

**AN EXPOSITION OF THE RELEVANCE OF UBUNTU PHILOSOPHY IN SOCIAL
WORK: A HUMANISTIC SOCIAL WORK PERSPECTIVE**

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the University of Staffordshire for
the award of Doctor of Philosophy Based on Published Work in Health and Welfare Studies

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I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Professor Peter Kevern for his invaluable advice, motivation and given guidance in the development of this submission.

Dedication

A special dedication to my paternal grandmother Enika Chigangaidze who passed on in July 2024. This is also to my wife Ruvarashe Mlambo as well as my 'mothers' Valerie Chigangaidze and Loice Terere. To my fathers who have slept: Luck Chigangaidze, Taurai Geza Chigangaidze, Spencer Musarurwa Chigangaidze and Jefta David Chigangaidze.

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Abstract

Social work has been dominated by Eurocentric paradigms since its inception. The aim of this thesis is to expose Ubuntu philosophy as a Global South theoretical alternative to decolonise social work. The objectives of this thesis are to analyse the relevance of Ubuntu philosophy through the Global Definition of Social Work; position Ubuntu philosophy in Humanistic-Existential Social Work; defend the application of Ubuntu philosophy in Clinical Social Work; evaluate the applicability of Ubuntu philosophy in Environmental Social Work and Sustainable Developmental Goals (SDGs); and advance Decolonial Social Work approaches by promoting Ubuntu Philosophy. Critical appropriation of Ubuntu philosophy, conceptual analysis and expositions are utilised to demonstrate the application of Ubuntu philosophy to social work domains. In view of the ideas of Humanistic work (existential, transpersonal and constructivist domains), the exposition of Ubuntu as a Humanistic philosophy is put forward, though appreciating that Ubuntu pre-dates the Humanistic approach. Spirituality being one component left out in most social work theories; this thesis offers a spiritual lens to assessments in clinical social work. In a world that is facing increasing occurrences of wars, pandemics, climate change and poverty, it is important to reflect on Ubuntu philosophy to promote solidarity, human dignity, cooperation and human rights in the face of these challenges. The thesis explores the rights of nature through the axiom of Ubuntu and the Humanistic concepts of *homo, sacra res homini* which consider man as an object of reverence in the eyes of other man. By considering an Indigenous Knowledge System (IKS) in the form of Ubuntu philosophy, the work contributes to decolonial social work. The thesis expatiates the relevance of Ubuntu philosophy to Social Work domains such as Environmental Social Work, Clinical Social Work, Human Rights Based Social Work, International Social Work, Social Development and other domains. Establishing Ubuntu's relevance to Social Work should never be viewed as undermining any philosophy but as a step towards multiculturalism and global mindfulness. The synthesis of 11 articles presented in this thesis show that this body of works advances Value-Based Social Work, Human-Rights Based Social Work, Decolonial Social Work and Anti-Racist Social Work, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Holistic Approaches to Social Work practice, Spirituality in Social Work and Environmental Social Work. The thesis recommends the use of Ubuntu Philosophy in all the above areas of Social Work practice. This research has methodological limitations to conceptual analysis and critical theoretical appropriation to explore why Ubuntu Philosophy is a Global South theoretical alternative to decolonise social work. Future research can utilise interviews and surveys to explore the views of Ubuntu Social Work practitioners on the efficacy of the philosophy as a theoretical alternative to decolonise social work.

Declaration form

I confirm that the work that I have submitted to Staffordshire University for the consideration of a PhD by published work is my own and have not been submitted anywhere for the award of a research degree. In -addition, I have also attached statements of contribution in cases where there are co-authors.

The work submitted for consideration was undertaken between 2020- 2023 in Zimbabwe and in the United Kingdom, mostly during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown period. All the work submitted for PhD by Published Work was done in these 3 years.

Robert K Chigangaidze

Date: 08/10/2024

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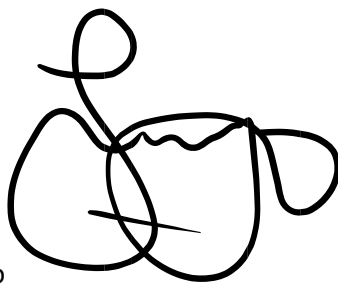
Statements of contribution

Chigangaidze, R.K *et al.* (2022) 'Establishing the relevance of the Ubuntu philosophy in Social Work Practice: Inspired by the Ubuntu World Social Work Day, 2021 Celebrations and the IFSW and the IASSW's (2014) Global Definition of Social Work.' *International Social Work*, 66 (1), pp. 6-20.

Robert Kudakwashe Chigangaidze was the lead author in the above-mentioned article. He was responsible for critical analysis and philosophical exposition of Ubuntu worldview through the Global Definition of Social Work. He also focused on interlocking the paper to humanistic social work practice. Robert led the discussions during the process of writing the paper and also revised the article to address the comments of peer reviewers. My role was that of a guide and critical commentator. Robert's contribution can be assessed as 80%.

Chigangaidze, R.K *et al.* (2024) 'The relevance of Ubuntu in Disability: A political, economic, social, technological, legal and environmental analysis' in Mutanga, O (ed.) *Ubuntu Philosophy and Disabilities in Sub-Saharan Africa*. First Edition. London: Routledge, pp. 18-29.

Robert Kudakwashe Chigangaidze was the first author in the above-mentioned article. He was responsible for political, economic, social, technological, legal and environmental analysis (PES-TLE) of Ubuntu philosophy and establishing the worldview's application in the fields of disability. He also focused on interlocking the paper to humanistic social work practice. Robert led the discussions during the process of writing the paper and also revised the article to address the comments of peer reviewers. My role was that of a guide and critical commentator. Robert's contribution can be assessed as 80%.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of several loops and a long horizontal stroke at the bottom.

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Statement of Contribution

Chigangaidze, R.K *et al.* (2022) 'Establishing the relevance of the Ubuntu philosophy in Social Work Practice: Inspired by the Ubuntu World Social Work Day, 2021 Celebrations and the IFSW and the IASSW's (2014) Global Definition of Social Work', *International Social Work*, 66 (1), pp. 6-20. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00208728221078374>.

Robert Kudakwashe Chigangaidze was the lead author in the above-mentioned article. He was responsible for critical analysis and philosophical exposition of Ubuntu worldview through the Global Definition of Social Work. He also focused on interlocking the paper to humanistic social work practice. Robert led the discussions during the process of writing the paper and also revised the article to address the comments of peer reviewers. My role was that of a guide and critical commentator. Robert's contribution can be assessed as 80%.

Elia Mudehwe:

Date: 23 July 2023



Statement of contribution

Chigangaidze, R.K et al. (2023) 'The relevance of Ubuntu in Disability: A political, economic, social, technological, legal and environmental analysis', in: Mutanga, O (ed.) *Ubuntu Philosophy and Disabilities in Sub-Saharan Africa*. First Edition. London: Routledge, pp. 18-29.

Robert Kudakwashe Chigangaidze was the first author in the above-mentioned article. He was responsible for political, economic, social, technological, legal and environmental analysis (PESTLE) of Ubuntu philosophy and establishing the worldview's application in the fields of disability. He also focused on interlocking the paper to humanistic social work practice. Robert led the discussions during the process of writing the paper and revised the article to address the comments of peer reviewers. My role was that of a guide and critical commentator.

Robert's contribution can be assessed as 80%.

Elia Mudehwe



Statement of contribution

Chigangaidze, R.K., Mafa, I.H., Simango, T.G., & Mudehwe, E. (2022). Establishing the relevance of the Ubuntu philosophy in Social Work Practice: Inspired by the Ubuntu World Social Work Day, 2021 Celebrations and the IFSW and the IASSW's (2014) Global Definition of Social Work. *International Social Work*, 66 (1), 6-20. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00208728221078374>.

Robert Kudakwashe Chigangaidze was the lead author in the above-mentioned article. He was responsible for critical analysis and philosophical exposition of Ubuntu worldview through the Global Definition of Social Work. He also focused on interlocking the paper to humanistic social work practice. Robert led the discussions during the process of writing the paper and also revised the article to address the comments of peer reviewers. My role was that of a guide and critical commentator. Robert's contribution can be assessed as 72%.

