

# NAMING AND THE RELEGATION OF POOR MIGRANTS: AN UBUNTU APPRAISAL

RUDOLPH NYAMUDO  
*University of Pretoria (South Africa)*  
u22886712@tuks.co.za

*Abstract:* Naming of a kind that relegates unwelcome poor strangers is a current challenge in countries that continue to experience substantial migration of destitute individuals. On the basis of African moral philosophy, and specifically an ubuntu/hunhu ethical theory, I examine the ethics of naming and particularly the concern that some names relegate unwelcome poor strangers in the host society. First, I discuss the problem of terms such as “foreign” and the relegation of poor migrants. Secondly, I draw attention to the ethic I am going to use to evaluate names, probing the African philosophy’s understanding of stranger and brother in terms of human dignity. Thirdly, I apply my favored dignity-based ethic to contemplations of naming, demonstrating which kinds of names are demeaning, which instead are apposite, and how various agents should change their present practices. What is distinct and new in this philosophical investigation on naming and the relegation of poor immigrants is that I appeal to ubuntu moral theory and propose positive alternatives about which names should be used along with recommendations for change of practice.

*Keywords:* dignity, hunhu/ubuntu, immigrants, insults, memes.

## INTRODUCTION

Naming of a kind that relegates unwelcome poor strangers is a current challenge in countries that continue to experience substantial migration of destitute individuals. The continued experience of xenophobia in South Africa and the controversial political debate on the influx of Mexican migrants in Texas are noteworthy examples. For example, “makwerekwere”, a demeaning label, is familiarly used to refer to unwelcome African immigrants in South Africa (Matsinhe 2011: 295; Mavengano et. Al. 2022: 226). How can a name be morally appropriate or inappropriate? Presumably a stranger deserves a dignified/worthy

ISSN 2283-7949  
GLOCALISM: JOURNAL OF CULTURE, POLITICS AND INNOVATION  
2022, 3, DOI: 10.12893/gjcp.2022.3.3  
Published online by “Globus et Locus” at <https://glocalismjournal.org>



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name, but why and which ones do not count? How should the media and people on the internet change some of their current linguistic practices? In this essay I provide answers to these questions. At present, there is insignificant literature on the problem of naming migrants. In 2015, Camilla Ruz referring to chiefly the migration to Europe wrote the article, *The Battle over the Words Used to Describe Migrants*, which points out that the problem of migration continues to prompt people to use varying names when considering migrants. Maria Obojska (2020) conducted a study of the subject of identity and name alteration among Polish migrants who encountered disfavor in Norway. Through changing one's name, the Polish immigrants in Obojska's case study sought "more powerful identity options" (Obojska 2020: 349). The challenge of naming continues to reinforce the relegation of unwelcome immigrants in different states.

In regard to the challenge of the distinctiveness of immigrants, African scholars have mainly written to counter the problem of xenophobia. Although the outstanding African History scholar, Achille Mbembe, in *No African Is a Foreigner in Africa – Except Down in South Africa* (2019), censures the treatment of immigrants in South Africa, the challenge of naming immigrants, for example by the use of labels such as "alien", "stranger", "foreigner" and other demeaning tags, is a bailiwick that currently requires an in-depth philosophical examination. Considering the rise of xenophobia in post-apartheid South Africa, Aquilina Mawadza and Jonathan Crush contend that "the media seems completely unable to refrain from slipping into highly provocative language designed to alienate, stigmatize and dehumanize the migrant" (2010: 373). More African scholars (Ojedokun 2015; Odiaka, Oriogu 2017) have argued that the government of South Africa is yet to address xenophobia. Mutsa Murenje (2020) and Romola Adeola (2020) both provide circumspectly written work on violence in South Africa. Adeola (2017, 2020) has profoundly paid attention to the problem of displacement of individuals within a state. While arguing for Afrocentric Education in a recent conference, Simphiwe Sesanti (2022) put forward the argument that Eurocentric education is to blame for the labelling of one's fellow Africans as "foreigner".

Relative to this existing literature, I provide an inquiry into the ethical problem of naming the poor migrant by systematically appealing to African values and suggesting positive alternatives to terms such as “foreigner”. On the basis of an African moral philosophy, and specifically an ubuntu/hunhu ethical theory, I examine the question of naming as a way to relegate unwelcome poor strangers in the host society. “Hunhu/ubuntu” is a communal ethical term among people living in the sub-Saharan region including Zimbabwe and South Africa that literally means humanness and is often used to sum up how to treat others morally.

I appeal to ubuntu morality because of the African theory’s practical concern for moral uprightness and the dignity of each individual in the community. In a typical sub-Saharan community, moral uprightness is understood as a key feature of what it means to be a genuine person. Moreover, ubuntu moral philosophy stresses the importance of an individual’s participation in human relations for the acquiring and carrying out of morality in society. Plausibly, one who understands the importance of others acts in such a way that exhibits sincere love in communal relationships. Grounded on a favorable and practical ethical theory, viz, ubuntu morality, I advance the position that the problem of naming and the relegation of poor migrants is a challenge that deserves a sincere philosophical investigation by African philosophers.

In this essay I argue that to give poor immigrants demeaning names is to act in a way that is contrary to the demands of ubuntu morality. An ubuntu ethic is concerned with practical concern for people’s worth, as well as the treasuring of one’s moral dependence on others in the community as I have suggested above. Thus, every individual in the society including the poor immigrant, deserves ethically appropriate names. Demeaning names targeting needy immigrants hinder sincere communal relations. Beyond novelly appealing to ubuntu moral theory to address the way immigrants are named, I propose positive alternatives about which names should be used/recommendations for change of practice. It is crucial to note that my ethic has implications for related expressive practices, such as the relaying of insulting pictures on meme templates, a practice common on internet and

social media. In comparison to affluent migrants, impoverished immigrants are often regarded as not meriting worth due to the disadvantaged migrants' poor circumstance. Moral philosophers have not paid much needed attention to the challenge of internet and social media users' expressive practices that relegate impoverished migrants. The African philosophy flavour to the problem of both naming and related expressive practices in the case of migrants is an additional novelty brought by this essay.

