WHAT UBUNTU CANNOT DO FOR SOUTH AFRICA AND ZIMBABWE

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Abstract
Academic discourse on ubuntu, both in South Africa and Zimbabwe, coincided with the arrival of freedom in these countries. Ubuntu's revival sought to show that there was an African alternative to the oppressive regimes that had cruelly governed both countries. This alternative was pronounced as offering a grounded beginning of the postcolonial society that would be able to humanize the African through resuscitating traditional values. These values would speak to how the African was supposed to be; ontologically, ethically, and politically. The hope was that the social conditions would, in line with these values, also transform to enable Ubuntu to thrive. However, I will contend that the social conditions developed in both countries not only fail to animate ubuntu but have begun to directly undermine its basics.

Keywords: Ubuntu, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Colonialism, Apartheid

Introduction
South Africa and Zimbabwe, two neighboring Southern African nations, have had more than their fair share of infamy in the colonial project (DOOLING 2019). South Africa is, by far, the greatest victim, with apartheid condemned as a crime against humanity (BALDWIN 2021). On the other hand, Zimbabwe had to undergo probably one of

the most barbaric bush wars on the continent to gain its independence from a settler white-minority (BIRD 2014). Both countries, in their intellectual and public spaces, share the same passion for ubuntu or hunhu (in Zimbabwe), which are synonymous concepts and systems. This passion is informed by two reasons; firstly, ubuntu is seen as an authentic mode of being African traceable to times before the colonial disruption. Secondly, ubuntu is seen as having a restorative capacity, which may lead to the healing of wounds inflicted by colonialism and apartheid. Ubuntu, then, can be said to have a dual role of affirming the historical dignity and moral worth of Africans as well as a healing tool that is able to reconstruct a damaged identity into something original and viable.

What I seek to do in this paper is to reflect on how the political, economic, social, and moral systems of both countries have been irretrievably broken down such that they are no longer capable of giving support to the realization of the ideals of ubuntu. I will divide this paper into three sections. The first section will give an overview of the core tenets of ubuntu. The second part will describe the necessary social conditions for the realization of ubuntu. The third part will describe the prevailing conditions that undermine ubuntu.

The Idea of Ubuntu
Ubuntu as an idea is given to varying interpretations, especially among its scholars. It is fair to say that there is no single idea of ubuntu that scholars appeal to when they think and write about ubuntu. A convenient example is to be found in the debate between Mogobe Ramose (2007) and Thaddeus Metz (2007) on what ubuntu is. Their differences are not merely hermeneutical but ontological. While it may be said that academics tend to debate the niceties of theories and social practices such as ubuntu, it should also be borne in mind that the differences have an implication in what our shared public understanding of the concept is. To sidestep this problem, I will limit myself to what can be called the core fundamentals of ubuntu. These fundamentals are: i) The community is of utmost importance such that no single individual can have any claims that trump its sanctity (MAWERE & VAN STAM 2016). ii) The sanctity of the community

is made visible through the relations that individuals have with each other (SAMKANGE & SAMKANGE 1980; SHUTTE 2001). These relations are of such a type that they promote intertwined humaneness (METZ 2021; MOLEFE 2019). iii) The best way of promoting the collective interests of individuals is by making each individual come to the realization that her being and interests are directly implicated and shaped by others (MOLEFE & ALLSOBROOK 2021). iv) The best way to express ubuntu is the maxim umuntu ngubuntu ngabantu (a person is a person because of other persons) (MOLEFE & ALLSOBROOK 2021), which affirms the existence of an individual as corporate as opposed to being individually deterministic.

These four fundamentals lead to the creation of an equilibrium between the community and the corporate individual. For this equilibrium to obtain, there must be concordial co-existence in the values, aspirations, systems, orientations, and operations of individuals and the community. Plainly, the corporate individual and the community must be in sync at almost all levels of their existence. The relationships between individuals must, first, be affirming experiences. There must be a high degree of shared identity, shared goals, and shared beliefs in specific values[1]. These relations are ones that transform themselves into a social reality that is equally affirming for individuals both as specific entities and as a collective. The best way to illustrate this co-existence is to be found in traditional small-scale communities where there was a widespread agreement on what community values were and what the individual's values were supposed to be (as a reflection of communal values). Private life was a shared endeavor and public life was an affirmation of private aspirations. Everyone had reason to cooperate with the next person, and all understood the community to be an enabler of their interests. Where interests differed, the community structures and practices were trusted to have a capacity to fairly and equitably resolve any differences[2]. We could say there was a natural understanding and

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[1] The best representation of the description of the intensity of these relationships is Shutte's mother and child relational model (2001).

