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# Critical Humanist Perspectives

The Integrational Turn in  
Philosophy of Language  
and Communication

Edited by **Adrian Pablé**

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## 5 An integrationalist perspective on African philosophy

Sinfrey B. Makoni  
Cristine G. Severo

### Introduction

There is a substantial body of research into integrationism in Western contexts, taking into account the impact of several issues such as writing, history, semiotics and economics. Even though integrationism has developed considerably and made substantial contributions to language scholarship, most of the research has largely been situated in Western contexts. From an African perspective, it can unfortunately be construed as Eurocentric. In this chapter, we contribute to a development of the concept of 'integration' in non-Western contexts by analyzing *Ubuntu* (Tschaege 2013), African secular humanism, from an integrationalist perspective. We carry out the analysis by focusing on the following important dimensions of *Ubuntu*, African humanism: independence and interdependence, individual, person and human rights.

### Writing, transition, world and humanism

Historically, the term *Ubuntu* has its origins in the Niger/Congo family language group. Through a process of morphological and phonological reduction, the term was subsequently framed as *Ubuntu*. According to Gade (2013) the term *Ubuntu* was first cited in European writing on Africa in 1850; however, it had been used in speech in African communities before 1850. Gade (2013) explores a historical development of written discourses of *Ubuntu*. Writing as a semiotic modality narrowed, stabilised and created an illusion of stability of the meanings of *Ubuntu* in writing. The semiotic modality of writing reinforced by Structuralism created *Ubuntu* as an object abstracted from its speakers and hearers.

*Ubuntu* can be found in Zunda varieties of Nguni languages, Zulu, Xhosa, Ndebele spoken largely in southern Africa and in the Tekela varieties, Sotho-Tswana. Linguistically, *Ubu* is an abstract prefix that means 'possessing the qualities of being human'. *Ntu* is a root which means a person. *Ubuntu*, in both Nguni varieties Zunda and Tekela, means *umuntu ngamuntu ngabantu* and *mutso ke mutso Ka batho babag*, meaning 'I am what I am because of who we all are'. *Ubuntu*, as a form of secular humanism, is also found in other parts of Southern Africa in Zimbabwe, notably among the Shona in Zimbabwe.



The equivalent of *Ubuntu* in Shona is *hunhu*. *Hunhu* is also interpreted as good manners. *Hunhu* and *Ubuntu*, although closely related, are different because *hunhu* refers to manners, but the primary meaning of *Ubuntu* is being human. The notion of what it means to be human varies between different languages, and communities and sociopolitical contexts.

The term *Ubuntu* was popularised in southern Africa in the 1980s and 1990s, a period related to the transition from white rule in southern Africa in Zimbabwe. The term was used by the African nationalist Stanlake Samukange and subsequently by Desmond Tutu (a former Anglican Arch Bishop of Cape Town), who defined it (*Ubuntu*) as 'amnesty and love', a view reinforced by Tutu's involvement in the Truth and Reconciliation (TRC), which was held in South Africa after the end of apartheid. It also appears in the Epilogue of the South African Constitution (Act 200 of 1993) as the following: 'There is a need for understanding but not vengeance, reparations but not retaliation, *Ubuntu* but not victimization'.

While it is feasible to establish the meaning of *Ubuntu* from a Structuralist perspective, it is difficult to do so in integrational linguistics because many factors have to be taken into account in the analysis, which include but are not restricted to type of genre, narrative contexts, agency, feelings of responsibility, misunderstanding, conflict and individual social trajectory. It is necessary to include a speaker's individual trajectory because no two or more people experience language in an identical way (Pablé & Hutton 2015: 41), and consequently, individuals may have different understandings of *Ubuntu* and by extension of humanism. Another important feature relevant to an analysis of *Ubuntu* (African secular humanism) are laypeople's experiences of language. Using laypeople's experiences of language as an analytical category legitimates ordinary people's expertise therefore challenging professional linguists' sole authority over language. The notion that the language expertise of laypeople is as important as that of professional linguists is liberating in African humanism, particularly in societies that are highly stratified along, class, race, caste and so on. A justification of ordinary people's expertise is well articulated by Orman and Pablé when they write: 'There are no impenetrable semiological truths hidden from lay thinking which the academic linguist can somehow bring to the fore' (2015: 5).