In order to achieve the goal of the essay I present three main sections and a conclusion. First, I discuss the problem of terms such as "foreign" and the relegation of poor migrants. Secondly, I spell out the ethic I am going to use to evaluate names, probing the African philosophy's understanding of stranger and brother. Thirdly, I apply my favored dignity-based ethic to contemplations of naming, demonstrating which kinds of names are demeaning, which instead are apposite, and how various agents should change their present practices. Finally, I draw the discussion to a close.

## ALIENS, BLAME AND RELEGATION OF POOR MIGRANTS

In this section I briefly provide the context of impoverished migrants and describe the *prima facie* problem of naming the poor immigrants. I consider the basics about economic migration and the way impoverished migrants have been labelled. Poor Zimbabwean immigrants struggling in South Africa will serve as my chief example. I examine the problem of terms such as 'foreign' as what fosters the relegation of poor migrants. Migrants continue to be targeted by brutal violence in South Africa (Ojedokun 2015: 168-172; Koenane 2018: 1; Adeola 2020: 494, 500), but also scholars have continued to note that a significant population of South Africa has a negative view towards African immigrants (Danso, McDonald 2001: 116; Mawadza, Crush 2010: 363; Mbowa 2020: 55). Thus, I stress that to label people with a callous tag is an immoral act. Moreover, in this segment I consider non-linguistic expressive practices that relegate the impoverished immigrants.

*Townships and poor migrants*

I highlight that poor Zimbabwean migrants are confronted with the problem of getting fittingly integrated into economic and social institutions of host states such as South Africa. Townships, slums, and streets have continued to be havens for poor immigrants who struggle to survive there. It is critical to note that South Africa, just like many worldwide states, has separate laws for foreigners in regard to accessing economic and social institutions. For example, legal requirements for opening a South African bank account or any lawful business make it almost impossible for poor migrants to access such institutions. South Africans merely present an identity document and a small amount of money to open a bank account in South Africa. Paradoxically, an individual who is not in possession of South African identification card or document is required to produce relatively numerous papers to attest that one is categorically a foreigner who is worthy to open a bank account. For the impoverished migrants, like poor Zimbabwean immigrants, it is considerably expensive to acquire required legal testimonies such as work or education permits. Due to the absence of meaningful income and legal papers, poor migrants live in the margins of society.

Living among the poor of the host nation, the marginalized poor migrants face continued relegation in townships of South Africa (Mawadza, Crush 2010: 372; Ojedokun 2015: 172). A considerable number of impoverished Zimbabwean migrants live in makeshift homes in townships such as Diepsloot and Alexandra, South Africa. The poor migrants do not only have limited access to proper housing, but lack basic necessities such as healthcare, food and clean water (Lefko-Everett 2010: 281-283). Plausibly, the lack of necessities by poor migrants is equally not different to the suffering of the local needy individuals in the host nation. Thus, I argue that demeaning names that also relegate poor immigrants to the margins of the society need to be challenged.

*Naming the poor migrant*

It is crucial to analyze the word “naming”. Why do we name people or things? How can a name be morally appropriate? Names can be understood as definite article terms that “can occur with markers of definiteness, such as the definite article ‘the’ in English” (Cumming 2019). In most societies, varying names are given to humans and other creatures. I advance the perspective that we label things according to their benefit or undesirability, but that we name humans so that we can better establish relationships with them. Living together with others requires identifying others with such names that exhibit their humanity, a characteristic that is unique to persons as I will discuss later in the essay. A morally appropriate name is that which does not demote a person, but encourages respect towards another being.

I stress the perspective that it is often the case that every individual in society has a particular name. Although human beings are referred to as people in general, every person has a unique name, a distinctive designation that differentiates one from all other members of society. Plausibly, the worth of every person is demonstrated by the idea that every human deserves a morally appropriate name. The act of giving names to both humans and non-humans is a duty that is discharged by society members, but is monitored by governments during the undertaking of issuing identity documents. Notice that it is often the case that a number of states provide law related guidelines for naming others, particularly newborn children or those who wish to change their names. Why should the state provide guidelines for names? Further, Carlton F. W. Larson, a scholar of Anglo-American legal history and constitutional law asks the question “to what extent can the law constitutionally regulate the names that parents give to their children?” (Larson 2011: 162). It is often the case that when a child is born, parents or guardians of the infant spend a considerable amount of time reflecting on a fitting name to give to the new child. However, in nations like the United States of America “(m)any parents with perfectly legitimate proposed names may simply accept a registrar’s denial without further challenge” (Larson 2011:

199). Thus, I emphasize that naming is a moral act that involves the community, but also the government. Societies across the world maintain a duty to issue appropriate names to people, particularly newborn individuals.

I advance the view that naming relays positive or negative attitudes towards a particular person or group of individuals in society. While appropriate names communicate a positive attitude towards others, labeling people with demeaning tags demotes humans' worth. Humiliating labels target people who are considered to be unwelcome and undesirable members of society. Hence, I maintain that a naming that communicates unfriendliness towards other individuals in the society is not right for people. Think of the Basotho who communicate with each other by using names when there are questions of infidelity between married spouses. In the event of infidelity, the Basotho "mother-in-law would express her dissatisfaction by giving a child the name that passes the message to the daughter-in-law" (Possa-Mogoera 2020: 4). Plausibly, unfavorable names are used to express one's dissatisfaction with another or others in the society. Hence, names that relegate others in the society are specifically applied to individuals who are considered as undesirable, like the unwelcome child from an adulterated relationship in the above Basotho example.

Unfavorable names given to disadvantaged individuals in the community further relegate persons who are already on the margins of the society. Rethabile Possa-Mogoera, a scholar of African languages, makes the argument that bad names "stigmatize the name bearers and make one feel unwanted and detested by the family and the society they belong to" (2020: 1). In a way, one who is given a bad name is understood as undesirable for communal relationships. For instance, in South Africa, African immigrants are called by such a name as "makwerekwere", a term that denotes a dislike for black foreigners (Mbowa 2020: 63). Thus, a bad name relegates one from the rest of the society. For Possa-Mogoera, "(i)n most cases, Basotho believe that a name has power to influence a situation or that anyone or anything takes after its name: be it a person, plant or animal; hence, they have proverbs like *lebitso lebe ke seromo* [A bad name is an omen]" (2020: 2). Even if the reader



does not accept the spiritual undertones of this suggestion, surely the way one is described will likely affect the way one is treated. It is therefore imperative to ask why states across the world including African countries have adopted the use of “alien” and “foreigner” when referring to immigrants.