[2] Wiredu (1997), for example, argues that in a consensual set-up, disputes could be resolved by virtue of there existing a rock-bottom identity of interests that

willingness to cooperate among the facets of individual interactions, individual agency as corporate, and the reality of the community as a shared good. It was this setting that made the four fundamentals possible, as a practice, and ideal as a possible way of living.

Modern advocates of ubuntu would not have reason to deny the necessity of the four fundamentals I have identified here for the viability of ubuntu. However, even if these basics were to be admitted as necessary conditions for ubuntu, there are some serious problems connected to such admission. Before attending to the problems I have in mind, it is only fair to consider what the modern conditions may have to be for the realization of ubuntu.

Conditions Necessary for the Realization of Ubuntu
As already stated, the conditions I have articulated above are likely to be at home with traditional small-scale societies[3]. While some adherents of ubuntu could insist that these conditions of equilibrium are also true of any society, that insistence can be easily pushed back by arguments of the sort that can demonstrate the possibility of societies that do not promote social values consistent with ubuntu's demands[4]. I am convinced that such arguments are generally successful. Yet those arguments do not close the discussion about the possibility of ubuntu. What an adherent of ubuntu only needs to do is to show that there is a possibility of conceiving ubuntu in modern terms. I will identify three conditions that ubuntu should satisfy in order to serve as an inspiration to the current state of affairs.

Firstly, ubuntu as a thought device about African identity as well as a promise for restorative moves necessary for the fostering of

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interlocutors would probably be unaware of. It would be that unawareness that leads to the dispute, in the first place. Once misperception about differences are removed, disputants come to realize that, after all, they have shared interests.
[3] Zimunya et al (2015) have demonstrated that ubuntu is adept at regulating traditional societies while retaining signs of inapplicability to modern/modernizing African societies.
[4] A good example is Praeg's (2017) criticism of Metz's conception of a utopian modern ubuntu society in a violent South Africa. Metz's attempt at reviving traditional corporate existence by applying it to some ubuntu aligned modern social arrangements is seen by Praeg as untenable.

dignity and authenticity of its subjects, must have a truly liberatory agenda. This liberatory demand is borne out of the well-known disruptive effects of colonialism (see TAIWO 2010). The purpose of this liberation agenda is to ensure that ubuntu serves as a reliable thought system to effectively counter the remnants of colonial ideologies. There are various ways in which this counter can be thought of. One way, which is unproductive, is to insist on the authenticity of Africans as people of a communitarian streak. This commitment sees communitarian frameworks as the only authentic mode of being African. Such insistence, no matter how credible its contents are, is incapable of offering any liberatory effect. Colonialism and apartheid were extremely violent ideologies and practices. They left lasting damage on the national psyche of the inhabitants of both countries, and their lingering effects are objects requiring tenacious responses. Ubuntu, with its fraternal outlook, appears unable to meet the violence of colonialism to the degree required to obtain freedom. A bit of this problem is owed to the way in which ubuntu emerges as a modern discourse in both countries. Ubuntu is massively popularized after the attainment of freedom or at the dawn of the attainment of freedom. An accompanying feature of that freedom was the demand for reconciliation (Samkange and Samkange 1980; Shutte 2001). The political elite, having bought into this demand, were quickly followed by scholars on ubuntu insisting on its pacifist (see MORE 2006) outlook as the core of what to be African was.

While reconciliation is an important feature of society or even a requirement of the progress of society, it is but just one facet. There are other facets that also require attention. These other facets may prove to be more complex than ubuntu is prepared to reckon with. For example, how does ubuntu propose to heal the wounds of the past sponsored by the two racist regimes of apartheid South Africa and colonial Rhodesia? How does ubuntu seek to address the problems that exist today that owe their origins to these countries' racially charged past? As a mode of existence that insists on a collective project in the community, what sense of community can be created between the former oppressor (who still has an advantage in

maintaining remnants of the oppressive system) and the formerly oppressed (who is not truly free in any meaningful sense)?

