



HÖGSKOLAN  
Dalarna

School of Culture and Media  
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# Ubuntu

An analysis of the Political Rhetoric of a Traditional Concept  
in Contemporary South Africa

Author: Hanna Eklund  
Supervisor: Peter Bretschneider  
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“Happiness only real when shared.”

–Christopher J. McCandless, 1992.

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## **Preface**

I went to South Africa in July 2007 for one semester to participate in an exchange program between my home university Högskolan Dalarna and two universities in South Africa: Stellenbosch University and the University of the Western Cape. Before my departure I learned that it would be good to find a subject for a thesis, but I honestly doubted that I would do so. I questioned, on the one hand that the culture I would meet could provide something that new and interesting to me, and on the other hand if there was such an interesting subject that I as a person would be open to see it.

It was in the course Public Morality at the University of the Western Cape where I came across the concept of ubuntu for the first time. I was surprised over my own interest in this new and unknown field, which I from the beginning thought was a small insignificant branch in ethics. I read an article written in 2005 by one of our professors, Antjie Krog, concerning how the spirit and use of ubuntu affected the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and its work to reconcile the nation after the abolition of apartheid. That article established my interest in ubuntu and made a big difference to me in my understanding of ubuntu and its relevance to people in South Africa.

## I. Introduction and Outline

My thesis aims to define what a person is from an anthropological perspective, with a focus on Africa, specifically southern Africa. Anthropological theories will be applied to this context to see their pertinence and therefore, the outline of my thesis is as follows: The first part will look at anthropological thoughts concerning theories about egocentric and sociocentric societies; the second will discuss a specific concept in the sociocentric domain, namely ubuntu; and the third part aims to observe how this concept is applied in the contemporary political discourse by looking at the political and economy spheres.

Part one shows how anthropological theories of the conception of personhood relate to theories about ego- versus sociocentric societies. How a person is conceived, the category of the person, is different over time and space, and is strongly intertwined to its context (Lukes 2006:3). This relativistic view is in conjunction with Émile Durkheim (Carrithers 1986:46f) when he states that the way people conceive themselves is not absolute, but particular to and relative to the particular society or epoch in question. Categories of thought are fundamental ideas, concepts or patterns of thinking, which can be found in different cultures and different historical periods. To contemplate different modes of personhood one will see how people actively and creatively use their minds and bodies to cope with the sometimes inconsistent events of every day life. One way to understand the numerous manners people tackle and perceive this interaction is from the perspective of the theories of ego- and sociocentric societies. To exemplify this we will look into traditional and modern societies, where a special focus will come on the traditional African society in the second part.<sup>1</sup>

Part two is about the Zulu saying *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*, which is traditionally translated as: “a person is a person through other persons” (Ramose 1999:49, Shutte 2001:23). The human aspect is called ubuntu, which will be the focus in this thesis. The definition

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<sup>1</sup> I am aware of the ideal description and complications of the terms “traditional”, “modern” and “the traditional African society”. First, the term “traditional” in an everyday language often equates to negative associations relating to the traditional as something inferior and behind the times. This association is linked to “the modern”, considered as the other (better) side of the coin. I would argue that there are no traditional societies today, in the meaning that there exist no societies that are untouched, rather there are societies that are more or less influenced by traditional values and practices. Second, “the traditional African society” is a very broad term consisting not of one type of an African society, but of a large number of communities, people, beliefs, habits etc. Even so, do I use the terms “traditional and modern”, because they are already established terms in the fields of anthropology, religion and philosophy (among others), with the meaning as something descriptive without valuation and judgements concerning inferior or superior. When it comes to the adoption of “the traditional African society”, I am trying to give a general overview for those things that are customs at many places but with local variants.

suggested above will work as a universal reference when I am doing an overview of the concept of ubuntu in South Africa. In understanding this definition a historical context is necessary, because by making the roots visible one can see how the concept has developed and changed. In my approach into ubuntu I will explore the term sociocentrism in the South African context. Because apartheid was the antithesis of ubuntu, with a policy of separation acting in contrast to a philosophy of togetherness, it can be very interesting to see how this concept has evolved over time. This will be done in part three, where I will do a research of ubuntu in contemporary South Africa, of the political rhetoric and the adoption of the concept in the business sector. It is said that ubuntu was used as a rhetoric tool in the aftermath of apartheid for politicians and commissioners in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in the process to reconcile the wounded nation (Krog 2005:5-8) and also that it is applied by business people for profit making and financial success. If it can be determined how people use the concept, it might be possible to decipher if ubuntu has any significance on the political and economical arena in South Africa today.

### **1.1 Material and Delimitations**

The literature in this thesis is collected mostly from academic books and journals.<sup>2</sup> In the first part I have mainly used anthropological sources from Jean and John L Comaroff, Michael Jackson and Ivan Karp, Anita Jacobson-Widding, and Michael Carrithers; Steven Collins and Steven Lukes to examine different views of personhood in traditional and modern societies. A number of authors, including Thomas Hylland Eriksen, Ruth Zimmerling and Anthony Giddens among others, have provided valuable materials for an understanding of theories of egocentric- versus sociocentric societies.

It occurred to me that when it came to the second and third part that there is plenty of literature on "ubuntu", but much of it is hard to get access to. This is due to the limitations of African literature on the subject in Sweden and that some are unpublished articles. Of what I could acquire about ubuntu and African traditional religion I have chosen a few as my base sources to seize the concept of ubuntu, the traditional African society and its relation to religion, but also for this concept's context in modern South Africa and how it is applied and used. These authors are Mogobe Bernard Ramose, Augustine Shutte, Johann Broodryk, John

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<sup>2</sup> The academic category can be discussed. Some of my books are explicit written as academic literature, where others have authors saying they are not written in an academic purpose. But I have chosen them due to sources they are built on that are, in my eyes, reliable and validate. See the bibliography for further information about my sources.

S. Mbiti, Nkonko M. Kamwangamalu, Zoë Wicomb, Mfuniselwa John Bhengu, Wim Van Binsbergen and Antjie Krog.

## **2. Part One: The Anthropological View of Personhood**

### **2.1 Egocentric and Sociocentric Societies**

According to the egocentric-sociocentric society theory, the egocentric culture is based on the ideology of the modern notion of individualism, meaning that every person has their own responsibility to be successful and cannot rely on others (Krog 2005:1f). While some societies with this view are more or less secularised others are Christians. Many societies separate religion from policy, but they are still built on Christian values, where the Ten Commandments are the pillars for law and justice. The modern notion of identity had its starting point in the 18<sup>th</sup> century when the European society was characterised by social hierarchy. During the Enlightenment there was an emphasis on honour, which created a social hierarchy. But honour was only for the nobility and the highest class because they had the rank inherited from birth. Only people in the high class were known as individuals, the rest were seen as a mass. When the social hierarchy started to collapse, honour was replaced by dignity. Dignity is in contrast to honour something everyone has by birth, and is a more universal characteristic. Dignity should, in accordance with its idea, be embraced universally because it is egalitarian and wants to recognize every individual as authentic (Taylor 1994:26-29,38).

The West<sup>3</sup> has a norm of egocentric values and its origins in written religions, which claim to have universal value. It was Christianity that conveyed the notion that each individual is and desires to be, his character, his true face. The idea about universally has continued to an assumption that the human being is superior everything else in the world, for the cause of the individual's dignity (Carrithers 1985:19f). Traditionally, Africa has a history of oral religions, which stands in contrast to the written religions, which one can see reflected in the present ego- and sociocentric societies. The most striking when speaking in terms of universal values is that oral religions are locally confined and do not claim to be applied elsewhere. The other difference between oral and written religions is that oral religions are embedded in the social

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<sup>3</sup> This broad term is a generalisation for the rich (economically) parts of the world, where Western Europe and North America are in the centre. The West is often contrasted with "the Rest", symbolising the less economic developed countries.

practices of society, while written religions are more detached from other social institutions and look further away when explaining the world (Eriksen 1995:199f).

Sociocentric societies are built upon a holistic understanding where similarities are cherished in contrast to egocentric societies, which focus on dissimilarities. Relations between people are in the centre and all cultural values, symbols and achievements are gathered and appreciated. The sociocentric culture has a plurality in the view of mankind where we all together create and are the wholeness of life in a rich spirituality. Religions of all kinds are important in the daily life and religion cannot be ignored in politics. There are no Ten Commandments or any other concrete written rules to follow like egocentric societies, instead there is an abstract perspective where evil is all those deeds which detract from and disturb the wholeness (Krog 2005:1f).

Modern individualism is an exceptional phenomenon among other civilisations. According to Alexis de Tocqueville (Lukes 2006:26) was it not long ago when people did not consider themselves as a detached part from a group, which makes individualism a fairly new concept. The West is built on individualism and assumptions about the human superior mind, also called the human rationality. In an egocentric society one can say that independence is the norm, while in a sociocentric it is rather interdependence (Kamwangamalu 1999:4). Steven Lukes (2006:24) writes that a society has the principle “all for each and each for all”, but individualism is a concept that has its pillars on “each for himself and each against all”, which is characteristic for the egocentric society. Individualism in this sense has, according to Lukes, created a malicious atmosphere for individuals in their conceptualisation of personhood.

## **2.2 Guilt- and Shame Cultures**

There exists a theoretical division between cultures depending on if they are built on shame- or guilt values, where it is said that shame cultures are the face of sociocentric societies and guilt is combined to the egocentric. Deepak Lal declares that culture determines the norms in a society and those norms are affected by if the culture is based on guilt or shame (Zimmerling 2003:1). What people feel ashamed or guilty about varies from one culture to another, depending on that particular society’s social norms (ibid.:4).

Shame played an essential role in the West until the scholastic development of the individualistic Christianity, which conveyed a change of social norms (Zimmerling 2003:4f). The shift came to a halt about the individual's deeds, which characterise the concept of guilt. Suddenly the West was very different from the 'Rest' by moving from a shame culture to a guilt culture (ibid.:4f). Shame can appear in a sociocentric context for example when a pupil has to stand in front of the class and be publically humiliated for doing something against the rules or norms. This is done in this sense for the individual to understand that he or she *should* feel shame. But Anthony Giddens does not agree that is a sufficient definition of shame because you can feel shame alone, that shame depends on feelings of personal insufficiency. Helen Lewis offers a distinction between these two states of shame, calling them overt and bypassed shame. Overt is when one is being humiliated by others and bypassed shame comes from unconsciously experienced anxieties when one is feeling insufficient about our self (Giddens 1991:64-69). T. J. Scheff (Zimmerling 2003:6ff) noted that shame is social and externalised, it is a feeling with reference to others. One cannot feel shame without any social relations, and therefore does an ashamed person try to hide from other people.

