The Capability for *Ubuntu*:
Connecting African and Anglo-American Conceptions of Being

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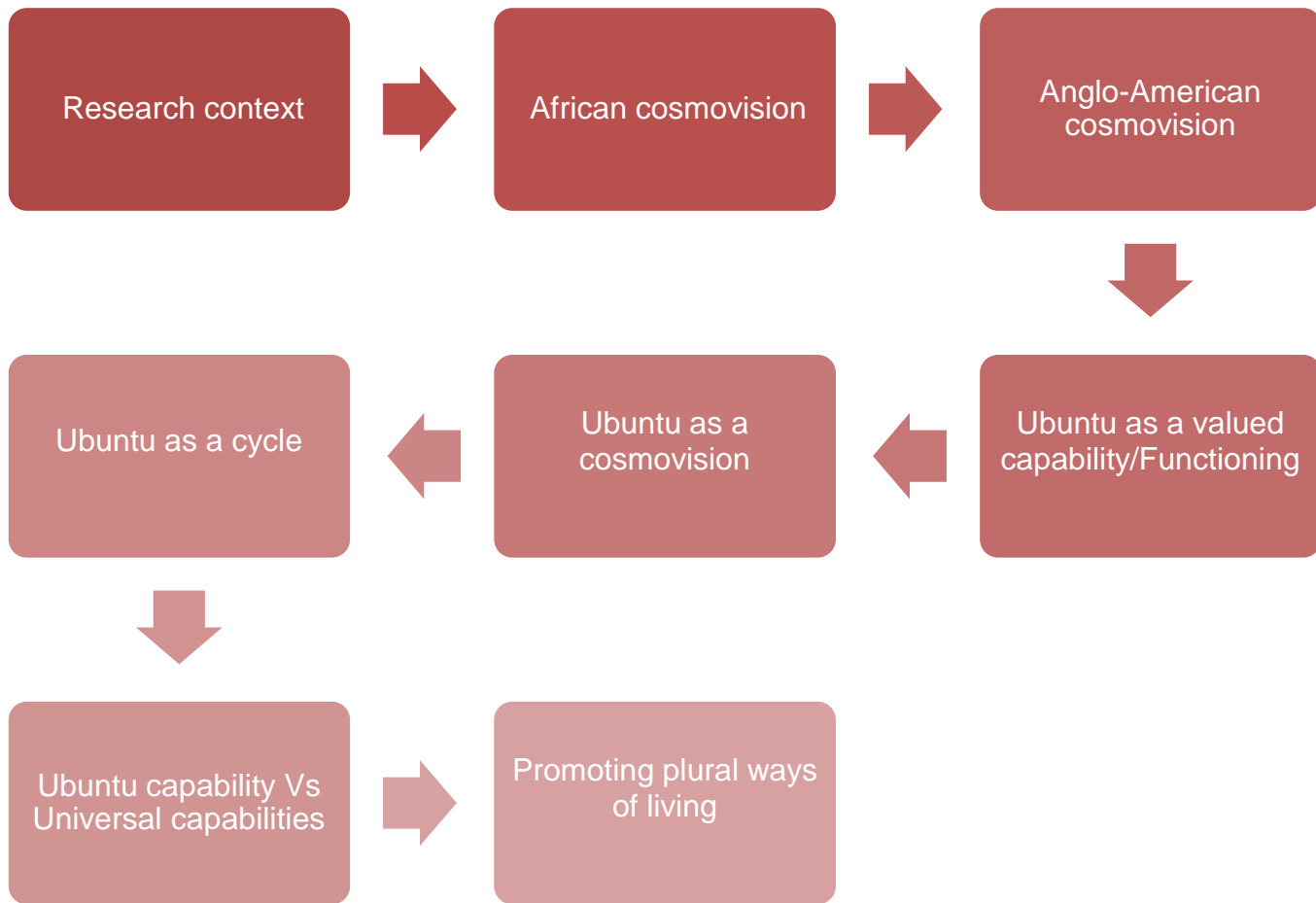
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Presentation outline

Research context → African cosmovision → Anglo-American cosmovision

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Ubuntu as a cycle ← Ubuntu as a cosmovision ← Ubuntu as a valued capability/Functioning

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Ubuntu capability Vs Universal capabilities → Promoting plural ways of living

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Research Context

- Do students value Ubuntu as a capability? If so, how does the capability for Ubuntu relate to universal capabilities?

- Two research projects
  - Miratho project
    - 64 students across five universities in SA
    - Methods: Life story interviews, photovoice and participatory workshops
  - DCR project
    - 12 undergraduate students from diverse backgrounds
    - Methods: Interviews (36) , participant observation and participant diaries + Follow up interview on Ubuntu capability

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African cosmovision

- **Rooted in African traditional practices – beyond country boundaries**
- *Ubuntu*: 'I am because we are' implies that each person exists because others do
- The individual is not seen as a separate entity to the group, community or society
- Implies that interaction between people necessarily involves reciprocity, mutuality and cooperation to ensure well-being

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Anglo-American cosmovision

- **Rooted in Western modernism (implications for coloniality)**
- Individualism (well-being)
- Universalism as the only way to understand, assess and create knowledge
- Implication on structures of power
- Determining what a 'good life' is for all (well-being)

Ubuntu as a valued capability/functioning

- Responsibility towards others
- Cycle 'If I help you, it doesn't mean you have to help me in return […] It's a generational cycle of giving' (Khayone)
- Khayone asserts, someone who practices Ubuntu is a person: 'who helps others to be successful. It is not about me, it's all about the community, or it's all about the well-being of other people. I want to see people being successful'.
- Compassionate empathy

Ubuntu as a cosmovision

- 'That's just reality' (Kungawo)

- 'My existence is, you know, linked to your existence' (Kungawo)

- 'As humanity, we are all interconnected' (Amahle)

- 'It is a guideline of how to live my life' (Minenhle)

- 'it guides the way I want to live' (Amahle)

Ubuntu capability vs universal capabilities

- Incongruences with universal capabilities
  - Emotions: 'Being able to have attachment to things and people'
  - Affiliation: Sense of responsibility over the well-being of others is missing

  => Problematic division between individuals and institutions

- Ubuntu as an architectonic capability (Le Grange, 2012)

- Universal formulas (CA and other cosmovisions)

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Promoting plural ways of living

- Hoffman & Mertz (2017, p.2)
  - 'our moral lives are messy: they are characterised by a plurality of values and marked by the possibility of ethical dilemmas and irretrievable regret'

- CA as a plural framework is able to accommodate multiple conceptions of a 'life worth living'

Promoting plural ways of living

- Context, time and cultural particularities have significant implications on the lives individuals have reason to live and the way they perceive reality. It is not only a 'list-issue'
- Acknowledge the universalism and individualism of the CA
- Academic scrutiny (only) is not enough
- We need to bring international discourses with local views in a equal platform in order to overcome unfair power structures and promote real public scrutiny.

THANK YOU

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