### Language typologies

The use of lay people's experiences as an important site of analysis complicates because of the different names and meanings speakers of African languages assign to their speech practices. While linguists may use names such as Shona, Ndebele or Xhosa, laypeople may define what they speak as 'human language', and conversely, speakers whose languages differ from their own are categorised as not speaking a human language. They may refer to what other people speak pejoratively as chirping of birds, for example, typically South Africans refer to people who do not speak a language different from their own as *ikwerekwere* ('they do not speak a human language; they sound like birds'). The critical issue

is that the sociolinguistic world of some indigenous communities revolves around African indigenous peoples. From their perspective, they are the center of their universe. Thus, questioning the linguistic use of Western categories such as minority languages, when applied to African sociolinguistics, is relevant because one cannot be on a periphery of a world in which they are at the center of their universe. Such aspect has an impact on African humanism. Humanism is therefore a social and contextualised process.

### *Ubuntu*, pan-Africanism and naming of languages

Some scholars regard *Ubuntu* as a pan-African concept with variants found in different languages and regions across Africa. The concept *Ubuntu* is found in other African languages and is not restricted to southern Africa. The term is *umundu* in Kikuyu, *umuntu* in Kimeru, *bumuntu* in Kisukuma and *kiHaya* both spoken in Tanzania and Kenya, *vumuntu* in ShiTsonga and ShiTswa of Mozambique. In Mozambique, linguistic variations of *Ubuntu* are *muthu* in Chubo, *brantu* in Ndaou and *mudhu* in XiSena. In Angola, similar terms include *munu* and *jiuntu* in Kikongo and *omanu* in Umbundu, and in Congo, the equivalent of *Ubuntu* is *munu* in Tshiluba. GiKwese is used in Congo and Angola. The last examples show that the concept of *Ubuntu* is not restricted to South Africa and Zimbabwe but is also found in ex-Portuguese countries. Whether the list of morphological variants of *Ubuntu* cited by Kamwangamalu (1999) and Chaua (2014) correspond with that of *Ubuntu* in southern Africa remains an open question because *Ubuntu* has a number of closely related but distinct meanings, so it's not clear which meaning Kamwangamalu and Chaua had in mind. When trying to establish ways in which humanism is expressed in different languages, it is important to bear in mind that in some cases, the same language has many names, which complicates the issue because at times, it is not clear whether the comparison that is being made about *Ubuntu* is from the same language with different names. For example, the following are the names for Anni, a language used in Togo, and Benin in west Africa: *Basila*, *Basilia*, *Basela* and *Ounji-Ounji Winji-Wingi*.

The idea of 'one language, one name, one expression' of *Ubuntu* reflects a monolingual approach, a situation that is radically different in multilingual contexts when a language may have many different names and many different languages may have the same name.

From an integrationist approach in colonial and postcolonial Africa, lay naming is important because the lay naming is therefore a challenge to colonial naming. Colonial naming of languages in Africa, particularly in the colonial era, tended to be pejorative. When names are assigned to language, the assumption is that there is an object called *language*. In integrationism, names in Africa are not only second-order macrosocial abstractions or metalinguistic categories but political creations as well, unlike in integrationism, in which second-order concepts are mostly considered from a philosophical perspective.



## **Ubuntu, law and jurisprudence**

The South African Interim Constitution of 1993 set the tone and atmosphere for South African sociopolitical transformation in post-apartheid South Africa. The constitution aimed to create a historic bridge between the past of a deeply divided society characterised by strife, conflict and untold suffering and injustice, seeking to promote a peaceful coexistence, a need for reparation and not retaliation. In addition, the constitution recognised the need for *Ubuntu*, although attaching great importance to *Ubuntu*, in the Interim Constitution, the term is not explicitly defined, opening the constitution to a critique that the *Ubuntu* from a jurisprudence is not helpful because the term is vague. Despite the vagueness of the term, the court used *Ubuntu* as a background to a critique of the loss of respect of human life and inherent dignity as apparent in *Ubuntu* (*S v Makwanyane and An-other*, 1995: 227). The Constitutional Court in South Africa adopted the approach that the range of constitutional values contained in the Constitution does not constitute a *numerus clausus* and that other values such as *Ubuntu* can be elevated to that status (Tshoose 2009).

