

The cross-cultural identity in the notions of *Ubuntu* of Augustine Shutte and Kwame Gyekye

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Abstract

This research seeks to make a unique contribution to moving identities by investigating *ubuntu* as a formation process of identity across different cultures. In African society, *ubuntu* as a notion of African humanism has been and is still subject to criticism. In African literature, anthropology, ethics, philosophy, and theology, *ubuntu* does play a role and scholars in Africa and beyond find the notion a contested one. The concept and approach to identity formation on the African continent has been written about widely. The article unpacked the notions of *ubuntu* of (Augustine Shutte) and (Kwame Gyekye). The views of these scholars will be juxtaposed to engage critically the possible comparisons for identity across cultures. The article addressed the commonalities and contestation of *ubuntu* as basis of identity formation. The article further explores the two African thinkers' understanding and assessed the relevance of *ubuntu* in contemporary Africa with an unprecedented number of migrants from various parts of Africa.

Keywords

Africa, cultures, Gyekye, identity formation, migration, Shutte, Ubuntu

Introduction

The word *ubuntu* is derived from a Nguni (isiZulu) aphorism: *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*, which can be interpreted as “a person is a person because of or through others.”¹ It essentially means that no one can be

1 Johann Broodryk, *Ubuntu. Life-coping skills from Africa* (Johannesburg: Knowres Publishing, 2006), 22.

self-sufficient and that interdependence is a reality for all. *Ubuntu* can be described as the capacity in African culture to express compassion, reciprocity, dignity, humanity, and mutuality in the interests of the building and maintaining communities with justice and mutual caring.² This African indigenous ways of life (culture) can be justified in today's globalised world, because of the strong emphasis on the life of communities with others, and an inclusive constructive engagement with all others. *Ubuntu* philosophy is integrated into all aspects of day-to-day life throughout Africa and is a moral thought shared by all tribes in Southern, Central, West and East Africa amongst people of Bantu origin. Although the Bantu languages have evolved since the notion was first formulated, the meanings and principles of *ubuntu* are the same in all these languages. Examples of the derivations of the term in the Bantu languages are summarised below.

Broodryk³ origins of *ubuntu* in Bantu languages:

Ubuntu Derivations	Bantu Language
Abantu	Uganda
Botho or Motho	Sesotho
Bunhu	Xitsonga
Numunhu or Munhu	Shangaan
Ubuntu (Umntu and Umtu) and)	(isiZulu and isiXhosa) South Africa
Umunthu	Ngoni, Chewa, Nyanja and Bemba (Malawi, Zambia, Mozambique, and Zimbabwe)
Utu	Swahili (Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda)
Vhuntu or Muntu	Tshivenda

2 Desmond Tutu, *God Has a Dream: A Vision of Hope for Our Time* (Johannesburg: Rider, 2004), 27

3 Johann Broodryk, *Ubuntu management philosophy: Exporting ancient African wisdom into the global world* (Randburg: Knowres Publishing, 2005), 235-236.

Interestingly, *ubuntu* philosophy finds exceptional position among the objective and subjective approaches to identity formation. This concept is very well expressed by Dion Forster: “If one were to apply the dialogical conceptual framework of I-Thou developed by Martin Buber in his philosophical essay *Ich un Du* (1923), one would be able to show that in the African worldview it is neither the ‘I’ (individual) nor the ‘Thou’ (community) that takes ontological primacy. Rather the ontological primacy is focussed on the hyphen, the ‘between’, of the, ‘I-Thou’”.⁴

Most significantly, identity is complex, contested, and dynamic. It is always in flux, never stable or static. It is relevant discourses when discussing the notion of *ubuntu*. Ideally, identity formation takes place over time and in space. One cannot give a detailed description of a person without realising that the person may well change as a result of one’s assessment. However, identity formation is the development of divergent personalities of an individual as a continuing being in a particular sphere of life. For Ernst Conradie,⁵ identity formation like *ubuntu* takes place in everyday life through non-verbal socialisation (ordinary conversation), storytelling, and the reflection of these conversations in serious dialogue or argument. Simply put, identity formation (expressed in beliefs and a particular ethos) takes place in communities (institutions); it is transmitted through narratives (myths); it is encountered through and embodied in role models (experiences) and internalised through exercises and disciplines (rituals). This notion is coined together with the moving identities of people across African culture and beyond.