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Dr I.H. Mafa

I.H.M

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Statement of contribution

Chigangaidze, R.K., Mafa, I.H., Simango, T.G., & Mudehwe, E. (in print). The relevance of Ubuntu in Disability: A political, economic, social, technological, legal and environmental analysis. In: Mutanga, O, Ubuntu Philosophy and Disabilities in Sub-Saharan Africa. First Edition. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003343684>.

Robert Kudakwashe Chigangaidze was the first author in the above-mentioned article. He was responsible for political, economic, social, technological, legal and environmental analysis (PESTEL) of Ubuntu philosophy and establishing the worldview's application in the fields of disability. He also focused on interlocking the paper to humanistic social work practice. Robert led the discussions during the process of writing the paper and also revised the article to address the comments of peer reviewers. My role was that of a guide and critical commentator. Robert's contribution can be assessed as 81%.

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Dr I.H. Mafa

I.H.M

Date: 24/07/23

Statement of Contribution

Chigangaidze, R.K., Matanga, A.A. and Katsuro, T. (2022) 'Ubuntu philosophy as a humanistic-existential framework for the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic', *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 62 (3), pp.319-333. DOI:10.1177/00221678211044554.

Robert Kudakwashe Chigangaidze was the lead author in the above-mentioned article. He was responsible for the philosophical exploration of the relevance of Ubuntu philosophy in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. He also focused on interlocking the paper to humanistic social work practice. Robert led the discussions during the process of writing the paper and also revised the article to address the comments of peer reviewers. My role was that of a critical commentator. Robert's contribution can be assessed as 85%.

Anesu A Matanga

Date: 29/07/2023

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading 'Matanga' with a stylized initial 'M'.

Statement of contribution

Chigangaidze, R.K., & Chikanya, N. (2023). Ubuntu Social Work benefits both the Practitioner and Service Users: An axiological reflection of a Clinical Social Worker and Theologian. In: Mayaka, B., Uwihangana, C., & van Breda, A.D. The Ubuntu Practitioner: Social Work Perspectives, 171-188. Rheinfelden, Switzerland: International Federation of Social Workers.

Robert Kudakwashe Chigangaidze was the lead author in this chapter published in the book, 'The Ubuntu Practitioner: Social Work Perspectives.' He was responsible for the conceptual framework of the paper, axiological reflection of Ubuntu philosophy and integrating the paper to social work practice. Robert led the discussions during the process of writing the paper and also revised the chapter to address the comments of peer reviewers. My role was to offer guidance and a critical commentary from the theological perspective. Robert's contribution can be assessed as 80%.

Rev Nigel Chikanya



Date: 22/July 2023

Statement of contribution

Chigangaidze, R.K. and Chinyenze, P. (2022) 'What it means to say, 'a person is a person through other persons': Ubuntu through humanistic-existential lenses of transactional analysis', *Journal of Religion & Spirituality in Social Work: Social Thought*, 41 (3), 280-295. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15426432.2022.20239341>.

Robert Kudakwashe Chigangaidze was the lead author in the above-mentioned article. He was responsible for the philosophical exposition of Ubuntu's axiom in view of Transactional Analysis. He also focused on interlocking the paper to humanistic social work practice. Robert led the discussions during the process of writing the paper and revised the article to address the comments of peer reviewers. My role was that of a guide and critical commentator. Robert's contribution can be assessed as 80%.


Dr Patience Chinyenze

Date: 30/ 07/2023

Statement of contribution

Chigangaidze, R.K., and Dudzai, C. (2023) 'Positioning the natural environment in Ubuntu's axiom, "Umuntu Ngumuntu Ngabantu": An Ecospiritual Social Work perspective', in Mayaka, B., Uwihangana, C. and van Breda, A.D, *The Ubuntu Practitioner: Social Work Perspectives*. Rheinfelden: International Federation of Social Workers, pp. 156-170.

Robert Kudakwashe Chigangaidze was the lead author in this chapter published in the book, 'The Ubuntu Practitioner: Social Work Perspectives.' He was responsible for the conceptual framework of the paper, philosophical exploration of Ubuntu as an ecological philosophy and linking the paper to social work practice. Robert led the discussions during the process of writing the paper and revised the chapter to address the comments of peer reviewers. My role was a critical commentator and second author. Robert's contribution can be assessed as 85%.

X 

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List of publications submitted for consideration for PhD by Published Work

Chigangaidze, R.K. *et al.* (2022) 'Establishing the relevance of the Ubuntu philosophy in Social Work Practice: Inspired by the Ubuntu World Social Work Day, 2021 Celebrations and the IFSW and the IASSW's (2014) Global Definition of Social Work.' *International Social Work*, 66 (1), pp. 6-20.

Chigangaidze, R.K. (2021a) 'An exposition of humanistic-existential social work in light of ubuntu philosophy: Towards theorizing ubuntu in social work practice', *Journal of Religion and Spirituality in Social Work: Social Thought*. 40 (2), 146-165.

Chigangaidze, R.K. (2021b) 'Defending the African Philosophy of ubuntu and its place in clinical social work practice in mental health: The biopsychosocial and ecological systems perspectives', *Social Work in Mental Health*, 19 (4), 276-288.

Chigangaidze, R.K. (2022) 'Utilising ubuntu in social work practice: ubuntu in the eyes of the multimodal approach', *Journal of Social Work Practice: Psychotherapeutic Approaches in Health, Welfare and the Community*, 36 (3), 291-301.

Chigangaidze, R.K. and Chikanya, N. (2023) 'Ubuntu Social Work benefits both the Practitioner and Service Users: An axiological reflection of a Clinical Social Worker and Theologian', in Mayaka, B., Uwhangana, C. and van Breda, A.D (eds.) *The Ubuntu Practitioner: Social Work Perspectives*, Rheinfelden: International Federation of Social Workers, pp. 171-188.

Chigangaidze, R.K. and Chinyenze, P. (2022) 'What it means to say, 'a person is a person through other persons': Ubuntu through humanistic-existential lenses of transactional analysis', *Journal of Religion & Spirituality in Social Work: Social Thought*, 41 (3), 280-295.

Chigangaidze, R.K. *et al.* (2024) 'The relevance of Ubuntu in Disability: A political, economic, social, technological, legal and environmental analysis' in Mutanga, O (ed.) *Ubuntu Philosophy and Disabilities in Sub-Saharan Africa*. First Edition. London: Routledge, pp. 18-29.

Chigangaidze, R.K., Matanga, A.A. and Katsuro, T. (2022) 'Ubuntu philosophy as a humanistic-existential framework for the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic', *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 62(3), 319-333.

Chigangaidze, R.K. (2023a) 'Environmental Social Work through the African philosophy of Ubuntu: A conceptual analysis', *International Social Work*, 66 (6), 1845-1856.

Chigangaidze, R.K. (2023b) 'The Environment has rights: Eco-spiritual social work through Ubuntu Philosophy and Pachamama. A commentary', *International Social Work*, 66 (4), 1059-1063. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00208728211056367>.

Chigangaidze, R.K. and Dudzai, C. (2023) 'Positioning the natural environment in Ubuntu's axiom 'Umuntu Ngumuntu Ngabantu': An Ecospiritual Social Work Perspective' in Mayaka, B., Uwihangana, C. and Van Breda, A.D, *The Ubuntu Practitioner: Social Work Perspectives*. Rhein Elden: International Federation of Social Workers, pp. 156-170.

1. Introduction

Famous African leaders such as Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu have promoted Ubuntu as a worldview, a value and a practice. It is difficult to pin down Ubuntu to one meaning due to its dynamic nature (Metz, 2007). The African worldview of Ubuntu is conceptualised as a comprehensive philosophy based on the values of intense humanness, caring, sharing, respect, compassion, associated values that enhance a happy and qualitative community life in the spirit of family. Ubuntu refers to the capacity in the African culture to express and promote humanity, human dignity reciprocity, compassion, and mutuality (Metz, 2014; Mugumbate and Chereni, 2019; Mupedziswa, Rankopo and Mwansa, 2019; Van Norren, 2014). The word 'Ubuntu' contains the prefix 'ubu-' and the stem '-ntu', of which ubu- suggests the concept of 'being' (Battle, 1996). Corresponding to this, Ramose (2005; 1999) in van Norren (2022) points out that Ubuntu involves a continuous motion of embracing the universe and its meaning is expansive: 'ubu-' meaning the potential being, meeting life force '-ntu'. Ubuntu involves the interconnectedness between humans and all creation, that is, the relationship between people, the environment, and spirituality (Mbiti, 1969 in Udah *et al.*, 2025).