The underpinning juridical principle of *Ubuntu* is that life should be taken from a communal perspective in which justice is ensured by supernatural forces. In this sense, justice is seen as “the restoration of equilibrium [. . .] as a continually lived experience” (Ramose 2001: 4). Laws are committed to concrete and immediate life of people. It is not about abstract values (as Western model) but embodied values in a contextualised and dynamic life. Because of such dynamism, the concept of law does not exist *a priori* in an abstract way but is shaped according to local and negotiated needs of equilibrium. Such perspective destabilises the Western concept of language rights because rights are not abstract and universal categories but should be considered in relation to a communitarian and shared everyday life.

## **Ubuntu, the individual and personhood**

*Ubuntu* is a philosophical view, a form of African humanism, a world perspective and ideology that captures kindness and virtue in either an individual and the moral and ethical obligation an individual has towards other individuals. *Ubuntu* and moral commitment is ‘not an innate instinct but a learnt tradition . . . morals do not always operate as explicit rules, but may manifest themselves, as do true instincts, as vague distillations to, or distate for, certain kinds of action. Often they tell us how to choose among, or to avoid, inborn instinctual drives’ (Hayek translated by Bartley 1988: 13). In *Ubuntu*, assistance to other people is regarded as a reflection of a moral commitment, a type of social behavior. Social behavior acceptable to *Ubuntu*, like other behaviors, can be construed as a type of activity, which can be defined thus:

Crucially, human behavior cannot (or should not) be understood as a product made of joint contributions from independently and analyzable kinds of

activity (‘linguistic’, ‘cognitive’, and ‘practical’ ones): rather human activity has a different character, with words, actions and thoughts being all mixed up together in some way, precisely as an ‘integrated continuum.’ (Pablic & Hutton 2015: 116)

The following are the *Pro tanto* moral principles that are unacceptable by and large by African humanism:

- 1 To kill innocent people for money.
- 2 To deceive people at least when not done in self defense.
- 3 To steal or take from rightful owner.
- 4 To violate trust or to discriminate on the basis of race when distributing and allocating opportunities to individuals.
- 5 The moral judgement regards it as immoral to make decisions that accentuate divisions instead of seeking consensus.
- 6 To make retribution a foundational and central aim of criminal justice as opposed to reconciliation; to create wealth on competitive basis as opposed to a cooperative one.

The notion of an individual, however, in *Ubuntu* is different from that in Western philosophy. Western philosophy tends to construe an individual in an *atomistic* manner. In African philosophy and humanism, individuals are influenced by powerful central normative principles, and an individual is composed of two aspects – one is visible and the other invisible. The duality is apparent in how an individual is framed. Second, an individual is both a medium and center of his or her own universe. In *Ubuntu* in some African contexts, individuals are defined by communities they belong to and the communities shape them. In *Ubuntu*, both the individual and community rights have to be upheld in order to realise issues about ‘social justice’ (Piller 2016) or more specifically in socio-linguistics, human rights.

## **Ubuntu, language and morality: ‘the story of the fat man’**

*Ubuntu* has been linked to discussion about morality, but there is no connection that has been proposed between language and morality over and above either the meanings and translations of *Ubuntu* or the implications of integration on *Ubuntu*. There is a relatively large number of Africans who are bilingual and a sizeable literature on *Ubuntu*. However, there is very little research that has explored whether Africans will make different moral judgments when a sensitive question is posed in a first as opposed to a second language. The ‘story of the fat man’ is used in a famous experiment to investigate the type of judgements that people make and whether there is any variation in the judgements when the question is posed in a first or a second language (Edmonds 2013). The results seem to suggest that people make different judgments



depending on whether the issue is presented in a first as opposed to a second language. When the dilemma is presented in a first language, the subjects make judgments that take into account moral issues, but when presented in a second language or any other language that is not the mother tongue, they make utilitarian judgements. Extrapolating from the results of the 'story of the fat man', it appears Africans are likely to make decisions and judgments that are morally sensitive aligned to *Ubuntu* when using a first language as opposed to a second language. *Ubuntu* is therefore likely to occur when speaking in a first language as opposed to a second language.