The specific demand on ubuntu, in this instance, is that it should find ways of engaging with the realities of racism, as sponsored by racist colonial and apartheid states. Such an engagement will involve an in-depth analysis of what such a society has to be in order to overcome the oppressive effects of post-racist societies. What would be useful is to learn what ubuntu has to offer those interested in struggles against the continuation of racism, or the struggle for the restoration of what was lost during the rule of the oppressor, meaningful redress of past injustices (both materially and mentally), as well as the re-ordering of society that would compel all to be equal before the jurisdiction of community. A notable exception in this regard has been Mogobe Ramose (2001; 2014), whose attempts at dissecting the effect of conquest has been instructive[5].

Secondly, ubuntu must speak to the changing nature of society in African realities. Ubuntu always carries the double responsibility of originating from a real set of facts that place it as a living organizational ideal as well as a theoretically attractive plausibility. It has to strike a fine balance between its idealization as a system of thought and its practical effect on real men and women who are situated within actual African societies. It is trite to admit that ubuntu is easily realizable under specific social conditions. Those conditions are largely associated with societies that are either under pressure to survive or societies that are largely irrelevant to the public ordering of life in current Africa. As Africa is increasingly trying to modernize and democratize, its public discourses may refer to ubuntu, but that reference is quickly clouded by values espoused by the demands of democratization, freedom, capitalist economies, individual rights, state limits, multi-party practices and overarching developmental

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[5] While Ramose succeeds at outlining the effects of conquest through the lens of ubuntu, it is not entirely clear if ubuntu will ever be able to completely overcome those effects. Ramose's attempt is notable since most scholars do not attempt discussing ubuntu alongside conquest and racism. Neither do they see the need to discuss ubuntu as a possible redress to ills brought by conquest (see SWARTZ 2006).

debates. What is common, though, is that ubuntu is invoked in societies that are broken, societies that are hardly responsive to possibilities of ever fully existing or functioning to minimally meet the requirements of ubuntu. There are a number of factors that are responsible for breaking these communities. Some of these factors are externally sponsored, such as the excesses of colonialism and neo-colonialism, as well as the continued skewed relations of oppression between former colonial countries and their formerly colonized territories. Then, there are internal factors of difficult economic and social settings that compromise human dignity and meaningful existence for Africans. These realities create citizens who are not well grounded in experiences of community but are oriented towards distrust and suspicion of the other. The sense is so deep that the citizens are not open to having meaningful and engaged relationships. However, ubuntu, in its original framing, is only possible where relations are not tainted by distrust and deceit but where they are characterized by trust and total identity with the other – which makes the phrase umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu possible.

Ubuntu, then, must be able to have something to say about the manner in which relations can be framed in severely broken societies – with a view to forming a viable community. What ubuntu is accustomed to is starting with the comfort of the virtues of uninterrupted traditional societies. It needs to go beyond that comfort by picturing communities within broken societies. This may include postulations on overcoming barriers either to full human interaction or restoration of severely broken relations such as those between citizens turned against each other. It could also do well by theorizing about the current African political scene, which is plagued by difficulties of contradictions and dysfunction accompanied by a disregard for both traditional and modern values.

Thirdly, ubuntu must concern itself with the daily challenges of the average African man and woman who walk many African city streets in search of opportunities to better their lives. A reckoning with a few basic facts will show what sort of place Africa is. Africa is the poorest place on earth (AIKINS & DU TOIT MCLACHLAN 2022), the least developed with a very young population, the most troubled –

with frequent wars and coups, the most backward and diseased of all continents. It has little infrastructure and not many promising prospects. Ubuntu must be able to address these desperate situations. At the very least, it must address how those caught up in such an existence may derive hope and expectation from ubuntu as a response to their desolate situations. Ubuntu must target how to improve Africans materially and make them secure in just the same way that traditional societies ensured that the material security of their citizens was guaranteed.