This article is about the understanding of cross-cultural identity in the African philosophy called *ubuntu* for a common and mutual humanity. It focused on the anti-individualist, anti-reductionist, anti-materialist, and anti-dualist insinuations of a generally mutual African worldview, universally known as *ubuntu* and explores contribution of a comprehensive anthropology (as disseminated by Augustine Shutte in his metaphysical investigation of *ubuntu* humanism and theoretical perspective of

4 Dion Forster, *The impact of knowledge systems on human development in Africa* (Pretoria: University of South Africa, 2007), 261.

5 Ernst Conradie, *Christian Identity: An Introduction* (University of Western Cape: Sun Press 2005), 99-101.

Kwame Gyekye approach of person (individual) and community (communitarianism). This article further explores the application of the notion of *ubuntu* for addressing xenophobia, tension, and identity issue in present day South Africa's migration. The article analyses and compares the relevance of *ubuntu* in Shutte and Gyekye, and how the course of identity societal issues are affected by migration dynamics. It concludes by emphasising the need for common ground regarding the moving identity across countries as a cause of identity formation by juxtaposing the other scholarly views of the *ubuntu* worldview.

Shutte's framework of ubuntu worldview

Shutte is mostly known through his two renowned works *Philosophy for Africa* (1993) and *Ubuntu: An ethic for a new South Africa* (2001). Shutte's works influenced my critical engagement of the African *ubuntu* worldview as a basis of identity formation across African culture. One interesting submission is by Richard Bell,⁶ who deliberated Shutte's method in his book, *Understanding African philosophy: A cross-cultural approach to classical and contemporary issues*, and voiced that it is "... an example of critical philosophy in the analytic, conceptual analysis tradition turned to specific existential conditions and priorities in Africa is found in Augustine Shutte's book *Philosophy for Africa*." Shutte, like other white South African theologians and philosophers, grappled with the significance of this discipline for the lived state of apartheid South Africa at the time. He is also very aware of the focus of "postcolonial" African philosophy, and how "the present struggle in South Africa is partly a struggle between Africa and Europe" and the degree to which South Africa has been colonised. In support of the context of the "new" South Africa, Shutte's investigations focused on the *ubuntu* philosophy and how it should be applied in every facet of life. This application can be seen in his most outstanding 1993 and 2001 books, where he passionately offered an analysis of the application of *ubuntu* ethics to issues of health care, education, politics, religion, etc.

6 Richard Bell, *Understanding African Philosophy: A Cross-Cultural Approach to Classical and Contemporary Issues* (London: Routledge, 2002), 27.

Moreover, Shutte's analysis looked at the more traditional worldview of African philosophy (Ubuntu) as a basis of identity formation. The correlation of this African worldview to situations of the sages, national ideologies, ethnicity (culture), and the hermeneutic narrative of African philosophy is paramount. This is pertinent in understanding the ethical value of European philosophy in offering Africa counterparts without the two condemning one another. Shutte makes people conscious of the ironic ethical values of *ubuntu* in African Philosophy that will and can contribute to European Philosophy. For this reason, others opposed to the concept of Afrocentrism, but Shutte maintained an interest in discovering the understandings of persons undertaking philosophy archaeologically in Africa.⁷

Gyekye's conceptualisation of ubuntu worldview

In his text, "Person and community", Gyekye confronted the view that in African beliefs, community confers personhood on the individual, and thus the individual's identity is just a copy of the community. He associated this concept with African philosopher Ifeanyi Menkiti, as well as socialist political figures like Kwame Nkrumah concept of "conscientism" of Ghana, Léopold Senghor concept of Negritude of Senegal, and Julius Nyerere concept of Ujamaa of Tanzania. Hitherto, Gyekye believes that African beliefs ascribe definite value to the individual. He cited the following Akan proverb: "All persons are children of God; no one is a child of the earth", in support of his argument that a person is conceived as a theomorphic being, having in their nature an aspect of God. This soul (known as *okra* to be Akan) is defined as divine and originates with God. Consequently, he claimed that a person is more than just a material or physical object, but children of God, and therefore, essentially valuable. This intrinsic value contests the belief that the individual's value stems exclusively from the community.⁸

7 Augustine Shutte, *Philosophy for Africa* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1993), 15.

8 Kwame Gyekye, "African Ethics", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. [Online]. Available: <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2011/entries/african-ethics>. (2011). [Accessed: February 2022].