Guilt, on the other hand, is claimed to be the private sphere of feelings an individual can have when failing to match up to the normative expectations, usually related to something the person has or has not done (Giddens 1991:64-69). Whereas shame is about negative emotions about one's own *character*, guilt is a negative emotion about one's own *action*. Rather than hiding when feeling guilty the individual tends to seek repairs or even punishment (Zimmerling 2003:8). To understand the main difference between these two Zimmerling rephrases Michael Lewis:

Hence, both shame and guilt are grounded in internally accepted standards; and you can feel guilt as well as shame concerning what you did to another. In the case of shame, however, a social setting is required, an (at least, potential) observer whose expected reaction in terms of his opinion about you is at issue. For the feeling of guilt, by contrast, you need no-one but yourself (Zimmerling 2003:9).

Guilt has no positive side, shame, on the contrary, has both a negative and a positive. These two can be seen as the feelings of dissatisfaction and failure on the one side and pride or self-esteem on the other. In the division between shame- and guilt cultures modern societies are often placed in the guilt category, but Anthony Giddens (1991:64-69) claims that shame is more important in the creation of self-identity. In the process of one's own self-identity the self's integrity is absolutely vital. There is an ever-lasting conflict for the individual between

the two sides of shame. A struggle to minimize the shame and to maximize the pride, to gain and possess a self the individual can feel content about.

### **2.3 Conceptions of Personhood**

There are varying courses of how human beings experience the world, according to widely numbers of needs and interests. There is also a broad range of explanations for these different realities we live in (Jackson 1990:17). Important to remember when exploring personhood, how one understands oneself and the surroundings, is that it is always culturally formed and a social construction. The social setting has different views of realities, which affects the creation of personhood (Comaroff 2001:276). Likewise does Durkheim consider the individual as a product of the society and this is clear if we look at some different ways of relating to the self over the world (Carrithers 1985: 66,93, Lukes 2006:26).

In accordance with Giddens (1991:34, 80f), the main factor of what determines the view of personhood in a society depends on if the society is regarded as modern or traditional. In the West where the norm lies in individualism, modernity has certain consequences for people's lifestyles, precisely like a sociocentric society's value ground of traditional conceptions form other conditions. A traditional society has in many ways already established habits and roles, but the modern society has a multiplicity of choices, with little help for the individual to choose. The norm is the individualistic thinking that the individual is in charge and the individual is the emperor of his or her life, which implies that it is up to every person to make the right decisions for themselves. Individuals are supposed to help themselves in their creation of self-identity and the self-reflection such a process carries along can be both liberating and dangerous for the individual. The liberating part is constituted of the individual's power to become who she or he wants, but implies on the other hand worried emotions while always having to calculate the balance between the best opportunities and minimized risk.

Giddens illustrates the modern society by showing a picture of how the individual is continuously and unceasingly influenced by a flow of accessible information. He addresses modernity as a world that has more and faster social changes than any society has had before. The social form in a modern society is based on the organisation, where the nation-state is the most prominent. A nation-state can primarily be understood with its characteristics of territoriality and surveillance capacities and monopoly over violence (Giddens 1991:15f).

Modernity is also characterised by the individual's tendency to ask many existential questions. The search for self-identity is said to be a modern problem, where the origins probably come from Western individualism. Roy Baumeister (ibid.:74) claims that there was no emphasis on individuality in pre-modern societies, but Jean and John L Comaroff do not agree with him, arguing that the notion of individuality was never absent in any place in Africa (Comaroff 2001:276). Giddens (1991:70,74f) says that the modern individual cares more than before about them self, but chimes in with Comaroff that the self or self-identity has occurred more or less in all cultures, so we must be more detailed if we want to distinguish modernity from traditional.

La Fontaine (Carrithers 1985:126) notes that when speaking about an individual it usually means the mortal human being, which refers to ideas of Western individualism. She draws attention to other social contexts by describing four societies to compare with: The Tallensi of Ghana, The Lugbara of Uganda, the Taita of Kenya and the Gahuka-Gama of Highland New Guinea. In modern states, with their bureaucratic hierarchies, society has a ground on an organisation of competing individuals who are citizens of the state. Continuity lies in a structure of offices and roles to which individuals accede according to their personal qualities. In such societies person and individual are virtually indistinguishable. Alfred Reginald Radcliffe-Brown (Carrithers 1985:137ff) depicted that personhood in a society based on tradition, where society continues by new generations, is a complex of social relationships. The society is seen as the descendants of founding ancestors and personhood is the fulfilment of a socially significant career, of which the crucial elements are parenthood and paternal authority. They all perceive human being as composite creatures, and interesting to note is that not all individuals are conceived as persons. This is for the reason that the individual has a social status depending on birth and is composed of material and immaterial components, but being viewed as a non-person does not have the same social meaning as in the West.

Karp (Jackson 1990:20) writes about the African metaphor of the bush and stresses that it is simultaneously a domain of dangerous powers and vital energies. The bush signifies the generative powers of persons as individual agents. The bush can be inimical to the social order, but the bush also stands for individuation and agency. To evoke the bush is thus to remind ourselves that the integrity and perpetuation of every collective order depends in the last analysis on the initiatives and actions of individual persons. This is something Anita Jacobson-Widding (ibid.:18f, 29) concurs with when saying that individuals must feel they

have a choice to express their own selfhood instead of a feeling of being imposed of it by tradition or inscribed in collective representations.

The modern notion about personhood is very much concentrated around the dignity of every person, where the focus is on the individual, its formation of a self-identity and to understand it. Marcel Mauss (Jackson 1990:15) wrote about personhood in his last essay published in 1938. When studying one single category of the self he had the terminology where the self was called *moi*. *Moi* is the ideological definition of personhood in terms of rules, roles and representations. This invites the individual to see the hidden inner of the person, an inner behind the outer persona or mask a person presents to the world. He also used terms like *personne* to describe the innermost nature of a person and *personnage* for the 'role-player' (Carrithers 1985:18ff).

Meyer Fortes (Jackson 1990:15f) also reasoned for a split in an individual's personhood, however, made of two base categories. The objective side is where there are distinctive qualities, capacities and roles, with which the society enabling the person to be known to be, and also to show herself to be the person she is supposed to be. The subjective side is a question of how the individual, as an actor, knows herself to be, or not to be, the person she is expected to be in a given situation and status. The individual is not a passive bearer of personhood, by walking the path of the subjective category she has the power and choice to use her qualities and capacities to create her own personhood. These are clear examples of the modern individualistic assumption that the ability lies in the hands of the individual; both the power to create what kind of person he or she wants to be in the eyes of others and also the capability to create success for oneself.

Giddens (1991:16-19) explains three main modern elements to observe the more profound affecting modes of behaviour in social life. The first is the separation of time and space. There has always been a notion of time, but in pre-modern settings time and space were connected in a day-to-day life, meaning that time was only an experience in relation to the space where one was moving. In the modern life space and time can be separated in abstract terms via technology, making people imagine space they have not seen. Time then does not become the experience of moving in space. The second element is the disembedding of social institutions; that social relations are lifted out from local contexts. Some disembedding mechanisms are, for example, people who have not met in real life or money that are just abstract numbers on a

computer screen. The third element concerns the modern reliance on knowledge, and not trust in religion or in elders' knowledge as in traditional systems where one generation passes wisdom to the next. Instead modernity relies on experts on a large impersonal organisational level or is deemed to exist in the individuals' belief in themselves. This implies that people still need trust, for instance, people have to trust when buying vegetarian food that it is without meat. This without knowing whom to trust, because trust is put on an institutional level. The modern egocentric society breaks down the small and protective community of tradition and local engagements, which can make individuals feeling lonely. In a modern society one can sit at home alone 24/7 and still have a functional life according to the government's measurement of handling social life and personal economy. This is possible because of the modern technology that enables a person to work and shop online and contact others via e-mail. In some ways modernity brings people closer to others far away. It can provide society with a feeling that the world is shrinking, that we can 'trick' the old notion about space and time when "skyping"<sup>4</sup> with people on the other side of the planet. Yet it takes them further away from real life meetings in quotidian life where trust is prescribed on a concrete person. Buying things at the local market from someone recognizable or go to the bank and exchange small but important information about each other's soundness can manifest into trust on a local level (Giddens 1991:21ff, 33, 131). The manner in which trust is used in the modern society can have harmful implications on the individual, which Wittgenstein illustrates by stating, "[w]here individuals cannot live creatively, either because of the compulsive enactment of routines, or because they have been unable to attribute full 'solidity' to persons and objects around them, chronic melancholic or schizophrenic tendencies are likely to result" (ibid.:41).

The modern society forces the individual to shape their own self-identity, something that in traditional societies is more or less given. Giddens (1991:32) means that significant for the modern society is how the global affect the local, which also has implications on the individual's process in shaping a self-identity. Trust is always in relation to risk, where the individual has to find a balance between risk and opportunity. Modernity does not put emphasis on fate and destiny like in traditional societies, modern life is to gamble and take the risk, which will disturb the fixity (ibid.:133). Ulrich Beck (ibid.:3ff, 19, 28, 32, 129) considers modernity as risk societies, because the individual is in open possibilities of action where one

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<sup>4</sup> Skype, a computer program that enables conversations on the Internet.

has to be aware of present threats, not only towards the community where one is living, but threats towards the whole planet. These threats can for example consist of ecological catastrophes, collapse of global economic mechanisms, mortal epidemic diseases or rise of totalitarian super-states. The interconnectedness globalisation brings between people over the world makes more risks visible where the individual is constantly confronted. There is always a threat above the individual, containing of death or other risks, which easily can give the individual a feeling of lost control. Every day there is fresh news about the latest threats, ranging from warnings for poisoned substances in cinnamon or dangerous fat in chips to global terrorism and global warming. The news is not only accessible to everyone but is also nearly impossible to avoid. According to Giddens (ibid.:123, 129), day-to-day life is not more risky in modern times than in prior eras, the difference is that modernity makes the individual think ever-presently about them. Individuals have to find a balance between risk and opportunity in the modern world, but the risks come somehow in focus. The awareness of risks has increased, and therefore the feeling of being unsafe has also increased.

#### **2.4 The Body and Body Symbolism**

The categories ego- versus sociocentric societies pave the way to remark about the differences of how people conceive themselves and the surroundings. One vital instrument in the perception of personhood is the human body, which here will be examined. Some societies focus on spatial models and are predominantly concerned with the division of social and cosmological categories as general principles, while others have the human body as a symbolic vehicle and are doing this by implying a complementarity and interconnectedness of human beings. The book *Body and Space* edited by Jacobson-Widding (1991) addresses the theme of cosmology and social structure. Within this theme one can often distinguish the division between the mundane world and the divine, or between the world of the living and of the dead where the body often is in reference (ibid.: 15ff).