Ubuntu philosophy also known as Botho (in Tswana) and Hunhu (in Shona) is an indigenous African philosophy applicable in almost all facets of human life. Ubuntu philosophy promotes unity, kindness and solidarity (Konyana, 2013). Furthermore, Ubuntu has been illustrated as follows:

What happens to the individual happens to the whole group, and whatever happens to the whole group, whole community or country happens to the individual. People, country, environment and spirituality are intricately related. The individual can only say: 'I am because we are; and since we are, therefore I am.' (Mbiti, 1969, p.106).

Thus, Ubuntu is a philosophy that views one's humanness through others while seeing the humanness of others through one's humanness.

Ubuntu philosophy is the first theme of the Global Agenda of Social Work and Social Development (2020-2030) and further presents to social work an opportunity to analyze an indigenous knowledge system (Mayaka and Truell, 2021). Ubuntu is relevant to Environmental Social Work domains, Clinical Social Work, Social Development, Human Rights Based Social Work, Humanistic Social Work, International Social Work, Decolonial Social Work and many other domains. Ubuntu is now fast receiving attention in the social work profession as a theory for practice and education (Mayaka and Truell, 2021). The necessity for Ubuntu's application in African contexts has been vigorously and widely noted in contemporary social work debates and the philosophy should be viewed as a form of social protection model, a framework for social justice, an ecological and eco-spiritual model, an indigenous model, and a decolonial model of practice (Bhangyi *et al.*, 2023). These elements constitute a collective and communal approach that

social work embraces. However, there is minimal work on developing the conceptual foundation of the African philosophy of Ubuntu in such a way that it begins to constitute theory in social work education and practice (van Breda, 2019).

1.2. Statement of Contribution to the Body of Knowledge

Mugumbate *et al* (2024) emphasise that in social work, philosophies shape how people think about family, community, society, spirituality and the environment. This critical synthesis shows how the collection of publications in the publication list above contribute to the body of knowledge in Social Work. For example, Chigangaidze *et al* (2022), for the first time, established the relevance of Ubuntu philosophy to the social work profession through a document analysis of the global definition of social work published by the International Federation of Social Workers (ISW) and the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) in 2014. Interlocking Ubuntu philosophy to the global definition of social work establishes a foundation through which the African philosophy can be integrated in social work practice and education. Thus, this synthesis advances the notions of decolonial social work which is integral to social work practice and education in a more diverse and globalised community.

Social work's axiology is based on the expositions of humanistic school of thought, especially, respect for human rights, social justice, human dignity, self-determination and other related values (Stefaroi, 2016). The publications submitted in this thesis (Chigangaidze, 2021a; Chigangaidze and Chikanya, 2023) explore in-depth connections of the humanistic-existential features of Ubuntu philosophy and social work. Thus, the philosophy of Ubuntu is identified and clearly located within a humanistic school of thought while acknowledging that it existed before the humanistic movement (third force in psychology). Utilising comparative analysis, Chigangaidze (2021a) discusses nine features of humanistic-existential social work and management considering the African philosophy of Ubuntu. Thus, the publications give strong evidence that clearly link Ubuntu worldview with the Humanistic-Existential perspective. Chigangaidze (2021a) is recognised as a good example for theorising and positioning Ubuntu philosophy in the Humanistic Social Work perspective (Hutchison and Charlesworth, 2023).

Whereas other scholars have argued that there is a disjuncture when it comes to the application of Ubuntu philosophy to clinical social work (Mupedziswa *et al.*, 2019, pp.33-34), these publications (Chigangaidze, 2021b; 2022) offer a new insight on the relevance of Ubuntu in clinical social work practice. In other words, the publications form a defence to the notions that claim Ubuntu is limited in its application to clinical social work practice through analysing and theoretically synthesising the worldview with clinical theories in social work. One of the clinical theories utilised to show the relevance of Ubuntu in clinical social work is Arnold Lazarus' Multimodal Theory (Chigangaidze, 2022). This work contributed to two more additions to the dimensions of Multimodal assessments, and these include the need to account for person-natural environment relationships and the person-

spiritual relationships within the modalities of assessments. In furthering the defence, Chigangaidze and Chinyenze (2022) utilise a clinical theory (Transactional Analysis) to unearth the meaning of ‘a person is a person through other persons.’ Furthermore, Chigangaidze *et al* (2024) have considered the relevance of Ubuntu philosophy in disability, disaster management and public health concerns such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Hence, these publications form a strong defence on the application of Ubuntu philosophy in clinical social work and contribute to the body of knowledge with this realisation.

In exploring the essence of Ubuntu philosophy in clinical social work, these publications point to the connections of health and environmental issues. As an eco-philosophy, Ubuntu is discussed in connection to the concepts of Mother Earth and a clear link to the Pachamama concept (Chigangaidze, 2023b). Ubuntu philosophy is conceptually synthesised as a theory for analysis in view of the themes generated from Krings *et al.* (2020) literature review of Environmental Social Work articles (Chigangaidze, 2023a). The publications (Chigangaidze, 2023b; Chigangaidze and Dudzai, 2023) appreciate the exposition by Van Breda (2019) that Ubuntu is an eco-philosophy relevant to social work and further utilise this foundation to introduce constructs of Rights of Mother Earth (Rights of Nature) and Ubuntu philosophy, the positioning of the natural environment in the axiom, ‘a person is a person through other persons.’ Thus, the contributions of these publications are beyond clinical social work as they unearth new insights in deep Eco-spiritual social work.

Furthermore, these publications advance Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of no poverty, zero hunger, good health and wellbeing, quality education, clean water and sanitation, climate action, life on land and life below water, and peace. For example, the submissions link to Environmental Social Work through the rights perspective and other components. In these publications, Ubuntu is considered a philosophy that requires the current generation to hand over to the next generation a better planet (Chigangaidze, 2023a; 2023b). This thesis offers interconnections of Ubuntu philosophy to the Social Development approaches of Social Work by linking Ubuntu philosophy to Social Development Goals (SDGs).

Considering all the 11 articles in the publication lists, the contribution of these submissions in the body of knowledge of social work and other disciplines is clear. Firstly, the work forms a conviction that Ubuntu is interconnected to the very nature of social work as evidenced by the document analysis of the global definition of social work in view of the philosophy. Secondly, the publications advance that the values of social work can be comparatively analysed with the axiology of Ubuntu philosophy through the Humanistic-Existential perspective. Thus, positioning Ubuntu in the Humanistic-Existential school of thought. Thirdly, the submissions form a strong defence of Ubuntu’s application to clinical social work. Fourthly, the articles further the agenda of Environmental Social Work. Fifthly, the articles promote the advancement of Sustainable

Development Goals (SDGs). Sixthly, the articles advance the notions of decolonial social work by promoting Ubuntu philosophy an indigenous knowledge system and theory of social work.

As a combined body of works, the articles advance Value-Based Social Work practice, Human Rights Based Social Work, Decolonial Social Work, Anti-Racist Social Work, Spirituality in Social Work, Environmental Social Work, Sustainable Development Goals and Holistic Approaches to Social Work Practice. The body of works also cover a methodological gap in Ubuntu Social Work by means of a conceptual analysis of Ubuntu philosophy through the humanistic-existential approach.

1.3. Aim

The aim of this thesis is to expose Ubuntu philosophy as a Global South theoretical alternative to decolonise Social Work.

1.4. Research Question

Why is Ubuntu Philosophy a humanistic and theoretical alternative to decolonise social work?

1.5. Objectives

The objectives of this thesis are to:

- i) Analyse the relevance of Ubuntu philosophy through the Global Definition of Social Work.
- ii) Position Ubuntu philosophy in Humanistic-Existential Social Work.
- iii) Defend the application of Ubuntu philosophy in Clinical Social Work.
- iv) Evaluate the applicability of Ubuntu philosophy in Environmental Social Work.
- v) Expound on the utility of Ubuntu philosophy in promoting Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- vi) Advance Decolonial Social Work approaches by promoting Ubuntu philosophy (an indigenous knowledge system).