Gyekye's theory of moderate communitarianism argues that the individual is an integral communal being, rooted in a context of social relationships and interdependence. This means that from a communitarianism point of view, an individual is not understood in isolation but rather as he/she depends and relates to others. His notion of communitarianism is different from Shutte and Mbiti. However, Bernard Matolino⁹ claims that Gyekye alleges both philosophers of inadequate adjustment to the freedom of individuals and rights within the community. Accordingly, Gyekye regarded Shutte's account as radical and ethically indefensible. In his moderate communitarianism, Gyekye¹⁰ views the community as a reality and not as an ordinary association of individuals. He accordingly notes that individual capacities should be recognised, for they define who a person is in the community. However, he carefully concedes that these capabilities should be realised within the context of a community. Moreover, at the heart of Gyekye's theory of *moderate communitarianism* shows feature of moral principle of a common good, the principle of rights, the principle of reciprocity, a community of mutuality, and the principle of responsibility. These features contribute to an understanding of a person in the traditional African thought as a basis of identity formation.

A comparative relevance of ubuntu in contemporary Africa

In African society, chiefly sub-Saharan Africa, the notion of community stand great in the identity formation relational that both implicit and explicit framework of the idea of relationship determines the communitarianism values. These ethical values are not ordinary conducts that influence an individual's way of life; they are ethical values that have ontological insinuations. Perhaps, they decide individual personhood within the society. These ethical values have both ontological and normative ties on individuals within the community. Shutte¹¹ admits: "The self [is] something

9 Bernard Matolino, "Radicals versus moderates: A critique of Gyekye's moderate communitarianism." *South African journal of philosophy* 28:2 (2009): 166.

10 Kwame Gyekye, *Tradition and modernity: Philosophical reflections on the African experience* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 49.

11 Augustine Shutte, *Ubuntu: An Ethic for a New South Africa* (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2001), 22-23.

private, hidden within our bodies”; in African settings “the self is outside the body, present and open to all. [It] is the result of the expression of all the forces acting upon us. It is not a thing, but the sum total of all the interacting forces. So we must learn to see ourselves as outside, in our appearance, in our acts and relationships, and in the environment around us.”

Shutte identifies the interpersonal facet of human beings within African societies. He notes that to occur is not to be determined or belong to oneself by an interdependent of self-preoccupation. The central of African communitarianism society is external in the logic that it encourages dynamic peaceful co-existence. The society, determined by communitarianism a value that is the space where all human activities stem their co-existence. This is the central of the maxim: “I am, because we are; and since we are therefore I am.”¹² An individual’s wellbeing depends on his/her relationship with the community and likewise develops the relational and normative values of family-hood. This is why: “Our deepest moral obligation is to become more fully human. And this means entering more and more deeply into the community with others. So, although the goal is personal fulfilment, selfishness is excluded”.¹³ The nature of life within *ubuntu* philosophy is one that does not end but originates from birth and continues even after death and life after death.¹⁴ *Ubuntu* surpasses the private scope of self-preoccupation in favour of a relationship that covers the community as a whole. Tutu notes that human reality is derived from human co-existence: “We need other human beings in order to be human. I am because other people are.”¹⁵

In contrast, Gyekye,¹⁶ says favourably of communitarianism adage that “the individual inevitably requires the succour and relationships of others in order to realise or satisfy basic needs”. Gyekye¹⁷ later notes that *ubuntu* “advocates a life lived in harmony and cooperation with others ... a life in

12 John Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (London: Heinemann, London, 1969), 108-109.

13 Shutte, *Ubuntu: An Ethic*, 30.

14 Mbiti, *African Religions*, 97.

15 Desmond Tutu, *No Future without Forgiveness* (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 3.

16 Kwame Gyekye, *An essay on African philosophical thought: The Akan conceptual scheme*. revised ed. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995), 155.

17 Gyekye, *Tradition and modernity*, 75.

which one shares in the fate of the other”. Although Gyekye’s point like those of other scholars but contributes significantly and proves very useful to the communitarianism ideology of *ubuntu*, perhaps, African realisms are too widespread to be talked through small normative formation of *ubuntu* as solidarity. Respectively, the communitarianism notion of *ubuntu*, particularly as it relates to the value of a communal relationship, is morally defensible and necessary in the understanding of communal living in African societies.