All sorts of objective tools of measurements used by international bodies or produced by researchers show Africa to be lagging and the general experience of living on the continent as dissatisfying (GIOVETTI 2019). High levels of hunger and other ills are not superb ingredients for creating coherent communities. On the contrary, such situations may lead to the undermining of any idea of community. If there is to be a community in such circumstances, that community can only be one that is excluded from mainstream notions of community. It would be a community bound by temporal or continuing connections among individuals in networks of destitution and hopelessness. These conditions will not be overcome through the creation of communities that are communitarian in the thoroughgoing sense as ubuntu prescribes. While coherent communities may be helpful in the equitable distribution of material stuff, such an approach will not be able to overcome the mass impoverishment and lack of opportunity that characterize African existence.

I think there are two fronts that ubuntu must be explicitly present. The first is the political theorization of the modern African state. Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze (2008) has advocated for the separation of politics from philosophy if ubuntu is to do good work. While such separation is meant to promote philosophical inquiry, there is a role to be played by ubuntu if it were to explicitly pick up the political mantle. There is a need for ubuntu apologists to theorize on the nature of the modern state, power relations between and amongst different actors in the state, communitarian arrangements between different communities, and notions of what a countrywide community could be. Ubuntu should also theorize on the material

conditions of the arrangement of modern society. This is especially true for the two countries of South Africa and Zimbabwe. The former has firmly kept the position of the most materially unequal (amongst its citizens) in the world (ADJAYE-GWEBAYO n.d.n. 2018), whereas the latter's economic viability has been under severe stress (MUNANGAGWA 2009; KANYEZA n.d.n. 2017). With conditions in both countries, ubuntu cannot rely on old proverbs, ideas on agency, and social practices to make a case for how politics should be. Those proverbs, ideas, and practices are antiquated and were framed for a different social, political, and economic milieu from the prevailing one. Hence, African thinkers, interested in ubuntu, need to develop a political theory that is alert to how modern politics has been shaped by forces such as colonialism, racism, global inequalities and postcolonial influences. These forces have shaped the internal dynamics of how politics plays itself out as precarious and rapacious – turning major public institutions against the people.

The second front is economic commentary. Ubuntu, as it is currently conceived, depends on dated economic practices such as letsema (voluntarily working together). While these practices do exist in those communities and places that are considered close to traditional societies, or more precisely – rural areas, they are not common in urban dwellings. As already noted, while retaining the core values of ubuntu, the likelihood of rural communities impacting broader society is nil. Modern African countries, societies, and communities are not exclusively influenced by traditional values. On the contrary, they are influenced by a failed application of capitalism to the continent, a mixture of a succession of colonial pseudo-capitalist policies, failed economic reforms, doomed structural adjustment programs, publicly discredited socialist experiments, and general misdirection of economic activity. At the very least, these characteristics do not promote principles aligned to letsema. This difficulty, facing ubuntu and similar thought systems, is well described by Shivji, who writes:

> Nyerere's attempt at spinning a home-grown ideology drawing on the cultural resources of the African society was a

valiant attempt. Yet, it proved to be fragile and its nationalist base, albeit radical, too weak to withstand the onslaught of the hegemonic construct of imperialism and neoliberalism. Compared to Ujamaa, Ubuntu in South Africa has been threadbare. South Africa's 'independence' was born into neoliberalism. Ubuntu can hardly be described as a hegemonic ideology at any point in time in the way Ujamaa could be during at least one decade after its adoption. Perhaps time has come to ask: Can robust African philosophies be constructed on the narrow basis of colonially constructed so-called nations or do they require the whole continent as a base? If so, should we not return to pan-Africanism as the point of departure for building a truly African philosophy and politics? (SHIVJI 2014, 148)

Notwithstanding Shivji's inclination towards pan-Africanism, if it is the case that ujamaa was given an opportunity to be a hegemonic ideology, yet still failed, ubuntu will never be able to assert itself in the way that its adherents hope for. As Shivji correctly notes, ubuntu was born into imperialism and neoliberalism, which were opposed to its values and, in all likelihood, sought to undermine its influence. Ubuntu does not have the social and political resources that ujamaa had, yet ujamaa failed. What then are the chances of ubuntu to succeed in the face of this onslaught? Ubuntu appears to be less equipped to effect social change than ujamaa. Ubuntu's largest asset is its appeal to its own traditions, accompanied by a hope for its appeal.

