Chapter 18
Ubuntu in the Diaspora:
Its Conservation and Comparison With Other World Views

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ABSTRACT

As people live in cross-cultural contexts, there is a need to recognize and appreciate the role of different worldviews and how they shape our understanding of humanity, upbringing, and engagement in social or work environments. The key starting point to enable this is exploring the often-overlooked indigenous philosophies of life such as Ubuntu and examining how such value systems survive alongside opposing or similar traditions. This chapter improves the understanding of cultural values by discussing the central tenets of the African philosophy of Ubuntu, in comparison to the Western ways of life and the strategies that Africans in the diaspora are applying to preserve Ubuntu values. Strategies for promoting Ubuntu in the education system and community settings are also recommended with the goal of enhancing cross-cultural awareness.

INTRODUCTION

Ubuntu is a fundamental pan-African concept, philosophy, culture, value system, belief, way of life or mind-set that governs the ways of life of people across the Africa continent (Kamwangamalu, 1999; Mugumbate, 2020b). Ubuntu is believed to have emerged from the Bantu languages among Eastern, Central, and Southern African communities (Murithi, 2007). It is popularly conceptualized from an IsiZulu proverb - *Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*, which translates *a person is a person through other people* (Nussbaum, 2003; Sakiemi & Whetho, 2013). The aphorism calls for our attention to recognize values related to human nature, humanity, connectedness, and collective consciousness to build peaceful, productive, ethical, and sustainable communities (Makalela, 2018). These Ubuntu values are deeply ingrained in African societies. Thus, as Africans interact with the rest of the world, they are at play influencing decisions, expectations, or interactions even though their impact may often go unnoticed (Sebola, 2019). Over the years, Africans from Ubuntu communities who have migrated to Western countries for work or study have to live and work alongside individuals from Eurocentric perspectives (Dillard & Neal, 2020). Eurocentrism is a perspective that fronts European based systems, values, attitudes, beliefs, and way of life as the standard for development or advancement (Kang, 2020). Given that the Ubuntu and Eurocentric perspectives vary in their approach, individuals who subscribe to the Ubuntu way of life face several challenges when migrating to Western countries that are predominantly Eurocentric (Naude & Naude, 2019).

While Ubuntu is researched across diverse contexts such as education, social work, conflict resolution or management (e.g. Assié-Lumumba, 2016; Gwaravanda, 2021; Mugumbate & Chereni, 2019; Woermann & Engelbrecht, 2017), there is still limited discussion on the conservation of Ubuntu values by Africans in the diaspora and comparisons between Ubuntu and other worldviews such as Eurocentrism (Assié-Lumumba, 2016; Whitburn, Hussain, & Mohamud, 2012). Such discussions are necessary for a more comprehensive understanding of behaviour since cultural-based differences may undermine efficiency and productivity among individuals, teams, or organizations, constraining global social ethics and communication across cultures (Poovan, Du Toit, & Engelbrecht, 2006). A better understanding of Ubuntu in the diaspora context would improve cultural dialogue and acceptability to enhance the effective management of diversity (Murithi, 2007). Additionally, understanding Ubuntu provides a basis for human rights advocacy, monitoring, and providing customized community support services for individuals from Ubuntu contexts (Mungai, 2014). This chapter addresses this gap in Ubuntu research by presenting reflections on how Africans are conserving ubuntu values in the diaspora and comparisons between Ubuntu and life perspectives in the Western world. This chapter's contribution lies in shedding light on the efforts by Africans in the diaspora to conserve Ubuntu values, differences between Ubuntu and eurocentrism, and strategies that can be implemented in different spheres to teach Ubuntu values to the younger generation. The authors of the chapter are Ugandans, brought up in the Ubuntu culture and migrated to the diaspora as adults for work and study opportunities.

The chapter comprises four sections. The first section reviews the Ubuntu framework by highlighting three key values: humanness/humanism, communalism/collectivism, and connectedness/interdependence. The second section discusses the conservation of Ubuntu community values in the diaspora. In the third section, a comparison of Ubuntu and Western world views highlights differences and similarities. The last section presents a call for action regarding approaches to be implemented in education systems and community settings to pass on Ubuntu values to the younger generation. Future research directions are also highlighted in this section.

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