In order to grasp the politics surrounding the usage of demeaning names given to poor immigrants, it is vital to examine “alien” and “foreigner” terms. One can consider a foreigner as “an individual who is neither a citizen nor a resident, but is not an illegal foreigner” (South African Immigration Act 2002: 8). Although to be a stranger is not considered as illegal in South Africa, i.e., one does not merely break the law by being an immigrant in the country, the status of being a ‘foreigner’ involves not belonging in the state.

The term “alien” is used not only to refer to non-citizens, but also to denote suspicious beings from other planets. Consider the United States government’s National Aeronautics and Space Administration’s (NASA) use of the term “alien” in reference to probable mysterious creatures from other worlds. Similarly, the alien term denotes the exotic nature of immigrants when used to refer to non-citizen members of the society. With regard to my main example of this philosophical enquiry, Zimbabwean immigrants are routinely the target of alien and foreigner terms in South Africa. It is important to note that with the rise of xenophobia in South Africa the alien and foreign terms have “automatically implied that an individual migrant was necessarily party to the negative characteristics of that group” (Mawadza, Crush 2010: 363). “Alien” and “foreigner” terms are used to categorize the migrants as a separate and often inferior group from the host society members. “In 2002, a new South African Immigration Act replaced the Aliens Control Act” (Mawadza, Crush 2010: 367). Immigrants are referred to as “foreigners” in in the South African Immigration Act of 2002. Hence, although the South African Immigration Act replaced the Aliens Control Act, immigrants are still lawfully referred to by unfavorable terms such as foreigners.

There are different motivations for demeaning names towards poor immigrants in a state like South Africa. First, due to rising unemployment, poor immigrants are accused of taking



local jobs that are meant for citizens. Secondly, poor immigrants are given insulting labels because of rising crime in the country. Inhabitants of high-density suburbs such as Alexandra, a township with a number of non-South Africans, accuse immigrants of committing illegal activities in the community. Third, the failing economy in South Africa is another reason why needy immigrants are called demeaning brands. I point out that poor immigrants are regarded as the cause of the economic struggles that the South African state continues to face.

### *Expressive practices on media and internet*

In this portion of the philosophical quest, I pay attention to expressive practices in relation to media and internet. The point that “(a)s texting technology has improved, it is easier to text photos or to copy and paste links into texters in order to share them with others” (Manning 2014: 1159) is critical. At present, philosophy scholars are confronted with an unavoidable mission “to study and understand the internet, including all the things, relations, and processes contributing to its nature and use” (Ropolyi 2021: 80). I take the position that demeaning expressive practices on the internet that target poor immigrants harm the impoverished migrants’ dignity. In countries like South Africa, poor immigrants are subject to accusations of gaining available resources at the expense of host members (Mawadza, Crush 2010: 363; Ojedokun 2015: 172; Koenane 2018: 3), with ill-mannered pictures and cartoons used to suggest that poor immigrants are unworthy and unwelcome in the host state.

For instance, think of a Twitter picture of a crowd of individuals scaling a border wall from one state to another alongside a photograph of a troop of gorillas. I emphasize the viewpoint that a significant number of people, thousands, “publish hate filled content on their social media every day, sometime explicitly calling for violent actions against migrant populations and other vulnerable groups” (International Organization for Migration 2023). Different people across the world use social media and internet to share degrading pictures, images that are prone to harmful editing, of poor migrants. Note that media

and the internet provide diverse image editing tools. Using ever advancing image editing devices on media and internet, a number of people are now able to discharge disrespectful expressive practices, behaviours that insult others. An insult is “an instance of unfriendly behaviour for conveying the attitude that a person is separate and other” (Metz 2022: 197). Although no literal name is applied in the above Twitter image, the Twitter posts relegates poor immigrants’ dignity. Hence, the relaying of demeaning pictures that target poor immigrants is a challenge that deserves philosophical attention alongside naming.

Furthermore, insulting expressive practices that take aim at needy immigrants are swiftly exchanged among people on internet and social media and without considered reflection or debate. It is essential to consider that “media undoubtedly provide a channel for cutting-edge, first-order ethical debate – and one that, for obvious reasons, favours the fast response and the personal appeal over professorial caution and reserve” (Lovibond 2013: 215). There is limited likelihood for social media and internet users to evidence the truth or falsity of demeaning expressive practices exchanged among people.

Moreover, demeaning non-verbal practices that take the form of pictures are easily accessible to the international online community since an expressive practice does not necessarily require one to have the capacity to read or understand an exotic language. Consider the above example of a Twitter post I have examined. Would some piece of writing, say in Chinese, below the photograph be required for one who does not understand the Eastern Asian language to grasp the demeaning nature of the photo? Plausibly, even if one were not to take due diligence in not rushing to reach a conclusion before proper examination is undertaken, a demeaning depiction of a person is comprehensible even without words attached to the picture.

In addition to the above contemplations, demeaning expressive practices on media and internet reinforce the relegation of poor immigrants and host members’ dislike for poor foreigners. Consider again the example that in South Africa immigrants are subject to accusations of gaining available resources at the expense of host members (Mawadza, Crush 2010: 363; Koenane 2018: 3). The relaying of insulting pictures that target

impoverished migrants in a state like South Africa prima facie additionally restricts the attainment of trustful relationships between host members and immigrants in the society. It is crucial to point out that “(t)he effect of the Internet, covering the whole Earth, influencing social relations and processes is also extremely important” (Ropolyi 2013: 137). Demeaning expressive practices illustrate poor migrants as an unwelcome problem to the host society members. The media has continued to propel the relegation of migrants by relaying biased views about immigrants (Danso, McDonald 2001: 124; Mawadza, Crush 2010: 364; Mgogo, Osunkunle 2021: 4). Social media and internet as moral instructive instruments exaggerate the risks involved in relating with poor immigrants. Thus, demeaning expressive practices misrepresent the authentic characteristic of the needy migrants and help to drive a wedge between them and host citizens.