Similarly, Thaddeus Metz¹⁸ mentioned the significant of *ubuntu*, by adding, “This maxim has descriptive senses to the effect that one’s identity formation as a human being causally and even metaphysically depends on a community. It also has prescriptive senses to the effect that one ... morally should support the community in certain ways”. In other words, the *ubuntu* ethics of communitarianism endorses the understanding of a person as essentially relational and normative. The important aspect of this concept of *ubuntu* or humanness is inarguably presented as gender-neutral which means it is equally incorporated by all members of the community, irrespective of their gender, in a network of mutual moral obligations associated with the *ubuntu* values of solidarity, respect, empathy, loyalty, cooperation, consensual democracy and collective responsibility.

The practical application of ubuntu ethics

Ubuntu ethics as an African worldview can be applied practically too various scopes of people daily life in Africa and globally, comprising health care, education, politics, religion, business management, moral renewal, the truth and reconciliation process (TRC), environmental preservation, work (solidarity and creativity) sex, and family life, gender relation, and nation-building. This section focused on the practical application of *ubuntu* by drawing from the work of Augustine Shutte and others to highlights the applications of the spheres of truth and reconciliation process and health care ethics.

18 Thaddeus Metz, “Toward an African Moral Theory.” *The Journal of Political Philosophy* 15, no. 3 (2007), 323.

(a) Truth and reconciliation process (TRC)

During the TRC process, *ubuntu* philosophy was exercised as a moral value of identity formation in South Africa. The important factor that significantly contributed to the peaceful transition process of South Africa during post-apartheid was the establishment of the South African TRC in July 1995 by the country's new parliament passing a law authorising the formation of the Commission. The latter, chaired by Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu, was appointed in December 1995, became a beacon of light around the world for its attempt to generate political reconciliation and peace. This court-like body was given the huge task of uncovering the truth about the crimes committed during the apartheid era. A series of discussions were conducted, and hearings held where victims and perpetrators of gross inhuman acts gave their testimonies. The perpetrators could thereby apply for pardon from prosecution. In most instances, these were painful and distressing experiences.¹⁹

Moreover, Shutte²⁰ contended that the TRC went beyond the sheer legal understanding of the law, crime, and punishment in the logic that it applied voluntary mutual storytelling as a means of obtaining the truth, which meaningfully contributed to the peaceful transition. Similarly, with the purpose of establishing truth and ensuring reconciliation in the move to democracy, forgiveness was the centre of the process. Broodryk²¹ therefore maintains that the real miracle was not so much a non-violent political revolt, but the survival of the *ubuntu* spirit on an enormous scale. The remarkable expressions of forgiveness as an aspect of the *ubuntu* principle during the TRC hearings were very much an exceptional episode in human history. This African philosophy (Ubuntu) was the water that extinguished the fire that justified violent behaviour and anger.

19 James Gibson, *Overcoming Apartheid: Can Truth reconcile a divided nation?* (Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2004), 1.

20 Augustine Shutte, "Ubuntu as the African ethical vision", in M.F. Murove (ed.), *African ethics: and anthology of comparative and applied ethics* (Scottsville: UKZN Press, 2009), 38.

21 Johann Broodryk, *Ubuntu: life lessons from Africa* (Pretoria: Ubuntu School of Philosophy, 2002), 16.

One of the TRC reporters, Antjie Krog,²² fully approves of this discourse. She is of the view that the smooth running of the Commission, as well as its achievement of various objectives, is a direct result of the fact that those involved in the process were firmly deep-rooted in the *ubuntu* principle or worldview. According to this African principle, forgiveness is equal to and means reconciliation. She relates the expression “interconnectedness-towards-wholeness” to the notion of forgiveness (or reconciliation), which necessitates that forgiveness ultimately points to complete personhood. The uncultured human rights violations committed by the perpetrators strips the victims of their humanity. Nevertheless, when they receive forgiveness, they become complete again, while, on the other hand, their victims’ humanity is also restored when forgiveness is established.

