rival, and maybe inferior or superior interpretations of life in Africa’s traditional set ups that were not aligned with the tenets of ubuntu. They recognise the persistence of these interpretation since it is in the nature of human beings to interpret life from different angles and to uphold values that are not always the same. The possibility for the existence of these values need not be negated even if they were undermined or excluded in our traditional societies. If these values are undermined and excluded that could show that one undermines Africa’s capacity for free intellectual activity (*Ibid.*, 201). Of greater significance is their point that delves on the disadvantages of revivalism. They conceive of revivalism as the project of pursuing the narrative of return as embedded in Africa’s search to revive an outdated African mode of being. They do not seem to sympathise with traditionalists in claiming that “everything African has to be found in the pristine state of Africa prior to slavery and colonialism” (Matolino and Kwindingwi, 2013: 201). This is simply because the authentic mode of being is given to varying shifts that retain multiple identities. They understand the realities and impacts of modernity, globalisation and colonialism and other dynamic factors as deep signifiers that could also contribute “on the shaping and development of the African mode of being” (*Ibid.*, 201). They take it to be the case that being African does not mean the same thing to all Africans, because it cannot be true that the only mode of being that Africans must tap into is one that takes the pristine state of Africa that existed prior to slavery and colonialism very seriously.

For this reason, Bloemfontein of South Africa is actually their good case in point. They contend that this large city does have various competing values that are not necessarily occasioned by how ubuntu is interpreted. They then set one crucial requirement that could somehow guarantee the effectiveness of ubuntu. That is, the success of ubuntu does not depend on large-scale cities that retain multiple identities, and other competing values. Rather, its success depends largely

on undifferentiated, small-scale, and tight-knit communities that are relatively undeveloped (Matolino and Kwindingwi, 2013: 202). For the spirit of ubuntu to flourish and register its success it must be immersed in communities that are interdependent. They think that it is the existence of these communities that could register its effectiveness and success. And if these communities do not exist ubuntu will “become [...] an appendage to the political desires, wills, and manipulations of the elite in [their] attempt to coerce society towards the same ideology” (*Ibid.*, 202).

The second part of their critique rests upon “the context in which narratives of return arise”. They suggest that narratives of return seek to affirm the dignity of Africans in the face of the excesses of slavery and colonialism (*Ibid.*). They contend that those in the business of returning the narrative are effectively propping up a certain political worldview without being explicit about their move. They suggest that the idea of being African, the one that readers could draw from these narratives, can easily clash with other ideals. They take it to be the case that small-scale communities, that make it easier for ubuntu and its values to thrive, are not only intolerant towards divergent ideas, but are also notorious for their dislike for outsiders and place a high price and value on blood relations in recognising the other. This leads them to argue that if one is effectively committed to the values of ubuntu, he or she must know that he is committed at the exclusion of other values (*Ibid.*). Moreover, they opine that to fit ubuntu into a relatively modern and highly differentiated society like south Africa is not as easy as other thinkers would have us believe. Were this the case about ubuntu, then it certainly would show that ubuntu is only advanced to serve a certain Africanist agenda that best suits the elite (*Ibid.*, 202). They further go on to argue that ubuntu or Afrocentric approaches in general tend to be exclusive of other views that are more inclusive. This is a direct result of how narratives of return are. These narratives take pride in emphasising and reviving certain aspects of being African in their quest for securing their political goals of what they take it to mean for a polity to be authentically African. Since these narratives are more exclusive and less inclusive, then anyone who purport to demonstrate his/her interests towards operating in conflict with them would be derided as a non-person or un-African (Matolino and Kwindingwi, 2013: 203). Matolino and Kwindingwi (2013: 203) take ubuntu as a failed philosophy since it does not seem “to capture [and articulate] the wishes of [the ordinary] citizens. These citizens are here and now, and the narrative of return does not help them. This is precisely because ubuntu as a narrative of return is not well suited for complex and multi-cultural societies that do not prize communality to realise their dignified and meaningful existence. In addition, they conceive of their joint essay

as a pointer to how ill-suited ubuntu could be to the current social realities that call for ethical reflection (*Ibid.*, 203). They contend that for one to understand its ill-suitability one must understand that impacts of irreversible effects of factors such as modernity, and industrialisation, must be taken seriously if Africa is really concerned about changes that unfold. If these irreversible effects are taken seriously then one would see that the values of ubuntu are now extinct especially in large-scale societies where multiple identities and divergent ideas are said to have thrived. As a result, for one to see the values of ubuntu as a reality for everyone, he or she must understand that ubuntu is possible once it is “embedded in the strictures of communalism”, because without communalism there is no possibility for ubuntu to register its success. This idea arises from Matolino and Kwindigwi’s view that “the mutability of African societies (away from their traditional antecedents) has rendered ubuntu dissonant with the naturalness of the opportunities for its realisation” (*Ibid.*, 203).

Moreover, they argue that being African can be anything without thinking that it has to be in concord with the dictates of ubuntu. They are of the view that there are other instances of being African that are not necessarily consistent with ubuntu. For this reason, ubuntu as a project of elitism, ordinarily understood as a narrative of return, the advocacy of the theory and practice of ubuntu as an authentic form of being African has lost currency, write Matolino and Kwindigwi (2013: 204). On this view, ubuntu’s yearning for the restoration of Africa’s lost identity or pristine mode of being is disjoined from the reality of ordinary people. Matolino and Kwindigwi (2013: 204) then suggest that even though there may be some political interests from elites that aim to defend their project of elitism, but its efficacy will never be realised. Therefore, for these thinkers, ubuntu in the academe and political circles has reached its end (*Ibid.*, 204).

### **3.2.2 Metz’s Account.**

Metz (2014) comes along and begs to differ since in no way he did succumb to Matolino and Kwindigwi’s recommendations that ubuntu ought to reach its end both as an ethical theory and way of life. He responds to them by contending that we should view scholarly inquiry into ubuntu and the political application of ubuntu as projects that are only now properly getting started (Metz, 2014: 66). He seeks to affirm - instead of questioning - the beginning for and the relevance of ubuntu in his “reply” to these thinkers. He can be read as offering “a defence of the relevance of ubuntu theorists” (Matolino, 2015). No doubt, only after Matolino and Kwindigwi had criticized ubuntu did Metz thought about its beginning. This is made manifest even in the title of his paper: Just the beginning for ubuntu: reply to Matolino and Kwindigwi.

For this reason, I read Metz's argumentation as imbedded in two-pronged strategies: (a) That of scholarly inquiry; and (b) Political application. His reading of Matolino and Kwindigwi depicts them as portraying dyadic equivalences. The first equivalence is sociological whereas the second one is philosophical. The former adumbrates them as insisting that political elites who have most influentially invoked ubuntu have done so in ways that serve nefarious social functions. Narrowing down the discourse about how to live is reminiscent of these nefarious functions. The latter adumbrates Matolino and Kwindigwi as insisting that the moral ideals of ubuntu are appropriate only for a bygone era or pre-modern age.

Metz's account proceeds from both the position of negativity and positivity. At the negative side of the spectrum is Metz's view that considerations proffered by Matolino and Kwindigwi are insufficient to draw their conclusion. The said insufficiency inaugurates and sets Metz's negativity towards them. On the positive side of the spectrum, Metz provides reason to think that ubuntu as an ethical theory has a lot going for it as an account of how individuals and institutions should be moral in the twenty first century. Not only does Metz's "body of work" serve as his defence of ubuntu but he was generous enough to grant other "interpreters of ubuntu" the opportunity to air their views against Matolino and Kwindigwi on their own (Metz, 2014: 66). It does seem that there is none amongst scholars – except Leonhard Praeg – that Metz cites who has reacted to his call up to now. He thinks that there are strong grounds for believing ubuntu as a theory about how one ought to treat others morally in modern African realities. Praeg is one of the experts on ubuntu or should be cited as one in Metz's view. As it turns out Praeg (2017) does not share even his interpretation of ubuntu as an ethical theory. He aptly thinks that the moral theory is yet to be theorised on the African continent. What this shows is that he does carry out his own contribution in a manner unbefitting Metz's expectation (*Ibid.*). It does seem clear that Metz's (2014: 66) clarion call has not received a better hearing since most scholars he did cite have remained silent so far.

He then divides his paper into three sections. In the first section Metz commits himself to the social functions of ubuntu. He argues that there is nothing false and epistemically unjustified about ubuntu as a moral theory. He reads Matolino and Kwindigwi as "maintaining that talk of and thought about ubuntu ought to die out because there is nothing philosophically worthwhile about it to compensate for its undesirable social function" (Metz, 2014: 66). He then proceeds to agreeing that ubuntu is a narrative of return. He thinks that narratives of return have had disastrous politico-economic consequences. He agrees with them that narratives of

return tend to prize pre-modern or traditional lifestyles that are far from modern African realities. He finds it difficult to oppose them on this issue. He admits that there are undesirable functions that are inherent in these narratives and also agree with them that ubuntu is “often invoked” as “a narrative of return even in south Africa” (Metz, 2014: 66). He further goes on to argue that not only do these narratives serve ideological functions but “should be avoided in (South) African political discourse” (Metz, 2014: 67). He makes some remarks about ubuntu and political elites. He contends that philosophers both “could” and “should” write about ubuntu in a way that does criticise them. He suggests that thinkers must see the responsibility “to reclaim talk of ubuntu” as something that is incumbent upon themselves to fulfil so that they could “contest its misuse by elites” (*Ibid.*, 67). If it were to be the case that narratives of return could be reinforced unintentionally by any philosophic work, then it certainly would not be obvious that one should stop expounding ubuntu. He then argues that “if the truth or plausibility of ubuntu as a philosophy were great, then one could have [...] reason to keep spreading the word” (*Ibid.*). This is one of the projects that have just begun for Metz (2014).

The second section delves on ubuntu as a moral theory, since he seeks to combat their claim that it is not a promising ethical theory. He reads Matolino and Kwindigwi as doubting ubuntu especially when it comes to its application to contemporary Africa. He then reviews “what they say about ubuntu as an ethical theory in their article to demonstrate that people residing in Johannesburg of south Africa could be said to live up to these (caring, humanness, respect and compassion) values” (Matolino and Kwindigwi, 2013: 199, in Metz, 2014: 68). The main thrust of his argument seeks to sidestep Matolino and Kwindigwi’s claim that ubuntu “cannot be exhibited in a modern, urbanised, industrialised and multicultural society” (Metz, 2014: 68). He contends that there is “no reason to think that [its values] are unique to a pre-industrial, small-scale setting. He could also be read as insisting that “the prospect of encountering precisely these kinds of caring and sharing relationships in Johannesburg is remote, Matolino and Kwindigwi are maintaining” (Metz, 2014: 69). He then gives readers three instances of why they should doubt what is being maintained by Matolino and Kwindigwi. By this Metz (2014: 69 – 70) seeks to convince readers that ubuntu is relevant for modern Africa. Namely: Being hospitable to strangers; state bureaucracy; and *Letsema*.

Metz (in the last section) insists that agreeing with these examples means agreeing that ubuntu is far from at an end. These examples are the ones that he spent some time discussing in his second section. And if one could adopt them that on its own would automatically show that

she/he agrees with Metz that ubuntu is far from at an end. This (last) section serves as his conclusion about “traditional ethics for contemporary Africa”. He thinks that ubuntu is rather getting started in the sense of now being in a terrific position to steer away from undesirable ways of life with which it has been associated, such as sexism, and conservatism, and to incorporate the insights of science, the benefits of technology and more generally, the desirable facets of modernity (Metz, 2014: 71). He understands ubuntu to be open up for modern demands. He then proceeds to articulate an ethical theory “that underlies the above examples (being hospitable to strangers; state bureaucracy; and *letsema*) of how contemporary society could be organised so as to manifest more ubuntu” (*Ibid.*, 71). It is this ethical theory that Metz construes as part of the project that has just begun. He aptly thinks that these examples are attractive and should not be dismissed since “they are grounded on a moral principle that is philosophically powerful and under-explored in the international arena” (Metz, 2011 in Metz and Gaie, 2011; and Metz, 2014: 71). As for Metz, when one construes ubuntu as an ethical theory one would see that it “is well understood to prescribe honouring relationships of sharing a way of life and caring for others’ quality of life (Metz, 2014: 71). Metz suggests that this is an ethic that he finds promising in the African tradition. Not only is this so, but he insists that this is an ethic that he has sought to articulate, refine, apply, and export to a local and international audience. For this reason, he thinks that project has only just begun, and scholars must find it worth continuing chiefly because it is so philosophically interesting and compelling (*Ibid.*, 71).

### **3.3 A Response to Metz’s Account.**

#### **3.3.1 The Logically Inconsistent Objection.**

This section contests Metz’s account and shows that it rests upon logical inconsistency. However, its point of contestation differs from the ones levelled against him by Matolino (2015) and Praeg (2017). By this objection, I seek to subvert the force of his argument in his “reply”. As a matter of fact, Metz construes political application of ubuntu and scholarly inquiry into ubuntu as projects that are now properly getting started. He justifies this as a fact from which to view these projects. This is an interesting submission to have been made, for Metz, in order to respond to Matolino and Kwindigwi. On this view, he might think of his current defence of ubuntu as un-controversially true. He might think there are strong grounds for thinking that his defence of ubuntu does not rest on any logical inconsistency.

However, there is one thing that readers must take into consideration. When one presumes a distinction between the tittle of his paper (*a*) And these projects (*b*) One would see that he

articulates a defence of ubuntu that rests on a logical inconsistency. In other words, the first philosophical gesture that must come to a reader's mind should reflect on his title: "Just the beginning for ubuntu" and these projects. To point readers to views that constitute this logical inconsistency they must notice that Metz argues for (a) The beginning for ubuntu and (b) Construes political application of ubuntu and scholarly inquiry into ubuntu as projects that are only now properly getting started. Most importantly, he can be accused of logical inconsistency simply because he did not specify the sort of justification readers could glean from his commitment to the beginning for ubuntu. Rarely did Metz spend some time defending (a) The beginning for ubuntu but his defence of ubuntu pales into logical inconsistency since he only justifies (b) The projects of ubuntu that he deems as now properly getting started: scholarly inquiry, and political application. On this way of thinking, if readers could presume a distinction between arguing for (a) The beginning for ubuntu; and (b) Political application and scholarly inquiry as projects that have just begun, they could notice that Metz does not provide good reasons for thinking there is something he can associate with (a): The beginning for ubuntu. Rather he only gives a justification that accounts for (b): The projects of ubuntu that he deems as properly getting started.

So conceived, there is nothing in Metz's account that guarantees the truthfulness of his "just the beginning for ubuntu". From this, we could accuse Metz of being inconsistent because he abandons the justifications for his understanding of the "beginning for ubuntu" by tapping into its projects: Political application and scholarly inquiry. As a result, does Metz mean the same thing when he talks about (a) The beginning for ubuntu and (b) The beginning for the projects that he deems as now properly getting started? It is without any doubt that Metz ends up arguing for the beginning for its projects: political application and scholarly inquiry. But readers are not likely to confuse the differences between his justification of (a) The beginning for ubuntu and (b) The projects of ubuntu that are now properly getting started. It is clear that Metz "beginning" purport to demonstrate the beginning for ubuntu's projects. It does not purport to demonstrate the "beginning" that he associates with ubuntu itself. If Metz's aim is to show the beginning for ubuntu, then why does he change his moves and spends the rest of his paper justifying the beginning for its projects that he deems as properly getting started? Political application and scholarly inquiry into ubuntu and ubuntu itself do not mean one and the same thing. Is Metz telling us about the beginning for ubuntu because it did not have its beginning before? What is the sort of 'beginning' that Metz aligns himself with? Does he mean that there was no point in which ubuntu began? Why is Metz focusing on its projects if he is committed

to the beginning for ubuntu? For this reason, it is my view that there are no sufficient grounds for accepting that he argues for the beginning for ubuntu itself. This is simply because he was not consistent in this pursuit.

### **3.4 Revisiting Chimakonam's Contribution.**

This section seeks to revisit and engage Chimakonam's contribution to the debate. For the purposes of this project, I read Chimakonam (2016) as providing answers to this project's key research question. It provides answers in the sense that he affirms Metz's modern version of ubuntu as registering its relevance for a modern society. Moreover, the force of my argument in this section is that Chimakonam's take is not compelling and therefore should not be adumbrated as standard reply. Thus, this section must be conceived as continuing with defending my position about "Metz's",<sup>35</sup> "Chimakonam's",<sup>36</sup> and "Koenane and Olatunji's",<sup>37</sup> contributions. If one struggles to understand what my intentions are in this section, she or he must read it as bringing him/her one step closer to accepting the cogency of the position I wish to articulate in this chapter at least. By so doing, I foreground this section in a manner that follows a clear logical pattern. Firstly, I give a preview of his contribution to the debate. Secondly, I give an explication of his assessment of the debate. Thirdly, I raise two objections against his contribution. Namely, I raise a general objection about his position about both Matolino (2015) as well as Metz's (2014) rejoinder. Finally, I give a specific objection to the credibility he attaches to his assessment of the debate.

#### **3.4.1 Chimakonam's Contribution to The Debate.**

Chimakonam's contribution aims to "show the philosophical significance" of what he identifies as a "conundrum" that resonates with Matolino and Kwindigwi. I take it to be the case that his maximal attention was limited to "showing the philosophical significance of the conundrum and the strengths and weaknesses in arguments" by Kwindigwi and Matolino. The philosophical significance of this conundrum is construed as "remaining decisive". But it is only arguments marshalled in support of it that are construed as "not decisive". The first gesture that I identified with Chimakonam resonates with what he thinks lies in Kwindigwi and Matolino. His reading of these thinkers led him to "a problem". This problem ensued from his reading. This reading shows that to insist "ubuntu has reached its end is not a mere declaration

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<sup>35</sup> Consider my position of Metz's reply to Matolino and Kwindigwi in the preceding section and the final chapter of this project.

<sup>36</sup> The present section attempts to establish my position on his contribution to the debate.

<sup>37</sup> The following chapter intends to interrogate them philosophically.

or position or conclusion” but it “is a problem”. His reading of Matolino and Kwindingwi points us to an understanding that he does not succumb to Matolino (2015: 214) who read their paper as “our position that ubuntu has reached its end”. It is this position which Matolino, when he responds to Metz, thinks “poses no threat” as he reads it as the original one. This is the position which insists that “ubuntu both as a recommended way of life, and as an ethical theory has reached its end” (Matolino and Kwindingwi, 2013). Chimakonam (2016) intervenes where this “position” ought not be viewed as “a position or mere declaration” since he identifies it “as a problem”. He tells us that not only would the significance of this “problem” redefine the sphere of ubuntu philosophy but even the historicity of African philosophy as a whole. He argues that even though Metz (2014) “may have offered systematization of ubuntu” but he agrees “with Matolino that Metz’s system may not be as impregnable as he envisages” (Chimakonam, 2016: 224). His recommendation resonates with arguing for the re-invention of ubuntu using the tool of conversational thinking. Moreover, Chimakonam chooses to work on two-pronged questions which his paper seeks to shed light upon. Firstly, has ubuntu philosophy reached its end as Matolino and Kwindingwi argue? Secondly, is ubuntu philosophy just the beginning as Metz insists? The simplest thing to be noted is that these questions spring from the main titles from which the former and the latter are couched in. In response to the former, Chimakonam thinks that ubuntu has reached its end is a serious argument to put forward: a nihilistic one. In response to the latter, it is not entirely clear what could his response attempt to show, except the excitement he associates with Metz’s rejoinder. And he thinks Metz drew this excitement from the “presentment of murkiness in Matolino and Kwindingwi’s *position*”. It is this presentment of murkiness found in Matolino and Kwindingwi that supplies philosophical excitement according to Chimakonam. In addition, he gives us two ways of looking at Matolino and Kwindingwi in his introduction. Firstly, he thinks that dismissing Matolino and Kwindingwi as a misnomer is one way of looking at what he calls “*this position*”. Secondly, he thinks the more fruitful one resonates with considering the philosophical significance of “*this position*”. But this chapter does not dwell on the philosophical significance he attaches to Matolino and Kwindingwi as well as his “Toward a conversational mode of philosophizing”. Instead, it is limited to his assessment of the debate

### **3.4.2 Chimakonam’s Assessment of The Debate.**

Not only did Chimakonam (2016: 225 – 227) task himself with espousing the significance of the debate as well as his “Toward a conversational mode of philosophizing” but he does launch what he deems as a credible assessment of the debaters. The manner in which he assesses these

debaters is two-fold. It is this credible assessment that attempts to underscore Kwindingwi and Matolino's (2013) and Metz's (2014) understandings of ubuntu. The most important thing to note here is that he attempts to deal with these debaters. On the one hand, his assessment relies on Metz (2014) and the sheer number of his publications on ubuntu related themes. For instance, he writes "*On Metz's side, I shall appeal to choice essays from a pool of numerous publications on ubuntu and ubuntu-related subjects*" (Chimakonam, 2016: 227). On the other, he makes it very clear that his assessment takes heed of Matolino and Kwindingwi (2013) and Matolino (2015). For instance, he writes "*I shall appeal to two essays from Matolino's side, namely "The end of ubuntu", co-authored with Kwindingwi, and "A response to Metz's reply on the end of ubuntu"*" (Chimakonam, 2016: 227). For the purposes of this project, these are four "*essential properties*"<sup>38</sup> that ought to be read as templates for a philosophical interrogation. I do this for analytical purposes at least:

(a) Metz (2014) – *Properties* > **a**

(b) Metz's publications "on ubuntu and ubuntu-related subjects" – *Properties* > **b**.

