Ubuntu in African Traditional Religion

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UBUNTU IN AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION

ABSTRACT

This thesis proposes to prove the authenticity of ubuntu through investigating its meanings and origins, as well as where ubuntu can be located. There has been some confusion in the West concerning what ubuntu is. The word has been translated into 'humanity' and has freely been used for different purposes. Although unrestricted use of the word is of course permissible, this way of understanding ubuntu is too simple. Therefore, this thesis will present different interpretations of ubuntu, as well as provide a staple understanding of ubuntu in a religious context. The thesis will mainly prove ubuntu's authenticity through discovering it where it cannot be heard. Ubuntu can be located in people's lives and it has a clear function. This presence and function can also be seen specifically in post apartheid South Africa, where it has also been visibly vocalised. Although it has been proposed by others that this presence and function is a utopian academic construct, this thesis will prove otherwise. One cannot explain away something that is already there.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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INTRODUCTION

Ubuntu is a word out of Africa. It has increasingly become a truth in the West that this word means 'humanity,' and is especially linked to forgiveness and reconciliation due to the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The word can be seen on fair trade goods in one's local supermarket[1], as the name of a very successful computer operating system[2] or heard during basketball or handball games in both North America and Europe.[3] However, there is more to ubuntu than being a slogan, a business idea or a life coaching philosophy for the strength of forgiveness. Therefore, this thesis is built on three questions:

What is ubuntu?

Where does ubuntu come from?

How can ubuntu be located?

Within these questions lies the debate on whether or not ubuntu is an authentic, historical and relevant element of African Traditional Religion, or indeed African life. Therefore, this thesis will look at how ubuntu is understood, performed and utilised. Through answering these questions, a wider one will also be answered:

Is ubuntu authentic?

In asking these questions, what do I hope to achieve? According to Leonhard Praeg,[4] expecting a constantive response is not going to provide us with anything usable. Ubuntu is often explained through showing an exaggerated difference, mainly from the West, or by what Praeg refers to as a 'collapsed difference', which means equating ubuntu to already familiar philosophies, such as socialism or communalism. In order to achieve something representative with these questions the focus needs rather to be on the performative or political function of ubuntu. Praeg insists we ask: 'What are the conditions of its possibility?'[5] This thesis will locate the conditions that make ubuntu possible. Rather than giving up explaining the inexplicable, which ubuntu often is said to be, or sidelining it completely with communitarianism, socialism or humanism, I will explain ubuntu through action. Where is ubuntu seen, heard and done? The main focus of this thesis will be to see

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[1] The Ubuntu Trading Company 2011.
[2] Canonical Group Ltd. 2012.
[3] William C. Rhoden 2008. 'Celtics Wearing the Banner of Unity,' in The New York Times, Tormod Brenna 2012. 'Derfor roper håndballgutta 'ubuntu!' etter timeout.' Dagbladet.
[4] Leonhard Praeg 2008. 'An Answer to the Question: What is [ubuntu]?' *South African Journal of Philosophy*.
[5] Ibid: 370-371.

ubuntu through South African political and everyday life, as well as a wider African approach. This thesis will also focus on the array of academic definitions and understandings of ubuntu. This is important in understanding what ubuntu is and what pretext it has for existence in people's lives. As well as this, ubuntu is placed within a religious context as the root of African Traditional Religion. This thesis will operate with the following definition of African Traditional Religion, put forward by Julius Mutugi Gathogo:

> '... it [is] an indigenous system of beliefs and practices that are integrated into culture and the worldviews of the African peoples. Like in other primal religions, one is born into it as a way of life with its cultural manifestations and religious implications. African Religion is thus an integral part of the African ethos and culture.'[6]

I do not wish to reduce ubuntu to one particular essence. Ubuntu is not restricted to the community and my intention is to treat ubuntu in the context of South Africa, as well as among many other countries of Africa. Although my cultural background is Euro-Christian, I have no desire to universalise ubuntu. I am attempting to explain ubuntu as a phenomenon as well as a religious element in African Traditional Religion through a performative approach. Through this I will prove ubuntu's authenticity and relevance. I believe that no phenomenon exists without a context. The phenomenon of ubuntu cannot, and does not, exist solitarily. As ubuntu speaks to interconnectedness, so do the chapters of this thesis. Interconnectedness is an important context in which to understand ubuntu, and it is within this that ubuntu manages to exist.

'I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am.'[7]
'I am human because I belong.'[8]
'People are people through other people.'[9]

These three quotes do not specifically say ubuntu, yet ubuntu is what they represent. Therefore, this thesis will investigate the meanings and uses of ubuntu by itself and in relation to its surroundings. In order to accomplish this, I draw on phenomenology. As far as it is possible I will attempt to sideline my cultural bias and desire to compare. To achieve what this thesis sets out to, I will make use of both morphological phenomenology, as well as hermeneutical phenomenology.[10] Through 'eidetic vision'[11] this thesis will classify the

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[6] Julius Mutugi Gathogo 2007. 'The Relevance and Influence of African Religion in Post Apartheid South Africa and Beyond – Part 1.' *Churchman*. 164.
[7] John S. Mbiti 2008. *African Religions and Philosophy*. Harlow: Heinemann. 106.
[8] Desmond Tutu 2000. *Ingen fremtid uten tilgivelse*. Oslo: Pax. 42
[9] Gathogo 2007: 170.
[10] Jacob K. Olupona 1991. 'Major Issues in the Study of African Traditional Religion,' in Jacob K. Olupona (ed.): *African Traditional Religions in Contemporary Society*. St. Paul: Paragon House. 29-30.

essences and the structures of ubuntu in line with morphological phenomenology. The hermeneutical phenomenology will locate the essences of meaning inside the phenomenon. This thesis will consist of a systematic, historical and descriptive approach,[12] through comparing the scholarly work, maintaining the specific historical and cultural contexts as well as describing the religious phenomenon.

The sources used to answer these questions are mainly a mix between journal articles and books. There is a balanced mix between African and European authors and scholars, also including some from North America. The most important authors for chapter one and three have been Kenyan scholar and priest John S. Mbiti and Tanzanian scholar and priest Laurenti Magesa. There is a wide range of sources used in chapter two, where the most widely used are articles by South African scholar Mogobe Ramose, Dutch anthropologist Wim van Binsbergen, American philosophy professor Thaddeus Metz and Ghanaian philosopher Kwame Gyekye, as well as Nigerian-American scholar Michael Onyebuchi Eze's book *Intellectual History of Contemporary South Africa*. The final chapter makes most use of the previously mentioned book, in addition to Kwame Gyekye's book *Tradition and Modernity*, and Canadian scholar Kenneth Christie's book on the South African truth commission, also including South African writer Antjie Krog's article about reconciliation and forgiveness. This wide array of academic backgrounds and nationalities will provide a balanced portrayal of ubuntu.

The first chapter is descriptive in character. For a wholesome understanding of ubuntu one needs to understand African Traditional Religion (ATR), as ubuntu is a religious phenomenon. I choose to discuss the change and development of ATR first, as it proves to be a natural starting point for a field of study that has seen many influences and developments. The main focus here is how common features can be located in such a large and diverse continent; the religious aspects; the plurality of ATR; and the impact of global powers on African Traditional Religion. Followed by the main characteristics of ATR. I will also give a brief summary of the history of South Africa, and the influences that has proven important for the present day. All countries of sub-Saharan Africa have a colonial past, although they all possess unique elements to their history. The history of South Africa will not serve as a general tale of colonialism and oppression in Africa, although it is a reminder of the context in which ATR has survived. The history of South Africa mainly benefits the last chapter,

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[11] Douglas Allen 2010. 'Phenomenology of Religion,' in John R. Hinnells (ed.): *The Routledge Companion to the Study of Religion*. New York: Routledge. 209.
[12] Ibid: 215.

which discusses ubuntu in post apartheid South Africa. It will prove valuable in the understanding of the problems facing South Africa after the end of apartheid, and how ubuntu has become a part of the public imaginary.

Chapter two will describe and discuss diverse understandings of ubuntu, mainly by scholars. This part of the thesis is in many ways the core of understanding the meaning inherent in ubuntu. The chapter will start by placing ubuntu into two religious contexts where ubuntu can be located. One is in African Traditional Religion and the other is in former Archbishop Desmond Tutu's own ubuntu theology. This focuses on the meanings and values of ubuntu within Tutu's Anglican Christianity. Including this view is important because it shows different aspects of ubuntu, as well as explaining Tutu's value basis during his participation in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). Following this, the etymology of the word ubuntu will be presented, mainly through a philosophical approach of the African scholar Mogobe Ramose. Presenting this creates a foundation for the further discussion of ubuntu. Chapter two also contains a salient debate on the *self* in relation to the apparent communal nature of ubuntu, which will lead us closer towards a full understanding of ubuntu. Another important path towards an understanding of ubuntu is the debate on whether or not ubuntu is an invented concept. Can one say that ubuntu is an African value? Or is it a lost value, eroded by globalisation and/or colonialism? Some scholars propose that ubuntu has been invented by contemporary academics for the benefit of the newly globalised African countries. Especially in the context of South Africa, it is argued that ubuntu has been used to suppress feelings of anger and resentment in their post apartheid society. This leads us further, where the focus is South Africa and the appearance of ubuntu in a pre and post apartheid society. The chapter will conclude by focusing on six theoretical interpretations of ubuntu, put forward by American-born philosophy professor Thaddeus Metz.[13] This final exercise of the chapter will help us differentiate between the various available and most relevant definitions of ubuntu. These interpretations focus on human rights, utilitarianism, communitarianism and personhood. This will leave us with a view of ubuntu to carry further into the next chapter.

The third chapter will prove the existence of ubuntu in people's lives and in the community. In purporting the authenticity and relevance of ubuntu, this chapter presents vital information. The examples presented in this chapter are taken from peoples in South Africa, but also from different communities in Africa. The reason for this wider reach is that the

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[13] Thaddeus Metz 2007. 'Toward an African Moral Theory.' *Journal of Political Philosophy.*

understanding and interpretation of ubuntu is not only found in South Africa. Incorporating examples from several communities provides us with a wider image of ubuntu. This serves two purposes, where one expands the general view of how ubuntu can be understood, where ubuntu comes from and how it can be located. The other purpose is to benefit the last chapter in particular. In explaining the African, intricate and socio-religious nature of ubuntu, one can more easily see how it has become such an apparent part of South Africa's public imaginary. The chapter will focus on three main elements of African Traditional Religion. The examples of structures and processes in the community here will prove the immediacy of ubuntu, as well as its prominence and authenticity. It does this through showing us where and how ubuntu can be located in the community.

The final chapter deals with ubuntu in the context of South African nation building after the end of apartheid. An important question here is how South Africa has managed the project of nation building, and where ubuntu can be found in this endeavour. This chapter will focus on defining the borders of the nation-state, the processes of nation building and what is required for achieving unity. Further, there will be a focus on how ubuntu has featured in the historical narrative that South Africa lacked post apartheid. The final part of this chapter is concerned with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of South Africa. This commission was given a mandate by the government in order to work towards national unity. The mandate and the choice of reconciliation over amnesty or retribution will be discussed initially. Ubuntu can be traced in the choices, responses and the structure of the commission. There will also be a focus on the importance of religious acknowledgement in the proceedings of the TRC. Many of those who died during apartheid were located as a direct result of the TRC proceedings, providing their family with the opportunity to bury their kin properly. As well as this, the following questions need to be addresses: when and how can reconciliation be an element of nation building; and when is the reconciliation expected to occur? Finally, this chapter focuses on how ubuntu was expressed during the proceedings of the TRC, as well as on how those participating in the proceedings acted in relation to religion and ubuntu. Finally, to illustrate that ubuntu is present today in South Africa, although not spoken out loud, I will present an example from recent years featuring a university professor in order to show that ubuntu exists among ordinary people in modern day South Africa, further proving ubuntu's authenticity and relevance.

1   AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION

Describing what African Traditional Religion is proves a precarious task. Since the mid 1900s there has been a tug of war between Western and African representations, and even between African scholars: who grasps the authentic African religion? At the same time, elite Africans could not wait until the colonial dust had settled before attempting to prove that Africa was just as good as Europe. There was a desire by Africans from the elite to correct the false image the West had created of Africa, but according to Rosalind Shaw '...ended up reinforcing the interloping tradition.'[14] Both answering back to the Western scholars and proving Africa through their words will detract from the topic at hand, which is African Traditional Religion. According to Chidester et. al., only when one turns away from the attention of the West altogether will the African come to the forefront. Now, this 'African' is not supposed to be an untouched entity, free from all outside influences, such as Christianity, Islam or modernity. Taking the historical context into consideration will promote the reality of the 'African'.[15] Well aware that I am a Western academic I can do nothing but my utmost in order to not fall into this trap. My wish is not to necessarily make this topic more understandable to the reader through the academic context, but as truly as is possible I wish to present African Traditional Religion on its own terms. The religion I am presenting is not a fixed being, never having developed or evolved. It is, however, a representation of only the religious parts of this belief system, as it should be. Politics do factor in, especially in this context when talking of colonialism and apartheid, but it does not infuse everything. As I am presenting ubuntu as a religious concept I will attempt to strip the religion down to the bare bone in order to more clearly show how ubuntu fits in. I will of course discuss the various areas of contention, like the plural nature of the religion, the religion's name and what a definition could sound like. In addition to this, how the religious picture of South Africa is presented today is of great interest, and will be addressed briefly. Thereafter I will look at the main characteristics of African Traditional Religion. In focusing on the similarities found all over sub-Saharan Africa, what are the important parts of the religion and how can we see them? The last section of this chapter will focus on the history of church state relations in South Africa, colonial missionaries and a brief history of South Africa from when the first settlers arrived until today, including an overview of the diverse groups and languages inhabiting South Africa today.

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[14] David Chidester, Chirevo Kwenda, Robert Petty, Judy Tobler and Darrel Wratten 1997. *African Traditional Religion in South Africa: An Annotated Bibliography.* Westport/London: Greenwood. 2.
[15] Ibid.

2.1 DEVELOPMENT AND CHANGE

African Traditional Religion does not have written rules, or a set of dogmas to accept and adhere to. The traditions that make up African religion have been passed down for generations through the forbears of each community. Each generation encounters different challenges and experiences, which alters the way of practising their religion in such a way that it is always moving forward and evolving. [16] Over time communities have crossed paths, for instance through marriage or as the cause of a disaster. This has seemed to create common characteristics of religious practices across the countries of sub-Saharan Africa. This has been an organic process where each community is unique at the same time as believing and viewing the world in much a similar way. So similar in fact that one can use the singular when addressing African religion. [17] Other religions of the world, which have a singular name, also possess uniqueness in their many different groups of people practising that religion. Other African scholars echo this belief, in a singular focus. Nokuzula Mndende stresses that people can look at common features of religion, without saying that religion is monolithic. This has been done with Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, so why should African religion be plural when one never hears talk of Christianities, and so forth. He stresses that the underlying principle of African Religion remains the same, even though customs and objects do not.[18]

Laurenti Magesa argues that African religion is a worthy world religion. To him, African religion fulfils all the criteria needed in order to be characterised as a world religion, including universality. He does, however, point out that to an African, religion is much more than a 'believing way of life', or 'an approach to life' lead by the writings of books. It is a 'way of life', or indeed life itself. There is no distinction or separation between religion and other areas of human existence. Further, Magesa states that when talking of inspiration and revelation these cannot be located in a book, nor mainly in the oral traditions of the people it concerns. It will be located in the peoples' lives.[19] This is where one can find the core of African religion: for the African, religion is quite literally life and life is religion.[20] African religion belongs to what Mbiti calls tribal or national places. There are no missionaries, and one cannot convert to African religion, as it is part of life in each community. African religion

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[16] Mbiti 2008: 2-3.
[17] Ibid: 4.
[18] Gathogo 2007: 166.
[19] Laurenti Magesa 1997. *African Religion: The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life.* Maryknoll: Orbis Books. 24-26.
[20] Ibid: 26.

has no founders, no reformers, except some highly thought of historical persons, such as former kings or political leaders.[21]

Louis Brenner argues that there is little evidence leading one to believe that the participants in religious practice in Africa have themselves perceived their religion as exclusive and autonomous. In fact, he stresses, there does not appear to be a word in any African language that is translatable to 'religion'.[22] Others claim there are no equivalents at all in other cultures for the word 'religion'. Some propose to get rid of the word altogether when researching non-Western religions.[23] The phrase African Traditional Religion (ATR) is debated and contested. For many, the inclusion of 'traditional' links the phrase to Christianity and the West. Those who profess this believe it will portray African religion as being archaic and outdated, which translates to it being irrelevant. Others favour leaving the word out as it does not appear in any of the other world religions, and should therefore just be called African religion. However, the problem with this is that African Religion in modern Africa is not straightforward. Christianity has become a significant African religion, which invites confusion as to what constitutes African religion by itself. The same can be said of Islam, which is also a substantial religion in Africa. The question, successfully posed by Julius Gathogo is then; how do we decide and devise the differences between the present and the pre-Christian or pre-Muslim religious discourses of Africa?[24] According to Robin Horton, Christianity and Islam were mere catalysts for change in African religion. African religion was already responding to social change at the time of new religious influences in the communities. This theory debunks previous claims that Christianity and Islam themselves changed African religion proposing that the change they were involved in was already in progress. This proves the strength inherent in African religion and its ability to change by itself. As Jacob Olupona points out: '...African traditional religion was not just a house of cards that collapsed at the instance of change.'[25] This is not to say that change has not produced Christian products in African communities. The advent of Independent African Churches is proof of this.[26] According to Bennetta Washington Jules-Rosette, there are more than seven thousand new religious movements in sub-Saharan Africa. More than 32 million adherents follow these seven thousand plus movements, which amounts to 15 per cent of the total sub-Saharan Christian population. Jules-Rosette argues that these new religious

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[21] Mbiti 2008: 4.
[22] Louis Brenner 2000. 'Histories of Religion in Africa.' *Journal of Religion in Africa*. 143-44.
[23] Jacob Beyers 2010. 'What is Religion? An African Understanding.' *HTS Teologiese Studies.* 1.
[24] Gathogo 2007: 164.
[25] Olupona 1991: 32.
[26] Ibid: 32.

movements primarily exist in places where there has been intensive contact with Christianity through missionaries. However, these movements, marked by being prophetic and revitalistic, did exist prior to European contact, although there was a stronger emergence after the widespread European contact.[27] According to Jules-Rosette there are three major types of new religious movements in sub-Saharan Africa: '(1) indigenous, or independent churches; (2) separatist churches; and (3) neotraditional movements.'[28] They all take on different forms depending on where on the continent they belong, but they all blend traditional religion with influences of both historical and modern churches. The reason for their emergence and continued growth has different sources. It may have been converts who were disappointed with the premises and outcomes of Christianity, translation of the Bible into local African languages, failure by Christian denominations to meet local needs, influence of Western medicine in favour of spiritual healing, or the failure of Christianity to create strong and necessary community bonds. According to Jules-Rosette, the new churches now emerge from and remain in growth due to the loss of sense of community in urban areas.[29] The sense of community is of vital importance to the African, and these social structures tend to break apart in urban situations. Although the level of urban population in Africa is low, the rate at which it is taking place is among the highest in the world. According to Oosthuizen, urbanisation in African today is more extensive than both in China and India.[30] He does, however, stress that both modern and traditional worldviews are prevalent in Africa today, with Christianity and Islam influenced by the traditional African religion, and all three influenced by secularisation. This being said, Oosthuizen points out that the modernist worldview of the West has not affected Africa in a significant way. He calls this Western worldview '...closed, essentially complete and unchangeable, basically substantive and fundamentally non-mysterious...', which is foreign to Africa where religion still is an important part of peoples lives.[31]

In addressing change in African religion, Rosalind Hackett argues that it is not the whole religious system which changes but rather concepts, practices and symbols. Citing Robin Horton, she continues by saying that when the enormity of the world enters into the small

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[27] Bennetta Washington Jules-Rosette 1991. 'Tradition and Continuity in African Religions: The Case of New Religious Movements,' in Jacob K. Olupona (ed.): *African Traditional Religions in Contemporary Society*. St. Paul: Paragon House. 150, 151.
[28] Ibid: 150.
[29] Ibid: 151.
[30] Gehardus Cornelis Oosthuizen 1991. 'The Place of Traditional Religion in Contemporary South Africa,' in Jacob K. Olupona (ed.): *African Traditional Religions in Contemporary Society*. St. Paul: Paragon House. 36.
[31] Ibid: 36.

community the local spirits are the first to be devalued. In stead the community focuses more on the Supreme Being and places more importance in one place. Others claim that it is the '…cultic, collective, or calendrical aspects'[32] that diminish first. This is because the community suffers a loss of identity and also of power. However, according to these writers important rites like healing, divination and magic keep their importance as they continue to be helpful in the challenges of a changing world. According to Hackett, the main waves affecting the change of African religion are: universalisation, modernisation, politicisation, commercialisation and individualisation. There is an attempt of scholars and others to universalise African religion so as to equate it to other World religions. To them, making African religion available around the world will thereby legitimate its existence.[33] This contradicts what Mbiti says of African religion having no missionaries, and outsiders not being able to convert to African religion, as it is highly local.[34] Modernisation of African religion is resulting in smaller churches using Christian forms in expressing themselves, at the same time as they claim to be authentically African, according to Hackett's research in Nigeria. In addition to this, modernisation is creating encounters between African religious sites or spirits that need to be incorporated into corporate situations. This includes creating static shrines with opening hours for worship, as well as performing rituals to please the spirits of a place where a cement company is being constructed. Politicians and government officials pour libation at the opening of hospitals or other buildings or monuments.[35] This does prove though that African Traditional Religion features, sometimes more predominantly than not, in African urban communities and cities. This is contrary to what Wim van Binsbergen claims. He argues that values found in rural village life are lost when people move towards the cities.[36]

The age of technology along with heavy urbanisation, Western style politics and trade are all very important and very much a part of daily life in many African countries. Although Christianity is the largest religion in South Africa, research shows that both those affiliated with either Christianity or Islam still refer to elements of African religion as part of their life, for instance the communication with ancestors.[37] David Adamo argues that African Traditional Religion has experienced resurgence in post apartheid South Africa. He mainly

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[32] Rosalind I.J. Hackett 1991. 'Revitalization in African Traditional Religion,' in Jacob K. Olupona (ed.): *African Traditional Religions in Contemporary Society*. St. Paul: Paragon House. 136.
[33] Ibid:136-38.
[34] Mbiti 2008: 4.
[35] Hackett 1991: 139-142.
[36] Wim van Binsbergen 2001. 'Ubuntu and the Globalisation of Southern African Thought and Society.' *Quest* .62.
[37] The Economist 2010. 'Islam, Christianity and Africa: A Beacon of Faiths.'

credits this to ATR practically being outlawed during apartheid, and now can be practices freely. He mentions health workers approaching the South African Parliament in order to give recognition to African healers. He also notes that Christian churches have been more than open for dialogue with those practicing African Traditional Religion.[38] According to the World Religion Database, the decline in adherents to African Traditional Religion seems to have stopped, just as the rise of Christianity seems to be on a similar pause. I therefore think we can say that Adamo's use of the word resurgence is overly optimistic. However, as is pointed out by the research from World Religion Database, people registered as Christians do still turn to their African Traditional Religion, which has in all probability played a major role in their upbringing, whether urban or not. As a compromise between saying ATR is experiencing a resurgence and ATR is exchanged for Christianity, we can say that Christian churches register their followers but do not lay down set rules of how to personally relate to the preached Christianity. African Traditional Religion can therefore still be a part of life.

