

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.18817/ot.v21i38.1170>

***CONCEPTUALISING AFRO-AUSTRALIAN UBUNTU FOR A NEW VISION OF
HUMAN RIGHTS IN MOZAMBIQUE***

***O CONCEITUANDO UBUNTU AFRO-AUSTRAL PARA UMA NOVA VISÃO DOS
DIREITOS HUMANOS EM MOÇAMBIQUE***

***CONCEPTUALIZANDO EL UBUNTU AFROAUSTRALIANO PARA UNA NUEVA
VISIÓN SOBRE LOS DERECHOS HUMANOS EN MOZAMBIQUE***

ORLANDO DO ROSÁRIO SEBASTIÃO

ORCID: - <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8672-3925>

Doutor in Intercultural Relations from the Aberta University. Teacher of the Human Rights and Contemporary Challenges, and International Peace and Security modules at the Corporate Business School – Higher School of Corporate and Social Management (CBS-ESGCS).

Maputo, Mozambique

Lilando.ors@gmail.com

ARMÊNIO ALBERTO RODRIGUES DA RODA

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5095-6567>

Post-Doctor. Federal University of Espírito Santo.

Espírito Santo, Vitória, Brazil.

armenioroda@gmail.com

Abstract: Firstly, the article seeks to present different concepts of the Ubuntu philosophy and its conformation with the logic of human rights. On the other hand, the article characterizes and analyzes Ubuntu as an organized set of ethical-moral principles and norms in terms of its historical and theoretical-conceptual construction, focusing on its recovery during the period after the so-called political-economic transitions in the 1990s Africa, with special attention to the Republic of Mozambique, given that it was at this time that there was a greater political-social affirmation of Ubuntu and its recovery or rebirth. On the other hand, the article defines Ubuntu/Umntu as a principle that positions the life of all the beings that inhabit planet Earth, including the entire human family, and not just human beings. Therefore, Ubuntu defends and safeguards values such as humanism, dignity, otherness, community, solidarity and interculturality in the light of the African worldview of life, in its most general and comprehensive sense. Nevertheless, the work discusses categories of Ubuntu-African philosophy from a variety of perspectives, namely Muntu, Kintu, Hantu and Kuntu (permeated by Ubuntu); in other words, beings (living, non-living and not-yet-born beings) and not just living beings in the purely biological sense.

Keywords: Ubuntu as an ethical-moral principle. Human rights. Humanism. Universalism.

Resumo: Em primeiro momento, o artigo busca apresentar diferentes conceitos da filosofia *Ubuntu* e a sua conformação com lógica dos direitos humanos. E, por outro lado, o artigo caracteriza e analisa *Ubuntu* enquanto conjunto organizado de princípios e normas ético-morais, no que concerne à sua construção histórica e teórico-conceitual, concedendo enfoque à sua recuperação no período após as chamadas transições político-econômicas em África, nos anos 1990, com especial atenção para a República de Moçambique, dado que será, nessa altura, que se assistirá a uma maior afirmação político-social de *Ubuntu* e da sua recuperação ou renascimento. Por outro ângulo, o artigo define *Ubuntu/Umuntu* como um princípio que posiciona a vida de todos os entes que habitam o planeta Terra, incluindo toda a família humana, e não propriamente somente a dos seres humanos. Portanto, *Ubuntu* defende e salvaguarda valores como humanismo, dignidade, alteridade, comunitariedade, solidariedade e interculturalidade, à luz da cosmovisão africana da vida, no seu sentido mais geral e abrangente possível. Inobstante, o trabalho discute categorias da filosofia *Ubuntu*-africana em variadas perspectivas, nomeadamente *Muntu*, *Kintu*, *Hantu* e *Kuntu* (permeadas por *Ubuntu*), ou seja, entes (seres vivos, não vivos e ainda-não-nascidos) e não seres vivos somente no sentido puramente biológico.

Palavras-chave: *Ubuntu* como princípio ético-moral; direitos humanos; humanismo.

Resumen: En primer lugar, este artículo pretende presentar diferentes conceptos de la filosofía *Ubuntu* y la estructura lógica de los derechos humanos. Además, el artículo caracteriza y analiza el *Ubuntu* como un conjunto organizado de principios y normas ético-morales, en términos de su construcción histórica y teórico-conceptual, centrándose en su recuperación durante el período posterior a las llamadas transiciones político-económicas en África en la década de 1990, con especial atención a la República de Mozambique, ya que, fue en este momento, cuando hubo una mayor afirmación político-social del *Ubuntu* y su recuperación o renacimiento. Así mismo, se define el *Ubuntu/Umuntu* como un principio que posiciona la vida de todos los seres que habitan el planeta tierra, incluyendo a toda la familia humana, y no sólo a los seres humanos. Por lo tanto, *Ubuntu* defiende y salvaguarda valores como el humanismo, la dignidad, la alteridad, la comunidad, la solidaridad y la interculturalidad, a la luz de la cosmovisión africana de la vida, en su sentido más general e integral. No obstante, la este estudio aborda las categorías de la filosofía *Ubuntu*-africana desde diversas perspectivas como *Muntu*, *Kintu*, *Hantu* y *Kuntu* (impregnadas de *Ubuntu*), es decir, los seres (seres vivos, no vivos y aún no nacidos) y los no-seres.

Palabras clave: *Ubuntu* como principio ético-moral. Derechos humanos. Humanismo.

1 Introdução

This article aims to present the concept of *Ubuntu* in light of the philosophical-moral perspective and its ethical and political application for the expanded construction of human rights in southern African countries, especially Mozambique. Nevertheless, the article presents the contributions of *Ubuntu* to the process of transition and democratization of the Mozambican state after the colonial period.

And to achieve the objectives referenced above, the research assumes an

exploratory and qualitative character, being conducted by a bibliographical review of several documents that reflect this topic.

Firstly, it is necessary to characterize and analyze Ubuntu as an organized set of ethical-moral principles and norms. Therefore, at first, we identify the main meanings that were attributed to the concept of Ubuntu by authors who write on the subject, since this term was, for the first time, mentioned in works written from 1846 onwards by Christian Gade, with a view to unveiling its main trends in semantic development. Secondly, the principles and norms of ethical-moral guidance that make up Ubuntu are identified and analyzed. And finally, the question of whether Ubuntu constitutes human moral conduct and/or an ethical *philos sophia* is discussed.

In this framework, with the perception of the main trends in semantic terms in the process of historical evolution associated with the concept of Ubuntu and the identification and analysis of its characteristics and primal principles, such as ethical-moral philosophy, it will be possible to understand its philosophical foundations. In this way, we will seek to identify the points of convergence and divergence with the Western ethics of human rights prevailing in the text of the UDHR, in the process of discovering a possible African contribution to a new universal thinking on human rights, taking into account the Ubuntu philosophical ethics practiced in Mozambique.

2 Genealogy of the term Ubuntu

The concept of Ubuntu is much deeper than the meanings associated with it throughout history, as, in fact, over the years, the different dimensions of its conceptual spectrum have been discovered.

Initially, Ubuntu was translated as “human quality” or “humanity towards others”. This is due to the fact that the translation derives from the root of languages usually classified in the Bantu family of languages, which attribute “ntu” to the plural, sometimes also to “us”, other times to “be/sermos¹”, while the prefix “Ba”² applied to “people”, whereas the languages classified in the Bantu linguistic family are those that

¹ in Portuguese the term 'ser' can also be conjugated in the plural 'sermos'

² Applied 'word' (Djalo, 2017, p. 14).

use the word Bantu to designate “us”, or “people”, or, sometimes, humanity as a whole, “peoples”. Thus, the prefix “Ubu”, in the languages of the Bantu family, would be the entity “before manifesting itself in concrete form”, which, together with “ntu”, which means “essential part of everything that exists [,] vital [force] of the universe that always occurs linked to its manifestation in something existing” or “[...] mode of being in the process of continuous discovery”, form the term ‘Ubuntu’” (Ramose, 2002, p. 325; Ramose, 1999, p. 50; Kagame, 1976; Geni, 2015; Silverstein, 1968). This term, when assumed as a hyphenated word (ubu-ntu), it is understood, according to Mogobe Bernard Ramose (2002, p. 2), as “[...] the fundamental ontological and epistemological category of African thought [...] the normative ethical category” as further clarified in this research. As for those who dedicated themselves to the academic study of Ubuntu, or those who, at least, wrote about it, very few have taken the time to write works on the history of the concept of Ubuntu.

