Poetically Africa dwells: A dialogue between Heidegger's understanding of language as the house of Being and African Being-with (*ubuntu*) as a possible paradigm for postfoundational practical theology in Africa

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ABSTRACT

The search for new paradigms and perspectives for practical theology in South Africa begins with the context, South Africa. What perspectives are given and what perspectives respond to the call of this context when this African context is brought into dialogue with the thoughts of a thinker who has to a large extent determined the paradigm of postmodern Western thought? This article was inspired by the hope that such a dialogue will reveal unique outcomes that could offer perspectives and possible paradigms for doing postfoundational practical theology in South Africa. I specifically brought into dialogue Heidegger's understanding of language and the poetics of Being, with *ubuntu*, interpreted as Being-with [*mit-Sein*] and how African *ubuntu* can be interpreted as being *of* language – poetically Africa dwells-with-others. This dialogue in Africa with Africa, *on* and *of* the *house of Being*, can only but 'gift' practical theology with new perspectives and paradigms, because practical theology can be understood as a critical theological reflection on the word event (language event) in the various sub-disciplines of practical theology (homiletics, pastorate, liturgics and diaconical ministry), responding to the Word event of Scripture as the written *said* in answer to the Divine *saying*.

I have reflected on this dialogue, not as an outsider objectifying *Africa or postmodernism*, but as one born in Africa (as-one-in-Africa) whose mother tongue (house of Being) is that of middle Europe. Theology has always been most creative at the intersection or intercessions of paradigms of thought, that is, Jerusalem–Athens, Jerusalem–Athens–Alexandria, Jerusalem–Athens–Alexandria–Rome, et cetera. The time has come for southern Africa to be part of this intersection and these intercessions, to offer perspectives and paradigms for practical theology.

A SEARCH FOR NEW PARADIGMS AND PERSPECTIVES FOR PRACTICAL THEOLOGY IN SOUTH AFRICA

Julian Müller (2003:300) in his description of postfoundational practical theology argues that perspectives or stories always begin with the particular context. He says this context needs to be described, interpreted and, more importantly, listened to. It begins with the local and particular, but then it must also point beyond the local towards the global (Müller 2003:300). Thus, the search for new perspectives needs to start by listening to the call and receiving the gift of the local and the particular context.

The particular context of this article began or should I say erupted when I heard that the abstract that I had foolishly, ambitiously and probably rather optimistically submitted had been accepted. I thus needed to immerse myself into the question of being an African, *ubuntu* and the whole question of identity and then dwelling in that identity, but in a divided and fragmented land with so many opposing views. This was a total minefield and it very quickly confronted me with the questions 'Who am I to write and reflect on such a context?' 'Who am I to write on *ubuntu* or *botho* and who I am I to say how Africans dwell?' and 'Am I not by this very attempt opening myself to the label of a *Whitey* who arrogantly believes he understands Black Africa?' Steve Biko so aptly described such people as people who think they are 'a black soul in white skin' (Biko 2004:20–28). No, that is not who I think I am, at least I hope not, although any text commits an arrogant violence against that which the text is about and in that sense, I am guilty of an arrogant violence.

I would like to understand my role as one who has sought to listen and then to respond to a certain unsaid call of the context in the only way he can, namely in and of the *house of Being*[1] that has provided him with the necessary words and thus tools to respond in speaking to this call. I cannot respond to this call, or as Ramose would argue, dance to the music, in the *house of Being* that is 'original' to Southern Africa, as I can neither speak nor write Setswana, Sesotho or Zulu or the language of the Khoi and San. But that is not of primary importance, as I do not believe that the call is particular to any of these languages, but that the call is before all languages, as it is that to which our different languages respond. Ramose would argue that the *house of Being* in Africa is not so much the various vernacular languages of Africa, but what he describes as *rheomode* language, the philosophical language of *ubuntu* (Ramose 1999:56–62). It is in this language that the be-ing of Africa comes to language. In a sense it is what Leonhard Praeg would argue the unthought other (Praeg 2008:368), or as Heidegger would say, the forgotten (cf. Heidegger 1971a:208) of our languages. The call itself speaks no language; if anything, it speaks the language of music. Ramose (1999:59) speaks of the music of the universe to which Africans are attuned and to which they respond in dance.

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1. 'Language is the precinct (*templum*), that is, the house of Being' (Heidegger 1971a:132).

Ramose describes this call as an *invitation to the dance of be-ing* (Ramose 1999:59) and Heidegger describes this call as the calling of dif-ference or the speaking of language, which speaks as the *peal of stillness* (Heidegger 1971a:207). Can one equate Heidegger's call of dif-ference or speaking of language with the invitation to the dance of be-ing? I do not intent to equate the dance of be-ing as described by Ramose with Heidegger's peal of stillness. African being has too often been interpreted within and colonised into the 'Western house of Being'. I do not want to highlight similarities or expose differences, but I see this article as an approach, a conversation or an encounter of the other to whom I owe my being.

In this article I focus on Ramose's description of *ubuntu* in his text *African philosophy through ubuntu,* fully aware that I will never speak his language and thus I enter this encounter the only way I can: fully dressed in my language, yet aware that in 'truth' before the call of dif-ference I am naked. This nakedness brings with it a certain fragility to our languages, thereby opening them up to the conversation. I am motivated by our shared habitation of the realm con*text* created by the speaking of language or the invitation to the dance of be-ing and the hope that conversations that heed the call of dif-ference (invitation to the dance of be-ing) will discover unique outcomes towards a way of becoming as we dwell together in poetry and dance.