2.2 MAIN CHARACTERISTICS

Man is at the centre of African religion even though the religion does not exist primarily for the individual, but rather for the whole community the individual is a part of. John Mbiti states that to be human is to belong to a community. In belonging to the community one takes part in the rituals, ceremonies, festivals and beliefs of that community. This way a person will always be religious, as they will always belong to their community, at least this is true in theory. But also in theory, severing oneself from the community will entail uprooting oneself to the fullest. A community is in a sense a set of 'others'; they make the person aware of their own existence. In separating oneself from the community, the 'others' will no longer be available in order to make the person aware of his own existence, and therefore become a fuller human being. This means that a vital part of the picture will be missing as this person navigates through life. This would be near impossible to do as Mbiti stresses; being without religion is akin to 'self excommunication' from society. And according to Mbiti, African peoples do not know how to exist without religion. Even so, education, urbanisation and industrialisation are all changing the face of African religion, as more and more people are being detached from their traditional backgrounds and environments.[39]

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[38] David T. Adamo 2008. ' Christianity and the African Traditional Religion(s): The Postcolonial Round of Engagement.' *Verbum et Ecclesia*. 2.
[39] Mbiti 2008: 4.

2.2.1 THE SUPREME BEING

An important element in African Religion is the 'incomprehensible and mysterious'[40] Supreme Being. The entity that did or did not create the world, depending on what scholars one agree with,[41] does not usually have a name. If it has a name, it is seldom spoken. Naming means asserting control, and leaving the deity without a name maintains its dignity. This also helps with separating the Supreme Being from humanity. Contact with the Supreme Being can only be done through councillors and mediators. However, the Supreme Being is 'in theory transcendent, but in practice immanent.'[42] Emefie Ikenga-Metuh attempts to explain African religious cosmogony in focusing on the essential difference between a Western God and an African Supreme Being. West African systems of belief do not see the Supreme Being as creator, even though there exists an image of a superior being. Despite believing in a Supreme Being, African religion cannot be referred to as a monotheistic religion. It cannot be called a polytheistic religion either, as other divinities are not equal in position to the Supreme Being. Therefore there are no words in Western philosophy that can correctly explain African religion.[43] Professor Gloria Emeagwali argues that African religion reflects monotheistic orientations in a polytheistic form. She explains this through Orisa and Ifa, deities of the Yoruba, which are characterised by paying homage to ancestors and constructing shrines, at the same time as submitting themselves to the different manifestations of the Supreme Being.[44] The ancestors can communicate with the Supreme Being on behalf of persons in the still-living family of the ancestor(s). Julius Gathogo uses examples from Southern and Eastern Africa to explain how common characteristics of African Religion can be found across Africa. The Xhosa of South Africa call their Supreme Being Qamata and the ancestors mediate between Qamata and the human beings. This same worldview imagery is found among the Kikuyu of East Africa, where the ancestors mediate between the humans and Ngai.[45]

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[40] Mbiti 2008: 4.
[41] Mbiti 2008: 4, Emefie Ikenga-Metuh 1982. 'Religious Concepts in West African Cosmogonies: A Problem of Interpretation.' *Journal of Religion in Africa*. 21.
[42] Mbiti quoted in Beyers 2010: 4.
[43] Sandra E. Greene 1996. 'Religion, History and the Supreme Gods of Africa: A Contribution to the debate.' *Journal of Religion in Africa*. 123-124, Ikenga-Metuh 1982: 21-23.
[44] Gloria Emeagwali 2006. 'Africa and the Textbooks,' in Gloria Emeagwali (ed.): *Africa and the Academy: Challenging Hegemonic Discourses on Africa.* Trenton/Asmara: Africa World Press. 8.
[45] Gathogo 2007: 166.

2.2.2 THE VITAL FORCE

Mbiti divides African ontology into five categories: God, spirit, man, animals and plants, and phenomena and objects without biological life. This 'anthropocentric' ontology is in complete unity where all elements are equally co-dependent. Keeping these categories in continued balance to one another, no one growing bigger or smaller than the other, is a very important act of maintaining harmony. This will make it possible to gain as much out of life in the present. According to Mbiti, there is a force permeating the universe. The Supreme Being controls this force, allowing some spirits and ancestors access to it, although not to all of it.[46] The vital force[47] is crucial in African Traditional Religion. All living things are given their life force by the Supreme Being to sustain life. All living things are connected through this vital force, and life is all about caring for it and passing it on. This vital force is important in maintaining the balance and harmony between the visible and the invisible world, which is a great ethical obligation determining quality of life.[48]

2.2.3 SPIRITS

According to Krüger, three categories can be identified as part of the spirit world; they are the spirits of the ancestors, nature spirits and deities. Spirits belong on the earth, whereas the deities reside mostly away from earth. The ancestors are vital in African Traditional Religion, and is directly linked to the preservation and passing on of the vital force. Ancestors have personal relationships with their descendants, and can act as mediators between humans and the Supreme Being. Becoming an ancestor is a privilege not everyone can obtain as they are considered educators for proper social behaviour. The unified community pointed out as a characteristic by Krüger refers to a '... natural bond between the individual, the extended family, the clan or the tribe, and the ancestors, nature and God.'[49]

2.2.4 THE CONCEPT OF TIME

According to Mbiti, the African concept of time is a two-dimensional phenomenon. There is a long past, a present, and no future. He also differentiates between potential and actual time. There might be an inevitable event to take place in the future, part of the 'rhythm of natural phenomena', which will be placed within potential time, not actual time. Events that have

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[46] Mbiti 2008: 15-16.
[47] Magesa 1997: 39. It is also known by the name of life force, life essence, dynamism or mana. Although Mbiti states that mana does not relate to the vital force in this definition. Mbiti 2008: 16.
[48] Magesa 1997: 73-74.
[49] Beyers 2010: 5.

not yet occurred cannot constitute time. Once the future events have passed, it is no longer in the future, but already in the present or past. Mbiti argues that time moves backward rather than forward. One is mindful of the past in order to incorporate it into the present, rather than the future. The experience of time comes partly through the individual and partly through the adherent community. There is an awareness of all the past generations. The past generations are re-experienced in the present by those living in the community in order to make the best one can out of the present.[50] This view of time is useful for us when talking about the immanence inherent in the African worldview. This immediacy affects all parts of life, and therefore religious life, explaining to a degree why the harmony in the status quo is of such importance. The focus on the here and now does not take away from the bigger picture. This bigger picture is part of the African worldview, as the vital force is of great importance in order to continue the bloodline and maintain the force, which is a long-term project. However, neglecting to do so will affect the here and now a great deal, which will not make possible a future. In 1969, when John Mbiti published his book on African religion he wrote that African peoples are discovering the future dimension of time through '…Christian missionary teaching, …western-type education, …[and] the invasion of modern technology with all it involves.'[51] In various countries the secular levels of government are affected as they plan for economic growth, political independence and extension of educational facilities, among other things. Mbiti argues that this change could be at the root of much of the instability seen in Africa's countries. He sees potential in extending the future dimension of time as much as he sees possible tragedy if this discovery is not harnessed and channelled productively.[52]

2.3 SOUTH AFRICA

Accounting for the history of South Africa is a formidable task. Which is why I will focus on three ways of talking about the history of South Africa that will benefit this thesis. First of all I will briefly and superficially talk about the role of the church in state relations since the first Dutch Europeans arrived on the shores of the Cape in 1652, and how this became a useful tool during the apartheid years. I will also, briefly and superficially address how colonial missionaries acted in the face of African Traditional Religion, and how they undermined the political order among the Tshidi of the Tswana people. Following this I will

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[50] Mbiti 2008: 17.
[51] Ibid: 27.
[52] Ibid: 27.

sketch out a broader history of South Africa, from the arrival of the colonists, to the Great Trek, on to apartheid up until today, focusing on how the colonists managed to control the whole of the country. The main focus of the last chapter of this thesis is South Africa. The other chapters do look at South Africa as well but they also have a wider focus. When talking of the understanding of ubuntu and the practicing of ubuntu, a broader approach is necessary and useful in properly explaining ubuntu in the role of African Traditional Religion. The last chapter focuses on how ubuntu has been utilised in post-apartheid South Africa. Therefore, a summary of the history of the country is essential in order to fully understand how ubuntu has entered and impacted the processes to be discussed in chapter four. This view of history includes looking at the role of Christianity from when the Cape Province was first colonised, the historical reasoning for apartheid, as well as the end of the apartheid regime.

2.3.1 THE ROLE OF CHRISTIANITY

There has always been a close relationship between the church and the state in South Africa. From the time the Dutch Europeans arrived in 1652 there was no clear distinction between politics and religion. This relationship only grew stronger during the 1700s, and mirrored what was the case in the Netherlands from whence they came: protection and control of the church. With the Cape Province going back and forth between the Dutch and the British, who arrived for the first time in 1795, there were made little changes to the close bond between church and state. They instead attempted to anglicise the existing majority church. When the National Party took power in 1948 the churches seemed a natural place in which to teach the apartheid worldview. The Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) was already involved in spreading teachings of separatism before the apartheid government was a reality, but now they received official acts to decree in the church rooms, such as the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act 55 of 1949. The DRC proved an indispensible affiliate of the apartheid government.[53] After being deemed heretical by the World Alliance of Reformed Churches in 1982, the Dutch Reformed Church counter fired by saying that apartheid was the will of God.[54] During the apartheid years there was no constitutional right for freedom of religion, however some Christian denominations and some religions were tolerated by the state. But

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[53] Pieter Coertzen 2008. 'Freedom of Religion in South Africa: Then and Now 1652-2008.' *Verbum et Ecclesia*. 350-354.
[54] Michael Onyebuchi Eze 2009. *Intellectual History in Contemporary South Africa*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. 55.

according to the apartheid state and the DRC, the only correct form of Christianity, and indeed religion, was what was practiced officially.[55]

The British, among many others, brought missionaries to the African continent as they expanded their empire. Unlike what the British met in the Cape Province, a Dutch Christian church, other parts of Southern Africa proved different. In communities where there was no Christianity there was perceived to be nothing, and the missionaries started the work of converting people to this European religion. In most instances the local religion was suppressed, as it was considered worthless, ignorant and devilish. According to Jean and John Comaroff, what attracted the native peoples to the missionaries were their technical skills and their weaponry more than their religion. The Comaroff's state that the missionaries became a prized resource and the different communities close to a mission station tried to attract the missionaries to them. On the border between South Africa and Botswana the Tshidi of the Tswana people were confronted with Methodist missionaries in the mid 1800s. As the Christian faith attracted some members, tension and disagreement started affecting the tribe. The missionaries saw that the chiefs with their ritual success held the most authority. In order to adopt this authority, the missionaries needed to take a stand against the rituals. Here among the Tshidi, as throughout Southern Africa, the community broke apart. According to the Comaroffs, by advancing Christianity the missionaries attempted to weaken or erase the spiritual aspects of what they had encountered, and ended up eroding the entire foundation of the 'chiefship' and what the Tswana saw as the inseparable dimensions of power and legitimacy. Authority became split, where the chief was no longer the centre of the social and symbolic world, the Christian church claimed authoritative space as well. This division of power, including the church taking on a political position, created many troubles for the communities the missionaries acted in.[56]

2.3.2 THE AFRIKANER

When the Dutch Europeans arrived in the mid 1600´s, South Africa was a country mainly made up of hunter-gatherers living off and with the land. The Dutch colonised the Cape and imported slaves from West Africa, Madagascar and South East Asia. There were more slaves than colonised citizens on the Cape. The Dutch paid little attention to the natives outside the borders of the Cape, and exerted pressure and control where needed inside the Cape.

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[55] Coertzen 2008: 358.
[56] Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff 1986. 'Christianity and Colonialism in South Africa'. *American Ethnologist*. 2-6.

Towards the end of the 1700´s all slaves were required to wear passes, so they would be able to identify themselves whenever needed. This was also a good way of controlling who went where and did what. In the beginning of the 1800´s the great scramble for Africa commenced. This brought the British to the Cape, making the Afrikaners fight for what they had made their land. The Afrikaners were made to flee from the Cape by 1836. They set out across South Africa on what was to become known as their Great Trek.[57] When they arrived on the other coast of the country, they encountered native South Africans there. The Afrikaner saw it as their duty to educate and take care of the natives, as they were considered too unintelligent to live up to the standards of the Europeans. Despite being chased off the Cape by the British, fellow Europeans, the Afrikaner refused to relinquish their view of themselves as European. During the Great Trek, myth has it that the only book the travellers had to read was the Christian bible. This helped ferment their ideas of themselves as akin to God's chosen people, also struggling through harsh and unwanted times, only to come out stronger on the other side. This is what drove them on across the difficult terrain of South Africa, and drove them to make the decisions they made once they started making a home for themselves in Natal. Later, the Afrikaner governments were enforcing and strengthening the idea of race in order to secure the massive wealth present in South Africa. The black workers were slowly marginalised before it turned into systematic governmental exclusion of the African from all spheres of business and public life. Controlling the natural resources and all the wealth in the country aided the development of a racial segregation ideology. The white state worked tediously for the black man to realise his stance in life, and his future. After failed attempts at freedom towards the end of the 19th Century, the black Africans assigned to never being able to fight the power, and begun considering themselves stupid and lesser than their white counterparts. This started changing in the 20th Century.[58]

2.3.3 END OF APARTHEID

In the beginning of the 1990's negotiations for a new government commenced. This followed after the unbanning of all opposition parties and the release of Nelson Mandela, as well as other political prisoners. The negotiations were primarily lead by the leader of the liberation group the African National Congress (ANC), Nelson Mandela and the leader of the apartheid ruling party the National Party (NP), F.W. de Klerk. The negotiations spanned a

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[57] All Afrikaners did not travel together in one single Great Trek, and did not arrive in one place at the same time, although the use of the word 'trek' in the singular may create confusion about this.
[58] Eze 2009: 14-34.

long period of time, and the NP was reluctant to relinquish as much power as the ANC craved, and did not want to step down without certain conditions. One of the best-known conditions for participating in the transition of power was amnesty. Initially, the National Part wanted to leave the past in the past and move forward. The ANC did not feel this was an adequate solution given the severity of the decades of oppression. The compromise became the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, where amnesty would be granted in return for full honesty and responsibility for crimes committed in the name of the political agenda of apartheid.[59] Up until the election of 1994, Nelson Mandela and F.W. de Klerk served in a joint government. After Mandela became president, de Klerk served as deputy president alongside Thabo Mbeki. Through actions like this, they showed they were willing to join forces in order to move forward. More than this, it showed black and coloured South Africans a man who had been treated so unjustly rise above and forgive. In 1994 South Africa held their first free and democratic election, with the ANC winning the vote. Nelson Mandela was elected president as the leader of the ANC, and he was the first black president of South Africa. Other parties, including the NP were represented in the government as well, although the ANC possessed a clear majority.[60] A massive task awaited, and the country had to tackle the severe situations of violence, serious financial troubles and the gross social inequalities created over many decades by the apartheid government, and even earlier. Mandela was very conscious of the major divides of South African society and worked to bridge these gaps and bring all the peoples together to face the future in unity.[61] In essence, all those that lived in the country belonged there; no matter what they looked like or what language they spoke. White South Africans should not fear the change in leadership, and black and coloured South Africans should not fear the white man. It is no wonder the world thought it miraculous,[62] what took place in South Africa. With the reality of an uncompromising and systematically unjust rule for a high number of years, colonialism and the violent turmoil of the early 1990s[63], what happened next must have appeared nearly unbelievable. There was no civil war in South Africa. Today the republic is one of the most successful and economically sound countries of the African continent. Although there are still major to be addressed, and the policies of the apartheid regime are still visible.

[59] Kenneth Christie 2000. *The South African Truth Commission*. Basingstoke: Macmillan. 16-17, 68-80.
[60] Ibid: 18.
[61] African National Congress 2012, Tinyiko Sam Maluleke 1997. 'Truth, National Unity and Reconciliation in South Africa: Aspects of the emerging agenda.' *Missionalia.* 3.
[62] Jonathan Allen 2001. 'Between Retribution and Restoration: Justice and the TRC.' *South African Journal of Philosophy.* 22.
[63] James L. Gibson 2006. 'The Contributions of Truth to Reconciliation: Lessons from South Africa.' *Journal of Conflict Resolution.* 413.

After apartheid, all groups of people were to be equally recognised with equal rights. Everyone was to be represented by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and take part in nation building in South Africa. With such a wider array of different viewpoints and memories, this was a massive task. This last part of this chapter explains something that is needed in fully understanding the challenges posed in the final chapter. How does one address the new South Africa? Today South Africa is a nation that recognises the plural realities, and to account for them this next part focuses on exact numbers. The Republic of South Africa has a population of roughly 50,5 million people. Of these 79,5 %, are categorised as African. 9 % are white, and coloureds, meaning people of mixed heritage,[64] similarly amount to 9 %. The Indian/Asian population constitute 2,5 %, or 1,2 million of the total of 50,5. The black African population can be divided into four groupings. This includes the Nguni, the Sotho-Tswana, the Tsonga and the Venda. The Nguni population group includes the Zulu, Xhosa, Ndebele and Swazi. The idiom most used when talking of ubuntu, 'ubuntu ungamntu ngabanye abantu', hails from the Nguni language group. This idiom is here written in isiXhosa.[65]

The Sotho-Tswana population group is comprised of the Southern, Northern and Western Sotho. Of White South Africans there are descendants of Dutch, German and French Huguenots, descendants from the British and other immigrants and descendants from other European countries. In the creation of the new South Africa, often referred to as the Rainbow Nation, 11 languages were recognised as official to the Republic of South Africa. These are isiNdebele, isiXhosa, isiZulu, Sesotho sa Leboa, Sesotho, Setswana, Tshivenda, Xitsonga, Afrikaans and English. Of these the wide use of isiZulu reveals that the Zulu are the largest population group, followed by the Xhosa. Afrikaans is the third most common language, as it is used both by the White descendants from Dutch, German and French as well as the coloured population.[66]

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[64] 'Coloured' is a contested category. They are mainly descended from slaves brought from east and central Africa, as well as the indigenous Khoisan, and others. They mostly speak Afrikaans. SouthAfrica.info 2012.
[65] SouthAfrica.info 2012. 'South Africa's Population.'
[66] Ibid.