(c) Matolino and Kwindingwi (2013) – *Properties* > **c**.

(d) Matolino (2015) – *Properties* > **d**.

No doubt, it seems like only in this way he does propose what he deems as the credible assessment. From this, readers must understand that Chimakonam proposes an assessment that takes these *properties* as the essential ones. If his assessment does not take heed of these four *properties* as essential, then it must be viewed with suspicion and be dismissed as non-credible since these are the only *properties* he deems as essential. All of these *essential properties* are things that his assessment must have and satisfy in order for it to count as credible.

The most important thing to note is that Chimakonam (2016: 227) targets *properties* > **c** or - Matolino and Kwindingwi's "version of ubuntu" - since it appears to be his first concern for a philosophical interrogation. The point he is getting at is that Matolino and Kwindingwi's "understanding of ubuntu is limited to what can be called the "worldview ubuntu". He conceives of this version of ubuntu as an ethnographic description of the precolonial/premodern sub-Saharan African outlook to life. It is this version of ubuntu that he construes as "community thought" and narrative of return. He thinks it was appropriate for Matolino and Kwindingwi to christens ubuntu as the narrative of return. In addition, his reading

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<sup>38</sup> See the last section of Chapters two entitled "The "Logic Behind" The Foregoing Affirmative Stances: A Critique" for a brief overview of what is meant by *essential properties* in analytic metaphysics.

of Matolino and Kwindigwi is unlike Koenane and Olatunji's who argue that ubuntu must not be viewed as a narrative of return (Koenane and Olatunji, 2017). He then appeals to *properties*> **d** - Matolino (2015) - to demonstrate his reading of ubuntu as "worldview ubuntu". However, readers must notice that there is a shift that has just occurred: a shift from *properties*> **c** to *properties*> **d**. This shift seeks to establish the idea of "worldview ubuntu" as quite embedded in *properties*> **d** or – Matolino's (2015) contribution.

For this reason, Chimakonam (2016: 227) reads Matolino - *properties*> **d** - as attesting to this version of ubuntu: the only possible version of ubuntu. He then cautions Matolino against what he calls "the costly error of assumption" (*Ibid.*). He thinks that there is nothing hasty about the manner in which he reads Matolino. He then attempts to make the state of this hastiness more apparent by providing Metz's understanding/ interpretation of ubuntu to reflect on *properties*> **d** and not *properties*> **c**.<sup>39</sup> As this shall be seen, this attempt seems to target *properties*> **d** alone because he never goes back to *properties*> **c**. For me, what this shows is that he has just opened a whole new can of worms in *properties*> **c** and tries to prove that *properties*> (**a** and **b**) would do a much better job of both sidestepping *properties*> **c** & **d** - though he no longer returns to *properties*> **c** properly.

No doubt, the state of this hastiness is only targeted at Matolino (2015) whom he accuses of committing a costly error of assumption. It is this costly error of assumption that is going to be elucidated by way of appealing to Metz's construal of ubuntu. Chimakonam's first attempt of what he deems as a "credible assessment" is in parenthesis with *properties*> **d**; *properties*> **b**; and *properties*> **a**. In other words, it is a combination of both *properties*> **a** – Metz (2014) and *properties*> **b** - Metz's numerous publications "on ubuntu and ubuntu-related subjects" - attempting to sidestep *properties*> **d** – Matolino (2015). It has no business in assessing *properties*> **c** – Matolino and Kwindigwi (2013) - in this instance or at this stage at least. One could read Metz as demonstrating to Matolino (2015) that he is only committed to nothing but the "worldview ubuntu" (Chimakonam, 2016: 228). This is what Chimakonam (2016: 228) had to say in order to demonstrate the most obvious instance of the hastiness, and "costly error of assumption" he attaches to Matolino's version of ubuntu:

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<sup>39</sup> Readers must notice this, as from the fourth paragraph of his assessment of the debate Chimakonam (2016: 227 – 230) no longer makes any reference to *properties*> **c** – Matolino and Kwindigwi (2013). He just commits himself to assessing a single *property* (**d**) instead of other *properties*. I will come to this in my second objection to his assessment below.

*“Metz does not deny the fact that ubuntu exists as a worldview of the people of sub-Saharan Africa (Metz and Gaie 2010, 274 – 275). But Metz also admits the limitations of the worldview version (Metz 2011, 533 – 534).”*

Chimakonam can be read as making two remarks here. Firstly, he thinks that Metz is not in denial of the existence of a worldview version of ubuntu. Secondly, he reads Metz as understanding the limits that are embedded in this worldview version. He thinks that Metz did a much better job of going beyond whatever limits that seem to bedevil the worldview version. He understands Metz as developing another version of ubuntu that not only transcend the shortcomings of the worldview ubuntu but one that is modern. He makes of this new-fangled approach to ubuntu as a philosophical system. By this he seeks to surmount Matolino (2015) by way of morphing Metz’s version of ubuntu into a philosophical system.

One may also want to read Chimakonam (2016) as insisting that Metz is very much aware of the limitations attended to the worldview version. He conceives of Metz’s version as “a systemic/systematized account”. It is this account that he deems as categorical and prescriptive. This version of ubuntu fits with rational principles that make it adequate and universally applicable. The applicability of Metz’s version of ubuntu is one that must be construed as philosophical. Chimakonam then reads Metz (2013, 80 – 81, 2014, 67) as recognizing “philosophically attractive germs” that are inherent in the worldview version of ubuntu. But he thinks that these are attractive germs that philosophers can tap into to construct a modern rigorous system such as an ethic of relations. This modern system is one that is in tandem with individual liberty and accounts for modern African realities. Not only is this so, but it can be construed as taking modern realities very seriously. It is also this version that is posited as “a promising ground for human rights” (Metz, 2011: 534 in Chimakonam, 2016: 228).

Chimakonam invokes Metz’s version to show that *properties* > *d* – Matolino (2015) - did fail to understand that it “is a philosophical system” that only takes “inspiration from the worldview version” (*Ibid.*, 228). He shows that Metz’s understanding of ubuntu varies from Matolino’s prescription of a narrative of return. I read Chimakonam as insisting that *properties* > *d* did fail to presume a distinction between the “worldview version”, and the “systematized” one. He suggests that Matolino’s version is sociological whilst Metz’s is philosophical. By recognizing that ubuntu is a narrative of return Chimakonam argues that Metz understood that it was in concord with the worldview ubuntu but not the systemic approach to ubuntu. He takes it to be the case that Matolino’s presumption of a worldview version - (narrative of return), varies from

Metz's understanding of ubuntu – (systematized version). He does not succumb to Matolino's insistence that there is only one possible version of ubuntu, except the worldview version. He thinks it is Matolino who has misread Metz as confirming his position that there can only be one collectivist interpretation of ubuntu. He argues that Matolino's assertion that "any attempt to construct another would become an individual effort that must be completely kept apart from ubuntu itself" is a skewed claim (Chimakonam, 2016: 229). He aptly thinks that Metz's re-articulation of worldview ideas is at a higher level of understanding. It is this re-articulation of worldview ideas which Chimakonam construes as "the project that has only just begun" (Metz, 2014: 71 in Chimakonam, 2016: 229).

As for Chimakonam, Metz's re-articulation of ubuntu, and ethnophilosophy or ubuntu worldview version must not be tarred with the same brush. This is simply because, for Chimakonam, Metz's new version does a much better job of breeding the proper function of philosophy. He suggests that Metz's project of systematizing ubuntu represents a new version of ubuntu with theoretical sophistication. This then, qualifies the worldview version of ubuntu to fall short of a theory. This version only qualifies to be construed as a narrative of return. He contends that Matolino has fired his trenchant criticism at the wrong theory: the one that breeds theoretical sophistication and proper mode of philosophizing. He has fired the wrong criticism simply because he thinks it [Matolino's criticism] is "not only mistaken but epistemically misleading" (Chimakonam, 2016: 229). It is mistaken and epistemically misleading in the sense that it denies the new version that takes modern realities very seriously unlike the worldview version that does not (*Ibid.*, 229). Chimakonam understands Metz's re-articulation of the worldview version as a philosophical system that does not fall short of being an ubuntu version even if Matolino "derides" it as Metzian. Whilst Matolino (2015) thinks that Metz agrees with him – that ubuntu is a narrative of return, - Chimakonam (2016: 229) suggests that it is "Matolino who unknowingly affirms Metz's position to the detriment of his own".

However, even though I do not want to scrutinize Chimakonam's argument against *properties*> *d* or -Matolino (2015) - in this project, but there is something interesting that careful readers would have to notice. Chimakonam's impatience with *properties*> *d* would not go very far simply because it is built on what *properties*> *c* or [Matolino and Kwindigwi (2013: 203)] have already anticipated as a "disingenuous" objection. What is being attempted by Chimakonam in reaction to *properties*> *d* can be intertwined with what Matolino and Kwindigwi or (*properties*> *c*) had already anticipated. Matolino and Kwindigwi (2013: 203) have anticipated the following potential objection(s):

*“A possible objection to our position could possibly seek to show that our criticism actually misses the point of the project of ubuntu”.*

Here, Chimakonam (2016) thinks that it is Matolino (2015) who misses the point of Metz’s ethical theory. He thinks that Matolino or (*properties* > *d*) does not understand that Metz’s version of ubuntu is not a narrative of return.

*“Such an objection could possibly point out that our concentration of the narrative of return is misguided” (Matolino and Kwindigwi, 2013: 203).*

Here, Chimakonam (2016) thinks it is wrong to construe that Metz’s version of ubuntu as an ethical theory is a narrative of return. He thinks there is a worldview version of ubuntu and a philosophical system of ubuntu.

*“The objection could be extended to claim that a narrative of return in itself does not compromise the ethical efficacy of ubuntu [...]”*

(Matolino and Kwindigwi, 2013: 203).

Here, Chimakonam (2016) insists that there is a difference between ubuntu as a narrative of return – worldview version – and Metz’s ethical theory – systematized version. He argues that the worldview version does not compromise the ethical efficacy of Metz’s modern version of ubuntu- as an ethical theory. In fact, he is of the view that Metz (2013, 80 – 81, 2014, 67) recognizes that there are “philosophically attractive germs” that are inherent in the worldview version of ubuntu that philosophers can tap into in order to construct a modern rigorous system such as an ethic of relations. This modern system is one that is in tandem with individual liberty and accounts for modern African realities. Not only is this so but it can be construed as taking modern realities very seriously. This version is posited as “a promising ground for human rights” (Metz, 2011: 534 in Chimakonam, 2016: 228).

*“The objection could seek to state that our emphasis on ubuntu as a narrative of return as opposed to seeing it as an African ethical theory has distorted matters”.  
[.] “On the contrary, the advocate of ubuntu may claim that [ubuntu] must be seen merely as an outline of an ethical theory” (Matolino and Kwindigwi, 2013: 203).*

Here, Chimakonam (2016) thinks that Matolino (2015) has distorted matters in the sense that he does not understand that Metz’s ethical theory is at a higher level of understanding, and that ubuntu as a narrative of return is not a philosophical system but a worldview version. For this reason, he is committed to the view that Metz articulates an ethical theory, and this is the project

of ubuntu that has just begun. That is, it is “*an outline of an ethical theory*” that breeds theoretical sophistication and proper mode of philosophizing.

However, if readers could follow this carefully, they could see that Chimakonam articulates or rather defends a point of view that Matolino and Kwindigwi construe as “disingenuous”. But to delve into the details of this reading or and to penetrate the vast recesses of Chimakonam’s impatience with Matolino (2015) – *properties*> *d* – is beyond the length parameters of this project. Rather, what I aim to do is to scrutinize Chimakonam’s contribution relying on two possible objections that will be discussed in the following section.

### **3.5 Two Possible Objections Against Chimakonam’s Assessment.**

#### **3.5.1 The First Objection: A Response to Chimakonam’s Stand with Matolino And Metz**

The first (general) objection I raise against Chimakonam resonates with his position about both Matolino (2015) and Metz (2014). I claim, quite seriously, that never before has Chimakonam’s contribution been criticised in a manner I anticipate in this section. In other words, I am not aware of any criticism targeted at his support of Matolino together with his impatience with Metz. However, besides citing thinkers that could show that his support of Metz would not go very far, as argued in the previous chapter and the above section, there are other strong objections that can be raised against his contribution. For this reason, it does seem clear that Chimakonam is not clear about where he stands in Metz’s systematisation of an ubuntu ethic. On the one hand, he thinks that Metz’s systematisation of ubuntu may not be as impregnable as Metz envisages. He makes this claim in agreement with Matolino (2015) (Chimakonam, 2016: 224). On the other, he takes it to be the case that Metz’s systematised version of ubuntu is not only modern, but it does represent the proper function and mode of philosophising (Chimakonam, 2016: 228 – 229). The former demonstrates his impatience with Metz’s systematised version since he agrees with Matolino, whilst the latter reserves his sympathies for Metz’s systematised version because he no longer agrees with Matolino.

On this view, I read these lines as presuming two crucial distinctions. In other words, the same Chimakonam is split into two: he sides with Matolino on Metz’s systematisation of ubuntu (e.g. “*Metz [...] may have offered systematisation of ubuntu but I agree with Matolino that this new system may not be as impregnable as he envisages*”) and supports Metz’s systematisation of ubuntu at the same time (e.g., “*The project of systematising ubuntu carried out in the ethical dimension by Metz represents a new version of ubuntu with theoretical sophistication [...] and*

*this is the proper mode of philosophising*” (Chimakonam, 2016: 224 and 229). On the contrary, there are no instances where Chimakonam opens up for (or justifies) his agreement or stand with Matolino’s rejection of (or impatience with) Metz’s systematisation of ubuntu in a manner that relies on sufficient grounds or plausible arguments at least. To my mind, his support of Matolino’s rejection of Metz’s systematisation lacks a clearly identifiable standpoint. When one reads Chimakonam along these lines one would see that there is another justification or proof that Chimakonam is reluctant to give in his contribution: the one that shows that he “agree[s] with Matolino that [Metz’s] new system may not be as impregnable as he envisages” (Chimakonam, 2016: 224). Rarely did he spend some time trying to justify this crucial point. In fact, he just abandons this important point, and leaves his readers scratching their heads, since the justification for grounding his agreement or stand with Matolino’s impatience with (or rejection of) Metz’s systematisation is nowhere to be found. Even if Chimakonam (2016: 230) were to show readers that he did argue that “Metz’s theory is [not] impregnable”, what destroys his attempt is his unsustainable grounds against Metz (2014) as well as his intention to agree with Matolino’s rejection (2015) of Metz’s systematisation of ubuntu for contemporary Africa.

For this reason, I am still wondering about what exactly the point of Chimakonam’s assessment is. Is he trying to assess the Matolino-Kwindingwi-Metz debate or Matolino (2015) and Metz (2014)? I think this is one of the most uncritical parts of his contribution besides the other one that I aim to register in the next section. Not even a single instance of his impatience with Metz could be found in his contribution. The following are Chimakonam’s (2016: 230 – 233) precise words:

*“But to go into an elaborate criticism of Metz from what he has produced in ubuntu is beyond the scope of this essay”.*

In his concluding remarks he argues that he has:

*“assessed the arguments of Matolino and Metz”.*

But where exactly did Chimakonam (2016: 230 – 233) bring this into completion?<sup>40</sup> It turns out to be the case, at least when one reads Chimakonam carefully, that he has not finished or pushed his mission “to agree with Matolino’s take on Metz’s new system” up to the end. So long as Chimakonam offers no support for his “elaborate criticism” of Metz, and agreement

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<sup>40</sup> This question has something to do with the second quotation and its relationship with what Chimakonam claims in the first quotation.

with Matolino's take on Metz's new system, his approval of Metz must be viewed with suspicion.

It does seem clear that Chimakonam finds nothing wrong in opening a can of worms and then tells the reader that dealing with it is beyond the scope of his essay. In other words, there is no support offered in support of Chimakonam's claim that Metz's new system is not impregnable. Not only is this so but there seems to be no justification in support of the claim that he has assessed Metz. This is simply because he does admit that going into an elaborate criticism of Metz is beyond the scope of his essay. Moreover, Chimakonam's assessment is guilty of equivocation. This is chiefly because in some instances he qualifies it as "*an assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of arguments by the Matolino-Kwindingwi-Metz debate*", whilst in other instances he construes it as an assessment of arguments by only two thinkers: Matolino and Metz (Chimakonam, 2016: 225 and 233). None of these assessments interrogated Metz, and Matolino and Kwindingwi philosophically.<sup>41</sup> The question that may be asked is: does Chimakonam's impatience with Metz's new system seem to be justified by substantial reasons given the fact that he has deferred what he had proposed in the abstract: "*I agree with Matolino that his new system may not be as impregnable as he envisages*"? (Chimakonam, 2016: 224). It does seem clear that at no point were both Chimakonam's (a) Approval of Matolino's impatience with Metz's systematised version and (b) His justification for dismissing Metz's systematised version [up to this present day], made manifest and carried up to their logical conclusions.

### **3.5.2 The Second Objection: Scrutinizing The 'Credibility' of Chimakonam's Assessment.**

Chimakonam's contribution is hardly ever seriously scrutinized when it comes to the credibility he attaches to his assessment of the debate. It reads as if only after his assessment of *properties*> *d* and not *properties*> *c* & *a* seem to have done some tricks will one attest to the said credibility of his one way of assessing the debate: (a) and (c). When one reads the preceding section, one would see that Chimakonam only attempts to surmount *properties*> *d* by appealing to *properties*> *b* & *properties*> *a*. Surely, this was an interesting assessment to have been made, but I think it does not deserve the status of "credible assessment". There is nothing that Chimakonam does to assess Matolino and Kwindingwi - (*properties*> *c*) and Metz - (*properties*> *a*) as he promises in his contribution. This is simply because that which had

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<sup>41</sup> I shall come to this point in my second objection.

promised to “*assessing the arguments of the Matolino-Kwindingwi-Metz debate*” turns out to be an assessment that only singles out *properties*> **d** - Matolino [2015] - (Chimakonam, 2016: 227). It singles out Matolino in the sense that its maximal attention aims to accuse him of the “*costly error of assumption*” (*Ibid.*). It reads as if this is just an assessment of Matolino’s (2015) response to Metz (2014). Moreover, what also appears to be an assessment of the Matolino-Kwindingwi-Metz debate, turns out to be summarized in Chimakonam’s conclusion as something that has “*assessed the arguments of Matolino and Metz*” even though it was reluctant to credibly assessing Metz - or (*properties*> **a**) - (Chimakonam, 2016: 233). Rarely did Chimakonam spend some time, presuming a distinction, or accounting for some relations between “*assessing the arguments of the Matolino-Kwindingwi-Metz debate*”, as well as claiming that he has “*assessed the arguments of Matolino and Metz*” (Chimakonam, 2016: 227 and 233). He did not even attempt to strike a balance between the specialized meaning or context that readers could glean from these ambiguities: assessing the Matolino-Kwindingwi-Metz debate versus assessing Matolino and Metz (Chimakonam, 2016).

Chimakonam’s move from *properties*> (**a**) & (**b**) to surmount *properties*> **d**, is somewhat incompatible with the credibility he attaches to his assessment. It is incompatible in the sense that he does not even show how appealing to these *properties* [(**a**) & (**b**)] - that he uses to scrutinize the merits of the arguments marshaled by (*properties*> **d**) - advance the force of his argument about the debate he did promise in his “*assessing the arguments of the Matolino-Kwindingwi-Metz debate*” section (Chimakonam, 2016: 227). It is not entirely clear how does dealing with a single *property* - (**d**) - contribute to credibly assessing the debate. If his aim is to credibly assess the Matolino-Kwindingwi-Metz debate, then how does criticizing *properties*> **d** and not *properties*> **c** & **a** contribute to the credibility he makes out of his assessment? Can one be justified in believing that Chimakonam has credibly “*assessed the argument [...] of [...] Metz*”, as Chimakonam tells us towards the conclusion that he did manage and succeed to assess the merit of his (Metz) argument? In other words, does Chimakonam succeed in ‘credibly assessing’ the merits of Metz’s argument? (Chimakonam, 2016: 227 and 233). I specifically do not want to think that this is necessarily so or probably the case. Chimakonam has abandoned some *properties* that are intrinsic and essential to his assessment: (*properties*> **c**) and (*properties*> **a**). This is exactly what ruins his reflections on the debate because his assessment targets *properties*> **d**, and not *properties*> **c** & **a**. He seems to have not provided any justification for leaving other *properties* hanging and unattended and this is exactly what makes it difficult for readers to grapple with his assessment of the debate.