Furthermore, the vast majority of those who spent time researching the history of the concept make simple mentions of the first works that contain the term Ubuntu. There are also those who chose only to “[...] point out some of its development trends” in terms of meaning (Bhengu, 1996; Binsbergen, 2001; Silva, 2021; Cavalcante, 2020; Lodge, 1999) and highlighted that the “[...] notion of Ubuntu is expressed in ancient African proverbs” (Meiring, 2015, p. 1). Others relied on the resource, made by Ramose (1999), regarding the morphology of the word Ubuntu (Ubu-ntu), to explain the depth of the concept, which is alien to many foreigners, and even to some Africans (as a philosophical concept), although they can live and feel it on a daily basis – this is the Ubuntu *Unconscious* Effect.

It was Christian Gade (2011) who produced the most complete work on the genealogy of the term, although he himself complained about the fact that Africans wrote little about Ubuntu, especially about the origin of the concept, maintaining that all previous works consulted to 1950, were written by individuals of European descent.

Agreeing with Gade (2011), even recently, there is a lack of works written by Africans about Ubuntu. In this context, it is important to make a small parenthesis before continuing with the research into the origin of this term, in order to present the possible reasons for the difficulty in understanding the genealogy of Ubuntu.

Before 1950, this void is understandable, given the colonial rule and its policy of censorship and historical and intellectual devaluation of African peoples, but regarding its weak contribution, in recent literature, justifications seem to be scarce. The North-American clinical psychologist, Na'im Akbar (1996), through his Afrocentric psychology, found an explanation in the “chains of psychological slavery”, which must be urgently broken; an opinion also shared by Paulina Chiziane (2018), expressed through her work *O Canto dos Escravos*; a book that deals with mental slavery and not physical slavery.

Still in this context, Cornell and Marle (2005) provide an excellent summary of what may be behind the reduced study of Ubuntu by African thinkers in general, as is the case with Mozambicans, although the case does not apply as much to the South Africans. Thus, Cornell and Marle (2005) point out, firstly, as reasons, the fact that youth, despite recognizing its traditional meaning as a social value, question its relevance today. In the same vein, Peter Mwipikeni, on the one hand, and Cornelis Willem Maris, on the other, will agree with Cornell and Marle (2005). Mwipikeni thinks that such questioning of the relevance of Ubuntu today is due to the fact that it is considered

[...] incompatible with the legal-political order and the economic system neoliberalism of modern society that promotes individualism and inequality distribution of wealth, the context of economic marginalization and severe impoverishment of the vast black African majority (Mwipikeni, 2018, p. 322).

Maris thinks that this lack of relevance is due to the fact that it is considered that the “[...] communalist ideal [underlying the concept of] Ubuntu is incompatible with the liberal emphasis on individual rights” (Maris, 2020, p. 315).

Other authors, such as Ducilla Cornell and Karin van Marle, argue that this lack of importance is due to the fact that Ubuntu is understood as pre-modern, patriarchal and conservative, according to Nkonko M. Kamwangamalu's (1999) suggestion of using the sociolinguistic perspective. Assimilating the semantic essence of Ubuntu with greater accuracy, Christian Gade (2011) presented three phases of development of this concept from a historical perspective, which, in this work, has been renamed, in our view more appropriately, as: 1 – monosemic phase; 2 – polysemic phase; 3 – Ubu-ntu

phase. Here we will continue the analysis of these three phases to show what we consider to be the main historical-semantic layers of Ubuntu.

3 Monosemic phase

This phase begins in 1846, when the term Ubuntu was first mentioned in the work of Henry Hare Dugmore et al, released in 1846, entitled *I-Testamente Entsha Yenkosi Yetu Ka-Yesu Kristu Gokwanamaxona*. In this way, Gade (2011) countered authors such as Mfuniselwa J. Bhengu (1996), who said that Ubuntu was, for the first time, used in South African writings in a text from a conference that took place in Durban, in 1960. From the same angle, Gade presented an older proof than that of Tom Lodge (1999) and that of Wim van Binsbergen (2001). While Lodge (1999) referenced Jordan Kush Ngabane's novels, namely *An African Explains Apartheid*, released in 1963, and *Conflicts of Mind*, published in 1979, Wim van Binsbergen (2001) considered the work of Samkange, S. & samkange, T. M., titled *Hunuism or Ubuntuism: A Zimbabwe Indiginous Political Philosophy*, from 1980, as being the oldest to mention the term under analysis.

In this monosemic phase, the authors who focused on the origin of the concept, such as Gade (2011) and Silva (2021), for example, presented Ubuntu as a quality with its predominant basic meanings varying between human nature, humanity, adult man and humanness (act or process of humanization). In this context, Christian Gade considered “Ubuntu [...] as a human quality” (Gade, 2011, p. 315), and Fabricio Pereira da Silva as “[...] a moral quality (someone has Ubuntu)” (Silva, 2021, p. 2).

4 Polysemic phase

In this second phase, in a use of the term Ubuntu as a (moral) human quality, in a cumulative process or one that resembles the discovery of the so-called “cultural onion”, by Geert Hofstede (2010), the predominant terms varied between philosophy, ethics, humanism and worldview or cosmovision.

This phase begins where the previous one ended (mid-20th century) and extends until 1995. It is a complex phase due to the political-economic and socio-cultural moment in which it falls, an engaging historical period evidenced by radical transformations.

For Mozambique, where the study takes place, it was a period of enormous transformations, moving from a colony to an independent country. In this context, the option for a socialist political system led the country to a civil war, as a result of internal and international geopolitical conflicts relating to the historical landmark of the Cold War. In view of this, only with the fall of the Berlin Wall and the subsequent signing of the General Peace Agreement in 1992, did the process of consolidating Mozambique as a liberal Republic begin with the first multiparty and democratic elections, which resulted in the victory of Joaquim Chissano as President of the Republic (Couto, 2005; Gonçalves, 2022; Hedges et. al, 1998). It was, therefore, a period in which, as highlighted by the Mozambican philosopher linked to the Pedagogical University of Mozambique, José Castiano (2010, p. 123), “[...] wonderful things happened [...] in Africa, [...] in all spheres, [with] Africans as main actors and not as simple objects”.

In the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, numerous African countries achieved independence from colonial rule. Mozambique achieved independence in 1975 and, in this new situation, more and more Mozambicans are coming into contact with Ubuntu through academic means (with Mozambican professors Severino Ngoenha and José Castiano) and social contact (through family relationships, work, tourism , among others) and, later, in the 90s, in the field of information technology, with Mozambicans using the South African Operating System (OS) called Ubuntu, which, inspired by this philosophy aimed at the good of all, is freely available. However, it is worth highlighting the lack of awareness on the part of the population that the *Ubuntu* that South Africans refer to corresponds to the principles that govern Mozambican sociocultural relations called traditional (the *Umunu* philosophical ethics), as a form of distinction with the Western or “white” culture, as it is popularly called.

It is worth highlighting that, in the period of anti-colonial struggle and the rise to independence, the concept of *Ubuntu* also mirrored the troubled time characterized by a thirst for liberation from colonial subjugation and the past of slavery, presenting a polysemy of meanings, ranging from its definition as an ethics, passing through its meaning as African humanism and culminating in the association with socialism. This last association proved to be quite controversial, taking into account the foundational differences between *Ubuntu* and socialism, as will be clarified later in this chapter.

Returning to the issue of Ubuntu's conceptual polysemy, Christian Gade's

definition is highlighted: “[...] linked to, or identical to, a philosophy or an ethics” (Gade, 2011, p. 315), but, as Fabrício Pereira da Silva recalls, in 1970, in his article *Ubuntu Como Filosofia Moral?*, published last year (2021), “Ubuntu was associated with African humanisms and socialisms that informed the processes of decolonization and construction of new States” (Silva, 2021, p. 3). Likewise, in South Africa, after the end of apartheid, the expression Rainbow Nation was always linked to *Ubuntu*, which was followed and practiced by Nelson Mandela himself, following the same purpose of strengthening the identity and national unity, to guarantee “[...] social cohesion and integration” (Buqa, 2015, p. 1).