1.6. Summary

This introduction has briefly outlined the contributions to knowledge that offered by the 11 publications. These include theorising Ubuntu in the Humanistic Social Work domain, exploring Ubuntu through the Global Definition of Social Work, defending Ubuntu's application in Clinical Social Work, Environmental Social Work, Decolonial Social Work and Sustainable Development Goals.

2.0. Research Approach

This thesis aims to share the African worldview and its applicability in social work through philosophical methodologies. It has been noted that:

Philosophy involves the critical examination of an idea which men live with, such as the idea of justice, morality, and political, even the idea of god. Within this critical examination and investigation, the philosopher engages in conceptual analyses, logic, criticism, and synthesis of issues that are of paramount importance to the African needs and ways of life...Africana philosophy involves theoretical questions raised by critical engagements with ideas in African cultures and their hybrid, mixed, or creolized forms worldwide (Marumo and Chikale, 2018, p.11697).

Theoretical synthesis, conceptual analyses, logic, criticism and expositions are utilised in this thesis (collection of publications) to establish the relevance of Ubuntu philosophy in social work through the Humanistic perspective.

Theories in research are a constant source of inspiration to scholars (Lukka and Vinnari, 2014). Conceptual analysis typically draws upon theories, multiple concepts and literature that play differing roles (Jaakola, 2020). Essentially, Gilson and Goldberg (2015, p.128) as cited in Jaakola (2020) highlight that a good conceptual analysis can “bridge existing theories in interesting ways, link work across disciplines, provide multi-level insights and broaden our scope of thinking.” A conceptual analysis utilises a domain theory and a method theory. A domain theory is a specific set of principles, knowledge and ideas on a substantial topic area situated in a field or domain. On the other hand, method theory is a ‘theoretical lens’; a meta-level conceptual system for examining the primary subject(s), idea(s) and principle(s) of the domain theory at hand (Lukka and Vinnari, 2014). In this thesis, Ubuntu philosophy is utilised as a domain theory and Humanistic Social Work perspective as a method theory or theoretical lens. The next section explores the Humanistic Social Work perspective as a method theory for this thesis.

2.1. Humanistic social work perspective as a method theory

There is slim literature covering recent work in the field of humanistic social work (Stefaroi, 2016, Payne, 2011). Humanistic approaches are based on the work of psychotherapists such as Carl Rogers, Abraham Maslow, critical philosophers and sociologists (Day, 1987). The term ‘humanistic’ includes an authentic relationship to ‘myself, to other people, to nature and the universe’ (Moustakas, 1985, p.5). According to Rogers (1980; 1961) personality development can be viewed in terms of the development of self-concept, which, in turn is dependent on the individual’s interaction with others and the environment. Humanistic interventions are meant to be individualised, holistic and relational with the aim to promote and support human development (Hiatt, 2022).

Humanistic perspectives are grounded and defined by many concepts, ideas, themes, values such as empathy, love, human freedom, agency, human being, person, relationships, human nature/essence, happiness and dignity, self-determination, human development, spirituality, culture, and faith (Stefaroi, 2016). A Humanistic approach also accepts the concepts of *homo, sacra res homini* which consider a human being as an object of reverence in the eyes of other human being (Melé, 2016). The Humanistic school of thought acknowledges the concept of *homo integralis*, - which considers the human being to have several possible motivations; a wide rationality, emotions, freedom, personality, and character that is moulded by moral traits; capacity of learning, sociability, intentional interaction with natural environment; openness to transcendence, with spirituality and/or religiousness; capacity for moral discernment; and a deep tendency of personal growth, human flourishing and happiness (Melé, 2016). The 11 articles presented in this thesis are grounded on holism in assessments, the interaction of humans with their natural environment, an emphasis of humanistic values such as empathy, kindness and human rights in social work interventions.

Social work emerges from humanistic values and without these values, social workers become only social technocrats (O'Leary and Tsui, 2019). Humanistic theories emphasise the goodness of humans and their ability to be cooperative, constructive, search for meaning and possessing the ability to self-actualisation (Chigangaidze, 2021a). All social work values and practices are anchored on humanistic values and principles (O'Leary and Tsui, 2019; Stefaro, 2016). Humanistic practices should be responsive to people and promote relationships that enhance both individual and societal growth (Hiatt, 2022). Furthermore, the humanistic approach acknowledges that humans are aware, and their consciousness includes an awareness of oneself in the context of other people (Bland and DeRobertis, 2019). Humanistic approaches focus on the application of constructs such as empathy, compassion, genuineness, acceptance and other values that promote human growth (Hiatt, 2022; Rogers, 1961). As a third force to psychology, humanistic theoretical underpinnings on empathy, warmth and genuineness have been highly influential in social work interventions (Brown, 1998; Stefaro, 2016).

The humanistic approach is based on three ideas which are:

- a) Existential: emphasises on situated freedom, responsibility and experiential reflection (including phenomenology).
- b) Transpersonal domain: looks at the aspects of spirituality, transcendence and compassionate social action.
- c) Constructivist field: involves political consciousness, culture and ascribing personal meaning (Schneider *et al.* 2015).

Thus, this thesis will explore the relevance of Ubuntu philosophy in Social Work considering these ideas.

Essentially, it should be noted that humanistic social work endeavours to promote social justice, human rights, equality and freedom. It is embedded on the respect of human dignity as well as the sacredness of life (Chigangaidze, 2021a; Payne, 2011). In addition, Melé (2016) suggests that humanistic work promotes characteristics such as holism, human dignity, development, comprehensive knowledge, common good, stewardship-sustainability and relationality. All these characteristics cultivates cooperation, liberty, motivation, oneness and participation in social life (Chigangaidze, 2021a). Given the above understanding, this thesis will establish the relevance of Ubuntu philosophy in Social Work through the humanistic approach by reflecting and synthesising on the 11 articles outlined in the publication list.

Humanistic philosophy's methodology involves features such as complexity, inspiration, creativity, questioning, revelation, meditation, qualitative and interpretive approach, divergent thinking and introspection (Stefaroi, 2016). The inspiration of these publications /submissions is also rooted on the view that Ubuntu is a philosophy which is at the heart of the researcher through his positionality.

2.2. A note on positionality

The concept of positionality outlines a researcher's worldview and the position they adopt about the research task and its socio-political context. In addition, positionality covers the individual's epistemological and ontological assumptions (Holmes, 2020). The researcher acknowledges that he was nurtured in Southern Africa where the philosophy of Ubuntu emerged and is practiced. For over a generation (30 years), the researcher was enculturated through Ubuntu practices and epistemologies. Humanists need to understand culture or human beings from an insider perspective as well as an outsider's perspective (Hardy, 2016). The researcher writes as an insider-outsider analyst in that he is an African (an insider) but also Westernized through educational systems, migration, indirectly and historically through colonisation. Though the researcher writes as an insider, he acknowledges that there are elders and more advanced scholars with more information on the philosophy. Hence, the researcher writes humbly with colleagues in some cases and with openness. The researcher is also more oriented to the fields of clinical social work and the humanistic school of thought.

2.3. Dealing with personal biases

The first mechanism to deal with any personal biases that the researcher utilised was making use of the writings of other academics on Ubuntu philosophy to support points in the expositions and analysis. The researcher was saturated with such literature and continually reflected on academic sources. Secondly, as a safeguard from personal biases, co-authorship was also considered in some papers to ensure that there is mutual agreement, questioning of any biases and reflections on experiences. The use of peer reviews through the editorial processes of journals pave way for scrutiny of

any biases. The experiences of the researcher on both the Ubuntu worldview and the Western worldviews are a strength that balanced the discourse in this thesis.

2.4. Summary

This section has covered the research design based on Ubuntu methodologies, Humanistic methods and a discussion on positionality.

3. Contribution of published papers

This section will critically explore on the articles submitted and offer a synthesis of how the works form a coherent study. The section will also highlight the unique contribution of each part of the submitted articles to the body of knowledge.

3.1. Ubuntu philosophy to the Global Definition of Social Work

Chigangaidze, R.K *et al.* (2022) ‘Establishing the relevance of the Ubuntu philosophy in Social Work Practice: Inspired by the Ubuntu World Social Work Day, 2021 Celebrations and the IFSW and the IASSW’s. (2014). Global Definition of Social Work’ *International Social Work*, 66 (1), pp. 6-20.