### ***Ubuntu* and intersubjectivity and interdependence**

*Ubuntu* is a relational philosophy. In *Ubuntu*, when drawing upon relational philosophy, an individual cannot be separated from the context she is situated in. *Ubuntu* from a relational perspective highlights the importance of a subjective and healthy emotional experience that avoids Cartersian dual distinctions between mind and the body. *Ubuntu* reinforces appropriate social relationships, in which communication is an integral part of social relationships. The use of what may be deemed as inappropriate communication may have an adverse effect on social harmony. In some cases, designs to retain social harmony are apparent in the enforcement of regimented social language. An excellent example is the use of *blonipha*. *Hlonipha* is a language variety and genre that ideally is used as a marker of respect when women are interacting with either their fathers-in-law or mothers-in-law. An individual who does not use appropriate *blonipha* when interacting with her in-laws is defined as lacking *Ubuntu*. In such cases, *Ubuntu* has a linguistic dimension. In integrationism, the use or lack thereof using *blonipha* is an activity, a type of discourse. *Hlonipha*, like other forms of communication, when viewed from an integrationist perspective demands continuous creative monitoring, even the most trivial act requires monitoring. In such contexts, as Rossi-Landi argues, drawing attention to language and *blonipha* is best treated as a form and type of work: 'I purposely speak of work rather than activity because words, are products rather than activity because words and messages constitute the concrete social reality from which we must begin' (Rossi-Landi 1983: 36).

### ***Ubuntu* and personhood**

Communities are based upon communication; personhood is only feasible via communication. There is no human society or community in which there is no communication. In African humanism, communication is therefore a pre-condition for being human. The issue in African humanism is not whether communication is necessary for personhood to take place but the nature of the communication. Because of the dynamic nature of African communication, a conduit metaphor in which language is encoded on one end and decoded at

another will be inadequate because communication in African contexts is energetic, flowery, replete with aphorisms and morals about humanism. In such contexts, the communication has to be constructed as open-ended and the form it will take unpredictable in advance. African humanism is therefore articulated in creative ways. Even though common themes run through African humanism, each communicative humanistic event is unique and in a manner consistent with integrationism.

Communication understood from an integrationist perspective considers that 'language is not an autonomous mode of communication and languages are not autonomous systems of signs' (Harris 1987: 136). Along with this perspective, in *Ubuntu*, we must take into account not only the local dynamics of meaning construction and negotiation but also what or who is there to be communicated with and the message to be communicated. Communicating is not about a system of signs that can be mechanically or pragmatically decoded and categorised; rather, it is about being human as a necessary response to the other, in which subjects are in front of the other, facing the other. The political implication of such perspective is that politics and ethics are closely tied. Thus, language – along with other semiotic elements – is in service of creating a communitarian way of being in the world. In this sense, *Ubuntu* is in line with Arendt's (1958: 4) concept of politics: 'Men in the plural, that is, men in so far as they live and move and act in this world, can experience meaningfulness only because they can talk with and make sense to each other and to themselves'. Talking does not mean a process of encoding and decoding verbal messages through separable episodes of speech acts but covers a broader and more complex meaning-making process.

Although *Ubuntu* can be labelled as philosophy, it is not about a meta-physical and abstract set of principles and ideas constructed by reasoning and expressed through written form. *Ubuntu* exists in relation to principles constructed and shared in ordinary and daily life. Human experience that underlines African humanism is built of several local practices, which include different ways of constructing relationship through language and communication. Examples are the use of proverbs, songs, narratives, tales, myth, poetry, aphorisms and several other oral discursive practices. Therefore, *Ubuntuism* as African philosophy has its roots inscribed in popular and oral practices (Castano 2010). One of the strongest contribution of such flexible roots of *Ubuntu* is that it remains as a relative open philosophical space that allows critical thinking in relation to contextualised and communitarian human condition (Tschacege 2013).

The communication model that forms the basis of interdependence in *Ubuntu* is different from a telementation perspective that is implied when labels of *Ubuntu* are identified as discrete. The idea of *Ubuntu* categories is a reflection of segregationism in which language is separated from its users and speakers, which undercuts humanism. A telementation model found cannot be reconciled with a communication relevant to *Ubuntu*. The communication model (Pablé



& Hutton 2015: 115–116) pertinent to *Ubuntu* from an integrationist perspective is based on at least five types of integration:

- 1 Interpersonal integration
- 2 Environmental integration
- 3 Transmodal integration
- 4 Temporal integration
- 5 Conjunctive integration

Two types of people may be defined as possessing *Ubuntu*. Whereas the weak version regards anyone who is part of the *Homo sapiens* as persons, the stronger one restricts personhood to Blacks who meet the moral, social and ethical obligations necessary in *Ubuntu*.