Here, it is clear that the concept of *Ubuntu* was adjusted by African politicians, including Mozambicans, as a policy aimed at ensuring national unity. In Mozambique, we will notice this use, especially during the administration of President Armando Guebuza, who presided over the country between 2005 and 2015, always considering that “[...] the future of Mozambique depends on national unity and self-esteem”, which are found in cultural and customary practices, in typically African forms of community-individual relationships (Omar, 2019, paragraph 3) and which translate *Umunu* (*Ubuntu*) ethical principles. However, at independence, the FRELIMO Party, which took over the State, recognized Portuguese as the country's official language, continuing with what several authors called “linguicide” and marginalization of Mozambican national languages, or “Europhone culture” (Furtado, 2016; Ponso, 2016; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018; Thiong’o, 1986; Appiah, 1991).

Although they did not use the term *Ubuntu* publicly in their speeches, Mozambican leaders – who supported the fight against *apartheid* – had appreciation for Nelson Mandela as leader of the “*Ubuntu* movement”, as admitted by Joaquim Chissano, who presided over the Mozambican State from 1986 to 2005, in an interview given to the newspaper *O País*, on December 28, 2021, in an article entitled *Morre o Homem e Permanece a Obra*³ (Chavo, 2021).

This political connection between Mozambique and South Africa, especially in Mandela era, is not only due to the fact that FRELIMO immensely supported the struggle of the African National Congress (ANC) against apartheid, nor because Desmond Mpilo Tutu helped to restore peace in Mozambique. This is presumably

³ Free translation: *The Man Dies and the Work remains*.

because they share the desire to bring together “[...] all classes and tribes [in] the same nation” (Chavo, 2021, paragraph 6), which would be a rainbow nation, in Mandela’s view, united and with high self-esteem, from the perspectives of Joaquim Chissano and Armando Guebuza. In short, it was in contact and interactions with a view to winning this fight against *apartheid*, in addition to the daily comings and goings of Mozambicans and South Africans (people with secular relationships hampered by borders established with the “sharing of Africa”), that *Ubuntu* was being transmitted and shared, despite geographic distance, as well as borders having shaped shared languages and cultures, accents, phonetics, lexicons, morphologies and syntaxes (Chavo, 2021; Buqa, 2015; Teyssier, 1982; Guerreiro, 2015).

5 *Ubu-ntu* phase

Coincidentally, with the transformation of Mozambique and South Africa into multiparty democracies themselves, more precisely in 1994, with the holding of the first multiparty elections, giving victory to Joaquim Chissano and Nelson Mandela, Ubuntu assumed the meaning of “[...] worldview, in the political field, and moral philosophy and ethics, in the academic field” (Silva, 2021; Gade, 2011; Piombo and Nijzink, 2005; Silva, 2015).

In this context, the democratization of Mozambican and South African societies (the South African case mentioned here, mainly due to its academic relevance in the study of Ubuntu and the strong links it maintains with Mozambique at various levels throughout history), will allow the exponential increase in terms of literary production on the subject. In this scope, appeared the books of the philosopher Augustine Shutte, *Philosophy for Africa*, published in 1993 in South Africa and, in 1995, that of Desmond Mpilo Tutu, published in the USA, with the title *No Future Without Forgiveness*, which greatly helped to spread the aphorem *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*, which came to be translated as *I am because we are*. This last aphorism is a quote from the work *African Religions and Philosophy*, published in 1960, by John Mbiti (Silva, 2021).

This phase is called *Ubu-ntu*, inspired by the work of Mogobe Ramose entitled *African Philosophy Through Ubuntu*, published in 1999, in Zimbabwe (Ramosé, 1999). This “Ramoséan” perspective, which we believe is quite widespread today, incorporates

a concept of philosophy, which, in some way, portrays the perspective established by Pythagoras of Samos, because, when asked about who he was, he responded: *philosophos*, that is, “[...] candidate or applicant to *sophia* [(know)]” (Graça, 2010, p. 66; Chaui, 2002, p. 68).

According to this understanding, the *Ubu-ntu* phase is dominated by the concept of Ubuntu as a hyphenated word (*Ubu-ntu*), which reveals a fundamental part of the *Ubuntu* philosophical ethics associated with an *Ubu-ntu* personality (“Umuntu [...] as a force endowed with intelligence [that] animates the Kintu, the sterile forces), which indicates being a candidate for *sophia Ubuntu*, that is, searching and cultivating in an incessant, permanent way, to transform oneself into *Ubuntu* (Graça, 2010; Chaui, 2002; Ramose, 1999; Castiano, 2010; Jahn, 1961; Ukwamedua, 2011).

The *Ubu-ntu* perspective constitutes a better approach to *Ubuntu* as an ethic of African peoples, in general. In this way, *Umuntu* is recognized as a *philosophos*, or rather, as a lover of *Ubuntu* knowledge, who, by nurturing this feeling, eternally pursues this knowledge, developing his capacity for agency to survive in the *Ubuntu* community structure (Machado-da- Silva, Fonseca and Crubellate, 2010; Caetano, 2011; Silva, 2000).

In this context, if Philosophy, not exactly as a discipline – which is a “construction” (Berger and Luckman, 2004; Soares, 2017; Marques, 2015) –, but in its more general sense, as a love of knowledge, on the one hand, is related to aesthetic admiration and curiosity in relation to the biophysical and metaphysical worlds, on the other hand, it is associated with the fact that the first human inhabitants of the face of the Earth had Africa as their birthplace (Diop, 1974). Thus, we can then say that Africans have always practiced Philosophy, as they have reason – as a force endowed with intelligence, capable of animating the “Kinto (thing) [...] sterile force” (Ukwamedua, 2011, p. 253-256) –, a central instrument to enable the capacity for aesthetic admiration. Therefore, as Mogobe Bernard Ramose and Boaventura de Sousa Santos also recognized in an interview carried out by the latter with the former, within the scope of the ALICE Project of the Center for Social Studies (CES) of the University of Coimbra, in 2016, Africa could be a cradle of philosophy, at least in its general sense, as love of knowledge (Conversations [...], 2016).

6 *Ubuntu* ethical-moral principles and norms

In the final part of the section concerning the *Ubu-ntu* etymology of Ramose, one can understand that the fact that all activity of the *Umuntu* (human being) aims at its transformation or materialization into *Ubuntu*, both epistemology as the expression of Ubuntu principles (but not only) and ontology as being and its materialization as *Ubuntu* and the philosophical ethics itself, as a set of principles – all, as an indivisible unit, have, as their ultimate end, *Ubuntu*. *Ubuntu* must therefore be achieved through an *Ubu-ntu* process, which aims to achieve the ideal of healthy relationships with others in community.

In view of this, we move on to a detailed study of some characteristics, which, at their core, carry fundamental principles that substantiate Ubuntu philosophical ethics, without forgetting that, tending to, ethics needs a raw material to be applied, that is, morality.

7 *Umuntu Ngumuntu Ngabantu*

As for the first and most widespread *Ubuntu* principle, mentioned above, two appreciative perspectives are encompassed, namely, the descriptive and the prescriptive. The first narrates, in detail, Ubuntu, through the enumeration of its circumstances and characteristics, making use of connecting verbs (being/to be, seem, for example), which do not aim to express actions, but the interconnection of *Ubuntu* to *Umuntu*. The second should be taken as a set of principles to be followed.

Descriptively, it is argued that someone's identity as a human being is based on a community. In other words, reality demonstrates that humanity satisfies the precepts of the concept of “[...] a being-with-others” (Ewuoso; Hall, 2019, p. 96). This means, as articulated by Ewuoso and Hall (2019) and Hoffmann and Metz (2017), that the *Umuntu* (the specific human being, as a moral entity, but equally, among others, political and religious) cannot survive alone, without being integrated into their community, with whom they live and coexist and with whom they interdepend. You must, therefore, interact and live with your *Bantu*, and your relationship with the *Ubuntu* community is always permeated by *Ubuntu*, which includes “Muntu” (“intelligent force”), “Kintu” (“things in their passive and non-active”), “Hantu” (“place and time”) and “Kuntu” (“form or modality”) (Ramose, 1999, 2002; Ukwamedua, 2011; Jahn, 1961; Kagamé,

1976).