I turn to the poetic speech by the then President Thabo Mbeki, which he presented on the momentous occasion of the adoption of the new Constitution. It is a speech that responds to the need to constitute the people dwelling in the land given the name South Africa. In this speech, Mbeki turned toward the land and all the things of the land that constitutes those who have found a home here. So maybe the question, 'Who am I to respond to the call?' can best be answered by moving away from the I and you and our differences and rather turn towards the con*text* that together constitutes all who dwell here; as Müller (2003) says, it all begins with the context. Antjie Krog, in an interview in 1975, spoke about opening up her poetry to include the other which is the context itself:

> Ek voel dat my gedigte tematies skraal is. Dit op sigself beteken natuurlik nie altyd armoede nie. Ek beskryf gewoonlik eie ervaring; mettertyd kan hierdie ek-en-jy-bedryf eentonig word. Daarom probeer ek in my werk uitbreek na 'n wyer mededeling, 'n verplasing in die materiaal deur die land self aangebied.
>
> (Krog 2008)

Mbeki seeking to constitute a people poetically turns to the call and the gift of the con*text* and the material the context offers to constitute a people.

Mbeki (2001) said the following in his speech, *I am an African*:

> I owe my being to the hills and the valleys, the mountains and the glades, the rivers, the deserts, the trees, the flowers, the seas and the ever-changing seasons that define the face of our native land. My body has frozen in our frosts and in our latter-day snows. It has thawed in the warmth of our sunshine and melted in the heat of the midday sun. The crack and the rumble of the summer thunders, lashed by startling lightning have been both causes of trembling and hope. The fragrances of nature have been as pleasant to us as the sight of the wild blooms of the citizens of the veld …
>
> (Mbeki 2001:8)

He further told of the different people who have experienced joy and sorrow in this land (Mbeki 2001):

> I owe my being to the Khoi and the San whose desolate souls haunt the great expanses of the beautiful Cape. … I am formed of the migrants who left Europe to find a new home on our native land … In my veins courses the blood of the Malay slave who came from the East. … I am a grandchild of the warrior men and women of Hintsa … the patriots that Cetshwayo and Mphephu took to battle, the soldiers whom Mosheoeshoe and Ngungunyane taught … I am the grandchild who lays fresh flowers on the Boer graves at St. Helena …
>
> (Mbeki 2001:9–10)

All these people, all these things and all this history are part of the call to Being, of being called an African and all these narratives are poetically woven together into a tapestry so as to constitute the realm, the con*text*, in which we dwell, called South Africa. So, the speech continued, poetically weaving together the tapestry of what it means to be an African and thus poetically constituting a people who dwell together. I believe that this speech is representative of *ubuntu*. I thus refer back to this speech as I seek to understand the meaning of *ubuntu*.

THE SPEAKING OF LANGUAGE AND *UBU-NTU*: THE CON*TEXT*

Following Müller's advice that the only place to start is the context, then what better place to start than the poetic speech that constituted the context as we search for new paradigms and perspectives for practical theology in South Africa?

The first thing that is so obvious that one hardly notices it is that this speech is in language. Not only this speech, but all attempts to define, understand and interpret the context are in language. In fact, we only have access to this context through language. Is there anything beyond language? No, there is nothing beyond language but more language. For Heidegger (1971a) the fact that we are always in language and that there is no beyond language because we cannot reach the things 'out there', but through language, is for him not a groundlessness or an abyss that opens into relativity and emptiness, but for him it opens up to a height:

> We fall upward, to a height. Its loftiness opens up a depth. The two span a realm in which we would like to become at home, so as to find a residence, a dwelling place for the life of man.
>
> (Heidegger 1971a:191–192)

In other words, for Heidegger language opens up a realm – the realm of our being. The speaking of language metes out the *templum* that is the house of Being (Heidegger 1971c:132). We could go so far as to say that my or our con*text* is language. But what does that mean: Our con*text* is language?

Everything is language – even reason is language which means that even our questions about language, our searching and our trying to understand and or to comprehend what language is, are all in language. This brings us to the tautological conclusion: Language is language (Heidegger 1971a:190). So, all we can try to do in this con*text* is not to seek to answer the question concerning language, but to follow Heidegger's advice: 'To discuss language, to place it, means to bring to its place of being not so much language as ourselves: our own gathering into the appropriation' [of language] (Heidegger 1971a:190). This leads Heidegger to the conclusion that language speaks (Heidegger 1971a:190). Thus, we should bring ourselves into the appropriation of the speaking of language. With this statement he does not deny that we also speak, but argues that all our speaking is a response to the primal speaking of language. As I mentioned in the introduction, I aimed to bring this speaking of language into dialogue with Ramose's understanding of *ubu-ntu* as the responding to the invitation to the dance of be-ing.

This is my con*text* and to its call I ventured to respond in this article.

There is nothing beyond language. Yet, many would deny that and say there is lots beyond language, for example the Drakensberg, the oceans and all those things that Mbeki mentioned in his speech to which he owes his being or his *Dasein*. These things exist. Yes, indeed they do, but our only access to them is through language. It is only in language that they become the things of my world. My world is only my world through the different things that make up my world. The Greek word for making is *poiesis*. The different things poetically make my world. It is only in my world that these things find a place, have meaning and make sense. It is only amongst these things that make up my world that I can be – in other words, that I can find a place, a *Da-sein*. *Dasein* literally translated means 'to be

there'. I can only be there, be somewhere in the dimension that is called my world, if this world is created by the different things of my world finding their place and thus finding meaning in the *there* of my world – the con*text*. This is exactly what Mbeki was doing in his speech. The title of the speech was: *I am an African*. His *Dasein* is African, but this *Dasein*, the con*text* of being, is poetically created (made *poiesis*) by the different things of Africa to which he owes his being.

Ubuntu comes from the African aphorism *Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* (Zulu) and *Motho ke motho ka batho* (Sotho) and is traditionally translated as 'a person is a person through others' (Ramose 1999:49f). It is clear from the above that my being (my *Dasein*) can only be, is only possible, because all these other things are woven together into the tapestry of my world – the tapestry of the dimension of my *Dasein*, namely the realm of my *Dasein*, the con*text* and thus *Dasein* is always a *mit-sein* – a being with others.

How does language do this, or how does *ubuntu* do this? How does it weave together the dimension of my *Dasein* as being-with-others (which includes all the things of my world)? I closely inspected Heidegger and Ramose and how they describe how language and *ubu-ntu* do this respectively, what *ubu-ntu* can learn from Heidegger and what Heidegger can learn from *ubu-ntu*, as both try to put into words a response to the call of the con*text*: the speaking of language or the dance of be-ing.