An example furnished by Krog²³ will throw more light on this discourse. She refers to a report made by one of the mothers of the Gugulethu Seven (seven young men ambushed and killed by security police in 1986): “This thing called reconciliation ... if I am understanding it correctly ... if it means this perpetrator, this man who has killed Christopher Piet, if it means he becomes human again, this man, so that I, so that all of us, get our humanity back ... then I agree, then I support it all”. The *ubuntu* spirit was practically at work when the perpetrators forgave the offender under one roof (reconciliation). Similarly, the extract is from the narrative of a poor blind man from the famous South African TRC hearing, illustrates the power of telling stories:²⁴

Ms Gobodo-Madikizela: Baba, do you have any bullets in you as we speak? Mr Sikwepere: Yes, there are several of them. Some are here in my neck. Now on my face you can really see them, but my face feels quite rough, it feels like rough salt. I usually have terrible headaches. Ms Gobodo-Madikizela: Thank you, Baba. Mr Sikwepere; Yes, usually I have a fat body, but after that I lost all my body, now I am thin, as you can see now. Ms Gobodo-Madikizela:

22 Antjie Krog, *The South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission: African Reconciliation and Forgiveness as part of wholeness* (Bellville: University of the Western Cape, 2005), n.p.

23 Antjie Krog, *Country of my skull* (Johannesburg: Random House South Africa, 1998), 30-31.

24 Krog, *Country of my skull*, 30-31.

How do you feel, Baba, about coming here to tell us your story? Mr Sikwepere: I feel what –what has brought my sight back, my eyesight back is to come back here and tell my story. But I feel what has been making sick all the time is the fact that I couldn't tell my story. But now I – it feels like I got my sight back by coming here and telling my story.

By telling the story in the presence of the other, whether the other is part of the community or not, is the opportunity to build a liberating future. Moreover, telling the story provides the space to give one meaning and experiences shared humanity as a rainbow nation.

Furthermore, the TRC of South Africa Report,²⁵ volume 1, states that the Commission had a constitutional obligation that called for respect for dignity and human life, as well as for a revival of the Ubuntu principle to establish restorative justice. The notion of restorative justice incorporates four healing aims in the sense that it seeks to redefine crime as wrongs, contraventions, or injuries done to another person. The objective was to repair by restoring human dignity to victims and offenders, their families, as well as the larger community; encourage offenders, victims, and the public to be directly involved in settling conflict and support the system objectives that guaranteed offender participation and accountability of both victims and offenders; and making good by putting right what is wrong. In terms of the TRC process, restorative justice accordingly challenged South Africans to build on the *ubuntu* worldview of humanity or humanness. It is consequently very apparent that Ubuntu played an outstanding role in encouraging restorative justice, not only to the victims of crimes, but also to the offenders, and the whole of South Africa.

Most indigenous African cultures that embrace *ubuntu* require restorative justice which is founded on human dignity and equality within human society. In his autobiography, Nelson Mandela explains *ubuntu* restorative justice. He opined that the oppressor and the oppressed both need liberation since a person who takes another person's rights is a prisoner of his/her own prejudice and hatred. His views about human freedom, which represent the

25 Desmond Tutu, "The Report of Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa." [Online]. Available: <https://www.justice.gov.za/trc/report/finalreport/Volume%201.pdf> (1998), 125-131.

ubuntu cultural meaning of justice, are expressed in the statement that is to be free is not merely to cast off one's chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others.²⁶ Therefore, from *ubuntu* perspective, retributive punitive justice is unethical and counterproductive. It is critical of the epitome and unbiased *ubuntu*.

(b) Health care and *ubuntu*

Ubuntu applies to health care. Shutte's²⁷ work on cross-cultural creation of a health-care ethic in post-apartheid South Africa argues that a health-care philosophy strives to marry the greatest of African and European ethical traditions should understand that persons' health is the personal responsibility for the wellbeing of the individual and community. The ethics of *ubuntu* obliges that health care professional present those they care for as persons and not just simply as officials. They have to acquire moral virtues, technical skills and committed as a calling for caring for the people through the expression of *ubuntu* spirit. It is through health care ethos that *ubuntu* flourishes through interpersonal attitudinal understanding and affirmative action oriented between health-care professional and patients and patients care for others as well. *Ubuntu* principle also thrives through justice ethos between person in relation to others in fairness and equality; therefore shun all kinds of impartiality and impunity to foster personal growth of health care and community. Shutte believes that South Africa and Africa needs the *ubuntu* spirit in order to build a rainbow nation and corruption free continent and to achieve solidarity in post-modernistic environment.