The concept of *Bantu* comes to be assumed here in the original meaning of the signifier of native African languages, as humanity or people, and not in the meaning adopted by European peoples, to refer to a set of “several dialects [of a] language [the which they called] *Bantu*”, or a “group of around 500 languages belonging to the Bantuid subgroup of the Benue-Congo branch of the Niger-Congo linguistic family”, considered as such because they have a “common grammatical morphology” (Bendor-Samuel, 2024; Cartwright, 2019).

In addition to the descriptive view, as initially mentioned, there is the prescriptive view of the maxim *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*, often translated as “[...] a person is a person through other people” (Bolden, 2014, p. 1; Odari, 2020, p. 60). In rarer cases, as highlighted by Francisco António de Vasconcelos, and even with a meaning closer to the real concept of *Ubuntu*, the “[...] Xhosa proverb is cited which reinforces this understanding [:] each individual humanity expresses itself ideally in relationships with others” (Vasconcelos, 2017, p. 102-103).

However, a small parenthesis should be made before proceeding with the presentation of this view. In the XiChangana language, predominant in southern Mozambique (namely in Gaza and Maputo, but also in parts of the province of Inhambane), and which is similar to Zulu, this maxim would be translated as *A person is a person because of other people* – this is because, as is commonly argued, there are other people without whom there would not even be the reproduction of human beings on Earth and on whom we depend, throughout our entire existence, including the moment of burial and the maintenance of the connection between the natural and spiritual worlds, through ceremonies such as *kupatlha* (Maputo and Gaza) and *Mucutho* (Zambézia), just to name a few examples. In view of what was previously expressed, the deep and inevitable interdependence between human beings should be highlighted here.

Essa visão MaChangana do uso do termo *por causa* em lugar de *através* é também partilhada por Nhlori Ngobeni, ao explicar o sentido de *Ubuntu*, por via da máxima em apreço, utilizando a expressão “por causa de” – *Umntu ngumuntu ngabantu*: uma pessoa é uma pessoa **por causa** das outras pessoas. Eu sou **porque** tu

és, e tu és **porque** somos. E estou bem se estás bem (Ngobeni, 2020, p. 1, grifo nosso).

This MaChangana view of using the term *because of* rather than *through* is also shared by Nhlori Ngobeni, when explaining the meaning of *Ubuntu*, through the maxim in question, using the expression “because of” – *Umntu ngumuntu nagabantu*: a person is a person *because of* other people. I am **because** you are, and you are **because** we are. And I'm fine if you're fine (Ngobeni, 2020, p. 1, our emphasis).

Although, in the Portuguese language, the adverb “through” and the adverbial phrase “because of” have the same meaning or are used to clarify the meaning of each other, the Machanganas consider, according to some surveys carried out during the research, that the adverbial phrase “because of” best expresses the meaning of *Ubuntu* through the maxim *Amuno hi imaka ia va whana vanu*, corresponding to the aphorism *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*.

This prescriptive vision in question can be seen as a set of ethical principles, which advocate that *Umntu*, to become or be *Ubuntu*, must incorporate and materialize or manifest itself, i.e., follow a set of *Ubuntu* ethical precepts to be a human person. This does not exactly mean that a certain human being is no longer considered a human person or that he is an animal. In truth, *Ubuntu* ethics respects even animals as true beings linked to the community, as can be seen in the context of the relationship between the biophysical and spiritual worlds. Because, as Mpofu Sonnyboy Mosana (2002, p. 47) highlights, “[...] in traditional African society there is no Person without a network of social relationships [(hukuma, in Shona, which means relationship)]”. And it is from this same perspective that Mogomme Alpheus Masoga (2014) states that the value of the Human Person is rooted and inherent in Belonging, that is, “it is located in Belonging” (Murove, 2020, p. 98).

In this context of prescriptions, Ewuoso and Hall (2019, p. 96) share some examples with several authors (Gade, 2011; Tschaepe, 2013; Shanyanana and Waghid, 2016; Boissevain et. al, 2013; among others), when citing the value of communal, harmonious and interdependent relationships, that is, “communal harmony”, as Murove (2020) prefers to call it. Another example is given by Dorothy R. Jolley (2011) in order to clarify that a person, in the permanent and incessant movement towards *Ubuntu*, to develop their personality, needs to contribute to the affirmation of others:

A person with *Ubuntu* is open, and available to others, not afraid of others being capable and skilled. [...] It has its own self-assurance that comes from the knowledge that [...] it belongs to a greater whole, and is diminished when others are humiliated or diminished, when others are tortured or oppressed, or threatened as if they were less than they are (Jolley, 2011, p. 30).

8 Consonance of the Ubuntu personality with the biophysical and spiritual worlds

Communal harmony, highlighted by Munyaradzi Felix Murove (2020), and which Ngozi Odiaka and Chuks Oriugu (2017) call *communal living*, goes far beyond the meanings contained in *being-with-others* and *identity with the others*, as it includes the meaning of human beings of different races, colors, sexes, languages, worldviews and philosophies of life, who live in a society with love and peace (UNIC, 2009), on the one hand. On the other hand, and even more important for the focus of our theme, the harmony of the *Ubu-ntu* personality (always moving towards *Ubuntu*) with the biophysical and spiritual worlds.

In this context, C. Ewuoso and S. Hall (2019, p. 96-97) evoke that *Ubuntu* is an “[...] ethical theory [based] on a (totemic) system, where an individual must see himself as even as being related and interconnected with the spiritual world in the vertical line, as well as with other non-human species and the broader horizontal environment.” This perspective agrees with the interconnection mirrored by Abbé Alexis Kagame's (1976) four categories, namely, *Muntu* (Human being), *Kintu* (Thing), *Kuntu* (Mode) and *Hantu* (Space and time), to which Ramose (1999, 2002) adds the fifth category, *Ubuntu*. In other words, the *Ubuntu Bantu* community is made up of people who fight incessantly, permanently and eternally, to strengthen the community itself, made up of “[...] people with intelligence, but without life [(ancestors) and] People with intelligence and life [(the *Bantu* in their biophysical space)]” (Kashindi, 2017, p. 16) and even the unborn.

In view of this, this *Ubuntu Bantu* community, which encompasses the relationship between the living and the ancestors, including those “not yet born”, has a strong influence in guaranteeing the “unity and harmony of the personality expressed in *Ubuntu*”, which encompasses since the visible world to the spiritual world. This harmony between the lives of the biophysical and spiritual environment constitutes an

Ubuntu “metaphysics” that does not support the “contemporary Western dualist dogma of ‘competition’” (Nabudere, 2005; Forster, 2010; Ramose, 2010).

Furthermore, this harmony and unity of personality manifested in *Ubuntu*, and which extends from the biophysical to the spiritual world, is expressed by Brad Breems, when he speaks of a continuity from human beings to other categories, as “[...] plants and animals, on the one hand, [and] spirits, on the other” (Breems, 2016, p. 65). That is, between man, the visible world (plants, animals, things) and the invisible (supernatural and transcendental forces, spirits, gods, God). In this context, let us remember the merged categories of Kagame (1976) and Ramose (1999, 2002). Agreeing with the perspective of continuity, presented by Brad Breems (2016), Ramathate Dolamo mentions that “[...] death does not discontinue this relationship” (Dolamo, 2013, p. 5), which is permeated by Ubuntu ethics, since death constitutes an introduction of Umuntu or the human person to the world of the living-dead (the non-living people who live in the spiritual world).

Finally, it is important to emphasize that, in this symbiotic relationship between the biophysical and spiritual worlds, as stated by Munyaradzi Felix Murove, complemented by C. Ewuoso & S. Hall, who has Ubuntu as a set of values as an intimate link of interaction with “[.. .] all three dimensions” (Murove, 2009, p. 319) – the past, the present and the future –, there are “[...] the present bonds of familiarity”, that is, “[.. .] the personal and real communication network”, as a priority in relation to ‘future relationships’” (Ewuoso; Hall, 2019, p. 97). This view is also defended by thinkers such as Thaddeus Metz (2016).