How does language open up a dimension (con*text*) in which humans can dwell, the dimension in which humans find their being, their *Dasein*-with-others? Heidegger argues that the speaking of language does this by 'thinging' things, in other words, by identifying things. In thinging things, particular beings (things) are differentiated and thereby made manifest so that they can come to their own by being named and placed into a world in which they have meaning and purpose. Language does this by calling into the word.

Heidegger (1971a) invites us to seek the speaking of language in what is spoken purely. He says:

> *If we must, therefore, seek the speaking of language in what is spoken, we shall do well to find something that is spoken purely rather than to pick just any spoken material at random. … What is spoken purely is the poem.*
>
> (Heidegger 1971a:194)

Mbeki named various things like the ocean and mountains as well as various people, such as the Khoi and San. This naming can be understood as handing out titles and decking out all the imaginable familiar objects found in Africa. Mbeki in his speech did not list all the things that are found in Africa for the sake of listing them. When he named the hills and the valleys, the rivers and the deserts, he called into these words and in calling he brought these things closer (cf. Heidegger 1971a:198). He brought them into nearness. The calling into the word is always a calling both *here* and *there*. The calling *there* is a calling in the sense that the call, the naming, differentiates the mountains from the valleys, the rivers from the oceans. The calling in a sense manifests what it calls, as it differentiates it, thereby revealing it, although there remains a difference between call and the thing called.

Ramose says that *ubuntu* is actually two words in one, as it consists of a prefix *ubu-* and the stem *-ntu* (Ramose 1999:50). *Ubu-* evokes the idea of be-ing[2] in general. *Ubu-* is 'enfolded be-ing before it manifests itself in the concrete form or mode of ex-istence of the particular entity' (Ramose 1999:50). If I bring Heidegger and Ramose together, I could say that everything that is (being in general) is enfolded be-ing undifferentiated and it is only through the calling into the word (e.g. mountain) that the particular entity, for example, the mountain, manifests or unfolds itself as such. The word that calls into the word calls into the word *there* where the particular entity (*-ntu*) manifests or unfolds itself out of the enfolded be-ing (*ubu-*). That is what the

calling into the word does *there*, but what about its calling *here*? When I read the words from Mbeki's speech, the mountains and the oceans and valleys that make up South Africa did not appear here amongst the chairs and people of this conference facility. The calling invites these things here in the sense that they come and bear upon us as things that have meaning. They bear upon us as things that make up our world, in this specific case: make up Africa. Thus, Heidegger (1971a) writes:

> *In the naming* [calling into the word], *the things named* [*ntu*-differentiated entities out of the enfolded undifferentiated general be-ing *ubu-*] *are called into their thinging. Thinging, they unfold world, in which things abide ….By thinging, things carry out world.*
>
> (Heidegger 1971a:199–200)

'World grant things their presence. Things bear world' (Heidegger 1971a:201–202). Ramose says: '*Ubu-* as enfolded be-ing is always oriented towards unfoldment, that is incessant continual concrete manifestation through particular forms and modes of being. In this sense *ubu-* is always oriented towards *-ntu*' (Ramose 1999:50).

The poetic call into the word differentiates the things *there* and invites them *here* and *here* they carry out world. The mountains differentiated *there* as the Drakensberg come *here* and together with all the other things invited through the speech they carry out Africa and what it means to be in Africa: an African. The differentiated manifested particular entity or thing *-ntu* is not only differentiated *there* from the undifferentiated mass of general be-ing, *ubu-*, but it comes *here* and *here* it is enfolded as it is given a fold, a place, a home in that it makes up the enfoldment (world) to which it belongs – con*text* and so the unfolded is again enfolded as it finds its place. Thinging things carry out world and only in the enfoldment of world are things – things that have meaning. If we do not speak of things, but of persons, as Mbeki did, namely a particular person, in this case himself, differentiated from the mass of people, he is only a person once he is enfolded in the be-ing of all the things and people that make up his world *ubu-*. *Motho ke motho ka batho.*

From the above we can identify two processes that are not separate, but one, but for the sake of understanding they need to be seen as two processes. I would venture to say that they are two processes of differentiation – two processes of dif-ference as Heidegger writes it. Heidegger's use of this word, dif-ference, is different from its usual use. What it names is not a generic concept for various kinds of differences, as it exists only as a single difference and in that it is unique.

Two processes of carrying out (*Austrag*) the first is what happens *there* when things are differentiated or unfolded from the rest and *here* where differentiated they create or enfold world, but remain different from world.

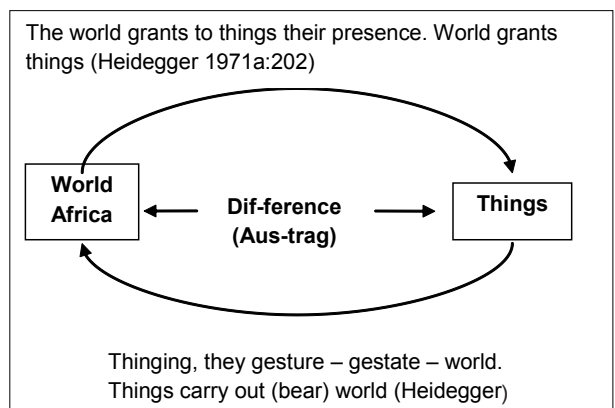These processes that are one process can be graphically depicted as follows:


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The world grants to things their presence. World grants
things (Heidegger 1971a:202)


World                                              Things
Africa  ←——→  Dif-ference  ←——→
              (Aus-trag)


Thinging, they gesture – gestate – world.
Things carry out (bear) world (Heidegger)
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FIGURE 1
Heidegger's dif-ference