2   UNDERSTANDING UBUNTU

Investigating the content of the many definitions of ubuntu is a crucial step towards discovering what ubuntu is and whether or not it is legitimate. The definitions are many, and they focus on different aspects of ubuntu. What others leave out, some add, what context ubuntu is placed in changes, and what the focus is differs. This being said, the fact that ubuntu lives outside the academic sphere does need to be addressed, whether or not they coincide with the definitions and descriptions of scholars. The spread of ubuntu globally does coincide with it being used actively in post-apartheid South Africa. What happened in South Africa after the apartheid regime was set-aside was viewed by many as a miracle, both at the time and years later.[67] The prospects for the well-being of the country and the people in it were bleak. Not only were there grave financial troubles, violence was also rapidly escalating.[68] What ensued in form of political negotiation towards a new agenda and fair elections alongside the proceedings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, showed the attentive world something out of the ordinary, and indeed, quite miraculous. There was turmoil all around the world, and in other countries in Africa as well during the time when South Africa started rebuilding. I lieu of this, the focus on exactly how South Africa managed what they did was massive. Ubuntu is presented as something infinitely good and helpful, as well as representing all what people wish they had and how the world ideally should be. Ubuntu, in this universal form, represents the best of humans and the human situation. We would all want to be kind, generous, patient, considerate and forgiving. Ubuntu has essentially become free to be used by all in whatever context people wish, whether as a sports cry or a free easy-to-share computer software, even if it means capitalising on it.

This chapter will focus mainly on the different academic definitions of ubuntu. The academic definitions are truly at the core of discovering ubuntu, and its definition. Scholars, and especially African scholars, of ubuntu have elaborated on ubuntu significantly since the start of the 1990s. Scholars have elaborated on the questions of where the word comes from, what it means, why it means these things, why it is relevant and how it can be an aid in the new South Africa, or indeed globally. All of which have been pertinent issues in post-apartheid South Africa and other African countries exploring their heritage and their future outside the colonial hegemony. This is not to say that scholars only discuss ubuntu for the

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[67] Tutu 2000: 34, Allen 2001: 22.
[68] Gibson 2006: 413.

benefit of post-colonial development. There is also an attempt to describe what ubuntu is for the West in particular. Especially after there was increasing attention drawn to this word and its meaning in the process of re-building South Africa. In addition to the academic definitions of ubuntu I have also included former Archbishop Desmond Tutu's own definition of ubuntu as a part of his Christian theology. He has been instrumental in insisting on ubuntu as being a vital part of rebuilding or indeed just building the new South Africa. Tutu has a deep seeded belief that recovering all what ubuntu entails will be an invaluable asset in going forward. He also believes that the entire world will benefit from embracing ubuntu, and has attempted to export ubuntu. Tutu argues that Africa is finally in a position to export something positive and life enhancing and not only the death, famine and destruction of the past decades. He is essentially working on re-branding sub-Saharan Africa, and using ubuntu to do so. This part of the text will not, however, focus on this, but rather on the content of his theology and how he fuses ubuntu and Christianity.

3.1 ACADEMIC APPROACHES

There are many ways of understanding ubuntu. Academics, African and European, have been attempting to define this concept for the past 30 years. To illustrate the diversity initially, I will put forward several definitions and views academics on what ubuntu is or what it represents. Muleki Mnyaka calls ubuntu an old philosophy of life, which has been present and sustaining life in Africa for centuries. Blankenberg links ubuntu to contemporary South African society, as its use in rebuilding the country shows how open ubuntu is to interpretation. Of ubuntu itself, he sees it as a philosophy and an ideal long being circulated in African history of tradition, primarily orally. Broodryk calls ubuntu a '… comprehensive ancient African worldview.' This worldview is based on values trying to ensure a '… happy and qualitative human community life.' The community will be based on family, focusing on humanness, caring, sharing, respect and compassion. Broodryk goes on to say that everything a person says, thinks and does is influenced if not determined by ubuntu. This is, according to Broodryk, because the norms of ubuntu have been orally transferred across generations. Saule keeps to this tone in saying that ubuntu is still around because of established traditional institutions. He sees ubuntu as '… something that springs from within oneself or better still, within society.'[69] Teffo goes in a different direction, arguing that ubuntu is not at all unique to Africa, and that such a claim would be

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[69] Eze 2009: 91-92.

ethnocentric. He continues in saying that the philosophy of ubuntu is found in all the philosophies of the world, however, not called the same.[70] Nyanthu views ubuntu as the backbone of many African societies, referring to it as a '...statement of being that encapsulates the fundamental elements that qualify any person to be human.'[71] Murithi views sees ubuntu as a way of viewing the world which is trying to capture the essence of what it is to be human. Dandala calls ubuntu a cosmology. 'It defines the 'harmonic intelligence' that is an intrinsic part of local Southern African communities,' and it is an African humanness in direct opposition to the Western humanness.[72] There are claims of universality by Teffo, and African ownership by Broodryk, Mnyaka, Dandala and Nyathu. There are claims of cosmology and philosophy, and of ubuntu being a contemporary tool for rebuilding South Africa. However, before this chapter can move forward one distinction has to be made. The common word ubuntu derives from the following proverb, in two different languages:

isiZulu: Umuntu ngumuntu ngabanye.

isiXhosa: Ubuntu ungamntu ngabanye abantu.

This translates into 'people are people through other people.'[73] This is the starting point for this chapter's search for an understanding of ubuntu.

3.1.1 UBUNTU AS A RELIGIOUS CONCEPT

I agree with Julius Gathogo that the Westerner might not see the religious aspect of the saying 'a person is a person through other persons'; however, this does not mean that there is none. In the African context this maxim has a deep religious meaning. Ubuntu is found in many African communities, like the Kikuyu who have a similar idiom to the one already mentioned; *Mundu ni Mundu ni undu wa andu*, or 'a human being is a person because of the other people.' The Sotho say *Moth eke motho ka batho*, which can be translated in a similar way.[74] Mnyandu explains ubuntu as not only a package of positive qualities, but also the essence itself, which enables people to become *abantu*, which in short means becoming a humanised being. About becoming a humanised being Mnyandu writes that people live in a

[70] Eze 2009: 92-93.
[71] John Hailey 2008. 'Ubuntu: A Literature Review.' The Tutu Foundation. 3.
[72] Ibid: 3-4.
[73] Gathogo 2007: 170, Michael Battle 2009. *Reconciliation: The Ubuntu Theology of Desmond Tutu*. Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press. 39. The word 'people' is sometimes exchanged with 'person' or 'human', or a combination of these.
[74] Gathogo 2007: 170.

world of self-expression in order to create harmonious relationships in their community, and the world beyond. Whereas Michael Eze claims this is an essentialist definition,[75] because it is placing ubuntu into a religious frame. Though there are elements here that can be used. Ubuntu is the essence itself; it is the basis for a religious expression in African societies. It is part of that which wishes to enable the human being to take responsibility for the well-being of others outside of oneself. The health and prosperity of one's family and surroundings are the most important things in a traditional African home. Ubuntu does not act alone, and is part of a much more complex set of rules of life, if you will.[76]

Dutch anthropologist, with a keen and long interest in Africa, Wim van Binsbergen professes that ubuntu is irrelevant in the day-to-day life of African people. It is only drawn on, according to van Binsbergen, when performing rites or as part of conflict settlement, or in divination.[77] The trouble with this view is that he is separating the obviously religious parts of the community from the everyday. In all major writings on African religion there is consensus in the fact that religion permeates all spheres of life in African societies. Religion is life, and life is religion. By dividing these two, van Binsbergen is effectively underscoring the importance of religion in Africa, as well as attempting to bring Western understanding of religion into an African mindset. One cannot separate the rites surrounding a wedding, initiation, naming or death from the workings of the community.

Desmond Tutu approaches ubuntu differently. Tutu strives to legitimise ubuntu through Christianity. He has created an ubuntu theology, where God features prominently. This theology was the backdrop for his work with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, promoting interconnectedness and togetherness in the wake of the fall of the apartheid regime in South Africa. Although Christianity was not a prominent factor in the proceedings. As part of his theology, Tutu preaches that Jesus taught humans friendship, to which the basis is a mutual understanding of each other. To Tutu, ubuntu can be sidelined with this teaching. Ubuntu breaks the racial classification of peoples, which in turn breaks the relationship of oppressor and oppressed.[78] Tutu explains ubuntu as the root of the African worldview, which he used to introduce the concept of racial reconciliation in South Africa. In order for the commission to succeed he needed to communicate that no human can be

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[75] Eze 2009: 91.
[76] Ibid: 91.
[77] van Binsbergen 2001: 65, 68.
[78] Battle 2009: 5.

fulfilled without their community, whether black or white.[79] Tutu's ubuntu theology has evolved side by side with apartheid in South Africa. His view is that losing the foundational thought that humans are created in God's image as well as finding what we need in God, turns into 'secular prosperity'. On account of this loss we judge others as if they lack the inherent human value. This materialist understanding creates a society where racial difference translates to fear. Michael Battle states that in order to understand Tutu's theology one must view it through ubuntu, as he believes we can only be human in community.[80]

Tutu says that being a 'self-sufficient human being is subhuman...God has made us so that we will need each other...to be is to participate...persons are ends in themselves only through the discovery of who they are in others.'[81] Tutu uses the genesis of the Old Testament to explain how we humans, from the beginning, were meant to live in communities with each other. In his view, God felt Adam must be lonely and therefore created Eve, another human being, for them to exist and live together.[82] What makes Tutu's viewpoint unique is the melding together of the Christian faith, and traditional African beliefs. He is attempting to bring the West, particularly Europe, and Africa together. Tutu focuses on the interdependent community, which is common in all writings on African religion. He also focuses on a person's distinctive identity, releasing the person from a rigid view of community, common in many writings on African communitarianism. All this together was going to overthrow apartheid.[83] Tutu proved indispensable in the struggle against apartheid, spreading the word and placing himself in harms way. He proved equally important after apartheid ended, and has been called the moral conscience of South Africa.[84]

3.1.2 ETYMOLOGY

Ubuntu hails from the Nguni language group, which includes isiXhosa and isiZulu, already seen in the beginning of this chapter. In Sesotho it is known as botho.[85] According to Dion Forster, the word ubuntu '...qualifies the noun *umuntu*.'[86] *Umuntu* translates to the human person in isiZulu. In this family of –ntu, one also finds *uluntu* – the vital force and *isintu* –

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[79] Battle 2009: 40.
[80] Ibid: 5
[81] Desmond Tutu quoted in Michael Battle 2009: 35, 39, 43.
[82] Battle 2009: 67-68, 41-42.
[83] Ibid: 40.
[84] The Elders 2011.
[85] Tutu 2000: 42.
[86] Dion A. Forster 2010. 'A Generous Ontology: Identity as a Process of Intersubjective Discover: An African Theological Contribution.' *HTS Teologiese Studies.* 8.

humanity.[87] Kamwangamalu states these other phonological variants of ubuntu in several African languages:

 '… *umundu* in Kiyuku and *umuntu* in Kimeru, both languages spoken in Kenya; *bumuntu* in kiSukuma and kiHaya, both spoken in Tanzania; *vumuntu* in shiTsonga and shiTswa of Mozambique; *bomoto* in Bobangi, spoken in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Angola respectively.'[88]

According to De Tejada, recounted by Augustine Shutte, ubuntu's geographical demarcation stretches from the Nubian Desert, to the Cape of Good Hope and from Senegal to Zanzibar, including the area of the Sahara before the desert developed. In an effort to explain the inherent qualities of the word ubuntu and the relevance to the larger aspect of African ontology and epistemology, Mogobe Ramose breaks the word down. Ramose argues philosophically for hyphenating ubuntu, into ubu-ntu. This will shed light on the word, and how we achieve it from 'umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu', which does not feature the word ubuntu, but still is seen as the root from whence the term has come. Following Ramose, ubu- is the prefix and –ntu is the stem of the word. Ramose contends that umuntu and ubu- belong together, '…the speech of umuntu is thus anchored in, revolves around, and is ineluctably oriented towards ubu-.' Umuntu focuses the epistemological towards the ontological ubu- through 'umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu'.[89]

While ubu- denotes a general sense of be-ing, -ntu represents the point where the general sense of being takes on concrete form. Or represents a process of 'continual unfoldment'. Ubu- is always directed towards –ntu, as ubu- wants to unfold into concrete manifestations. Ubu- and –ntu are a whole and inseparable oneness. From this Ramose sees ubu- as ontological and –ntu as epistemological, together they represent the foundations of African thought among the Bantu speaking peoples. Ramose insists that umu- shares an identical ontological feature with ubu-, although umu- is more specific than the general ubu-. Umu-ntu translates into human being, and shows here the concrete manifestations of umu-. This is because there is movement, not a general view of a human being. It is rather the emergence of the human as the maker of politics, religion and the law. This makes it an entity '…which continues to conduct an inquiry into being, experience, knowledge, and truth'

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[87] Mfuniselwa John Bhengu 1996. *Ubuntu: The Essence of Democracy*. Cape Town: Novalis Press. 2.
[88] Eze 2009: 91.
[89] Mogobe Ramose 2003. 'The Philosophy of *ubuntu* and *ubuntu* as a Philosophy,' in P.H. Coetzee and A.P.J Roux (eds.): *The African Philosophy Reader*. New York/Abingdon: Routledge. 230, 231.

which constitutes an activity. Ramose argues that this all means that ubu- can be viewed as be-ing becoming.[90]

Ubuntu is understood as being human in a kind relation to others. Ubu-ntu then, Ramose stresses, is as much a condition of be-ing as it is a recognition of be-ing becoming. However, through the maxim 'umunutu ngumunu ngabantu', Ramose claims that 'ngabantu' reveals that just being human is not sufficient; one has to become a human being. One has to prove that one is the embodiment of ubu-ntu. He bases this on the terms *ke motho* and *gase motho,* which translates literally into 'he/she is a human being', or the negation of this, which goes beyond the biology of the human to the '...ethical, social, and legal judgement of human worth and human conduct.'[91] This leads us to the debate of personhood in African thought.

3.1.3 UBUNTU AND PERSONHOOD

The main questions to deal with here are whether ubuntu is strictly communitarian? Does this communal nature belittle the autonomy and identity of the individual? Can one fail at personhood, and therefore lose or never gain ubuntu? If not; when does one become a person? However, in talking of personhood in African thought, we first need to differentiate between communalism and communitarianism, as they coincide with each other. The difference between the two is the degree of politics and organisation. The definition of communalism is based on federate communes in a political organisation, which dictates how people live successfully together in sharing. It can also be centred on the 'ethnic' group, where allegiance lies with them rather than the wider community. Communitarianism on the other hand is a theory of social organisation in small self-governing communities, and it can also be described as an ideology where the responsibility of the individual in regards to the community and the family is emphasised. On the basis of this, communitarianism is what can describe the African community, whereas communalism can at best be attributed to the political leaders in Africa who often purported African socialism when first independent.[92] The main contention in the debate on personhood is whether or not the communal focus of African society belittles the autonomy and identity of the individual person. Both political leaders Senghor and Kenyatta observed and reiterated the inherent communal structure of African life and society. Kenyatta went even further in saying that '...individualism and self-

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[90] Ramose 2003: 230-231.
[91] Ibid: 232.
[92] New Oxford American Dictionary 2005, Kwame Gyekye 2003. 'Person and community in African thought,' in P.H. Coetzee and A.P.J Roux (eds.): *The African Philosophy Reader*. New York/Abingdon: Routledge. 299.

seeking was ruled out.'[93] This statement does appear too strict in its understanding of communitarianism. From a communitarian starting point, the person is intrinsically social or communal, not an isolated individual. The community therefore consists of people who are interconnected through common values, goals and interests. 'They have intellectual and ideological, as well as emotional, attachments to those goals and values; as long as they cherish them, they are ever ready to pursue and defend them.'[94] Desmond Tutu has warned against glorifying African communitarianism. He views it as a breeding ground for both conservatism and conformity. Tutu argues that the tradition of communalism in Africa, especially among newly emancipated states particularly from mid-1900s, is the basis for dictatorship. This form of government has ravaged many African countries over the past 60 years. According to Tutu, this tradition allows powerful members of society to easily take control of the public sphere and exercise their own will instead of that of the people. Tutu claims the West has laws to combat pitfalls like this, and in this way ensures the will of the people to be exercised by the governing forces. On the other hand he also criticises the West's overly individualistic worldview, where the person's ultimate way of viewing himself or herself comes from within. In Africa, Tutu argues, one learns best to know oneself through others. However, he promotes balancing African communalism with the thought of the human being's 'inalienable uniqueness', as he wants the West's view to be balanced with the human's need to connect.[95]

Menkiti asserts that the community defines the person, but the person has to acquire and achieve personhood and it is possible for a person to fail at gaining personhood. Without a process of incorporation the description of person does not apply. When a person is incorporated and earns their personhood they become more and more of a person the older they grow.[96] This is contested. Kwame Gyekye argues that the person can be an individual in African communitarianism, or simply in the African community. The person can also be helpful to others out of moral responsibility, not just out of duty. This makes the African an individual, who makes choices about moral responsibility and awareness. This means Africans are capable of making other choices in their own life. Hence, the human is not a dutiful robot, but a person with capabilities of thinking individually for the common good.[97] Mbiti goes down a middle road in saying that *many* African societies do not believe the

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[93] Gyekye 2003: 298.
[94] Ibid: 299.
[95] Battle 2009: 38, 144.
[96] Gyekye 2003: 298, Ifeanyi A. Menkiti 1984. 'Person and Community in African Traditional Thought,' in R.A. Wright (ed.): *African Philosophy: An Introduction*. Washington: University Press of America. 172,173.
[97] Gyekye 2003: 308-311.

person is a full human until he or she has undergone the processes of becoming human, through birth, naming ceremonies, initiation rites, marriage and maybe even procreation. In these cases, only after these processes is the person fully born, and is therefore considered a complete person.[98] Mbiti has also stated: 'I am because we are; and since we are, therefore I am', which is being imposed as a basis for argumentation by both Menkiti, as mentioned, and Chukwudum B. Okolo.[99] In this, an African version of Decartes' *cogito ergo sum*, Mbiti explains how a person is never alone and passes through different stages of incorporation in life, even after the person dies they are incorporated into the extended family of the dead.[100] Here, Mbiti diverts from the middle road he was on earlier into believing that a person has to prove their humanity and personhood throughout their life. This is the way in which the person best benefits the community, also after they die. He postulates that in African traditional life:

> '…the individual does not and cannot exist alone except corporately. He owes this existence to other people, including those of past generations and his contemporaries. He is simply part of the whole. The community must therefore make, create, or produce the individual; for the individual depends on the corporate group…whatever happens to the individual happens to the whole group…'[101]

Okolo states that *self* in African thought is viewed from the outside, as in relation to the other, and not in relation to itself, thus from the inside. Okolo goes on to criticise the African philosophy for ignoring or not adequately including the human values of '…personal initiative, responsibility, subjectivity, independence, etc.' Okolo views these values as the way to determine the human being as a subject, not an object. By undermining these aspects of the human, Okolo contends that the roots of human freedom and autonomy are being forgotten, which gives African philosophy a blind spot.[102] Kwame Gyekye purports a different view. He sees the whole as a function of its parts. Relationships between persons in a community are contingent, voluntary and optional made so by the ontological derivativeness of the community. According to Gyekye, the community equals the context for where the possibilities of the individual can be acted out. The community is merely the social or cultural space where the person can express their individuality. The function of the community structure is to pass on the values and goals of the community to the one who enters into it. This makes the person a product of the community. Gyekye is aware that this

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[98] Mbiti 2008: 24.
[99] Chukwudum B. Okolo 2003. 'Self as a problem in African philosophy,' in P.H. Coetzee and A.P.J Roux (eds.): *The African Philosophy Reader*. New York/Abingdon: Routledge.
[100] Mbiti 2008: 106.
[101] Ibid: 106.
[102] Okolo 2003: 215.

view of the community may lead to an extreme understanding of how the person and community function together. In order to explain that an individual still has the possibility of having their own personality and therefore individuality is to acknowledge the many assets of a person. The person is by nature social, but they are *also* carrying other attributes as part of who they are. Without taking this into consideration, Gyekye warns one might succumb to an exaggeration of the communal nature of African society, something he feels Menkiti specifically has done.[103] The same can be said of Okolo in this instance, as he has provided African philosophy, and thereby African Traditional Religion, with a major flaw that is not necessarily based in reality. Gyekye's argumentation is very persuasive, although overly eager in expressing the individuality of the human. We will nonetheless continue with this understanding of personhood in mind.