This last point of prioritization of “present ties of familiarity”, over “future relationships”, opens space for debate, taking into account the intimate connection between the visible (biophysical) and invisible (spiritual) worlds and *Muntu*, and the *Kintu*, *Hantu*, *Kuntu* and *Ubuntu* categories. To some extent, this aspect will be touched on in some detail in the next chapter, but it is interesting, for now, to maintain the point of view that the Bantu, in the relationship between the biophysical and spiritual worlds, taking into account the three dimensions (past, present and future) mentioned, uses the knowledge obtained from past experiences, to solve the problems of the present and envision the future, with Ubuntu as “[...] the ethical-normative category that prescribes and, therefore, permeates [in this context ,] the relationship between *Muntu*, *Kintu*,

Hantu and Kuntu” (Ramose, 2002, p. 324, emphasis added).

Therefore, the *Bantu*, as they ideally possess an *Ubu-ntu* personality in their constant, incessant, dynamic and adaptive advancement, with no return, with a view to materialization, as *Ubuntu*, interconnects all relationships, whether past or present, to guarantee that future relations do not endanger the survival and development of the Ubuntu community.

9 *Ubuntu* community ontology

Before moving on to clarify the priority and ontological contingency of the community and the individual, we will focus on clarifying the concept of community from the African perspective, making a quick distinction with the Western forms of relativism and communitarianism, to which we will focus with more detail in the next approach.

Taking into account the authors read, who focus on *Ubuntu*, it appears that they do not define community either in its descriptive conceptualization, as a set of individuals who satisfy a particular description, nor in its relational meaning, which defines it beyond of the set of members that embody certain particular traits, demanding the inclusion of a relationship of recognition between the members among themselves and each one of them with the community as a whole (Neely, 2012). The *Ubuntu* perspective of community, although it encompasses numerous aspects of descriptive and relational concepts, assumes it as an “[...] ideal form of relating to others in a community” (Metz and Gaie, 2010; Ewuso and Hall, 2019).

In this scope, although Erica L. Neely recognizes the limitations of the descriptive formulation because it is “[...] simplistic [and] therefore does not provide a sufficiently robust concept of community” (Neely 2012, p. 147), and assume that the relational notion is more philosophically enriched by capturing the “true nature of the community”, the concept of Ubuntu community brings a new notion of community, which, in addition to being a relational ideal, contributes important elements linked to the determination of group norms and objectives of its members. Therefore, this concept does not exactly imply, as Ewuso and Hall (2019) remind us, that the dominant culture, or the group, determines moral norms or what is right. For Metz and Gaie (2010), this is a Western (relativist and communitarian) approach to community

relations.

Community is, in the *Ubuntu*-African perspective, in addition to the aforementioned, a “standard objective”, which should guide what the majority wants (Metz, 2017; Ewuoso and Hall, 2019). For a better understanding of what was said, such a community as a “standard objective” is, for Barbara Nussbaum, the “global community” (Nussbaum, 2003, p. 1), while for Adrian D. van Breda it would be “[...] humanity between people within the community” (Breda, 2019, p. 439). What is certain is that *Ubuntu* considers all human beings, including foreigners, as humans who must seek to be and cultivate, permanently and eternally, an *Ubu-ntu* lifestyle, while respecting the cultures of others and the accidental characteristics of each human being, individually.

Having clarified the essence of the concept of *Ubuntu* community, we move on to the question of the ontological priority or contiguity of the community in relation to the individual, inspired by a discussion originated by Aristotle about “ontological dependence and priority” (Angioni, 2010; Sousa, 2018), that is, of *Muntu* in relation to *Ubuntu*. The ontological priority takes the community as a mechanism serving *Muntu*, therefore, crucial to the development of the person's personality and humanity.

As for ontological contiguity, it portrays a mutually constitutive relationship, a “dialogical relationship” (Eze, 2008, p. 386), in which the personality and humanity of the person and the survival of the community are simultaneously satisfied. In this way, it is guaranteed that, while the individual promotes harmony and community good, individual good is similarly assured. David W. Lutz (2009, p. 1) puts this question very well, while distancing himself from Marxist collectivism, “[...] the individual does not pursue the common good [in place] of his own [...] well, on the contrary, he pursues his own good by pursuing the common good.”

In view of this, it is necessary to remember a relevant element chained to the nature of the community in the context of Africa *Ubuntu*, already mentioned previously, which is the prioritization of the communal relationship, but as a standard objective, as was pointed out when analyzing the notion of community in *Ubuntu* meaning.

As Christopher Simon Wareham (2017) explains, at some point, it is difficult for Westerners to perceive this concept of communitarianism based in African societies,

rooted in a tangible relationality, which differs from Western atomism, which places the human being at the center, while African morals theories put humans in harmony with the biophysical and spiritual worlds. This matter is articulated in more detail in the next section when we dedicate ourselves to identifying and debating the points of convergence and divergence of Ubuntu and Western philosophical ethics, considering the positioning of the human being from Antiquity until the moment in which begins to occupy the center of the universe (anthropocentrism), a vision that began to take hold at the end of the Middle Ages amid the “[...] tension between the human and the divine, between sin and grace, or in the famous Augustinian metaphor, between terrestrial city and the heavenly city” (Coutinho, 2008, p. 9).

10 Community nature: Identity and solidarity with others

As for the concepts of “identity with others” and “solidarity with others”, the main understanding to retain is that *Ubuntu* requires, as Thaddeus Metz highlights, a mixture of both concepts, that of a sense of “pro-group self”, more than a “We”, and a state of solidarity. In other words, a “combination of identification with others” and “solidarity with others” from the perspective of the maxim *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* (Metz, 2011, p. 532).

In the first case, that of “identification with others”, *Ubuntu* is more associated with the “pro-group self”, a process in which the adoption of group preferences does not undermine the preservation of individuality, personality and personal reasoning. This way, *Umuntu* will be able to reach the *Ubuntu* community.

No seguinte caso, um membro *Bantu* exibe solidariedade ao demonstrar preocupação com os outros, dado que, segundo os *Bantu*, se *Ubuntu* promove união e partilha de identidade, a “ação é correta”. Em vista disso, a violação da solidariedade para com os outros, ao longo das linhas vertical e horizontal, é uma transgressão à ética *ubu-ntu*, o que implica a desvalorização do *Umuntu* ao ponto de ser considerado um “animal”, mas não no seu verdadeiro sentido da palavra, como se explicou anteriormente (Rapatsa, 2016; Tschaepe, 2013; Mabovula, 2011; Mayaka e Truell, 2021; Mboti, 2015; Metz, 2010).

In the following case, a *Bantu* member displays solidarity by showing concern for others, given that, according to the *Bantu*, if *Ubuntu* promotes unity and shared

identity, the “action is right”. In view of this, the violation of solidarity with others, along vertical and horizontal lines, is a transgression of the *ubu-ntu* ethics, which implies the devaluation of *Umntu* to the point of being considered an “animal”, but not in its true meaning of the word, as explained previously (Rapatsa, 2016; Tschaepe, 2013; Mabovula, 2011; Mayaka and Truell, 2021; Mboti, 2015; Metz, 2010).

11 Moralization of humanity e personality

It is the unification of *Ubu-ntu* ethics with humanity and personality that grants the individual the necessary ethical-moral traits and the ideal opportunity to become a person and not an animal, and develop their personality, that is, “the essence of being human” (Jolley, 2011). In short, “[...] it is this unification of Ubuntu ethics with humanity and personality that allows the human being to become a person” (Hallen, 2015, p. 1), and no longer a “Kintu” (a sterile force that needs the action and activity of other forces) (Ukwamedua, 2011).

Concern for others becomes ethical when it seeks to develop “[...] the person as a person” (Haegert, 2000, p. 494). This simple statement by Sandy Haegert, as well as the previous contributions advanced and appreciated, involves a central message for the *Ubuntu* ethical philosophy, that is, the magnitude of the role of community as an ideal to be achieved in the development of humanity and personality. This means that it is the way of valuing others in interacting with us, in an *Ubuntu* way, that develops humanity and personality; no one reaches it alone.