#### STRANGER OR ONE’S BROTHER?

In the present section I probe the African philosophy’s understanding of stranger and brother. First, I spell out my dignity-based ethic and motivate it as meriting serious attention. Predicated on this ubuntu ethic, I show that a so-called “stranger” has a worth equal to one’s siblings and therefore deserves to be referred to as “brother”, “sister”, “father” or “mother” in a typical African community. I defend the proposition that “an act is right insofar as it promotes harmony in the long-term but without degrading the individual’s dignity, which she has in virtue of being capable of engaging in harmonious relationships” (Metz 2007: 374). It is important to note that such human dignity is not determined by one’s belonging to a particular state, which means that respect for persons would avoid labelling people on that basis.

*Dignity-based ethic*

In this subsection, based on ubuntu morality I spell out a dignity-based ethic and motivate it as deserving serious attention. An Ubuntu ethic is not detached from the cardinal principles of human dignity (Murenje 2020: 97). It is vital to point out that “there is some facet of characteristic human nature that is good for its own sake to a greater degree than anything else in the physical world” (Metz 2011: 19). Why is it morally wrong to fail to consider the worth of all persons? All the people are beings with priceless worth that warrants treatment that is devoid of disrespect (Metz 2022: 72). Human dignity is an essential characteristic of persons.

Why is it the case that all persons have an equal worth from a moral point of view? Philosophers from across the world have continued to reflect on the concept of dignity. However, one can argue that “(a)s a strictly normative concept, dignity was introduced into moral philosophy by Immanuel Kant” (Steigleder 2014: 471). Kant grappled with the question of how we ought to relate with other people, rational beings who possess dignity. For example, in the second part of *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, the Formula of Humanity, Kant highlights that rational beings should not be treated as mere means to a particular end (1785: 4:428-4:429). African scholars writing on the worth of all persons highlight three main conceptions of dignity. The three main conceptions of human dignity are spiritual nature, liveliness, and communal relationship (Metz 2014: 312-315). Lately, more other African scholars, including Polycarp A. Ikuenobe and Motsamai Molefe, have provided notable conceptions of dignity concerning the realization of a person’s moral capacity (Ikuenobe 2016), but also or the ability to care (Molefe 2022). In this essay I choose a communal relationship conception of dignity. Communal relationship approach of dignity stresses the perspective that we have special worth compared to any other thing because of our ability to establish associations with other individuals. Persons are beings with dignity because of their capacity for accomplishing loving relationships with other people (Metz 2022: 169). Plausibly, a person who comprehends the perspective that it is our relationality, an

impartial brotherhood, that gives us dignity, strives to treat others with respect. Thus, I favour a communal conception of dignity on the basis that it is more capable of promoting the achievement of friendly relationships with others.

In *Antidotes to Extremism: Africa's Refugee Hospitality Paradigm*, Gilad Ben-Nun attests that African states tend to be more hospitable to immigrants than the occidental nations (Ben-Nun 2019: 117). It is essential for African moral philosophy to confront antipathetic names given to poor immigrants. According to communal conception of human dignity “what gives us a dignity is our capacity to befriend others and to be befriended by them” (Metz 2022: 184). The capacity to relate with each other enables people to experience friendly associations in society. People’s disposal to pay attention to essential needs of others respects their dignity, that is, persons’ capacity to love one another. Each human being “has a superlative, non-instrumental value, a dignity, because of her ability to relate harmoniously” (Metz 2022: 356). Since the worth of every individual is not comparable to any other thing, treatment of others in the community should exhibit the importance of every individual’s worth. Human dignity demands a sincere display of mutual caring for one another since it inheres partially in their capacity to be cared for. It is vital to point out that the Shona of Sub-Saharan Africa exalt moral virtues of fraternity and solidarity (Mungwini 2017: 151). Living together requires sincere respect for each other’s dignity.

In this essay dignity is not understood as mere proclivity to friendliness, but involves identity and solidarity. To honour the dignity of others, i.e., the capacity to lovingly relate with other people in the society, requires both identity and solidarity. “Identity” involves recognition of one as a distinct being as well as the understanding of the importance of advancing others’ ends. “Solidarity” denotes “that one acts to improve another’s condition” (Metz 2022: 151). Consider a candidate for a mayoral position who targets his contender with insulting advertisements. Practising identity and solidarity involves avoiding discrediting the dignity of others. I point out that insulting advertisements, for example in the above case, discredit individuals’ capacity to associate with others in society. Further, since insulting advertisements aim to exclude others from a

particular engagement, they discourage solidarity. I stress the proposition that since “our basic duty is to express respect for beings with a superlative non-instrumental value, then we ought not try to tell them or others that they lack such a value” (Metz 2022: 197). Besmirching another for the reason of discrediting his or her dignity is contrary to the principles of the ubuntu ethic. A person who honours the dignity of others acquires ubuntu. Dignity is an inherent characteristic that is shared equally by all persons in society. Achieving a virtuous character involves demonstrating one’s dignity towards others in the community. I emphasize that “the challenge for humanity is to enrich and not to impoverish human dignity as an overriding value for all humankind” (Deng 2004: 502). Since dignity is shared by all persons in the community, one ought to aim to lovingly relate with others.

Furthermore, I argue that the understanding of human dignity, i.e., the capacity to lovingly relate with others is obscured by bad behaviours in the community. Think of a situation where one decides to burn excess crop produce to maintain high selling prices of his sales on the market. An uncaring attitude towards others contradicts others’ capacity for loving relationships. It is of paramount importance to comprehend that “(w)e have a full moral status because we can advance others’ ends and improve their quality of life and also because others can do so in respect of us” (Metz 2022: 284). One should strive to demonstrate his or her capacity for loving relationships towards other individuals. Ubuntu ethic affirms that every person cannot be comprehended “as independent from social relations” (Graness 2019: 97). The capacity to relate with others in society is a critical human quality that requires one to avoid all forms of ill-mannered attitudes.

Plausibly, every individual has the capacity to respectfully relate with others in the community. However, I underscore the point of view that since honouring persons’ “capacity for communality means respecting their actualization of it, an agent can have some obligation to create and protect communal ways of relating on the part of others” (Metz 2022: 192). Accomplishing loving relationships in the community involves being respectful of one’s associations with others. Respecting the capacity for

communality of others in society is not detached from having interest in achieving unambiguous loving relationships.