Conditions Undermining Ubuntu
The guiding question in this section would be: Why is ubuntu an unviable ethical theory and practical guideline to modern-day South Africa and Zimbabwe? I will start by presenting the theoretical problem with ubuntu and then present three challenges for South Africa and one for Zimbabwe that hinder ubuntu from being realizable. While both countries are not the same, they share similarities in their approach to a broad understanding and appreciation of the value of ubuntu. They are also countries that have

been associated with the idea of ubuntu. They are also countries that have the biggest possibility (if ever one was to be had) to regulate public life in keeping with the dictates of ubuntu.

Regarding the theoretical problem, the question to be asked is whether ubuntu is a good or bad theory. If, following my claim, that ubuntu is untenable as a theoretical commitment to what is ideal – then we must understand what this means. The best way to explain my position is to start by distinguishing between two forms of theorization in philosophy. There is theorization that is completely disconnected from practical affairs, and then there is theorization that is deeply connected to practical affairs. With the latter, such theorization either emerges in practical experiences or actual constructions of reality by living individuals. Ubuntu can fall under both orientations. However, a more accurate interpretation of ubuntu is one that is sensitive to its practical aspect. While it is possible to theorize about ubuntu, such theorization cannot proceed without giving due attention to the practical origins of ubuntu (RAMOSE 2014). That is why all descriptions of ubuntu, or all its theorizations, refer to its original society, the features of those societies, and the organizing principles of those societies. The attraction lies in the ability to transplant these values into modern spaces. While I admit that there are remnants of such original societies, they are neither dominant nor defining on the continent. There are also other societies that are dissimilar to the original societies, and those societies may be unresponsive to the dictates of ubuntu. Yet those societies could be dominant in modern African settings. If this is the case, theorization will have to be about practical matters as they unfold from traditional societies of ubuntu to modern societies that may not be so imbued with such a spirit. I will outline below how such a spirit is made absent in modern societies. For present purposes, though, it suffices to state that theoretical statements on ubuntu must be about their practical consequences. Those statements must have a visible impact on how life is arranged, and they must also be a reflection on the actual arrangements of life. It is odd to have an elaborate system of ubuntu, rooted in the ethos of traditional societies, but disconnected from the everyday in the here and now. In any case, ubuntu falls under social/political theory and

ethics, and its philosophical theory is tied to the practical or actual existence. So those who seek to praise the purity of ubuntu merely as a theoretical articulation, have actually failed to be faithful to the demands of ubuntu – its practical component, which my maternal great-grandmother's mother lived centuries ago in what today is known as KwaZulu-Natal.

I now move to consider the specific conditions that afflict South Africa, followed by Zimbabwe. South Africa is a troubled country (MASIPA 2018). I will specify three conditions that are proving problematic for South Africa. The three problems are as follows: i) the history of apartheid and its after-effects (SWARTZ 2006); ii) the enduring economic and social divisions in society (STODDARD 2022); iii) the crime problem (ALTBEKKER 2010). The first and second problems are closely related, but they can be separated for the fullness of understanding.

Apartheid was a nasty form of government based on racial discrimination against the majority of black citizens. It is not by chance that it was declared a crime against humanity, as declared by the United Nations General Assembly in 1966. In order to understand the lingering effects of apartheid, there are two considerations that are relevant. The first is the material structuring of discrimination that rendered the black majority second-class citizens. By organizing the apartheid state to be economically in favor of the white minority, all spaces of development, modernity, sophistication, education, social mobility, good services, and general welfare were confined to the spaces the white minority claimed to be theirs (GRADIN 2018). This effectively meant that the majority of black people had no access to those spaces and services but also that their own spaces were never materially equivalent to whites (ERRITOUNI 2006). Qualitatively, there was a huge difference in the experience of life between whites and blacks as South African citizens. The second consideration is that at the end of apartheid and the beginning of a democratic South Africa in 1994, the transformation that occurred was nominal. Nominal in the sense that the black majority's participation in society and full citizenship was limited to the right to vote. Social and economic inequalities manufactured under apartheid were allowed to continue

by structures that were impervious to change (*ibid*). The dehumanization of the African remained intact and continues to this day through various manifestations that inhibit the average black South African to lay full claim to political citizenship that allows her to be a fully engaged citizen in/with her democratic space. The after-effect of apartheid is still felt everywhere in South Africa, where the average black citizens continue to exist on the periphery of society with regular denial to access basics that would make their lives truly transformed and meaningful (GRADIN 2018).