### *Ubuntu, language rights and integrationism*

*Ubuntu* involves the co-occurrence among the following elements in Zulu (Venter 2004): *umzimba* (body), *umoya* (breath), *umphefumela* (spirit), *amanandla* (energy), *inhliziso* (heart), *umqond* (head), *ulwimi* (language) and *Ubuntu* (humanness). From this perspective, personhood, language and being human are strongly connected. This means languages cannot be taken as individual and autonomous unities that can be counted and named but as embodied realities whose meaning exist only in relation to being human. *Ubuntu* and integrationism can be approximated in relation to the way languages are understood from a broader and complex perspective because for integrationism, 'Language as social interaction involves not just vocal behavior but many kinds of behavior' (Harris 1987: 141). This means that languages must be understood in relation to discursive and semiotic practices that bring together body, soul, reason, emotion and morality. *Ubuntu* and integrationism when applied in colonial and post-colonial Africa share a communitarian and thus politicised concept of language built on the idea that language practices only make sense when radically contextualised into specific modes of being in the world. Language policy studies may benefit from *Ubuntu* and integrationism towards a broader concept of public sphere in which action and discourse only make sense from the perspective of plurality and coexistence (Arendt 1958).

Discourses on language rights are part of human rights ideology of universalism. In this perspective, a common concept of human being crosses different times and spaces. Such abstraction is typical of Eurocentric thinking that was 'imposed as globally hegemonic in the same course as the expansion of European colonial dominance over the world' (Quijano 2000: 542). Language rights framework inherits such universal tendency of human rights discourses to define and classify different experiences from a common view. For language rights discourses, languages are taken from segregationism (Harris 1987) that considers languages as countable and nameable units. Such perspective cannot apprehend the linguistic complexities of plurilingual societies where linguistic

boundaries are fuzzy, language identity is dynamic and moving, communicative practices extrapolate the idea of language as unit, and language is sensitive to intra- and intergroup power relations (Makoni 2011).

The roots of human and language rights discourses are attached to the early modern European culture and politics. Enlightenment and liberalism contributed to the emergence of human rights as a universal category. The world wars in the twentieth century reflected the formal creation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. The Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights dates to 1996, when used particularly when referring to the trope of 'endangered languages'. The trope of 'language endangerment' is politically tricky because it reinforces a biological concept of language based on the ideas of language development, evolution, language competition, language loss and language extinction. From the point of view of integrationism, languages are not natural species but cultural and contextualised practices (Makoni 2011). Even though language rights were officially recognised only in the 1990s, the roots of such discourses can be traced back to the emergence of both modernity and capitalism, which were only possible because of colonization. Thus, by contextualizing human language rights, it is possible to identify a complex set of power relations that involved the ideas of race, racism and exploitation that deeply affected Africa, America and Asia for more than four centuries. This way, we argue that language rights discourse must go through deep epistemological and political revisions; otherwise, it runs the risk to reproduce colonial ideologies that deprive Africans of their human condition: 'Colonization was predicated on the idea that the African was not a full and complete human being' (Ramose 2001).

### *Ubuntu, capitalism and resistance*

Although *Ubuntu* is a powerful framework to criticise capitalism and individualism, it has also been used for utilitarian purposes 'in service of ideologies, such as corporate South African capitalism' (Venter 2004: 150). The same occurs with other philosophies, such as the indigenous Latin American ones that have been appropriated to justify a commodified vision about environment, life and tourism. Such appropriation of discourses of diversity and resistance by capitalism was classified as functional interculturality (Walsh 2009), focused on liberal politics of inclusion and tolerance supported by global capitalism, without problematizing the deep roots of power relations that helped to frame modern institutions and knowledge. Examples are the discourses of UNESCO, the United Nations, human rights, language rights, cultural heritage, among many others. A critical perspective requires a deep revision of colonial structural power relations that include the ideas of race and racism. The critical thinking problematises capitalism and its capacity to transform everything into something capable of being consumed, including culture, people, beliefs and languages. Even though capitalism may be seen as 'indestructible' (Žižek 2007), several 'politics of resistance' reveal possibilities for local resistance. A perspective that recognises the fatal victory of capitalism would include as possible forms of



resistance the bombardment of 'those in power with strategically well-selected, precise, finite demands' (Žižek 2007: 17).