However, a reasonable person of the opposing view might object that my argument is not convincing at this stage. He or she might argue that Chimakonam did make a case for the credibility of his assessment. But in response, that ‘credibility’ turns out to be directed at a single *property* (**d**) that he thinks is justifiable in dealing with *properties*> **c** or Matolino and Kwindingwi. On top of that, he ended up shifting his focus from Matolino and Kwindingwi (2013) to Matolino (2015). This shift occurs when his disapproval of Matolino and Kwindingwi has not matured. Or it just occurs when there are no specific directions for the ‘credibility’ that one may glean from his assessment of Matolino and Kwindingwi (2013). One would have noticed that this shift is exactly what has led Chimakonam to read Matolino’s “*declaration about one possible version of ubuntu and of its irrevocable ends [as] hasty*” (Chimakonam, 2016: 228). Surely, there is one thing that readers would not doubt: this hastiness aims to specifically deal with a single *property* (**d**) - Matolino (2015) alone - and leave other *properties* aside. This *property* - (**d**) - alone does not exhaust the point that he was toiling to achieve: a credible assessment of the debate. Dealing with this only one *property* - (**d**) - does not demonstrate that Metz’s systematized version is not impregnable. It does not even show that Chimakonam agrees with Matolino (2015) that this new system may not be as impregnable as Metz (2014) would have envisaged. Let alone the assessment of Metz that he concludes as demonstrated successfully. If Chimakonam thinks that he has succeeded in assessing Metz’s argument (probably as I do not), then what does his reluctance to provide ‘an elaborate criticism of Metz’ bring the ‘credibility’ of his one way of assessing the debate into? (2016: 227 – 233). And if Chimakonam is ready to admit that his stand with Metz’s argument is surely a story for another day, then what sort of communications and consequences will his ‘reluctancy’ have or do to his ‘one way of credibly assessing’ the Matolino-Kwindingwi-Metz debate? (2016: 227).

As a result, his assessment remains a piece of unfinished business since it raises a whole lot of questions about the status, or province of its credibility. It remains a piece of unfinished business simply because it lacks all sorts of justifications that could satisfy the credibility he does attach to his assessment. Were this the case about his assessment, then it probably would invite more questions than answers. The most crucial point to notice is that Chimakonam’s readers will be faced with another dilemma. They will fail to understand along what specific lines does the said “credibility” proceed and intermingles with his assessment. It is not easy to pin down which direction(s) readers must follow in order to get into the province of this assessment’s “credibility” except his appeal to *properties*> **b** & *properties*> **a** that ended up attempting to surmount *properties*> **d** only. If there seems to be no specific direction(s) or map

that readers must zoom into in order to get into the bottom line of this assessment's credibility, then how credible is Chimakonam's 'one way' of assessing the debate? And it does seem clear, at least when one reads Chimakonam charitably, that there is no specific direction or valid criterion for locating his assessment of the debate into its desired place: the province of "credibility". It is my view that he has promised to give a "credible assessment" right from the very beginning of his assessment, but he has never managed to accompany and locate this assessment to its province of "credibility". On this way of thinking, the issue of his assessment and desired strategy to locate it in its special and desired province - (credibility) - is not only unsettled but ought to remain as a problem that readers must worry about.

No doubt, Chimakonam spends some time justifying that *(b)* and *(a) properties* do a much better job of surmounting *properties > d*, forgetting that the bottom line of his assessment was directed at two *properties* that are at the nerve of the debate before its contributors: *(c)* and *(a)*. If it is necessarily so or likely to be that he has abandoned or deferred *properties > c & a* in his assessment, then what sort of justification could there be for demonstrating the credibility of his assessment of the Matolino-Kwindingwi-Metz debate? Is it not the case that Chimakonam attempts to interrogate *d > properties* by appealing to *(b)* and *(a) properties*? If that were to be necessarily the case, then is *d > properties* part and parcel of the debate that he is laboring to assess credibly: Matolino and Kwindingwi (2013) and Metz (2014)? Or should it be understood as a contribution/ "continuation of the debate" as Matolino (2015: 214) would have us believe? Since '*d > properties*' is a contribution to the debate, how does criticizing it accomplish Chimakonam's attempt to 'credibly assessing' *(c)* - Matolino and Kwindingwi (2013) - and *(a)* - Metz (2014) - *properties*? (Chimakonam, 2016: 227 – 233).

So conceived, one ought to remember that Chimakonam's assessment is supposed to be mainly about the debate *(a) & (c) properties* and not one of its contributions – (*properties > d*). It is no hidden fact that *properties > d* is the first contribution, and therefore is related to the debate but not related enough to the point that Chimakonam is toiling to achieve (Chimakonam, 2016). His point then is to credibly assess the debate: (*properties > a*) and (*properties > c*), not one of its contributions (*properties > d*) or thinkers who so wish to "continue the debate" (Chimakonam, 2016; and Matolino, 2015: 214). Why is he distracting readers from what is at stake? Why is he distracting readers by only targeting '*properties > d*' that emerges after the debate *(a)* and *(c)*, and defers his credible assessment of *(c)* and *(a) properties* deliberately? Of course, he would have not probably distracted readers had he assessed *properties > d* and other *essential properties* in a manner befitting that which he attempts to provide: the "one way of

*credibly assessing*” the debate (Chimakonam, 2016: 227). In other words, he has abandoned his commitment, which is the ‘credible assessment’ not contributors or thinkers who ‘*continue [with] the debate*’ (Chimakonam, 2016; and Matolino, 2015: 214).

Most importantly, let us assume, for argument’s sake, that Chimakonam’s assessment of the debate is positioned at point number one: P<sub>1</sub>, and that the credibility he assigns to his assessment is positioned at point number two: P<sub>2</sub>. Let us also read Chimakonam as committed to demonstrating that P<sub>1</sub> is identical with or at least complements P<sub>2</sub>. What I attempt to do here investigates whether Chimakonam did manage to articulate an assessment that does not lack coherence or the one that either morphs it into its desired province of credibility or not. The reason why P<sub>1</sub> compliments P<sub>2</sub>, at least here, is chiefly because it is the same Chimakonam (2016: 227) who does aim at “*credibly assessing the merits of the arguments marshalled by the debaters*”. These debaters are Matolino and Kwindigwi (2013) as well as Metz (2014). The impression that one gets is that Chimakonam (2016: 227 – 230) seeks to give a “credible” [P<sub>2</sub>], “assessment” [P<sub>1</sub>] of “*the arguments of the Matolino-Kwindigwi-Metz debate*”. As noted above, he seeks to invoke Matolino (2015) in the process of “*credibly*”-[P<sub>2</sub>]- “*assessing*”-[P<sub>1</sub>]- Matolino and Kwindigwi’s side, and Metz’s “*numerous publications on ubuntu and ubuntu-related subjects*”. He does this - on Metz’s side - in the process of “*credibly*”-[P<sub>2</sub>]- “*assessing*”-[P<sub>1</sub>]- his (2014) rejoinder. The most important question to ask Chimakonam at this stage is: How is it that his P<sub>1</sub> is located in its desired province (P<sub>2</sub>)? This question seeks to search for the most obvious instances where his P<sub>1</sub> could be said to cohere with his desired P<sub>2</sub>. Hence, the following passages make a case for why Chimakonam’s assessment (P<sub>1</sub>) should not count as the credible one (P<sub>2</sub>) in the Matolino-Kwindigwi-Metz debate.

Predominantly, what needs to be emphasized is that, in Chimakonam’s reflections on the debate, P<sub>1</sub> must be divorced from any identity or status which philosophers could attribute to P<sub>2</sub>. This is chiefly because what he has ended up achieving makes it difficult for P<sub>1</sub> to sustain its identity with P<sub>2</sub>. It is this P<sub>2</sub> that speaks to the “credibility” status. For this reason, it is no longer easy, as Chimakonam makes it even harder for readers, to identify the possibilities of P<sub>1</sub> as identical with or attuned to P<sub>2</sub>. This is justified by the claim I have made above that he did not make a case for other *properties* – [(a) & (c)] – that are intrinsic and essential to his P<sub>2</sub>, as other *properties* [besides (d)] that morph P<sub>1</sub> [his assessment] into the status of credibility – P<sub>2</sub>. It is my view that the said credibility is still awaiting and difficult to pin down. P<sub>1</sub> and P<sub>2</sub> are neither identical nor complementary. They are neither identical nor complementary in the sense that his P<sub>2</sub> is still pending as it was delayed by interrogating a single *property*- (d)- instead

of exhausting the ones that are intrinsic and essential to the credibility of his assessment of the debate: *(c)* and *(a)*.

As a matter of fact, *(c)* and *(a)* *properties* are still in need of a philosophical interrogation if Chimakonam really wants to succeed in demonstrating the possibilities of P<sub>1</sub> as identical or complementary with P<sub>2</sub>. On this view, P<sub>2</sub> is still loading and pending precisely because P<sub>1</sub> has never unlocked its own possibilities and potentialities of being morphed into some coherencies that philosophers could easily attribute to P<sub>2</sub>. That on its own shows that there are no attempts or at least “*one way of credibly assessing*” *properties*> *c* as well as *properties*> *a* properly in his contribution to literature. Chimakonam’s (2016: 227) view that he engages the debaters proper: *(c)* and *(a)* must be viewed with suspicion because it is not supported by compelling arguments. Indeed, P<sub>1</sub> is far from realizing its potentialities and possibilities of being identical or at least complementary with P<sub>2</sub>.

As noted above, Chimakonam has only achieved one thing. That is, assessing only one *property* - *(d)*, - by using *properties*> *a* and *properties*> *b*. This must not be construed as the one way of ‘*credibly*’ assessing the debate. This ‘*one way*’ must be composed of all the essential properties (e.g., *(a)* and *(c)*) that Chimakonam seeks to attach to the credibility of his assessment. As a result, there needs to be a clear separation of P<sub>1</sub> and P<sub>2</sub>. In fact, the idea that P<sub>1</sub> and P<sub>2</sub> must be used with quotation marks [since there is nothing in Chimakonam’s reflections that shows he has interrogated *properties*> *c* & *a* philosophically] is exactly what I take into consideration. Not only is this so, but it must be used with quotation marks if P<sub>1</sub> and P<sub>2</sub> were neither pursued up to the point where they could breed compelling arguments against the debate, in a manner that makes things possible for P<sub>1</sub> to manifest more of P<sub>2</sub>. And of course, in P<sub>1</sub>’s attempt to demonstrating that it is identical or at least complementary with P<sub>2</sub>. For this reason, there needs to be a gap that must be left wide open between Chimakonam’s P<sub>1</sub> and, P<sub>2</sub> so as to demonstrate the shortcomings or non-credibility of his one way of assessing the debate. It is clear from the foregoing that Chimakonam’s one way of assessing the debate is not as credible as he makes it sound (Chimakonam, 2016: 227 – 230).

Furthermore, when one reads Chimakonam (2016: 227 – 230) the impression that one gets is that whenever thinkers grapple with the debate, the most obvious or one credible assessment to make is only through invoking *(b)* and *(a)* *properties* to surmount *properties*> *d*. There seems to be no room for other *properties* that must be interrogated philosophically - *properties*> *c* & *properties*> *a* - in order for them to be convinced that his P<sub>1</sub> compliments P<sub>2</sub> well. It would not

be an exaggeration to claim that Chimakonam has tasked himself with subjecting the Matolino-Kwindingwi-Metz debate to  $P_1$  and hoped for the manifestations of  $P_2$  in his  $P_1$ . It turns out to be the case, at least for him, that one would still examine *properties*  $c$  only by criticizing a single *property* –  $(d)$ . And he does this very strictly as he was unapologetic about appealing to other *properties*:  $(a)$  and  $(b)$ . If my reading of Chimakonam were correct, then one would still have to argue that the other two *properties* are not taken seriously in his “*one way of credibly assessing*” the debate. The only *property* he ended up subjecting to critical scrutiny  $(d)$  is not compelling enough to demonstrate that his  $P_1$  falls within the province of  $P_2$ . It is only by interrogating philosophically the two *properties* he left un-assessed that Chimakonam’s  $P_1$  would be said to be located to its desired province –  $P_2$ . Thus,  $P_1$  does not do a much better job of migrating to its desired  $P_2$ . Therefore, Chimakonam’s assessment of the debate is not as credible as he would have us believe. It is not compelling enough to be located into (or at least cohere with) its desired place –  $P_2$ . And under no circumstances should this assessment count as standard reply to Matolino and Kwindingwi (2013: 197 – 205).

### **3.6 Closing Remarks.**

This chapter sought to provide a critical examination of ubuntu in modern philosophical discourses. In demonstrating exactly what its usefulness was, it has outlined the nature of the Matolino-Kwindingwi-Metz debate; targeted Metz’s (2014) intervention and Chimakonam’s (2016) contribution for critical scrutiny. Its philosophical point of departure was that reflections and recommendations by these thinkers are neither compelling nor should they be adumbrated as standard replies.

## Chapter 4.

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### **Three Specific Problems for A Philosophical Interrogation: A Response to Koenane And Olatunji's Contribution.**<sup>42</sup>

#### **4.1 Preliminary Remarks.**

This chapter presents three specific problems that deserve to be interrogated philosophically in Koenane and Olatunji's (2017) contribution: (a) *Through a close analysis of their contribution;*<sup>43</sup> (b) *A misreading of Matolino and Kwindingwi's anecdote;* and (c) *A misinterpretation of Matolino and Kwindingwi's understanding of ubuntu.* This is not to suggest that only what is contained in this chapter should count as the main template that deserves serious philosophical attention in these philosophers' contribution. But, and besides the manner in which these philosophers are interrogated in the present chapter, there is something one should not be in denial of. That is, theirs is hardly ever seriously scrutinized and interrogated up to the end, and therefore has not received considerable attention in philosophical circles. For the purposes of this project, theirs springs not only from arguments that are neither compelling but under no circumstances should one adumbrate it as standard reply to Matolino and Kwindingwi (2013). Its shortcomings rest upon their failure to understanding the gist of the debate. But this is not to suggest that their contribution is bereft of philosophical reflection. Rather, the menu of its problems presented below entertains the possibility that these philosophers have mishandled the debate even though they conceive of themselves as making sure that it is "read and reread [...] many times" (Koenane and Olatunji, 2017: 273). This chapter registers some grounds of scepticism against these philosophers since it conceives of their contribution as vulnerable to significant flaws. In doing so, it interrogates three problems to arrive at the conclusion that their arguments are neither compelling nor should they be adumbrated as standard reply to Matolino and Kwindingwi (2013: 197 – 205).

##### **4.1.1 Outline.**

This chapter is comprised of four sections. Firstly, it provides an explication of Koenane and Olatunji's contribution to the debate. Secondly, a close analysis of their contribution. Thirdly, a rejection of their reading of Matolino and Kwindingwi's anecdote. Finally, a rejection of their interpretation of Matolino and Kwindingwi's understanding of an ubuntu ethic.

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<sup>42</sup> I interrogate these philosophers chiefly because I acknowledge and recognize their contribution as providing answers to this project's main question: what is the relevance of ubuntu in modern southern African societies?

<sup>43</sup> The first problem is in a form of 'Analysis'. It addresses two shortcomings: (a) *The perspective they have adopted* and (b) *Their own summary and examination of Metz's rejoinder.*

## **4.2 An Explication of Koenane And Olatunji's Contribution.**

Koenane and Olatunji (2017) react to Matolino and Kwindingwi (2013) by arguing for the relevance and competitiveness of ubuntu (as a moral theory and way of life) for contemporary Africa. They state their contribution as “challenging the proposition put forward by Matolino and Kwindingwi that values associated with ubuntu no longer apply in South Africa” (2017: 263). Their “contention is that [ubuntu] is still alive, relevant, and can play a vital role in civil society” (*Ibid.*). Their contribution seeks to provide a critical overview of Matolino and Kwindingwi and upholds Metz’s rejoinder as offering a more plausible argument. Their essay is composed of three important sections: (i) *Logical structure of Matolino and Kwindingwi’s argument*; (ii) *Ubuntu and social order/disorder*; and (iii) *Moral erosion and ubuntu*.

The first section points readers to what these scholars identify as misleading and hidden inconsistencies. These inconsistencies emanate from Matolino and Kwindingwi’s ‘sociological observations’ and conclusions that seem like they were responding to previous scholars. For this reason, it is not quite clear whether Matolino and Kwindingwi posit ubuntu as a scholarly construct or sociological phenomenon, write Koenane and Olatunji (2017: 264). They resort to a comparative method that seeks to understand and challenge Matolino and Kwindingwi in the light of pragmatism and capitalism. They think that Americans would not deny pragmatism as authentically American because it fosters individualism or the commodification/commercialization of human value. They suggest that to be committed to the values associated with ubuntu does not necessarily mean the exclusion of other values. They think that one would not outlaw capitalism just because (as a result of sociological observations) it has been linked with violence, economic competition, crime, and terrorism (2017: 264 – 265). They suggest that the position that ubuntu fosters conformity and that an ubuntu community would look askance at contrary position is supported by a curious logic. They think that there is nothing which proves that other competing theories have a lower status than ubuntu. They direct readers to what they posit as resting on unsupported grounds. They seem to be impatient with Matolino and Kwindingwi’s insistence that ubuntu has attained grater prominence than other rival theories. They argue that there is no theory, system or ideology that is ever perfect from inception. Instead, they think that strong theories and systems of today have evolved through debates, suggestions, contributions, and criticisms and not by ceasing to discuss or challenge them (2017: 265). If this is what these thinkers are committed to, then what does this tell us about their stand on ubuntu, its inception and perfection for our own times? If thinkers must not stop theorizing or expounding on ubuntu today, then what does it tell us about its relevance

or perfection for modern Africa? Can one continue to theorize about ubuntu's relevance if it has been proven to be relevant for our own times? Or does this mean that ubuntu has not yet registered its relevance for our own times? Are they rest assured about its competitiveness as an ethical theory for contemporary Africa, if they argue that ubuntu has not been shown to be a strong theory or contemporary system that has evolved through debates? What about Metz who thinks that his version of ubuntu is promising for a contemporary African moral theory? What about Chimakonam who thinks that Metz's moral theory is at the higher level of understanding since it breeds ubuntu's current state: theoretical sophistication or proper mode of philosophizing? Predominantly, Koenane and Olatunji insist that nothing implies that ubuntu has been adopted merely because of its past, precolonial existence without measuring its post-colonial suitability. For these thinkers, ubuntu has been adopted for post-colonial Africa without being cluttered with its primitivism since its suitability and potential or relevance is made manifest even in this era. They are of the view that ubuntu is relevant for contemporary Africa. From this point of view, they contend that Matolino and Kwindigwi have missed the point that ubuntu means different things to different people even though Matolino and Kwindigwi (2013: 197 and 201) posit ubuntu as 'variously conceived' or enjoying a 'popular appeal'. They also argue that Matolino and Kwindigwi's 'The end of ubuntu' is akin to Fukuyama's 'The end of History' (Koenane and Olatunji, 2017: 266). They conceive of themselves as the first ones to concede that the task Kwindigwi and Matolino have embarked on is not an easy one. They suggest that the most significant functions of culture in every society is to shape, determine and direct thought. For this reason, there is something fundamental about ubuntu as a way of life for Koenane and Olatunji. They think of ubuntu as seeking to shape, determine and direct the thought of insiders. In other words, they understand ubuntu in the light of significant functions of a culture that shapes, determines and directs thought of insiders and not outsiders. Furthermore, they think that Matolino and Kwindigwi's critique of ubuntu and the judiciary is tantamount to superficiality chiefly because they referred to Geraldine Freser – Moleketsi's statement on the White paper for the department while she was Minister of welfare and social development. They argue that it does Matolino and Kwindigwi no good to proceed with their critique without "telling us what it is that was wrong with her utterances or reference to the ubuntu ethic" (2017: 266). They seem to be concerned with the reasons as to why Matolino and Kwindigwi did not dismiss theories such as deontology and utilitarianism. Again, a careful reader would notice that this is another instance where Koenane and Olatunji resort to a comparative method. They also appeal to African

thinkers who apply a comparative method [ubuntu and Christianity; the Aristocratic virtue ethic, and African socialism] when approaching ubuntu to challenge Matolino and Kwindiwi. Had Matolino and Kwindiwi appealed to a comparative method or construed ubuntu in the light of Western ethical systems, they would have succeeded in providing an alternative to ubuntu, write Koenane and Olatunji (2017). It reads as if ubuntu's alternative is necessitated by how we measure its suitability with Western ethical systems, according to these philosophers. It reads as if they are prime candidates for suggesting that Western ethical systems ought to ground the possibilities of talking about ubuntu's alternative. To be more precise, things would have been interesting had Matolino and Kwindiwi interrogated the Christian ethos as they did for the ethos of ubuntu, write Koenane and Olatunji (2017: 266). What strike them as problematic is what they consider to be Matolino and Kwindiwi's failure to present a preferable alternative to ubuntu. They submit that this failure leaves a vacuum. It is this failure to give a preference to ubuntu that makes Matolino and Kwindiwi to take "the easy way out" (*Ibid.*). To my parity of reasoning, I think Koenane and Olatunji's submission might be wrongheaded especially if one considers Matolino and Kwindiwi's (2013: 204) preference of a "slightly different direction where [they] seek to make a case for *a more inclusive ethic, particularly on the political front*".