3.1.4 UBUNTU: AN AFRICAN VALUE

Julius Gathogo asks the question if we can have an African homogeneity, mainly in terms of religion, without foreign attachment. If we can, Gathogo views ubuntu as the best description of an African homogeneity. Ubuntu represents a religio-cultural unity, which often has been over-powered by the insistence of the African religio-cultural diversity. Quoting Augustine Shutte, Gathogo explains that ubuntu as a concept has developed over many centuries from a pre-literate, pre-scientific and pre-industrial African culture.[104] This supports my own argument that ubuntu is not an a-historical concept, although not all scholars agree on this. Some see ubuntu as invented, and claim there is no historical authenticity to ubuntu. They argues this on the basis that ubuntu is an invented piece of the new South African discourse on democracy and human rights. Wim van Binsbergen is one of those scholars. His essay[105] on the utopian and prophetic nature of ubuntu is a matter of agreeing and disagreeing. I disagree in his future premonition that ubuntu will harm South African society,[106] and I disagree that ubuntu lacks a factual basis.[107] I agree that ubuntu is not explicitly stated in the community; rather it is an implicit part of the local society.[108] I do, however, disagree in that the values of the local community have disappeared in the face of globalisation and urbanisation, as he states very clearly in his essay. van Binsbergen views ubuntu as a product of globalisation, created for the sole purpose of rebuilding South Africa.

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[103] Gyekye 2003: 300-301.
[104] Gathogo 2007: 168-169.
[105] Wim van Binsbergen 2001. 'Ubuntu and the Globalisation of Southern African Thought and Society.' *Quest.*
[106] Ibid: 57.
[107] Ibid: 60.
[108] Ibid: 61.

He cites Mogobe Ramose as his opposition, who believes that globalisation is a phenomenon coming from outside to be countered by ubuntu. van Binsbergen argues that the urban and rural people in South Africa do not all have the same cultural background. Because some are now urban, concerned with life as it is relevant in cities, they have no connection to the village life, except for when they physically go there.[109] I do not agree that the values people carry with them are not measurable, and certainly not measurable by what people do in their daily lives. It is problematic to say that once we leave the physical place where the values still exist visibly, in practice, we no longer have them as a part of us. It is giving Africans a trait that is neither here nor there. It is not even something familial in the West, that Christians carry the values given through their religion only when in church. van Binsbergen must not view ubuntu as a part of a religious reality, and views it merely as a cultural trait which erodes away upon other cultures. I do not contest that the values of ubuntu are known by everyone, or can be seen everywhere. There is little doubt that in the context of South Africa, apartheid in particular has broken the community up into so many pieces and created a new and difficult reality. However, to say that all urbanised South Africans under the age of forty have no concept of what is inherent in ubuntu,[110] the values of how to lead life, is a gross exaggeration.

This being said, do not all the troubles plaguing the countries of Africa tell us that ubuntu must have been lost? Despite African countries being so much more than their 'rape, pillage, death' reputation, there have been and still are ongoing bloody conflicts as well as extreme poverty, with adhering problems. How can one then explain ubuntu and place it at the heart and root of African worldviews? Did ubuntu disappear when the colonists arrived, or leave with them perhaps? I do not believe this is the case. Firstly, believing that ubuntu existed before Africa's post-colonial time but not after puts ubuntu in a position where it does not stand up to adversity; be it war or changing times. This would imply that Africa always has been a peaceful continent with no rivalries or wars. As a continent with the earliest known empires of the world, this would be unthinkable. Not to say that I can place ubuntu this far back in time, but the continent is known to have had internal differences before the colonists arrived on the continent. Phillip Iya[111] points out that some Africans feel a sense of loss of ubuntu, as well as colonial rule suppressing and in some cases obliterating African tradition.

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[109] van Binsbergen 2001: 62.
[110] Ibid: 63.
[111] Phillip F. Iya 2009. 'Ubuntu and Human Dignity: Analysing Concepts and Exploring Relationship for in-depth Understanding and Application Directed Towards Improving the Quality of Life in Africa,' in Drucilla Cornell and Nyoko Muvanga (eds.): *Law in the ubuntu of South Africa*.

The strain of modern living has seen ubuntu disappear from the public and private spheres of people. Those arguing this point claim that Western values have aided Africa in going forward, but at the same time making tradition a casualty. They also claim that in many communities ubuntu is bound up to tribal laws and what is sometimes looked at as ancient 'undemocratic practices'. Iya insists that ubuntu is not lost but sometimes hindered, especially in the urban areas where capitalist values often reign. The family dynamic is important for maintaining ubuntu, and when this entity is broken down, ubuntu suffers. He argues that learning ubuntu values in one's upbringing will provide a sense of self-worth. It is this that ushers a person forward to pass on the ubuntu values in their life. If a person's upbringing lacks a focus on ubuntu values, chances are they will be destructive to their surroundings.[112] These points are very valid, and make use of human psychology to explain how taught and experienced values affect relationships. Circumstances, families and communities all change, and it is no secret that most African countries have had a rough and unforgiving history which is sure to change people, societies, states and areas for the long term. Urban areas are naturally more stressed and may sooner lose a grasp on values that one grew up with.

Further, van Binsbergen contends that ubuntu is not a word he has seen used in the communities in which he has worked and visited in his life. He too explains the linguistics of the word, with the root of –ntu from the Nguni language group,[113] as has been mentioned previously.[114] Desmond Tutu, Mogobe Ramose and Mfuniselwa Bhengu contest that ubuntu, as a word, is expressed.[115] Whether the word is in part an invention, as van Binsbergen argues,[116] might be so, but this does not delegitimise what ubuntu actually embodies. One could contend that the word ubuntu is an easy way of conveying what is intended, and therefore this has been the word chosen to express to many what is infinitely more complex at closer inspection. Desmond Tutu says in his book *No Future Without Forgiveness*, and to Richard Branson in the television programme Iconoclasts[117] where Branson helped teach Tutu how to swim, that where he comes from one can compliment another person by saying they have ubuntu. By saying this one is saying that this person is open, friendly, giving, selfless, which is truly a superb compliment to another. In this instance Tutu is using ubuntu in a sentence, more specifically in a compliment: 'Yu, u nobuntu', or 'Yes, he/she has

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[112] Iya 2009: 390-391.
[113] van Binsbergen 2001: 54.
[114] In 3.1.2.
[115] Tutu 2000: 42, Ramose 2003: 230-231, Bhengu 1996: 2.
[116] van Binsbergen 2001: 20.
[117] Iconoclasts 2008.

ubuntu.'[118] This particular use of the word ubuntu begs the question, why does van Binsbergen call ubuntu a '...deceptively vernacular term for an etic concept formulated in a globally circulating format'?[119] van Binsbergen's main contention with ubuntu is that he views it has invented by elite scholars of Africa claiming an unadulterated past from which ubuntu emanates. Van Binsbergen argues that scholars cannot rightly claim this pristine, traditional, pre-colonial African life. Ubuntu is merely as '...contemporary academic construct.'[120] In order for the modern South Africa to accept this model of thought, ubuntu had to be globalised. However, this globalised format is to be seen as a prophetic ideology that masks the social ills of South Africa today.[121]

van Binsbergen's foremost counterpart, Mogobe Ramose, calls ubuntu the unequivocal root of African philosophy. An African's place in the universe is interconnected to ubuntu. Thereby making ubuntu an all-encompassing entity. Ramose connects ubuntu inextricably to what he refers to as the 'African tree of knowledge.' He goes on to claim that if ontology and epistemology are the basis of philosophy, ubuntu makes African philosophy a long existing franchise. In arguing for the importance of ubuntu he calls for philosophical goggles through which to see the 'family atmosphere' amongst the indigenous people of Africa. Ramose accepts differences between the family members in question, but reaffirms that there is a basis for affinity. Through this definition Ramose is one of the scholars who uses proverbs and aphorisms from the Nguni languages as an argument for the African universality of ubuntu.[122]

Motho ke motho ka batho; Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu – A person is a person through other people. This indicates that each person is inextricably and intricately interwoven with the next person. To be human is to recognise others' humanity.

Feta Kgomo o tshware motho – Ignore the cow and save the person because life is greater than wealth. Life is to be prioritised over wealth, because preservation of human life is the highest human goal.

Kgosi ke kgosi ka batho – The sovereignty of the king derives from and belongs to his subjects. This is a symbol of African communitarianism.

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[118] Tutu 2000: 42.
[119] van Binsbergen 2001: 69.
[120] Eze 2009: 135, van Binsbergen 2001: 62.
[121] Eze 2009: 136-137.
[122] Ibid: 93-94.

Motho gase mpshe ga a tshewe Sesotho – No single human can be thoroughly and completely useless. This is again an emphasis on human life as the be all and end all.[123]

3.1.5 UBUNTU IN SOUTH AFRICA

Although I agree that ubuntu is incapable of showing unbroken continuity, it is as much van Binsbergen's guess as anybody else's whether or not this is true. What can be certain is that ubuntu has evolved. There is little doubt, from van Binsbergen or any other scholar on ubuntu, that ubuntu has been a legitimate, if unspoken, part of African life.[124] This includes the time before colonialism. It is likely to think that the pieces of native culture and tradition not eradicated by missionaries or colonists, indeed existed before the alien forces ceased power. It is not ubuntu that is unfamiliar, it is the way it is now spoken of and referred to. This is not similar to advocating it has been invented. The format, context and the uses are invented. Just because an African tradition or concept historically has been the silent basis for life, does not mean that it is its eternal fate. One may say ubuntu is re-invented, or more accurately re-introduced in a different context. The village and the local community is an entity that has more or less forcibly changed over the past centuries. The modern form of government in South Africa today is a long way away from the tribal chiefs of history. However, certain values are passed on down through generations, and when reality shifts there are new ways in which to pass the values on. In South Africa this became apparent after apartheid.

Eze argues that ubuntu, as a national South African discourse, is an essential building block of the post-apartheid nation. According to Eze, South Africa during apartheid was a state without a nation. The community was dominated by a minority-created discourse, as well as a fear-related identity. The majority South African experienced a unity through struggle during apartheid. What would happen when that struggle was over? After political parties were unbanned and political prisoners freed in 1990, the intra-communal conflict in Natal developed into a civil war. The number of people, mostly black Africans, killed between 1990 and 1994 was nearly triple the amount of those killed in the five years prior to 1990. There was an ongoing bloody conflict between the African National Congress and the Inkatha Freedom Party. According to Brandon Hamber there was a shift in the character of violence in the 1990s from vertical, state against citizen and vice versa, to horizontal,

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[123] Eze 2009: 94.
[124] van Binsbergen 2001: 69

citizens against each other. Although some of this was Third Force activity, meaning state sponsored conflict; there was great turmoil in the period of governmental negotiations.[125]

Although ubuntu was not used or exploited by the ANC during the struggle, the word turned up in the newly formed South African interim constitution of 1993. Eze points out clear evidence that ubuntu appeared in texts prior to the end of apartheid, proving its existence as a word and concept before being popularised and factoring into the new national discourse. Eze points out that ubuntu first saw the light of day as a politicised cultural memory in 1975. The Inkatha Freedom Party movement used it in its constitution as a guiding principle of the movement. The constitution state that beside what they have to copy from successful economic, political and educational plans of the West, the African humanism of ubuntu should be promoted to maintain and protect human dignity. As well as protecting '…personal growth and fulfilment, and the individual pursuit of happiness.'[126] This shows that one can argue that the lack of definition of ubuntu in this constitution must mean that the general public must have known the definition for themselves. This in turn means that ubuntu is more than only a post apartheid phenomenon.

3.1.6 MORAL THEORY OF UBUNTU

In discussing the different definitions of ubuntu further I will make use of Thaddeus Metz's formula in his essay 'Toward an African Moral Theory'[127], where he explores six theoretical interpretations of ubuntu. This will help us differentiate all the various definitions available and create the larger picture of how ubuntu is viewed by scholars.

Metz's theoretical interpretations are divided by asking to what extent an act, specifically in the community, is right or wrong. The first four interpretations relate morality to something internal in the human individual, which Metz insists makes the common separation of Western morals as 'individualistic' and African morals as 'communitarian' wrong.[128] The first of the six interpretations focuses on human dignity. In these interpretations a right action is constituted by the fact that it respects a person's dignity. One has done something wrong if one degrades humanity. The basis for this interpretation is that value is intrinsic in human nature and should be honoured. This theory finds its foundation in the legal world,

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[125] Brandon Hamber 1999. '„Have no doubt it is fear in the land". An Exploration of the Continuing Cycles of Violence in South Africa.' *Zeitschrift fûr Politische Psychologie.* 114-115.
[126] Eze 2009: 103.
[127] Thaddeus Metz 2007. 'Toward an African Moral Theory.' *Journal of Political Philosophy.*
[128] Ibid: 333.

and Metz makes use of the statements of Justice Yvonne Mokgoro to explain the wish to appeal to ubuntu in decision-making in law. Human rights speak to the inherent dignity of the human, which Mokgoro links directly to ubuntu. According to Metz, this view of human dignity can clearly be traced back to Kant. It is a classically Western theory that may be troublesome in the context of defining ubuntu. Metz asserts that a human's capacity of autonomy does not go along with his three moral duties of African society: reconciliation over retribution, tradition and rituals in civil society or procreation.[129] Metz argues that in order to account for this larger array of duties in the community, this theory needs to be broadened beyond the value of human life.[130] However, he does concede that from the aspect of honouring the human life, the Justice's remarks can be helpful. The promotion of life is a prime factor of the African community and African Traditional Religion, as I will return to later. The harmony required by and in the community is necessary for the vital force, the force of life, to be promoted.[131]

Although I do agree with Metz to a certain degree, it seems he may have omitted certain Mokgoro thoughts. Justice Yvonne Mokgoro explains the maxim, which she reiterates as 'a human being is a human being because of other human beings', as implying that one will be challenged by others in order to achieve self-fulfilment. This takes place through collective social ideals. She further explains ubuntu through the everyday life of the people it concerns. She contends that African maxims such as *'[m]otho ke motho lo batho ba bangwe,'* meaning 'people live through the help of others', and *'a botho bag ago enne botho seshabeng'* which is translated to 'let your welfare be the welfare of the nation,' speaks to the strong community emphasis on family and the obligations surrounding it. Mokgoro argues that people in a community are willing to join their resources together in order to help an individual in need.[132] It seems clear that Mokgoro does not have as narrow a understanding or interpretation of ubuntu as Metz portrays in his essay. She indeed views ubuntu in a broad spectrum, as one should, and is not blind to the importance of ubuntu in the community, even if the Kantian view of ubuntu in law is not necessarily a good fit in this context.

The second interpretation Metz puts forward is more utilitarian based where the improvement of the quality of life is the main focus. Here, gaining harmony in the community is the means to an end of human well-being. However, Metz professes that a

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[129] Metz 2007: 328.
[130] Ibid: 340.
[131] Metz 2007: 328-329.
[132] Yvonne Mokgoro. 'Ubuntu and Law in South Africa', in Drucilla Cornell and Nyoko Muvangua (eds.): *Law in the ubuntu of South Africa*. 364-365.

utilitarian view of ubuntu has no possibility of controlling acts such as stealing or discrimination, as they can be viewed as necessary for the greater good. This interpretation bears resemblance to the third interpretation, which focuses on communitarianism. According to Metz, if one adds human rights to the utilitarian interpretation, communitarianism is the end result.[133] Metz further claims that the ground of moral rightness can only come from caring relationships, and not 'welfarist' well-being alone.[134] Metz quite controversially states that true quality of life cannot happen in the context of a community which practices consensus, cooperation or to whom tradition weighs heavily.[135] By citing social sciences research, Metz claims that '…majoritarianism in politics, labour- and consumer-markets in economics, and innovative and unconventional behaviour in civil society'[136] are proven ways to human quality of life. What Metz appears to be saying is that if African countries do not follow the Western template of politics, economics or civil society, human well-being is not in the cards for them, even if their rights in the community setting of cooperation are considered. The fourth interpretation purports that self-realisation in the community and the positive relation to others make an action right, whereas the act is wrong if it takes away from our value as a social being.[137] Metz asserts that this interpretation focuses on '…firm moral judgements about when, how and why to help others.'[138] According to Metz, many African thinkers use the maxim 'a person is a person through other persons' to mean that one should develop one's own personhood. According to Augustine Shutte our '…deepest moral obligation is to become more fully human.'[139] Shutte also insists that selfishness is not an option, although it could seem to be one when personal fulfilment is the goal. The realisation of oneself will benefit the community as one is established as a being in a community, where one engages in communal relationships. Metz interprets this understanding of ubuntu, as addressed by both Augustine Shutte and Mogobe Ramose, to mean that if one needed to kill another person in order to acquire a living organ one needed to live, it could be defended by this interpretation. It would maximise the person's self-realisation and support the other surrounding people in the long-term. Similarly, when this is the goal Metz points out a problem in the selfless act of giving up one's life for someone else, including one's own children. As dying would end self-

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[133] Metz 2007: 331.
[134] Ibid: 340.
[135] Ibid: 331.
[136] Ibid.
[137] Ibid.
[138] Ibid: 340.
[139] Ibid: 331.

realisation, this act of selflessness would not be an option.[140] This example may seem frivolous, however, Metz puts forward a good point here. There is a need to expand the definition of ubuntu. However, in interpreting Shutte and Ramose, self-realisation without thought of others does not seem entirely correct. Both claim that in developing one's personhood and self, one will become more of an asset to the community. Both scholars establish that affirming other people's humanity is a way to expand one's self and benefit the community. In Metz's interpretation this does not seem to be present, which is a fault.[141] The community is still an important factor. Self-realisation for the sake of self-realisation is not an adequate interpretation of these two scholars' work.

The last two interpretations presented by Thaddeus Metz he calls 'properly communitarian' in their interpretation of ubuntu. The first of these two relates back to the first book published on ubuntu, which focuses on solidarity, especially in facing the poor and disadvantaged groups of a community. Metz contends that this view is too narrow to constitute a moral theory for Africa, as ubuntu necessarily should stretch beyond the poor in a community. Ubuntu should be relevant for everyone.[142] Metz views this as one way of promoting shared identity but by no means the only one.[143] Metz's final interpretation of ubuntu is his favourite, as well as mine: 'An action is right insofar as it produces harmony and reduces discord; an act is wrong to the extent that it fails to develop community.'[144] This being said, ubuntu exists on many levels and is useful in the other interpretations mentioned above, although they may not be as full and fundamental interpretations of ubuntu. Ubuntu, in my view, can be of use in many spheres of life and for the promotion of different actions and thoughts in the human being. For the sake of the wholeness of ubuntu, and this thesis, this last interpretation places ubuntu at the basis of the community and the harmony within it, which is the place where ubuntu is rightly to be found. To understand why harmony or togetherness is the ultimate greater good for the African one needs to understand what constitutes harmony, which Metz is attempting to do. With a combination of shared identity and good will, where shared identity means being together in a group working towards the same ends and good will talks of creating caring and supportive relationships, we have the basis for harmony.[145] The path towards harmony is contingent on a few factors, such as: consensus, reconciliation, community economics, spread wealth,

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[140] Ibid: 233.
[141] Metz 2007: 331-332.
[142] Ibid: 334.
[143] Ibid: 340.
[144] Ibid: 334.
[145] Ibid: 337.

inclusion in community and procreation. Consensus is unanimous with shared identity, according to Metz. Decision-making with unanimous results promotes both good will and shared identity in the long run, more than 'majoritanianism' as the minority feels included. Punishment does not promote good will or shared identity. Retribution, unlike reconciliation, is not based on outcome, according to Metz. Economically competing against one another to maximise self-interests does not fit with communal good will as goods and wealth should be shared for all. The upholding of traditions and rituals are an important way in the community for people to identify with others, which maintains the shared identity and therefore good will. Lastly, procreation '...enables one to expand the range of a common sense of self, to enlarge the scope of a 'we'.'[146] My main contention is that Metz claims that there are significant accounts of ubuntu that make no reference to religion.[147] This is easily understood, especially from a Western stand, but leaving out the religious aspect of African life makes little sense in order to produce a complete picture. Particularly when there are sound arguments to place ubuntu in the foundations of African Traditional Religion, and thereby African life, trying to separate the two seems unproductive and misunderstood.

3.2 CONCLUSION

From all of this we can deduce some key elements of importance in a definition of ubuntu. There is a relative consensus among the scholars who study ubuntu that the community is an important part of understanding ubuntu. A human can exist to their full ability only in a community, only in relation to other people. Which brings us to the next vital point of understanding: the self. The community is the central theme for where one's *self* is developed. As we have seen, some scholars argue that a person has to earn their personhood. The traditions of the community bring the person to the point where one is a human being ready to be further fulfilled as a complete human being. Others claim that a person is born a human being, and the traditions of the community help them to create inter-communal relationships based on and to promote harmony. Therefore, a person's value as a human is inherent in them, not something that can elude them or at which they can fail. This being said, not everyone becomes an ancestor or a spirit in death. Only if the deceased has lead an exemplary life can they guide others in their life through being an ancestor. This will be addressed in the next chapter. To continue in our definition of ubuntu,

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[146] Metz 2007: 339.
[147] Ibid: 328.

there are several scholars who view ubuntu as an underlying essence of community life and humanity. The aim of this underlying element is to help create harmonious relationships and help humans in maintaining relationships with others. Desmond Tutu has stated: 'To be is to participate.'[148] All actions come back to ubuntu, which will always promote a sense of a shared identity between the people relating to each other in a community. This will in turn lead to a general wish for well-being inside the community. It is the harmony in the community that is the ultimate goal, and it is here that we can locate ubuntu. Ubuntu is in all people and all actions and thoughts. Ubuntu is to maintain harmony in the community. This is an inherently religious enterprise. As mentioned in the previous chapter, life and religion is one and the same thing in the African context. In the context of African Traditional Religion ubuntu is the basis for the purpose of the religion, which is harmony. This will be further discussed in the following chapter.

