

# Ubuntu dialogues

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## Ubuntu and Women's Experiences as Epistemology



**Unifier Dyer**

PhD Candidate

University of Wisconsin- Madison

### Bio

Unifier Dyer is a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of African Cultural Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Her research interest is in Indigenous Knowledge Systems in contemporary literature and creative works on and by women. She completed her MA in African Literature at the University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa focused on Apartheid literature and silence as a weapon of self-affirmation.

### Abstract

Unifier's paper repositions the conversation around women's everyday experiences and explores how a focus on self-care can

challenge positivist, universalist or dominant epistemologies. Drawing on women's embodied knowledge and African and Diasporic feminist thinking, it highlights the meeting point between Ubuntu as a moral philosophy that is appropriated for nationalist reconciliation and contested gender marking.

The paper presents contemporary feminists and writers and their concern for self-care practices as a counterpoint to persisting nationalist and patriarchal narratives about women, who are often the ones tasked with performing principles of Ubuntu such as hospitality, generosity, forgiveness and caregiving, and yet often remain marginalized in the larger structures of the nation state.

## Ubuntu as Expressed in the Nature of Fynbos?

### Bio

Rhoda Malgas is a Lecturer and PhD Candidate in the Department of Conservation Ecology and Entomology at Stellenbosch University. Her teaching and research centre on social-ecological systems – a conceptual coupling of the nature-human nexus that allows description, analysis and design of natural resource use for conservation-oriented outcomes. Rhoda serves on several boards and Trusts dedicated to conservation action and development.

### Abstract

Rhoda's paper explores the idea that nature can be observed and studied as an expression of Ubuntu. It describes the parallels between the Fynbos Biome of South African (which is home

to 9 500 species of plants, 70% of which occurs nowhere else in the world), and the human condition and societal realities in the country. In particular, it draws on the ecology of *Aspalathus linearis*, one of the endemic species popularly known in global markets as "rooibos tea," to cultivate the metaphor of Ubuntu.

The paper does so without replicating the Social Darwinism pitfalls of indiscriminately imposing ecological parameters on society. It raises important questions about the promise that Ubuntu, and other concepts that derive from the lexicon of indigenous cultures, for conserving and preserving biophysical and biocultural heritage in South Africa.



**Rhoda Malgas**

PhD Candidate and Lecturer  
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