Jacobson-Widding (ibid.:16-19, 24) writes that the body gives the individual a feeling of substance to feelings and unity to his or her existence, where the body is primarily referred to when human beings want to account for their own involvement in the world they live in. The body helps individuals to see themselves as part of an integrated whole, where analytical categories may lose their pertinence. One can refer to the body as something real and concrete, while analytical concepts are abstract and can easily be perceived as fuzzy or vague. According to Jacobson-Widding (ibid.), many people make use of space and body as

complementary idioms to understand themselves and their surrounding. Space is different from the body because it is not an indivisible unit. Space needs to be divided into parts and compared to each other before the person can grasp it. Individuals usually choose to put space in structure models outside their body, instead of letting them be the active subjects. This is for identifying objective categories, and project them onto spatial models rather than models inspired by the body, meaning that individuals apprehend body and space as physical realities. A person knows her own body, because she learns it subjectivity from all her senses. But individuals perceive and learn to see space differently, from the outside, where a physical reality is discerned after visual inspection. It is only after distinguishing the boundaries dividing physical space into separate parts that individuals become aware of any spatial dimensions at all and the spatial experience composite of division. Space is defined by distinctions and oppositions that have logical form, which say: “it is good to think” (ibid.). Bodies on the other hand do not have a logical form, which has a focus on feelings rather than thoughts. Because of the space’s logicity the individual uses that to define a rational order when he is defying rationality by using body symbols. This makes space associated with partition or division, while the human body is primarily connected with the perception of wholeness, or unity.

In traditional societies the body is used externally, where the individual can go beyond its own body to search answers (Giddens 1991:57, 102, 105f). In situations where binary structures and hierarchical orders are considered irrelevant the architectural space may be designed so as to represent a human body. The inside has a free exchange of feelings between human beings and they are all one in that context. The outside of such a “body-building” may at the same time represent a rational definition, like that of a person representing a particular social category. For example is the inside of the round traditional cooking hut in eastern and southern Africa often associated with the inside of the mother’s body (Jacobson-Widding 1991:19). According to local African theories there is a secret, a mystic power, inside the body, which is protected by body control. This is a force that has miraculous capacities and strong emotions, like love, passion, grief and anger. It is also associated with hunger and with all those feelings and processes in the body that are beyond rational control. In sociocentric societies there are often an assumption about the dichotomy in life, for example between men and women. By using spatial dichotomies like centre for representing men and periphery for women the village gets a structure and organisation. But the focus on space changes when

particular men and women are in question. Then the body becomes the vital part, where complementarity and connectedness are of importance (ibid.:15ff).

Gemetchu Megerssa and Aneesa Kassam (Jackson 1990:16f) examine the Oromo model of empirical personhood, which says that in an anthropological view the sense of the world and of ourselves are by no means invariant. The model has a metaphor of the human body to describe three modalities of thinking: within the belly, in the head, and in the heart. The belly is unifying and harmonizing where boundaries between the self and the other are dissolved. The head is the opposite with a patriarchal and hierarchical structure of distinction and division. And the heart is the emotional, a poetic and inspirational source. The three modalities in the same body are different modes of apprehending the reality and are therefore strongly intertwined. Mediating symbols often express emotion rather than rationality, which goes into the pattern of the distinction between the two society forms this thesis follows. The egocentric society has due to its roots in the Enlightenment and their first priority in rationality, while sociocentric societies continue to listen to the words emotions speak.

The notion of the body in a modern sense contrasts greatly to the traditional. Michel Foucault (Giddens 1991:57) stresses that the body has become focus to self-control in the modern world. By controlling one's own body, what to do, eat and think, a person can get a feeling that he or she is in charge and knows what is happening. Feelings are dangerous, and the aim is to control them by the rational brain. The norm is that individuals become amenable for the design of their own bodies, their pride and temple they show to the world. Their self-identity is truly cohered to their body, which says that a person is how he or she looks, that there is nothing more. The body cannot be divided into categories where different parts have certain spiritual meanings linked to each other. Rather can the body be conceptualised with different categories where the brain stands for logical thought and the heart for emotions. But they are two separate units where the human brain is associated with rationality and therefore conceived as superior.

Most of all the body is a tool for the individual to accomplish things in life. It is seen rather foolish and naive in an egocentric view to believe that the body can be transcended outside the body in external objects. The main reliance is put on the separate individual and that individual shows its self-esteem through the body. Therefore, issues like anorexia have become a modern phenomenon, as they encompass reflexive self-control, self-identity and

body appearance among other people. Shame anxiety plays a preponderant role because shame is what comes from a poorly nursed temple, meaning when a person cannot be satisfied with his or her body. The normative goal of life is to be successful and the idea is that the means to get there is through pride (see 2.2). This can supposedly be achieved by self-control. But there are however situations when the individual seeks its self outside the body. Such situations come to question when the individual is not satisfied with its self-identity or how other people treat the individual, which is directly a threat towards the individual's self and existence. Prisoners from concentration camps during the Second World War have described their experience as unreal or as if it was someone else who was there, that they were just like a character in a play. By escaping one's temple, one's self-identity, disembodiment can in the same conditions function as an attempt to transcend dangers and be secure (Giddens 1991:59).

## **2.5 Conclusions Part One**

This section has examined the various methods people utilise to understand their reality and throughout, the main theme has been how personhood is shaped by its social setting, suggestible of the egocentric or sociocentric values, which affects the individuals after different social norms and values (see 2.1, 2.3). Arguably, the egocentric society is built on values of individualism and autonomy. The individual is confronted with many choices to create the self-identity. The body's shape and the capacity of the brain are of utmost importance for the self-identity, because the body is all what an individual has and consists of. Modern thoughts about the individual often divide different aspects of the person into categories. People in a sociocentric society tend to go beyond their own physical body to find answers, where emphasis is put more on emotions than logic. The body is seen as a whole with interlaced parts, rather than disconnected categories. There exists a bigger picture where we all create the wholeness together. Therefore, external are believed absolutely vital, not only in other people, but also in spirits, gods, ancestors etc. The sociocentric society has not a numerical diverse of choices to find its self-identity like egocentric societies, because many habits and roles are already established (see 2.3, 2.4).

## **3. Part Two: Ubuntu and South Africa**

We will now dig deeper into the theory of the sociocentric society by looking at it from two angles that are connected. First, I will examine the concept of "ubuntu", which is considered

as a manifestation of sociocentrism. Second, I will approach South Africa, regarded as a society with its roots in sociocentric values. South Africa is a country with a diverse population and a brief look at its history is necessary to understand changes and to see if the country has a contemporary value ground of sociocentrism. So this part will start with ubuntu, where I will try to elaborate its connection to theories of sociocentrism, which will be done by an approach into different spheres of traditional Africa. The following pages will give a general description of the concept, through a compilation of philosophers', ethicists' and anthropologists' interpretation. Then the concept of ubuntu will be applied to South Africa, to see its historical relevance and connection to the country and if the concept has been carried along through South Africa's shifting phases and changes.

### **3.1 Ubuntu**

#### **3.1.1 Roots**

Ubuntu is, according to Ramose (1999:49f), the root of African moral philosophy, emerging from thoughts of the Bantu speaking people. It is reflected in all those assumptions called African traditionalism. No one can know for sure how old these roots are, but Johann Broodryk (2002:foreword) suggests that ubuntu has been in Africa as long as the human race. The Thoughts of ubuntu have presumably deployed over many centuries, changing some of its concept along the way (Shutte 2001:9). It has been transmitted and maintained in different forms and thoughts, from one generation to another in African manner through oral genres, fables, proverbs, myths, riddles, stories, songs, customs and institutions (Kamwangamalu 1999:3, Shutte 2001:9). The deep connection between ubuntu and African traditionalism makes ubuntu an African tradition and vice versa. Nico Koopman (2003:200) describes ubuntu as a way of living among many people in Africa and therefore can ubuntu qualify to illustrate the African personhood (Bhengu 1996:50).

Kamwangamalu (1999:5f) stresses the importance to seek answers in the origins of a language where the culture is reflected in terms of how people apprehend the world. Ubuntu emerges from local variants of the Zulu aphorism: *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*, interpreted in English as: "a person is a person through other persons" or "I am because we are" (Ramose 1999:49, Shutte 2001:23). Zulu is just one language, in fact, all African languages with Bantu speaking

origins have local variants of the same saying (Broodryk 2006:3).<sup>5</sup> The word *umuntu* in Bantu languages is in English translated to “person” or “human being”, and *ubuntu* to “humanness”. Yet, as noted by Mfuniselwa John Bhengu (1996:5), the translation for ubuntu is a compromise, because “humanness” does not do justice and contain the same meaning as ubuntu. Umuntu is the human being, who is the creator of politics, religion and law and ubuntu alludes to show how a human being should live and act when doing so. To fully sense this meaning one must search the bottom of African cultures based on values of ubuntu. Among such societies there is a large cultural diversity, but also many shared similarities between them in their value systems, where ubuntu is a pivotal norm (Kamwangamalu 1999:2f).

### 3.1.2 Characteristics

There are many qualities related to ubuntu and we can here just mention a few salient principles like caring, respect, affection, dearness, sharing, sympathy, humanity and humanism (Kamwangamalu 1999:1, Broodryk 2006:26). Augustine Shutte elucidates ubuntu in its context as:

The idea of community is the heart of traditional African thinking about humanity. It is summed up in the expression *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*, a person is a person through other persons. This means that a person depends on personal relations with others to exercise, develop and fulfil those capacities that make one a person. At the beginning of one’s life one is only potentially a person. One’s life, if it all goes well, is a continual of becoming more of a person through one’s interaction with others. Personhood comes as a gift from other persons (Shutte 2001:12).

Ubuntu is a conception about togetherness and sharing, focusing on that all people have something in common, namely that we are all human beings (Shutte 2001:25). One cannot be a person autonomously as in the individualistic thinking, where the self is conceived as private (see 2.3). Instead all interacted forces, internal and external, are intertwined and form the person (see 2.4). This is in contrast to the egocentric view, something public, reachable and visible to all (ibid.:22f). The assumption about the human dignity is linked to the relation to others, where one becomes a person by treating others well, for instance by respect and sharing (Bhengu 1996:5). Ignorance about others would result in ignorance in one’s own personhood, because individuals and others are interlaced. When caring about others for the sake of oneself, one has to develop a great sense of empathy to realise the needs of others. By

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<sup>5</sup> I have remarked when reading about ubuntu that the Zulu variant is most often mentioned, but the Xhosa proverb *ubuntu ungamntu ngabanye abantu* or *umntu ngumntu ngabantu* can also be seen as an example with the same meaning.

doing so one gets an open mind for diversity, within the main idea that despite people's differences they are all humans, sharing and creating a wholeness together (Broodryk 2006:12).