The second section points readers to what Koenane and Olatunji adumbrate as a gross mistake on ubuntu: ubuntu as entrenched in blackness. They insist that it is inconsistent for Matolino and Kwindiwi to theorize as though the situation in South Africa alone is sufficient to validate or invalidate ubuntu. They contend that ubuntu has no business in accounting for pigmentation. They suggest that one can become a person if his or her actions are accepted as good by the community that establishes the moral outlook of society (2017: 267). In other words, a person with moral dispositions of becoming is regarded as *umuntu* and the emphasis here is not on the colour of one's skin. Thus, ubuntu must not be understood through the prism of race, write Koenane and Olatunji (2017: 267 – 268). It is this manner of categorizing ubuntu through the prism of race that strike Koenane and Olatunji (2017: 267) as philosophically untenable. Again, this might be viewed as a wrongheaded submission since it is not true that Matolino and Kwindiwi understand ubuntu through the prism of race.

Moreover, Koenane and Olatunji (2017) further go on to argue that ubuntu is not a narrative of return. They think that Matolino and Kwindiwi are influenced by Leonhard Praeg when they qualify ubuntu as a narrative of return. But this is not to suggest that these scholars use the term 'narrative of return' in a manner akin to Praeg's (Koenane and Olatunji, 2017: 267). They

interrogate the question and validity of Matolino and Kwindingwi's insistence that ubuntu can be viewed as a narrative of return. Had Matolino and Kwindingwi qualified "their concept of 'narrative of return'" they would have made an argument that is supported by strong grounds according to these philosophers (*Ibid.*). Koenane and Olatunji (2017: 272) contend that Metz is mistaken in agreeing with Matolino and Kwindingwi that ubuntu is a narrative of return. They suggest that there is a more plausible description of ubuntu. They posit ubuntu as a 'narrative of becoming human'; 'a narrative of seeking the truth' (*Ibid.*). They think that ubuntu is about being. They suggest that becoming has nothing to do with the narrative of return project. They neither understand it as an ideology. Instead, they understand it as a worldview, and a way of life since it defines what it means to be human. They understand an ubuntu ethic as socially and psychologically justifiable. On the other side, they argue that ubuntu as a moral theory is more than what people do. They conceive of ubuntu as addressing one's failure to act appropriately especially when one is obligated to do so. For these thinkers, this idea for ubuntu takes morality seriously as a vehicle through which we can promote the well-being of our fellow human beings. They argue that it is expected of human conduct, even under ubuntu moral theory, either to be deficient or excessive in terms of what people do or fail to do. This is what Matolino and Kwindingwi fail to understand, write Koenane and Olatunji (2017: 268). They contend that in the case of Matolino and Kwindingwi's case study, the taxi driver lacked humanness in terms of the ethos of ubuntu: his actions were barbaric and cruel. Actions such as these (barbaric and cruel) occur almost every day around the world. They think that the taxi driver's actions do not imply that ubuntu must be abandoned as a way of behaving since the same conclusions can be drawn if one considers utilitarianism, or deontology and virtue ethics (*Ibid.*). They think that Matolino and Kwindingwi have appealed to an incident that conjures up a negative picture about Black South Africa whilst ignoring other countless reports which lament these incidents as unusual and horrific. This has led them to argue that Matolino and Kwindingwi 'have drawn over-generalised conclusions about South Africa from particular acts that occur worldwide' (2017: 268 – 269). They construe these 'generalizations' as unfounded since they posit them as 'a deliberate distortion of information or a pre-philosophic position which should be avoided in philosophy'. They accuse Matolino and Kwindingwi of giving an example that seeks to 'compromise the moral outlook' of ubuntu and choosing to be silent on the positive aspects of ubuntu as a moral theory (2017: 269).

They then move to Matolino and Kwindingwi's take on xenophobia. They reject the idea that ubuntu breeds xenophobic or Afrophobic tensions (Koenane and Olatunji, 2017: 270). They

understand ubuntu ‘as an all-inclusive worldview’ that ‘stands for universalized humanness (ubuntu) values which are shared across cultures’ (2017: 269). They contest Matolino and Kwindigwi’s point on disliking outsiders. As for Koenane and Olatunji, it is disappointing that Matolino and Kwindigwi have completely ignored academic calls against all forms of xenophobia: Afrophobia. They think it is absurd for Matolino and Kwindigwi to think that xenophobia is peculiar to black communities in South Africa. This indicates ignorance about the phenomenon of xenophobia, write Koenane and Olatunji (2017: 270). They argue that Matolino and Kwindigwi should have consulted other philosophers in their attempt to build an argument on ubuntu and law or public policy. They suggest that Mogobe Ramose addresses Matolino and Kwindigwi’s concerns.

Further, they argue that the idea of perceiving the ubuntu worldview as a threat to other African’s existence is absurd and fallacious. They insist that ubuntu, just like most other African worldviews, expresses itself in all aspects of life, and it is therefore not strange to adumbrate ubuntu as a way of life. However, if ubuntu expresses itself in all aspects of life, is it true that it does not threaten other Africans whose lives are determined by multiple identities and cultures? Or if ubuntu expresses itself in all aspects of life, whose lives are they [Koenane and Olatunji] really talking about? Matolino and Kwindigwi (2013: 201) have already warned us about ‘reducing African reality to a monolithic view’. So, I urge readers to take notice of Koenane and Olatunji’s (2017: 272) insistence to see how they contradict themselves in their reaction to Matolino and Kwindigwi: “*We argued earlier that ubuntu is a way of life: a worldview for Bantu people*”. No doubt, different questions may arise if a careful reader takes notice of this quotation. For example:

- (a) If ubuntu is a worldview for Bantu people only, does it really account for changes that unfold in modern Africa?
- (b) Can Bantu people (who are committed to the values of ubuntu) succumb to the constitution that advocates for gay rights, or abortion rights?
- (c) What sought of justification could there be for thinking that abortion and gay rights are truly representative of the moral convictions and the political philosophies of the Bantu peoples of South Africa? (Ramose, 2004: 158).
- (d) Can one be justified in believing that ubuntu does not clash with other ideas (tolerance, cosmopolitanism, and even democracy) that may be seen as having equal worth for Bantu peoples of contemporary South Africa? (Matolino and Kwindigwi, 2013: 202).
- (e) Is it true that ubuntu worldview has conditioned most South Africans to see the world through the window of ubuntu even in urbanized or large-scale and technologically advanced communities? Koenane and Olatunji (2017: 273)

Moreover, Koenane and Olatunji (2017) argue that Matolino and Kwindingwi have an issue with politicians' talk about ubuntu: the project of elitism. For Koenane and Olatunji, the project of elitism is inseparable from issues of governance: ubuntu is a principle through which good governance should be promoted, and ubuntu discourse stimulates public participation which would encourage accountability in politicians (2017: 271). They concede that politicians may be misusing ubuntu, and therefore caution needs to be exercised when engaging in the discourse around it. They do acknowledge that ubuntu is a promotional concept which appeals to all human beings and so could be abused. For this reason, they argue that calling for the end of ubuntu is going too far and seems to suggest that people must reject their own culture and replace it with whatever 'unspecified' culture Matolino and Kwindingwi have in mind. However, readers may ask: who are these 'people' and whose culture? Are they referring to black people and their culture? Koenane and Olatunji have argued that ubuntu is not limited to a certain group of people, but it seems like there are now talking about a certain group of people and their culture. The same Koenane and Olatunji insist that "for most Bantu people of Africa, the ubuntu worldview has conditioned us so that we see the world through the window of ubuntu. This being the case, Matolino and Kwindingwi suggest that those of us who perceive the world and make sense of it from this perspective or worldview must be deprived of our way of understanding our existence" (2017: 273). They further suggest that it is legitimate and desirable for politicians to appeal to ubuntu. They argue that Matolino and Kwindingwi's understanding of ubuntu is very superficial since they have failed to consult well known African thinkers who have written extensively and continue to write on ubuntu. They construe this as a serious omission (2017: 273). As a result, they wonder what the reasons are for wanting ubuntu's demise. They think this project is suspect. For them, the talk of ubuntu is likely to continue as suggested by Metz. Calling for the end of ubuntu is a disguised form of suggesting the death of the African way of life and philosophy of life, which is an old Western project, write Koenane and Olatunji (2017: 274).

In their last section, Koenane and Olatunji (2017: 274) claim that Matolino and Kwindingwi have pointed out incidents that do not display the moral standards associated with ubuntu. They are of the view that these incidents are of great concern to those who believe in the principles of ubuntu. On this view, calling for the end of ubuntu is against Letseka's "ought" principle which affirms what is morally acceptable to society, write Koenane and Olatunji (2017: 274). They think that through the ethical "ought", one needs to make a case for moral conduct (*Ibid.*). Furthermore, they saw fit to argue that Matolino and Kwindingwi's call for "The end of

ubuntu” is an irrational and exaggerated reaction since it lacks the spirit of ubuntu. They think that Metz’s position and objection is more plausible and justified (*Ibid.*). In addition, they claim that Matolino and Kwindingwi are reluctant to acknowledge people’s interactions at all levels in the new South Africa. For this reason, they insist that Matolino and Kwindingwi were correct in pointing out that there is an intolerance of different viewpoints. However, this intolerance has nothing to do with ubuntu, write Koenane and Olatunji (2017). As a result, they asked questions of the following sort in order to show their impatience with Matolino and Kwindingwi’s call for the end of ubuntu: *What would we become without encouraging people to behave civilly towards others? What would we become if we were to support Matolino and Kwindingwi and do away with ubuntu?* Hence, they suggest that this call for ‘The end of ubuntu’ is too radical, unduly harsh, and extreme (2017: 275). They then agreed with Metz’s insistence on the beginning for ubuntu by showing what it could offer to the global world: giving the world a more human face (Koenane and Olatunji, 2017: 276).

### **4.3 A Close Analysis of Koenane And Olatunji’s Contribution.**

There are two basic things (in this section at least) that a careful reader would have to notice about Koenane and Olatunji’s contribution: (a) The perspective they have adopted; and (b) Their own summary and examination of Metz’s rejoinder. These are the kinds of things that I decided to put asunder in the preceding section so as to ease the text flow of my reading/explication of Koenane and Olatunji’s contribution. In what follows, I unveil these things since they inform my own analysis and interrogation of Koenane and Olatunji’s contribution.

#### **4.3.1 Koenane And Olatunji’s Adoption of A ‘Different Perspective’.**

Readers might have noticed that these scholars mention something profound about their stand or position on this debate. Koenane and Olatunji have introduced their position as seeking to provide ‘a different perspective’ that does not tally with the manner in which Metz (2014) responds to Matolino and Kwindingwi (2013). At first glance, this might sound like an interesting proposal to have been made in order for Koenane and Olatunji to introduce a new-fangled approach of responding to Matolino and Kwindingwi. But as time goes on, readers would notice that if this proposal is quite serious, strange, and unacceptable conclusions might logically follow.

As a result, this section seeks to show that Koenane and Olatunji’s perspective is not as different as they make it sound. If there is some truth that could be drawn from this ‘different perspective’, then how would its ‘difference’ supersede others that we might construe as not

different from Metz's? I urge careful readers to think about what the Matolino-Kwindingwi-Metz debate would have to be like (for other new contributors) were Koenane and Olatunji's proposal quite serious and philosophical. And if their proposal for a different perspective were quite serious, then what would its 'adoption' and 'difference' be like for it to count as philosophical.

Let me start with Metz's perspective. Metz's perspective seeks to take a rather more specific form. It seeks to reject Matolino and Kwindingwi's recommendation that ubuntu as an ethical theory and way of life must be jettisoned since it is no longer applicable to modern African realities (Matolino, 2015: 214). Not only did Metz (2014: 66 – 67) agree with Matolino and Kwindingwi that ubuntu is a narrative of return, but he also defends ubuntu using his modernist interpretation (Chimakonam, 2016). However, Koenane and Olatunji argue that it is not sufficient for Metz to demonstrate the theoretical deficiency of Matolino and Kwindingwi's position. Not only do these thinkers articulate their own response to Matolino and Kwindingwi's position but they do suggest a way forward. This is precisely because they seek to 'examine the two earlier opposing positions (Matolino and Kwindingwi's and Metz's) with a view to synthesizing them' (Koenane and Olatunji, 2017: 264). Their position seeks to defend ubuntu as an ethical theory and way of life. Hence, this is similar to Metz's perspective.

On this way of thinking, Koenane and Olatunji opt for 'a different perspective' that promises to have some defensible undertones right at the beginning but end up providing a conclusion that contradicts what they are really committed to: *an adoption of a different perspective*. This perspective fits in with the perspective they wish to abandon. Rarely did these thinkers commit themselves into arguing for the need to adopt this 'different' perspective. Not only is this so but there are no instances where these thinkers demonstrate its significances and differences as well as reliable hints and grounds for its adoption. Even though they disagree with Matolino and Kwindingwi that ubuntu is not a narrative of return (unlike Metz who does not), but their perspective is not 'different' and strong enough to carry us through a specific position that does not tally with Metz's perspective. Metz's perspective seeks to show that *values associated with ubuntu* are a promising ground for a contemporary ethical theory (Metz, 2014: 65 – 66). Not only is this so, but this perspective grounds the possibility for Metz's defense of ubuntu's relevance for our own times. The same Koenane and Olatunji (2017: 264) follow the same route. Their perspective seeks to 'challenge the proposition put forward by Matolino and Kwindingwi that *values associated with ubuntu* no longer apply in contemporary South Africa' (*Ibid.*). In fact, they contend that values associated with ubuntu are applicable to contemporary

South Africa (Koenane and Olatunji, 2017). So, does Koenane and Olatunji's perspective differ from Metz's if both of them seek to defend ubuntu as an ethical theory and a way of life for modern African realities or values associated with ubuntu at least? I hardly think so.

However, if there are reasonable persons who might think that Koenane and Olatunji's perspective differs quite clearly from Metz's, then they would have to provide a good analysis that could easily discern or identify the main source of their differences. They must not point us to Koenane and Olatunji's arguments about '*capitalism and pragmatism, utilitarianism, deontology and virtue ethics, xenophobic and Afrophobic tensions, narratives of return, blackness and law and public policy*' or what they consider to be Matolino and Kwindigwi's '*superficial understanding of ubuntu etc.*' to demonstrate how their perspective differs from Metz's. For me, these were building blocks or justifications that serve as signifiers for Koenane and Olatunji's defense of ubuntu as an ethical theory and way of life or values associated with ubuntu at least. Strictly speaking, Metz's perspective seeks to defend ubuntu as an ethical theory and way of life. These thinkers (Metz; and Koenane and Olatunji) use different justifications to arrive at the same position about the relevance and competitiveness of ubuntu as an ethical theory and way of life for contemporary Africa. On this view, I think readers might fail to discern and penetrate what Koenane and Olatunji consider to be their different approach: the one that does not tally with Metz's defense of ubuntu as an ethical theory and way of life or norms and values associated with ubuntu at least.

As a result, did Koenane and Olatunji manage to adopt a 'different perspective' if they posit and confirm Metz's position and objection as 'the most plausible and justified'? (Koenane and Olatunji, 2017: 274). Does this perspective communicate or confirm something different from Metz's rejoinder? I specifically do not want to think that this is necessarily so or likely to be and probably the case. The perspective adopted by these thinkers lapses into the same perspective that Metz cherishes. It does not even go beyond his response to Matolino and Kwindigwi that ubuntu is still relevant and competitive 'as an ethical theory and way of life' (Metz, 2014). So, what is the fundamental focus of the perspective - as well as its uniqueness - being proposed by Koenane and Olatunji? What does it do to demonstrate how it sufficiently differs from Metz's? For this reason, there is no philosophical foundation that justifies the extent to which this proposed perspective differs from Metz's strategy. Rarely did Koenane and Olatunji spend some time accounting for a transition from 'Metz's perspective' to their preferable or newly adopted perspective. This newly adopted perspective is devoid of meaning. It does not have significant tractions since it lacks a new flavor or different scope and content

that should designate or ground its specialized context. Were this the case about Koenane and Olatunji's perspective, then surely readers would struggle a little bit to understand along what specific lines does the said 'perspective' differs - from what Metz cherishes - if it only pays dividends to a defense of ubuntu as an ethical theory and way of life alone or values associated with ubuntu at least (Metz, 2014: 65 – 72; and Koenane and Olatunji, 2017: 263 – 277).

For this reason, Koenane and Olatunji's perspective is no different from Metz's. It does not even attempt to address or sidestep Matolino's (2015) response to Metz (2014). It is not easy to presume a distinction between these (Metz's; and Koenane and Olatunji's) perspectives except their *different justifications* for the same perspective. Surely, readers are not likely to confuse the two: (a) Koenane and Olatunji and Metz's *different justifications for the same position* and (b) Koenane and Olatunji's and Metz's similar position: *their defense of ubuntu as an ethical theory and way of life or values associated with ubuntu at least*. On this view, if Koenane and Olatunji have succeeded in establishing their perspective, together with grounds for its adoption, then what is it that makes this 'different' perspective yearns for the same position that seems to be upheld by Metz's perspective? The only difference or uniqueness that I have encountered is that their contribution seeks to somewhat adopt or devise new ways of saying 'Yes' to Metz's perspective. This is simply because it does not even escape (or go beyond) the trap that was set by Metz (2014) in his reaction to Matolino and Kwindigwi (2013). Instead of providing some justifications for their 'different perspective', they reduce its uniqueness into a hopeless search that affirms Metz's perspective as 'most plausible and justified' (Koenane and Olatunji, 2017: 274). To my parity of reasoning, Koenane and Olatunji's perspective pales into insignificance precisely because it is accommodated by Metz's. It is not as different as these thinkers make it sound. It is certainly not new. It only serves as a resuscitation of Metz's perspective but with different justifications.

#### **4.3.2 Koenane And Olatunji's Summary and Examination of Metz's Rejoinder.**

When one reads Koenane and Olatunji's joint essay, one would understand that they set out to "indicate engagement with" Matolino and Kwindigwi as well as Metz "respectively" (2017: 263). By so doing, they wish to examine two opposing views that bifurcate between these scholars. Their engagement intends to deepen/enrich the debate on ubuntu. In carrying out this intention, they promise to provide readers with summaries of both scholars and follow it with a synthesis of their opposing views. Their engagement seeks to show why it is insufficient for Metz to demonstrate the theoretical deficiency of Matolino and Kwindigwi's position

(Koenane and Olatunji, 2017: 264). This might sound like an interesting engagement to have been made in order for Koenane and Olatunji to give the Matolino-Kwindingwi-Metz debate serious philosophical attention. However, their contribution makes no effort to provide ‘a brief summary of Metz’s response’ as well as an examination of his opposing view (*Ibid.*). Surely, I had some expectations that there is going to be a serious examination of these opposing fronts. But little did I know that no examination would come out of their contribution to literature.

As a result, I urge careful readers to refrain from reading Koenane and Olatunji as showing any serious ‘engagement’ with Metz’s position (Koenane and Olatunji, 2017: 263). The summary of Metz that is subsumed in their contribution does not even come closer to Metz’s specific argument nor does it include even a good bit of paraphrasing that sets the tone for ‘why it is insufficient [for Metz] to demonstrate the theoretical deficiency of Matolino and Kwindingwi’s position’ (*Ibid.*). Does omitting a summary and examination of Metz’s position mean that their contribution only functions well outside the scope of his rejoinder? No, they are still trapped in espousing a particular view or perspective that falls within the ambits of Metz’s rejoinder. One would have noticed that instead of indicating some engagement with Metz, Koenane and Olatunji (2017: 275) choose to argue that the philosophy of ubuntu has shown resilience against forces that have tried to destroy it and will continue to do so for many more years to come. But I think this particular claim rests upon unsupported grounds precisely because they did not even point readers to these “forces” (*Ibid.*).

Furthermore, let us not forget that their “Is it the end of ubuntu or just the beginning of ubuntu?” question was formulated to show engagement with Matolino and Kwindingwi as well as Metz. But their engagement of Metz is left hanging and unattended. No doubt, this is a serious omission. They neither examine his (Metz’s) position of protest against Matolino and Kwindingwi nor do they even attempt to provide a general or rough synthesis of their (Matolino and Kwindingwi and Metz) opposing views. Instead, what they argue is that ubuntu represents what has become known by the iconic phrase “the struggle continues” since they think “the struggle for ubuntu as a way of life continues” (Koenane and Olatunji, 2017: 275 – 276). However, besides this section’s close analysis, the following section seeks to provide two possible objections against Koenane and Olatunji’s contribution. These objections purport to demonstrate the kind of suspicion that a careful reader would have to foster towards understanding Koenane and Olatunji’s response to Matolino and Kwindingwi.