2.This is also the reason why Ramose writes be-ing with the hyphen to indicate these two aspects of being that together form a whole-ness of be-ing.
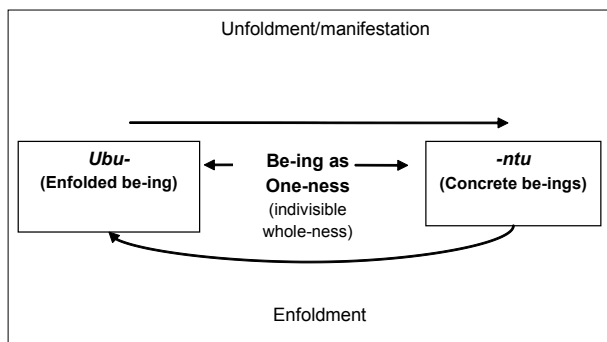
Ubu-ntu can be depicted as follows:

FIGURE 2
Ubu-untu

> *Ubu- and -ntu are not two radically separate and irreconcilably opposed realities on the contrary, they are mutually founding in the sense that they are two aspects of be-ing as a one-ness and indivisible whole-ness.*
>
> (Ramose 1999:50)

Heidegger says: 'For world and things do not subsist alongside each other. They penetrate each other. Thus the two traverse a middle. In it, they are at one' (Heidegger 1971a:202). Yet they are different, just as *ubu-* and *-ntu* are not the same. In the midst of the two, in the between of world and thing, in their inter, division prevails: dif-ference (Heidegger 1971a:203).

The word calls into the word and *there* it calls out of the dif-ference and *here* into the dif-ference. *There* out of the dif-ference as between word and thing there always remains a *différance* and *here* there is a difference between world and thing, yet intimately connected a indivisible one-ness and whole-ness. This double dif-ference carries out world and things (cf. Heidegger 1971a:202).

There is an 'open space' between world and thing, but this space that binds them together as it keeps them apart is called in German the *Unter-schied*, translated as 'difference' or 'distinction'. We could say the open space is the hyphen in Ramose's *ubu-ntu* or be-ing. This space (dif-ference)

> *first opens up the separateness and towardness of world and thing. Such an opening up is the way in which the dif-ference* [Unter-Schied] *here spans the two. The dif-ference* [Unter-Schied], *as the middle for world and things, metes out the measure of their presence'*
>
> (Heidegger 1971a:203)

– metes out the dimension of the con*text*.

Thus, the dif-ference for world and things '*disclosingly appropriates* things into bearing a world; it *disclosingly appropriates* world into the granting of things' (Heidegger 1971a:202–203). Dif-ference is thus the diference between world and thing, the being towards one another of world and thing, whose unity it (dif-ference) carries out. As I have reflected above, dif-ference (*Austrag*) means the mutual carrying outside of one another and bearing in on one another of *ubu-* (world) and *-ntu* (things). It is in this carrying out and bearing in on one another that the field of presence, the con*text*, is opened up – the presence of what is present (*das Anwesen des Anwesenden*) (Caputo 1982:161).

What has all this to do with the 'essence' of language and what does it have to do with poetry as the purest form of language? The poets call this dif-ference by its poetic name, 'pain', as the rending or rift [*Riss*] between world and things (Caputo 1982:161). It is the original pain of birth or the tear [*Riss*] of the umbilical cord, the pain of being a separate entity, of being unfolded. It is the pain of being *-ntu* seperated from *ubu-* . Pain calls from this dif-ference with a longing and a hunger for the lost unity between world and thing, between *ubu-* and *-ntu*. It is

the pain of the call of dif-ference, it is the pain of the speaking of langauge, it is the pain of the hyphen between *ubu-* and *-ntu*, that calls language forth and thus gives birth to mortal speech and thereby breaks the silence of be-ing (Ramose 1999:53).

This pain needs language, this pain cries out to langauge and thus poetic speech summons up world and thing in the intimacy in which they belong together, as Mbeki's speech did. Poetic speech allows the difference between world and thing to come into presence, therefore the dif-ference itself (*Unter-Schied, Austrag*) requires language:

> *The difference between world and thing emerges from the dif-ference itself which is essentially linguistic. It is the Unter-Schied which does the 'bidding' which we experience in the poet's words.*
>
> (Caputo 1982:161)

What is really called, Heidegger (1971a) says, is the dif-ference:

> *The primal calling, which bids the intimacy of world and thing to come, is the authentic bidding. This bidding is the nature of speaking. Speaking occurs in what is spoken in the poem. It is the speaking of language. Language speaks. It speaks by bidding the bidden, thing-world and world-thing, to come to the between of the dif-ference.*
>
> (Heidegger 1971a:206)

What is called is bidden to come out of the dif-ference into the dif-ference. The dif-ference is that which calls inasmuch as it is the silent source (stillness) from which thing and world emerge. The dif-ference stills in a twofold manner, as it stills by firstly letting things rest in the world's favour and secondly by letting the world suffice itself in the things. In this double stilling of the dif-ference there takes place: stillness (Heidegger 1971a:206).

This gathering calling Heidegger (1971a) calls the pealing. This is without excitation or the spreading of sound:

> *When the dif-ference gather world and things into the simple onefold of the pain of intimacy, it bids the two to come into their very nature. The dif-ference is the command out of which every bidding itself is first called, so that each may follow the command. The command of the dif-ference has ever already gathered all bidding within itself. The calling, gathered together within itself, which gathers to itself in the calling, is the pealing as the peal. The calling of the dif-ference is the double stilling. The gathered bidding, the command, in the form of which the dif-ference calls world and things, is the peal of stillness. Language speaks in that the command of the dif-ference calls world and things into the simple onefold of their intimacy. Language speaks as the peal of stillness.*
>
> (Heidegger 1971a:207)

Mortal speech is a calling that names, a bidding that out of the simple onefold of the dif-ference bids things and world to come. The call of dif-ference is taken up in human language when humanity hears its address, then 'thing and world and so the intimacy and dif-ference in which they subsist come into words' (Caputo 1982:162).

