

UBUNTU PHILOSOPHY

NUANCES AND APPLICATION IN
SELECTED AREAS AND DISCIPLINES

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OF WOLLONGONG
AUSTRALIA

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African philosophy

EXPLORING AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY: THE VALUE OF UBUNTU IN SOCIAL WORK

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ABSTRACT

This paper looks at the concept of ubuntu, how it has been applied in different fields and lessons that can be drawn for the social work profession. Ubuntu can best be described as an African philosophy that places emphasis on 'being self through others'. It is a form of humanism which can be expressed in the phrases 'I am because of who we all are' and ubuntu ngumuntu ngabantu in Zulu language. So far, it has been successfully applied in theology, management and computer science. This paper concludes that its utilisation in these disciplines makes it suitable for application in social work especially to enhance practice ethics, community work and conduct in research. the paper was based on desk research.

KEY TERMS: ubuntu; African philosophy; social work; humanism

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A

15000

Downloads in last 5 years. More views, citations and conference invitations.

Western philosophy

Disability, employment, and social justice

Employment experiences of people with epilepsy in Harare, Zimbabwe

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B

400

Downloads in last 5 years. Less views, citations and no conference invitation.

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Australia

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Paper A has succeeded because it used an African philosophy. I was more relevant in A than B.

NUANCES OF UBUNTU

AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY

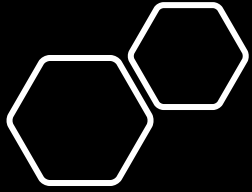
In most African communities or countries, descriptions of being human are similar or very close.

It is wrong to say this philosophy originated from South Africa. It is shared by all Black communities in Africa but can have different names



This is work in progress.

The cultures, practices and values in ?????? areas are very close to ubuntu. The likelihood that ubuntu is there is very high. The presence of ubuntu among ?????? can not be discounted.