#### **4.4 Two Possible Objections Against Koenane and Olatunji's Contribution.**

##### **4.4.1 A Misreading of Matolino And Kwindingwi's Anecdotal Story.**

The first worry that strikes me as problematic is Koenane and Olatunji's reading of Matolino and Kwindingwi's anecdote. An anecdote can be defined as a short account of an interesting (or general if not specific) incident or event, and it aims to lend color and generate understanding to a particular discussion (Seech, 1992: 16 – 17). However, Matolino and Kwindingwi's anecdote takes a rather more specific form. Its narrative form is not just aimed at outlining an incident that appeared in the Bloemfontein CBD CCTV footage in the year 2012, but it seeks to reveal the manner in which they question the Minister of Police who appeals to ubuntu when he reacts to the barbarity and criminality associated with such an incident. For this reason, I would like to quote their anecdotal story as it is in order to frame the discussion for my analysis of Koenane and Olatunji's reading:

*“At the beginning of 2012 South Africa was stunned by television footage that showed an extreme act of barbarity meted out by a taxi driver to an apparently innocent pedestrian. Bloemfontein CBD CCTV footage that was screened on major television news bulletins captured the driver of the said taxi making a hasty reverse at a set of traffic lights. He diverted his vehicle from the road and darted onto the pavement where he knocked a pedestrian down. He reversed and alighted to check the impact of his unique driving skills. Upon realizing that his vehicle had not exerted discernible damage to the pedestrian, the driver unleashed a powerful kick to the abdomen of the pedestrian who was struggling to raise himself to his feet. The effect of the kick seemed to have the desired effect on the mind of the taxi driver. He shoved a female passenger, who had also alighted, probably to save the poor man from further punishment, back into the taxi and took off. Other healthy-looking males standing around this shocking scene appeared either unbothered or too scared to come to the aid of the hapless pedestrian. The Minister of police appeared on the eNews Channel Africa television station to bemoan the lack of ubuntu in reaction to this incident. Besides the patent criminality and barbarity of the taxi driver, perhaps equally surprising is the Minister of Police bemoaning the lack of ubuntu in such an incident. Was the Minister justified in not only expressing his sadness at the disappearance of ubuntu in the Bloemfontein CBD, but also in his expectation that there should be a constant exhibit behavior and*

*characteristics that are consistent with ubuntu in the Bloemfontein CBD and, by extension, all corners of South Africa?” (Matolino and Kwindingwi, 2013: 197 – 198).*

The aforementioned passage seeks to point readers into the Minister’s reactions that seem to have constituted Matolino and Kwindingwi’s speculative interests: The Minister’s appeal to an ubuntu ethic. This appeal to ubuntu interrupts the flow of other modes of reflecting on this incident. This is necessarily so since it has occurred in a particular place that is filled up with special affluences which open up for other avenues of interpreting a number of realities that spring from large-scale and technologically advanced societies. This appeal by the Minister of Police makes us more detached to other modes of interpreting the scene since he thinks that the only thing that preserves the monopoly of understanding it is through the prism of ubuntu. That is why Matolino and Kwindingwi (2013: 201) “suggest that what one finds in Bloemfontein are probably various competing values that are governed ordinarily by the law of the land without necessarily seeking to be interpreted in the light of ubuntu”. In other words, a charitable reading of their anecdotal story should not be necessitated by the mere act of debunking or overlooking how they question the Minister’s justification for invoking (or bemoaning the lack of) ubuntu in the Bloemfontein CBD. It is clear that this incident just occurred in a large city. A city that is filled up with ethnic, religious, class, cultural, and racial differences. This city does not have substantial agreements regarding these differences. These differences do not occur or exist because of how ubuntu is or ought to be interpreted. These differences are in a city that retains multiple identities. This is not a city of similarly constituted selves. It is a city that does not force individuals to ‘place a high price and value on blood relations’; the virtues of extended familyhood; or worldviews and ethical norms that are normally upheld by ‘undifferentiated, small, and tight-knit communities’ (Matolino and Kwindingwi, 2013: 202). Instead of appealing to what is normally associated with his duties as the Minister of Police, the Minister then decides to express not only his sadness about the disappearance of ubuntu in the Bloemfontein CBD, but he had so much expectations about a constant exhibit of behavior and characteristics that are consistent with ubuntu (*Ibid.*, 198). Indeed, their speculative interests are based on the Minister’s ‘sadness’ and ‘expectations’. It stands to reason that the Minister’s appeal to ubuntu is exactly what strikes Matolino and Kwindingwi as ‘surprising’ (*Ibid.*). As a result, I read Matolino and Kwindingwi as denouncing the Minister’s readiness to invoke or bemoan the lack of ubuntu in a city that upkeeps competing values that do not necessarily seek to be interpreted through the prism of a specific worldview, ethical system that only work effectively in situations where communities are small and undifferentiated

(2013: 201 – 202). They further suggest that for a worldview, ethic, or system of ubuntu to work effectively and attain its stated goals, it must be upheld by traditional communities whose members “foster the necessary feelings of solidarity that enable the spirit of ubuntu to flourish in the manner envisaged and bemoaned by the Minister of Police” (*Ibid.*, 202).

#### **4.4.1.1 A Close Analysis of Koenane And Olatunji’s Misreading.**

Koenane and Olatunji’s misreading of the anecdote is much easier to detect especially when one considers the following passage. I use the following passage to expose Koenane and Olatunji’s three ways of missing the point of what the anecdote resembles:

*“In including this incident in their articles, these authors [Matolino and Kwindigwi] aimed at highlighting the following: (i) The appalling act of the taxi driver, which lacked any element of ubuntu. This was characterised by reversing into another person and then violently attacking the other (which Matolino and Kwindigwi rightly regard as “barbaric”). (ii) The reaction or lack thereof of the onlookers, who did nothing to intervene or prevent the taxi driver from causing more harm to the victim. The expectation by Matolino and Kwindigwi was for these onlookers to intervene or do something to limit the injury. This act of cowardice or indifference by “healthy-looking” men is perceived by Matolino and Kwindigwi as a failure to apply the values of ubuntu. (iii) The response of the Minister of Police was basically to appeal to the public to “exhibit” behaviour befitting ubuntu and display “characteristics” consistent with ubuntu values. This appeal should not have been necessary if ordinary South Africans were already attuned to the ethos of ubuntu” (Koenane and Olatunji, 2017: 264).*

This passage seeks to demonstrate three propositions [(i); (ii); (iii)] that attempt to devise Koenane and Olatunji’s awareness of what is really going on with Matolino and Kwindigwi’s anecdote. From my own analysis, it reflects a particular problem I identify with their misreading of the anecdote. This is a telling problem that resembles three propositions/ways of missing the point of what is really going on with Matolino and Kwindigwi’s anecdote.

Firstly, Koenane and Olatunji read Matolino and Kwindigwi as arguing that the actions of the said taxi driver lack any elements associated with ubuntu. In other words, they reduce Matolino and Kwindigwi into a hopeless search for ubuntu in this incident. This is simply because Matolino and Kwindigwi are construed as committed to viewing ‘reversing into another person and then violently attacking’ the victim as lacking ‘any elements of ubuntu’. On the

contrary, a charitable reading of Matolino and Kwindingwi's anecdote would not drag them into arguing that there is indeed an absence of ubuntu in such an incident. Instead, it would presume a distinction or acknowledge the difference between the Minister who bemoans the lack of ubuntu and Matolino and Kwindingwi who question the Minister's appeal to ubuntu. Strictly speaking, Matolino and Kwindingwi demonstrate that it is the Minister who infiltrates ubuntu-talk when he reacts to the barbarity and criminality associated with such an incident. In other words, their position is not in tandem with the Minister's strategy to bemoan the lack of ubuntu. The Minister thinks that values or behaviour befitting ubuntu are applicable to a particular place like Bloemfontein. This applicability is also made manifest in Metz's (2014) insistence that values and norms associated with ubuntu are applicable to a particular place like Johannesburg.

Secondly, Koenane and Olatunji's reading of Matolino and Kwindingwi involves another different apparatus: their (Matolino and Kwindingwi) expectations when they think about this incident. The expectation by Matolino and Kwindingwi was for the onlookers to do something or intervene in order to limit the injury, write Koenane and Olatunji (2017). This act of cowardice or indifference by these onlookers demonstrates 'failure to apply values associated with ubuntu' (Koenane and Olatunji, 2017: 264). From my point of view, Matolino and Kwindingwi did not argue that they expected the said 'onlookers' to intervene or do something to limit the injury so as to make things much easier for them to infiltrate ubuntu-talk in this incident. Again, this proposition seeks to reduce Matolino and Kwindingwi into a desperate search for values associated with ubuntu in this incident: an incident that has occurred in a relatively modern and highly differentiated city. To my mind, Matolino and Kwindingwi are not in a desperate search for values associated ubuntu in a highly differentiated city like Bloemfontein. Instead, they are in the business of articulating the shortcomings of ubuntu in a city that does not retain natural environs in which we can conceive ubuntu to have been a success for contemporary Africa (Matolino and Kwindingwi, 2013: 204). In fact, they are of the view that to be committed to the values of ubuntu in a large city that retains multiple identities is to be committed at the exclusion of other values (*Ibid.*, 202).

The final proposition seeks to impute a slightly different apparatus: the reaction by the Minister of Police. Koenane and Olatunji read Matolino and Kwindingwi as positing that the Minister's reaction or response was basically 'to appeal to the public to "exhibit" behaviour befitting ubuntu and display "characteristics" consistent with ubuntu' (*Ibid.*). They read Matolino and Kwindingwi as highlighting that the Minister's appeal to ubuntu should not have been

necessary were South Africans already attuned to its ethos (Koenane and Olatunji, 2017). Moreover, Koenane and Olatunji (2017: 268) write:

*“In fairness to Matolino and Kwindingwi, in recent times in south Africa the number of incidents that lack the moral disposition of ubuntu have been countless: the Marikana massacre; the rape and murder of children; the attacks on gays and lesbians in our townships; xenophobic attacks; police murders etc.”*

Even this quotation seeks to reduce Matolino and Kwindingwi into a desperate search for moral dispositions of ubuntu. Koenane and Olatunji (2017) argue that barbaric acts are everyday phenomena throughout the world. They think that with all these incidents, the uncritical reader may agree that talk of ubuntu in South Africa must come to an end (*Ibid.*, 268). For Koenane and Olatunji, talk of ubuntu must not come to an end and must not be necessitated by these incidents. As a result, it appears as if another misreading is at play here. It is not true that Matolino and Kwindingwi interpret these incidents as lacking any elements associated with ubuntu. It is my view that their speculative interests are directed at the Minister’s appeal to ubuntu. Their speculative interests are neither directed at a number of incidents that occur worldwide. However, Koenane and Olatunji (2017: 274) change the story. They argue that “Matolino and Kwindingwi rightly point to incidents which [...] do not display the moral standards associated with ubuntu”. No doubt, this is a serious contradiction from Koenane and Olatunji (2017). On the one hand, they contend that they think that Matolino and Kwindingwi are in the business of reflecting on an incident that lack the moral disposition of ubuntu. On the other side, they argue that Matolino and Kwindingwi have rightly pointed to incidents that do not display or lack the moral disposition of ubuntu (Koenane and Olatunji, 2017).

However, it is clear from the foregoing that Koenane and Olatunji do not understand what Matolino and Kwindingwi’s anecdote resembles. Even if my own reading of Matolino and Kwindingwi does not succeed in providing good justifications for what exactly resembles their anecdote, but Koenane and Olatunji’s reading of the anecdote is problematic and does not help readers understand this anecdote in its true light or for what it is. This is chiefly because their reading of the anecdote is necessitated by the mere act of debunking or overlooking how Matolino and Kwindingwi question the Minister’s justification for invoking (or bemoaning the lack of) ubuntu in the Bloemfontein CBD. But how does Matolino and Kwindingwi question the Minister’s appeal to an ubuntu ethic? Their main question is stated as follows: *Was the Minister justified in not only expressing his sadness at the disappearance of ubuntu in the*

*Bloemfontein CBD, but also in his expectation that there should be a constant exhibit of behavior and characteristics that are consistent with ubuntu in the Bloemfontein CBD, and by extension, all corners of South Africa?* (Matolino and Kwindingwi, 2013: 198). This question is especially important since it demonstrates Matolino and Kwindingwi's grounds of skepticism about the applicability or relevance of ubuntu in contemporary South Africa. This question must not be read lightly since it might presuppose different sub-questions that are (but not limited to) ontological and phenomenological descriptions. Phenomenological (or what it is like) questions are different from ontological (or what it is) questions. However, I wish to frame the manner in which the following sub-questions may be asked by using a phenomenological approach so as to show the significance I associate with Matolino and Kwindingwi's main question. And it is not my aim to address these sub-questions here. This is not to suggest that an ontological approach cannot be used as a starting point for understanding the manner in which Matolino and Kwindingwi question the Minister's appeal to an ubuntu ethic. Therefore, I confine my understanding of Matolino and Kwindingwi's worry to sub-questions of the following sort:

- (a) Does the Minister think that there are no modes of interpretation which resemble other affluences of articulating what it's like to react to the criminality and barbarity associated with such an incident, if he only limits his reactions to the disappearance of ubuntu alone?
- (b) What if the Minister does not know what it's like to think about other affluences of judging such an incident (that may equally reflect or articulate whatever we do when we try to make sense of an incident) without relying on a specific worldview that only works effectively where communities are small and undifferentiated?
- (c) What if the Minister does not know or fully understand what it's like (or when it is the right time) not to think about ubuntu when he is supposed to react to an incident that occurs in a large city that functions without encouraging its citizens to prize communality and interdependence as the only blueprints for Africanness?
- (d) If the Minister thinks that ubuntu is the only prerequisite for fully reacting to such an incident, does he really know and understand the merits of what it's like to exhibit behavior befitting this worldview in a (relatively modernized and highly differentiated) city whose members are not molded through communal dependence for their meaningful existence?
- (e) And if the Minister does not know and understand the merits of what it's like to exhibit behavior and characteristics that are consistent with ubuntu in Bloemfontein, then what sought of justification could there be for expressing his sadness at the disappearance of ubuntu in this large and technologically advanced city?

Therefore, if I succeed in providing a charitable reading of Matolino and Kwindingwi's anecdote, readers will understand that Koenane and Olatunji's reading is vulnerable to three

[(i); (ii); (iii)] ways of missing the point of what it (the anecdote) resembles. Were this the case about Koenane and Olatunji's reaction to Matolino and Kwindingiwi, then readers would be convinced that their arguments about the anecdote are neither compelling nor should they be adumbrated as standard reply.

#### **4.4.2 A Serious Misinterpretation of Matolino And Kwindingiwi's Understanding of An Ubuntu Ethic.**

The second worry that occupies the center stage in this section is one that strikes Koenane and Olatunji (2017: 273) as superficial. No doubt, this worry resonates with their intentions to "deepening/enriching the debate on ubuntu" on their own (2017: 264). They commit themselves to a view that Matolino and Kwindingiwi's understanding of ubuntu is guilty of shallowness: "the two authors' understanding of ubuntu ethics is superficial" (2017: 273). In response, I will seek to argue that this argument is not convincing since it is tantamount to serious misinterpretation. This objection is part and parcel of my suggestion that these thinkers' arguments are neither compelling nor should they be adumbrated as standard reply. The most important thing is that these thinkers try by all means to surmount Matolino and Kwindingiwi. But little did they know that the manner in which they carried out this objection was prone to serious misinterpretation since it is not true that they have understood the gist of the debate. To object to an understanding that struck them as superficial, this is what Koenane and Olatunji (2017: 273) had to say:

*"What we find striking, and what leads us to conclude that the two authors' understanding of an ubuntu ethic is superficial, are the sources on which they have based their conclusions. Matolino and Kwindingiwi's assertions about ubuntu are drawn mainly from Broodryk, Marx and Binberger, but they fail to consult well-known African scholars, whom we mention but a few, including Mokgoro (1998), Teffo (1998), Ramose (2002), Khoza (2012), Letseka (2000; 2013a; 2013b; 2014) and others."*

This quotation serves as a rationale for Koenane and Olatunji's attempt to register a serious skeptical note against Kwindingiwi and Matolino's understanding of an ubuntu ethic. The manner in which these philosophers mount their skeptical note shows that Matolino and Kwindingiwi did "fail to consult well-known African scholars". This was an important submission to have been made in order to deal with Matolino and Kwindingiwi if one reads them charitably. For these philosophers, it appears as if much better reasons exist for rejecting what Kwindingiwi and Matolino had proposed than accepting it. This is a direct result of

omitting well-known African thinkers: Letseka (2014) is amongst thinkers they cite. It reads as if the sources from which Matolino and Kwindigwi base their conclusions is a gazing stock for Koenane and Olatunji's impatience with their understanding of an ubuntu ethic. Had Matolino and Kwindigwi avoided citing "*Broodryk, Marx and Van Binberger*" (and not van Binsbergen (2001)) - according to Koenane and Olatunji - they would have succeeded in providing an understanding of ubuntu that is non-superficial. Or had Matolino and Kwindigwi consulted the said well-known African thinkers, their understanding of ubuntu would not be superficial.

These African thinkers {Ramosse (2002); Teffo (1998); Khoza (2012) etc.} are probably construed as providing insightful viewpoints that are superficially-free. It is only after taking a cure of non-superficiality from these thinkers including Mokgoro (1998) and Letseka (2000; 2013a; 2013b; 2014) that Matolino and Kwindigwi (2013) would have sufficiently understood an ubuntu ethic. Matolino and Kwindigwi would have sufficiently understood ubuntu based on certain conditions: one of these conditions is to take heed of Letseka (2014) whose paper was published after these philosophers had written their paper in the year 2013. Of course, readers must not be shocked, when they encounter Koenane and Olatunji, that Letseka's (2014) paper was supposed to appear in Matolino and Kwindigwi were they to succeed in providing a non-superficial understanding of ubuntu. In fact, they must read them as committed to this view. For this reason, I read Letseka (2014) as one of the thinkers whom Koenane and Olatunji have appealed to in order to maximize the soundness of their skeptical note. This is a serious conviction for Koenane and Olatunji: Matolino and Kwindigwi were supposed to consult Letseka (2014) even though their paper appeared in 2013. And I am tempted to think that this is in parenthesis with what these philosophers had promised: "deepening/enriching the debate on ubuntu" on their own (Koenane and Olatunji, 2017: 264).

On this view, appealing to Letseka (2014) or expecting Matolino and Kwindigwi (2013) to consult him as if his piece were already accessible to literature, is not only flawed but it raises more question than answers. For a start, what sort of justification could there be for expecting Matolino and Kwindigwi (2013) to predict an "essay"<sup>44</sup> - [Letseka (2014)] – that serves as a

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<sup>44</sup> Koenane and Olatunji (2017) were not supposed to invoke Letseka (2014) because he is not the prime candidate for Matolino and Kwindigwi's (2013) essay: his paper appeared in 2014 and not in 2013 or before 2013. If ubuntu is variously conceived, as Matolino and Kwindigwi (2013: 197) tell us, then there would be no need for Koenane and Olatunji to be very selective since everyone has something to say about ubuntu. Koenane and Olatunji could have argued for the need to invoke Letseka (2014) if they think their selection were quite serious.

legitimate candidate for any form of consultation if the year in which their paper was published does not exist alongside the year 2014 in which Letseka's was? What is it like and what difference does it make to take heed of an article - [Letseka (2014)] - that does not exist alongside or prior to Matolino and Kwindingwi's year of publication? How is it that Letseka (2014) was a well-known African scholar even before the year 2014 or during the year in which Matolino and Kwindingwi's paper was published online: 06 September 2013? How does his 2014 article deserve to be qualified and morphed into the same status with thinkers who were omitted - [e.g., Khoza (2012); Ramose (2002) or Letseka (2013a and 2013b)] and who happen to write their articles alongside or prior to the year in which Matolino and Kwindingwi appeared on the *South African Journal of Philosophy*? For these thinkers, it reads as if, failing to consult or foresee what was coming in the year 2014 somehow serves as a *raison de'tre* for certainly reducing Matolino and Kwindingwi's understanding of ubuntu to complete superficiality. It is for these reasons that I think I have succeeded in picking up a set of sentences that suit their impatience with Matolino and Kwindingwi's understanding of ubuntu.

To provide reasons that best reveal the most obvious cases of serious misinterpretation, I think it is crucial for one to come into terms with what Matolino and Kwindingwi had to say wherever they invoke "Broodryk; Van Binberger; and Marx". But before coming into terms with what these thinkers had to say wherever they invoked Broodryk one must understand that Broodryk has written extensively on ubuntu. For this reason, it is unfair to invoke Broodryk's name as if everyone will understand the most obvious instances where Kwindingwi and Matolino relied on him to draw their conclusion. In their joint paper Matolino and Kwindingwi (2013: 199 – 200) invoke Broodryk (2006) and (2005). What Koenane and Olatunji have failed to tease out is a specific year or years in Broodryk's account that constitutes the most obvious instances of an understanding of ubuntu that is tantamount to superficiality. In Koenane and Olatunji's (2017: 273) reaction, it is not entirely clear whether they have proffered a specific objection that necessarily qualifies Broodryk's (2005) or (2006) works as denoting the most maximal superficiality of ubuntu that everyone would not doubt. It is one thing to invoke Broodryk without the years [2005; and 2006] in which Matolino and Kwindingwi cited his works and quite another to invoke his works without being explicit about publications in which Matolino and Kwindingwi gleaned their understanding of ubuntu.