More radical politics of resistance against capitalism would be in line with the politics of decolonization, which include a critical and historical attitude towards capitalism. It is about deconstructing colonial power relations on several levels: economic, political, cultural, epistemic and subjective (Quijano 2000; Walsh 2009). One example of decolonization in Latin America is the official recognition by the Constitution of Ecuador of *sumak kawsay* (*bem viver*, 'good living'), a principle of strong coexistence between human beings and nature in line with Andean and Indigenous worldviews. In an African context, *Ubuntu* can also be considered an example of a 'politics of resistance' in relation to several aspects: (1) economic, by proposing communitarian values that problematise the commodification of people and culture; such perspective prioritises the group survival to the detriment of the individual necessity; (2) political, by recognizing the evolving nature of power relations in search of the restoration of equilibrium; (3) cultural, by recognizing the importance of local and ordinary practices and knowledge; (4) epistemic, by proposing critical thinking about human being, ethics and morality; and (5) subjective, by recognizing otherness as central to self-constitution. Although the aim of this chapter is not to itemise the several ways *Ubuntu* may work as a critique of capitalism, it is relevant to consider such political dimension.

### *Ubuntu in Africa and diaspora*

Considering that Africa is not a preexisting and homogeneous reality but an invention, we may consider that *Ubuntu* plays a central role in defining Africa as an idea (Mbembe 2015). Several meanings and histories helped to construct different narratives about Africa from different perspectives. Colonial narratives have been powerful in the construction of negative stereotypes that steal Africans' humanity, as the ideas of racism and the practice of slavery. In the colonial era, race was used as a category that created hierarchies and legitimated power relations and exploitation by the use of violence: 'Domination is the requisite for exploitation, and race is the most effective instrument for domination that, associated with exploitation, serves as the universal classifier in the current global model of power' (Quijano 2000: 572). The colonial history of Africa implies the recognition of strong and intense processes of forced diaspora through slavery system. This means that for four centuries, Africans from different parts of Africa were sent to several places, mainly America. Colonialism seeks to deprive the colonised of their *Ubuntu* and paradoxically has the likelihood of depriving the colonisers of chances of either retaining or securing their own humanity.

In the context of colonial diaspora, Brazil was the destiny of most Africans between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries, representing nearly 4 million people against 0.4 million taken to the United States. The origin of Africans is varied, although a large proportion were taken from current regions of Angola

and Côte d'Ivoire. Angola became the central target in the trade of slaves when, between 1701 and 1810, 1.285.900 Africans were brought to Brazil (Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics<sup>1</sup>). African people taken to Brazil were grouped into two major ethnicities: Sudanese, coming from West Africa, and the Bantu, coming from equatorial and tropical Africa. Among these groups, the Bantu presence was significant in the linguistic and discursive formation of Brazil, with strong influence of Kikongo, Kimbundu and Umbundu in Brazilian Portuguese (Castro 2001; Mendonça 2012 [1935]). We understand, however, that such ethnic classifications can be complicated because they do not represent the complexity of the local situation.

Currently, more than half of the Brazilian population is made up of Afro-Brazilians, according to the category of 'self-identification'. Brazil has inherited several African practices, languages, cultures, customs and variations of *Ubuntu*, African communication styles, and the African languages, which reflect the Africanity of Brazilian social practices, even in the spoken Portuguese of Brazil. Our focus, however, is to identify the *Ubuntu*'s footprints in the Afro-Brazilian worldview. We believe one powerful connection between the African diaspora in Brazil and *Ubuntu* is the idea of *Quilombo*. The concept of Quilombo has historically evolved since power relations produce new political configurations: 'the various meanings of quilombo, including its appearance in Angola during Portuguese colonization, reinforce the organizational sense and struggle for autonomy that are reconfirmed and highlighted in current struggles for territory' (Leite 2015: 1226).