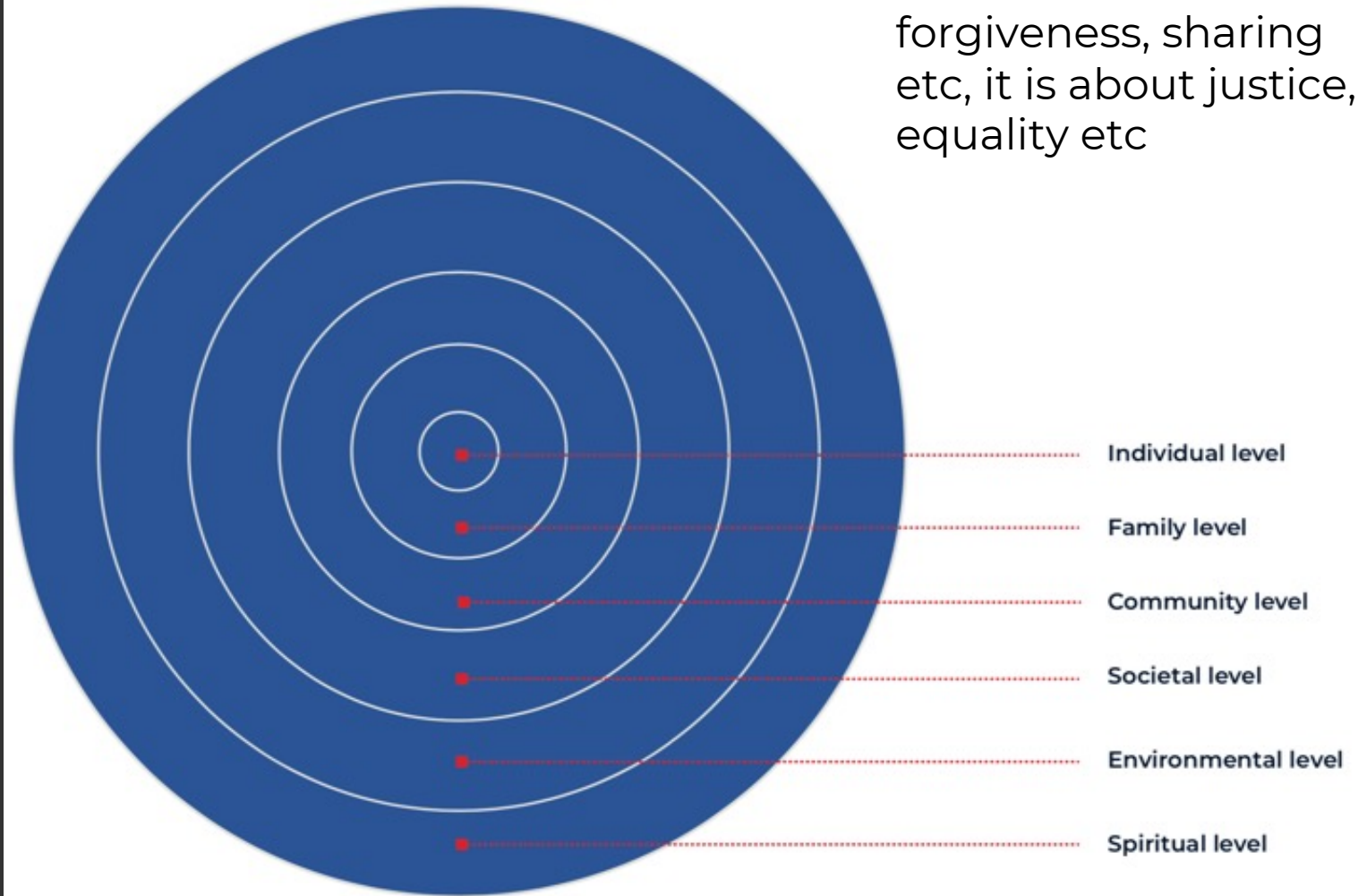


DEFINITION OF UBUNTU

Ubuntu is a collection of values and practices that black people of Africa or of African origin view as making people authentic human beings. While the nuances of these values and practices vary across different ethnic groups, they all point to one thing – **an authentic individual human being is part of a larger and more significant relational, communal, societal, environmental and spiritual world** (AJSW, 2020).

Some definitions limit ubuntu to 'I am because we are' or 'A person is a person through others'. These short definitions limit ubuntu to communalism but ubuntu has several other aspects.

LOOKING AT UBUNTU HOLISTICALLY



Ubuntu is not only about the individual but it exists at higher levels. Ubuntu is far more than forgiveness, sharing etc, it is about justice, equality etc

UBUNTU ASPECTS SUMMARY

Individual aspects

Needs, rights, choices, failures, progress, crimes, interventions etc are seen through the family and community. Family rules and identity are valued.

Family aspects

Ubuntu is the foundation of African families. Family needs, choices, desires, resources etc are seen through the larger family, tribe, clan and community. Continuation of the family is highly valued.

Community aspects

Ubuntu is the foundation for African communities. Community members and families are expected to work collectively, to be reciprocal, volunteering, responsible, just etc

Societal aspects

Ubuntu is the foundation of African society. It shapes the economy, politics, justice, education, religion, pan-Africanism, liberty, human rights, power etc

Environmental aspects

Connection to, and protection of the environment is highly valued. People connect with their land by building a permanent home (*musha*) on it, protecting the land and passing it onto to future generations. Birth-in-place and death-in-place (meaning on one's soil or land) are valued. Land is a heritage that provides income and livelihoods. The land is the home of deceased family members, their graves are located there. So will be those of future generations.

Spiritual aspects

Ubuntu is the spiritual foundation of African societies. Spiritual strength comes from connectedness with God, connectedness with living or deceased parents, relatives and Elders, connectedness with family, connectedness with land and the environment.

UBUNTU MAXIMS/STATEMENTS

Munhu munhu nekuda kweVanhu
(Zimbabwe; Samkange, 1980) – human through others

Ndiri nekuti tiri
(Zimbabwe) – collectivity, communalism

Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu (South Africa) – collectivity, communalism

Mambo vanhu
(Zimbabwe; Samkange, 1980) – people-centred leadership

Chikuru upenyu
(Zimbabwe; Samkange, 1980) – valuing life

Motho ke motho ka batho (Botswana) – collectivity

Mwana ndewemunhu wese
(Child belongs to the village) - collectivity

Umoja ni nguvu
(Swahili) – collectivity

Ndi nii tondu wanyu
(Kenya) – collectivity

An dhano nikeche wantie (Kenya) – collectivity

Musha mukadzi
(Zimbabwe) – valuing women

Miti upenyu
(Zimbabwe) – valuing the environment

Mhosva hairovi
(Zimbabwe) – valuing justice

Ndiri nekuti tiri
(I am because we are)

Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu is the most popular maxim but it is one of several maxims.

APPLICATION OF UBUNTU IN SELECTED AREAS AND DISCIPLINES

UBUNTU THEOLOGY

John Samuel Mbiti

- John S. Mbiti is regarded as the father of modern African theology.
- Challenged the European view that Africa has no religion of its own, and the colonial and Christian view that African religious views are primitive, demonic and evil, and Africans are savages.
- African religion and religious views are just as legitimate and require respect as Christianity, Islam, Judaism, and Buddhism.
- **'I am because we are; and since we are, therefore I am'**, (Mbiti, 1969, p. 106).
- Ubuntu carries African religious beliefs
- We should use ubuntu to decolonize African religious beliefs
- African religious beliefs are mostly not return, they exist in orature





UBUNTU IN EDUCATION

Stanlake Samkange

“Whose fault is it if no one knows about the philosophy of your grandfather and mine? Is it not your fault and mine? We are the intellectuals of (Africa). It is our business to distill this philosophy, and set it out for the world to see”, (Samkange, 1980).