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[148] Battle 2009: 39.

3   PERFORMING UBUNTU

In the view of Vincent Mulago, the central tenets of African religion are: unity of life and participation; belief in the enhancement or diminution of beings and the interaction of beings; symbol as the principal means of contact and union; and an ethic that flows from ontology. First on his list is the point of unity of life and participation, which is most relevant here. He also refers to union of life as a vital union. This union entails a person's being and life with all the important people near by, participating in the union. The living and dead are being joined in a vertical and horizontal bond, representing a life-giving principle. Mulago goes on to state that the life of the '…individual is understood as participated life.' All the members of a society know that they live by the community. The tribe, the clan, the family all believe that they would not have the means to survive outside the community. All life is sacred, and existing in the heart of the community means participating in the sacred life of the ancestors. In addition to this, the conservation and enhancement of the ancestors depend on the members of the tribe, the clan, and the family. The life before and beyond the grave is inseparable and exists dependently on one another. Mulago points out that there is a belief that the individual survives after death, and that there is an interchanging relationship between the living and the dead. This has to be maintained.[149]

Gerhardus Cornelis Oosthuizen argues that thinking in traditional Africa is synthetic, rather than analytical. This means that everything is seen as being interdependent, which in turn means that everything has religious value, as nothing traditionally oriented can be religiously neutral, according to Oosthuizen. In this religiously loaded traditional African belief there is an orientation towards totality. It is this orientation that lays the groundwork for the intense sense of community. Not only this, but nature is free from being objectified, which strengthens the feeling of community as one is not being alienated by nature. 'An individual is never a mere individual, but is also the other (who is not merely another).'[150] He argues further that a person's personality has the highest priority because this personality presupposes relationship. And relationships are the meaning of existence. Everything done from birth until death and '…thereafter bind the person as a communal being to everyone around themselves…'[151] He goes on to point out that the person is the centre of existence, however, not as a person by herself, but as a family and community.

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[149] Vincent Mulago 1991. 'Traditional African Religion and Christianity,' in Jacob K. Olupona (ed.): *African Traditional Religions in Contemporary Society*. St. Paul: Paragon House. 120-121.
[150] Oosthuizen 1991: 41.
[151] Ibid: 41.

Blessings in life, like children, are nothing unless the whole of the community share in it all. The metaphysical forces are the sustainers of the world in which the human is at the centre, instead of matter. The essence of things is what is important as religion embraces everything.[152]

The family, for African peoples, include many generations and branches. The circle is wide, and may include extended families where brothers or sisters establish families close to one another. Beyond the living in families between 10 and one hundred members, the family also includes the living-dead. They exist in the memories of the still living. If one is remembered, one is not completely dead. Although they are not walking on the earth they still have a say in what happens in the family, as well as being available for advice or reprimands. Forgetting the dead will lead to grave misfortune for the surviving members of the family. The values inherent in most every community, like fellowship, hospitality and respect are still important after death. One is to recognise the value of the living dead who have served as pillars of the family, and now, after death, bind the family together. In addition to considering the living dead as a part of the family, those who are yet to be born are also considered as members. This is because they are already in the loins of the living. If members of the family do not find someone to marry, the unborn will die and the life force of the family will be diminished. This is an important point, as it gives clear meaning to initiation rites and rituals surrounding marriage in particular. Both are to ensure that the life force of the family will be strengthened and continued.[153] The members must be fully integrated into the society and be able to carry the life force forward.

The examples put forward in this chapter are by no means an exhaustive, complete or full portrayal of cases available to be used for the purpose of this chapter. This is simply a rough overview of a few cases from among different peoples in Africa in order to support the goal of this chapter. There is a need to clarify the context of this chapter, as I do not contend that African peoples, such as those mentioned in this chapter, necessarily are the same now as they were when these examples were put into writing. Kenyan born scholar John Mbiti mainly uses sources from the beginning of the 1900s up until the 1960s,[154] whereas Laurenti Magesa's sources date from the mid-1960s up until the 1980s.[155] What this chapter will show is that there is no separation between ubuntu, religion and community life. It will

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[152] Oosthuizen 1991: 41, 39.
[153] Mbiti 2008: 104-105.
[154] Ibid: See index.
[155] Magesa 1997: See index.

also show that ubuntu historically has been a part of African societies. It is, however, important to note that I do not propose that the examples used below are unchanged illustrations of African community life. These examples have been recorded at one point in history, and portray the community life of that particular people in a particular year. The importance of them is nonetheless that they do in all instances portray something that is true of the wider society of peoples in Africa: the focus on the value of life for the purpose of harmony. This is the reason these illustrations will explain the history of ubuntu to be longer than roughly 20 years, which is purported by van Binsbergen. All parts of life are focused towards maintaining harmony, and all societal actions return to the upholding and transference of the vital force; life, which is the most important element of maintaining harmony in the community. As African Traditional Religion is far-reaching and exists outside of South Africa, this chapter will make use of cases from several different peoples located in sub-Saharan Africa. Firstly I will talk about the importance of community life in African societies. There are structures in the community that are focused towards maintaining the well-being and harmony in that community. Thereafter I will focus on the importance of the vital force of the community, also referred to as the life force. The concern will be practices maintaining and ensuring the transference of the vital force in the community. Lastly, the emphasis will be on the significance of ancestors, also referred to as the living-dead, in the upholding of harmony in the community. All three parts of this chapter concentrate on the importance of life and how to best preserve it. Ubuntu is found in all three parts of this chapter. Thaddeus Metz locates the centre of ubuntu in the work towards communal well-being and shared identity, and this is what can be seen below. In 4.1.2 I use the word prayer, which can be said to possess Euro-Christian connotations, as can the language in which the prayers are presented. However, I choose to make use of the original quotes and the word 'prayer' in order to most easily deal with the data.

4.1 COMMUNITY

Friday Mbon argues that African traditional societies value the welfare of the individual person, as it is a consequence of welfare in the society. And the society is the most important aspect of life. In African traditional societies, he continues, no man lived unto himself. As the actions of any person will directly or indirectly affect another person or persons, or the entire society. Mbon uses the word 'eudaemonistic' when explaining the African societal system as systems of happiness. The dictionary calls it a '…system of ethics that bases moral

value on the likelihood that good actions will produce happiness.'[156] Laurenti Magesa views sociability and creation of relationships in the course of daily living by the individual and community as the central moral and ethical imperative in African religion. There is a strong focus on the formation and execution of relationships as these relationships keep the universe going. At the same time, in African religion there is an inherent focus on the present. Living in the now concentrating on having a good life now, is crucial. The emphasis on relationships here and now is to emphasise the importance of living in the present. In this type of relationship, where everyone understands the importance of interconnectedness, the focus is the health of the community, as well as the circulation of life so that life is kept moving. A relationship means one has to share. Not sharing is counterproductive to the well being of the community. Sharing creates and cements bonds required to form and sustain the community. If one refuses to share it is likely to think this person does not have the best interest of the community at heart.[157] These two following quotes describe the importance and relevance of the community: 'The unity of the community [...] a unity that is the community's life in its fullest sense, is the paramount good. The opposite constitutes the paramount destruction.'[158] 'Participation-sharing is thus a central principle or imperative for human existence in African religion, the "quintessence of authentic humanity (Obuntu)".'[159]

In focusing on community we will look at parts of the community where the whole community is engaged in maintaining, upholding or restoring the vital force, and with that: harmony. All of the community is engaged in the well being of everyone who is part of the community. Rituals represent a physical communication with ancestors, spirits or the Supreme Being that most often involves the whole community. Sacrifices and offerings are made to prevent difficult situations, turn difficult situations around, and restore harmony after wrongdoing, to thank or to remember. The community comes together with the worries or their happiness and share problem solving or thanksgiving. Prayer and rituals may or may not happen simultaneously. Prayer is a common way of communicating with ancestors, spirits or the Supreme Being where it is most common to petition those forces relevant for something that is needed for harmony in the homestead or the community. Prayers can be uttered in private, but prayer also brings the members of the community

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[156] Friday M. Mbon 1991. 'African Traditional Socio-Religious Ethics and National Development: The Nigerian Case,' in Jacob K. Olupona (ed.): *African Traditional Religions in Contemporary Society*. St. Paul: Paragon House. 102.
[157] Magesa 1997: 64-65.
[158] Ibid: 65.
[159] Ibid: 66.

together. Finally, I will mainly focus on the part played by the medicine-doctor for the promotion of societal well-being. There are medicine-doctors and other specialists in every community who locate ailments, illness or evil and offer cures, or preventative medicine. They function as important upholders of harmony, and members of the community can turn to them when they are worried or ill.

4.1.1 RITUALS

Rituals are central in the community and are used for the restoring and maintaining of life. According to Magesa, the most common rituals in this respect are sacrifice and offering. He differentiates between sacrifice and offering by focusing on whether there is separation by destruction or dedication. When there is a sacrifice, an item, most often a food, is killed or destroyed most possibly by fire, or through abandonment. The item sacrificed needs to be connected with human use and of value in the community. The community or the person is separated from the item of value through the destruction of the item, such as foodstuffs, water or honey,[160] which now belongs to the ancestor or spirit it was sacrificed to. In offerings the items connected with human use are not directly destroyed, but separated from the community or the person through dedication to the ancestor or spirit in question. The item can still appear in the community, but does no longer belong to them. This is a symbolic exercise, where no blood is shed. In some instances of offering, the item cannot be used again as it is inhabited by the mystical powers, however, this is not always.[161] As is explained through sacrifice by the Turkana, the burning, dissection, roasting and eating of the animal creates a '...new entity or super-entity of interrelationships with coolness and happiness.'[162] The spirits and ancestors, man and animal have through sacrifice become a totality, which fosters harmony in the community. This is the fundamental meaning of sacrifices, according to Magesa, the restoration of wholeness. Wrongdoing can create a distance between the elements of the universe, and this needs to be rectified.[163] However, it is not only specifically human wrongdoing that needs sacrifices and offerings. Droughts, epidemics, floods, war or other dire situations also call for communication between persons in the community and the mystical powers. Communities, such as the Akamba and the Gikuyu, sacrifice in order to prevent potential dire situations, such as before planting, before

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[160] Emeka C. Ekeke 2011. 'African Traditional Religion: A Conceptual and Philosophical Analysis.' *Lumina.* 9.
[161] Magesa 1997: 201.
[162] Ibid: 203.
[163] Ibid: 203.

ripening of crops, before harvest, or as part of rites of passage in the community.[164] Sacrifice may be performed in unison with prayers, as a woman of the Bachwa who brings a portion of the food she has cooked to the forest. When offering them to the Supreme Being as appreciation for becoming pregnant she utters: 'God, from Whom I have received this chills, take Thou and eat!'[165] Among the Taita of Kenya reconciliation permeates their whole religious system. The Taita perform reconciliation rites in order to re-establish ties in the community, which according to Magesa, is important to any divination procedure. As the point of sacrifices, offerings as well as divination is to restore harmony in the community, there needs to be certainty that at the end of such undertakings the community is tied together. This is of major importance among the Taita, where one has to be honest and recognise anger or resentment one has inside and cast them away. This amounts to the same as casting away the anger or resentment of the mystical powers. They have a ritual specifically for the riddance of anger, where the person carrying out the ritual must be clear of anger in their heart.[166]

4.1.2 PRAYER

There are many ways in which the community in works in union towards maintaining harmony. According to Magesa, prayer is one of the ways by which to achieve harmony. The focus of prayer is to remove all that is bad from a community and restore what is good. Prayer, connecting the visible and the invisible world, enhances the mutual interdependent relationships. According to Adeyemo, Magesa and Mbiti, prayer is the most common act of worship in African religion.[167] It is a communication, a petition between the visible and the invisible world. The main goal is the maintenance of harmony between persons in the visible world and between them and the invisible world. There are typically no standardised prayers in African religion because the situation here and now needs to be respected. This means the tone of the prayer can change all depending on the situation. Anger and frustration is permitted, especially as the one praying always will have a feeling of being humble when communicating with ancestors, spirits or the Supreme Being. This leads us to where the prayers go, where they are directed. They do not only have one place to go, and can be addressed to ancestors, spirits or the Supreme Being. Magesa stresses that one has to be completely honest in this communication with the spiritual beings in order to be properly

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[164] Mbiti 2008: 59.
[165] Ibid: 60.
[166] Magesa 1997: 234-236.
[167] Magesa 1997: 195, Mbiti 2008: 61.

heard. This prerequisite relies on trust between the living humans and the spirits and ancestors. Magesa also recognises that there is pragmatism in the prayer in that one often asks for what is needed to continue affirming life.[168] One example of prayer is from the Bambuti Pgymies of the Democratic Republic of Congo. If they find themselves in the forest when a thunderstorm arises: 'Father, Thy children are afraid; and behold, we shall die!'[169] The goal is the wellbeing of those who find themselves in the forest to not die of lightning, in order to maintain the family and the vital force, and therefore harmony. This is a petition and a warning for the controllers of the thunderstorm, as well as to the ancestors in position of communicating directly with the Supreme Being. Another prayer that is recorded comes from the Meru in Kenya and illuminates life in a prayer for the wellbeing of the homestead, the community, and beyond:

> 'Kirinyaga…, owner of all things, I pray to Thee, give me what I need, because I am suffering, and also my children, and all the things that are in this country of mine. I beg Thee, the good one, for life, healthy people with no disease. May they bear healthy children. And also to women who suffer because they are barren, open the way by which they may see children. Give goats, cattle, food, honey. And also the trouble of the other land that I do not know, remove.'[170]

The focus of this prayer is what is needed for the recovering of harmony in the community. The Meru are petitioning for health and food, which is needed for a successful transmittance of the vital force. The focus of the one uttering the prayer is the children, born and not yet born. Even when there is clear distress, the one praying is asking that barren women should be able to bear children. This in itself shows the importance of what will occupy the next part of this chapter; the vital force. The main goal is to make the situation healthy in order for the vital force to be preserved. Most common starting points for prayers are petitioning, thanksgiving and memorialising, which are all important in order to not only uphold harmony in the community of the living, but also to uphold harmony in the community that involves the ancestors and spirits. Recognising the efforts and work of the ancestors and spirits further include these beings into the community, and they will in turn assist in affirming life and harmony. However, when one is asking something of the ancestors or spirits it is usually linked to protection from evil in whatever form, and the flourishing of life. If these prayers are heard, thanksgiving is in order.[171]

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[168] Magesa 1997: 196-198.
[169] Ekeke 2011: 10-11.
[170] Magesa 1997: 197-198.
[171] Ibid: 199.

4.1.3 SPECIALISTS

The medicine-doctor represents a position in the community whose sole purpose is to protect or restore the vital force. As underlined by Magesa, the workings of the medicine-doctor show the '...interconnectedness of, and interdependence between, humanity and the rest of creation.'[172] The medicine-doctor symbolises the '...hopes of society: hopes of good health, protection and security from evil forces, prosperity and good fortune, and ritual cleansing when harm or impurities have been contracted.'[173] They make use of the whole of nature in their work to protect, restore or prevent. Harmony in the community is not restricted to harmony among persons but it also includes nature. All that surrounds the community is relevant and important, and a balanced relationship with nature will also help maintain the vital force, and therefore uphold harmony. According to Mbiti, the medicine-doctors believe spirits or ancestors are calling them into becoming a medicine-doctor. This can happen when they are young or when they are older, and their training can be either formal or informal, but there is always some kind of apprenticeship for the medicine-doctor to-be. They will learn how to treat ailments medicinally, through all sorts of nature-objects, be it insects or fruit. Medicine-doctors will also know how to determine the cause of illness or suffering, which includes barrenness or poor crops, and how to cure these sufferings, or how to prevent them. Medicine-doctors possess knowledge of how to use or to combat the use of magic, witchcraft and sorcery. They also have a task of understanding the spirits and ancestors, what they mean by their messages and other communications, without dealing directly with them.[174] According to Magesa, there is a belief in African religion that the true reason behind all things that happen can be known,[175] which is why there are members of the community apt to locate the sources of evil and offer a cure or prevention tactics. For instance, '[a]mong the Ndebele[176], the medicine-man supplies medicated pegs for the gates of a new homestead. He combats witchcraft and magic by preventing their action...'[177] The medicine-doctor is in this case creating a sense of stability and safety, as well as doing what is necessary for the maintenance of the vital force.

Communities have several 'specialists' to look out for the interests of the community as a whole. There are mediums that are the main intermediaries between the living and the

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[172] Magesa 1997: 210.
[173] Mbiti 2008: 166.
[174] Ibid: 162-164, 167.
[175] Magesa 1997: 214.
[176] Of South Africa, Zimbabwe and Botswana.
[177] Mbiti 2008: 164.

living-dead and the spirits. The mediums are regular people most of the time but when a spirit possesses them, they can help the living receive messages to guide them with large or smaller things in life. Another specialist is the diviner, which is primarily concerned with divination, most often in correlation with medicine. Mbiti describes them as friends of the community that act like counsellors, comforters or problem solvers. African communities also have a rainmaker in the community, as rain is regarded as a great blessing. Mbiti regards them as '…some of the most important individuals in almost all African societies.'[178] The Zulu of South Africa call rainmakers 'shepherds of heaven'. The rituals and ceremonies connected with rainmaking is often a very important community event, which makes it important for solidarity and unity.[179] These are rough overviews of different specialist in African societies and communities that play an important role in the community. There are many forms of mediums, diviners, medicine-doctors and rainmakers. They all have many diverse methods, and they are found in all societies in Africa as a part of African Traditional Religion. There is an endless amount of rituals and prayers as well. However, in this brief explanation of some aspects of these forms of community co-existence, they all showcase precisely this coming together in the community for the benefit of communal harmony and the preservation of the vital force; the life force.

4.2 THE VITAL FORCE

The vital force is the most central part of the community. This force is part of human beings, and is the basic force of the universe. Without it there is no life. The vital force is what everybody is working towards preserving. After going through rites of initiation one can move forward to the next step, which is the important transmitting of the vital force. In uniting two communities in marriage, they become one entity, one people. Marriage is what the survival of kinship depends on. A marriage will establish strong bonds between the two people coming from different families and clans. All this is not to say that each community in the sub-Saharan countries share the same 'kinship-relationship terminologies', as Magesa puts it. The kinship structures can be patrilineal, matrilineal, unilateral or bilateral. However, the importance of marriage and the continuing of the vital force remains largely the same wherever one goes. Thus, the family as created by marriage '…is the "fundamental element" and the "basic sphere of action" in African relationships.'[180]

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[178] Mbiti 2008: 174.
[179] Ibid: 174,176.
[180] Magesa 1997: 115-116, 119.

The whole clan has a responsibility to honour the obligation of reproducing in order to maintain the community's well-being. Magesa argues that this is why solidarity is the most important feature within and between families.[181] In the community there is put serious emphasis on the need to become married. Each person has a moral obligation to marry and have children so that the social community's life cycle is not interrupted. An interruption would be devastating for the community. Marriage does not only affect the social factors in a community, it also affects the economic, political and religious factors in the community. Marriage more than any other aspect of life affects the society as a whole.[182] When focusing on marriage, I will look at the surroundings of how a marriage takes place, and how it preserves the vital force. An important part pertaining to marriage is bridewealth, which will be the following focus. It is an important ceremonial undertaking to ensure the well being of the bride and the bridegroom's clans, and also the two people becoming a married couple, which is done through bridewealth. Furthermore, the preparations for life in society and marriage through initiation rites and taboos are aspects needed to complete the picture of how important the vital force is in the community. All these parts together emphasise the crucial value of the vital force, and provide guidelines for its maintenance.