### *Poor migrants and family relationships*

What is strange about the poor migrants? In this subsection I consider poor migrants and family relations in the host state for the sake of illustrating appropriate names, but also friendly attitudes towards new needy individuals in society. I stress that “(k)inship ties and love are what characterised the traditional African culture” (Idang 2015: 108). It is important to point out that a stranger has an equal worth, dignity that I have discussed above, to one’s close family. “Familial relationships of the desirable sort tend to have good consequences for those party to them” (Metz 2022: 156). Plausibly, desirable associations for poor migrants should involve the attainment of amicable relationships with others.

I put forward the argument that the so-called “stranger”, i.e., the poor immigrant, deserves to be considered as part of a family. In a Traditional African society, the poor person’s worth was not demeaned (Nyerere 1968: 3-4). Destitution does not diminish one’s worth in society. Ubuntu involves achieving impartial brotherhood towards others (Broodryk 2006: 82; Nzimakwe 2014: 31; Murenje 2020: 96; Magezi, Khlopa 2021: 23). A person’s perceived depravedness should not be considered as a deterrent for loving relationships in the community.

The Shona speaking people of Zimbabwe make use of the adage, *munhu munhu nekuda kwevanhu*, which translates to, “an individual is a person because of others”. The African dictum, an individual is a person because of other human beings, is common not only among the Shona, but is also used by the Kikuyu, Sotho and many other African peoples (Gathogo 2008: 46). The existence of others in the community is critical for the personhood, i.e., virtue of an individual. Reflecting on the above adage, Christian B.N. Gade writes that often African scholars “quote the proverb or refer to the idea of the proverb that people are interconnected” (Gade 2011: 318). Thus, extending familial relationships to poor migrants is crucial for



immigrants, individuals with a disposition to lovingly relate with others in the host state.

Plausibly, a stranger, particularly one who turns to others seeking assistance, is a person who should be considered just like one's own family member. It is crucial to point out that "(t)he African people learnt how to survive through brotherly care and not individual self-reliance" (Nzimakwe 2014: 33). Consider the reason why poor immigrants seek for help, particularly in a certain host state and not anywhere else. Also, consider the perspective that often siblings seek help from one another. I defend the proposition that African hospitality denotes an unrestricted extension of kindness to others (Gathogo 2008: 42). One should not limit the understanding of family relationships to blood relatives. A more fitting understanding of family should include even those who are non-blood relatives, particularly individuals with whom one shares a local community including desperate immigrants. Assisting one another affirms that "we are more special than rocks, plants and animals in virtue of our capacity for communal relationship" (Metz 2014: 315). Poor migrants are *prima facie* individuals who seek to lovingly associate with others in relationships in the host state.

Further, in a state, in most situations loving relationships are firstly experienced in the family through one's interaction with parents and siblings for example. In traditional African community "(s)o important was kinship that even slaves were called children" (Obbo 1971: 231). Similarly, it is essential for poor migrants to experience unlimited loving relationships in the host state. The tangible aspect of ubuntu involves a "spontaneous desire to act in a caring and compassionate way, in which our selfhood is inspired by a sense of collective belonging" (Nussbaum 2003: 9). Hence, the treating of poor migrants as family by host society members not only demonstrates respect for others' worth, but leads to the attainment of reciprocated loving relationships.

In addition, it is important to highlight that a commitment to love only one's blood relatives is a limited way of understanding others' dignity, i.e., the capacity to love and be loved by others. One should regard non kinsmen or kinswomen just as one's blood relatives. "To relate in a friendly manner is more or

less to enjoy a sense of togetherness, to engage in cooperative projects, to help one another, and to do so for reasons beyond self-interest” (Metz 2020: 260). Considering unfamiliar people, such as poor migrants, as family broadens one’s understanding of individual dignity and the worth of others in the community. “In other words, embracing attitudes of loving and caring for others are values by means of which individuals are judged” (Koenane 2018: 5). Hence, a member of the host city demonstrates a proper understanding of human dignity when he or she respectfully considers poor migrants as his/her family.

#### NAMING POOR MIGRANTS: APPLYING DIGNITY-BASED ETHIC TO CONTEMPLATIONS OF NAMING

I now apply my favored dignity-based ethic to contemplations of naming, demonstrating which kinds of names are demeaning, which instead are apposite, and how various agents should change their present practices. Demeaning names are anti-ubuntu – they demote the other, as opposed to treating her like family. It is important to note the argument that “many early African societies were anthropophagic, seeing strangers as non-threatening guests and at least capable of being digested in the social body over time” (Cohen 2019: 46). The daring of the poor migrants to desire to live in the host society plausibly evidences the needy migrants’ dignity, the desire to relate with others. Since demeaning labels debase the dignity of the other in the community, it is important to name the poor migrants with suitable names. The poor migrants deserve suitable names that show that they have priceless worth in comparison to any other creature. Consider the naming of migrants with hostile names that include *makwerekwere* and “alien” in South Africa (Lefko-Everett 2010: 279; Mawadza, Crush 2010: 366). Both names, that is, *makwerekwere* and “alien” denote being foreign. According to the ubuntu ethic, to label a person, that is, a being who is part to associations with identity and solidarity (Metz 2022: 198), as “foreign” is to demote one’s dignity. I stress that demeaning tags such as “foreigner” demonstrate resentment towards others. In the same way that alien plants are considered

as a threat to the thriving of indigenous plants, “(c)ampaigns to root out and destroy ‘alien’ species have been a constant, high-profile feature of post-apartheid South Africa” (Mawadza and Crush 2010: 366). Host community members, such as some of the South Africans, who refer to immigrants as “makwerekwere” need to consider positive names that display the worth of impoverished migrants.

Particular tags, such as “makwerekwere”, that are given to migrants in a country like South Africa are clearly derogatory. Note that “makwerekwere” refers to non-South African citizens, individuals who migrate to South Africa from other African states. Notice that in South Africa “the phantom of *Makwerekwere* has been constructed and deployed in and through public discourse to render Africans from outside the borders orderable as the nation’s bogeyman” (Matsinhe 2011: 295). Non-South Africans are accused of being the root cause of the country’s problems. Thus, the tag *makwerekwere* is a label of condemnation directed towards migrants from African states. Individuals who are called *makwerekwere* are regarded with contempt, but also treated with unwarranted suspicion. It is crucial for a state like South Africa to adopt new practices that recognize the poor immigrants as part of the host society familial members. “Container metaphors also arouse fears of a buildup of large numbers of undesirable migrants within. Once inside, the migrant is a *makwerekere* to be feared, ostracized and insulted” (Mawadza, Crush 2010: 370). I suggest that a name that is given to a person should reflect dignity of the individual.