- We should use ubuntu to decolonize African education and learning
- Ubuntu also crucial as an African political philosophy



Photo: Library Thing





UBUNTU MANAGEMENT



Lovemore Mbigi

- African has its own style or philosophy of management, ubuntu management
- “Community is the cornerstone in African thought and life (Mbigi, 2005, p. 75).
- **Masibambane** which means ubuntu inspired business culture marketing, leadership, accountability, training and production.
- **Nhorowondo** – understandING organisations, needs, motivations, processes and phenomena in their context.
- **Mumvuri** - shadow corpse theory – often, when organisations are not functioning, there is a ‘shadow’.
- Collective leadership and decision making is important. Collective fingers theory (**chara chimwe hachitswanyinda**)





POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY



Kenneth Buchizya Kaunda – African humanism

- Need for maintaining an African overarching philosophy in all spheres of life – political, economic and social.
- Doing away with colonial mentality, breaking with colonial past
- Appreciation of African values, heritage and worldviews
- Socialism – ensuring that the means of production, distribution, and exchange is community owned and controlled
- Authentic African identity
- African spirituality

”Humanism abhors every form of exploitation of MAN by man.”

“Humanism seeks to create an egalitarian society—that is, society in which there is equal opportunity for self-development for all...”



PAN-AFRICANISTS AND OTHERS

Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana (ubuntu, being African)

Julius Nyerere of Tanzania (ujamaa)

Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia (ubuntu, being human)

Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe (ubuntu, total independence and importance of land)

Nelson Mandela of South Africa (ubuntu, reconciliation)

Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya (harambee)

Samora Machel of Mozambique (ubuntu, total independence and importance of land)

Seretse Khama of Botswana (Kagisano)

Desmond Tutu (reconciliation)

Many other Pan-Africanists in **West, East, North, Central and Southern Africa**

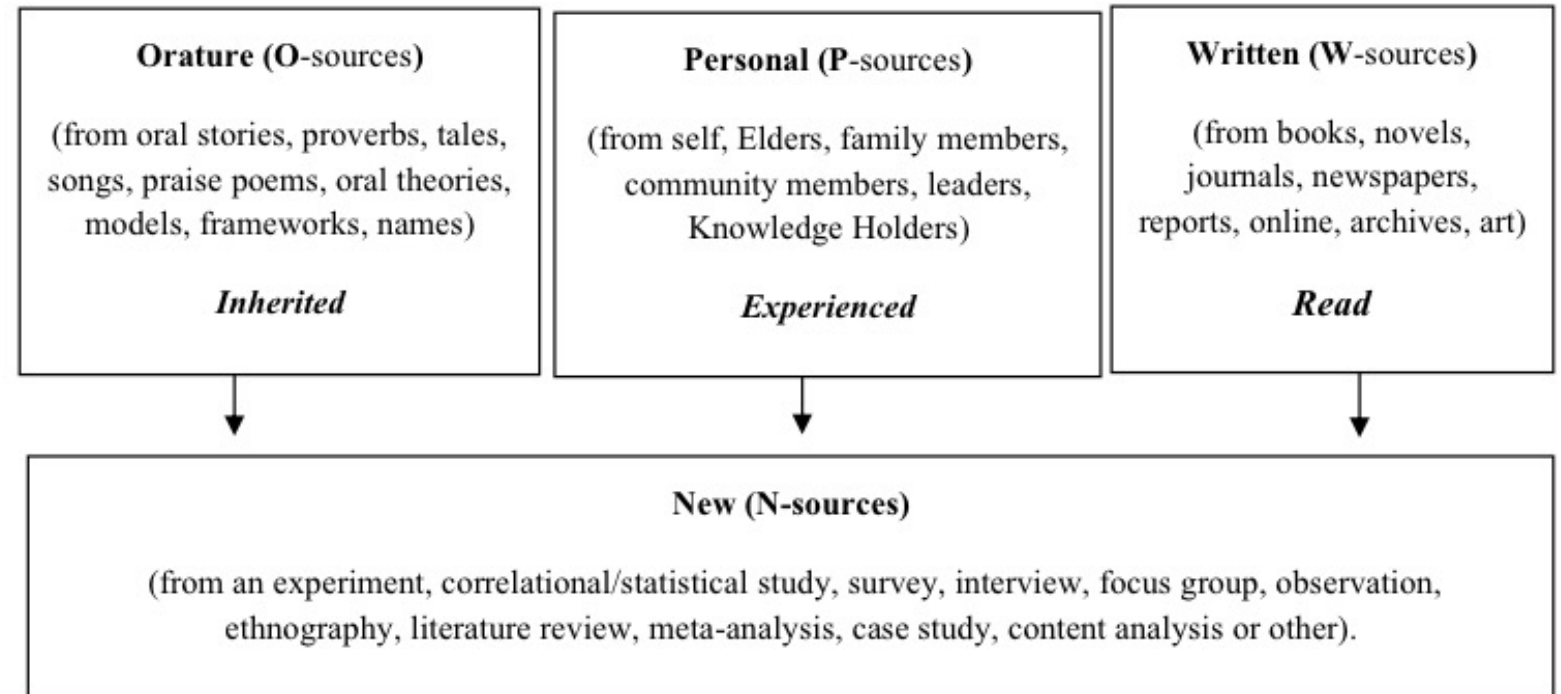
Although each of these people has their weaknesses, they were all motivated by ubuntu, to be human is to be free.

