

UBUNTU: CURATING THE ARCHIVE

Edited by Leonard Praeg and Siphokazi Magadla
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Ubuntu: Curating the archive is a timely conversation on the meaning of ubuntu in South Africa two decades after the miracle that never was. The authors of the edited volume, from professors to postgraduate students, in South Africa and elsewhere, approach the topic with a sense of urgency that speaks to their commitment not only to their various disciplines but also to the state of the nation. The question with which Danielle Alyssa Bowler ends the book illustrates this overarching commitment: ‘What sort of moment is this in which to pose the question of Ubuntu to the contemporary South African reality?’ (pp. 210)

The editors have made use of the strength of an edited volume: they manage to foster debate between the contributions without the end result being disconnected or fragmented. For instance, in their article Siphokazi Magadla and Ezra Chitando explicitly tackle Ilze Keevy’s view on the “dark side of Ubuntu which erodes the human rights of women and others” (pp. 188). Magadla and Chitando rather agree with Drucilla Cornell, and others, who, unlike Keevy, emphasise ubuntu being a living tradition, which is reinvented in the present. As a living tradition, ubuntu is not bound to given time-specific values and forms of social life, but has revolutionary potential in the here and now. The (contested) relationship between ubuntu as (historical) praxis and ubuntu as a philosophy and an ethic is indeed one of the key threads that run through the book. Elsewhere in the book the internal debate is not always explicit but nevertheless obvious as the writers clearly argue from different political positions. The book is an exciting read as it welcomes the reader to participate in these debates.

While several disciplines are represented, as a theologian, one is bound to notice that religion is hardly interrogated in the book, even if mentioned here and there. Yet the book is a recommendable read to a theologian who wants to join the conversation on ubuntu in a way that goes beyond clichés. It offers a well-argued frame for

reflection also in theology and religion studies: on the one hand, the authors locate the ubuntu discourse in the historical context of imperialism and colonialism as a critique to Western racist modernity, and, on the other, in the broader context of rearticulating African humanism post-independence. More than anything, *Ubuntu: Curating the archive* calls for the end of conceptual laziness in our conversations on ubuntu.