Broodryk (2006:10) addresses life in an ubuntu society with a goal to find the greatest true form of happiness. The secret to do so is to seek cohesiveness in relation to others, for the reason that people can only grow in community. In an egocentric society the self is divided, with many roles towards one's self and towards different people (see 2.3). However, this is not worth striving for in an African traditional thought. Rather the individual is seen as the centre of forces, who finds herself in interaction with others, which creates her personhood, her virtue of humanness. The main project is therefore, for each individual to unite these roles, to create one person with the same face towards it all in a spirit of togetherness (Shutte 2001:23). By arguing that personhood only comes in relation with another person implies that an individual is not a person from the beginning when no relation has been established (see 2.3). Shutte (2001:25) illustrates personhood as a gift one has to earn and as something one cannot take oneself. From a personal perspective other people determine my personhood, supporting and guiding me in change and in my process of being built up as a human being. And I do the same for others so they can become persons. But if personhood can be given for acting according to ubuntu values, it can as well be taken away if humanness is treated with ignorance and disrespect.

### **3.1.3 Communalism**

*Umoja*, the spirit of togetherness, is the most important quality in an ubuntu society (Broodryk 2006:5f), in accordance with the theory of sociocentrism (see 2.1). Existence is symbolized in an "African rationality" by combining physics and psychology in others' and one's own body, where emotions create rationality (see 2.1, 2.4). René Descartes (Bhengu 1996:54) once expressed Western philosophy in the famous "cogito ergo sum", "I think therefore I am". In ubuntu it would rather be "I feel, therefore I am" (ibid.:18) or I belong, therefore I am (Koopman 2003:199). The value of the community spirit in traditional Africa is illustrated in Leopold Senghor's term "communalism", which differs from European theories about the collective life in communism and socialism (Shutte 2001:26). Desmond Tutu (Koopman 2003:199) has uttered anxiety of expressing ubuntu in terms of collectivism, because it does not acknowledge the individual and can therefore easily be used in purposes of oppression. It is here the main difference becomes viable from European collectivistic

thoughts, for the individual is not just part of the community but also viewed as partial wholes with reference to others (Shutte 2001:8, Ramose 1999:79,193, Bhengu 1996:17). In other words, the individual is not only a part of the world, rather the individual is the world. Every single person both represent the world and is a part of it, which makes it very easy for an individual to relate to the world or to another person for the reason that it is to relate to oneself (Shutte 2001:26f). To find oneself one must therefore look at the other (Shutte 2001:226). “Umntu ngumuntu” (a person is a person), implies that each person has a self-defining value. By adding “ngabantu” (through other persons), one has an individual who cannot be taken out from its context, the wholeness, as an autonomous being (Bhengu 1996:2).

In an African context communalism means that no one lives for himself, one is always connected to one’s family or village. Suggestible by Bhengu (1996:6) ubuntu is manifested much more in practice than in theory, so the different ways ubuntu can be understood is by looking at the daily life in a community where the values are built-in within family, friends and work, where people share and assist each other. Bhengu refers to ubuntu in a Zulu context and gives an example to exemplify how ubuntu can be manifested in ordinary life:

When someone greets another person, we say *sawubona, ninjani* (good morning or good afternoon or good evening, how are you?). ‘How are you’ is used in a plural sense, because it is believed that a person is a social being. Therefore, we don’t say *unjani* in a singular sense. The person would respond and say *siyaphila singezwa nina*, meaning ‘we are well, what about you?’ Again, this is in a plural sense (Bhengu 1996:6).

Bhengu means that no one is alone and therefore is even Zulu as a language formed after this belief. The idea that no one is alone refers to the “extended family”, which probably is the most common, and also the most fundamental expression of the African idea of community. The concept is very broad and involves people beyond Western assumptions of family (Shutte 2001:29). People call other females “sister” for example and not only biological sisters. By the same token are neighbours supposed to be treated as siblings. The “family atmosphere” in the community has a value norm of group solidarity, reciprocity and interdependence where the group has a prior value than the interest of each individual (Kamwangamalu 1999:3ff). The extended family is built on the idea that people are connected and the same, so the family becomes very important for the individual, but the family is also viewed as equal to the individual. A consequence of this is a cultural interpretation consisting of the seamy side of the extended family that also should be mentioned. Quite simply put: if something bad has been done, the whole family can be blamed and punished for the perpetrator’s deed, because that is equal as punishing the individual him- or herself (Mbiti 1990:164).

The community spirit within ubuntu is based on consent. Everybody was welcome to community meetings and every person was involved because every single opinion was important (Louw 1998: 24f). The meeting form was basely an elder, with the social authority status as regent, who opened the meeting and listened to all those who wanted to speak. Social power elders had can in a western sense be understood as a representative democracy system, where social authority was seen as a divine gift and therefore legitimated. When all opinions had been heard and the elders had reached consensus the regent declared the meeting over (Broodryk 2005:16, 47f). Bhengu (1996:23) assesses the concept of ubuntu as underpinned by democracy in African societies, with a democracy in its purest form for the reason that it involved all.

Sharing and caring is of the outmost importance in ubuntu, which also is reflected in people's relation to work, material supplies and profit making. Many South Africans refer to the traditional concept to work in a spirit of *shosholozza*, to work as one (Broodryk 2005:56f). Group solidarity and empowerment for the individual member are cornerstones for a workplace and because people do the work together the profit is also distributed collectively. The employees, in turn, share their salaries with family members, even including the extended family (Broodryk 1996:40, 2005:131, 2006:14). It is not only the profit from work that was shared this way in traditional Africa, even land was distributed this way. The resources of the earth are common property for all people in all times. Meaning: no one can own part of it simply for themselves and the only profit strived towards is to get the basic necessities. Broodryk (2006:7f) and Shutte (2001: 29f, 157ff, 170) argue that because much was shared equally within the kingroup, the idea of social classes based on wealth is conceived as absurd among traditional societies in Africa. Work is understood to be valuable when it serves the development of persons and community, which it only does if persons come before products.

### **3.1.4 Religion and Cosmic World Order**

We will now analyse the idea of wholeness, which is the forum where everything belongs in a society with ubuntu values. According to Louw (1998:23f), there is one major reason why ubuntu cannot be translated nor fully comprehended by many Westerners because of its very different conceptualisation of the world. In the traditional sociocentric African society religion is ever present and cannot be separated from other spheres in the society. Therefore ubuntu has a religious meaning and the community and the communal life are attached to

religion because the idea that no one can be human apart from the society means that there are no irreligious people (Mbiti 1990:2). Religion contains the whole picture of being, which makes religion more of a value and moral system. Based on the reason that traditional African societies have their origins in oral religions, are there no creeds or holy scripts similar to Western written religions (see 2.1). Instead Mbiti (1990:3) means that “[t]he creeds are written in the heart of the individual and each one is himself a living creed of his own religion”.

Ramose (1999:62ff, 80) argues that the ubuntu worldview has three interrelated dimensions that together create the whole in a striving for cosmic harmony. This universe is both physical and metaphysical. The first dimension is the living, when the virtue of being human is played out in speech and knowledge for instance. The second consists of the dead, or more correctly the living-dead also called ancestors. They continue to live in an unknown world to those left behind, but can affect the living wherefore it is important to people to maintain a good relationship with their ancestors. Mbiti (1990:9) remarks that ancestors are remembered, and not “worshipped” as it many times is misunderstood from a Western view. The third dimension of the ubuntu worldview is looking at the future, to those yet-to-be-born. They exist in a present sense even if they literally have not been born. Beliefs and actions together call the whole into existence and values are imbedded in everything in the society, regardless of categories such as economy and politics (ibid.:15). The vision of a world in these dimensions is primarily anthropocentric, meaning that the human is at the very centre of existence (ibid.:90). However, this centre position is only in balance with everything that is around, the external like gods, spirits, animals, plants, objects, phenomena etc (see 2.4). Between the three dimensions and the whole surrounding there is a force, inherent in everything, possessed more by humans than animals and animals have more than stones (Shutte 2001:22). This mystical power is not human, but some people have the capability to control it, but it is mainly God who maintains the balance. The balance is absolutely vital for the wholeness to be maintained, so just to destroy or remove one category is to demolish the whole existence (Mbiti 1990:15f).

The power is neither good nor evil in itself, it has to be used by an agent, human or spiritual (Mbiti 1990:200). When it is used to harm someone or his belongings it is regarded as an evil deed (ibid.:197). Just like the power is not evil or good in itself are there no assumptions about intrinsic good or bad characters, but people can act in good or evil ways. Ubuntu is

showed in one's action towards one other, or put differently the deed signifies what lies behind the person (ibid.:210). When someone is committing an evil deed he or she is regarded as a sorcerer (or witch or wizard), a person who has the capability to control the power, but is doing so to harm. Sorcerers are the most feared and hated members of the community and each community has its own set form of restitution and punishment for various offences, both legal and moral. These range from a punishment consisting of killing to paying fines of cattle or money. What determines the punishment is the degree of the deed and the particular community. Committing acts like murder and adultery are usually seen as practicing sorcery, which is the highest degree (ibid.:195,198,206). An example of how a situation can be handled is from the Azande people. Their belief is that when a man dies his spirit turns into an animal and waits outside the accused (witch's) family's house. The family kills the animal and then the family members start to die. If the family member admits guilt the family pays cattle to the family of the dead man and the "curse" of the revenge is closed because of that or a powerful medicine-man is called to remove or stop it (ibid.:164).

West has a general distinction between moral and natural evil. Moral evil are those deeds done against another person and natural evil are those things no one really is to blame, like suffering, misfortunes and diseases. On the contrary, such "natural causes" do not exist in the traditional African society, based on the reason that nothing is an accident. Some agent, human or spiritual, always caused it. This lead to an ever-present suspicion and jealousy among people in a community. For African people sorcery is an anti-social concept related to a mystical power, which can be used by poisoning someone's food for instance. According to the society's norms those people are treated differently, but those who are accused of sorcery will generally have to suffer. Mbiti (ibid.:195f) claims that it is still fairly common that people are being attacked, and occasionally killed, on accusation or suspicion of practicing evil magic, which one can read about in the newspapers. But the evil cause can also be a penalty from God, who punishes in this life, because this is the only life (ibid.:205ff). No line is drawn between the spiritual and the physical, which means that there is one world where everything belongs at the same time, implying for instance that there is neither a paradise nor hell. The result of such a worldview is people with a focus on a living here and now (ibid.:4).

Another reason for not believing in a paradise or hell is a different assumption about time. As we have seen in Part One, the notion of time is in a traditional sociocentric society intertwined with space (see 2.3). They are so closely linked that they often have the same word. Space and

time are defined by their content, where something geographically near is important and therefore are peoples tied to their land (Mbiti 1990:26). Western philosophy rather view time as an empty space to fill, but traditional religion considers time as something that the human being makes and regards it non-existing until an event is tied to it (Ramose 1999:61). Time in the traditional religion composites of a two-dimension system, with past and present senses (Mbiti 1990:5). To be fair with this statement, one can say that people are conscious that there is a future, without focusing on it (ibid.:28). The short future is more an extension of the present, and because there is no interest in the future beyond there are no words for such events in African languages (ibid.:16f). The absence of the future sense forms a living Ramose (1999:78) calls “worldly”, where there is no longing for a better afterlife or hope of being “saved” in the future of any God. Every person is the centre of this universe and therefore the creator of life.