This is one of the things that reasonable persons of the opposing view are not likely to confuse. If one were to look at Matolino and Kwindingwi carefully, then they would have to understand that there is Broodryk (2005) and Broodryk (2006), and that there are no instances where

Broodryk is divorced from (or discussed without invoking) his (2005) and (2006) works. Koenane and Olatunji provide no justification for separating Broodryk from his (2005) and (2006) works. If it is probably the case that there seems to be no Broodryk (2005) and (2006) in their main text and list of references or their footnotes at least, then there are strong grounds for doubting their reading of Matolino and Kwindingwi. Koenane and Olatunji have championed a view that lacks reasonable grounds for registering their impatience with Matolino and Kwindingwi by invoking Broodryk alone and not Broodryk (2005) and (2006). They did not specify Broodryk's work(s) that could be qualified as the ones that Matolino and Kwindingwi must be accused of as asserting, in order to reach their conclusion about ubuntu. Were this the case about Koenane and Olatunji, then in no way would their line of criticism count as 'standard reply' or at least undoubtedly so.<sup>45</sup>

Besides this misreading of Matolino and Kwindingwi, a reasonable person of the opposing view might even reveal that there are no instances where they [Matolino and Kwindingwi] did cite "*Van Binberger*". Rather, what we must attest to is that there are those instances where Matolino and Kwindingwi (2013: 199 - 201) invoke a certain thinker who goes by the surname: "van Binsbergen" and not "*Van Binberger*". Even when one picks up the last scholar ["Marx"] that Koenane and Olatunji read as articulating an understanding of ubuntu that is amenable to a particular form of superficiality, he or she is not likely to confuse the senses in which Matolino and Kwindingwi appeal to the surname "Marx". It does seem clear that Koenane and Olatunji have invoked "Marx" and "Broodryk" in a manner that certainly leaves readers shocked and confused. Readers are forced to guess or pin down for themselves the senses in which Koenane and Olatunji have appealed to a certain thinker that goes by the surname "Marx". Thus, they left readers scratching their heads on this crucial distinction. This is a

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<sup>45</sup> There is something that could be of interest to other scholars who may seem to be curious about how Koenane and Olatunji (2017) deepen and enrich the debate on ubuntu. That is, Koenane and Olatunji (2017: 268) adopt Broodryk when his understanding of ubuntu is working for their own good, and immediately abandon or denounce the same Broodryk when he is cited by Matolino and Kwindingwi. The only passage where Koenane and Olatunji (2017: 268) spoke approvingly of Broodryk is when they do not accuse him of any form of superficiality. Rather, these philosophers mention Broodryk (no date) as one of the thinkers who understand that ubuntu does not fall within the prism of race discourses. They cite Broodryk alongside philosophers like Metz; Prozesky; Nussbaum; Shutte; Stubbs; Praeg; and others not only to show their sympathies for him but also to articulate an argument that best responds to Matolino and Kwindingwi. This is where Broodryk's understanding of ubuntu is not attached to any form of superficiality. In fact, this is where they demonstrate that he must be cited as an authority or as a thinker who can sidestep Matolino and Kwindingwi. But I think it is also interesting to note that when Broodryk is used by Matolino and Kwindingwi, his understanding of an ubuntu ethic just pales into insignificance. And it then qualifies to be construed as superficial just immediately after that (Koenane and Olatunji, 2017: 273).

distinction between Christoph Marx and Karl Marx. Matolino and Kwindingwi (2013: 201; and 204) have invoked Christoph Marx (2002) (*who had criticized ubuntu for fostering conformity*) and Karl Marx (*to pose a question about the economic commitments of ubuntu*). What Koenane and Olatunji (2017: 273) have failed to tease out is to show the reader that there are two senses or specialized contexts in which Matolino and Kwindingwi have invoked that which goes by the surname: “Marx”: a distinction between Christoph “Marx” and Karl “Marx” in Matolino and Kwindingwi’s essay. In other words, Koenane and Olatunji have failed to presume a distinction between Karl “Marx” and Christoph “Marx” in their attempt to qualify a certain thinker who makes Kwindingwi and Matolino to articulate a superficial understanding of an ubuntu ethic. If this crucial distinction is not always presumed, readers may ask the most basic questions: Who else is responsible for shaping Matolino and Kwindingwi’s assertions besides ‘Broodryk and Van Binberger? Is it Karl Marx or Christoph Marx? For this reason, it does seem clear that Koenane and Olatunji (2017: 273) were not explicit about the “Marx” they appeal to. What cannot be doubted is that they did reserve their understanding of what should count as superficial not only for “Broodryk and Van Binberger” but also for a certain thinker who goes by the surname “Marx”.

No doubt, Koenane and Olatunji (2017) or their sympathizers at least, would register some grounds of skepticism about the manner in which they are criticized in this section. Now let us think of the strongest possible objection against my (attempted) line of criticism. It is only after considering the strongest and revised version of Koenane and Olatunji’s impatience with Matolino and Kwindingwi that one will see why I accuse them of serious misinterpretation. Let us suppose for argument’s sake that Koenane and Olatunji would modify their argument since it seems to be flawed in a manner that can be easily fixed. Let it be supposed that they could abandon or withdraw Letseka (2014) as one of the thinkers who were necessarily omitted by Matolino and Kwindingwi (2013) since his - Letseka (2014) - paper was surely not at their disposal. For some reason, let us pretend they could admit that since the *South African Journal of Philosophy* published Matolino and Kwindingwi’s paper in 2013, it certainly would be a grave mistake to expect them to foresee or take heed of Letseka’s paper that was published by the *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences* in the subsequent year - 2014. Koenane and Olatunji could remove Letseka (2014) in the above quote since Letseka (2013a, and 2013b) himself did not cite or acknowledge his (2014) essay as the one that was “forthcoming”. Or an essay that must be invoked to authenticate an understanding of ubuntu that is not superficially so. That on its own shows that Letseka (2013a, and 2013b) did not see the need to appeal to his

“forthcoming” (or 2014) paper when he articulates an understanding of an ubuntu ethic that is superficially-free. That is to say, in his (2013a) work Letseka only made reference to his (2012; and 2000) and not (2014) works. In his (2013b) paper he did not make reference to Letseka (2014), but he only appealed to his (2013a; 2012 and 2000) works. This is exactly what could justify them in removing Letseka (2014) in the above quote since there is nothing which demonstrates the necessity to cite this (2014) work in matters associated with providing an understanding of ubuntu that is non-superficial. On the other side, they could show that they meant Wim van Binsbergen (2001) instead of “Van Binberger”, and that by “Marx” they meant Christoph Marx (2002) instead of Karl Marx.

In what follows, I seek to present my argument about serious misinterpretation based on the hitherto revised objection. I do this to articulate an argument that best responds to Koenane and Olatunji’s revised objection. The sort of misinterpretation that I accuse Koenane and Olatunji of has nothing to do with other thinkers they deem as “well-known African thinkers”. Instead, this accusation is surely in concord with how they conceive of Wim van Binsbergen (2001); Christoph Marx (2002); and Broodryk (2005, and 2006) as thinkers who make it possible for Matolino and Kwindingwi to provide an understanding of ubuntu that struck them as superficial. It is my view that even this revised objection does not provide substantive reasons for thinking that Matolino and Kwindingwi have articulated an understanding of ubuntu that is prone to any form of superficiality. It is through this revised objection that I accuse them of misinterpreting Matolino and Kwindingwi (2013). To provide the most obvious instances of serious misinterpretation, I think it is crucial that I appeal to certain passages that are pretty much easy to identify in Matolino and Kwindingwi (2013: 199, 200, and 201). These are the main passages that guide me and motivate the sort of interrogation to be forwarded to Koenane and Olatunji, or readers in general, so that they will encounter this misinterpretation. The strategy to be provided below is a double-edged sword.

Firstly, let us identify Broodryk’s (2005; and 2006) works as interpreted in Matolino and Kwindingwi to investigate the truthfulness of Koenane and Olatunji’s position: the position that Matolino and Kwindingwi provide an understanding of ubuntu that strike them as superficial. This is what Matolino and Kwindingwi (2013: 199 – 200) had to say in their “general overview”<sup>46</sup> of ubuntu and their section about “ubuntu in policy making”:

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<sup>46</sup> If it is true that they aimed to provide a general overview of ubuntu there was no need for Koenane and Olatunji to insist that they failed to consult well-known African scholars. First things first, their overview of ubuntu is

- (a) General overview of ubuntu - *“The Gauteng Department of Education has introduced in its schools ubuntu as part of the subject for guidance for pupils. Children are taught the values of ubuntu in the hope that positive social values would be restored where they have disappeared and to popularise ubuntu amongst children of all cultures. It is hoped that ubuntu will create a value-driven society (Broodryk 2006: p. 25).”*
- (b) General overview of ubuntu - *“At the core of ubuntu is the idea that umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu, that is, a person depends on others to be a person. This claim is seen as the unique product that ubuntu offers to the world”. Shutte (2001) and Broodryk (2005) hold that it is time that ubuntu is exported to the international arena and be applied as an ethic in management for better productivity and service delivery.”*
- (c) Ubuntu in policy making - *“The government of South Africa and its organs and indeed the adherents of the above-mentioned view (at different levels of society) hold that the use of ubuntu as an ethic will establish some code of conduct that will transform society. In the civil service, government implemented the motto Batho Pele (people first) and expect civil servants to deliver in this spirit (Broodryk (2006: p. 25).”*

As a matter of fact, it is crucial to note that in (a) Matolino and Kwindingwi aim to provide a general overview of ubuntu, and that they happen to invoke Broodryk (2006) to demonstrate ubuntu and its relationship with objectives of the Department of Education. For this reason, the government wanted to implement the type of educating children that is in concord with the dictates of ubuntu. Educating children about its values was part and parcel of restoring positive social values. I construe Matolino and Kwindingwi as writing from a position of protest against an outdated mode of being that is used to coerce society into the same ideology in modern Africa. I think the burden lies on Koenane and Olatunji to account for the sort of superficiality that one could draw from the above (a) assertion. I read (a) as asserting that there is a relationship between education and ubuntu that seems to be the gazing stock for the department of education in the Gauteng province. There is nothing about (a) that must be read as close to any form of superficiality. The relationships between ubuntu and education is itself not new. And thus, Koenane and Olatunji did not provide any justification for thinking that

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limited to some extent: theirs was a general one. The fact that they did not consult other well-known African scholars does not mean that they have failed to pursue their critique of ubuntu up to the end. They state their abstract as “we seek to advance arguments that question” ubuntu. They provided their overview before they made their critique of ubuntu. And their critique was not based on the manner in which they did present their overview of ubuntu.

understanding ubuntu as embedded in educational discourses is superficial or at least likely to be necessarily so.

Broodryk (2005) was not the first one to make assertions about ubuntu and education. This relationship dates back to 1978 were the Inkatha Freedom Party proposed that children must be taught the values of ubuntu in schools (Griffin, 1995). There is a bulk of other scholars who write on ‘ubuntu and education’: Higgs (2004; 2012); Venter (2004); Waghid (2004; 2014); Bondai and Kaputa (2016); Shanyanana and Waghid (2016); Piper (2016); Oviawe (2016); Etieyibo (2017) etc. But there is a certain scholar that I want to mention here. This scholar is he who was and still convinced that education should therefore be the promotion of *botho* or *ubuntu*. Surely, this scholar predates Koenane and Olatunji’s contribution to the Matolino-Kwindingwi-Metz debate. This individual scholar is he who does not seem to fall from the good graces of these two philosophers. In fact, he seems to be one of those thinkers which they deem as well-known African scholars of ubuntu. This is none other than Letseka (2000: 191). If Koenane and Olatunji were ready to dismiss Broodryk’s assertion about ubuntu and education - as superficially so - then they must also recognize that Letseka (2000) does something of this sort in his “African Philosophy and Educational Discourse”. It is my view that Matolino and Kwindingwi invoke Broodryk not to insist on his definition of ubuntu but to insist on the relationship that exists between ubuntu and education in South Africa. This is where Koenane and Olatunji’s misinterpretation of things lie. It is wrong to construe Matolino and Kwindingwi as insisting that Broodryk is one of the “sources on which they have based their conclusion” (Koenane and Olatunji, 2017: 273).

Secondly, if Koenane and Olatunji were interpreted in light of (*b*), then one would probably understand that Broodryk (2005) was cited by Matolino and Kwindingwi to reveal his understanding and application of the well-known aphorism of ubuntu: *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*. They cited Broodryk (2005) alongside Shutte (2001) to show that ubuntu is now deemed as exportable to the global community for some thinkers. This reading of ubuntu as exportable to the international arena is not peculiar to Matolino and Kwindingwi’s general overview of ubuntu. And it is a serious misinterpretation to argue that Broodryk (2005) is one of the sources in which one could identify any form of superficiality attributed to an ubuntu ethic.<sup>47</sup> It is germane to note that Koenane and Olatunji (2017: 263 and 269) account for

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<sup>47</sup> This is limited to the passages that Matolino and Kwindingwi used to talk about ubuntu and education in South Africa.

something of this sort but they immediately denounce someone who is convinced by this manner of going about things. That is, they insist that one does not have to be African and black to embrace ubuntu but reject Broodryk (2005) who does something of this sort or is at least committed to it.

No doubt, ubuntu is not applicable to Africans, and blacks in particular, but its values are applicable to the global community or other Western philosophical approaches of the world, write Koenane and Olatunji (2017). This is exactly what Shutte (2001) and Broodryk (2005) had in mind. For instance, Koenane and Olatunji (2017: 263 and 269) understand ubuntu as an all-inclusive world view and admit that it stands for universalized humanness (*ubuntu/botho*) values, ones that are shared across cultures: respect; care; honesty; tolerance; compassion; empathy and hospitality. They admit quite strongly that the philosophy of ubuntu is no different from other philosophies of the world. Matolino and Kwindigwi as well as Koenane and Olatunji seem to recognize that some thinkers entertain the possibility that ubuntu shares some features with other ethical or Western philosophical approaches of the world. But in that recognition Koenane and Olatunji still think that Broodryk's understanding of ubuntu is superficial.

At this juncture, I am still wondering about what the point of Koenane and Olatunji's argument really was. Matolino and Kwindigwi understand that ubuntu's values are construed as applicable to other places: this is what Koenane and Olatunji are ready to admit. If Koenane and Olatunji were to accept that their understanding of ubuntu compliments (*b*) then it certainly would be interesting to see the form of superficiality that one could glean from Matolino and Kwindigwi's (*b*). The manner in which their [Koenane and Olatunji] understanding of ubuntu compliments (*b*) lies in the idea that ubuntu is deemed by Shutte (2001) and Broodryk (2005) as exportable to the international arena (Matolino and Kwindigwi, 2013: 200). Hence, (*b*) has no business in accounting as one of the sources in which Matolino and Kwindigwi drew their conclusion about ubuntu. Thus, all of these assertions come down to my argument that whatever Koenane and Olatunji have carried out against Matolino and Kwindigwi's view about an understanding of ubuntu pales into serious misinterpretation.

When one looks at (*c*) she or he will understand that Matolino and Kwindigwi were trying to show that there is something going on about ubuntu and public policy in South Africa. This must not be construed as something that sets the tone for their support of Broodryk. They invoked him to show how the government of the day (the ANC) has decided to implement the

motto *Batho Pele* (people first) and expect civil servants to deliver services in this spirit. There is nothing superficial about how Broodryk (2005) has invoked ubuntu here. It is no hidden fact that the government has implemented the motto “*Batho Pele*” ‘to animate, or perhaps pay obeisance to ubuntu’ (Matolino and Kwindingwi, 2013: 197). It appears as if Koenane and Olatunji do not understand that the government has chosen ‘its service delivery mantra and its public slogan’ deliberately (*Ibid.*). This shows that another misinterpretation is at play here.

However, not only did Koenane and Olatunji argue that Matolino and Kwindingwi’s assertions are drawn mainly from Broodryk, but on the other hand, their impatience with them was extended to other thinkers that are discussed below: Wim van Binsbergen (2001) and Christoph Marx (2002). This is the second point that I want to make about my view that Koenane and Olatunji’s impatience with Matolino and Kwindingwi rests on a serious misinterpretation. As a result, Wim van Binsbergen and Christoph Marx are some of the thinkers who are construed as making it possible for Matolino and Kwindingwi to provide a superficial understanding of an ubuntu ethic. It is said that Matolino and Kwindingwi’s understanding about the end of ubuntu emanates from these sources: van Binsbergen (2001) and Marx (2002) (Koenane and Olatunji, 2017: 273).

Most importantly, I propose to give substantive reasons for thinking that Koenane and Olatunji did misinterpret whatever it is that Kwindingwi and Matolino were laboring to achieve by citing these scholars. The most important thing to note is that van Binsbergen (2001) is invoked twice whilst Christoph Marx (2002) was invoked once in Matolino and Kwindingwi. Matolino and Kwindingwi (2013: 199 and 201) appeal to van Binsbergen (2001) in their “general overview of ubuntu” and van Binsbergen (2001) and Marx (2002) in their “critique of ubuntu”. There is nothing in both passages that shows that Marx and van Binsbergen are the sources from which Matolino and Kwindingwi have based their understanding about ubuntu. Even if Koenane and Olatunji read Marx and van Binsbergen as making it possible for Matolino and Kwindingwi to provide an understanding of ubuntu that is superficial, I propose to read them [Matolino and Kwindingwi] as succeeding in escaping what Koenane and Olatunji’s line of criticism aimed at achieving. Their line of criticism serves to confuse readers and misinterprets Matolino and Kwindingwi’s take on Marx and van Binsbergen. This is what Matolino and Kwindingwi (2013: 199 and 201) had to say about van Binsbergen (2001) and Marx (2002) in their essay:

(a) General overview of ubuntu - *“Win van Binsbergen (2001) holds that ubuntu has been explored as a viable philosophical concept in the context of majority rule South Africa and that for the academic philosophers it has become a key concept to evoke unadulterated forms of African social life before the European conquest.”*

(b) Critique of ubuntu - *“The critique we seek to make is somewhat different from other criticisms that have been made against ubuntu. van Binsbergen, for instance argues that ubuntu denies humanity to non-autochthonous individuals (2001: pp. 53 – 89). On the other hand, Christoph Marx has criticized ubuntu for fostering conformity and has been noted that of nation-building suffers the tension of inclusion at the same time (2002: pp. 49-69). [...] Although we endorse these criticisms and others similar to them, immediately below we seek to pursue a different line of criticism.”*

The most important thing to notice from (a) is that Matolino and Kwindigwi (2013: 199) appeal to van Binsbergen (2001) in their “general” overview of ubuntu. This overview was a template for a general overview of ubuntu. If (a) were to count as a passage that does influence them to provide a superficial understanding of ubuntu, then surely it would be unfair, for Koenane and Olatunji, not to mention Dandala (1996); Mthembu (1996); Richardson (2008); Khanyile (1995); Shutte (2001); and Mkhize (2003; 2008) who are constitutive of this general overview of ubuntu. For this reason, it is true that their general overview of ubuntu also relied but not “mainly relied” on van Binsbergen. If that were to be the case, then it certainly would still not be easy to see how could van Binsbergen and Broodryk alone had a strong influence in their understanding of ubuntu. What about the other scholars just mentioned above? Is it not the case that Matolino and Kwindigwi did accept for themselves in their critique that what they seek to pursue is somewhat different form van Binsbergen’s? But this form of misinterpretation becomes easily visible in (b). In (b) Matolino and Kwindigwi were very clear about their move. They started off by recognizing other authorities who have critiqued ubuntu before them. They made it quite clear that theirs is somewhat different form others. In other words, van Binsbergen’s critique must not be read as a blueprint for Matolino and Kwindigwi’s understanding of ubuntu if (b) makes it clear that they “seek to pursue a different line of criticism” (Matolino and Kwindigwi, 2013: 201).

The same goes for Christoph Marx. Matolino and Kwindigwi recognize these thinkers: Marx and van Binsbergen, and their different lines of criticism and “others similar to them”. If Matolino and Kwindigwi were to be influence mainly by Marx and van Binsbergen, then what

would be the significance of a distinction that is presumed in *(b)*. In other words, when one reads *(b)*, it is easy to see that a distinction is presumed between criticisms by Marx and van Binsbergen as well as others similar to them, and Matolino and Kwindingwi's "different line of criticism". If Koenane and Olatunji did not make this distinction, then is it because Matolino and Kwindingwi's line of criticism is not different from others registered by Marx and van Binsbergen or others similar to them? It seems like the distinction between Marx's critique and Matolino and Kwindingwi's line of criticism is not carefully presumed by Koenane and Olatunji. Thus, Koenane and Olatunji's failure to presume this distinction is as follows.