The second problem of the wide gaps existing in economic and social divisions between different classes and races has shown itself in shocking ways. One of these ways is the gap in material wealth between those who have and those who do not have. South Africa has been the most unequal society for decades now, and it does not appear that there is any system in place to arrest this anomaly (see FRANCIS & WEBSTER 2019). The other way is in how people live in their physical spaces and how they conceive others as potential threats to be kept out (see SAMARA 2010). Former white suburbs in prominent cities such as Johannesburg, Pretoria, Durban, and Cape Town are characterized by large spacious houses hidden behind high walls, electric fences, razor wires, and armed guards (see ROBINS 2002). Within the same respective municipalities, one finds several shanty towns where impoverished citizens try to eke out a living. In South Africa, some citizens experience first-world standards of living while others experience below third-world standards. These divisions seem to be deepening and, at times, are racialized.

The third social problem in South Africa is the high rate of crime. South Africa has been described as the crime capital with an assortment of serious and violent crimes such as murder, rape, hijackings, and abductions happening daily (see ALTBEKKER 2005). Women in South Africa have a real fear of being raped, and everyone stands an equal chance of being murdered. Added to this are other crimes, such as corruption, theft from the poor, and corporate maleficence. I do not wish to concentrate on the violent nature of the crimes committed in the country but wish to point out how dehumanizing some of these crimes are. Take, for example, the

murder of women and children, the murder of lesbians for being lesbians, the torture of home dwellers by home invaders, and the direct stealing from the poor by some politicians. While some of these crimes are violent and others are not, they share the same characteristic of leaving the victim dehumanized. There is something about these crimes that robs the victim of their dignity. They are not crimes such as burglary, pickpocketing, swindling etc. These crimes are not humiliating but leave one feeling either stupid or silly for allowing oneself to be duped. Dehumanizing crimes, on the other hand, leave the victim feeling violated to the core of their identity. It may take a while, including lots of counselling, for the individual to be restored to some form of their humanity. Those who perpetrate these crimes show a certain dehumanized existence of their own, which they transfer to their victims through their vile acts.

The second case of illustration is Zimbabwe. The 1980 Zimbabwe of the Samkanges is different from the current Zimbabwe. The difference is significant, especially in its social ethos[6]. Post 2000 Zimbabwe has gone through a number of publicly acknowledged problems. Some of these problems have had to do with the history of Zimbabwe as a British settler colony (TENGELY-EVANS 2017; NORTH 2017). Some of the problems have to do with Zimbabwe as a postcolonial state (see MBEMBE 1992; 2001). Such states on the African continent are always assured to end in some kind of failure and social complication. With Zimbabwe, I just wish to focus on one prominent problem with the aim of showing how it has impacted interpersonal and social relations. The breakdown of the Zimbabwean economy is well-documented. Ranging from its history to its record-breaking inflation to the collapse of the formal economy, Zimbabwean citizens have endured one of the most stifling economic environments (MLAMBO 2017). What has not been canvassed is how this restrictive economic environment has affected how people relate to

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[6] The Zimbabwe of 1980 that the Samkanges were writing for was a country, just emerging from war, preparing to enter into its independence phase. The Samkanges' purpose was to foster reconciliation by encouraging victors to be gracious towards their losing former enemies. 20 years later, Zimbabwe was totally different from what the Samkanges had written for

each other as well as how they have come to shape their value systems. I, therefore, seek to give a brief assessment of the effects of these hardships on conceptions and realities of relating.

In any economic environment, people seek to engage in activities that earn them a living. Normally, for the majority of citizens, this is done through stable employment with a stable salary. Zimbabwe does follow the same pattern but with interesting deviations. As formal employment is very low, most people have been forced into informal work. However, informal work has come with its own pressures. The most prominent pressure is to make as much money as possible. What the quantity of that money is, is never specified, but ordinary people have been forced into a life of dealing, chasing the US dollar, and general trickery (see JONES 2010). Money has become the defining object of interaction[7]. With this attitude, basic ethics such as caring for the other, building relationships, and honesty in work and dealing with money have largely been compromised[8]. Instead, these values have been replaced by greed, self-preservation, desire for maximization of profit, and self-centered exploitation of every situation and everyone in it. While values such as cooperation for the common good may be found, their distribution is sparse. What colors public spaces and interaction between people is the idea of how to maximize making money as well as avoiding being exploited by fellow citizens.