### **3.1.5 Women and Men**

Shutte (2001:31, 71, 81, 84f) approaches the dichotomy in African tradition between women and men (see 2.4). They are conceived as equally but differently human and complement each other. He links ubuntu to this notion where the opposite gender is the other, and it is through a relation with the other that the individual is formed. This does not however justify injustices of any kind, for example, the subordination of women to men in the world today clearly evident in women’s lower wages. In fact, such treatment of women is not only immoral because it dehumanizes women, but it also damages any conceptualisation of wholeness and therefore, according to ubuntu philosophy, also dehumanizes men. Shutte argues that by following the thoughts of ubuntu there should no longer be a division of labour with the woman in the home and the man at “work” in the public field. Every man and woman should have an equally important role in the society, chosen by themselves in relation to others. Shutte also makes a statement that inequality is a disgrace in the eyes of ubuntu for the reason that the liberation of women is the most important liberation that exists socially and it is the central pillar of ubuntu. He argues that men and women are inherently different, but does not however clarify how this can be seen or practiced if women and men are to do the same chores.

Shutte's adoption of ubuntu in this case explains his understanding of differences between men and women.<sup>6</sup> It is true that many traditional African societies have a separation between genders (see 2.4) but there are two things I want to pinpoint here. The first thing is a reminder that the dichotomy between men and women is a generalized picture of the traditional view of gender. There are examples of communities where there are more than two gender categories, or that people classified in one gender can under certain circumstances be moved to the other category (Eriksen 1995:121). The other thing is that there is not anything proving that ubuntu as a philosophical concept makes a distinction between women and men. By adopting the concept of otherness ubuntu involves, one could instead argue that ubuntu sees every other person as both the other and the same, irrespectively of gender. This means that the world has plenty of different categories and not only of two base categories consisting of gender. Therefore, according to ubuntu, no matter the categorisations, regardless of the individual's place or position, is that person another person's other. The illustration in a personal perspective is that your power as the other can form me, and I you, so we complement each other and we are therefore the same.

## **3.2. South Africa**

### **3.2.1 Change**

South Africa, illustrated as a sociocentric society, a country with all those characteristics described above with a value norm of ubuntu, came to be a land for colonisation and Christianisation. Ramose (1999:13f, 58f) explains how the European conquerors legitimated their actions by taking theories of the just war, their (self-declared superior rationality and a willingness to "help" Africans to be rational. Africans were conceived as emotional creatures, which in the Western thought is the opposite of the rational human being (see 2.4). But in an African view emotions and rationality have mutual dependence, where all skills of the human should be used and mastered mutually (see 3.1.3) to accomplish a mission where all people are the same all differences had to be eliminated. One of the biggest differences the Europeans could see was, in their eyes, Africans inferior and savage religion. By taking Jesus Christ's words "go ye and teach all nations" (Matt. 28:19) as an instruction to make all people Christians, the idea of the religious evolution was established in practice. This model of religions placed African religions on the bottom and the Europeans on the top. For Christians

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<sup>6</sup> Presumably a bit to the "difference feminism"-direction, promoting that men and women are ontologically different versions of the human being. My comment.

there could only exist one God (monotheism), which was not the God the Africans had. The misinterpreted picture from the Europeans assumed that the African Religion not only had a number of gods (polytheism), but as well countless spirits in objects in the nature (animism). The religion the Europeans brought to South Africa was in sharp contrast to the traditional African religion of the reason that it did not involve religion in every sphere of life (see 3.1.4). Christianity was rather like a hobby, something one went to practice once a week (Mbiti 1990:7, 228).

The peoples of South Africa were forced to emigrate from their land and the largest community that was forced away were the Bantu people (Bhengu 1996:13f). The land was their soul of life; what formed each individual's personhood due to the connection with the community spirit and the fact that people lived of their land (see 3.1.3). When the Bantu people were robbed of their land they also lost much of their identity and culture. Each individual went through an identity crisis with a feeling of lost sense of meaning of life when communities broke away from their main cultural group and that emigration resulted in many tensions and wars (ibid.:3f).

The concept of the human dignity is far from alien in traditional African philosophy, but the human dignity is attached to others (see 3.1.3). The European values of individualism and individuality started to be imposed on the sociocentric South Africa, which also conveyed ideas about economic competition (Mbiti 1990:215f). Earlier people cultivated the soil and lived by their land, which gave them all the requiring things (see 3.1.3). Without their land, they were forced into the capitalist world. Westerners introduced a concept where money would now on provide the necessities earlier provided by cultivation. But the Europeans already had the advantage in this system because they possessed the money and became therefore the regents of the system they invented (Ramose 1999:3).

A rapid tempo, where time and speed are in focus, came to flourish South African societies. The new way of living involved three major changes. First, modern transition involves a future dimension of time, which made it difficult to keep up with certain cultural practices and face to face communication was drastically reduced (Mbiti 1990:216, Bhengu 1996:27). Second, there was a replacement of the old value system based on the common good for the collective to an individualistic capitalist system. Along with this came materialism, which means that what is measurable is real and what is controllable is valuable (Shutte 2001:5).

Suddenly employment was placed above work and producing and benefiting was more important than people (Ramose 1999:5, 194). Finally was urbanisation. People moved into the cities without roots or tradition there and this contributed to further social problems (Mbiti 1990:218).

Broodryk (2006:9) argues that there is a very informal and relaxed way of living in South Africa. According to him, this is apparent by looking at the daily life of singing, dancing, laughing and painting that exist among many Africans. This makes Africans capable of appreciating life even in times of temporary misery and he illustrates this attitude in the proverb:

God gave man  
-the serenity to accept the things man cannot change  
-the courage to change the things man can and  
-the wisdom to know the difference between the two (Broodryk 2006:9).

An acceptance of the inevitable seems to remain in South African societies, which is very functional in the African life, daily confronted with poverty and serious sicknesses like HIV/AIDS. The preferable path to choose for adapting is to make the best out of the situation by continuing life in others' company (ibid.).

But as exemplified earlier (see 3.1.4), if something is regarded as an inevitable occurrence it is still not necessarily always an accident and people still are afraid that their enemies will hurt them. But this does not go over-hand in a hunt for exaggerated control. In contrast to Westerners, Africans seem to handle crisis in a calmer manner and maybe it is here where the biggest difference between the modern society and the pre-modern exists (see 2.3). South Africa is in many ways categorised as a modern society, but even so seems people know that accidents can happen and that is part of life. Some things are tough to tackle, but it is not more to do than accept this reality about the world. The technical revolution replaced religion with the standpoint that modernity is about control and you have to minimize the risks to gain control, but South Africans hold on to the more traditional way. Reasons for that might be the inevitable fact that religion is still very present.

### **3.2.2 Shame and Pride**

The racism that colonisation implanted in South Africa culminated in the series of legislative laws known as apartheid, an Afrikaans word meaning separation. Ubuntu is the very contrast to apartheid. The former is promoting sharing and caring, while the latter wanted to separate

people through classification and regulation. Even before apartheid, South Africans had started to adopt and appreciate Western lifestyles, by buying into the Western value system that black people were inferior. In South Africa during apartheid, the body colour was synonymous with the individual's status. The colour determined dignity or dishonour and the body became a site of shame (Wicomb 1998:93). In the case of coloureds the shame is located in the word 'coloured'. It was for this reason that the category was established by the Nationalist government's Population and Registration Act of 1950, with a negative definition that "coloured" is "Not a White person or a Black" (Wicomb 1998:101). Due to the racism came South Africans to be ashamed of their whole cultural heritage and existence. As a consequence of that, many blacks and coloureds sought security in identifying themselves with whites and their culture instead because of the potential for the higher social status (Bhengu 1996:22).

Zoë Wicomb (1998:97) describes the struggle to overcome the negative associations of shame with colour labels. In this fight, the word "proud" came in verbal practice as a black consciousness term. The Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) saw its mission in bringing back black people's humanity and self-respect. To illustrate this meaning Steve Biko<sup>7</sup>, the founder of the BCM, writes:

[...] It becomes more necessary to see the truth as it is if you realize that the only vehicle for change are these people who have lost their personality. The first step therefore is to make the black man come to himself; to pump back life into his empty shell; to infuse him with pride and dignity, to remind him of his complicity in the crime of allowing himself to be misused and therefore letting evil reign supreme in the country of his birth. This is what we mean by an inward-looking process. This is the definition of 'Black Consciousness' (Biko 2002:31).

Stuart Hall (Wicomb 1998:93) explains this method by saying that "[i]t is only through the way in which we represent and imagine ourselves that we come to know how we are constituted and who we are". Blacks manifested a pride over their skin colour, something they could not nor wanted to change. Therefore they shifted their assumptions about their personhood from shame to dignity, taking back their right to decide and create their own self-identity (see 2.2).

### **3.3 Conclusions Part Two**

This part has portrayed the traditional African concept of ubuntu and how it is attached to the theory of sociocentrism. Ubuntu, as stated previously, derives from the Zulu saying *umuntu*

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<sup>7</sup> Biko was killed in the liberation movement in 1977 by the South African police.

*ngumuntu ngabantu*, translated as: “a person is a person through other persons” (Ramose 1999:49, Shutte 2001:23). With that as its cornerstone and a worldview permeated by a religious wholeness has ubuntu characteristics that are strongly related to those societies described as sociocentric. All feelings and thoughts together create the person in “the African rationality” (see 3.1.3). Ubuntu stands for sharing and caring, for others as well as for oneself. This is why in an ubuntu society there are the deeds towards other people that create the wholeness we all live in and also forms each individual. Personhood is given by the other and therefore should every person be respected and valued (see 3.1.2). It encompasses a view of personhood that forms individuals to give priority to the group, and through the group the individual is valued as a single being. Ubuntu should therefore not be mixed up with communism or socialism, rather as “communalism” (see 3.1.3).

South Africa is a country filled with a diverse cultural tradition and a less pleasant history of colonialisation and Christianisation. Much has changed, from being a rural land with sociocentric community values, to an urbanised modern country. South Africa is moving in an accelerated speed towards modernity and egocentric values. Apartheid is said to have been one of the major factors that contributed to this change and damaged the spirit of ubuntu (see 3.2.1).

#### **4. Part Three: The Political Rhetoric of Ubuntu in South Africa**

We have earlier seen the question concerning gender as an example of how ubuntu can be adopted and interpreted for different purposes (see 3.1.5). Now we will see what has happened with ubuntu in South African after all the change the country has gone through and examine if ubuntu is used for specific purposes to legitimate a standpoint. If it does, is that standpoint in accordance with the philosophy of ubuntu, or is it shaped after the particular purpose? The West dragged along norms of egocentrism to South Africa by trying to make it a modern country (see 3.2.1). So an eventual finding of ubuntu in contemporary South Africa carries along other questions impossible to avoid. Questions such as: If ubuntu is maintained, meaning that sociocentrism still exists, does that make South Africa a traditional society? Or can a modern country have sociocentric values?