26 Nelson Mandela, *Long walk to freedom: The autobiography of Nelson Mandela* (UK: Hachette UK, 2008), 544.

27 Augustine Shutte, "Reflection in practice as source of values: The cross-cultural creation of a health-care ethic in post-apartheid South Africa." *Journal for the Study of Religion* 31, no. 1 (2018): 199-205.

Xenophobia and *ubuntu* worldview

The concept of *ubuntu* applies to all humanity. The reflections from Nitha Ramnath's²⁸ article titled "Xenophobia chips away at the African notion of Ubuntu" published in the Mail and Guardian newspaper is insightful here. Reflecting on the recurrent wave of xenophobic violence in South African since 2008 with foreigners often accused of taking jobs in the country, she stressed that:

These wise words and the concept of Ubuntu of Africans, however, stand in stark contrast to the bout of xenophobic attacks and violence seen in South Africa in recent years ... The assumption that these migrants have come to "take the jobs" of South Africans has subjected many African nationals to xenophobic attacks, resulting in the deaths of 12 people in 2019. Thousands of migrants, mainly from Somalia, Ethiopia, Zimbabwe, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, found themselves displaced and their shops looted and vandalized. Xenophobia is a threat to the idea of the African Renaissance – the ideals of harmony and diversity are in danger. It seems that South Africa soon forgot about its own struggles and attempts to overcome the injustices of the past and its many projects of social cohesion and inclusive nation-building, all premised on the idea of *ubuntu*.

The South African government responded to these repeated attacks by launching a *national action plan*²⁹ to combat xenophobia, racism, and discrimination, in order to address the widespread human rights abuses arising from xenophobia, crime, intolerance, GBV and discrimination. Whether this policy of action plan has been successful in curbing the ongoing violence on foreigners that takes place annually is a million-dollar question. The action plan, however, has glaring gaps and has failed to address the lack of accountability for xenophobic crimes. There have been virtually no convictions of the perpetrators of such violence as most

28 Nitha Ramnath, "Xenophobia chips away at the African notion of Ubuntu", *Mail and Guardian* 20 May (2020).

29 The plan is based on the collective conviction of South Africans that, given that the societal ills of unfair discrimination and inequality are human made, she has the means to completely eradicate these ills from state.

of them have gotten away with crime thereby setting the stage for similar attacks in the near future. It is trite due to colonialism; Africans were classified, ethicised, and divided through artificial borders that unapologetically separated brothers and sisters, one bound together by *ubuntu*, the African philosophy of love and loyalty.

Similarly, Steven Gordon's³⁰ article titled "The xenophobia is on the rise in South Africa: Scholars weigh in on the migrant question" published in *Eyewitness* newspaper captured the significant of the general public appearance to be misinformed about the impact of migration and its effects to the national labour market. International migration in South Africa in relation to labour market is highly controversial subject. He claims that undersigned migration research shows that international migrants' make-up only a small percentage of the South African population, and that the overall effect of international immigration on the labour market is not unfavourable.

Gordon³¹ further stated that the general public appear to be misinformed the accurate number of foreign-born nationals in the country. Statistics South Africa estimates the net immigration to be 852, 992 people between 2016 and 2021 and 3.95 million foreign-born people living in South Africa at the mid-point of 2021 with relative population of around 60 million. One of the main talking points around international migration relates to the participation of foreigners in the labour market. Nevertheless, through the population and housing census of 2011 or the labour migration modules in the quarterly labour force survey of 2012 and 2017, foreign participation in the various sectors of the labour market is constant at a maximum of 10–12% per sector. He says that South Africa has many problems, including an unemployment crisis, officially close to 35% and it is imperative that government develop policies to tackle the challenges. South Africa is a signatory to the global compact for safe, orderly, and regular migration as well as the global compact for refugees of 2018. The non-binding agreements

30 Steven Gordon, "The xenophobia is on the rise in South Africa: Scholars weigh in on the migrant question." *Eyewitness News* 16 April (2022).

31 Ibid.

provide a blueprint for migration and refugee governance which seeks to protect the rights of migrants.³²

Subsequently, South Africa has taught the world many lessons about forgiveness and reconciliation. Similarly, as violent, anti-immigrant rhetoric sweeps through Europe, the USA, and many other parts of the world, conceivably, this is another opportunity for the nation to teach the world about how hatred emerges and how it can be stopped.³³ The citizens need to be reminded of the principle of *ubuntu*, such as the attitude of benevolence and tolerance towards foreigners or strangers before xenophobia and living in harmony with their neighbours. The reasons while the local citizens feel threatened by African immigrants are now being exploited by a group calling itself Operation Dudula³⁴ – which is manipulating the material conditions of the poor for its members' personal ambitions.

