

## Chapter 8

# Living and Revitalizing Ubuntu: Challenges of Passing on Ubuntu Values to the Younger Generation and Attempted Strategies to Overcome Them

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### ABSTRACT

*Although Ubuntu/Obuntu philosophy remains a foundation for many African communities, there are also growing concerns about its gradual erosion and assault. There is limited understanding about the struggles that African parents, especially in the diaspora experience as they pass on Ubuntu/Obuntu values to their children who live in a different context from the one their parents were raised in. This knowledge is crucial for facilitating Ubuntu/Obuntu's revitalisation and transmission to the younger generation. Using a critical approach, this chapter draws from lived experiences and existing literature to discuss two key challenges that the authors, who are African parents, have experienced in passing on Ubuntu/Obuntu. The challenges relate to past and ongoing colonialism manifested in Eurocentric education systems in Africa and the diaspora and dwindling community interactions. Strategies adopted by the authors in the diaspora to overcome these barriers and implications of an Ubuntu/Obuntu-inspired education are also presented.*

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## INTRODUCTION

This chapter seeks to share our lived experiences with *Ubuntu*, the challenge of passing on *Ubuntu* values to the younger generation and propose strategies to overcome them. The current reinvigoration of *Ubuntu* renders the philosophy to mis and or underrepresentation. Tran & Wall (2019) warn of the risk of presenting *Ubuntu* as a singular, essentialist concept where a complete, exhaustive picture or imaginary consensus can be given. *Ubuntu* has multiple localized meanings and diverse forms in different communities throughout Africa (Muwanga-Zake, 2009), which implies that authors writing about the philosophy need to state and acknowledge which contexts/community or experiences are guiding their conceptualization. In this chapter, we present the localized meaning of *Ubuntu* from our lived experiences as Bantu language speaking people of Buganda, Busoga, and Ankole, in Uganda, East of Africa. With over 400 bantu languages (Muwanga-Zake, 2009), there are different Ubuntu terms in these languages and in the communities where we were raised.

### Understanding *Ubuntu* And Challenges of Passing It on To Younger Generation

Ntibagirirwa (2018) rightly observes that the exposure of the Ubuntu concept by South African scholarship misled many into believing that the concept is originally from South Africa. However, previous research has shown that it is a concept widely shared by the Bantu people that are part of the much bigger Niger-Congo hypothetical language family. The *Ubuntu* philosophy has been the foundation of many African communities, defining their morality and ethics, perspectives, and expectations (Mugumbate & Chereni, 2019). Hailey (2008) writes that Ubuntu is defined in many ways that include sympathy, collectivity, humanness, dignity, among others. In their review of systemic Ubuntu, Euwoso & Hall (2019) concluded that the concept of Ubuntu is basically an ethical, relational term that values the traits mentioned by Hailey (2008), as well as things like interdependence, fellowship, reconciliation, community, friendliness, relationality, and any action that promotes peace and harmony, as well as fosters unity between the physical and spiritual world. In this paper, we adopt these definitions and highlight the role that Ubuntu played in forming our identity and the value that we attach to community and interactions.

For clarity purposes, *Ubuntu* is known as *Obuntu* or *Obuntu Bulamu* in Luganda, thus explaining why we use the terms together in this chapter. Bannink Mbazzi et al., (2020) opine that *Obuntu Bulamu* is closely related to *Ubuntu*, and it is defined as “an accepted and significant behavior that signifies a shared set of values that promote well-being, togetherness, and unity” (p.404). We do not claim to provide an exhaustive picture of *Ubuntu* as we understand it; to be “*a way of life*” that has guided/continues to guide predominantly the Bantu people across generations (Dandala, 1994; Hailey, 2008; Ramose, 1999). We also understand that *Ubuntu* is best lived or demonstrated in actions than written or talked about (Hailey, 2008). Thus, we take a self-collective reflective approach to the discussions of *Ubuntu*, where we draw on our lived experiences as African women raised in African communities deeply shaped by the *Ubuntu* philosophy. *Ubuntu* philosophy shaped our childhood view of the world, and it still underpins how we see ourselves, the world, and the upbringing of our children in the current country of residence, Australia, where we chose to settle after our doctoral studies. We view this approach that extols personal and collective experience as a practice of *Ubuntu* itself (Hailey, 2008; Mbeje, 2010; Mugumbate & Nyanguru 2013), invalidating “the usually scholarly discussion where the researcher[author] aims for emotional ‘detachment’” (Sigauke, 2016, p.27).

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