To exemplify the use of the concept I will examine how it is carried out in two spheres in contemporary South Africa: the political rhetoric and the business sector. This will show

whether it still exists in practice and of what significance; significance, on the one hand for ubuntu as a concept, and on the other hand for South Africa.

#### **4.1 Ubuntu in Contemporary Politics**

Kamwangamalu (1999:6f) says that South Africa, compared to countries in Africa where there have not been legislative racism laws to the same degree, is the country where ubuntu is most mentioned. He argues that the reason for the high level of promoting ubuntu in South Africa is probably because of apartheid that destroyed the ubuntu spirit in the country. Because of the negative impact from apartheid on ubuntu, Kamwangamalu continues, it has to be reminded, compared to those other African countries where ubuntu is maintained as a natural part of life that does not have to be officially promoted (ibid.).

After the abolition of apartheid and the democratic elections in 1994 the South African government was confronted with the hard task to reconcile the country. A new constitution was established in 1996, which was the pillar in the reconciliation process. It pleaded for the human dignity of all people to be respected and protected, which are, according to both Broodryk (2006:7f) and Shutte (2001:186), the values of ubuntu. Many aspects of ubuntu were used in the process, with arguably the most famous example concerning Nelson Mandela. He walked out from prison after 27 years without any feelings of bitterness or revenge, but with a strong willingness to reconcile the wounded nation. This, according to many, is a clear picture of ubuntu in practice (Bhengu 1996:29f, Broodryk 2005:191, 2006:18).

The concept of ubuntu has further influenced post-apartheid South Africa to be rebuilt after the damage caused by apartheid within a moral document called “The Ubuntu Pledge” from 1998, which all political parties in the parliament and many religious groups in South Africa supported. By and large, the pledge demands people to live for the community above self-interest and to help and respect other people (Broodryk 2002:127f, 2006:18). Jacob Zuma<sup>8</sup> stated his opinion about the document on January 31, 2003: “We also welcome the adoption of the Ubuntu Pledge by the religious fraternity of South Africa. This is a significant development since our religious leaders are entrusted with planting the seeds of our morality and nurturing and sustaining them” ([www.info.gov.za/speeches/2003/03020309461009.htm](http://www.info.gov.za/speeches/2003/03020309461009.htm)).

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<sup>8</sup> Elected President of the African National Congress (ANC) December 2007 but was at the time Deputy President of South Africa.

In the verbal use we can see how words related to ubuntu, such as community, help and respect (see 3.1.2) are connected to a political document with ubuntu in its name. In turn, as an attendant phenomenon, that links ubuntu to all those things the document is pleading to reconcile South Africa.

On the whole, the sphere that arguably made the concept of ubuntu famous worldwide was the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in South Africa. To deal with the past and heal the nation the South African government decided to put up a Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Alex Boraine (2000:36), one of the commissioners, explains that the goal for the TRC came to be first and foremost to achieve a peaceful society, where people who earlier had been fighting now in some way should collectively live with each other. The reason for this was in the agreement that the TRC's aim was to achieve reconciliation and to prevent abuses like those that had occurred from happening again. Luc Huyse (2003:12f) regards the term "reconciliation" as both a goal and a process, where the goal is the longing for a future and the process focuses on the dealing with how things are now in the present. Jeremy Sarkin (2004:34) adds that it is also a conflict resolution method where the goal is to reconcile and to unite people in order to create a society of peace. In this process the commission decided to put emphasis on restorative justice instead of retributive.<sup>9</sup> The basis for this was the idea that a "collective amnesia" was something one wanted to avoid for the reason that it was regarded as a short-term solution. Rather the TRC wanted to have truth be the key to collectively move on (Boraine 2000:41,402,419).

The argumentation within the TRC came to be significantly influenced by ubuntu. The TRC had its guidelines for their work in the "National Unity and Reconciliation Act, No 34 of 1995" and the final clause of the interim says: "[...] 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 victimization [...]". With this as the framework, Archbishop Desmond Tutu (1999:260), the chairperson of the TRC, had his interpretation of ubuntu saying it advocates a restorative justice built on forgiveness rather than retributive justice built on revenge. He promoted a

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<sup>9</sup> Charles Villa-Vicencio (2004: 33) argues that restorative justice seeks a peaceful solution for the society to make it sustainable. It has a focus on reparation, healing and rehabilitation, which especially priorities victims and survivors beneficence. It has an emphasis on restoration, for victim's self-respect and on the relation between perpetrator and victim within the community as a whole. Boraine (2006: 59f) says that retributive justice seeks to punish the wrongdoer in a spirit of revenge, arguable that justice will be granted in a balanced way. It is also used to give an example of the state's power to the community, as a reminder of what will happen if you commit crimes.

restorative justice based on forgiveness to enable South Africa to move on as a unit. Christian as he is, made him not only connect politics with religion, but also Christianity with African tradition, thus proving a new interpretation on the concept of ubuntu. The latter was done in the following steps starting by taking one of the most important stands in Christianity, namely forgiveness. God forgives us for our sins and we should therefore forgive our neighbour for his wrongdoings (John 20:23). Then he took the part of ubuntu saying that “I am a person through you” and we create a wholeness together that can be demolished but restored (see 3.1.4). Further he applied this to the people involved in the reconciliation process, the people of South Africa, victims and perpetrators living in the same society. From that he draws the conclusion that the victim and the perpetrator are spiritually linked in the concept of wholeness and because of the perpetrators’ atrocities, the wholeness been destroyed and they had both been dehumanized. To restore the wholeness and get their humanity back they needed to see each other again, implying that the perpetrator had to see the victim as a subject (Krog 2005:5ff). And as Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela (ibid.:8) claims, it is to make it too easy for the perpetrators to condemn them as monsters, instead a dialogue is necessary to confront them with their inhumanity. Furthermore, the victim has the capacity to bring a sense of humanity back to the perpetrator and according to the TRC this was done by an open attitude from the victims to forgive their perpetrator.

Tutu elaborated on the link between Christianity and ubuntu in the TRC further when he applied the idea that each individual has a commitment towards each other under the Christian ideal that everyone is created in the image of God. Michael Battle (1997:79-82) says that Tutu “Africanised” Christianity by adding the concept of wholeness which ubuntu stands for. Here Tutu combined two worlds; on the one hand the Christian, where he could reach both West and all those in South Africa who struggled to be more modern and egocentric, and on the other hand ubuntu, an indigenous concept with sociocentric values that still occurred among many people in the country. He was a black South African and also a modern man. His identity and method together, meant that Tutu used a concept that blacks, coloureds and whites could identify with, three groups covering the major part of South Africa’s population. Tutu’s rhetoric to gather all different people under the same roof becomes evident here. Antjie Krog (2005:5-8) suggests that maybe it is due to ubuntu that victims after apartheid were able to forgive their perpetrators. She says that she does not speak about the ubuntu as a philosophy promoted by the TRC, but about ubuntu as a concept maintained in people’s value norm. She shows examples of victims living in remote areas of South Africa coming to

witness, without knowing to read or write and who never have heard the word ubuntu, but even so expressed a willingness to forgive their perpetrator to get the humanity back (ibid.:6). Shutte (2001:33) agrees with Krog that ubuntu influenced the process, but does not hesitate at all when claiming that forgiveness during the TRC hearings and the non-violent revolution made ubuntu tenable in the process, for it would not have been possible without it. According to Krog, ubuntu is maintained in South Africa undefeated of colonialism and apartheid. If ubuntu is preserved so are also sociocentric values because ubuntu is a manifestation of sociocentrism (see 3.1.2). In a sociocentric society there is a view that there cannot be an autonomous individual who is doing something just for oneself. In the case of the TRC this can mean that many individuals forgave because of the sake of both oneself and others. But in an egocentric society one is usually forgiving because it is a "nice" thing to do according to personal moral and ethical values without the concept of wholeness. Due to the individualistic way of thinking there is no assumption about wholeness that can link people together (see 2.1), rather forgiveness in a western sense is to maintain social order and social norms, but is every individual's own choice. Therefore, the main norm is that it is up to every individual to choose whether he or she wants to forgive or not. But also that what has been and is happening between the perpetrator and the victim is their private business.

In South African the major part of the population is regarded as active Christians, which implies a lot of people who can relate to the commission's suggestions for reconciling the nation. Tutu could bring Christianity into the picture of the commissions work without any mass demonstrations. Even so continues Krog (2005:6) to foster the idea that it was the sociocentric values within ubuntu that enabled for forgiveness and healing in South Africa and not particularly Christianity. As Tutu stressed above, forgiveness is an ideal embedded in the Christian church and naturally Christians would more easily forgive, but that did not always seem to be the case. Religion is suggestible not what is the most deceived whether people can forgive or not. According to Krog (2005:5-8), egocentric values can be stronger than religious conviction and therefore was it not Christianity itself in South Africa that paved the way for forgiveness, but the old social construction of ubuntu.

Van Binsbergen (2002:9) suggests that the TRC harnessed ubuntu as advertising to get what they wanted and that the dark side of doing so was that it was not the black population in South Africa that defined the methods to address the reconciliation process. A fact, not so often spoken about, is that the commission did not even have one traditional diviner-priest or

any other person with great knowledge in the area of the traditional worldview to consult the TRC. Why this was the case might be that such expertise would not only have paved the way for ubuntu's advantages as a human life philosophy, but that it would also have opened up doors for its misinterpretations made by the TRC and its limitations in the context of South Africa's national reconciliation process. An example of the misgivings from the TRC, according to van Binsbergen, are how they interlaced an unconditional forgiveness and cleansing in exchange for admission of guilt with the South African traditional culture. Van Binsbergen admits that this happened in traditional communities when someone guilty of a crime had to work to bring his humanity back. But perpetrators were put into two different categories to restore the wholeness, depending on the degree of the deed (see 3.1.4). If the crime was of a less serious character, the methods would be as promoted by the TRC (for example collective reconciliation). But perpetrators of terrible atrocities were classified as hopeless and sorcerers, which usually was handled by a killing of the person to restore the humanity. Van Binsbergen (2002:55, 76f) points out that those perpetrators who committed atrocities during apartheid would probably have been classified to the latter, and therefore were treated accordingly. He vehemently criticises the move of the TRC to hide this fact about traditional societies and inculcates the newly emerging black elite as having a defensive attitude when being questioned of the legitimacy to promote ubuntu. The prevailing jargon among them was the primary defence against their opponent, which van Binsbergen says in concurrent to the idea that: "we are merely applying, in yours interest as well as in ours, our most cherished common African ancestral heritage, our *ubuntu!*" (ibid.:77). To justify the adoption of ubuntu by claiming one's inherited belonging and that no one can hurt you because you are on your own territory, you have the preference to interpret the concept and you become safe and protected. This is comparable with someone who calls him- or herself a "feminist" and when being accused of acting in a sexist way he or she would answer: "that's impossible –I'm a feminist".