It is the dif-ference that stirs human talk to name world and thing, but the original call of the dif-ference, which preceeds human talk, is itself silent. This is what Heidegger meant when he said language speaks. Language (the original dif-ference) calls out to human speech to let world and thing be in their intimacy and dif-ference (Caputo 1982:162). Ramose speaks of this silent speaking of be-ing, the peal of stillness, as universal music and the call to respond to this music with the dance of be-ing (Ramose 1999:58–59). This is the silent call, the unspoken speaking of the con*text* that constitutes our being and thus constitutes our *Dasein*-with-others. This is the language of *ubu-ntu*, this is the language of the dance of be-ing.

How do we respond? How do we respond in a multilingual context? How do we respond in South Africa as church to the speaking of language?

Both Heidegger and Ramose agree that the problem is when it comes to responding to the speaking of language or responding

to the invitation to the dance of be-ing that humans believe themselves to be masters and shapers of language and that language is a tool in their hands. According to Heidegger, 'Man acts as though he were the shaper and master of language, while in fact language remains the master of man' (Heidegger 1971b:215). It is a basic belief that language is 'essentially' communication and expression and thus a tool in the hands of humanity. This one cannot deny, as it is a fact that language is a tool to be used by humanity, but language is also more than that and before it is that, it is the speaking of language itself (Heidegger 1971a:192–193). Ramose argues that language is so easily misused because of the classic structure of everyday language where one has a noun (subject), a verb (action) and an object (the acted upon) (Ramose 1999:53–54). This structure of language places the noun (subject) as doer in the position of moulder and thus as one who has the ability to order be-ing. This structure closes language off from the open call of the dif-ference, it does not experience the pain or the speaking of language as it closes language off from the invitation to the dance of be-ing. This structure puts an end to the speaking of language, as it captures everything in a said. It brings the music of the universe to a halt in a fixed mould.

Leonhard Praeg makes a very useful distinction between the *work of ubuntu* and the *discourse of ubuntu* (Praeg 2008:373). The work of *ubuntu* I believe could be understood as the invitation to the dance of be-ing. The discourse of *ubuntu* is an attempt to respond to this invitation in the languages that are available to us. We attempt a response in everyday language and by doing so we capture the speaking of language in a said and thereby bring the music of the universe to a halt. The work of *ubuntu* cannot be captured in a discourse on *ubuntu*.

The testimony of Cynthia Ngewu, one of the mothers of the Gugulethu Seven, given at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) hearings, captures something of this inability of the discourse on *ubuntu* to capture the work of *ubuntu*. She said:

> This thing called reconciliation … if I am understanding it correctly … if it means this perpetrator, this man who has killed [my son] 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.

(Krog 2009:211)

The TRC was determined by a South African discourse on *ubuntu* focussing on reconciliation and forgiveness. Cynthia was not an expert in this discourse that shaped and determined the TRC, but she was formed by the poetry, proverbs and various traditions of her world and this world (the others) gave her, her identity and made her who she was and she sensed something of her being (*-ntu*) being dependent on the whole (*ubu-*). This is the work of *ubuntu*, the particular entity always enfolded in the whole, but this work cannot be captured in a single discourse, because that would mean that the unfolding and enfolding had stopped and had come to completion. Mokgoro (1998) argues that it is impossible to capture notions of the work of *ubuntu*:

> Defining an African notion in a foreign language and from an abstract, as opposed to a concrete approach, defies the very essence of the African world-view and may also be particularly elusive. […] Because the African world-view is not easily and neatly categorized and defined, any attempt to define ubuntu is merely a simplification of a more expansive, flexible and philosophically accommodative idea.

(Mokgoro 1998:16)

Thus the work of *ubuntu* always dissappears and therefore is lost from any discourse on *ubuntu*. The work of *ubuntu* is hinted at in sayings, proverbs, testimonies like Cynthia's and the oral tradition and poetry that tell stories of the wisdom of kings like Moshoeshoe – as Heidegger would say, these are probably the purest forms of speaking, because they come closest to the speaking of language, they come closet to the work of *ubuntu* as the dance of be-ing.

Any discourse on *ubuntu* will thus always be and will have to be an academic construct (Van Binsbergen 2001:62) or, in Heidegger's terminology: a masterful use of words, thereby forgetting the speaking of language and in a sense disabling the work of *ubuntu*.

Austin's (1962) book captures exactly what Heidegger says with its title *How to do things with words.* This title clearly perceives language as a tool in the hands of masters. Austin's ideas are taken up by Avramides (1999), who differentiates three different things one can do with language by identifying three different speech acts, namely locutionary (factual – expression), illocutionary (putative) and finally perlocutionary (persuasive). These ideas are certainly not wrong, because we are masters of language, we cannot deny that, but what has happened to the speaking of language? Heidegger so eloquently argued that poetry is the purest form of speech, just as Ramose argues that dance, music and singing are closest to the language of *ubuntu*. Yet both of them became victims of the temptation to become masters of words rather than listeners and responders to the speaking of language. Rather than dancing in response to the invitation to the dance of be-ing, they responded to this primal language, the language that is before all languages and the language that bids languages to speak by linking this primal silent language to a specific language and cultural-racial-ethnic group. Thus, Heidegger created (moulded) not poetically, but as a master of words the Greek-German myth and thereby he enslaved the speaking of language to this cultural-racial myth. In other words, he argued that there is a language and a people who spoke the speaking of language, namely the pre-Socratic Greeks and he believed that they put into words this primal call of being, but this has been forgotten. Now it is the fate and responsibility of the Germans today (in the 1930s) with their language and culture to respond to this call of the ancient Greeks. When Heidegger ventured beyond the humble listening of a poet to become a master of words, he forged words locutionary and illocutionary, stating facts and presuming facts about the Greek language and culture as well as the German language and culture, with the result that one of the greatest minds of the 20th century was caught up in creating the master plan for the master race of one of the greatest human atrocities of the 20th century.