The global definition of social work has been analysed through the Western, English-based theory and ontological frameworks (Ornallas *et al.*, 2016). There is a huge gap in literature on the analysis of the global definition of social work through indigenous knowledge systems that focuses on collectivism, development and interdependence such as Ubuntu philosophy. The above-mentioned article (Chigangaidze *et al.*, 2022) covers this gap in the knowledge base of social work by offering a document analysis through the African philosophy of Ubuntu. Chigangaidze *et al* (2022) also interlocks Ubuntu philosophy to the Global Agenda of Social Work and Social Development. O’Leary and Tsui (2024) have cited this text as exploring that Ubuntu philosophy can mobilise hope to overcome challenges while valuing diversity. Xiang and Leung (2022) further highlight that this text verifies the interconnection between Ubuntu philosophy and Social Work practice, based on its analysis of the definition of social work at a global level. Bell (2023) highlights that this text calls for the profession to evolve beyond overreliance on philosophies founded on divisiveness, hierarchies and dominance to ensure that social work is characterised more often as a catalyst of social change and more less as an agent of social control.

Inspired by the 2021 World Social Work theme, ‘Ubuntu: I am Because we are are-Strengthening Social Solidarity and Global Connections’ (IFSW, 2020), Chigangaidze *et al* (2022) call for social workers to network, unite and fight against corruption, health inequalities and social injustice. The paper establishes a strong foundation on the relevance of Ubuntu philosophy in constructs of social work such as academic discipline, practice-based, social change and development, social cohesion, empowerment and liberation of people. Essentially, the paper links Ubuntu philosophy to social work themes such as social justice and human rights, respecting diversities and inclusion of theories of social work, social sciences and humanities. It should be noted that Ubuntu has now become a theory of social work (van Breda, 2019).

Mohamed (2023) cites this text (Chigangaidze *et al.*, 2022) highlighting Ubuntu is relevant in all domains and methods of social work. Mugodhi (2023) agrees that this text aligns Ubuntu philosophy with social work practice, theories and perspectives such as the Person-in-the-Environment perspective, Ecological Systems Theory and several other approaches. Exploring

Ubuntu through the lens of the global definition of social work also illustrates a clear relevance of the worldview to the profession: both in its ontological sense and axiological base. However, the utility of Ubuntu philosophy in this article does not translate to undermining other indigenous knowledge systems but is an example of how these can be useful in advancing professional goals.

3.1.1. Emancipatory nature of social work and Ubuntu philosophy

The definition of social work highlights the importance of indigenous knowledge and respecting diversities thereby promoting anti-oppressive, multicultural and structural approaches to social work practice (Osborn and Karandikar, 2022; Ornellas *et al.*, 2016). Analysing the relevance of Ubuntu philosophy from the themes of respecting diversities and promoting indigenous knowledges promotes Anti-Racist Social Work and Anti-Oppressive Practices that emphasise tackling racism, oppression as a system of domination as well as promoting learning from black perspectives (Dominelli, 2018; Edwards, 2018; Sue, 2006). Ubuntu philosophy advances and is closely linked to the concepts of ‘philoxenia’ which is a Greek notion meaning to ‘love a stranger’ (Koenane, 2018). In its axiom, ‘I am Because we are’, Ubuntu philosophy promotes mutual respect of being human and acknowledges one’s humanity by and through other people. Thus, this publication (Chigangaidze *et al.*, 2022) which establishes the relevance of Ubuntu through the global definition of social work highlights the significance of the philosophy in Anti-Racist Social Work, Emancipatory practices, Multicultural Social Work and calls for cultural competence in practice.

The paper highlights Ubuntu’s promotion of empowerment and liberation of people through social and collective activities such as *nhimbe*, *ujamaa* and *harambe* (activities where individuals within the community unite, work together with a sole aim of offering psychosocial and economic support among its members) (Mayaka and Truell, 2021). This addresses aspects such as liberation of people from poverty through collective responsibility and social cohesion which are essential elements of the social work definition. Humanistic social work practices aim at empowerment, liberation of people, and promoting humane relationships in addressing life challenges (Stefaroi, 2016; Payne, 2011). Thus, from a humanistic social work perspective, Ubuntu has its place in the ontological features of the profession as it advances interventions that target socio-structural issues of poverty, violence, stigma and discrimination, corruption and health outbreaks in the community.

3.1.2. Addressing life challenges and enhancing well-being

The goal of addressing life challenges and enhancing well-being is inherent to the global definition of social work. Mayaka *et al* (2023) contend that Ubuntu-inspired social work helps professionals to more fully understand the approach of addressing people’s physical, psychosocial, economic, spiritual and environmental wellbeing. As a professional indigenous practice, Ubuntu social work is anchored on core values of respecting social justice and human rights, environmental rights, humanness, equality, human responsibilities and the role of spirituality in enhancing the quality of

life. Fundamentally, Ubuntu can be conceptualised as the ability to live and fulfil the highest truest expression of ourselves as human beings (Wilson and Williams, 2013). Thus, Ubuntu situates within the precepts of humanistic social work. According to Stefaroi (2016) the mission of humanistic social work is mainly summarised with the phrases such as:

- Diminishing the service users' suffering and distress.
- Increasing spiritual wellbeing.
- Personal and community development as well as obtaining the autonomy.
- Moral development and socio-human integration.

Thus, this article interlocks the global definition of social work to Ubuntu philosophy and highlights the significance of the African worldview in enhancing the quality of life of service users and the ethos of social work.

3.1.3. Global Definition of Social Work; Global mindfulness and Ubuntu philosophy

Chigangaidze *et al* (2022) acknowledge that the global community is off-track in dealing with climate change and is witnessing a generation of inequalities in human development, some of which have been exposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Again, the world is facing military conflicts, ethnic violence and a rise in corruption particularly in the Global South. Interlocking Ubuntu to the global definition of social work is a call for social workers to collaborate internationally in the fight against social inequalities that aggravate human suffering. Indeed, it is a call for social workers to collaboratively work towards addressing health inequalities exposed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The article highlights that Ubuntu, and the global definition of social work advance collective responsibility, social change, social development, social cohesion and empowerment of people through knowledge exchange. The article calls for social work educational institutions across the globe to partner and establish consortiums that offer pathways for multicultural learning and promote a sense of global connectedness thereby enhancing global mindfulness. Finally, the establishment of the relevance of Ubuntu philosophy in the global definition of social work calls for the respect of indigenous knowledge systems or local knowledge systems, valuing human dignity, community resources and sustainable development.

3.2 Positioning Ubuntu as a Humanistic philosophy.

Chigangaidze, R.K. (2021a) 'An exposition of humanistic-existential social work in light of ubuntu philosophy: Towards theorizing ubuntu in social work practice', *Journal of Religion and Spirituality in Social Work: Social Thought*, 40 (2), pp. 146-165.

For the first time in social work literature, Chigangaidze (2021a) positions Ubuntu philosophy as part of the humanistic school of thought while acknowledging that Ubuntu pre-dates the third force of psychology. Based on humanistic ideas, the article considers an exposition of humanistic-

existential social work in view of Ubuntu philosophy. The article considers themes such as self-awareness, self-determination, human dignity, holism, pursuit of social justice and human rights, motivation, social cohesion, spirituality and death as humanistic-existential features that are explored considering Ubuntu philosophy. One of the main contributions of this text is its emphasis on the view that Ubuntu promotes holism as it views the person as an integration of biological systems, psychological systems, spirituality, society and the environment (Otieno et al., 2024; Gotsis and Grimani, 2023). Moreover, Hutchison and Charlesworth (2023) are of the view that this text is a good example of a synthesis of one of the Global South theories (Ubuntu Philosophy) and the theories from Global North, for example the application of Ubuntu in Social Work through humanistic-existential theoretical perspective.

Chigangaidze (2021a) acknowledges that in Ubuntu philosophy, self-awareness is attained through others. One views *self* through others from the perspective of Ubuntu. From a Rogerian approach, humans are aware, and their consciousness includes an awareness of oneself in context of other people (Bland and DeRobertis, 2019). The article makes a significant contribution to the realisation that Ubuntu considers self-awareness though it emphasises on communality. A good example is the axiom of Ubuntu, ‘a person is a person through other people’, ‘I am because you are’ all of which emphasize on the individual is aware of their *being* in the view of other people. Self-awareness in social work is of great importance to the practitioner and service user. Self-awareness helps for the practitioner to avoid imposing self-beliefs on the service user. The paper calls for social workers to appreciate their inner resources, weaknesses and skills and how these can impact the helping process.