Most significantly, South African scholar Ernst Conradie³⁵ calls for the rescue of the spirit of *ubuntu* to address the sense of deep-rooted moral crisis in South Africa by summarising the vision of *ubuntu* as expressed in at least three vital beliefs, namely:

- The notion that a human is human through other human beings. This means that one's basic sense of identity is formed through one's belonging to a bigger community;
- The idea of respecting the human dignity of others. This is based on one's sense of identity and dignity is determined by how others are treated; and
- The call for solidarity within human communities. This means that those members of a local community who are experiencing difficult personal circumstances, plus those who have specific material needs,

32 Ibid.

33 Also see Mojalefa, Koenane, "Ubuntu and philoxenia: Ubuntu and Christian worldviews as responses to xenophobia", *HTS Teologiese Studies/HTS Theological Studies* 74. No. 1 (2018): 1-8.

34 Operation Dudula is a splinter group from a faction in the Put South Africans First movement, an organisation that first popularised and renewed anti-immigrant campaigns on social media before finding expression on the ground.

35 Ernst Conradie, *Morality as a way of life: the first Introduction to ethical theory* (Stellenbosch: Sun Press, 2006), 26-27.

should be assisted by the others in the community. The *ubuntu* spirit expressed in this form can help society to thrive.

Migration in South Africa

Migration refers to movement of human and things from one place to another based on social, economic, political, religious, or environmental purposes. The main rationale of migration in the last period has been the disrupting of nations and countries based on political intolerance, wars, and economic hardships. Migration has contributed to the rise of discourse on ‘moving identity’, one that creates tension as regards xenophobic violence, social patterns, cultural practices, and the shifting of everlasting limits. Migration from other parts of Africa has particularly raised important problems about national identities, nation state methodologies to relocation and citizenship.

John Klaasen³⁶ opined that migration has received diverse reactions, here regarding the integration of people who cross regional and national borders and reside within their new locations for a significant period of time. The reaction is largely short-term resolutions with a lot of losses and trauma for the migrants. The aims for these kinds of reactions are situated within the factors that cause and influence migration, which include economics, political and religious conflict, societal factors such as language and culture, health issues such HIV and AIDS and Covid-19 pandemic and environmental factors which are some of the causes of migration.

In post-Apartheid South Africa and globally immigrants are largely denied citizenship through strict immigration laws. This practice has resulted in a denial of social services, employment and other basic human rights. However, immigrants within the South African context should not be regarded as “the other” in a sagacity of alien or disengaged entity or foreigners. The immigrants play an important role in the formation of the identity of the citizens³⁷. On a contrary, within South Africa, migrants are

36 John Klaasen, “Church’s response to migrants’ quest for identity formation.” *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 77, no. 3 (2021): 1-7.

37 John Klaasen, “Church, narrative, community and identity in times of migration.” *In die Skriflig/In Luce Verbi* 54, no. 1 (2020): 1-7.

usually forced to accept a foreign identity that overwhelms their wellbeing. Migrants are forced to yield to an enforced identity for their survival. Hence, their physical appearance, dress code, behaviours and general public appearance is adjusted to fit into the social patterns of the nationals. It is alleged that immigrants threat poses to the emerging notion of an identical society in South Africa. It is also claimed by many quarters that mainly marginalised groups of people that migrates deplete the economic opportunities, health care and social resources of the impoverished section of society.³⁸

The categorising, segregation, and assessment of immigrants in terms of their worth is still happening today. There are stories of hope where communities are getting involved in creating opportunities and spaces for welcoming immigrants into the community and where they are taught skills to help them settle permanently.³⁹ Klaasen⁴⁰ and Settler & Mpofu⁴¹ are amongst South African scholars who advocate for spaces of hospitality that focus on the recognition of the “Other” in a way that will not alienate immigrants but recognise and include them.