*"Their [Matolino and Kwindingwi] criticism of ubuntu seem to run as follows: first; ubuntu fosters conformity." (Koenane and Olatunji, 2017: 264).*

When one looks at *(b)*, one would see that this criticism is reminiscent of Marx's. But if one were to read this quote carefully and the context it proceeds from, then she or he would have noticed that Koenane and Olatunji (2016: 264) interpret "ubuntu as fostering conformity" as the first line of criticism that flows from Matolino and Kwindingwi. It is not even read in the light of Marx's line of critique. In other words, is this not a serious misinterpretation? I think it really is. This is chiefly because Koenane and Olatunji do not distinguish Marx from Matolino and Kwindingwi. They conceive of Marx's critique as having the first intrinsic quality in their (Matolino and Kwindingwi's) line of criticism. In addition, I do not want to reduce the manner in which these philosophers exchange their ideas with Matolino and Kwindingwi into a quarrel about words. But one must notice that the word "conformity" is neither used more than once nor twice in Matolino and Kwindingwi (2013: 201). There are no instances, other than this, especially where the phrase "ubuntu fosters conformity" seem to appear in other parts of their essay. They argue "ubuntu fosters conformity" especially in *(b)* and not throughout their essay. The point I am getting at is that this phrase could be read as leading Koenane and Olatunji into a category mistake precisely because instead of it being understood as reminiscent of Marx's critique, it is construed as flowing from Matolino and Kwindingwi's line of criticism. If they are of the view that Matolino and Kwindingwi are committed to this phrase, then they must distinguish it from how Marx use it and designate its specialized context so that it could be re-interpreted as having the first intrinsic quality in Matolino and Kwindingwi's line of criticism. Thus, one would have noticed that these thinkers took a wrong turn that might lead them to serious misinterpretation precisely because it is not

true that Matolino and Kwindingiwi (2013: 201) were mainly influenced by Marx (2002), and van Binsbergen (2001). In fact, in (*b*), I read them as pursuing a different line of criticism.

Therefore, if it is true that these philosophers were influenced by Marx, Broodryk, and van Binsbergen, then one would expect Koenane and Olatunji to pursue a different argument that designate a specialized interpretation or context that could suit and qualify their impatience with Matolino and Kwindingiwi. For instance, they must point readers to other passages in Matolino and Kwindingiwi's essay that could be interpreted as being inspired by Marx and van Binsbergen. Surely, this was not central to their line of criticism. But this is one of the instances which could strengthen the force of their argument. So, if my argument against Koenane and Olatunji succeeds, then readers must come to an understanding that their objection to Matolino and Kwindingiwi is vulnerable to significant flaws. And readers would also be convinced that this specific objection that Koenane and Olatunji had against Matolino and Kwindingiwi is neither compelling nor should one adumbrate it as standard reply.

#### **4.5 Concluding Remarks.**

This chapter sought to present three specific problems for a philosophical interrogation in Koenane and Olatunji's contribution. It sought to argue that their arguments are neither compelling nor should they be adumbrated as standard reply to Matolino and Kwindingiwi. It was comprised of four sections. Firstly, it sought to provide: an explication of Koenane and Olatunji's contribution to the debate. Secondly, a close analysis of their contribution. Thirdly, a rejection of their reading of Matolino and Kwindingiwi's anecdote. Finally, a rejection of their interpretation of Matolino and Kwindingiwi's understanding of an ubuntu ethic.

## Chapter 5.

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### **Ubuntu And Modernity: A Plea for Taking Modern Realities Seriously.**

#### **5.1 Preliminary Remarks.**

The debate introduces ‘ubuntu and modernity’ as an area of a philosophical interrogation that serves as a plea for taking modern realities seriously. This debate champions different postulations that either “jettison” (Matolino and Kwindingwi) or “endorse” (Metz) ubuntu and its relationships with the facets of modernity. The reason why ubuntu and the facets of modernity serve as their template for taking modern realities seriously, is because Matolino and Kwindingwi reject its relevance whilst Metz adopts it for modern societies. It appears, at least when one reads the debate carefully, that ubuntu and its facets with the dictates of modernity can do or cannot do a much better job of formulating proper theorisations that account for what it means for modern African realities to be taken seriously. This chapter charts a direction that grapples with the question of ubuntu’s relevance that has been lingering in the previous chapters: is ubuntu still relevant for modern African realities/societies? By so doing, it interrogates this question using the debate since it has received scant examination in this project. This chapter conceives of the debate as de-centralizing and centralizing ubuntu’s place in modern realities. This kind of reading renders initiators of the debate as anchors for the “de-centralization” (Matolino and Kwindingwi) and “centralization” (Metz) of ubuntu’s place.<sup>48</sup> Surely, this may not be a good path to follow, especially for those who neither concentrate on the question of ubuntu’s relevance by appealing to the debate. However, just like those who may want to think that its question could fall within the ambits of the debate, this chapter argues that a “pro-centralizing camp” fails to account for ubuntu’s relevance in modern Africa.

##### **5.1.1 Outline.**

I wish to achieve three outcomes in this chapter. Firstly, I provide a preview of modern African realities. Secondly, I provide the architecture of the debate as resting upon two competing camps. Namely, “de-/and pro-centralizing” camps. Finally, I argue that the “pro-centralizing” (or Metz’s) camp fails to account for what it would mean for ubuntu to be relevant for modern African Societies.

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<sup>48</sup> The purpose and role of these concepts [de-centralization and centralization] will be explained in sections 5.3.1 and 5.3.2

## 5.2 A Preview of Modern African Realities.

This section gives a preview of modern realities that Africa is conditioned under. Before considering these realities, it is important to note that on the African continent individualistic behaviours are excoriated and those who embrace it stand condemned for abandoning a superior mode of living: Communalism (Taiwo, 2016: 83). This is what Taiwo (2016: 83) proposes:

*“It matters little what that individual “feels” or “thinks”, respecting how and where “he can develop his potential, his originality” – simply put, he has not been given the choice; the decision has been made for him. He has not, we might say, been taken seriously. He has been rendered less than a person.”*

The most important submission to make here is that much larger African societies in today’s world are characterised by increasing urbanization, significant religious, ethnic cleavages, and class differences (Ciaffa, 2008: 36). Some thinkers like Taiwo (2016: 95 – 96) for instance, might suggest that the spatial arrangement of many buildings in large scale communities makes it difficult for the architecture of communalism and its associated values to thrive. He concedes that our cities and towns, large and small, are devoid [...] of common spaces for the unfolding of communal living. He seems to question the praise of communal living. He accuses African scholars of forever singing the praise of communal living; the virtues of the extended family; how Africans often and easily assume the burdens of being another’s brother’s keeper (Taiwo, 2016: 83). It is hardly an exaggeration to argue that each and every decision on matters close to their hearts and lives, most individuals in large-scale communities make them without calculating the interests of their kin or lineage groups (Abraham, 1992: 18).

Communities of this sort are neither characterised by substantial agreements regarding religious beliefs, customs and morals nor do they seem to have been characterised by a sense of solidarity and shared destiny among the people (Bodunrin, 1991: 69 – 70 in Ciaffa, 2008: 36). Life in traditional societies is not the same as that of the modern, individual and, large-scale societies. This is not to suggest that there is no co-operation in traditional, small, and undifferentiated societies. But the communitarian outlook one may glean from this society is hardly true for modern African societies. Matolino (2018b: 168), in his book entitled *“Consensus as Democracy in Africa”* contends that human beings, all over the world, have basic needs which must be satisfied, not undermined, or overlooked, in order to secure a dignified and meaningful existence. He argues for the need to consider the possibility that the

remoteness of Africa's past represents in modern Africa. It is this remoteness that he deems as indicative of Africa's potential ineffectiveness when it comes to providing a prescription for today's ailments (Matolino, 2018b: 173). He suggests that there is a serious disconnect that exists between traditional social structures and modern structures (Matolino, 2018b: 174). Elsewhere, he argues that some communities in Africa are constituted by individuals who no longer share a common communal good. He thinks that the essentialists view that the African notion of community as constituted by individuals who share a deep connection and commitment to the same good is unwarranted in modern societies. He doubts that all or most African communities are constituted in this manner. He suggests that most parts of Africa are fairly modernised and governed by rules and structures that do not retain the structures of classical communitarianism (Matolino, 2011a).

It is beyond any shadow of doubt that most if not all countries on the African continent have experienced urbanization and technological expansion. In fact, William Abraham (1992: 14) makes this pronouncement when he argues that this experience with urbanization has brought influxes of populations from the country into the cities. He thinks that the protective connections and certitudes that were said to generate the fellowships and bonds of rural life have been disrupted throughout the continent. It is this population movement that has registered daunting challenges on the value; material; and institutional facets of rural life. Abraham (1992:15) construes this daunting challenge as the great population drain. He thinks that this is the great population drain from rural areas. These areas have transferred thousands of national populations to urban communities which have transferred to urban areas. Not only did this movement become a signifier of detrimental effects but it has caused frustrations on traditional cultures and norms. Key to these frustrations and detrimental effects is the very idea of family that has changed completely. The functions and prerogatives of the old lineage group has become a big question for citizens who reside in urban and industrialized communities. Not only is this so but it is not entirely clear whether lineage groups continue to have discernible impacts on the education and the shaping or upbringing of children in large cities. This is simply because, in their upbringing, urban children tend not to be well acquainted with the dictates of the traditions for any lineage group (Abraham, 1992).

When it comes to children and their peer groups Abraham (1992: 17) argues that the rural settings in the past and today especially in small tight knit communities would supply a framework for their initiation as adults and their training in social institutions. However, in the urban settings he thinks that social control is weakened since the sanctions and instruments of

traditional cultures are thwarted without equivalent substitutes (*Ibid.*, 17). Just like Africans residing in large-scale communities, their way of life is neither in tandem with social nor ethical norms of their original cultures. It is said that these cities are filled with those who hold on to aspirations of individual success as opposed to or distinct from family success. As Abraham (1992: 18) argues, this is primarily because they are little inclined to sacrifice children's opportunities and their own in favour of their siblings, nephews, and nieces. For this reason, this is not a community whose members are "bound together by common blood and feelings of extended familyhood" (Bodunrin, 1991: 69 – 70 in Ciaffa, 2008: 36).

### **5.3 The Architecture of the Matolino-Kwindingwi-Metz Debate.**

The architecture of the debate and contributions glued from it spark a certain kind of philosophical exploration that centres on ubuntu and its relationship with modern African realities. The present section delves on the architecture of the debate that hinges upon two camps: de-centralizing and pro-centralizing camps. It conceives of the debate as de-centralizing and centralizing ubuntu's place in modern societies. It renders initiators of the debate as anchors for the de-centralization and centralization of ubuntu's place in modern Africa. The first camp is composed of Matolino and Kwindingwi (2013); Matolino (2015), whereas the second one is composed of Metz (2014) and a number of his publications he deems relevant to the debate.

These camps do not take modern African realities for granted. In fact, I read them as taking modern realities seriously. I read these opposing camps as following Taiwo's (2009) insistence that the continent must overcome its numerous present difficulties and evaluate its relationship with the project of modernity. Whilst the first camp decentralizes the relevance [if not place] of ubuntu in modern Africa, the other camp centralises its relevance and place for modern Africa. I wish to argue that the reading proposed here will illuminate and inspire a philosophical interrogation that renders ubuntu's relevance as its underlying motif. The reason why this reading renders the relevance of ubuntu as its underlying motif is simple because it attempts to spark a certain kind of investigation about ubuntu in modern Africa.

These camps orient the reader to a scant examination of ubuntu's relevance that must be attended to in the debate. This chapter charts a different direction I deem suitable for reading the debate and how its initiators secure ubuntu's place. From the point of view of this current research on ubuntu and its project with the facets of modernity, the impression I get, when I read the debate, is that either one agrees with Matolino and Kwindingwi or demonstrates and

searches for new ways of saying yes to Metz's claim to fame. Metz's claim to fame here refers to his invitation to other scholars that might see the need to respond to Kwindigwi and Matolino on their own (Metz, 2014: 65 – 66).

### **5.3.1 The De-Centralizing Camp.**

This camp cuts across two features in its attempt to take modern realities seriously. Firstly, it seeks to decentralize the place of ubuntu by separating it from the menu of realities the camp deems as characteristic of modern Africa. Secondly, it argues that ubuntu's relevance is placed and served by a small fraction: remote and most traditional communities. In no way does this suggest that other features that one could glean from Matolino and Kwindigwi (2013) and Matolino (2015) are non-existent. However, I appeal to these two-pronged features for the purposes of what I characterise as a decentralizing camp. These features are mentioned to tease out distinctions between ubuntu's "hereness", and the "no-where-ness" of an ubuntu ethic. By doing so, this section proceeds by way of providing answers to the following question: What sort of communication does each feature make in its venture to decentralize or pinpoint the place and relevance of ubuntu both in traditional and modern Africa?

#### **5.3.1.1 The First Feature: A Decentralization of ubuntu's place.**

No doubt, ubuntu, at least for this camp, is separated from the menu of realities that modern Africa is conditioned under. For instance, modernity; industrialization; globalisation; individual creativity and capacities; individual and dissenting thought; the capacity for intellectual activity; varying shifts that retain multiple identities and other dynamics that could possibly direct and shape current African life (Matolino and Kwindigwi, 2013). Scholars of ubuntu might insist that it does place a high premium on modern realities. But it could be argued that such a premium would not be wide open for other realities and needs that modern Africa is conditioned under. This menu of realities is wired up by a number of interests that are human, natural, and equally important for a modern society.

Indeed, I read Matolino and Kwindigwi as questioning the tenability of ubuntu in modern Africa since the visibility for the present state of its nowhere-ness is made manifest in this camp. It is this camp that decentralizes ubuntu and drags it into the status of nowhere-ness. They push for its nowhere-ness in the sense that the present state of its place and relevance is fragmented by calls for taking African reality together with its relationships with the facets of modernity not lightly. The reason why ubuntu is nowhere in large scale and industrialised African communities is simply because of ubuntu's failure to be in concord with the dictates

of modernity, individual capacities, and potentialities. In as far as this camp decentralises the place (if not relevance) of ubuntu, one must note that it does so to shift ones focus to taking modern realities very seriously. What this shows is that Matolino and Kwindingwi's essay attempts to bring readers one step closer to taking modern African realities not lightly. Not only does it take them very seriously by recognizing other experiences that are characteristic of modern African societies, but it does so by also insisting on them not being taken for granted. What one will acknowledge is that when other experiences are taken seriously and not for granted, he or she will somehow concede that ubuntu is not fit and therefore cannot fully account for modern African realities.

It is my view that the constitutive features of a critique by Kwindingwi and Matolino leaves no doubt that ubuntu is subjected to vigorous scrutiny since they show that it is unwarranted in modern societies. I read them as committed to views that seek to canvass the downfall of ubuntu and the rise of modernity discourses. Their understanding of what they take a modern society to be, together with its present state and realities, cause them to reveal the challenges that bedevil ubuntu, and therefore expose its limitations. Insisting on other dynamics and multiple identities that shape modern Africa is all there is to their recommendation that ubuntu has reached its end. This end of ubuntu is warranted or inaugurated by its limits to be in concord with the dictates of modernity or other dynamics that have characterised what a modern society is likely to be. However, it must be borne in mind that this camp does not deny that there are academics and elites who push for its place or where-ness in modern Africa. Matolino (2015) makes it quite clear that those who are involved in this enterprise bend ubuntu to their own proclivities. Since the present state of its where-ness is occasioned by elites, Matolino and Kwindingwi suggest that they are advocating for ubuntu's relevance without being explicit about their political moves.

### **5.3.1.2 The Second Feature: The Only Hope/Right Place for Ubuntu's Relevance.**

The second feature demonstrates that the question of ubuntu's relevance ought to take place in rural communities and ought not to take place in modern communities. It is this camp which construes ubuntu's relevance as placed and served by a small fraction: remote and most traditional communities. For this reason, Matolino and Kwindingwi focus on small communities as the right place to locate ubuntu's relevance. These philosophers do not deny that ubuntu stands somewhere. The sort of evidence they point readers to especially about its "where-ness" is in small-tight nit and rural communities. Their advocacy for its nowhere-ness

is evinced by the first feature. Central to their advocacy for the end of ubuntu is the recognition of its “here-ness” in modern Africa especially the “here-ness” of ubuntu that is maintained by elites and academics etc. But Matolino (2015) argues that those who are engaged in affirming its relevance and “hereness” for modern Africa twist ubuntu to their own purposes and proclivities. Since the present state of ubuntu’s “where-ness” is dragged into small-scale communities, Matolino and Kwindigwi think that this is the only place where ubuntu can register its howling success. It is for these reasons that they deem ubuntu as only endowed to be relevant to this community. This is precisely because the status of ubuntu’s relevance is only upheld by communities of this sort. This is simply because they insist that if one recognises the irreversible effects of industrialization and modernity one would see that the values of ubuntu are now extinct especially in large-scale societies where multiple identities and divergent ideas flourish.

As a result, for one to see the values of ubuntu as a reality for everyone, he or she must understand that ubuntu is possible once it is “embedded in the strictures of communalism”, because without communalism there is no possibility for ubuntu to register its success. This idea arises from Matolino and Kwindigwi’s view that “the mutability of African societies (away from their traditional antecedents) has rendered ubuntu dissonant with the naturalness of the opportunities for its realisation” (2013: 203). However, the present state for its relevance and here-ness is occasioned by Metz’s insistence on its beginning especially in matters associated with scholarly inquiry and political application. This is exactly what occupies the scope of the following section.

### **5.3.2 The Pro-Centralizing Camp.**

In this camp, Metz can be read as creating a zeal for resisting Kwindigwi and Matolino’s position on the end of ubuntu. For Metz, ubuntu is in better shape as he has managed to develop it to suit the demands of modern African realities. This is what he seeks to affirm by also appealing to his numerous publications. The most important question at this stage is: what sought of justification could there be for ubuntu’s relevance, as construed through the prism of Metz’s rejoinder? The discussion that follows attempts to provide answers to this question.

Metz focuses on urban communities as the right place to locate ubuntu’s relevance in southern Africa. For Metz (2014), ubuntu could not afford to be left behind; or at least be “left completely out of discussion” (Eze, 2006: 63) about changes that unfold in modern Africa. For this reason, he can be interpreted as giving an account that takes modern realities seriously. On

this view, he conceives of ubuntu as being open to the dictates and facets of modernity. His rejoinder maybe construed as signalling the quest for coming into terms with the place [if not relevance] of ubuntu and its present state as an ethical theory for modern Africa. Metz concurs that it fits well and does account for these realities: in view of his ethical theory. He seeks to show that the centrality of ubuntu and its relationships with the facets of modernity and industrialized African societies deserve a better hearing. This hearing appeals to “the several norms and values associated with ubuntu”. These norms and values are the ones that Metz (2014: 65 – 66) qualifies as “a promising ground for a contemporary ethical theory”. These norms and values ground the possibility and place of ubuntu as an ethical theory for our own times.

For this reason, I read Metz as rejecting an attempt to decentralise the relevance of ubuntu in modern African societies. Supporters of Chimakonam’s contribution might insist that Metz’s moral theory presents ubuntu into its better shape because it represents ubuntu’s present state: theoretical sophistication and proper mode of philosophising. This version of ubuntu is one that compliments modern demands since it breeds theoretical sophistication and proper mode of philosophising for our own times, or as Chimakonam (2016) would have us believe. Even Koenane and Olatunji (2017: 263) uphold that ubuntu is not only a competitive moral theory, but it is a theory that ultimately proves to be a desirable ethic. An ethic which could make a positive contribution in developing “moral character” in modern Africa. Metz gives us one of the major cities in South Africa to show that there are those instances where several norms and values of ubuntu compliment modern day African realities. Johannesburg is Metz’s actual case in point since he thinks that those currently residing there would surely live up to these values (caring; sharing; humanness; compassion and respect etc) of ubuntu. He then reasons – using a set of sentences – to attain correctness about the current state of ubuntu’s place in modern Africa:

*“Surely, those in large-scale, technologically developed societies can be humane, respectful, and compassionate and share what they have with others. [...] There is, so far, no reason to think that it is unique to a pre-industrial, small-scale setting.”*

(Metz, 2014: 68).

Metz thinks that this major city is populated by people who are in consonant with the values of ubuntu. In other words, he is against Matolino and Kwindigwi’s insistence that the uniqueness of ubuntu’s values is only served by a small fraction: pre-industrial and small-scale set ups.