Furthermore, the development of personality and humanity must involve the *Ubuntu* community, which, as already mentioned, is made up of the entities that inhabit the physical and spiritual, visible and invisible worlds, and which has the role of demanding that the *Bantu* accept *Ubuntu* as a body of socially generated norms. In addition to these conditions, for *Umntu* to be considered a worthy person, that is, with “full moral status [must] be capable of being both subject and object” (Metz, 2017, p. 119) of relationship, that is, comply with the philosophical meaning of the *Afro-Austral Ubuntu* adage “I am because we are; I can only be a person through others” (Gade, 2011, p. 313).

Furthermore, Christian Gade also argues that “we can only be completely human when we are human together” (Gade, 2012, p. 493), and it is in this same context that

Ramathate Dolamo, when highlighting Ubuntu as an Ubu-ntu process, states that African ethics does not define the person as self-realization or as an act ontological. On the contrary, it describes the person as a process of [passing] into existence in the reciprocal relationship between the individual and the community, where the latter includes not only the deceased, but also God [The Force/Wanthamo] (Dolamo, 2013, p. 3).

Although renowned thinkers, such as Mogobe Bernard Ramose (2002) and Mluleki Mnyaka and Mokgethi Motlhabi (2005), agree that personality develops in a process, which must also include a ritual transformation in addition to the social one, Michael Onyebuchi Eze (2008, p. 395) disagrees, considering it to be a “co-substantive” process.

In this context, one can make a quick reflection on the circumstances or conditions necessary for an *Ubuntu Umuntu* (human person) to be worthy of Human Rights. From this consideration, which will receive credit in the next exposition, some of Ubuntu's contributions are extracted to fill the incompleteness of the dominant Western ethics in the UDHR of 1948. A possible answer to this question, in this vein, intelligently provided by Kevin Gary Behrens (2017) and Michael Cook (2017), is linked to two concepts introduced by the first author, that of “People with Moral Agency” (which are those who are self-determining and capable of relating appropriately with others) and the of “People Without Moral Agency” (those who may or may not be self-determining, with reasoning problems). According to these authors, all people have human dignity, in other words, moral status, in which the former must ensure the protection of the rights of the latter.

12 Narrative of going

This principle is, on this occasion, presented not as a priority in contrast to the idea defended by Kubow and Min (2016), and shared by other authors, such as Matolino and Kwindigwi (2013) and Gade (2011), among others, that “Ubuntu functions as a call for Africanization” (Kubow; Min, 2016, p. 8, emphasis added), but to make clear that Ubuntu, as it implies an *Ubu-ntu* philosophical ethic (and its underlying ontology and epistemology), as Ewuoso and Hall (2019, p. 97) maintains, constitutes, in our words, a “departure narrative”. Or rather, *Ubu-ntu* philosophical ethics represents a

constant, incessant, dynamic and adaptive *Ubu-ntu* advancement with no return, with a view to materializing as *Ubuntu*, and does not constitute a simple *narrative of return* to a glorious past, nor a simple call to Africanization or re-Africanization.

In this context, the Ramosean *Ubuntu* philosophical ethics clarifies that the approach to an *Ubuntu of return*, whether to a glorious pre-colonial past, or the recovery of values from the aforementioned ennobling era, with the aim of molding them to solve contemporary problems and *perspectivate* the future of current African nations, does not constitute as strong an argument as it might appear at first glance.

In this logic, as highlighted, *Ubuntu*, which is incessantly and eternally sought, is supported by the descriptive and prescriptive visions chained to the aphorism *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*, by the harmony of the *Ubu-ntu* personality with the biophysical and spiritual worlds, in an *eternal narrative of always going*, which shares a “-ntu” continuity, which permeates from the Munitu categories to the *Kintu*, *Hantu* and *Kuntu*. It is an unrepeatable and timeless transformative process, although it preserves an essence to always achieve *Ubuntu*, which is obviously contrary to the promotion or support of failed and tyrannical governments, or large-scale impoverishment of the *Bantu*. That would be transgressions.

The reasons for such transgressions seem to have complex tentacles embedded in the modern capitalist political-economic and socio-cultural Western system as demonstrated, on the one hand, by renowned thinkers from the Modernity/Coloniality Group, such as Enrique Dussel, Walter Dignolo and Aníbal Quijano, with arguments, insightfully, articulated through theories such as *Transmodernity* (Dussel, 2002, 2016, 2019), the *Geopolitics of Knowledge* and *Colonial Difference* (Dignolo, 2005b) and the *Coloniality of Power* (Quijano, 1992, 2005, 2012). On the other hand, just to name a few Africans, Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong’o (1986) does so using his *Decolonization of the Mind*; Valentine-Yves Mudimbe (1988), via *African Gnosis* and the *Colonial Library*; Joseph-Achille Mbembe (2001, 2003), through *Postcolony* and *Neocropolitics*; Kwasi Wiredu (1995), for *Conceptual Decolonization*.

Therefore, there are countless instruments used by the West, which remove the capacity for free agency and action for *Ubuntu*, positioning the members of these communities in an inferior social space, curbing their influence on the modern Western

structure. The aforementioned South American and African thinkers, however, and many others around the world, including Europeans, such as Boaventura de Sousa Santos, just to name one case, have managed to use their capacities for agency and action dialogically in relation to the structure, with a view to denouncing and trying to overcome such obstacles.

13 *Ubuntu* ethical principles

Discussed the origins of the term *Ubuntu* and its concept, in addition to understanding the underlying philosophy, we, here, summarize the central principles of this African ethics, central to the self-definition of *Umuntu*, which materializes it, daily, in the eternal and permanent process for its transformation into *Ubuntu*, in a symbiotic interaction with the biophysical and spiritual worlds and the beings that inhabit them, with a view to reaching or building an *Ubuntu* community.

Fundamental principle of life: this is the fundamental principle of *Ubuntu* ethics, since all those who are part of this ethics constitute, symbiotically, a single set of principles (which is *Ubuntu*), which aims, exactly, to guarantee, safeguard and the preservation of human life, as members of the same family – humanity. Furthermore, it is important to highlight that this fundamental principle of life in the *Ubuntu* ethical-moral philosophy corresponds to the “shadow principle”, that is, “the principle of birth and death that man shares with animals” (Ukwamedua, 2011; Kagame, 1976). This fact reveals the concern of *Ubuntu* ethics with preserving the dignified life of all beings that inhabit planet Earth.

***Ha Umunu* (being a person) Principle:** for an *Umuntu/Umuntu* to become *Ubuntu*, he must incorporate *Ubuntu*, that is, follow a set of *Ubuntu* ethical and moral principles to become a human person. This does not mean that a certain human being ceases to be truly considered a human and become like a (wild) animal.

***Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* principle,** that is, *a person is a person because of other people*, as the MaChangana prefer to say, or *a person is a person through other people* (Bolden, 2014; Ngobeni, 2020; Metz, 2017; Obuaku-Igwe, 2020; Kombo, 2002): the *Umuntu* – the being specific human, as a moral being, but equally, among others, political and religious – cannot survive alone, without being integrated into their *Ubuntu* community (other categories with whom they live and co-exist and on which they

interdepend in an ideal of community relationship), that is, without interacting and living, ideally, with your community, without becoming *Ubuntu*, which includes a permanent and eternal interaction between the categories *Muntu*, *Kintu*, *Hantu* and *Kintu* permeated by the category *Ubuntu* (Kagamé, 1976; Ramose, 1999).

Ubuntu principle of belonging: in traditional African society there is no person without a network of social relationships. The value of the human person “is located in belonging” to an *Ubuntu* community, that is, in an ideal form of relationship with others in a community (Mosana, 2022; Masoga, 2012; Murove, 2020).

Ubuntu personality development principle: for a person to develop a human personality, in the permanent and incessant movement towards *Ubuntu*, that is, through the *Ubu-ntu* process, which embodies the following of an *Ubu-ntu* lifestyle, needs to contribute to the affirmation of others and to the “communal harmony” (Murove, 2020, p. 98). In other words, the person has to be open and available to others, with the confidence that they belong to something much bigger – the *Ubuntu* community –, because if they are not happy, neither will they be, and if they are moved to the abyssal “other side of the line”, the same *Umuntu/Umunu* will also be so (Santos, 2009).