We argue that this kind of organizational sense has philosophical connections with *Ubuntu*. To better justify such an argument, we present Abdias do Nascimento's Manifesto in defense of Afro-Brazilian memory. Nascimento (1914–2011) was an Afro-Brazilian scholar, artist and activist who strongly defended Afro-Brazilian civil rights. His Manifesto, called *QUILOMBISMO: An Afro-Brazilian Political Alternative* (1980), was an effort to include Afro-Brazilian into a larger project of reconstructing African's memories in diaspora. Quilombism was initially related to a communitarian form of resistance against slavery in Brazil. Later on, several other meanings were attributed to *Quilombism*, turning it into a robust project of shared existence, as pointed out by Nascimento (1980: 160):

Black people have a collective project: the erection of a society founded on justice, equality and respect for all human beings [...] We have no interest in proposing an adaptation or reformation of the models of capitalist class society [...] An operative conceptual tool must be developed, then, within the guidelines of the immediate needs of the Black Brazilian people.

*Quilombos* were designed as specific modes of experience, in which the main principles of *Ubuntu* would be presented: a radical communitarian perspective together with values that reinforced collective experiences rather than individual ones. This idea of living together was strongly reinforced by the Manifesto,



aiming at an economic egalitarianism. The philosophical nature of Quilombism, including a concept of the subject with political implications, can be exemplified by the following quote:

Quilombismo is a scientific historical philosophy whose pivotal focal point is the human being, as actor and subject (not merely as passive object, as in the Western scientific tradition), within a worldview and a conception of life in which science constitutes one among many other paths of knowledge.

(Nascimento 1980: 162)

In diasporic contexts, African experience must take into account the different ways Africanity was resignified in dialogue with several historical experiences. Quilombos do not exist only in Brazil. Several Latin American countries, such as Colombia and Haiti, have shared similar experiences in relation to a more solidary, shared and communitarian perspective of human beings and of life. Quilombo is currently seen as an economic, political, juridical, social, cultural and subjective mode of existence better defined as 'a system of social organization and a right' (Leite 2015: 1226) rather than a racial category. A post-utopian conception on Quilombo focuses on the idea of Quilombo as a human right, deconstructing color and race as criteria of exclusion (Leite 2015). Quilombo integrates this large African *Ubuntu* humanism that extrapolates geopolitical boundaries.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, we explored the theoretical and practical potentialities of the African concept *Ubuntu*, considered as a mode of existence shared in the daily life. Even though the origins of *Ubuntu* may be strongly connected to South Africa, it extrapolates this context and covers different regions and languages in Africa and abroad. Examples are the concept of Quilombo in Brazil (Nascimento 1980) and the idea of Black theology in the United States (Castiano 2010). *Ubuntu* works as a philosophical humanistic orientation whose roots are based on popular practices, including a vast amount of knowledge shared through orality as proverbs, tales, narratives and stories. Being together and sharing the public space through a dialogic relationship define the political facet of *Ubuntu*. Such aspect is deeply embedded in an otherness-oriented ethical behavior, which means that 'I' exist only in relation to 'us'. The linguistic implication of such perspective is that language cannot be reduced to an abstract, countable, nameable and separable unity. Language is a complex set of elements that only make sense together, including emotion, reason, body and verbal expression, among others. Integrationism is a strong theoretical approach that can be approximated to *Ubuntu* by considering the complexity of language practices considered from contextual and historical perspectives. Despite the capitalistic use of *Ubuntu* to justify renewed forms of control by reinforcing the idea of authenticity, we argue

that *Ubuntu* works as a powerful political and ethical framework that helps us to think about different possibilities of being together in public and shared space. Such an aspect, however, does not mean that power relations do not exist, but they make sense in a social dynamics that work towards restoring equilibrium. *Ubuntu*'s strength is rooted in its evolving nature because it is based on experience rather than on abstract principles. This creates an opened space for reflection that at the same time reinforces the discourses of tradition and allows space for utopia and creativity. Such openness reflects the way sharing life and being together are continually molding and remolding the subjects.

## Note

- 1 Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics. Available at <<http://brasil500anos.ibge.gov.br/territorio-brasileiro-e-povoamento/negros>>. Other statistical information can be found at <[www.slavevoyages.org](http://www.slavevoyages.org)>.

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