Designations such as foreigner are not clearly derogatory, but plausibly target new members in the community in an unfriendly manner. To be a “foreigner” denotes being separate from other people in a particular society. A person who is considered to be a foreigner is an individual who is regarded as an outsider to the community. Various states including South Africa, Zimbabwe and the United States of America use the term “foreigner” to refer to non-citizens. Although term “foreigner” targets poor migrants, I show that the same label is often used in reference to all people from different countries, individuals who are non-citizens. To call another person a “foreigner” is to

consider them as not belonging to a particular community. An ubuntu ethic discourages immoral acts that exclude others, persons with a dignity, from the community. Hence, I emphasized that “foreigner” is a demeaning label that is not suitable for human beings. It is a demeaning tag that encourages the exclusion of others.

Though impoverished, poor migrants remain bearers of dignity, i.e., the capacity to lovingly relate with others, who do not deserve to be treated in an unfriendly manner. Treating people in an unfriendly way includes “thinking of others as separate and inferior” (Metz 2014: 316). Naming another individual, a worthy member of the community, with a demeaning label needs to be confronted. Dignity indicates human worth of every individual person, “an idea that no one should be stripped of self-worth, subjected to abuse, degradation, torture, harassment and/or neglect of any kind” (Rapatsa, Makgato 2016: 67). Such labels as “foreigner” and *makwerekwere* further marginalize the poor migrants into the peripheries of the society. Therefore, it is important to give poor migrants names that express the dignity of each human person.

I point out that it is common for persons in African communities to refer to each other as brother, sister, mother or father even if the people concerned are non-blood relatives. I stress John Mbiti’s argument that “each individual is a brother or sister, father or mother grandmother or grandfather, or cousin, or brother-in-law, uncle or aunt, or something else to everybody else” (1970: 136). In a typical traditional African society, it is critical to demonstrate respect towards others such as immigrants. Again, in ancient African communities, an Ubuntu ethic required all persons to undertake the duty of being each other’s keeper (Ojedokun 2015: 179). Further, I draw attention to the perspective that referring to non-kinsman individuals with familial names exhibits respect to the other. Again, it is important to highlight the argument that “holism is founded on African humanism entrenched in ubuntu as the universal brotherhood of Africans which, can be described as all-encompassing” (Magezi, Khlopa 2021: 13). Although, one remains essentially a distinct individual, persons, including impoverished

migrants, through their capacity to amicably relate with each other form vital family bonds in society.

Furthermore, I maintain the perspective that familial names such as “father”, “mother”, “brother” or “sister” point out the attractiveness of poor migrants’ dignity. Family members are characteristically amicable to each other in the community. All things being equal, actions that are appropriate produce harmony in society (Metz 2007: 334) since we have a dignity in virtue of our ability to relate harmoniously. Family members comprehend that it is crucial to welcome each other and to be concerned about the other’s challenges. Love for each other among siblings often leads to sincere concern for each other’s life. The suffering of a member of a household demands that the rest of the family seeks ways to assist the one who is in need. A migrant who is named ‘mother’ becomes an individual to whom the host community owes unfeigned loving relationship. It is essential for one to note “that the importance we give to each other is what enables us to live together and respect our differences as human beings” (Koenane 2018: 4). Thus, naming is critical for the moral act of honoring human dignity, that is, the poor migrants’ capacity for loving relationships in the community. As discussed in the previous section, an African community “hospitality is ideally extended to all people: friends, foes and/or strangers” (Gathogo 2008: 40). Positive names for the poor migrants are essential for honoring their worth.

Familial names do not only highlight the attractiveness of poor migrants, but also communicates what new community members can concretely achieve. Both the poor immigrants and the members of the host community have the capacity for credible loving relationships in the society. Since poor immigrants are capable of being involved in loving relationships like those between kinsmen or kinswomen, it is important for the needy migrants to be called by positive familial names. “If our basic duty is to express respect for beings with a superlative non-instrumental value, then we ought not try to tell them or others that they lack such a value” (Metz 2022: 197). Referring to poor immigrants as “father”, “mother”, “brother” or “sister” plausibly encourages both the poor immigrants and host society members to exhibit their capacity to practically love each other.

Beyond being appropriate in itself, the use of names that mean family relationships in reference to the needy migrants is an ideal resolution for the fight against xenophobia and demeaning internet practices that are common in states like South Africa. “Xenophobia” signifies fear of persons who are regarded as strangers (Klaaren 2011: 138; Polzer, Segatti 2011: 203; Kanu 2018: 2). It is essential to point out that demeaning names and internet practices that target poor immigrants do not only fail to denote the worthy of migrants, but affects the migrants’ appeal for relationships. The fundamental values of ubuntu philosophy “seek to honor the dignity of each person and are concerned with the development and maintenance of mutually affirming and enhancing relationships” (Nussbaum 2003: 1). Positive names portray ubuntu values that demand one be humane to poor immigrants and are likely to do some good in the long run. Again, “people have an opportunity to express their humanity and desire to help community members, particularly during disasters, and that in these situations, the media themselves play a helpful role” (Nussbaum 2003: 8). Positive names for needy migrants prescribe how one should relate with the poor immigrants. Therefore, it is important for the host community members to use names such as father or mother when referring to poor migrants.

Lastly, I stress the point of view that ubuntu ethic encourages one to honour the dignity of others. A person with ubuntu is one who contemplates how “to affirm our fellow human beings and to work and act towards each other with the communal good in the forefront of our minds” (Nussbaum 2003: 2). To achieve respectful associations with other beings with a dignity, that is, persons with the capacity for loving relationships (Metz 2022: 265–267), it is essential to aim not only to assist others in times of need, but to refer to others with positive names.