Principle of harmony between the Ubuntu Personality and the Biophysical and Spiritual Worlds: the African *Umuntu* sees itself, in constant, permanent and eternal relationship and interconnection, as if it were a single ecosystem, with “[...] the spiritual world on the vertical line, as well as with the other species non-human and the broader horizontal environment” (Ewuoso; Hall, 2019, p. 96-97), in an incessant and permanent struggle with a view to strengthening and guaranteeing the survival and happiness of the *Ubuntu* community, which is, obviously, composed of living, non-living and unborn beings, in their symbiotic relationship with the biophysical and spiritual worlds.

Principle of categorical continuity and symbiotic metaphysics: this principle encompasses two central moments in the life of *Umuntu*, the continuity existing between the aforementioned five categories/entities of Alexis Abbé Kagamé (1976) and Mogobe Bernard Ramose (1999), which not even death discontinues such interrelationship, in addition to the promotion of a symbiotic metaphysics, which is supported between the beings that inhabit the biophysical and spiritual worlds and

between all of them, symbiotically, as if they were the same human body.

Standard Goal Principle: The *Ubuntu* community constitutes a “standard goal” (Metz, 2017, p. 118) of all *Bantu* members, which configures an ideal of relationships with others in the community. The below mentioned principle of community-impartiality, which is *Ubuntu*, and which co-substantially with *Umntu* itself forms a symbiotically structured entity, establishes group norms and objectives, which must govern what the majority wants, without compromising development, happiness and individuality of *Umntu* as a being seen in isolation, which is taken as such simply to facilitate the understanding of the mechanics of the interrelationship between the entities that make up the *Ubuntu* community.

Principle of the *Ubu-ntu* way of life: The *Bantu* and the *Umntu*, who constitute a single body, should seek and cultivate an *Ubu-ntu* way of life. This presupposes a lifestyle of permanent, incessant and eternal battle with a view to transforming into *Ubuntu* and achieving the *Bantu's* standard objective: the *Ubuntu* community.

Principle of ontological co-substantivity of the *Ubuntu* community: the personality and humanity of a person and the survival of a community are simultaneously satisfied, that is, co-substantively satisfied. Thus, it is guaranteed that, while the individual promotes harmony and community good, it also ensures individual good. This principle reveals a central difference between Marxist collectivism, which states that the individual pursues the common good instead of his own good, and the communal co-substantivity *Ubuntu*, in which the *Umntu* pursues its good, seeking the common good.

Principle of community-impartiality: the *Ubuntu* community emphasizes community and relationality, placing human beings in harmony with the world (the biophysical and spiritual worlds and the entities that inhabit them), and not placing them at the center of the world. Because all the beings that inhabit the aforementioned worlds, and the worlds themselves, constitute a symbiotic body.

Principle of community nature: this principle considers that the mixture of “identification with others and [...] solidarity with others” (Metz, 2011, p. 532), in the same perspective as the maxim *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* (a person is a person for the

sake of other people), is the recipe for *Umntu/Umunu*'s reach of the Ubuntu community. The violation of the vertical and horizontal lines is a serious transgression of Ubuntu ethics, with the implication of the devaluation of *Umnto* (isiZulu/isiXhosa) or *Umntu* (xiChangana), to the point of being considered an animal, but not in the true sense of the word (Metz, 2010, p. 57-58). In this context, *identification with others* is associated with the *I-pro-group* (Metz, 2011; Metz, 2017), a process of adopting group preferences, without undermining the preservation of individuality, personality, and personal reasoning. As for *solidarity with others*, it is about demonstrating concern for others (Rapatsa, 2016; Tschaepe, 2013; Mabovula, 2011; Mayaka and Truell, 2021).

Principle of the *Ubuntu* narrative of going: Ubuntu does not function as a call to Africanization (Kubow; Min, 2016, p. 8), but a forward narrative, that is, a constant, incessant, dynamic and adaptive *Ubu-ntu* advancement, without back, with a view to materializing as *Ubuntu*. Agreeing with Olatunji and Koenane's view, it is a “[...] narrative of becoming human, a narrative of searching for truth” (Olatunji and Koenane, 2017, p. 272). The search for *Ubuntu* constitutes an unrepeatable and timeless process, although it retains some essence, whenever the transformation into UbuIntu is achieved or carried out.

15 *Ubuntu*: moral conduct or ethical *philos sophia*?

However, before moving on to this arduous but fascinating task, it is necessary to realize that the *Ubuntu/Umunu* ethic is, fundamentally, embedded in human relations in society, a fact that leads authors, such as Fainos Mangena (2016), to state that *Ubuntu*, within the scope of African philosophy, stands as an imperative of the importance of the group or as a communal existence in opposition to the Western emphasis on individualism and individual human rights – these issues will be analyzed during the comparison between *Ubuntu* philosophical ethics and Western philosophical ethics. Therefore, *Ubuntu* can constitute an African contribution to a new universal thinking on human rights, which goes far beyond the current human rights enshrined in the UDHR of 1948, as a valuable subsidy of the typically African system of thought used to achieve “individual reflexivities”, appreciating “themselves”, as well as to understand “reality”, a “Bantu worldview”, therefore, “a black African philosophy” (Crahay, 1965; Ukwamedua, 2011; Ramose, 1999, 2002).

Regarding the fact that *Ubuntu* is also a morality, Mogobe B. Ramose (2002, p. 324) mentions its “[...] focus on the specific principles underlying particular behavior and also [the] justification of these principles”. However, in our understanding, Ubuntu/Umunu is not philosophy for that reason alone. Ubuntu, as ethics, also encompasses, on the one hand, the meaning of the term *Philosophia* in the sense coined by Pythagoras of Samos (c. 570-495 BC) “[...] when asked about what [it] was, [and] replied: I am a lover of knowledge” (Ruedell; Alles; Vieira; Kinn; Cossetin, 2014, p. 27). From the Pythagorean meaning, *Ubuntu* is seen as a hyphenated word (Ubu-ntu), which reflects the idea of an ongoing process, of searching for transformation and materialization of *Muntu* into *Umuntu*, that is, from *Umuntu* into *Ubuntu*. On the other hand, *Ubuntu* is philosophy, not because it is a philosophical discipline, as previously explained, but in the sense of the terms that make up the Greek etymology (*philos* and *sophia*) of the word Philosophy, that is, *Philosophia*. Thus, *Ubuntu*, as *philos sophia*, is the human capacity, will and curiosity to appreciate and relish the world around them, or better yet, the love of knowledge, as a way of distinguishing Philosophy – *Philosophia* – as a discipline, tied to a Western philosophy.

Taking into account the meaning of *Philosophia* as a questioning activity [that is, as] the activity of those who want to know [which implies] the search for the [materialization] of a project, [...] being interested, meeting, being on the way, [...] set in motion, [...] building through movement and change (Ruedell; Alles; Vieira; Kinn; Cossetin, 2014, p. 26).

Ubuntu is a philosophy (here, we will call it *philos sophia*, for the reasons presented), because, metaphysically, it is a constant and incessant movement in search of the “sophia” *Ubuntu* (the Bantu project: ideal of relationships with others in community), a search for the materialization or concrete manifestation of *Umuntu* in a multiplicity of “forms” or “modalities” (Jahn, 1961, p. 109). Ubuntu is, in the same sense, what a *Bantu* wants as an objective, as it leads him to what he desires, to the community with members of the *Bantu* family, as an ideal of relationships with others in community; always aware that it is an eternal and incessant process of searching for *Ubuntu sophia*, which implies a constant will (*philos*) on the part of the *Bantu* human being (the *Umuntu*), who is always a *philosophos*, since he is not defined by absolute wisdom, as it does not represent the fixity of a path that has reached its end. [...] The desire to know is the search for the science of construction, so that knowledge [*Ubuntu*

principles] can be the indication for the right construction. Wanting and knowing are irremediably linked, as in the word Philosophy: wisdom is not conquered as something that was wanted and that could now be maintained and manipulated indefinitely, because when one stops wanting to know, one no longer knows. When you supposedly achieve knowledge, you no longer know (Ruedell; Alles; Vieira; Kinn; Cossetin, 2014, p. 27).