The article further argues that in Ubuntu philosophy and the Humanistic Approach, self-determination is an important concept to consider. Ubuntu views self-determination in the limitation of common good. For example, one’s decision should not limit community development. Furthermore, the article connects human dignity to the value systems of Humanistic Social Work and Ubuntu philosophy. Ubuntu calls for human dignity in the sense of valuing self and others in the same light of the humanistic-existential approach to social work. Self-neglect is an anti-thesis of Ubuntu, and it is the role of the community to ensure that the human dignity of the individual be restored.

Transpersonal psychology as a Humanistic ontology emphasises on spirituality and compassionate social action (Bland and DeRobertis, 2019, Schneider *et al.*, 2015). In this article (Chigangaidze, 2021a), spirituality, death and social connectedness are discussed in connection with Ubuntu philosophy and humanistic social work. Ubuntu relates to the past, present and future generations through spirituality and environmental issues (Van Breda, 2019). This paper argues that Ubuntu connects the living dead with the current generation and calls for cultural competence as well as humility in practice. Ubuntu philosophy has its place in Humanistic Social Work as evidenced by

its clear link to the humanistic ideas as witnessed in this article. Humanistic theory is also applicable in Clinical Social Work.

3.3 The application of Ubuntu in Clinical Social Work

Considerable work has been covered on the application of Ubuntu philosophy in child protection, social policy formulation, ethical decision-making, global social work and environmental social work (Mugumbate and Chereni, 2019; Mayaka and Truell, 2021; van Breda, 2019). There has been an argument that the application of Ubuntu philosophy in clinical social work is minimal as compared to other meso and macro levels of social work practice as indicated:

... the challenge of integration comes in the wake of applying ubuntu in the context of direct social work practice, since micro-practice emphasizes the essence of an individual. The micro-practice approach and conception differs diametrically from social work practice at the micro level, which is more consistent with the ubuntu philosophy. Micro-level services (such as clinical work) are often referred to as 'one-on-one' because of the emphasis on an individual (Netting *et al.*, 2017). Even so, opportunities for tapping into the philosophy of ubuntu do also exist at the micro level of social work practice (Mupedziswa *et al.*, 2019, p. 33).

The above clearly argues that Ubuntu's application to clinical social work is minimal because clinical social work is limited to micro level practice. However, the limitation of clinical social work to micro level practice in the above excerpt is problematic mainly because clinical social work is beyond the micro practice. The realisation that Ubuntu has opportunities to be applicable at micro level and beyond in Clinical Social Work practice are addressed in great depth in this submission (Chigangaidze, 2021b). Thus, Chigangaidze (2021b) defends that Clinical Social Work is applicable at micro, meso and macro levels. Hence, the African worldview of Ubuntu philosophy is applicable also to Clinical Social Work.

Clinical social work has a focus on emotional, mental and behavioural well-being of individuals, couples, families and groups. It emphasises a holistic approach to psychotherapy and the client's relationship with their environment (Thyer, 2017). Prevention of behavioural, emotional and mental problems is of essence in the multi-layered interventions of clinical social work. Prevention is considered at the micro, meso, exo, macro and chrono systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), as it is conceptualised as primary, secondary and tertiary. Furthermore, clinical social workers participate in interventions that facilitate equality and improved social conditions (Howard, 2018). The assumptions of this submission as opposed to those of Mupedziswa *et al* (2019) are that clinical social work is structural and not limited to the micro-level of practice, hence, Ubuntu philosophy is applicable to this domain of social work practice. Clinical social work advances human rights, looks at the clinical problems from an ecological systems approach and a social justice stance (Berthold, 2015; Martinez and Fleck-Henderson, 2014; Thyer, 2018). In clinical social work, the

Black Perspective is a philosophical lens to perceive and appreciate the social, political and historical context of the client and the clinical problem. That is to say, the ways of oppression and historical trauma are also considered in view of the lived experiences of historically disadvantaged groups (Howard, 2018).

As mentioned earlier, the African worldview of Ubuntu promotes social justice, human rights, holism, consideration of historical contexts and ecological approaches to dealing with life challenges. Clinical social work and Ubuntu advance humanistic principles of practice including empathy, acceptance, non-judgemental attitude and emotional warmth which are all therapeutic requirements in clinical interventions. Considering the above line of reasoning, the sections below utilise clinical social work theories and approaches (Biopsychosocial approach, Ecological systems theory, Multimodal approach and the Transactional analysis) to expose the relevance of Ubuntu in clinical social work. Thereafter, a critical reflection on how Ubuntu values benefit both the practitioner and service users is shown from a clinical social worker's view and a theologian's perspective.

3.3.1. The Biopsychosocial Approach and Ecological Systems theory

Chigangaidze, R.K. (2021b) 'Defending the African Philosophy of ubuntu and its place in clinical social work practice in mental health: The biopsychosocial and ecological systems perspectives', *Social Work in Mental Health*, 19 (4), 276-288.

Utilising biopsychosocial and ecological systems thinking, this paper defends the applicability of Ubuntu philosophy in clinical social work interventions in mental health. Wilson and Williams (2013) argue that a positive mental health model is embedded ecologically in an African cultural context. One of the key features of Ubuntu is survival which means that the ability to survive in the face of adversities through 'brotherhood and care' (Engelbrecht and Kasiram, 2012). Furthermore, Hlongwane *et al* (2018) highlight Ubuntu philosophy is ultimately concerned with understanding the meaning humanness, the features of human functioning and restoration of human development to resolve psychosocial problems. The article outlines that Ubuntu philosophy is applicable in clinical social work interventions in mental health at the micro, meso, exo and macro levels.

Additionally, Chigangaidze (2021b) highlights the relevance of Ubuntu in clinical diagnosis, family therapies, clinical advocacy, behaviour change and research in mental health. In evaluating the effects of a community-oriented therapeutic model on Ubuntu to improve mental health and wellbeing in post-genocide Rwanda; Jansen *et al* (2024) acknowledge that this text acknowledges Ubuntu way of life promotes mental health by encouraging social support, nurturing environments, and peaceful existence. In the same vein, Kainja *et al* (2022) appreciate this article considers Ubuntu as a philosophy that promotes the provision of casework, groupwork, family therapies as well as community-based interventions rooted on strength-based approaches in the rehabilitation process. In addition, Mokgolodi (2023) utilises this text to advance the need for contextual model of healing that considers a culturally sensitive healing environment, a trusting and authentic relationship be-

tween the client and the healer, a mutually agreed theoretical framework for healing, and procedures for change based on belief systems.

Values inherent in Ubuntu philosophy such as respecting human dignity, social justice, compassion and kindness guide clinical interventions at every level especially in fighting stigma and discrimination associated with the diagnosis of mental health. Chigangaidze (2021b) also emphasises the importance of integrating Ubuntu value systems in clinical research in mental health as the philosophy is interlinked with non-maleficence and beneficence. The values of research are to promote good quality of life and promoting community engagement which are at the centre of Ubuntu. The article significantly articulates on the relevance of family systems and community participation in mental health interventions. Wilson and Williams (2013) argue that Ubuntu has demonstrated that through extended family structures and family responsibilities to help, develop a sense of emotional security, love for, and concern about kin and non-kin members.

Chigangaidze (2021b) outlines the weaknesses of Ubuntu philosophy in view of the clinical social work interventions in mental health. The article points out that there is no diagnostic manual based on the philosophy of Ubuntu in mental health and calls for Ubuntu-inspired clinical social workers to collaborate in drafting an assessment tool that is congruent with the philosophy. Even in the face of its weaknesses, an analytical discussion of the values of Ubuntu philosophy reflects that the worldview is intrinsically relevant to clinical social work practice in mental health as it reinforces the biopsychosocial and ecological systems way of thinking. Ubuntu is holistic in nature and considers modalities of behaviour, affect, sensations, imagery, interpersonal relationships, cognition, drugs/ biology, spirituality and the person-physical relationships modality. The Humanistic school of thought acknowledges the concepts of *homo integralis*- which considers the human being to have several possible motivations; a wide rationality, emotions, freedom, personality, and character that is shaped by moral traits; capacity of learning, sociability, intentional interaction with natural environment; openness to transcendence, with spirituality and/ or religiosity; capacity for moral discernment; and a deep tendency of personal growth, human flourishing and happiness (Melé, 2016). Thus, by considering holism in Ubuntu based assessments, Chigangaidze (2021b) situates the philosophy in the Humanistic perspective. Having considered the applicability of Ubuntu in clinical social work through biopsychosocial approach and ecological systems thinking, this thesis will now reflect on Ubuntu philosophy in the eyes of a multimodal approach to clinical assessments.