*Changing government's, economic institutions' and private companies' naming practices*

Moreover, agents that need to change their present practices, i.e., the habit of labelling and relegating poor migrants, are not merely citizens, as I have discussed so far, but also government institutions such as clinics. It is vital to ask the question, “Does the issue of origin and identity affect and supersede the question of equality and dignity?” (Kanu 2018: 1). Plausibly, biases towards immigrants, in townships of South Africa for example, are easily transferred to workplaces and other situations. Consider poor Zimbabweans who face challenges in South African hospitals due to the migrants’ nationality. Due to the reason of being viewed as “foreign”, various Zimbabwean migrants in South Africa are confronted with not only healthcare challenges, but also ill treatment, enslavement, and criminal trafficking (Serumaga-Zake 2017: 7). I defend the view that individuals who are inspired by ubuntu ethic “know that they are diminished when others are humiliated, diminished when others are oppressed and diminished when others are treated as if they were less than who they are” (Koenane 2018: 2). It is essential for poor migrants to experience humane associations with host city institutions. Contrary to an ubuntu ethic, the label “foreigner”, appears on various documentations that are associated with migrants in countries like South Africa.

Furthermore, it is essential for the government to seek ways to minimize the spread of internet and media practices that demean the dignity of poor immigrants. I stress the perspective that internet and media practices that insult poor migrants need to be confronted. African philosophy stresses the proposition that all humans “should be treated with humanity and dignity in all matters” (Sebola 2019: 2). The worth of a person does not change because one comes from a different country. The government ought to set regulations that disallow the spread of demeaning names on the internet and media. Every person deserves a respectful name from others in the community. Referring to poor immigrants using demeaning tags jeopardizes the capacity of both host community individuals and migrants to relate with each other in a respectful manner. If people’s “basic



duty is to express respect for beings with a superlative non-instrumental value, then we ought not try to tell them or others that they lack such a value” (Metz 2022: 197). Hence, I emphasize that it is essential for the host government to endeavor to limit the spread of media and internet practices that target to exclude poor immigrants from engaging with the host society members.

The government, that is to say, South African civil service or any other administration in a different state, ought to put in place measures that deter economic institutions and private companies from relegating poor migrants to the margins of the society. Rather than merely threatening economic establishments or private companies with fines, I suggest that it is vital for the government to provide education and make requests that aim to encourage a respectful attitude towards poor migrants. For example, the government could arrange workshops or seminars where leaders of private companies are taught about how to discharge ethical duties, good behavior that honors everyone including poor migrants.

Moreover, I address the ethical obligation of economic institutions such as banks in respect of naming. Economic institutions such as banks in states like South Africa have separate demands for individuals who are labelled ‘foreign’. Negative and intolerant attitudes towards individuals from other African countries “influence institutional attitudes and official policy responses to migration” (Chiumbu, Moyo 2018: 137). For example, banks in South Africa demand a disproportionate number of documentations from individuals who are labelled ‘foreigners’ in comparison to South Africans as I have pointed above. Poor individuals, people who do not afford to have the required credentials, are not straightforwardly allowed to engage with economic institutions such as banks. I support the viewpoint that it is contrary to the demands of ubuntu to disallow others from engaging with economic institutions such as banks, organizations that enable one to access basic services. Think of a so-called “foreigner” without a bank account and a debit card. Note that a bank account is a general requirement for most formal jobs in a number of states across the world. Debit cards have also become very common because some

products, for example online goods, are only bought through the use of automatic teller machine cards, but also cash is easily withdrawn using bank cards. Thus, I suggest that poor migrants should be able to have personal bank accounts and credit cards to access basic services in a host state. Grounded on the ubuntu ethos, I maintain that economic institutions such as banks should not make use of labels such as “foreigner” to prevent others from engaging with organizations that make people, including poor migrants, access basic services. I point out that it is difficult for people, poor migrants in this case, to flourish without being included in important commitments or activities such as banking.

I briefly discuss moral duties of private companies in respect of the naming of poor immigrants with demeaning terms such as “foreigners”, “alien” or *makwerekwere*. Private companies that provide media and internet platforms should discharge moral duties that promote human dignity. Plausibly, poor migrants suffer from demeaning names that they carry, but also from being subjected to insults. Imagine that one posts a demeaning picture or message of desperate immigrants, say, an illustration of poor migrants climbing a border fence alongside a troop of apes as per earlier example. Should private companies remove such content against the will of the individual? I propose that private companies should instead make use of “nudges”, that is to say, quick brief messages with friendly suggestions, to make one freely reconsider a post. Besides providing instructive advertisements, i.e., free moral lessons on how to be friendly to others, private companies could offer some rewards of some kind to individuals who consistently demonstrate good behaviour on communication platforms. A company could give an ethical media or internet user a good name, a designation that highlights one’s ideal conduct, that is easily seen by all other customers. A good name that shows one’s respect towards different people is plausibly a designation that encourages individuals to honour others in society. I defend the position that the ubuntu ethic prescribes moral duties, that is to say, obligations to respect the dignity of all people, to everyone including private companies. The ubuntu ethos stresses the

idea that loving others involves being friendly towards others, including poor migrants.

Finally, I stress the idea that treating everyone fairly entails that demeaning terms such as *makwerekwere* are disregarded, but also that poor immigrants receive appropriate names. “Ubuntu posits that nothing is impossible when the nation shares common goals and compassion for humanity” (Rapatsa, Makgato 2016: 72). While one may argue that a state should prioritize its citizens over immigrants, I advance the perspective that it is critical for governments to avoid acts that are damaging to migrants. Again, ubuntu ethic is concerned with “being with others and for others” (Magezi, Khlopa 2021: 23) as opposed to being hostile to strangers. Antagonistic names such as foreigner that are printed on migrants’ documents demean the worth of particularly poor immigrants in the society. Hence, it is essential for the government, economic institutions, and private companies to consider ways of identifying migrants that do not harm poor immigrants.

### *Objections to suggested names of poor migrants*

I briefly consider the probable implications of my position on the use of ubuntu ethic that might be criticized. One should comprehend that “Zimbabwean migration to and from South Africa is a highly complex and variable phenomenon” (Mawadza, Crush 2010: 364). In total, I consider three possible implications of my position on the use of the African ethic on the problem of naming poor migrants.

First, is it practical for a government or banking institution in the host city to make use of the names that I suggested above? Immigrants do not only suffer from being blamed for the South Africa’s problems but endure “relentless name-calling” (Lefko-Everett 2010: 279). Precisely, referring to another person as “father”, “mother”, “sister” or “brother” is often practiced in informal settings. Still, even if the names like father and mother are restricted to family set ups, without failing to perform its duty of registering all individuals in the nation, the government should identify immigrants in the same way as host society

members. For example, one's original name from home country including fingerprints are fitting ways that can be used to distinguish one person from another without demeaning one's dignity.