One thing about ubuntu discourse is that it relies on what the prevailing public mood is. That mood exhibits itself in terms of the language that people use, the kinds of things they value (as expressed in their daily idioms), and the sort of behavior they exhibit as a result of this. Ubuntu thinkers rely on proverbs or popular sayings to make

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[7] For an instructive discussion on the negative and corrosive effect of pursuing money over human worth, see Ajei and Ramose (2008)

[8] Ramose (2020) chides the rise of valuing money, which he calls timocracy, over human dignity. While advocating ubuntu as a corrective to this phenomenon, he notes how dangerous the disposition to timocracy is. It is also quite revealing that he makes a distinction between urban dwellers and rural dwellers in as far as their openness to being influenced by ubuntu is. I think one can justifiably infer that the spirit of ubuntu tends to dissipate in urban areas where the pursuit of money is the end goal for many.

a case for the values of community and human interaction. Notions and realities of letsema are invoked by ubuntu thinkers to show how cooperation is valuable as an ethical good among ubuntu adherents. Common sayings such as umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu are readily invoked to show how the identity of an individual is implicated in the existence of others. The major premise of ubuntu thinking is that there is a high degree of care for the other's welfare to make existence a shared caring experience. Tragically, for friends of ubuntu, the language used on the streets of money gathering in Zimbabwe is far removed from collective ethos. At least in the Shona language, the words, grammar, and idioms that have emerged tend to extol individual craftiness for the benefit of that individual[9]. They are far removed from the values of communal participation and identity.

The reality of economic hardship is that it has created a certain enterprising spirit in ordinary people, a spirit that promotes selfishness through continued acts of looking out for oneself. In such a situation, no one is present for the other as all people are forced to work out ways of ensuring that their families are fed, clothed and housed at the end of the day. What used to be ordinary everyday tasks have been turned into challenges that call forth wit, trickery, deceit, and maximization of personal gain at the expense of the other. This is truly so on the streets of major towns and cities and all highly populated urban residential zones[10]. Beneath the veneer of normalcy, there exists an enterprising spirit of survival that is not inspired by the values of corporate existence found in ubuntu. The change of economic activity

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[9] Jones (2010) describes the hardships experienced by Zimbabweans on a daily basis and the terms they have developed to describe those hardships as well as tactics to dealing with those hardships. These terms, which expand every year, tend to show how individual inventiveness is a necessary condition for basic survival. To a native Shona speaker, these words do not connote virtue. This in itself is reflective of a prevailing spirit and value system that individuals and communities find themselves living by and accepting as necessary. If this goes on for a generation, it becomes an established way of being.

[10] However, this is not only limited to urban areas. It is also true for rural areas. For example, in a study done in one the most recognizable rural areas in Zimbabwe, a place called Chivi, Gukurume and Mahiya found that the usage of mobile money (doing financial transactions through mobile phones) affected relatedness in that community.

from traditional peasant occupations to colonial exploitation and then to the post-2000 economic meltdown has meant that the mode of understanding work and earning a living has also drastically changed.

I do not need to argue for long to demonstrate that the individual who arises out of these circumstances will not likely yield to the values of ubuntu. Yet adherents would still argue that it would be desirable of the individual, theoretically, to retain values of ubuntu. Again, I think a distinction must be made between theorizing from no known social facts and theorizing from extant social facts. Adherents' insistence belongs to the former camp. I do not think that such theoretical approach is useful in the real world. The real world of living men and women is the one that gave us fodder to theorize on ubuntu. However, that world no longer exists in its original form for us to continue thinking about ubuntu as adherents do. On the contrary, there now exists a new world that gives us grounds for thinking about how the ethics of damaged societies must be construed. First, it is to be appreciated that as transforming societies, both South Africa and Zimbabwe held so much promise such that it was necessary to ground their freedom on authentic and traceable African traditional ideals. Second, since, for a variety of reasons, both countries have not reached their transformational goals, there is a need to understand how these societies have shifted from the promise of ubuntu to the promise of something else. Third, even if this shift carried with it some negative connotations, it is incumbent upon modern philosophers to theorize within those negative connotations. There is nothing wrong with coming up with theories from a negative or failed African experience.