3.3.2. Ubuntu and the Multimodal Approach in Social Work

Chigangaidze, R.K. (2022) 'Utilising ubuntu in social work practice: ubuntu in the eyes of the multimodal approach', *Journal of Social Work Practice: Psychotherapeutic Approaches in Health, Welfare and the Community*, 36 (3), pp. 291-301.

Humanistic social work has a special attitude towards man, society and social practices, generating the focus of interest on individuality, person and personality, on micro- community, meso relationships, on creativity, spirituality and on human resources in the social practices and activities (Stefaroi, 2016). Humanistic philosophy can also utilise intuitive methods of inquiry to bridge the subjective and the objective in the experiencing person to honour the richness of human experience in its multimodal levels: physiological, imaginal, cognitive, affective, individual, group, social, political, artistic and spiritual etc. (Bland and DeRobetis, 2019). Chigangaidze (2022) explores the African philosophy of Ubuntu in the eyes of the Multimodal Approach. The African worldview of Ubuntu has gained momentum in various fields of the helping professions and in clinical assessments as it promotes ethical decision making and holistic approaches (Ewuoso and Hall, 2019; Hlongwane *et al.*, 2018). In the view of Arnold Lazarus' multimodal approach which is based on seven modalities known on the acronym BASIC ID (Behaviour, Affect, Sensations, Imagery, Cognition, Interpersonal relationships and Drugs / Biology), the philosophy of Ubuntu adds two values to the approach which are: the person-physical environment relationship and the spiritual relationship. In exploring the modality of Behaviour, Ubuntu philosophy promotes actions or behaviours that enhance social solidarity, unity, the quality of life and hope. As a worldview, Ubuntu is against behaviours that include xenophobia, selfishness, violence, stealing and any other actions that contribute to human suffering. Affect-wise, Ubuntu is against rage and all forms of aggression but promotes pleasant emotions such as love, creativity, laughter, empathy, musical performances that enhance mood, temperance and good quality dialogue.

Chigangaidze (2022) emphasises the importance of sensations in assessments. Ubuntu acknowledges the importance of sensations in the healing process as evident in the concept of *umbellini* (a gut feeling experienced by the empathetic healer during intervention usually signifying that healing is taking place). In addition, the modality of imagery is of great importance in Ubuntu as witnessed by the Bantu rock paintings in the caves. Thus, one can argue that Ubuntu promotes art as a therapeutic intervention. The paper also appreciates that Ubuntu considers modalities such as cognition, interpersonal relationships and drug/ biology in interventions. However, the publication clearly points out two weaknesses of Lazarus Arnold in view of Ubuntu philosophy. Firstly, the approach does not account for the person-physical environment modality. Secondly, the approach never mentions the spiritual modality.

3.3.2.1 A focus on spirituality and the person-physical environment

Spirituality is culturally formed and informed (Marumo and Chakale, 2018). Ubuntu is an ethical theory in which the natural are united with the spiritual. This theoretical perspective is based on a totemic system in which a human being ought to see the 'self' as related and interconnected within the spiritual world on the vertical line, as well as other non-human species and the wider environment on the horizontal line (Ewuoso and Hall, 2019). Ubuntu highlights that the healer is a mediator between the supra-natural source of illness and the patient (van Norren, 2022). Considering the

role of spirituality in recovery and healing promotes holistic care. The role of spirituality and person-physical environment are intertwined in the African philosophy of Ubuntu as highlighted:

The therapeutic significance of experiencing the immensity and grandeur of nature lies in the opportunity to shift perspective from personal to a more expansive perspective on life. Personal circumstances and stories then may be perceived from the larger context of life, providing meaning to life's hardships while eliciting focus on issues larger than oneself (social and environmental) ...Such experiences resonate with psychological notions that emphasize the importance of spirituality as nurturing the human desire to find meaning within the reality of our own mortality (Piedmont, 1999) and provide answers to existential questions about our place and purpose in the big scheme of the world... (Naor and Mayseless, 2019, pp.14-15).

Thus, spirituality and the natural environment connect people to their very purpose on the universe and creates pathways for stress relief, a search for meaning and an understanding of mortality.

Ubuntu-inspired social work practice accepts that through spiritual beliefs, there are connections of hope, optimism, resilience, perseverance and strengths, while religious activities such as prayers provide a sense of 'communality' in dealing with problems (Tusasiirwe, Nabbumba and Kansiime, 2023). Additionally, Ubuntu practice is governed by a humanity that appreciates the spiritual essence of self and others which is a prime mover in the universe (Washington, 2010). In support of these claims, it is emphasized that:

Ubuntu, as indigenous knowledge, contains consideration about the physical environment, especially as it relates to the social environment of humans and with regards also to the interaction between the two. This is because Ubuntu is a cosmological notion (among other numerous cosmologies) that is based on the ways that the spiritual and the material aspects of our existence are connected (Topidi, 2022, p.52).

Hence, Ubuntu infuses humans with a consciousness of wholeness and interrelatedness on each other and their natural surroundings, recognising a spiritual level of being (Van Norren, 2014).

The idea behind the inclusion of the two modalities (person-physical environment relationship and spirituality) is to ensure that the multimodal assessment is holistic in addressing clinical needs thereby improving the quality of people's well-being. It should be stated that the inclusion of such modalities in social work assessments promotes mindfulness, consideration of cultural needs and the provision of a therapeutic milieu that fosters on hope, love, peace and unity. Thus, Chigangaidze (2022) contributes to the body of knowledge in clinical social work, spiritual social work and other domains such as nursing, mental health, health promotion, cultural studies to mention but a few. Spirituality in Ubuntu connects also to the connection an individual has with the ancestors,

and how ancestors contribute to one's becoming as will be explored in the next paper through transgenerational scripts.

3.3.3. Ubuntu's axiom and Transactional Analysis

Chigangaidze, R.K. and Chinyenze, P. (2022) 'What it means to say, 'a person is a person through other persons': Ubuntu through humanistic-existential lenses of transactional analysis', *Journal of Religion & Spirituality in Social Work: Social Thought*, 41 (3), pp. 280-295.

Chigangaidze and Chinyenze (2022) utilise theoretical analysis of the meaning of Ubuntu's axiom 'a person is a person through other persons' and its significance to clinical social work. The theory utilised to analyse the axiom is Transactional Analysis which is a system and personality theory for understanding human behaviour which was developed by Eric Berne. Transactional Analysis is regarded as a Humanistic approach (van Rijn, 2019). Chigangaidze and Chinyenze (2022) emphasise that Ubuntu philosophy, Social Work and Transactional Analysis have humanistic-existential features such as the emphasis of honesty, authenticity and their most emotional as well as social manifestations in encounter and intimacy (Berne, 1966; Letseka, 2012). Thus, this paper connects the relevance of Ubuntu philosophy to Clinical Social Work by means of a clinical theory (Transactional Analysis). In so doing, it gives the world a better understanding of Ubuntu's axiom from a Transactional Analysis point of view, at least as a starting point.

Ubuntu philosophy is connected to Transactional Analysis and Social Work by their unit of analysis which are 'transaction' and their significance in interventions as well as understanding human behaviours. Transactions express the way people show their concern for others and how they authenticate each other through human demeanour (Berne, 1966). Humanistic management and social work also accept the concepts of *homo, sacra res homini* which consider a human being as an object of reverence in the eyes of the other being (Melé, 2016). Ubuntu is about authenticity, seeing one's humanness through others and accepts it is through transactions that one can show that he or she has Ubuntu/ Hunhu/ Botho (humanness). One's transaction is relevant to be a unit of analysis in both Social Work and Ubuntu philosophy. Thus, from their very names (Transactional Analysis, Social Work and Ubuntu philosophy), through the lens of humanistic-existential approach, this article clearly expatiates their connections and relevance to each other.