UBUNTU JUSTICE

- Ubuntu justice emphasizes these elements:
- **Deterrence** which can be done socially, physically, economically or spiritually
- **Returning and Replacement** – meaning bringing back what has been stolen, replacing it or compensating. In Shona language this is called *kudzora* and *kuripa*
- **Apology, Forgiveness and Reconciliation** (restoration of *ukama* or relations) after meeting the above
- **Warnings and Punishments (retribution) from community**, leaders and elders if the above have not been achieved or ignored
- **Warnings and Punishments from spiritual beings** if the above have not been met. In Shona culture, these are called *jambwa* and *ngozi*

UBUNTU INSPIRED RESEARCH

Figure 8: AJSW Framework for Classification of Sources of Knowledge (AJSW, 2019)



Ubuntu inspired research acknowledges different sources of information. It uses ubuntu ethics and methods.



RESEARCH ETHICS

African Research Ethics and Malpractice Statement (AREMS)

- Value for Family (*umhuri*, familyhood)
- Respect for Community (*ujamaa*, 'communityhood')
- Decolonising
- Developmental and capacity building research
- Sustainable research
- Justice
- Value for life
- Protection of most vulnerable populations



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UBUNTU ETHICS IN SOCIAL WORK

Upenyu – valuing life. **The ethic is do not harm or kill**

Umhuri – familyhood, valuing blood relations. **The ethic is protect families and marriages**

Umuganda – service to others. **The ethic is help others in need or reciprocity**

Ururami, Ubulungiswa, Ubutabera – justice. **The ethic is for people to be just**

Ukama, Harambee – familyhood, valuing blood relations. **The ethic is protect families and marriages**

Ujamaa – familyhood or communityhood. **The ethic is promote cooperation and collectivism**

Ubunyarwanda – nationhood. **There are many ethics including promote peace**

Uhuru – liberty/independence/freedom. **The ethic is liberate and protect African liberation**

Umachobane – sustainability. **The ethic is to do programs that are sustainable.**

Itorero – good members of society, and a strong sense of cultural values and leadership skills. **The ethic is to respect our cultures**

Umoja – unity, peace and harmony. **The ethic is to promote oneness.**

Kagisano – good neighbourliness. **The ethic is to promote harmony**

Musha – permanent home in ancestral lands. **The ethic is to protect and maintain permanent homes**

Simunye – strengths in numbers, we are one. **The ethic is promote cooperation and collectivism**

Shosholoza – resilience. **The ethic is remaining strong despite adversity**

Kuumba – creativity. **The ethic is not to imitate**

Ujima – collective responsibility. **The ethic is to look after one another**

Utungamiri – leadership. **The ethic is people centered leadership**

Ushavi – workmanship, enterprising. **The ethic is hardworking**

Urithi, Nhaka – inheritance. **The ethic is to protect inheritance**

Uroho – spiritual connectedness. **The ethic is to be holistic**

Unyanzvi – professionalism. **The ethic is to act professionally**

SOCIAL WORK, WELFARE SERVICES & DEVELOPM ENT

- Council of Social Work, Zimbabwe (2012) has ubuntu in its professional code of ethics
- The Tswana Kagisano framework (2016) used by the Government of Botswana to promote solidarity and development
- Anti-poverty and social protection model of ubuntu (Metz, 2016)
- Ubuntu as a pan-African philosophical framework for social work in Africa (Mupedziswa, Rankopo and Mwansa, 2019)
- Ubuntu ecological and eco-spiritual perspective (van Breda, 2019)
- An integrated framework of Ubuntu (Mugumbate and Chereni, 2019)
- The decolonial framework of ubuntu (various authors)