Regardless if the TRC, with Tutu in the lead, avoided certain aspects of African traditional culture on purpose or not, we can for sure see that it was a successful concept for avoiding a violent phase. The TRC wanted to avoid violence to every price, and the people most likely to create such atmosphere was the black population. It would not have come as a surprise if people started to seek revenge, for even in sociocentric societies have instances of social violence. It is also possible as suggested above by Van Binsbergen, that they wanted to restore the wholeness by eliminating the perpetrator (read sorcerer). Therefore, it was of utmost

importance to convince the blacks that the TRC-way was the right way. Tutu is a black man, which was of significance in the process because he came to be one of the primary examples that the black man had taken back the power they once lost. Tutu promoted Christianity as an African Christian and he pleaded for ubuntu as a man with his roots in Africa. The reason that made this possible was that both these concepts were well established among many South Africans, especially the black majority. The TRC created a new idea by integrating cultural ideas to build a new political rhetoric in South Africa. Of course the TRC did not promote all aspects of traditional culture and all interpretations of ubuntu, because they worked for the new South African government. Rather they took those parts that suited for their purpose, explicitly to avoid violence and secure South Africa as a democratic nation-state. I would argue that it was the well thought-out mixture consisting of a reminder of the sociocentric traditional value ground, the Christian forgiveness, the black consciousness thought and the power of democracy that paved the way for tributes that have been paid world-wide to the work done by the TRC in South Africa.

Here it can be suggested that the TRC be applauded for following the directions outlined by the government for avoiding a civil war to ensure the country's future, –but to what prize? And here, specifically meaning what happened to ubuntu? For when some aspects of a concept are lightened it can give a somewhat vague picture of it. In addition to that the concept was linked to all those things the TRC promoted, which in practice made ubuntu equal to those. For example ubuntu does not speak in terms of “forgiveness” or “truth”. I am not saying that ubuntu necessarily would plead against it, but it is obvious that this is Tutu's and the rest of the commission's interpretation of the concept. In this interpretation it is also true, as van Binsbergen noted (see above), that some things about the customs in traditional Africa were never mentioned when talking about ubuntu for healing the wholeness (read nation-state).

Nevertheless, it is here we have come to a question of interpretation of what ubuntu really stands for. Here I feel it is necessary to go back to the traditional African society where ubuntu has its roots. There, among many different peoples and their thoughts, a philosophy was established, developed and changed. Ubuntu, as a philosophy and an ethical concept, is an ideal of how one should live and includes assumptions of what a person is. For that reason people's behaviour can not always be understood and be in preference to a normative life philosophy. An ideal ethic is not always reflecting the choices people take and there are

plenty of exceptions. We can compare this to Sweden and see that not even when Swedes were as most Christian did not they live accordingly to the Ten Commandments to the letter or we can look at this on an personal level where people continuously break their own codes for ideal living.

The concept of ubuntu is interlaced with the theory of sociocentrism, but that does not implicate that all those things happening in a sociocentric society therefore justifiable can be explained as ubuntu. So when it comes to the disagreement between Tutu and van Binsbergen concerning the adoption of ubuntu in the TRC we might have to ask the question: who has the preferential right of interpretation of ubuntu? And we can look at on the one hand what ubuntu meant in the traditional Africa, and on the other hand how ubuntu should be interpreted in a contemporary setting. Tutu argues for ubuntu as an inherited part for every individual with traditional roots. He uses the assumption about the world as a wholeness and claims that people can restore it and bring back each other's humanity –if they want to. Tutu refers in this case to the general way of approaching perpetrators in many traditional societies in Africa where one could confess and “pay oneself free” from ethical, morally and legal guilt. He does not however consider van Binsbergen's point that killing actually occurred when humanity was to be restored after a terrible deed and Mbiti stresses that this actually still happens for people who are considered as sorcerers. This puts further emphasis on the concept that many traditional societies had an eye-to-eye attitude when handling things, which goes beyond the individual and the (extended) family can come under fire (see 3.1.4). Here we have come to an interesting conclusion where some things were traditional practices, but we do not know whether ubuntu as a concept can be viewed in accordance and as a framework for those, or put differently: we do not know if those practices were ubuntu. Ubuntu is not, as I mentioned earlier, synonymous with all those things people did in traditional African societies. Therefore it is essential to clarify one's own opinion, for the reason that it is all about questions of how one ought to live and therefore has the topic a broad frame for interpretation.

#### **4.2 Ubuntu in the Business Sector**

Politics is not the only sphere where ubuntu is influential in modern South Africa. A whole market has been created in the business sector where ubuntu is used in terms of “Ubuntu Management Philosophy”, for example Broodryk who specialised in the area and has for instance given out a book under the title *Ubuntu Management Philosophy* (2005). He argues

that values of ubuntu could and should be applied in all areas of life, specifically in organisations and businesses. He approaches ubuntu in this sector by alluding to the aphorism “umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu” as a slogan (Broodryk 2005:1). This is probably what Gabriel Setiloane (Bhengu 1996:52) refers to when he says that “[u]buntu has become the buzz-word of the corporate world”.

There is also a relationship between ubuntu and capitalism one has to look into. A definition of “capitalism” in the *Cambridge Advanced Learner’s Dictionary* (2003:175) is: “[...a]n economic, political and social system based on private ownership of property, business and industry, and directed towards making the greatest possible profits for successful organizations and people.” That is a brief description of the concept, but here one must keep in mind that the conceptualisation of capitalism has a sordid history in South Africa. During the colonial times, wealth was only enjoyed by a few privileged people at the exploitation of other human beings (see 3.2.1) and that is unfortunately still the case. South Africa has a large religious population and according to Mbiti (1990:259) capitalism cannot be part of any religion in the way it exploits humans in favour to material and monetary gain, to the degree that the individual loses her humanity. Furthermore ubuntu can neither support private ownership nor strive for a maximized profit (see 3.1.3). Capitalism values the individual higher than the group and encourages each person to strive for personal goals. To do so one must compete against others, which is a complete contradiction to ubuntu, because that would be the same as competing against oneself (Kamwangamalu 1999:5f).

Managers and people in positions of authority and responsibility in South Africa agreed in 1998 on “The Ubuntu Code of Conduct”, which is a framework for behaviour for building a successful community that will be sustainable. Taking the title of the conduct into consideration one has to assume that it is based on ubuntu values, or at least said to be so, for example by Broodryk (2002:125ff, 2005:5f, 56f, 131, 220, 175, 2006:7, 22). His aim is to change the normative values in the business world by disseminating the concept of ubuntu. He argues that with core values of sharing, caring and respect the organisation can create a “we”-feeling. With a better teamwork of shosholoza and umoja (see 3.1.3), there would be less stress on the individual, which will create happier people. When looking at what Broodryk does it becomes apparent that ubuntu is here practicable to re-unite the people by promoting its name and meaning with a reminder of traditional expressions like umoja and shosholoza. People know about those things and that is a part of their traditional values they are (and

should) be proud over. Just like Tutu took some parts of ubuntu to succeed in politics (see 4.1), Broodryk is taking certain aspects to make it fit into the business sector.

Broodryk (2005:11, 102) emphasises the traditional value of sharing and offers the term “False Bantu” to signify Africans with a lust of money. That is why he concludes by stating that ubuntu as a management philosophy will have humanness and not greed as its underlying primary value. Bhengu (1996:33ff, 40) would entitle Broodryk’s type of management style “co-operative capitalism”, since profit would be shared between owners and workers. He argues that ubuntu in the business sector would be a good complement to Western practices where they can match each other. He states that ubuntu values of working together are necessary if South African business wants to be efficient in the global market.

Ubuntu ingredients can be used profitably in the business sector for bringing a better spirit at work and to make the company successful. For example, there is the software programme “Ubuntu”, which is developed by the company Canonical Ltd. This company has its base in London, but the founder Mark Shuttleworth is South African, hence a reason why the product wears the name of “Ubuntu” ([www.markshuttleworth.com](http://www.markshuttleworth.com)). Canonical claims that their product “Ubuntu” emphasis the spirit of the community in the software world. In their code of conduct it says:

Ubuntu is an African concept of 'humanity towards others'. It is 'the belief in a universal bond of sharing that connects all humanity'. The same ideas are central to the way the Ubuntu community collaborates. Members of the Ubuntu community need to work together effectively, and this code of conduct lays down the "ground rules" for our cooperation ([www.ubuntu.com/community/conduct](http://www.ubuntu.com/community/conduct)).

Furthermore their homepage ([www.ubuntu.com](http://www.ubuntu.com)) states that: “Our work is driven by a philosophy on software freedom that aims to spread and bring the benefits of software to all parts of the world”. The programme has not much at all to do with the traditional concept of ubuntu, despite the fact they are using the name and arguing that it is justified because they share with each other and are, according to them, a community. This way to interpret how people are living through each other could not be further away from the philosophy of ubuntu, for the reason that ubuntu wants people to actually meet and live together in the quotidian life. The software is free, which could be in accordance with ubuntu values, but here there is more related areas to address. For instance they say: “The freedom to improve the programme and release your improvements to the public, so that everyone benefits” (ibid.). The purpose is to benefit, and because this programme is presumably aimed to a capitalist arena, it is also part

of the capitalist system, which as previously stated, is in contradiction with ubuntu (see 3.1.3). Furthermore it is noteworthy that it is a programme that wants to spread its ideas world wide, which ubuntu as an oral religion never intended to do (see 2.1)

Canonical has from its company logo created a logo for the product “Ubuntu” and suddenly, the philosophy of ubuntu stands in reference to a flashy picture (see fig. 1 and fig. 2).



Fig. 1: The company logo of Canonical Ltd.

([www.canonical.com](http://www.canonical.com))



Fig. 2: The “Ubuntu” logo.

([www.ubuntu.com](http://www.ubuntu.com))

This “Ubuntu” logo is now printed on a diverse range of products for sell (<https://shop.canonical.com>), which takes us even further away from the philosophy and closer to the capitalist market (see fig. 3 and fig. 4).



Fig. 3: “Ubuntu Thinking Putty”.



Fig. 4: “Ubuntu 1gb Flash Drive”.

(See more examples in appendix A.).

Kamwangamalu (1999:6f) sees a problem of using ubuntu in the business sector because the concept would just be conceived as something good as long as the company benefits. He asks what will happen with ubuntu when a company for instance goes bankrupt. Probably the value of ubuntu will vanish because it has been linked to a capitalist idea. The company in question will maybe next time take another concept to try to achieve success with at the world economy stage.