It is now necessary to lay open the answer to the guiding question in this essay: what is it that ubuntu cannot do for South Africa and Zimbabwe. I will answer this question in a roundabout way. In my descriptions of the problems above, I was attempting to demonstrate that these problems are real not only for their respective societies but also for a sizeable portion of society. The fact of these problems has two implications. The first is that they may require a practical solution and that solution will not be sufficiently covered by all practices of ubuntu. This means that the sort of solution to these

problems is not going to be ubuntu. Or at the very least ubuntu may have to work alongside other systems of thought to end these problems. The second implication has to do with how we theorize about these problems. Philosophically, if we were to think of these problems, what would our analysis be? And what sort of theoretical handle would drive that analysis? There have emerged a number of conceptual schemes that try to understand and rectify these problems. One of the most prominent of these theories is postcolonial thought. We could then ask which of these two theories does a better job of articulating and solving current problems in the two countries.

What ubuntu can no longer do for both South Africa and Zimbabwe is to continue as a representative theoretical tool to understand and explain social organization. Ubuntu, in its essence, is a mitigation between conceptualizing public good and individual good. By thriving to show a collectivist understanding of the good, coupled with a group-oriented conceptualization of the individual's ethos, as distinctly African – ubuntu invites two failures. The first failure is that, theoretically, ubuntu is a limited adventure. It is limited in the sense that it represents an old approach to African life that has been overtaken by events such as modernization, greed, and self-centeredness. It speaks to individuals who are in communities that cohere well and make sense to both the public and individual understanding of community as a caring space that individuals can identify with and wish to contribute towards. While I admit that there are pockets in society that still live in accord with the dictates of the communitarian nature of ubuntu, those pockets are always rural, uninfluential (politically, economically, and socially) and are truly at the margins of shaping the national character. Such character is shaped in the capitals of African countries and other cities, which are apt to dish very rough treatment to citizens. Those citizens, in turn, become rough and dish out rough treatment to each other. The reason for this is that the dominant African space is one that is characterized by the after-effects of colonialism. In particular, for our present purposes, colonialism sought to overthrow everything that was distinctly African. It sought to replace traditional values and ways of life with a sort of Euro-Christian value system. However, it attempted this under

the banner of racism, discrimination, the mission to civilize, as well the dubious belief that Africans were second-class to Europeans. In the sincere belief that Africans were not civilized, the European conquerors sought to civilize Africans to a point of successful servitude. Hence the violence of the colonial mission. These attitudes and practices have had a lasting effect on how public life is organized in postcolonial Africa. Thinking about all these historical events and their effects, as well as what may mitigate against them, is beyond ubuntu's competencies.

The second failure of ubuntu is that it has little practical effect on the conduct of public affairs insofar as it impacts individual disposition towards the very same public affairs. In order for ubuntu to be a success, there must be a reciprocal recognition of its values between the public spirit and what individuals hold. While the public space is infused with the vigorous promotion of ideals of ubuntu, that promotion does not get to be well received by ordinary people as a worthy project. In the same vein, the conduct of the people, as I have described in the two cases above, does not seem to feed into the public spirit of ubuntu. While the public space and the individuals governed by that space acknowledge the need for the existence of ubuntu as well as its truth and rootedness in their context, they seem powerless to effect it. The reasons for this paralysis are found in what I have canvassed above.

Conclusion

From the foregoing argument, it is difficult for ubuntu to be the dominant, let alone influential, think-device for understanding, motivating, and interpreting post-apartheid South Africa and postcolonial Zimbabwe. The dominant social and economic features of these countries have surpassed the reality for which ubuntu is competent to adjudicate. What is needed is a re-think of how to diagnose and address current problems facing the continent as an unfolding reality. That unfolding reality is, for the most part, influenced by factors that are beyond ubuntu's powers of influence. It is for this reason that ubuntu cannot be a reliable theoretical and practical framework for guiding postcolonial African societies. There

is a need to appreciate ubuntu's postcolonial limitations while at the same time developing innovative theoretical handles.

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