Secondly, a critic to my position on the challenge of designations for poor migrants on the basis of the ubuntu ethic may put forward the idea that it would cost time, money, labour, and other important scarce resources for the government to intervene on the naming issue, which resources could be better spent on something else in the host state. So, why should the naming of immigrants really matter? I point out that the perception towards a given society by others generally depends on the existence of loving relationships in that state or community. For example, I have pointed above that different scholars agree that South Africa is indeed a xenophobic nation due to continual brutal attacks on migrants in the state. However, ubuntu moral ethic offers persons including states an optional way to "re-learn how to live together with respect, compassion and dignity and justice and to re-organize resources accordingly" (Nussbaum 2003: 3). Those who love each other *prima facie* use positive names and terms to refer to each other. It is critical for persons with dignity, i.e., the capacity to lovingly relate with others "to avoid subordinating, harming, or insulting" others (Metz 2022: 198). Insults not only demean the dignity of the other, but promote relegation of others. If host members and poor immigrants were to shun relegation, ultimately the entire state would become more friendly.

Thirdly, one may point out that referring to poor immigrants with fitting names does not remove the migrants' poverty. In responding to the skeptic of the importance of naming it is essential to highlight that positive names and humane treatment of migrants make it easier for the suffering poor immigrants to fit into the economic and social institutions of the host nation, a venture that would eventually fight against poverty. An ubuntu ethos points out that family members do not overlook the suffering of the other. A person with ubuntu is an individual who understands the importance of "sharing wealth in the interests of building the community as a whole" (Nussbaum 2003: 3). Family members, individuals who are motivated to act by an unfeigned love in the form of identity and solidarity,

provide support to each other. Thus, in contrast to degrading labels such as “foreigner”, “alien” and *makwerekwere*, labels that keep others on the margins of the economy and society, I emphasize that familial names would help to reduce the poverty of poor migrants. I advance that it is “doing good towards others, which makes one belong in the world as a full human being” (Krog 2008: 364). Besides illustrating how demeaning names economically marginalize, but also worsen the poverty of poor migrants, I defend the idea that names given to humans often signify the worth of each person in the African society, for example designations of infants at birth. Again, the *Ubuntu* philosophy puts emphasis on a human being as a being that should be treated with humanity and dignity in all matters (Sebola 2019: 2). Hence, familial names would not only reduce the poverty of poor migrants, but also encourage respect towards the dignity of needy new members of society.

## CONCLUSION

I have grappled with the problem of naming of a kind that relegates poor strangers in states that continue to experience substantial migration of destitute individuals. Poor immigrants who reside in states like South Africa, i.e., the country which I have used as main example in the essay, continue to experience deadly prejudiced attacks. I have responded to the questions I submitted in the introduction. The questions include, how can a name be morally appropriate? Does a stranger deserve a dignified/worthy name and, if so, why and which ones do not count? How should the media and people on the internet change some of their current linguistic practices?

First, I ventured to discuss the problem of using terms such as “alien” and “foreigner” when refereeing to poor migrants. Secondly, grounded on ubuntu ethic, I spelled out a plausible understanding of dignity grounded on our ability to relate and used it to evaluate names, probing the African philosophy’s perception of stranger and brother. Thirdly, I applied my favored dignity-based ethic to reflections of naming, establishing which

kinds of names are demeaning, which instead are apposite, and how various agents should change their present practices.

It is important to highlight that I appealed to ubuntu morality because of the African theory's practical concern for right morals and the dignity of everyone in the society. In a typical sub-Saharan society, moral uprightness is comprehended as a crucial feature of what it means to be a human being. Additionally, characteristically, ubuntu moral philosophy emphasizes the person's dependence on human relations for the attainment and undertaking of morality in society (Metz 2022). Plausibly, a person who understands the importance of others acts in such a way that displays sincere love in communal relationships. Thus, grounded on a promising and practical ethical theory, viz, ubuntu morality, I advanced the position that the problem of naming and the relegation of poor migrants is a problem that deserves a sincere philosophical investigation by African philosophers.

To give poor immigrants demeaning names is plausibly to act in a way that is contrary to the demands of ubuntu morality. "Due to the interdependent nature of human existence, it follows that if one person's dignity is violated, other people are also affected" (Graness 2019: 98). An ubuntu ethic involves practical concern for people's worth. Every individual in the society including the poor immigrants deserves ethically appropriate names. Thus, I argued that denigrating names including demeaning non-verbal practices that target needy immigrants hinder sincere communal relations.

Moreover, what is distinct and novel in this philosophical investigation on naming and the relegation of poor immigrants is that I appeal to ubuntu moral theory and make concrete prescriptions for change in the light of it amongst other things proposing positive alternatives about which names should be used. It is vital to note that my ethic has implications for related expressive practices, such as the relaying of insulting pictures on meme templates, a practice common on internet and social media. In contrast to affluent migrants, poor immigrants are often regarded as not meriting worth because of the disadvantaged migrants' poor circumstance. Scholars, specifically, moral philosophers have not paid much needed attention to the challenge

of internet and social media users' expressive practices that relegate impoverished migrants. The African philosophy flavour to the problem of naming and expressive practices in the case of migrants is additional novelty presented by this philosophical discourse.

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am very grateful to all the people who helped me with the above essay. First, I thank participants at "Stranger, Other... Enemy? Strangeness and Otherness" conference organized by the faculty of Philosophy and Sociology, Maria Curie-Skłodowska University (UMCS), Lublin, Poland. Secondly, I express deep gratitude to two anonymous referees for "Glocalism: Journal of Culture, Politics and Innovation". The two anonymous referees provided me with thoughtful ideas. Additionally, I sincerely thank Prof. Thaddeus Metz, my Doctoral supervisor, who gave me quite engaging commentaries for this research. Lastly, I indicate that this work comes for my Doctoral thesis undertaken at University of Pretoria, South Africa.

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ISSN 2283-7949

GLOCALISM: JOURNAL OF CULTURE, POLITICS AND INNOVATION

2022, 3, DOI: 10.12893/gjcp.2022.3.3

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