4.2.1 MARRIAGE

In African religion the process of marriage is a step-by-step development, which integrates the community, '… it is not an end in itself, it is a means to an end.'[183] There are several ceremonies in different places; all varying from community to community. However, as Bishop Kaseba of the Democratic Republic of Congo stresses, the gradual process is taken with the utmost seriousness. Making sure everyone is involved in the marriage process, helping the couple towards a lasting union of marriage. This whole process is what makes a marriage. Two families are coming together, at the same time as one of the partners are leaving their homestead. The gradual approach to a complete marriage union is taking every party into consideration allowing alliances to be formed and a growing together of families. This gradual process also allows for interruption if the parties prove incompatible. An interruption is not regarded as a divorce when the process is not complete, it is just recognised and accepted as an attempted marriage that did not go into fruition. When the true meaning and purpose of marriage has been accepted and decided, a child is the last step

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[181] Magesa 1997: 121.
[182] Ibid: 119-121.
[183] Ibid: 125.

towards marriage. '...[W]ithout children ... marriage has no meaning.'[184] This is because children are the symbol of the transmission and preservation of the force of life. Without children, there is no further life. When a child is born, a marriage should under no circumstances end. This is because the demands of marriage extend beyond the present life. In many instances, in case of death of a parent, a sister or brother should replace him or her. When a child is born the husband and wife are inextricably bound to one another, as are their families and communities. This causes the two people, families and communities to expand, and realise their humanity, as they are able to live in '...a larger circle of human beings.'[185] The members of the expanding community attain their full humanity as a result of togetherness, which is a direct consequence of marriage. Not only for the coming together of the two persons and communities, but also because the ancestral union can only be achieved through children.[186]

With the purpose of maintaining the vital force, African communities have different solutions to situations that put this in jeopardy. The marriage bond is so profoundly strong that death does not necessarily spell a broken bond. There are unions prepared to deal with the event of death, or infertility, to continue fostering life in the community.[187] One such solution is a levirate union, where a man marries his deceased brother's wife. The children born through this union belong to the deceased man and inherit from his estate. Similarly, the woman is not married again, only living in the same house as her 'caretaker'. It is the responsibility of the deceased husband's relatives to take care of his wife, and secure their survival through children. If there are no men to step into this role, a widow may be treated as a man and take a 'wife'. This wife may have sexual relations with other men, but the children are still counted as the widow's, who is their 'father'. Another solution to a problematic situation is a wife having her sister be a co-wife. If a woman is married and discovers she is barren there is great shame to befall her family and clan. In this 'sororate' marriage the sister would conceive and give birth to the children of her sister and her husband's family and clan. In this way the vital force is secured. In other cases, a man may die without children and a woman will marry him after he has died and carry babies into his name. This is known as a ghost marriage. According to Magesa, sexual relations of any kind are deemed ethical, as the purpose they serve is above all else.[188] The maintenance and

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[184] Magesa 1997: 126.
[185] Ibid: 128.
[186] Ibid: 127-128.
[187] Ibid: 135.
[188] Ibid: 140-141.

transmittance of the vital force in order for communal harmony is the most important part of African Traditional Religion and the African community. However, one can assume that the sexual relations need to be legitimated through the community. In most instances homosexual relations are not permitted, which means Magesa's statement is not quite correct. This is, however, not a topic that will be addressed in this thesis.

There are preparations for marriage and the transmittance of the vital force through initiation rites. These rites that coincide with puberty teaches boys and girls about maturity and responsibilities, but also about sex and family life. According to Mbiti, initiation could be characterised as a '…sanctification and preparation for marriage', and when these rites are over the boys and girls have become men and women, ready and allowed to become married. After being taught the ways of the adults, one can choose a marriage partner. The parents of the woman, or the parents of the man can choose a partner on behalf of their children. Preferably the choices are made from outside of the clan, so as to assure healthy offspring. Relatives can also be involved in choosing a partner, and in some instances the young women or men make their own choices, leaving the marriage negotiations up to their parents and relatives. When a partner is chosen the courtship can begin, where generally no rites are used. Although in some societies there are ways of symbolising the pending union of the families. If the partners decide they wish to stay with each other after the period of courting, they can marry. There is no set wedding ceremony in African Traditional Religion, and the ways in which marriage is consecrated are very diverse. According to Mbiti, some societies have ceremonies over several days filled with rituals for the occasion, whereas some fight symbolically in order to incorporate the bride into her new clan. Although it is not always the woman who goes to live with the man's family and clan, in matrilocal communities the man comes to live with his wife's family. In some instances there is no ceremony until a child is underway. In these cases the woman and man live together until the baby is conceived.[189] Either way, most commonly there are negotiations surrounding the union of two people, where bridewealth is the most important topic.

4.2.2 BRIDEWEALTH

Solidification of unity in marriage comes through bridewealth. It is not a matter of purchasing a wife, but rather a recognition of the women's clan's work in raising the bride. Creating this type of bond between two families makes for a stable union. Not paying

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[189] Mbiti 2008: 130-135.

bridewealth leaves the couple to be married in limbo. There is the uncertainty of which clan a child between the two will belong to, which ancestors will be the child's guides, and what place will the child, as well as his/her parents have in the clan. The man will for instance lose his rights to naming,[190] which means neither he or his family have any rights connected with the child. The woman might also have trouble fitting into her new home, or in making connections to his family, without the exchange of bridewealth. The instability of the community and union when there is no bridewealth is precisely what the community in general is working against. Bridewealth, as other traditions, are in place to ensure the stability of the community. And stability is synonymous with preserving the vital force. Bridewealth is a way of solemnising the father-mother status, ahead of the husband-wife status, as pointed out by Magesa. Bridewealth means that the security of the child is prioritised, at the same time as one is honouring the parents on both sides who have already secured the vital force to be carried through in their children.[191] The bridewealth is designed to take the place of the bride in her family after she leaves. It also symbolises the bride's value in her family, and what a loss it will be when she leaves. The family of the bride do give gifts to the groom's family, although smaller in size, as thanksgiving.[192]

According to Schapera'…the basic point of bride-wealth has to do with life, the proper identification of the offspring and their confirmation into and within a certain clan whose life is increased on account of their birth.'[193] This view is echoed among the Azande of Sudan, the Gikuyu and the Kipsigis of Kenya, the Kwaya of Tanzania, the Akan of Ghana and the Ivory Coast and the Thonga of South Africa. According to Henri Junod, the bridewealth creates solidarity between the two communities as the exchange of it takes place in public. Due to bridewealth the marriage is harder to break up on '…account of its social, psychological, and ritual significance.'[194] And the children born into this union are given an identity and legitimacy.[195] When the marriage has been sealed with bridewealth and realised by having children, the four most important things in human life have been enabled:

> '1) it has re-presented (made present among the living) the life force of departed ancestors by way of naming; 2) it has given the parents the assurance of life with the ancestors in that they will in turn be remembered by being named after; 3) it has ensured continuation of the life of the clan

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[190] To be explained in 4.3.1.
[191] Magesa 1997: 128-135.
[192] Mbiti 2008: 137.
[193] Schapera in Magesa 1997: 130.
[194] Henri Junod in Magesa 1997: 131.
[195] Magesa 1997: 131.

in this world by increasing vital force through new members; and 4) comprising all the above, it has tied the bond of communion between the living, the living-dead, and the yet-to-be-born.'[196]

John Mbiti characterises marriage as the focus of existence for African peoples. All members of a community come together over a marriage; this includes the living and the yet-to-be-born. As much as it is a rhythm of life it is a duty for the good of the society and community. Refusing to marry is a rejection of society, and in return the society rejects them. Mbiti sees procreation as a means of sealing the marriage, as man's attempt to recapture what he refers to as the lost gift of immortality. Procreating then becomes a way in which a man can contribute the seed of life towards the struggle against the original immortality. One is also perpetuating the chain of humanity. Without creating descendants the fire of life is put out as the living-dead lose their opportunity to be reincarnated. As long as one is remembered one is not dead. To not be remembered is the worst punishment for any person, as it means they are utterly cut off from society; one is disconnected without any links with mankind. Therefore, the greatest hope for a person and the community is marriage.[197]

4.2.3 INITIATION AND TABOOS

Another aspect of life, which confirms the importance and impermeable capacity of the vital force is a rite of initiation. During a person's childhood one is instructed in the life of the clan, making sure the members of the community become ready to take on the moral responsibilities of being part of the clan and community. According to Magesa, the societal rights and responsibilities of the individual are achieved during the initiation rites of puberty. The life force of the individual is confirmed formally and becomes imprinted in the rational consciousness of the individual.[198] According to Magesa, there are five areas that are stressed during the initiation. These are '…religion, the mystery of life and death, domestic and social virtues, sex and sexuality, and forms of self-identity.'[199] Initiation usually has five steps that needs to be followed, which are: '…seclusion, instruction, physical impression (either actual or symbolic), integration, and covenant.'[200] The Ndebele of South Africa, Zimbabwe and Botswana have a short ceremony to celebrate the changes of puberty in boys and girls. Mbiti describes the ceremony.

'When a boy has his first night emission of sperms, he gets up early the next morning, before other people are up, and goes naked to the river where he washes himself. Then he returns home and

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[196] Magesa 1997: 135.
[197] Mbiti 2008: 130-131.
[198] Magesa 1997: 95.
[199] Ibid: 97.
[200] Ibid: 96.

stands outside the homestead near the gateway that leads to the cattle shed. When other boys see him there, they come over and beat him with sticks. He flees into the woods and remains there for two or three days, being carefully watched by other boys. During that time he is not allowed to eat food in the daytime, but only at night. When the period is over, he returns home and is given medicated food by the traditional doctor. This is done ceremoniously. The medicine-man puts maize meal at the end of a stick which he thrusts at him and the boy must take hold of it with his mouth. When he succeeds in doing so the medicine-man gives him three or four blows with a stick. People say this makes the boy hard. His father and relatives give him presents of cattle, sheep and goats.'[201]

According to Mbiti, the days in the forest symbolise the death and resurrection of the boys, and childhood is left behind through the act of washing. The whole rite is a preparation for life as an adult. When the boy is considered 'hard' it is seen as an approval of the boy that means he can be incorporated into the wider society. Only when a boy is deemed ready to take on the responsibilities of the wider society, can he take part. Washing symbolises the girls' initiation rite, which takes place after their first menstruation. A big feast is prepared for the girl, who is now allowed to be married.[202]

A very important part of initiation rites is the emphasis on sexuality. Information and instruction about sex is vital as the transmittance and preservation of the life force is dependent on a sound understanding of sex. According to Magesa, there is a focus on the pleasure of sex, but also on the responsibility of sexual interaction.[203] Taboos serve a similar task in African communities. There is emphasis on keeping sex within the practices that promote life and the vital force. According to Magesa, many taboos are centred on blood. A person's blood can be either hot or cold, where hot represents a condition that is dangerous to others. For instance, among the Kgatla of Botswana, people who have just had intercourse are considered hot and can therefore not partake in certain rituals. Also widows are hot for a whole year after their husband has died. A woman is similarly hot during menstruation, pregnancy and after birth. Among the Mbuti of the D.R. Congo a man whose wife is menstruating cannot take part in hunting. He is also banned from hunting when his wife is pregnant or has just given birth. Her blood needs cooling down before he can hunt once again. Several peoples of Africa have forbidden any contact with menstrual blood. If the taboos are broken the consequences can be dire. For instance, a man who has intercourse with a menstruating woman can become impotent. More serious than the taboo regarding blood, is the incest taboo. The list of kin one cannot have sexual relations with is large, and is so important because of the confusion that arises when incest is committed. They share

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[201] Mbiti 2008: 127-128.
[202] Ibid: 128.
[203] Magesa 1997: 98.

their vital power with one another, and if incest takes place that clan relationship must end right away. Sex and sexuality, Magesa stresses, are sacred ways of preserving and transmitting the vital force. Taboos ensure the correct use of sex in the community, so as not to jeopardise the continuation of life.[204]

During initiation rites among the Thonga of South Africa, there are not only those being initiated who are not allowed sex, but also those guarding the initiates. Breaking these rules could result in death. People in the village who are married may have sexual relations, as long as there is no noise, not even from quarrels. Imparting the responsibilities of sex and the concern for life is very important. Circumcision and scarification in African communities are primarily carried out as a physical reminder of the importance of life. The operation in this case is deliberately painful, so as to make a lasting impression of the importance of life.[205] These rites confirm the importance of the vital force, and how vital it is for the community to secure its well-being, which in turn secures the well-being of the entire community. There are complicated societal structures in place to always ensure that the vital force is being taken care of. Each community, each clan, has their own ways of preserving and transmitting the vital force, knowing that without the continuation of the life force, there would be nothing left. Although modern day African countries' development has changed the family and clan structures, as well as the homestead itself, there is evidence of life enforcing structures in societies. Even though it cannot be proven how far back structures like this go, they are linked to ubuntu through the valuing of life in order to maintain harmony between people, as well as nature.

4.3 ANCESTORS

Ancestors, or the living-dead, are the closest link between humans and the spirit world. This is because they are still part of the families they until recently lived with, but they are also close to the spirit world. The ancestors are considered to be people, not spirits or things. Generally, it is the oldest member of the family of the living who is contacted by the ancestor. They contact the still living to enquire about family affairs, but also to warn against dangers as well as disapproving of those who have not followed their instructions. Ancestors are considered the guardians of the family they once lived amongst. If a member of the still living family breaks tradition or has questionable ethics, this is ultimately an offence against the ancestors, as they are the ones upholding rules and the best interest of

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[204] Magesa 1997: 143, 149-153.
[205] Magesa 1997: 98.

the family. Their authority lies in that they have one foot in either camp, the visible and the invisible. They have recently been living, and therefore know and understand the needs of the family. At the same time, as they have died, they have open channels to the spirits and the Supreme Being. According to John Mbiti the ancestors are wanted and not wanted. Even though they are the link between the living and the spirit world, if they visit too frequently people are likely to resent them. At the same time, the ancestors can act revenge upon the family if they were not buried properly, or if they were offended near their death. If the family does not share food with the ancestors, as one is supposed to in order to say 'welcome' as well as 'goodbye', the ancestors can show their anger by way of misfortune or illness.[206]

4.3.1 NAMING

The significance of names in African societies is not to be underestimated. A person usually bears more than one name. A name can come from circumstances surrounding his or her birth, or a similarity with ancestors or elders discovered upon birth, as well as an ancestor's wish. A person may bear a name recalling hard times that were a fact when they were born. According to Magesa, this will remind the family of these times and that they do not want that to happen again. A person can be named after desirable events, physical or moral qualities, like for instance 'luck' or 'charity'. Having names like this will function as a reminder to oneself and the surroundings how important these qualities or events are, all in an attempt to preserve the vital force. This is also why ancestors take such an interest in the naming of a child. According to Magesa, in most cases of birth it is an ancestor's vital force returning to earth and the family. Often this means that the ancestor will want the child named after him or her. This will imbue the child to live up to the characteristics and moral qualities of the ancestor. Being raised this way strengthens the connection between the ancestors and the still living. Remembering ancestors through naming means the whole clan will benefit from the vital force being brought back as it is transmitted to the whole clan. Not naming children after ancestors, but rather after events, things, seasons and so on preserve the link between creation and humanity reminding the clan that the life force of humanity and nature are inseparable.[207]

An ancestor is a role model, a guide in life and an advisor for those still living. Their existence relies on being remembered by the still living. A person's children are the first

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[206] Mbiti 2008: 82-83.
[207] Magesa 1997: 90-91.

who can make this happen. If one has lived a morally good life, one's children will do the same. This means that they will fulfil their obligation to the clan, to be married and give birth to children, and these children will in turn do the same. These children might be named after the ancestor most directly connected to them, most often a grandparent. If that is not possible, the next in line will be the next choice.[208] 'Naming involves the incarnation or actualisation of a person (an ancestor), a certain desired moral quality or value, a physical trait or power, or an occasion or event.'[209] A name has deeper meaning because one asks for a personality, status or destiny. This is a form of reincarnation where the life force of a person no longer living inhabits, protects and shapes the character of the newly born. This is how the deceased keep on living in the community; they become a central beholder and distributor of the vital force. According to Magesa, the more children who are connected to one ancestor the more power their vital force gains, which will contribute positively to the family, clan or lineage. The rite of naming completes the transmission of life, of the vital force.[210]

Among the Luo of Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda, the baby will be given a name whilst crying. If the crying ends when a particular name of an ancestor is named, that name will be given to the newborn baby. The newborn babies among the Akamba of Kenya receive their name on the third day of their life. This is an occasion marked by a feast, followed the next day by the father of the child hanging an iron necklace around the baby's neck. This symbolises that the baby has lost touch with the sprit world and is now fully human. Both these acts of naming show the importance of a name and how it is chosen, as well as what it means for the new baby being born into a community.[211] 'The physical aspects of birth and the ceremonies that might accompany pregnancy, birth and childhood, are regarded with religious feeling and experience – that another religious being has been born into a profoundly religious community and religious world.'[212] Not only do these examples of the importance of naming and bringing children into the world prove the religious nature of African communities, it also shows acts of ubuntu and confirms ubuntu's religious grounding.

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[208] Magesa 1997: 76-79.
[209] Magesa 1997: 89, Mbiti 2008: 115.
[210] Magesa 1997: 89.
[211] Mbiti 2008: 116.
[212] Ibid: 117.

4.4 CONCLUSION

Through the processes that restore or maintain the vital force, ubuntu can be said to exist in the everyday lives of people, ingrained in the social structures that promote the well-being, shared identity and harmony of the community. Ubuntu can be found in the preservation of the balance between all things and all forces in the universe, which directly affects the community. Ubuntu can be connected to good deeds, selflessness and generosity. However, the question of ubuntu is more complex than acts of kindness. Ubuntu is found in every aspect of life, and is the root of the structures, functions and relationships that make the community. This chapter has shown where ubuntu can be located. Although the word is not vocally expressed, the actions of people are still connected with ubuntu. Through these structures and processes in the community ubuntu gains history, authenticity and relevance.

4   UTILISING UBUNTU

This chapter will focus on ubuntu as a part of nation building in South Africa. Ubuntu features prominently in the discussion of how this work of nation building has developed. Ubuntu has proved to be a cornerstone in making out what South Africa should be, although this is not unanimously agreed upon. The main theme of this chapter is nation building; therefore the chapter will start by focusing on discussing what constitutes the building of a nation, which preconditions South Africa has for this endeavour. Further there will be focus on what processes are included in the building of a nation, in an African and a South African context. The largest obstacle faced by South Africa in their post-apartheid country, is the question of what exactly they are rebuilding and what this new nation should be built upon. Following this, I will more closely focus on the difficult question of a South African historical narrative. How important is this in nation building and in South Africa particular? Can a unified historical narrative be created? This leads us to the second part of this chapter, which focuses on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). The TRC represents one element of nation building, and has been important in demarcating the path of the country. Therefore I will discuss their mandate and how reconciliation was chosen over amnesia or retribution. In addition to this, I will look at the role of religion in the proceedings of the TRC, as well as how reconciliation can constitute or prepare for nation building. After this I will focus on the actual impact of the TRC on the regular person, and how one can say that the TRC indeed filled a position that was needed in order for the country to take necessary steps forward. Finally, there is an example of ubuntu in practice, showing how impactful the call for reconciliation has been for people in South Africa. Professor Jonathan Jansen of the University of the Free State employed reconciliation, and by default ubuntu, in dealing with a disturbing act performed by students from this university. This will show ubuntu working in a wider community context and being moulded into a context of modern democracy. Rather than be proof of the inautheticity of ubuntu, seeing that it is being utilised for a specific and important purpose, this proves the relevance, progression and adaptation of ubuntu. Ubuntu evolves, as it has always done, in order to accommodate the need of balance, harmony, well-being and shared identity in the community.

5.1 NATION BUILDING

'These [past wrongs] can now be addressed on the basis that there is a need for understanding but not for vengeance, a need for reparation but not for retaliation, a need for

ubuntu but not for victimisation.'[213] These are words taken from the 1993 Interim Constitution of South Africa, which built the basis from which the Truth and Reconciliation Commission could exist. The word ubuntu is specifically featured when talking of how to move forward after the end of apartheid. The word is not found in the revised and final constitution of 1996, but ubuntu in the sense of a new human rights oriented society can be seen all the way through.[214] As mentioned previously,[215] the word ubuntu first appeared officially in the constitution of the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) in 1975. The movement used ubuntu as a basis for their political programme propagating the economic emancipation of the Zulus, which later was refashioned towards national liberation.[216] Without alluding to a collaborative link between the African National Congress (ANC) and the IFP, who have had several disagreements in the liberation struggle and beyond,[217] the ANC made use of ubuntu nearly two decades later. The difference between the two uses is the political agenda. Whereas the IFP used ubuntu as a guiding principle for their political organisation, the ANC made use of it as a non-political call for unity. One cannot bypass the fact that the ANC is a political party, one that evolved from a liberation organisation. However, the continued struggle for reconciliation and unity after the fall of apartheid was seen as a struggle that surpassed politics.

In one way it can be argued that there was no other way for South Africa to commence the work of creating a nation. There had never existed a modern democratic state in South Africa, and there had never existed a unified nation or state where all inhabitants were factored into all decisions. As stated in chapter one, the suppression of South Africa started long before the apartheid regime was made official in 1948. No people native to South Africa had ever experienced freedom or equal opportunities. As Desmond Tutu states in his book *No Future Without Forgiveness*, he had to wait until he was 62 to vote for the first time, and Nelson Mandela until he was 76.[218] In more than one way South Africa had to start from scratch when this lack of positive past that could form a collective narrative was missing. Those oppressed had a collective narrative of being oppressed, and the oppressors had a collective narrative of being oppressors. However, without suppressing the past, one had to join these to collective narratives into one and make a new present and future.