In response to the invitation to the dance of be-ing, various discourses on *ubuntu* have developed in Africa. These discourses, like Heidegger's, became masterful discourses linking the dance of be-ing to a specific racial-cultural group, namely all who dwelled in pre-colonial Africa from the Cape to sub-Sahara. Just like with Heidegger, there is a certain truth in these links, as the early Greeks did indeed see the world differently if one compares them to the Greek-influenced world after Socrates. In the same way, the proverbs, poetry, oral traditions and stories that we have of pre-colonial Africa do indeed tell a story of a different world, especially in comparison to the stereotype that is given of Western society as being individualistic and materialistic. And so myths are created for various reasons about the early Greeks and about pre-colonial Africa. Yet in both Heidegger's and Ramose's thinking there is inbuilt deconstruction to these myths, as Heidegger says that the speaking of language is the peal of stillness and Ramose says that *ubu-ntu* is silent and it needs the speaking of *umuntu* to break that silence (Ramose 1999:52–53). In other words, the speaking of language and *ubu-ntu* is before language and therefore it is prior to any particular language, as it is that which gives birth or which calls language into being and therefore it can never be linked to any particular language or cultural ethnic group, as it is that which calls language and thereby calls culture forth.

I would like to shortly reflect on *ubuntu* as discourse, because in the everyday reality of South Africa it is with these discourses that we are confronted. Then, using Heidegger's and Ramose's thoughts, I seek to deconstruct these discourses as they open up to possible unique outcomes, namely the gift of the con*text*.

DISCOURSES ON *UBUNTU*

I focus on the discourses I have already touched on, namely the cultural ethic discourses of *ubuntu* in various forms and under various names. This discourse has been criticised by Paulin Hountondji, who argues that this is not philosophy, but ethno-philosophy (Hountondji 2001). This kind of philosophy has also been criticised by Mudimbe (1997), who coined the term 'retrodiction' (speaking backwards). Ethno-philosophy has certain similarities to Heidegger's liking of the speaking of language to the early Greeks. In other words, in the discourse of *ubuntu* the work of *ubuntu* is captured in a single ethnic group at the exclusion of others. This kind of discourse stops the music, as the music become stagnant, the speaking of language is *begriffen* (captured) in a said. Once it is stagnant it is no longer open to the flow of the music, it is no longer listening to the speaking of language. Once the speaking of language is reduced to the said, then everything is fixed. Thus change, plurality and becoming are by definition excluded and everything is reduced to essentialism and thus faces the danger of cultural/racial fundamentalism (cf. Van Hensbroek 2001). This cultural-ethnic essentialism can lead to catastrophic consequences, as Heidegger's political biography tells. I do not want to equate the discourses of *ubuntu* with Nazi ideology – far from it, but I do want to highlight the dangers of such essentialism and capturing the work of *ubuntu* in a single ethnic group. Trewhela highlights that some of these ideological discourses of postcolonial Africa sound dangerously similar to Heidegger's Greek-German myth that became tied up in Nazi politics (cf. Trewhela 2008).

There are various political ethnic discourses in African postcolonial history, such as African humanism, negritude, *ujamaa* and *ubuntu*,[3] which all have this ethno-philosophic tendency.

There is of course a very powerful and legitimate reason for such 'ethno'-philosophy and retrodiction and that is to liberate Black difference or African difference, namely to encourage, create and develop a certain Black consciousness. Firstly liberation and secondly the development of a consciousness are extremely necessary, as Steve Biko (2004) argued in his book: *I write what I like*, before any true dialogue can take place between White and Black or Africa and Europe. This means that before *ubuntu* can do its work, the different things *(-ntu)* need to be equaly visible and equally audible to be able to enfold a true reflection of the context world *(ubu-)*. After so many years where the essentialist White discourse reduced the African other to an inferior other, a powerful counter-discourse is necessary to liberate from that inferiority. In other words, for so long the Western other determined Africa as its other and fixed this in a static discourse. In the liberation of Black difference and development of Black consciousness it is clear that a certain amount of ideological violence is necessary to counter the centuries of imperial violence, but I believe one needs to be fully aware of this violence. The violence that I speak of is the violence that Hountondji describes as the unanimist illusion, thus disregarding all the differences and covering up all the problematic areas of traditional pre-colonial village life and setting it up as an utopian ideal. It is the founding mythological violence that Benjamin (1986) speaks about that is necessary in any founding and thus any liberation movement will need this founding violence. Oquejiofor (2009:94) also defends the need for such a powerful discourse, but he argues that the mistake the inventors and masters of these discourses made was the essentialism of their writing and speaking and that they wrote not as individuals, but as if they were voicing the langauge of the community.

Yet, in a sense, this discourse that has as its main purpose the liberation of the Black difference is called forth by the same forces of 'oppression, economic exploitation, and cultural alienation

that have shaped Southern African society over the past two centuries' (Van Binsbergen 2001:62). Mudimbe argees that this is not liberation, but a construction of a new prison, a prison that is still Western, as it is in respose to the West. In response to the West, Africa tries to find something essential and unique to Africa so as to be able to stand up against Western superiority. Mudimbe says: 'I think that the most beautiful mystification, the most remarkable lie of our century – the last and the new – is the belief that the identity of women, the identity of Africans, the identity of Europeans can be limited to this or that element. And that's not true. Anything is possible' (Mudimbe 1997:xx).

This discourse does not liberate the identity, but binds it in a new construct and the end result is that the discourse is used mainly to defend the privileges of a new elite, as discussed in Van Kessel (2001), Schweigman (2001) and Van Hensbroek (2001). Mdluli offers a very powerful critique of the misuse and abuse of *ubuntu* philosophy for political and ideological assipation. He says: '[T]his concept has been reclaimed by the African bureaucratic bourgeoisie to legitimize its own hegemony in the political struggles' (Mdluli 1986). Amilcar Cabral (1974), an African Marxist, argues that the development of such elite groups is inevitable and part of the revolution and thus such an elite group,

> *the revolutionary petty bourgeoisie must be capable of committing suicide as a class in order to be reborn as revolutionary workers, completely identified within the deepest aspirations of the people to which they belong.*
>
> (Cabral 1974:17)

Seen in this light,

> *the concept ubuntu is historically determined to constitute a bone of contention, to remind us of past violence and to lead us into new violence, until we realise that above all ubuntu is the invitation to confront this determination and, together, rise above such violence.*
>
> (Van Binsbergen 2001:82)

But that is the work of *ubuntu* and not the discourse of *ubuntu*. Therefore, the discourse of *ubuntu* must continualy stand under the deconstructive corrective of the work of *ubuntu*.