Benghu (1996:43) shows the example of Japan, which adapted to the competitive capitalist world system, but developed its own Japanese identity, which turned out to be very successful (within the capitalist system). South Africa now stands in a crossroads if it wants to follow this example, which implies that it has to compete under the same conditions, on the same footing, as all other countries. Even if Broodryk proposes a more human form of capitalism it

still may have its nucleus in a striving towards a maximizing of assets, material or economical. The West's assumptions about effectiveness and maximizing do not rhyme well with traditional values. People did not think in terms of time that can be "saved" (see 2.3, 3.1.4) and the community only cultivated what was needed, without hoarding, to not waste the earth's resources (see 3.1.3).

The philosophy of ubuntu, in its different interpretations and uses, has lately been put under much pressure to seek a bigger arena and be exported abroad. This is done because ubuntu is translated as humanity and should therefore, the argument goes, be introduced and have legitimacy everywhere (Shutte 2001:2). However, this cannot coincide with, on the one hand ubuntu as a throughout religious concept (see 3.1.4), and on the other hand oral religion's local connection that it should not be applied universally (see 2.1).

Kamwangamalu (1999:3) argues that ubuntu has not vanished in South Africa, especially not in rural areas where it is easier to live in a communal spirit. But there are two imminent dangers. One is that there is no forum or mechanism today to continuously resuscitate and foster ubuntu values. People tend to develop new thoughts and values and forget the old; so without a teaching of ubuntu it might disappear (Bhengu 1996:27). The second danger is a misuse, abuse and overuse of the concept in everything from pop songs and advertising to politics and business. If ubuntu becomes trivialised in this way it will eventually lose its original meaning (Shutte 2001:14f, Bhengu 1996:10). Kamwangamalu (1999:5-9) stresses that ubuntu is a social rather than a business concept. Ubuntu can indeed be promoted, but on the grassroots level, in the communities, where ubuntu is needed most. If ubuntu is not maintained and practiced at the community level, the promotion of the concept on higher levels will only be used for the wrong reasons. Particularly as a tool applied to appease and fit into the system of capitalist world economy; the very same system that hurt and exploited people, changed people's mind-set and damaged Africa's roots and tradition, namely ubuntu.

One can say that ubuntu has qualities that many people could value and appreciate. Some of it would probably be beneficial for any person, community, organisation, corporate or state, for whatever plan. However, and this is an important point, one has to be very careful when using its concept and name. For what it comes down to is that if ubuntu is being used to legitimate an opinion or being adopted for purposes that stands in discrepancy to its intention it will probably lose its merit and meaning (see 3.1.5, 4.1).

Mbiti (1990:222) says that to bring tradition into the picture of the modern South Africa is an attempt to create a substitute for a new culture. This can be true and legitimate without any judgemental values, for South Africa has a tradition to be proud of. South Africa is today a modern country, but even so, ubuntu can still be maintained, viable in sharing what one has and caring for each other. Also the “African way of living”, consisting of a more relaxed view towards dangers than the modern, is descriptive to the South African population in unanimity with a traditional approach of life. There are many voices raised promoting traditional values and an importance to maintain culture and heritage, but there is a strong respond eager to be in the lead of growing economical states on the world stage (see 3.2.1).

### **4.3 Conclusions Part Three**

It is probably due to that apartheid promoted values in contrast to those of ubuntu that ubuntu has been very popular in contemporary South Africa, not only in the spheres of religion, ethics and anthropology, but also in politics and business. In politics the concept has been used for instance by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in its aim to heal the nation after the abolishing of apartheid (see 4.1). In the business sector ubuntu is used for creating a more humane workplace built on teamwork, which can change the unpleasant atmosphere of capitalism (see 4.2). The opinions have been divided, bringing out the concept in a diversified way. Tutu, Broodryk, Krog and Shutte for instance, reply that ubuntu is part of the African heritage and therefore inherited and available in all South Africans. It might need to be remembered more often, but it exists and should be applied to all. Van Binsbergen and Kamwangamalu mean that this is a bit naive and raise issues of the purpose behind the adoption of ubuntu, for it seems to be an easy victim for manipulation. To use ubuntu in the capitalist system is not synonymous with African tradition, a tradition where there was no striving towards material maximization and where the earth should be shared by all.

This part has also discussed that ubuntu might not always synonymous with African tradition. The concept is easy to interpret because it is a philosophy about the good way of life, which people tend to have different opinions about. Ubuntu is now in a context of modern South Africa, which means that South Africa is a modern country with influences of traditional thoughts and values.

## 5. Summary

This thesis has examined the anthropological view of personhood by analysing theories of ego- and sociocentric societies. These theories explain major differences between social forms, which affect the creation of personhood, for the reason that the individual is a product of the society he or she lives in. I have argued that the social setting always is a social construction that explains different views of the world (see 2.3).

Egocentric and sociocentric societies differ on numerous ways and I have pinpointed some of them. The egocentric society has its roots in the Enlightenment with the thought of individualism and each person's autonomous dignity and value, which represent the modern worldview today. The world is usually not conceived in religious terms; rather religion and politics are separated. The sociocentric society comes from traditional thoughts where the base is the community instead of the particular individual, and everything is perceived as religious (see 2.1, 3.1.4).

The body is important for both types of societies, but for different reasons. In the sociocentric society the body is part of a religious wholeness the reality exists of. External objects can be related to the human body, but there is also an emphasis on the connection within the body to use both feelings and thoughts. The egocentric view, on the contrary, sees the body as the tool to create a self-identity for each individual to represent oneself. The shape of the body is therefore of great importance, but the "capacity of the brain" is also indispensable. The different parts of the body are seen as exactly *different parts*, which do not have any significant communication. Rather the brain is associated with the superior controllable rationality and the heart with dangerous impulsive feelings (see 2.4). Important in the creation of a self-identity in both society forms are emotions of shame that are bound to how the person wants to be viewed by others, appertaining to the character (see 2.2).

After establishing the theories of ego- and sociocentrism in this thesis I applied them to the concept of ubuntu. This is an African traditional philosophy and the roots of the African value system. It has developed over the whole continent and can be defined from the local Zulu saying: *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*, translated in English as: "a person is a person through other persons" or "I am because we are" (Ramose 1999:49, Shutte 2001:23). Ubuntu is, in accordance with the theory of sociocentrism, throughout religious in an image of the world as

a wholeness, maintained by all. It is promoting values of caring, sharing and respecting at the community level. After confirming that ubuntu was a sociocentric manifestation I chose to examine how the concept was carried out in South Africa. There were mainly two reasons for choosing South Africa. First, colonialisation and apartheid stand in the very contrast to ubuntu, which had terrible consequences for the population and might have changed the influence of ubuntu and sociocentric values. Second, South Africa is the country where it is most promoted by politicians and business people. One possible reason for that might be that apartheid deprived black and coloured South Africans of their identities, making them ashamed of themselves (see 3.1.1, 3.1.2, 3.1.4, 3.2.1, 3.2.2).

To understand the significance of ubuntu in South Africa today I have looked at the use of the concept and its different interpretations foremost in two spheres: the political rhetoric and the business sector. Here we can start with the findings from the political sector, where the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in South Africa used the definition of ubuntu as to imagine oneself in the other, which, according to them, means that it is in encounters with others the process of reconciliation begins and that we can understand others and through others understand ourselves. It was claimed that to achieve reconciliation, forgiveness was needed for victims and perpetrators. But the opinions differ on which base ubuntu was adopted and implied in the reconciliation process in South Africa. Shutte, Tutu and Krog argue that ubuntu played a true and vital role. They argue that the work by the TRC was established in a spirit of democracy and representative for the South African population and the achievements in the reconciliation process would not been carried out without the framework of ubuntu. Important to note is that Tutu managed to speak to the major part of the South African population, given the fact that he is a black Christian African. The majority could feel represented and reflected in him in some way. Krog stresses that ubuntu in the TRC testimonies enabled victims to forgive their perpetrators of three reasons: They wanted the wholeness to be restored, get their humanity back and get rid of the way the perpetrators looked at them as objects. By using forgiveness the TRC had a more peaceful process, where people did not seek for revenge, which probably have had been the case if retributive justice had been used. Ubuntu was a contribution to a rather smooth transition to a new phase in South Africa, instead of having a situation turning into civil war. Van Binsbergen, on the contrary, sees the use of ubuntu in another light, namely as an exaggerated political rhetoric tool, claiming that certain aspects of traditional manners were hidden, that the concept was twisted to match political goals, which fooled people to walk their path. But Tutu responds

that he used a concept people already lived through, that it was something inherited. This debate made me problematize the concept of ubuntu, and I came to the conclusion that because it is an ethic and philosophy, it is a concept open for interpretations, which people take advantage of. For example the TRC claimed that ubuntu stands for forgiveness, which was what they promoted for a peaceful solution. Ubuntu has never promoted forgiveness, but neither argued against it. Van Binsbergen points out that violence was a common punishment in traditional societies, which therefore stands in discrepancy to what the TRC promoted. But here it is clear, that not all practices in traditional societies can be understood as ubuntu practices (see 4.1).

In the business sector we have seen that the concept often goes under the term “Ubuntu Philosophy Management”, promoting organisations and companies to bring a more humane work spirit grounded on values of sharing and caring to the workplace. That will, according to Broodryk among others, lower the stress factor, increase the teamwork and make the process more efficient. In respond to that I have claimed that even if a better teamwork and increased sharing would be better than the contemporary capitalist corporate world, can it not be ubuntu. Sociocentric traditional values from Africa never strived towards competition, maximized profit making or private ownership, which are all those things the capitalist market does. Rather, as Kamwangamalu fears, if ubuntu is linked to an economic company, its value will fall concurrently with the companies reduced profit making (see 3.1.3, 4.2).

In my last paragraph (see 4.2) I stated that South Africa has a situation today that seems to closely stand with the modern egocentric Africa on the one side and traditional sociocentric values on the other, where the modern side carries a greater weight. This side has huge cities that are growing in competition with new technology and large corporations, and an individualistic approach with a strong will and longing to be a part of the global modern world. This side is using ubuntu for these purposes regardless of some aspects of its meaning as a sociocentric manifestation. South Africa’s also stands, especially in rural areas, in traditional Africa containing of ubuntu, where people share the daily life together, without the same degree of pressure and stress as the West. Here, life is concentrated on a present living where the family comes first. These are the two sides in contemporary South Africa, but the influence of traditional values cannot be compared to the degree the egocentric values from West have been ingratiated in the normative value system. Even so do many people care about sociocentric values as well and that does not seem to vanish. At the same time, as the

country stands trying to find social balance in the 21st century, people are still searching for their own identity in many ways, and in contemporary South African society, the traditional characteristics of ubuntu will continue to play a significant role in their social development.

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Appendix A: “Ubuntu” Products (<https://shop.canonical.com>).



”Ubuntu Ballpoint Pen”



“Ubuntu Metal Key Fob”



“Ubuntu Stickers”



” Ubuntu Mouse Mat”



“Ubuntu Vase Speaker”



“Mens T-Shirt”



”Ubuntu Ogio Metro Backpack”



“Recycled Ubuntu Notepad”



“Ubuntu Lanyard”