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[213] South African Government Information 2012. 'Constitution of the Republic of South Africa Act 200 of 1993.'
[214] South African Government Information 2012. 'Constitution of the Republic of South Africa No. 108 of 1996.'
[215] In 2.1.5
[216] Eze 2009: 103.
[217] Christie 2000: 32, 133-138.
[218] Tutu 2000: 13.

5.1.1 THE NATION STATE

In discussing nation building one must naturally address the question of the nation-state; what is it? Kwame Gyekye[219] differentiates between two conceptions of the nation that is relevant here: nation as an ethno cultural community and nation as a multinational state. The first sense of the nation is based on the etymology of the word nation, which is 'birth group', or 'blood related group'. Gyekye calls this the original meaning of the word nation where there is emphasis on avoiding mixing of races and nationalities, as 18th Century German philosopher G.W. Herder put it.[220] Central to this understanding of nation is the belief that one shares ancestral heritage, in addition to sharing culture, language, history and (possibly) territory. Gyekye proposes that the nation in its original sense and the ethno cultural community share definitional boundaries with one another. The shared identity in the sense of cohesion based on blood ties found in the relations between people in this instance speaks to this, according to Gyekye. In many cases, even in modern multinational states, people still equate ethnicity and national affiliation. According to Gyekye, a nation does not need to be a static construct; it can also be fluid without physical country boundaries. The Jewish people referred to a Jewish state before there was one in existence, and Arab leaders often refer to the Arab nation, even though no such thing officially exists. A state therefore becomes an entity where there is sovereign political power, at the centre, which in turn becomes a nation-state when there is a culturally homogenous nation. However, states are mostly multinational and are still referred to under the umbrella of the nation. Gyekye holds that this means that the meaning of nation has evolved.[221]

The complex entity of the multinational state has now become synonymous with the understanding of nation. The multinational state is comprised of several ethno cultural communities, or nations. This is where the multinational state encounters trouble. Previously, when the components of the state were separated in their nations, there were equal interests and goals among the members of the nations. The heterogeneous entity of the state is not necessarily or naturally based on similar culture, language or blood relations. This is why nation building is an issue for the state, and not the nation in its original sense. According to Gyekye, the state attempts to emulate the unity of the nation, or the homogenous ethno cultural community, in order to create coherence for the state. As he

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[219] Kwame Gyekye 1997. *Tradition and Modernity: Philosophical Reflections on the African Experience.* New York: Oxford University Press.
[220] Ibid: 78.
[221] Ibid: 79-82.

points out, there is never talk of country building or state building, but nation building. This is because the multinational state has to be built, unlike the ethno cultural community that is already one unit. As the multinational state is made up of many of these units, one needs to weld the units together so as to act as if they were one people, one nation, or one ethno cultural community. Many nations make one state, in a sense. That is not to say that one longs to suppress the diversity, but rather to add the moral, social and cultural values of the ethno cultural entity.[222] This view of the multinational state becomes very apparent in South Africa, a country of eleven official languages, 4 main population groupings, and several sub groupings all with roots in Africa, Europe and Asia.[223] With this understanding of the nation, the state and the nation-state in mind we delve deeper into which factors and elements are relevant in the building of South Africa.

5.1.2 THE IMAGINED COMMUNITY

Nigerian-American professor of postcolonial African studies, Michael Onyebuchi Eze calls South Africa prior to 1994 a state without a nation.[224] Greatly applauded Benedict Anderson claims the nation is an imagined community. Even though most citizens of most nations will never meet or know of one another directly, they will still assume them part of their extended community. According to Anderson, this community is marked by a common language, religion and culture. These factors facilitate the national imagery, and are contingent upon a common faith in the community by the members of the community. In addition, some characterise a nation through a common historical narrative, which chronicles that peoples' origins.[225] South Africa had none of these in place. There had been no common language as white people spoke Afrikaans, and it was predominantly their only language. Africans spoke several languages depending on which group they belonged to. There was no common religion, although Christianity was spread by missionaries and widely adopted in the country. The Afrikaner people developed their own version of Christianity, excluding all non-whites. The Afrikaners did not share any culture with non-whites, as by their definition they were the only ones possessing culture. Also, their cultural basis was primarily European, not African.[226] When it comes to the historical archive of South Africa, white and black had experienced similar things, however what they shared most of all was the white suppression of the black. This then constitutes a historical archive,

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[222] Gyekye 1997: 82-85.
[223] SouthAfrica.info 2012. 'South Africa's Population.'
[224] Eze 2009: 104.
[225] Benedict Anderson 2006. *Imagined Communities.* London/New York: Verso. 6.
[226] Eze 2009: 29-31.

however not a particularly good one. By the end of apartheid most traditions and symbols in South Africa, which could tie people together, were mainly reminders of what had been. Even the holidays implemented by the apartheid government celebrated events which non-whites either had no connection to, no good connection to or an opposite connection to. The latter can be seen in the December 16 celebration of the Battle of Blood River known as Day of the Covenant, which black people call Dingane's Day or Heroes' Day.[227]

This national history will cement a common past and make this relevant in the present.[228] According to Michael Eze, when talking of identity one is also talking of the 'other'. An identity can only be created in relation to something else; therefore a nation is defined by its borders with other nations. This mainly constitutes a national language that will make it easier to spot outsiders coming in to their demarcated space.[229] This is necessary to point out in order to clarify, as Michael Eze, claims that the colonial South Africa was a state without a nation. The scenario Eze sees as absent in colonial South Africa, is an open-ended convergence of historical memory and past, which causes him to agree with Gellner in that nationalism creates nations where they do not already exist, rather than being seen as a tool for the reawakening of nations. This is what Eze argues South Africa now must do; transform this new state into a nation-state. 'The new South Africa as a location of multiple and often contradictory identities needs its own story in its imaginary formation as a nation.'[230] In trying to find out how South Africa can make a social transformation into a nation through social engineering, Eze finds answers in the creation of social and political myths. This way the new national consciousness can be invented. He stresses that as a narrative, a myth is not necessarily untrue. A myth will have a virtue in retelling the story over generations, and in this way appears central in aspect of social order and can narrate the human experience. It has, however, to be viewed as an allegory.[231]

5.1.3 PROCESSES IN NATION BUILDING

Eze further elaborates on the case of a myth in regards to the nation. Eze argues that a nation's coherence is not dependent on narratives of a unified past, but rather a confluence of narratives. Eze claims that this shows how nation building is a project in continuity. This makes the nation a dynamic discursive formation, according to Eze, not a fixed social

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[227] Eze 2009: 129.
[228] Ibid: 104.
[229] Ibid.
[230] Ibid: 106.
[231] Ibid: 106-108.

imaginary. He further argues that in this view the myth is not a given element in nation building but argues nonetheless for its importance for young nations as it can in this instance act as a solidifier of the meaning of the new nation.[232] Furthermore, a nation often focuses on finding its 'other' when defining itself in order to have something to distance itself from, thereby creating what they are through what they are not.

In discussing nation building it is crucial to look at the frames around which this takes place and keep in mind that the creation of nationhood is a process. This process involves a social formation that needs a specific ideological form that has to be more than just political values. This means that nationhood has to be based on something previous, and cannot rely completely on the current political values. The process of creating nationhood cannot exist alone or in isolation.[233] The nation that had been invented during apartheid was one of otherness. Apartheid was dependent on the existence of its other, the African natives, to legitimise their existence and dominance. Without an other to mirror their identity the Afrikaner could not separate themselves and see themselves as different.[234] Of course, racism played a crucial part of apartheid in South Africa. Supported by Anderson, Eze claims that with national boundaries racism becomes an instrument of oppression and domination. This is typical of colonial racism, which focused a great deal on class rather than the purity of the nation.[235] The initial motivation for this way of governing was finances. In order to secure the financial values in South Africa, all not worthy of possessing it should be excluded. This in turn became systemised discrimination based on the colour of one's skin.[236] This is not to say there was not a class-based system between the whites of South Africa. However, they all had access to the same societal benefits.

Post-apartheid South Africa should be treated as other postcolonial countries in that the end of apartheid does signify the end of colonialism in South Africa. This poses challenges for the South African society, as any other, in that 'the white man' has oppressed the native peoples of South Africa for centuries. Eze points out the dangers connected with racism in a postcolonial context where he argues national culture and discourse '...can become manipulated to enhance reverse racial discrimination...'[237] Therefore, the national identity of South Africa is intertwined with a national discourse to create one national memory,

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[232] Eze 2009: 109.
[233] Ibid: 112.
[234] Ibid: 124.
[235] Ibid: 112.
[236] Ibid: 24-26.
[237] Ibid: 112-113.

where the country has a history of several memories. This is a challenge when one is creating a new national identity.[238] In Fanon's view, the rehabilitation of a nation can lie in the claim to a past national culture. This can offer the native population or the oppressed a trace of the unity or imagery they want or miss. In the context of South Africa this seems very relevant, as apartheid systematically negated the other person's identity and humanity. Giving those previously historyless access to a national culture could cause a significant change in them and how they view their identity, which will further assist in the project of nation building. The first embodiment of providing the native, as Fanon calls the oppressed people of South Africa in this instance, with a national culture was embodied by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). This new public history, that legitimised the existence of the TRC, redefined past historical moments through a new interpretation of the previous narrative. Other attempts at redefinition were the discussion on the fate of Robben Island in 1992, merging the Afrikaner's Day of the Covenant with the liberation movements Heroes' Day, the fusion between the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) and the military wing of the liberation movement, the new South African flag and the new national anthem, all merging the old with the new.[239] These were conscious attempts by the government to '...achieve a contemporaneous shared time, a sense of national inclusiveness, a national core by assimilating the old into the new order.'[240]

5.1.4 UBUNTU AND HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

Eze purports that through the TRC, ubuntu became a symbol of public history in South Africa offering a break from the past. Ubuntu introduced two modes of forgiveness, according to Eze, one essentialist and one performative.

> 'On the one hand, the power of forgiveness is in the hand of the victim who appeals to his cultural tradition (ubuntu) as a source of that power (essentialist). One the other hand, reconciliation is achieved in fulfilment to the bargain with the nationalist party (performative).'[241]

Eze underlines that there is debate surrounding whether or not the TRC succeeded in restoring 'agency' and 'voice', meaning power, to the subjects of the proceedings. Eze continues by saying that the attempt to restore power to people created a window through which a possibility for a collective memory became apparent. These shared images that make up collective memory will aid in the construction of nationhood, and the imagined

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[238] Eze 2009: 113.
[239] Ibid: 120-121.
[240] Ibid: 121.
[241] Ibid: 127.

community. According to Brewer a nation needs a common historical narrative, a common view of the journey towards nationhood as well as a common identity, which will bring out common solidarity.[242] Eze claims that in creating a nation, whether or not the myth one bases the nation on is factually true or what is desired to be true is less important. What is important is where this takes the nation. In the case of South Africa Eze sees that many African intellectuals have written about their history, and especially in regards to ubuntu, as a means of writing about their own identity. During colonialism the identity of the African was suppressed and deconstructed, and South Africa suffered under colonialism longer than any other African country, when justly factoring in apartheid. All of these writings on African philosophy and intellectual history are an attempt of regaining one's lost identity in order to rehabilitate one's subjectivity. All of this is part and parcel, according to Eze, of attempting to create a collective memory and build a nation in South Africa.[243] In Eze's quest to place ubuntu firmly in the South African imaginary, he does discuss a vital issue in the South African case; the past. Nation building is in part reliant on the ability to look back into its past. The process of creating nationhood is, as Eze puts it, '… mediated by constant referent to a past tradition or a presupposition of a phantasmal imagination of a past.'[244] Without the ability to invent or imagine a past there can be no nation. Kumar and Hobsbawn share the view that a nation with no past is a contradiction. The future, as well as the present, is dictated in a large degree by the common image of a common past. However, this past need not be authentic according to French 19th Century scholar Ernest Renan, as the nation is a dynamic entity ever evolving. Extremism connected with nationalism comes from failing to see this asset of the nation, insisting on absolutism of the phenomenon.[245]

In creating a narrative of the past, the myth needs substantive content in order to withstand the process, and so the myth is suffused with invented traditions filled with memories. This will give the myth legitimacy, according to Eze. This is what he argues to have happened with ubuntu in South Africa. As a myth '… ubuntu infuses a *virtuelle* gemeinschaft [as an ideological basis] for a unified postapartheid South Africa; it functions to preserve an illusion of coherence and contemporaneity.'[246] In order for a new national consciousness to be created, ubuntu was projected on the nation as it was seen as historic, traditional, inclusive and stabile, in clear opposition to the previous national consciousness, which was

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[242] Eze 2009: 127.
[243] Ibid: 127-128.
[244] Ibid: 146.
[245] Ibid: 147.
[246] Ibid: 148.

false, racist, exclusive and unsafe.[247] Because the community of a nation already is imagined, what does it matter if the national narrative and consciousness is also imagined? This is Eze's point of departure for fitting ubuntu into the South African cultural and political narrative. At the same time as being the starting point for a collective memory it provides a point of realisation of the imagined community,[248] which participates in strengthening the new nation. The more solidarity is shared and the more one believes that most everybody is on the same page, the more easily one can continue working for the good of the nation however painful and slow it might be.

The history of South Africa is very traumatic, which needless to say has affected the communities of the country. Families and communities were separated from one another, most notably through the Bantustan homelands created by the apartheid government. Being uprooted from one's land is a traumatic event in any community, and no different in South Africa. However, in South Africa the relationship between people and the land was one of absolute unity. Finding oneself in an alien environment will undeniably have an impact on how people relate to one another, and to their surroundings. At the same time, this uprooting of people does not without question mean that the value systems passed through generations disappears. It adapts. Maybe it adapts into not being as easily visible as previously experienced. And maybe it is sometimes forgotten. This does not mean that placing ubuntu in a public discourse is useless or wrong. It is still clear that many people have a connection to what is being defined as ubuntu. Whether or not people used this very word in the past, or even addressed this value, element or idea so specifically, is irrelevant. It is irrelevant because times change. The new reality in South Africa, where the struggle is no longer the primary focus, craves that people are able to put into words what they want and feel. The state of perpetual bare survival under a heavy weighing threatening machine is over. And although people still struggle, primarily for the bare necessities, the struggle has changed. As has people's view of culture, values and religion, what to do with them and what to use them for. One important part of nation building in South Africa is that this approach to reconciliation and merging of memories seems to embrace the good with the bad. The negativity of the apartheid past is being included in the narrative, alongside all else. Desmond Tutu makes this point when he says 'We are all victims of apartheid'.[249]

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[247] Eze 2009: 148.
[248] Ibid: 148.
[249] Ibid: 128.

5.2 THE TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION

Desmond Tutu, the chairman of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), talks of forgiveness as the ultimate self-service. To forgive reinstates the human's humanity. Not only that, the act of forgiveness gives the perpetrator's humanity back as well. Anything that dehumanises the victim of a crime dehumanises the offender as well. Tutu famously called all South Africans victims of apartheid. The oppressors were also victims under their own regime, as all of our humanity was intertwined with one another. By inflicting endless pain and suffering on the victims, supporters of apartheid were in the end also suffering this same pain. Their way of life was contingent on suppressing other people, which ultimately made a rotten society for all.[250] There is no doubt that while the apartheid regime was being negotiated away, violence in South Africa was ripe. Black, white, coloured, were all caught in what seemed like a dress rehearsal for a civil war. Desmond Tutu seemed very aware of this as he talked of voting for the first time in his life, not knowing what could potentially happen that day. A bomb had exploded at Johannesburg Airport, and there were numerous threats made by right wing extremists.[251] The Truth and Reconciliation Commission was a small but important part of the work towards reconciliation in South Africa. It cannot be viewed outside of the project of nation building. In regards to ubuntu it is the most visible and internationally known attempt to utilise ubuntu for the benefit of constructing a new South Africa. Ubuntu is the backbone of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and features so heavily that it is appropriate to explain the commission in the further discussion of ubuntu in an arena of nation building and also politics. The TRC was a complex undertaking attempting to provide truths of what had been done during the apartheid years, right wrongs and remind and renew the spirit of ubuntu in the minds of all people of South Africa. In explaining their mandate, their structure and their proceedings, a clear picture is given of how prominent the concept of ubuntu was in the making of the commission. It also explains how the TRC came to be viewed as it did, a remarkable forum for those most affected by apartheid. Although there has been much critique of their choices and the outcomes, it has become a sought after template for other countries.

5.2.1 THE MANDATE

Talking of truth commissions generally, Kenneth Christie identifies two main objectives in recovering the truth in such processes. On one hand the commission is to investigate,

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[250] Tutu 2000: 42.
[251] Ibid: 13-16.

document and record the human rights violations under discussion. On the other hand it focuses on transforming the institutions of society from violating to protecting human rights.[252] The Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa played a crucial part in transitioning the country from a gruesome apartheid past, to a waiting brighter future. The TRC played a relatively small role, but it was immeasurably important. The mandate of the TRC was stated in the interim constitution of South Africa. As the new South Africa was emerging after the release of political prisoners and unbanning of political parties, the ANC under the leadership of Nelson Mandela wanted to display openness about the past of the ANC as participants in violence.[253]

In 1995 Nelson Mandela, as South Africa's first democratically elected president signed the Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act, no. 34. This Act gave the TRC their mandate with the boundaries within which they would work. They were to promote '… national unity and reconciliation in a spirit of understanding which might transcend the conflicts and divisions of the past.'[254] The TRC were to deal with gross human rights violations committed between the day of the Sharpeville massacre, March 1 1960, and the day of implementation of the transitional government, December 5 1993. The commission opened on April 15 1996 and did not close until two years later.[255]

The TRC's mandate did not grant them judicial power. They were not able to cast a sentence on anyone they met. They could grant amnesty to people who showed full disclosure and could prove that they had been absolutely truthful about their crimes. The TRC's focus would be political crimes motivated by political views, rather than personal crimes. This has been a point of contention as it is difficult in a history such as South Africa's to distinguish between crimes committed because of politics and not, as the apartheid politics permeated society. It was in the church, in the schools, the workplace, and generally a part of everyday life. However, the line had to be drawn somewhere. The objectives of the TRC was to:

1. account for the methods, policies and causes of human rights violations;
2. attempt to explain the causes of these violations and the consequences for the victims, their relatives and society;
3. facilitate the granting of amnesty and to restore the human and civil dignity of victims by granting them an opportunity to relate their own accounts of the violations suffered;

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[252] Christie 2000: 49.
[253] Ibid: 78-79.
[254] Ibid: 78.
[255] Ibid: 91.

4. to recommend legal and administrative measures to prevent such violations in the future;
5. complete a report which will provide a comprehensive an account as possible of the events and circumstances of past human rights violations.