The discourse of *ubuntu* is and will always be a specifically African inspired, respond*ing* to the invitation to the dance of be-ing. I place the emphasis on the suffix *-ing* in respond*ing*, thereby indicating that *ubuntu* is not a static final discourse, but a continual becoming and as such it continually needs to evolve as it responds to the invitation to the dance of be-ing. In this sense it can never be essentialist or exclusive.

THE WORK OF *UBUNTU* DECONSTRUCTING THE DISCOURSE ON *UBUNTU* AND UNIQUE OUTCOMES: THE GIFT OF THE CONTEXT

I come back to Mbeki's speech and I am not so naïve to believe that this speech was not political. No, the speech was political through and through, but in its poetry it was very close to the speaking of language, very close to the dance of be-ing and thus to the work of *ubu-ntu*. It said I am because of others. I owe my being … as I am made in the enfoldment of all and everything that belongs to Africa. I cannot choose who I am, as I do not construct who I am, because I am made by the speaking of language. I am made by the dance of be-ing and that is the gift of our context. The gift of our context is all the things that together create the dwelling that defines me and this includes both the things (people) I like and those I do not like. Mbeki's speech tried to be as inclusive as possible by including both old enemies and friends. This inclusivity was motivated by a very powerful political agenda of nation building, but behind this inclusivity was also the 'truth' of *ubu-ntu*: I owe my being to all the things that in thinging create the world of my being. I can neither choose which things are part of my world, nor can I choose when

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3.I do not wish to equate African humanism, negritude, *ujamaa* and *ubuntu* and thereby ignore the important differences between them. In this article I am only comparing them as postcolonial speech acts and not their content.

the thinging of things created of my or our world stops, because it is continuous – it is the speaking of language and not the said of language, thus the very con*text* is alive with the speaking of language and gifts me with a continuous becoming. This is the continuous gift of the other in a multicultural context.

Mudimbe translates this thought of continual becoming into the question of identity (who am I) and he says that identity is a project or a work of art continually being made (*poeisis*). He says that only after we have died can there be identity as something identifiable and thus finite (Ceton 2005:115).

> In other words, be-ing human is not enough. One is enjoined, yes, commanded as it were, to actually become a human being. What is decisive then is to prove oneself to be the embodiment of ubu-ntu (bo-tho) because the fundamental ethical, social and legal judgment of human worth and human conduct is based upon ubu-ntu.
>
> (Ramose 1999:52–53)

The unique outcome that *ubu-ntu* in dialogue with the speaking of langauge or the call of dif-ference offers us is not that we are African, but that we are contiually becoming and thus the con*text* (the others or things of the context) gift us with who we will be-ing becoming and that is the unique outcome.

HOW TO RESPOND TO THE SPEAKING OF LANGUAGE? HOW TO RESPOND TO THE INVITATION TO THE DANCE OF BE-ING? WHAT WE NEED IS A CHANGE OF TONGUE.

Ramose suggests a radically different language, a true change of tongue[4]. Heidegger is less ambitious, as he suggests we turn to poetry. What does Ramose's (1999) different language entail? For Ramose, *ubu-ntu* is a verbal noun. He says:

> On this reasoning, ubu- may be regarded as be-ing becoming and this evidently implies the idea of motion. We propose to regard such incessant motion as verbal rather than the verb. -ntu may be construed as the temporality having become. In this sense -ntu may be a noun. The indivisible one-ness and whole-ness of ubu-ntu means, therefore that ubuntu is a verbal noun.
>
> (Ramose 1999:51)

Traditional language cannot accommodate such a verbal noun and thus a different language is necessary, this language Ramose finds in rheomode language. Rheo is Greek for 'flow' and thus 'rheomode language' gives the necessary grammar to the verbal-noun structure of *ubuntu* and its be-ing becoming rather than being and becoming. He describes it as follows:

> It is an appeal for the understanding of entities as the dimensions, forms and modes of the incessant flow of simultaneously multi-directional motion. This understanding speaks to be-ing rather than be! It sustains and at the same time preserves the whole-ness and not the whole of be-ing. Whole cannot appropriately describe be-ing since it already implies the fixation of be-ing and its replacement by being. Precisely because motion cannot be stopped since in the very act of stopping motion is already present, we cannot talk about the whole of be-ing as though be-ing had attained to the state of complete stagnation: absolute rest.
>
> (Ramose 1999:56)

Heidegger does not suggest a new language, but rather invites us to learn to live in the speaking of language (Heidegger 1971a:210) and he believes that poetry comes closest to that. We need to bring poetry back into our everyday language, because everyday language is a 'forgotten and therefore a used-up poem, from which there hardly resounds a call any longer' (Heidegger 1971a:208). Antjie Krog says it so beautifully: ''n Taal begin taal wees in die stemme van digters' (Krog 2008). In other words, a language only becomes langauge, a house of Being, in the voice of poets.

4.I have taken this idea from Antjie Krog's (2003) book entitled *Change of tongue*.

POSTFOUNDATIONAL PRACTICAL THEOLOGY

Let us take Heidegger as a father of postmodernity into one of the many consequences of postmodernity in conjunction with globalisation, namely multiculturalism. Let us take his thoughts born in a monolingual context into the multilingual context of postmodern South Africa.

I believe that Heidegger's call of dif-ference, the speaking of language, together with *ubu-ntu*, can offer perspectives and paradigms for theological practice in a multilingual context. *Ubu-ntu* not being something static, but always evolving, describes being human as Dirk Louw says, as being-with others, but also what being-with-others should be all about (Louw 2001:15). In other words, *ubu-ntu* calls us into a continual be-ing becoming until all the languages of my context have made (*poeisis*) the dimensions of my being-there, my *Dasein* – which is a never-ending process.