Diversity and *ubuntu* worldview

Ubuntu respects human diversity. Diversity is beneficial to societal fulfilment; plurality enhances both personal and community achievement. The culture of *ubuntu* realises the importance of diversity for achievement as human beings, for societal prosperity and for moral living. Van Der

38 Julia Suárez-Krabbe, “Identity and the preservation of being.” *Social identities* 18, no. 3 (2012): 337.

39 For examples see: Nomvelo Chalumbira, “WATCH: NGO Empowers Refugee and Migrant Women with Hairdressing and Beauty Courses.” *News24* (13 Feb 2021); Kate Pond, “Refugees in South Africa Share Acts of Kindness with their Hosts.” *The UN Refugee Agency* (13 October 2020) and Alex Farley, South African Migration Policy. Policy Insights 70 (South African Institute of International Affairs, June 2019) 8-10.

40 John Klaasen, “Identity and migration in Post-Apartheid South Africa: The retelling of the Christian open-ended narrative as service to the Church and the World.” *Diaconia* 8, no. 2 (2017): 152-165.

41 Federico Settler & Buhle Mpofu, “Social Responsibility with Respect to Religion and Migration in South Africa.” *Journal for the Study of Religion* 30, no.2 (2017): 12-31.

Merwe⁴² notes that *ubuntu* decrees that to be human is to recognise the genuineness of fellow citizens. The acknowledgment of and reverence for each person's distinctiveness is a vital module of society. This distinctiveness of human society comprises the diversity of values, languages, customs, and histories. *Ubuntu* acknowledges variance and diversity as fullness. Consequently, human society flourishes on diversity.

Russel Botman⁴³ in his work titled "Dealing with Diversity" explained three ways diversity should not be dealt with the following experiment:

Firstly, the apartheid South Africa was a variation where theology was used to endorse the political dispensation. On the other hand, the Nazi regarded themselves as superior to the rest of humankind and their political constitution became the ideological vehicle of the way in which their churches were structured. However, Apartheid South Africa and Nazi Germany identified diversity as basically an "ethnic, collective identity" problem and not individual problem, therefore present pre-modern solutions to constitution making. Theologically these experiments were heretical and sinful in that they took as point of departure the irreconcilability of people as to where and when they differed.

Secondly, the North American experiment which is an attempt to regard diversity as manifested in all individuals as the building block of national unity. Every individual is then described legally as a person with constitutionality defined human rights and this experiment represents the modern solution in dealing with diversity.

Thirdly, the theological perspective is mentioned by German theologian Jürgen Moltmann that refers to churches that are established by means of confirmation. He argues that people, who are like us, think the same, have and want the same things, group together and confirm each other.

42 Willie van der Merwe, "Philosophy and the multi-cultural context of (post) apartheid South Africa". *Ethical Perspectives* 3, no. 2 (1996): 2-3.

43 Russel Botman, "Dealing with Diversity," in Duncan, Buchanan and Jurgens Hendriks, (eds.), *Meeting the future: Christian leadership in South Africa* (Pretoria: Knowledge Resources, 1995), 165-168.

Also, Botman⁴⁴ notion of “Ubuntu-fying” the church maintains that South African law views the church as a voluntary society, and they speak and practice Ubuntu daily. It is Ubuntu to love and care, to be just and fair, to be truthful, and to show honest compassion and hospitality, to be kind towards others in distress. It is Ubuntu to be the Church in Africa. It calls us as a dialogical discipleship into a community structure. The German ‘community’ helps us to differentiate between *Einheitskirche* (a unity-church) and *Kircheneinheit* (church unity). A church-unity is a monolithic, monological understanding of the church, while church unity calls for a dialogical unity in diversity. It is *Ubuntu* in which perfect balance is possible. The church is one community which can speak about the fragility of the unity in the face of diversity. This is possible in the church because it works with the community-based definition of reconciliation; therefore, the church goes beyond peaceful co-existence to reconciliation.

Conclusion

This article investigated the divergence views of the concept of *ubuntu* as basis for identity formation in Shutte’s and Gyekye’s, works and its application thereof to addressing xenophobia, tensions and moving identity issues of immigrant in present day Africa’s migration. The article described and analysed the scholarly use of the term *ubuntu* and compares the distinctiveness of its relations to societal issues affected by migration dynamics such as unemployment crisis, crime, and other socio-economics problems. The article presented challenges faced at creating hospitality and inclusive spaces for immigrants to have a new start on life, but also to stand back and continually re-examine the work that they engage in. African philosophers’ communitarianism ideas of *ubuntu* are potentially close to a form of relations that develops cross-cultural identity, cultures, and traditions.

44 *Ibid.*, 169-170.

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