This is the positive direction that will guarantee the place for ubuntu in modern societies for Metz. He thinks that being humane is not unique or limited to but rise above small-scale and pre-industrial settings. He is rest assured about the centeredness of ubuntu's values even in technologically developed and large-scale societies. It is this centeredness that could be interpreted as assuring the relevance of ubuntu and its current state as an ethical theory for modern Africa. He insists that that being humane, compassionate, respectful, and sharing what one has is guaranteed in modern African societies. It is for these reasons that Metz might view his account as centralizing and complimenting ubuntu's relevance with the facets and dictates of modernity. He contends that "being hospitable to strangers"<sup>49</sup> is not applicable only to members of small and tight-knit communities but equally applicable to modern Africa. In his own words Metz (2014: 69) thus concurs:

*"These facets of ubuntu are clearly not applicable only to members of 'small and tight-knit communities that are relatively developed. [...] I maintain that ubuntu provides all-things-considered justification for certain relationships in contemporary (South) Africa that admittedly lack ubuntu to some (pro tanto) degree". [...] much more sharing, and caring is in fact possible in it."*

He uses ubuntu to reappropriate it as a viable alternative for the dictates of modernity. He appeals to his works to show the viability and relevance of ubuntu for contemporary South[ern] Africa. He conceives of his works as a helping nudge that orients the reader to ubuntu's defence that he deems relevant for modern Africa.

No doubt, I read him as deploying ubuntu's ethical theory as a template for modern African Societies. Metz deems ubuntu as an ethical theory that is in tandem with "how contemporary society could be organised so as to manifest more ubuntu". It is quite clear for Metz that ubuntu is in concord with the facets of modernity (Metz, 2014: 71). He appeals to ubuntu as a moral theory to account for its centredness in modern African realities. The direction that he is heading in demonstrates that "ubuntu as a moral theory has a lot going for it". The sort of positivity that one may glue from a lot that goes for ubuntu as a moral theory is "how individuals and institutions should be moral". Metz then appeals to examples which show that ubuntu is relevant for modern Africa. Namely: Being hospitable to strangers; state bureaucracy; and *Letsema* (Metz, 2014: 69 – 70). He insists that agreeing with these example means agreeing

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<sup>49</sup> welcoming visitors to a village; sharing one's best food with strangers at least for a time; viewing everyone as part of a human family; or as someone with whom to commune etc.

that ubuntu is far from the end. He thinks that ubuntu is rather getting started in the sense of now being in a terrific position to steer away from undesirable ways of life with which it has been associated, such as sexism, and conservatism, and to incorporate the insights of science, the benefits of technology and more generally, the desirable facets of modernity (2014: 71). He understands ubuntu to be open up for modern demands (Metz, 2011; and 2014: 65 – 72).

#### **5.4 Is Ubuntu Still Relevant for Modern African Societies/Realities?**

This section proceeds from my reading of both camps. It seeks to argue that Metz's camp fails to provide a strong justification for thinking that ubuntu can be deemed relevant for large-scale societies in Africa. This section draws on a preview of modern African realities, discussed in the first section of this chapter, and applies other relevant sources (e.g., Abraham (1992); Matolino and Kwindigwi (2013); and Taiwo (2016)), to sidestep Metz's insistence that ubuntu's relevance is not limited to small and tight-knit communities but is also served by another fraction: large-scale, and technologically advanced societies. The reason why his attempts do not succeed in placing a high premium on ubuntu's relevance in large-scale communities is simply because there are spatial arrangements of many buildings in these large-scale communities that make it difficult for ubuntu to be a success and reality for everyone. It is my view that cities like Johannesburg and Bloemfontein are devoid of common spaces for the unfolding of traditional communal living and ubuntu to thrive. The praise of communal living that is said to be witnessed in large-scale cities is exactly what Taiwo (2016: 95 – 96) subjects to scrutiny. He then accuses African scholars of forever singing the praise of communal living; the virtues of the extended family in these cities (Taiwo, 2016: 83). For this reason, I think the tenets of ubuntu are vulnerable to these cities because most individuals are not exclusively in tuned to its moral standards. I endorse the Matolino and Kwindigwi's camp that denies its relevance for communities of this sort. These are not communities of similarly constituted selves. Instead, communities of this sort are neither characterised by substantial agreement regarding religious beliefs, customs and morals nor do they seem to have been characterised by a sense of solidarity, [interdependence] and a shared destiny (Bodunrin, 1991: 69 – 70 in Ciaffa, 2008: 36).

For this reason, modern and technologically advanced societies are far from what traditional and tight-knit communities were. And it is true that the old milieu is now gone on the African continent (Wiredu, 1980). There needs to be a distinction between traditional and modern societies. In other words, life in traditional societies is not the same as that of the modern, individual, and large-scale societies. This is not to suggest that there is no co-operation, or

ubuntu in traditional, small, and undifferentiated societies. But the communitarian outlook that makes the successes of ubuntu to flourish is hardly true for a city like Johannesburg. This city does not warrant talk of interdependence as the business or reality for everyone who really searches for his or her meaningful existence. It can thus be understood as exhibiting different cultural systems which are not necessarily complementary fragments of one whole. Rather, they are divergent in their inspiration, orientation, structure and in their aims and methods of inculcation (Abraham, 1992: 18).

However, a reasonable person of the opposing view might object that my argument is not convincing at this stage. She might agree with Metz that ubuntu is open for modern demands. She might argue, just like Metz, that being humane, compassionate, respectful, and sharing what one has is guaranteed in modern African societies. She could extend his objection to claiming that Metz might still have a coming back. Let us say this person believes in the relevance of ubuntu both in urban and rural communities. Let it be supposed that this individual person recognises that a “de-centralizing” camp aims to question the specific relevance of ubuntu: the one that she might glean from its first feature. Let us imagine that she understands that, for the first camp (but its second feature in particular) ubuntu’s relevance continues to thrive in small-scale and tight-knit communities. Now the most important question she might pose is: does the first camp succeed to constructing any theoretical sophistications and complexities that morph modern conditions into the status of destroying the tenets of ubuntu? By this question she might argue that there are other instances where ubuntu could flourish very easily in modern societies.

For this reason, she might identify an individual person, let us call him “*Mehluko*”, an adherent of ubuntu who succumb to both “the lure of the city” and his ancestral home (Abraham, 1992: 15). Let us say *Mehluko* not only resides in a small-scale and tight-knit community but also works permanently and stays in a large city during working days. *Mehluko* returns home every Friday and travels back to his apartment in this or that large-scale city on a Sunday. However, she might say: if it is true that there are such people in urban areas who still hold on to values such as compassion; caring; honesty; kindness; and friendliness just like *Mehluko*, is it possible to reject Metz’s claim that people like *Mehluko* can be attuned to the dictates of ubuntu in the midst of all the realities modern societies are conditioned under?

By posing this question she could aim to show that Matolino and Kwindigwi’s camp lacks comprehensiveness since it ignores this human (*Mehluko*’s) experience. If we take this human

experience seriously one would surmount Matolino and Kwindingwi's insistence that the successes of ubuntu are limited only to communalistic societies. Not only is this so but human experiences such as these should count as important ones to have been voiced by the first camp. She might argue that if Matolino and Kwindingwi do not take note of this human experience they might be faced with the danger of being accused of articulating the end of ubuntu that lacks comprehensiveness. If indeed Matolino and Kwindingwi accept that ubuntu is relevant only in rural communities, is it not possible for it to thrive in urban areas if those who live in these (rural) communities also work permanently in large-scale and technologically advanced ones? She might suggest that Metz must be read as demonstrating this sort of human experience to those individuals who stay in large-scale cities like Johannesburg. If the human living conditions of *Mehluko* do not clash with other values that are characteristic of modern realities, then would Matolino and Kwindingwi still be convinced that ubuntu is only served by a small fraction? Should the living and human conditions of *Mehluko* be treated with much less seriousness just because he comes from a community that is said to be 'intolerant towards divergent ideas' (Matolino and Kwindingwi, 2013)? She might conclude that even large-scale communities could serve as the right place to locate ubuntu's relevance. Therefore, she might argue that this potential objection is plausible and can contribute to defending Metz's "pro-centralizing" camp.

As a result, I conceive of this potential objection as a crucial one that could have been raised not only to sidestep a "de-centralizing" camp but also to support Metz's "pro-centralizing" camp on ubuntu's relevance for a modern African society. In other words, this is an objection that could have been voiced to provide answers to a specific question that serves as this section's heading. However, a response to this objection would require one to understand that there are no theoretical sophistications and complexities that Matolino and Kwindingwi could tap into in order to demonstrate the problems faced by ubuntu in this instance. Rather, readers might understand that this camp seeks to report certain changes that unfold in modern African societies.

It is my view that the protective connections and certitudes that could generate the fellowships, [ubuntu], and bonds of rural life have been disrupted by the very nature of technologically advanced societies (Abraham, 1992). The institutional facets of rural life and values that existed prior to colonialism and slavery have become vulnerable to the structures of individualistic societies, since these societies are a great signifier of detrimental effects that have caused frustrations on traditional cultures, values, and moral standards. Key to these frustrations and

detrimental effects are the very ideals of interdependence; familyhood or brotherhood that have changed completely. The functions and prerogatives of the old lineage group have become a big question for citizens who reside in urban and industrialized communities. Not only is this so but lineage groups no longer have discernible impacts on the cultivation of traditional moral standards. It is no hidden fact that rural settings and norms can easily flourish in tight knit-communities but once one gets into modernised societies, he or she realises that that one could be said to be African without being an ubuntu adherent because they contain multiple identities that are not even aligned with the spirit of communalism. These cities do destroy or weaken the manifestation of one's sense of lineage group greatly. Once this individual gets to understand urban settings, he could see that social controls that prevailed in traditional societies are weakened since the sanctions and instruments of traditional cultures are thwarted in modern societies (Abraham, 1992).

For this reason, it is not true that all individuals in large-scale cities are moral agents of an ubuntu ethic since not everyone would want to validate his or her humanness in terms of life with certain values that a small-scale community cherishes. So conceived, a *ubuntu* can be an agent that is not necessarily a doer of ubuntu or an agent that participates in the perennial doing of ubuntu as the human quality, conduct or character and the essence of being human or African in modern African societies. Prizing communal relations is not the order or business of the day in these societies since a true human potential is no longer moulded by the tenets of ubuntu as a communal way of life alone. Africans residing in large-scale communities would notice that their way of life is neither in tandem with social nor ethical norms of their original cultures. It is said that these cities are filled with those who hold on to aspirations of individual success as opposed to or distinct from family success. As Abraham (1992: 18) argues, this is primarily because they are little inclined to sacrifice children's opportunities and their own in favour of their siblings, nephews, and nieces. From this point of view, it is clear that modern African societies are more about the self than ubuntu which is more about the community. Societies of this sort do not necessarily have passion for community or unselfishness: something that is so central to the survival of traditional communal relationships. Individuals in these cities are no longer inherently relational in the sense of being natural members of a traditional community that believes in social relations as a panacea for Africanness or meaningful existence.

For this reason, ubuntu is not relevant for these societies because they are not the types of societies whose members are "bound together by common blood and feelings of extended familyhood" (Bodunrin, 1991: 69 – 70 in Ciaffa, 2008: 36). These societies do not place a high

premium in nurturing persons with reference to their traditional moral standards that prioritise talk of interdependence as the only epitome of Africanness. The African today is highly complex since he or she has a variety of cultural fragments. Her education has a strong capacity of inculcating her with a different conception of the individual and the individual's responsibility to others. She is schooled by an education system that dominates her growing life and has a strong capacity to determine her future. Her hopes, aspirations fall within a new belief system which comes with its own axioms and postulates, its own norms, and its own ethic (Abraham, 1992: 14 – 18). In other words, there are those instances where individuals could be said to ignore the sense of community or interdependence as something that renders him or her to be mutually responsive to the needs of others. Not everyone in large scale communities owes his or her existence to the existence of others: something that is at the nerve of an “*umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*” aphorism for an ubuntu ethic.

For instance, it is not an exaggeration to claim that being sensitive to the needs of others or prioritising and fostering the spirit of communality that Africans are noted for, is a reality that is somehow overlooked in modern Africa. If ubuntu has registered its howling successes in modern Africa selfishness would be non-existent. Even if its values are there but it is still possible for persons to die of hunger because “selfish tendencies” - something that “*hazvina hunhu*” or lacks ubuntu - is natural in human beings. Human beings in general, desire what is beneficial to them and anything they do is for gain and glory. On this view, if a human being saves a little child from drowning, this is not necessarily done with clean hands or altruistically. But it is done to serve specific purposes. It is done for recognition as a heroic figure or to save a child to avoid the guilt of knowing they watched someone die (Zimunya; Gwara; and Mlambo, 2015: 11).

As a matter of fact, if it is true that the spatial arrangements of many buildings in large scale communities make it difficult for the architecture of ubuntu and its spirit of communalism to flourish, then one would see that ubuntu is no longer relevant for complex and multicultural societies. These societies are devoid [...] of common spaces for the unfolding of communal living and ubuntu (Taiwo, 2016). Were this the case about ubuntu, then it certainly would be necessary to argue that a “pro-centralizing” camp does fail to prove its justifications for locating ubuntu's relevance to modern and large-scale societies. If that were to be necessarily the case, then it certainly would be true and quite reasonable to claim that ubuntu is cluttered with prizing communality, interdependence; a high price in recognising the other; the spirit of brotherhood; bonds of rural life and values; institutional facets of traditional moral standards;

and Africa's lost pristine mode of being – in recognizing or realizing dignified/meaningful existence or the only epitome and panacea of Africanness (Abraham, 1992; Matolino and Kwindigwi, 2013; and Taiwo, 2016). These are the realities that clatters ubuntu's relevance. Therefore, it is my view that ubuntu is not relevant for modern African societies if it is cluttered with these realities that are at the nerve of narratives of return or projects that seek to revive a specific *modus operandi* of being truly African.

### **5.5 Concluding Remarks.**

In this chapter, I have sought to argue that the Matolino-Kwindigwi-Metz debate champions different postulations that either “jettison” or “endorse” ubuntu and its relationships with the facets of modernity. For this reason, ubuntu and modernity serve as its template for taking modern realities seriously. The chapter has charted a direction that grapples with the question of ubuntu's relevance that was outstanding throughout this project: is ubuntu still relevant for modern African societies/realities? By so doing, it has interrogated this question using the debate which I sought to read as de-centralizing and centralizing ubuntu's place in modern Africa. In other words, the entire chapter conceived of the debaters as constituting “de-centralizing”, as well as “pro-centralizing” camps. Its philosophical point of departure was that a “pro-centralizing camp” fails to account for ubuntu's relevance for our own times. In the process of defending this position, this chapter appealed to a preview of modern African realities; the architecture of the debate as resting upon two competing camps in order to argue that ubuntu is cluttered with realities that makes it (ubuntu) difficult and fail to account for its relevance in modern African Societies.

## General Conclusion.

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To conclude and give this project's final epilogue, the previous chapters sought to provide a critical examination of ubuntu and its challenges in modern philosophical discourses. In doing so, this project subjected the Matolino-Kwindingwi-Metz debate and its two earlier commentaries (Chimakonam (2016); and Koenane and Olatunji (2017)) to philosophical scrutiny. The question of the relevance for ubuntu served as its key research question: *What is the relevance of ubuntu in modern southern African societies?* This research question served as this project's recurring motif. This project's original contribution rested upon two basic tenets since it is a starting point for giving the Matolino-Kwindingwi-Metz debate and its two contributors serious philosophical attention:

- (a) Its aim was to show that Metz's, Chimakonam's and Koenane and Olatunji's arguments are neither compelling nor should they be adumbrated as standard replies to Matolino and Kwindingwi.
- (b) It was aimed at showing that ubuntu is not relevant for modern southern African societies. This was based on my reading of Matolino and Kwindingwi and Metz so as to search for ubuntu and its relationships with the facets of modernity with the attempt to deal with its relevance for our own times.

This original contribution [(a) ; and (b)] was aimed at making sure that the debate and its two commentaries receive considerable attention or this was one of the gaps to be identified and filled up in this project. This project's identification of both (a); and (b) with reference to the question of ubuntu's relevance was surely to open new ground since these were underexplored. This was a starting point. However, this project only recognized two thinkers who mounted their skeptical notes against Metz's attempt to defend ubuntu as an ethical theory and way of life for contemporary Africa. These thinkers were Bernard Matolino (2015) and Leonhard Praeg (2017). And it was not my aim in this project to subject them to critical scrutiny. Instead, I sought to introduce readers to my own interrogation of Metz which somehow draws inspiration from these thinkers. As a matter of fact, it is up to those scholars who are keen about (or fascinated by) this debate to deal with their (Matolino and Praeg) responses to Metz's current defense of ubuntu for contemporary Africa. Readers might have noticed that this dissertation does not dwell on the philosophical significance of the Matolino-Kwindingwi conundrum as adumbrated by Chimakonam (2016) as well as his 'Toward a conversational mode of philosophising'. My reluctance to comment on these areas does not mean that they

are not worth thinking through seriously. In fact, they are worth thinking through seriously. But this specific research is a ‘starting point’ for what may be conceived as giving this debate and its two contributors serious philosophical attention. So, it must be understood and carefully examined along these specific lines. This philosophical attention is served by the question of ubuntu’s relevance as this project’s recurring motif. Therefore, this project’s reading of ubuntu’s relevance with reference to this debate and its contributors is open to further fruitful/philosophical interrogations, critical scrutiny as well as informed and honest disagreements since it must be construed as a ‘starting point’. For the purposes of this project, I argued against two contributors and ubuntu’s relevance for contemporary Africa.

Most importantly, this project started off by providing a critical exposition of ubuntu. This exposition aimed to demonstrate the broadness of ubuntu’s pertinent views. It sought to provide: a brief description of ubuntu; a brief construal of what ubuntu is as articulated by different thinkers and an account for the African community in understanding ubuntu. This account was limited to the role of the community in understanding ubuntu-: Chapters one. However, in order to bring readers one step closer to the vast recesses of the debate and its two contributors chapters two sought to provide a critique of scholarly inquiry into ubuntu. This critique attempted to challenge the logic behind affirming the possibilities of ubuntu’s relevance for contemporary Africa. It sought to rely on some of the affirmative assertions for ubuntu’s relevance/talk to lay a foundation for a critique I wanted to make about scholarly inquiry into ubuntu. These affirmations span from different interpretations: ubuntu and metaphysics; ubuntu as African education; ubuntu as African law/jurisprudence; ubuntu as humanism; ubuntu as cosmopolitanism; ubuntu as African ethics; and ubuntu as environmental ethics. It was at the level of detail that drew from a metaphysical grounding for these affirmations which manifested reactionary frameworks for an ubuntu ethic. This was done with the intention to foreground different ways in which the possibilities of ubuntu’s relevance have been affirmed in Southern Africa. My critique sought to penetrate the recesses of ubuntu’s affirmative postures, a little bit. In other words, it was at the level of detail that sufficed to build a foundation for thinking harder about ubuntu and its relevance throughout this project. As a matter of fact, I did not make a case for it being the best critique that one could offer in reaction to the logic for or behind ubuntu’s affirmative postures-: Chapters two.

As a corollary to this line of critique, this project then tapped into the Matolino-Kwindingwi-Metz debate and its two contributors for a serious philosophical interrogation. This was

intended to bring readers a step closer to accepting the cogency of my arguments about Metz (2014); Chimakonam (2016); Koenane and Olatunji (2017), as well as my take on ubuntu's relevance and how it fails to register its relevance for modern African societies. As a result, chapters three pointed readers to a logical inconsistency that haunts Metz's rejoinder. This inconsistency bifurcates between his justifications for: (a) The beginning for ubuntu; and (b) The beginning for its projects that he deems as properly getting started. I then developed two objections against Chimakonam's contribution. Firstly, I provided a response to his stand with Metz and Matolino on Metz's systematization of ubuntu. I made a case for why it is not clear where he stands in his: (a) Approval of Matolino's impatience with Metz's systematization; and (b) His rejection of Metz's systematisation. Secondly, I then subjected his "one way of credibly assessing" the debate to scrutiny. In other words, I pursued a specific line of critique which shows that Chimakonam's 'one way of credibly assessing' the debate is not as credible as he makes it sound. In chapters four, I sought to argue that Koenane and Olatunji's contribution is vulnerable to significant flaws: (a) Through a specific analysis of their contribution, I sought to demonstrate that the perspective they have adopted - in their reaction to Matolino and Kwindigwi - is not as different as they make it sound. Not only is this so but their perspective serves as a resuscitation of Metz's perspective with different justifications. I also provided another analysis which shows that they have failed to provide a summary and an examination of Metz's rejoinder. (b) I then pointed readers to their misreading of Matolino and Kwindigwi's anecdote; (c) As well as their misinterpretation of Matolino and Kwindigwi's understanding of ubuntu.

Chapters five was based on my reading of the debate so as to search for ubuntu and its relationships with the facets of modernity in its (ubuntu's) attempt to demonstrate its relevance for modern African societies. This reading shows that this debate seeks to take modern realities very seriously: either by arguing that ubuntu is not in concord with the desirable facets of modernity, or by insisting that ubuntu is not vulnerable to the changes that unfold in modern African societies. However, for various reasons which were demonstrated in this final chapter, I sought to argue that Metz's account fails to account for ubuntu's relevance for our own times. My understanding is that ubuntu is cluttered with realities that makes it fail to account for changes faced by modern southern African societies.

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**Table of Abbreviations.**

ANC – African National Congress.
IFP – Inkatha Freedom Party.
TRC – Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

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