It is a matter of living in a multilingual house of Being and in this kaleidoscope of languages one seeks as Willie van der Merwe says, to impel oneself

> to enter into dialogue with the traditions of wisdom and thinking of other cultures – not so much in the hope that one will reach a transcultural, metaphilosophical consensus, but as a way of acknowledging the particularity of one's own viewpoint and discovering the cultural contingency of one's own philosophical presuppositions and allegiances.
>
> (Van der Merwe 2000)

He continues following Bauman when he says:

> Without doubt one of the implications of multiculturalism for philosophers, educators and intellectuals in general is to be or become such transversal cross-cultural interpreters of the divergent experiences, values and practises in their societies.
>
> (Bauman 1987)

In a multilingual context *ubu-ntu* as 'being-with-others' opens for transversal and postfoundational thought, as my foundations are not static and fixed, but are continually be-ing becoming. Our hope neither lies in past foundations of what we were in precolonial times or to seek our identity or 'foundation' in what it means to be an Afrikaner or Zulu at the exclusion of the others, nor in the present by clinging to priviledges and rights, but the unique outcome comes from the speaking of language (the con*text*) and thus an openness to the whole-ness of the multilingual being and our response in continual be-ing becoming as together we dwell poetically. That is the gift of the con*text*.

What perspectives and paradimgs can *ubuntu* and Heidegger's speaking of language offer to postfoundational practical theology in South Africa? Johan Cilliers has already unpacked what *ubuntu* can offer preaching in his '"Ubuntu Model" for inter-meaningful preaching' (Cilliers 2008:12), where he reflects on *ubuntu* as a hermeneutical womb that embodies the relational potential of meaningful interconnectedness (Cilliers 2008:13).

Ubuntu offers much to preaching and I would add in the pastoral or diaconical encounters as well as ubuntu invites us to truly interface. To face the other. Cilliers (2008) says:

> Interfacing is not about manipulating the other towards your own image, it is not mere mirroring of one's own face, but being open to be transformed in the encounter with the other.
>
> (Cilliers 2008:16–17)

Facing the other in South Africa mean neither to integrate the other into myself nor to identify the similarities in his or her otherness, but to face the other as other and as the other calls me beyond myself towards be-ing becoming in a multicultural South Africa.

Cilliers argues that this can only happen if '[m]eaning may never solidify into a monument' (Cilliers 2008:17). Meaning must always be open to the flow of the context of others.

> This will have to be an ongoing process, a perpetual inter-flow, in which fixed beliefs and notions on all sides of the South African spectrum can be scrutinized and held up to the light.
>
> (Cilliers 2008:17)

WHY WE NEED POETIC THEOLOGIANS AND NOT GUARDIANS OF ETERNAL TRUTH TO RESPOND TO THE CALL OF DIVINE SAYING – THE SPEAKING OF THE POET OF THE UNIVERSE

Practical theologians, as administrators of the word event, call into the word and venture further than anybody else toward the speaking of language as they find traces of the divine saying (cf. Heidegger 1971c:93) – the speaking of the Poet of the universe, who speaking created the universe as a place of dwelling as our con*text* – the text of our *Dasein*. Traces of the divine speaking can be found throughout the con*text* and in the Text – the divine said. The task of the theologian is not to be a guardian and protector of the divine said, as the task is not to mummify this said, but to call into the word of the said by venturing into the pain of the difference and there discover traces of the divine speaking, the *viva vox* – the living word of proclamation in preaching and liturgy as well as the living word in the '*Zuspruch*' of pastoral counselling and diaconical ministry. To venture further into the word than others (cf. Heidegger 1971c:94), past its noun structure, the said of tradition, the said of the community, the said of the world and the said of the self and thus attend in singing and dancing to the trace of the divine speaking by opening the said to the verbal be-ing becoming – the messianic calling of the other and the wholly – whole-ness – holy Other.

Such poetic theologians 'sing the healing of the whole in the midst of the unholy' (Heidegger 1971c:140). Poetic theologians who are of the more venturesome kind are underway on the track of the holy because they experience the unholy, the divided, the unreconciled and stagnated. They are on the track of the holy because the music has stopped. They venture beyond the abyss of the said as they follow the traces of divine saying and return in song. 'Their song over the land hallows. Their singing hails the integrity of the globe of Being' (Heidegger 1971c:141). Such holiness can only appear in the widest orbit of the wholesome or whole-ness. Holiness, healing, reconciliation, transformation can appear only in the widest orbit of openness to the be-ing becoming of Thy kingdom come and Thy will be done.

Let me end as I have *said* too much when all I wanted to do is to respond in *speaking* to the call of the con*text* and thus I give way to the speaking of a poetic theologian, who jokingly calls himself Rev. Bos. I believe in his singing, he ventures further and sings the holy, the wholesome and the whole-ness.

Jy vir my Suid-Afrika (Stef Bos)

Jy het die weg gewys
Jy het my heel gemaak
Jy het my tuis laat kom
Jy het my hart geraak

Waar ek gaan of staan
Ek dra jou in my saam
Jy het weer laat sien
Jy het my 'n stem gegee

Ek sal nie altyd aan jou kant staan
Maar ek volg jou tot die einde
Al sal die passie ook verbygaan
tog sal die liefde nie verdwyn

Jy is vir my nie jou verlede
Jou sentiment jou ossewa
Jy's vir my alleen die toekoms
Jy vir my Suid-Afrika

Ek kom as vreemdeling hier
Lank gelede aan
Jy het met my gepraat
Ek het jou leer verstaan
Ek ken jou skadu-kant
Ek weet hoe jy kan wees
So innemend en so geslote
Soms sou koud as die Weskus see

Maar jy het my altyd weer ontvang
Met ope arms op my gewag
Jy was my uitweg uit die donker
Jy was die daglig na die nag

Jy vir my Suid-Afrika

Dus trek jou grys mantel uit
Van koue trots en selfverwyt
Want die plek wat sy onskuld verloor het
Is ook die plek waar die liefde gebore word.

(Bos 2003)

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