The commission were separated into three sub-divisions, namely the Human Rights Violation Committee, cataloguing victims' accounts, the Reparations and Rehabilitation Committee, hearing and helping victims, and the Amnesty and Indemnity Committee, focusing on the aspect of justice.[256]

5.2.2 WHY RECONCILIATION, NOT RETRIBUTION?

The transition in South Africa was built on compromise. The ANC was unbanned, and let in to negotiate with the National Party who must have seen their system ready to tumble. The fall of the Soviet Union eliminated the already hard to believe idea that South Africa was the last frontier against the communist threat.[257] The financial state of the country was dire and violence rising when F.W. de Klerk decided to unban the African National Congress (ANC), the Pan African Congress (PAC) and several more political parties, as well as releasing political prisoners, none more important than Nelson Mandela.[258] Amnesty was the golden bargaining card for the National Party when negotiations started, and members of the TRC have stated that without this compromise the country would have fallen apart. Initially the National Party wanted a general amnesty, so that the past could simply be forgotten and the country could move forward. However, this form of general amnesia was not sufficient for the majority, mainly represented by the ANC. Some form of justice and acknowledgement of the past had to be seen. The Nüremberg model was contemplated and discussed, and found too heavy. The cost of such a process would be impossible for the economically strained nation to bear. Not to mention the time it would take to process all those responsible for human rights violations under the apartheid regime, prolonging the pain it would impart. At the same time, and crucially important, there were no winning side in South Africa. One side had not beaten the other, there were no victors of the struggle. In World War 2, Germany had quite clearly lost the war, while the allies had won. There was no strength left in the Nazis. The National Party of South Africa could have continued with the apartheid system without sufficient finances and much of the world against them. But they did not. The last option in South Africa was a truth commission. This had been attempted before, for instance in Chile, and would focus on reconciliation of the opposing sides, not retribution for the

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[256] Christie 2000: 89-90.
[257] Tutu 2000: 44, Christie: 46.
[258] Ibid: 45.

other side.[259] The white population and the National Party strongly advocated leaving the past in the past. Throughout the negotiations for a new government, mainly between the National Party an the ANC, there was unwillingness from the National Party in discussing the human rights violations made on their behalf during apartheid. The ANC engaged a different stance, and President Mandela set up the 'Commission for Enquiry into Complaints by Former African National Congress Prisoners and Detainees' and the 'Commission of Inquiry into Certain Allegations of Cruelty by ANC Members' in 1992 to deal with claims of human rights violations at the hands of the party and their military wing Umkhonto we Sizwe.[260] Although some party members thought their cause was just and the TRC were too harsh on violations by the party in their proceedings,[261] some ANC members and other majority groups of South Africa favoured a Nuremberg approach towards the actions of the NP and other white people committing crimes during apartheid. They felt that court justice was the only way to free the population from the past of South Africa. The only correct way to deal with these violations was to be within the frames of the court of law.[262] Desmond Tutu states that a Nüremberg type of trial would put an unmanageable strain on the already shattered South African economy. After years of sanctions by the international community and boycotts of their exports, the economy hardly had a heartbeat. Tutu goes on to explain the outlandish costs of two trials of apartheid government officials prior to the commencement of the TRC's proceedings.[263] If similar treatment should be given to all NP officials, the trials would go on for many years, never closing the chapter of the horrid past. However, for those who did not apply for amnesty the TRC would recommend prosecution.[264] At the same time reparations and programmes for solving the social imbalance caused by apartheid would have been utterly impossible to sustain. Further, the collective amnesia wished and fought for by the National Party would free money for programmes rectifying the social differences, but could not give the oppressed population recognition for what had happened to them, their families and communities.[265] It would forever then be the elephant in the room, so to speak. The ANC and the majority populations of South Africa did not see this as sufficient. So, within the financial restrictions and with the feeling of justice in mind, a truth commission was selected as the medium through which the

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[259] Christie 2000: 45, 56, 66-69.
[260] Ibid: 78-79.
[261] Ranghild Drange 2000. *Human Rights, Reconciliation and Democratic Consolidation - A case study of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission.* Thesis - UiO. 85.
[262] Christie 2000: 121, 165.
[263] Tutu 2000: 35.
[264] Christie 2000: 124.
[265] Tutu 2000: 38, 39-40.

past would be addressed. There would be no legal prosecution for criminal acts committed, but amnesty for those who revealed all their own wrongdoings in front of the commission as well as the victims and/or next-of-kin.[266] An apology was not a requirement for amnesty, and not the goal of the exercise.[267] The victims and/or next-of-kin were given an opportunity to tell the commission their side of the story and forgive their perpetrator(s) if they so wished. There are stories of people who could not have gone on with their lives without the TRC and stories of people who could, or did not find it as satisfying and cleansing as the would have hoped to. Also, some of the criticisms of the TRC regard how the commission mainly dealt with gross human rights violations, not the systematic nature of the apartheid regime, or smaller cases of ruined lives.[268] However, the line had to be drawn somewhere. The argument for this is that the exercise of reconciliation in the TRC is just that, an exercise, and the people participating are seen to be representative of the larger population. And in viewing the bigger picture presented in the end, one would see the framework of a systematically detrimental regime.

5.2.3 RELIGION AND THE TRC

It seems that research on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission focus mainly on the social sciences. There is not much mention of religion, unless it is criticism of the choice of an Archbishop to be its head.[269] When it comes to nation building, there is little scholarly emphasis on religion. This could be the case because scholars are afraid to meddle another element into the reconciliation process. South Africa's history sees Christianity coming in with the British, trumping the native religions (especially on the West coast). Christianity was then taken over by the Afrikaners and turned into a twisted religious ethno-racial belief, all the while suppressing what they viewed as inferior animalistic religion of the Africans. Today South Africa has all sorts of Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, and African Traditional Religion, or an amalgamation of Christianity and ATR. Religion plays an important part in nation building and the reconciliation process, just as it played an important role in the struggle for freedom. According to Kenneth Christie, one of the most practical and revealing aspects of the work of the TRC was the number of discovered bodies. These bodies were exhumed and returned to their families. Christie himself devotes no more than a paragraph to this, saying only that: 'One commissioner informed me that for

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[266] Tutu 2000: 41, 52.
[267] Christie 2000: 13, 155, 166.
[268] Ibid: 152.
[269] Ibid: 166.

African people that grave was significant; it was an important point of remembrance that they could point to and say there is my father's grave, my mother's grave, and so on. They could in that sense have something to identify that that person once lived.'[270]

What Christie neglects to see here is the actual importance of this. For the family and the community, these burials might have proven more important than any other aspect of the TRC. This alone may be enough to foster a sense of reconciliation among the people who were able to bury their loved ones properly. Among the Ndebele for instance, there are complex and long lasting ceremonies to accompany death. After these have been performed, intimating the importance of procreation through having their eldest child by their deathbed and the importance of the link with the living dead through the slaughter of an ox or goat, burial rites follow. In the example put forward by John Mbiti regarding the Ndebele, the brother initiates the digging of a hole and other men help him. The dead body is wrapped in a blanket or animal skin. In the procession the dead body is carried to the dug out hole. According to Mbiti, the grave has an east-west shape in order to capture the movement of the sun. 'The oldest son strikes the grave with a spear, and then the body is laid down.'[271] Mbiti claims that the clash between the spear and the grave symbolises how there will be no danger on the way to or in the new place where the dead man is heading. The body itself has to face south in the grave, and the man has to be laid on his right, whereas the woman must be laid on her left. Personal belongings also have to be put into the grave before it is covered with dirt. The person going to the hereafter should not feel poor. The person buried must also be given food to sustain him or her on their journey to the hereafter, and therefore an animal is killed. The last part of this burial ceremony I will address here is of great importance in understanding the significance of a proper burial. The remaining members of the family of the deceased and the community drink a medicine made from the burnt bones of the killed ox or goat. This unites them with their departed community member.[272] Among the Yoruba, the rites connected with burial create a space where all religio-social differences are forgotten. The focus is on social integration, not on social class or religious affiliation. As pointed out by Wande Abimbola, many Yoruba are members of the Muslim or Christian faith, and this is put aside out of the respect for the deceased.[273] This example in particular also showcases the merging of African Traditional Religion with other religions, in addition

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[270] Christie 2000: 156.
[271] Mbiti 2008: 146.
[272] Ibid: 146-147.
[273] Wande Abimbola 1991. 'The Place of African Traditional Religion in Contemporary Africa: The Yoruba Example,' in Jacob K. Olupona (ed.): *African Traditional Religions in Contemporary Society*. St. Paul: Paragon House. 55-56.

to the importance of the burial rites and what sort of effect it can have on a community. In South Africa since it was first colonised up until the end of apartheid, many of these societal structures were broken. The restoration of the freedom to choose to perform rites like this or to participate in them is deeply meaningful.

5.2.4 RECONCILIATION AS NATION BUILDING

South African writer André Brink argues that Afrikaners and Africans are more similar than they like to think, and they belong together on the basis that they have the same collective consciousness of the same past. Robert Thornton claims that the Afrikaner and the African, who see each other as enemies yet sons of the same soil, compete to be *of* the land, not only on the land.[274] This is a key notion in understanding the problematic issues concerning the new South Africa. The Afrikaners see the land as given to them by God, and they are destined to live there. Their primary aim for taking control over the native population was to save them from themselves, as they were uneducated and lacked religion, despite the native population actually having inhabited that land from time immemorial. However, the Afrikaner views themselves as Africans, because Africa is after all their continent.[275]

The Minister of Justice, Dullah Omar, who introduced the Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act in 1995, calls the Truth and Reconciliation Commission a pathway and a stepping-stone to the new South Africa. This way the TRC is only one aspect of the broader project of nation building. There were other commissions and programmes in place to aid South Africa in its transition to democracy. The issues to tackle were multiple, for instance retrieving land that had been taken away from people when black South Africans were moved from their homes and communities, to be relocated in what was called Bantustans.[276] As well as rectifying the gross economic imbalance that was built up during apartheid, and educating people in a new school system where all children would be taught the same. Not only this, but expanding electricity and water systems so it would cover those previously without these basic parts of daily life taken for granted by the white population.[277]

One commissioner of the TRC was honest about seeing truth as the main focus of the commission, where reconciliation would follow later, as an effect of the process created by the TRC. He argued this because he felt that the commission was in essence educating

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[274] Christie 2000: 107.
[275] Eze 2009: 30-31.
[276] Christie 2000: 102, Eze 2009: 31.
[277] Ibid: 103.

people about what exactly went on during apartheid. This attempt to create a common view of the history of South Africa was to be a first step in the process of nation building.[278] South Africa is made up of millions of people, while only a few thousands took part in the proceedings of the commission. As it was widely broadcast, available for everyone to see, the commission embraced all who showed interest to partake in this creation of history. This way the TRC had a reach far beyond the rooms where confessions and forgiveness were taking place. This effect is necessarily very difficult to measure, both inside and outside the venues of the TRC.

5.2.5 INTERCONNECTEDNESS-TOWARDS-WHOLENESS

Desmond Tutu states that people are able to change, and in the face of the commission it is possible for the perpetrators of evil to recognise their wrongs and ask for forgiveness.[279] Antjie Krog, a well known South African writer, puts the word ubuntu aside in her essay *'This thing called reconciliation…'*[280] and replaced it with interconnectedness-towards-wholeness. She views ubuntu as so over-used and exploited that it becomes unusable. Interconnectedness-towards-wholeness explains the core of ubuntu from the viewpoint of African communitarianism. She explains interconnectedness-towards-wholeness as a

> '…mental and physical awareness that one can only 'become' who one is, or could be, through the fullness of that which is around one – both physical and metaphysical. Wholeness is thus not a passive state of nirvana, but a process of becoming in which everybody and everything is moving towards its fullest self, building itself; one can only reach the fullest self though, through and with others which include ancestors and universe.'[281]

She does in this connect with Ifeyani Menkiti in his view that personhood is not something given, it is something one must earn, and at which one could fail.[282] In Krog's view, the exercise of the TRC was grounded in the belief that acknowledging one's interconnectedness and acting on this would lead towards wholeness for the person. To achieve this forgiveness and reconciliation were key elements. Krog is careful to point out the distinctions between forgiveness and reconciliation. Whereas forgiveness involves a change in the victim, reconciliation involves change in both the victim and the perpetrator. Krog believes that some of the uniqueness of the TRC is found in the mutual dependency of reconciliation and forgiveness. According to Krog, forgiveness '…opens up the process of becoming, while

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[278] Christie 2000: 153.
[279] Ibid: 146.
[280] Antjie Krog 2008. ''*This thing called reconciliation…'* Forgiveness as Part of an Interconnectedness-towards-wholeness.' *South African Journal of Philosophy.*
[281] Krog 2008. 355.
[282] Menkiti 1984. 172,173.

[reconciliation] is the crucial step into this becoming.'[283] When talking of forgiveness in the context of the TRC it is important to point out that this forgiveness is not in large part connected to the Christian understanding of forgiveness. Whereas, as pointed out by Krog, the coloured and white people who testified in front of the TRC referred to Christianity in which when they forgave the perpetrator, Jesus forgave them. However, among the Xhosa and Tswana testimonies for instance, there was no mention of God or Jesus. In the TRC context, the Xhosa word for reconciliation is forgiveness.[284] This is vital in understanding how the act of forgiveness was viewed by the majority of those partaking in the proceedings of the TRC. One offered forgiveness based on a desire to be a more human person in the interconnected world, not because of a religious belief in Jesus. This debunks Dutch anthropologist Wim van Binsbergen's claim that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was created under European, white Christian dominance. According to van Binsbergen, with this basis the commission is illegitimate in its work towards national unity.[285] However, as stated above by Antjie Krog, Christianity and its perception of forgiveness was not dominant in the proceedings of the commission. It was visible during testimonies of white and coloured South Africans, but not among the black South Africans. In addition to this, the commission did not actively call upon it. According to van Binsbergen, South Africa will pay a high price for not revealing the real African perception of sin and evil in the aftermath of apartheid. van Binsbergen further argues that due to the illegitimate basis for the proceedings, South Africans will wake up feeling cheated because the TRC facilitated a '…massive and manipulative repression of resentment,'[286] especially through its use of ubuntu.[287] This is countered by Michael Eze who claims that the strength and uniqueness of ubuntu as a public history is that it will include and make room for '… different narratives and memories while simultaneously redefining (not obscuring) hidden antagonisms within the national margins.'[288]

The Gugulethu Seven were seven young men who were approached by representatives for the South African Police Force disguised as guerrillas, recruiting people to Umkhonto we Sizwe, the military wing of the ANC. The seven young men were ambushed and all killed by security police in 1986. The circumstances of the killings were far from straight forward, with witnesses stating they had seen the young men unarmed that morning, and they were

[283] Krog 2008: 356.
[284] Ibid: 356, 357, 358.
[285] van Binsbergen 2001: 76.
[286] Ibid: 77.
[287] Ibid: 76.
[288] Eze 2009: 128.

found with weapons on them. During a private meeting set up by the TRC between one of the killers and the mothers of the Gugulethu Seven, the mother of Christopher Piet, Cynthia Ngewu stated the following (translated to English):

> 'This thing called reconciliation…if I am understanding it correctly…if it means this perpetrator, this man who has killed Christopher Piet, if it means he becomes human again, this man, so that I, so that all of us, get our humanity back …then I agree, I support it all.'[289]

Krog argues that this statement from an illiterate, uneducated member of South African society proves how ubuntu is a natural part of people's consciousness. Ngewu understood her own interconnectedness, and she understood it in relation to the perpetrator's interconnectedness as well. The perpetrator killed because he had lost his humanity, forgiving him would allow him to regain it. Ngewu's humanity was affected by the killing of her son, and she could, after offering this forgiveness, once again become fully human herself. Krog uses this quote and this story to show how ubuntu was permeating the TRC proceedings, which in her view explained the absence of revenge.[290] There were other examples from the TRC proceedings that showcased the presence of ubuntu, or interconnectedness-towards-wholeness. Krog cites nine references to interconnectedness during the second week of proceedings. Among some of them were these:

> '(a) …we need to keep reminding ourselves we do belong in one family. And to help those who lost their humanity to recover their old (*Chairperson Tutu to Kwisomba family)*
>
> (c) Your wound is ours too (*Commissioner Ntsebeza to Juqu family*)
>
> (If) the Truth Commission (can) assist in the education of that boy, as well as accommodation of that boy. Because in the old end, he is got to contribute maybe to peace – towards peace in this country, he will have felt the pain, and he will have felt maybe how to forgive, thank you (*Mr Kama in the Mzimkulu Johnson case*)'[291]

In this process of redefining the present and the concepts within it, victims or next-of-kin who participated in the proceedings of the TRC expected a mutual effort towards the regaining and re-establishment of humanity and interconnectedness. In most cases this did not happen. According to Krog, this explains the anger shown by many victims now. Although many use this anger to show what a failure the TRC was, Krog argues that the anger does not come from being forced into forgiveness. It comes from being the only party holding up their end of the bargain.[292] What sets Krog apart in her assessment of the TRC is her apparent attempt to understand the workings around the TRC. In studying the material,

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[289] Krog 2008: 356.
[290] Ibid: 356-357.
[291] Ibid: 358-359.
[292] Ibid: 364.

the critique of the TRC as being a Christian infused European construct, is slashed by the participants themselves. Their words show how the essence of ubuntu permeated the chairpersons and those testifying, mostly non-white Africans, who for all intents and purposes made up most of the victims.

5.2.6 AN EXAMPLE OF RECONCILIATION TODAY

An example of how the TRC still affects people and national discourse today is found in the actions of professor Jonathan Jansen. As rector of the University of the Free State he promulgated reconciliation after his term began in 2009. His arrival into the job as rector was a result of an incident that hit the Internet in early 2008 and sparked a national outrage.[293] Four white male students from University of the Free State filmed black female university workers '…drinking from bottles of beer, racing against each other, eating from a dish, vomiting into buckets, dancing and playing rugby.'[294] It was a deliberate act of humiliation by the four white young men of the black female university workers. The part of the video that caused the most negative reaction was where one of the students appeared to be urinating into the dish of food presented to the women.[295] Following this, the university looked for new leadership after admitting that this behaviour sprung out from the institutional culture. Jansen dropped the charges of the young men and invited them to come back to the university.[296] The four boys were fined 20 000 Rand[297] and 12 months in jail each after they plead guilty.[298] He based his decision on the wish for reconciliation, forgiveness and social justice to become a part of the university.[299] University of Free State has been an Afrikaans-speaking university, where there has historically been no racial integration. The university was established in the Boer created Orange Free State. This was the independent Boer state after they had left the Cape Colony due to the British. It remained a white university until the start of the 1990s.[300] According to Jonathan Jansen, prior to the incident mentioned above, there had been protests voiced against racial integration on campus.[301] He has worked towards rebranding the university and bringing the students together. Jansen has not been shy to voice his view that much of South African

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[293] de Waal, Mandy 2011. 'The beautiful mind of Jonathan Jansen.'
[294] News24 2010. 'SAHRC goes to court over Reitz.'
[295] Ibid.
[296] Jonathan Jansen 2009. 'Why we're withdrawing charges against Reitz four – Jansen.'
[297] Equals: 14 379 NOK, 2425 USD, 1532 GBP – 22.05.2012.
[298] Times Live 2011. 'Reconciliation programme for Reitz four and workers.'
[299] Jansen 2009.
[300] Southern African Regional Universities Association.
[301] Jansen 2009.

society still exists in separation, victim and perpetrator. Young people act as if they experienced apartheid, when they have not. The professor sees that people are still affected by apartheid and the societal structures created under it, and people are also struggling to move ahead beyond the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Jansen claims people are attempting to ignore the past, with unsuccessful outcomes. His view is that the past is there, and we need to define how we will be today.[302] Jonathan Jansen's work for reconciliation after the terrible actions of the students shows that the lessons of African community and what came forward during the TRC is still in the forefront of people's minds. Ubuntu can be located anywhere. It does not have to be spoken of out loud, but it can still be spoken of and be part of choices one make.

5.3 CONCLUSION

Through the actions of the post apartheid government ubuntu was given a ringside seat in the building of the new South Africa. Even before the official mandate for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the transitional government placed ubuntu in the constitution as a guiding principle to lead the way of all that was to come. Nelson Mandela became the image of this approach, saying:

> '...the oppressor must be liberated just as surely as the oppressed...When I walked out of prison, that was my mission to liberate the oppressed and the oppressor both...For to be free is not merely to cast off one's chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others.'[303]

Desmond Tutu became the image of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, not shying away from promoting the South African approach worldwide. This has for instance lead to Turkey's exploration of applying an ubuntu-based reconciliation model to bridge the divides between the Turks and the Armenians.[304] Tutu has exclaimed that '...[w]hat dehumanises you, inexorably dehumanises me.'[305] Ubuntu has been utilised to its fullest capacity for the greater purpose of attempting to create unity and stability in South Africa. It is important to keep in mind that the way in which ubuntu has been used in the TRC is only one path towards reconciliation, which is a long-term project. However, the fact than ubuntu can be located in 20th and 21st Century South Africa speaks to its authenticity, relevance and

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[302] Jansen 2009, de Waal 2011.
[303] Hailey 2008: 13.
[304] Ibid: 15.
[305] Ibid: 13.

resilience. Ubuntu has evolved and is now found in a modern democratic state, utilised to benefit the progression and well-being of the all those living in South Africa.

CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this thesis has been to answer three main questions, and in that answering a larger one. Through this thesis it has become clear that there are several answers to what ubuntu is. It has been interpreted as a life philosophy, a life guide, a worldview and more. However, the answer that has been important through this thesis is that ubuntu is a religiously anchored word originating from the Nguni language group of Southern Africa that denotes the promotion of harmony, shared identity and well-being in the community. The word is linked to the *self* as well as the nature of interconnectedness and can be located most everywhere both orally and practically. Ubuntu can be seen through those community structures that are set to promote, maintain or restore harmony, shared identity and well-being. In the communities dealt with in chapter three, one can see an underlying focus on life, and the preservation, transmittance and the restoration of it. Care is taken in teaching the young about the balance of the universe, the importance of relationships and of children. The structures surrounding marriage are all in place to ensure that balance will be maintained in both families involved. The ancestors are taken care of, and honoured through naming, so as to keep the family united. The community comes together in order to attempt in unison to restore balance if something has gone wrong, or to provide thanksgiving, also in unison. There are roles in the community specifically for people trained to assist the members of the community in finding the path to harmony and balance. Ubuntu is part of all of this. Which is why it seems nothing but natural that ubuntu should evolve into something that can play a vital role in the healing of South Africa.

This leads us to the larger question of ubuntu's authenticity. If ubuntu merely is an academic construct in a globalised world for the benefit of modern development in Africa, should one not then be able to locate ubuntu anywhere but in those academic contexts? If indeed the present interpretation of ubuntu, which places ubuntu in public processes, is invented, how does one explain the continuous presence of ubuntu? Ubuntu does exist in regular people's lives, proven both by the examples provided in chapter three as well as by the mother of Christopher Piet, as seen in chapter four. This also answers why ubuntu still plays a role in South African society, either through the continued attention by the government, or by university rectors. Ubuntu has evolved, as any other religious element or phenomenon. Placing these phenomena into new contexts does not automatically imply that it no longer is true to its original form or meaning.

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