In this context, the autonomous exercise of rationality, by members of the *Bantu* family, is fundamental to tread the path in constant and incessant search for *Ubuntu*. This does not mean that one never becomes *Ubuntu*, but that the dynamism of life and social circumstances require an *Ubuntu* philosophical ethic, also dynamic, mobile, in constant search of filling its incompleteness as a true *philosophos*, that is, as a lover of knowledge, and not like a sage.

Ubuntu philosophical ethics, born from the living conditions of the human experience of African peoples and which constitutes a reflection of the ways in which the *Bantu* experience the world as theirs, has an important contribution to the universal thought of human rights, which would be an epistemicide not enable its integration into the current UDHR, in the sense that it is a universally inclusive document, which promotes a multicultural conception of Human Rights, which recognizes the “pluriversality” of human experiences and, consequently, the “incompleteness” of its conceptions of Human Dignity (Ruedell; Alles; Vieira; Kinn; Cossetin, 2014; Conversations [...], 2016; Santos, 2009).

16 Philosophical foundation of *Ubuntu* ethics

The philosophical approach to *Ubu-ntu* ethics, with the aim of identifying and understanding the foundation and principles of *Ubuntu* African philosophical ethics as a whole, inevitably implies taking into account, in addition to the meanings that various authors have attributed to *Ubuntu* throughout history and its recognition as ethical *philos sophia* and rules of human moral conduct, the thought of the South African philosopher, Mogobe Bernard Ramose, evident in his work *African Philosophy Through Ubuntu* published in 1999.

In this context, Ramose (1999), as recognized by José Castiano, in his search for the foundations of African philosophy, finds *Ubu-ntu* “[...] in Ontology, [...]

Epistemology and [...] Ubuntu-African Ethics” (Castiano, 2010, p. 156). It should be noted that each of these three sources constitutes part of one and only foundation of African philosophy, the ontological Ubu-ntu.

In view of the above, in the subsequent sections, we will elucidate the reasoning advanced by Ramose (1999), within the scope of the three sources of the foundation of African philosophy, which is Ubuntu, “[...] the fifth normative ethical category of African philosophy” (Ramose, 2002, p. 324), in addition to the “[...] four categories of Abbé Alexis Kagame” (Ukwamedua, 2011, p. 248), namely “Muntu = being of intelligence (Man); Kintu = being without intelligence (Thing); Hantu = being locator (Space and time); Kuntu = modal being (Mode of being)” (Djalo, 2017, p. 41). The relationship shared between these four categories, which with Ubuntu complete African philosophy, discussed by Jahn (1961) and Ramose (1999, 2002), will be clarified later.

17 Ontology

The philosophical understanding, assumed by Mogobe Ramose (2002), which is the one assumed here, is that Ubuntu should be seen as a hyphenated term (*Ubu-ntu*), but only in the linguistic field, for purely explanatory purposes of the ethical-philosophicalcultural content carried by him. The Mozambican philosopher José Castiano (2010) helps to clearly explain this philosophical understanding of *Ubuntu* from the perspective of Ramose (2002). Thus, it clarifies that Ubuntu is composed of the prefix Ubu- and the suffix -Ntu, where “[...] -Ubu evokes the idea of Being in general [(Ser as Being)]” (Castiano, 2010, p. 156), which is constantly on the verge of materializing as a particular entity or individuality. This only occurs in conjunction with -Ntu, from which, in truth, it is never separated. As previously stated, the separation presented here is merely explanatory, so that the perception of the depth of the content of the philosophical concept of *Ubuntu* can be rationally grasped.

From an ontological point of view, there is no division between Being and Appearing (Castiano, 2010, p. 156), that is, between Being as an essence and its materialization “in its forms of concrete appearance” (what Abbé Alexis Kagame, 1976, calls modality or modal being), as occurs with the dualist perspective of the “Cartesian conception and tradition”. This matter will be further developed in the next chapter regarding *The Western Perspective and the Ubuntu Perspective on Human Rights*:

Points of Convergence and Divergence (Castiano, 2010).

Another aspect worthy of attention, within the scope of the *Ubuntu* ontological source of the foundation of African philosophy, that is, regarding the uniqueness and totality of *Ubu-ntu*, despite its linguistic separation as *Ubu-* and *-Ntu*, is that *Ubu-* reflects the idea of a constant and incessant movement and *-Ntu* expresses an ephemeral materialization or transformation.

18 Conclusion

Ubuntu is fundamentally dominated by a non-dualistic ethical and anthropological-philosophical perspective, which does not impose the “separation between humans and nature”. *Ubuntu* advocates a humanism that places the human beings at the center of the world, granting them authorization to even subdue “the great forces of nature.” In this context, *Ubuntu* can contribute to removing the anthropocentric perspective tied to “humanism”, bringing an ecosystemic vision, where man is an integral part of a whole with the universe and the immediate ecosystem in which he is inserted, overcoming “the anthropocentric-ecocentric”.

Ubuntu does not see human beings as superior to other entities that inhabit the biophysical and spiritual worlds. *Ubuntu* considers the different entities that inhabit nature (rivers, mountains, trees, plants, animals, etc.) as being part of the *Muntu* category (Kagamé, 1976), as they are intermediaries of communication between the biophysical and spiritual worlds’ entities, as the *Muntu* category also includes all entities that relate to human beings. In addition to this fact, the recognition that human beings share the “shadow principle (it is the principle of birth and death)”, that is, they share “life” with animals, for example, helps to refute the simplistic argument that *Ubuntu* is “speciesist”. *Ubuntu* is much more complex than that, so much that this article only touches, superficially, the essence of this African ethics, which would deserve a voluminous work to cover its content (Kagamé, 1976; Ukwamedua, 2011; Ramose, 1999, 2002; Enslin and Hortstherne, 2004; Le Grange, 2012).

Given this fact that the *Ubuntu* biophysical and spiritual perspective, linked to the ethical principle of community, will contribute to placing the human being not at the center of the universe, but in harmony with the biophysical and spiritual worlds and the beings that inhabit them, always with the ultimate objective of preserving life on earth,

in general, and guaranteeing the survival of the human family in mutual respect for existence.

Another important contribution, which will allow the transition from a perspective of the instrumental value of nature (as something that exists only for the benefit of human beings) to an ecobiosophic perspective, which goes beyond the intrinsic value of nature (nature has value independently of its benefits for human beings), it must include two fundamental dimensions: the biophy

sical and the spiritual, mixed in a symbiosis similar to that existing in the *Ubuntu* community, whose ultimate objective is the preservation of life.

This contribution would add and allow the new UDHR, which should ideally be called the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Duties (UDHRD), to encompass two Human Rights principles that are essential for guaranteeing dignity and life on planet Earth: *all beings have intrinsic value; Nature and the entities that inhabit it, when used, must be used to “satisfy vital human needs” in a sustainable way*. The objective is to promote a better life in qualitative and quantitative terms (high standard of living), resulting from the cultivation of a biophysical and spiritual philosophy of life that promotes a lifestyle in “harmony and ecological balance”, a life lived with “wise”.

It should be clarified that the material principle of life proclaimed by *Ubuntu/Umuntu* philosophical ethics is a principle which positions the lives of all beings that inhabit planet Earth, including the human family, and not just that of human beings. Therefore, *Ubuntu* defends life in its most general and comprehensive sense possible, to include all categories of *Ubuntu*-African philosophy, namely, *Muntu*, *Kintu*, *Hantu* and *Kuntu* (permeated by *Ubuntu*), that is, beings (living beings, not living and not-yet-born) and not living beings only in the purely biological sense.

The new UDHR must arise, therefore, from the articulation, on an equal footing, of the contributions of the *Ubuntu* and Western perspectives on Human Rights, as well as the perspectives of human dignity from other civilizations on the planet, to ensure, thus, a “Afropolitanist” and “global ethics”, which facilitates “global dialogue”, not as a “homogeneous global culture”, but which values “the variety of human forms of social and cultural life”, guided by the material principle of universal life.

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