3.3.3.1. Ubuntu axiom and stroking

Eric Berne defines the term 'stroke' as 'a unit of human recognition' and can be either positive or negative (Solomon, 2003). The paper illustrates the importance of human recognition in the Ubuntu axiom, 'a person is a person through other people [who stroke him or her]' and emphasises it is these strokes that also contribute to the authenticity of humanness. The emphasis is on stroking as it is 'the unit of human recognition' corresponds with Ubuntu in that one recognises his or her humanness in connection with others or through others. For example, eating is recognised as a stroke.

Mukuka (2013) posits that Ubuntu *kulya* meaning that for one to be able to exhibit Ubuntu he or she should have eaten. Feeding a baby or any human being is a recognition of humanness. An infant though a person can never become fully human without the strokes such as love, feeding and meeting physiological, emotional and other needs. Ubuntu's worldview advances the contributions of parents, grandparents, community and the environment that need to be credited for stroking people in the process of them 'becoming'. In so doing, Chigangaidze and Chinyenze (2022) link Ubuntu to clinical social work interventions that emphasise in empathy, child development and understanding human behaviour. From a Humanistic Social Work perspective, human consciousness always involves the awareness of self in the context of the other (Stefaroi, 2016). Thus, 'stroking' which is a concept of Transactional Analysis is linked to Ubuntu's axiom, 'a person is a person through other people' which illustrates the relevance of Ubuntu from a Humanistic Social Work perspective as highlighted in this paper.

3.3.3.2. Connecting the past, present and future: Transgenerational scripts

The paper promotes the need for clinical social workers to connect the past, present and future interventions. It advances the consideration of transgenerational scripting which focuses on the unconscious systematic patterns that people repeat in families, groups and organisations. The paper advances the use of genograms in assessments to tap into historical contexts of the service users. The current generation, through Ubuntu philosophy, is connected to the past (ancestors) and to future generations (van Breda, 2019). This implies that Ubuntu philosophy and Transactional Analysis acknowledge the importance of the chronosystem from Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems approach by giving reference to the connections of the past, present and future. In the same vein, Humanistic Social Work acknowledge that people are aware that they can cause future events and seek meaning, value and creativity (Stefaroi, 2016, p. 49). It should be noted that Ubuntu emphasizes on the positive orientation towards the future despite a 'doomed' past.

3.3.4. Ubuntu values and their clinical benefits

Chigangaidze, R.K. and Chikanya, N. (2023) 'Ubuntu Social Work benefits both the Practitioner and Service Users: An axiological reflection of a Clinical Social Worker and Theologian', in Mayaka, B., Uwhangana, C. and van Breda, A.D, *The Ubuntu Practitioner: Social Work Perspectives*, Rheinfelden: International Federation of Social Workers, pp. 171-188.

The values of Ubuntu have been integrated in social work to promote ethical practice (Mugumbate and Nyanguru, 2013). This chapter is grounded on humanistic values of kindness, forgiveness, social justice, human rights, empathy, compassion, social connectedness and spirituality. It explores how these values can benefit both the practitioner and the service user. The chapter integrates the perspectives of a Clinical Social Worker and a Theologian in exploring the benefits of Ubuntu values. The paper argues that social work, since its inception has promoted Ubuntu values such as

kindness, compassion, empathy and social connectedness. Kindness is associated with enhanced feelings of happiness and wellbeing (Patel, 2019). Humanistic theories are also integrated in the debate, for instance, empathy is explored from the Rogerian approach as a pre-requisite condition for therapy. In addition, Maslow's hierarchy of needs gives emphasis to belongingness which is an attribute of social connectedness, a value that has been linked to sustainability, health, well-being and longevity. Social connectedness protects against social isolation, neglect and promotes social participation, inclusion and networking which are integral in Ubuntu philosophy.

To its end, the chapter calls for social workers to tap into Ubuntu values, promote compassion-driven interventions, social connectedness, kindness, human rights, empathy and social justice in practice. The promotion of such values helps in ensuring a better tomorrow which is a result of thinking of one's pain as the pain of the other. Ubuntu values are integrated into the humanistic scope and advanced as prerequisites for a therapeutic milieu, hence, this paper makes a unique contribution to value-based practice from an indigenous knowledge system and a humanistic perspective.

3.3.5. Ubuntu for people with disabilities

Chigangaidze, R.K *et al.* (2024) 'The relevance of Ubuntu in Disability: A political, economic, social, technological, legal and environmental analysis', in Mutanga, O, *Ubuntu Philosophy and Disabilities in Sub-Saharan Africa*. First Edition. London: Routledge, pp. 18-29.

The above-mentioned article utilises PESTEL analysis (political, economic, social, technological, legal and environmental analysis) to discuss the relevance of Ubuntu in Disability. Politically, the article places welfare responsibility to political leaders to implement policies and services that are service user friendly for people with disabilities. It calls for the inclusion of people with disabilities in political decision making. Economically, the article argues that Ubuntu philosophy promotes community projects that support income generating projects run by and for people with disabilities. Socially, Ubuntu respects the need for social connectedness, hospitality and acceptance of all human beings in all shapes and forms. The article emphasises that humanness would need to transcend ability and similarity in bodily features (Ngomane, 2019). The article also utilises lyrical analysis of Ubuntu-inspired songs that fight stigma and discrimination targeting people with disabilities. Furthermore, the article explores that Ubuntu has entered the world of technology. Ubuntu is about enhancing the quality of life. Technologically, Ubuntu promotes the use of aids to ensure that people with disabilities engage in communities and participate. Legally, it is taboo to abuse people with disabilities as they are divine. Environmentally, Ubuntu enhances the prevention of environmental harm that cause disabilities. As mentioned before in previous sections, Ubuntu connects the environment with the clinical. The worldview of Ubuntu argues that if the environment is

not treatment healing, recovery or rehabilitation may not take place. The paper advocates for environment that are accessible to people with disabilities. Thus, the paper contributes to a comprehensive PESTEL analysis of the relevance of Ubuntu in disability that endeavours to advocate for an improved way of life for people with disabilities.

3.3.6. Ubuntu and COVID-19 pandemic

Chigangaidze, R.K *et al.* (2022) 'Ubuntu philosophy as a humanistic-existential framework for the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic', *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 62(3), pp. 319-333.

Chigangaidze *et al* (2022) offers a humanistic-existential framework that can be utilised to fight the COVID-19 pandemic. It appreciates that COVID-19 pandemic is beyond the biomedical approach and will require an ecological systems approach to manage its effects. The article illustrates Ubuntu's concern for human welfare during and after the pandemic. It highlights that Ubuntu fosters on environmental health and personal hygiene, food securing, team spirit, generosity, holistic service provision, health promotion, social justice and human rights. The article also calls upon colleagues and all people to be considerate of others during and after the pandemic. The article interlocks social work practice to humanitarian issues and the need to enhance people's welfare in the face of the pandemic. It rebukes egotism and encourages considering the welfare of all people in the face of health adversities such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

In a systematic review, Costa and Ntsobi (2023) pinpoint this article shows that core values of Ubuntu theory such as human rights, human dignity, kindness and communality may assist in implementing effective public health programmes. Moreover, Nyandeni *et al* (2024) argue that this text considers how Ubuntu can be utilised during the COVID-19 pandemic as it fosters team spirit, comprehensive provision of services, and dealing with socioeconomic inequalities. Besides, Chowdhury *et al* (2023) highlights this text as one of the leading texts of COVID-19 pandemic and Ubuntu philosophy. In addition, Costa and Ntsobi (2023) also highlight the text extensively covers the application of Ubuntu philosophy in health care as it underlines humanity, interdependence and interconnectedness of the individual and the community. Mukoma *et al* (2023) underline this text promotes the use of Ubuntu philosophy in times of disaster by emphasising cooperation rather than competition, and concern for others in the prevention of infection. Thus, the contribution of this text to the body of knowledge is beyond social work as it explores public health and value systems in disaster management.

3.4. Ubuntu and Environmental Social Work

Environmental Social Work is an approach to social work practice that is founded on ecological justice principles and involves the creative application of social work skills in addressing issues concerning the natural environment, addressing and mitigating environmental degradation and

climate change as well as their impacts (Ramsay and Boddy, 2017). This section will consider the applicability of Ubuntu philosophy in Environmental Social Work.

3.4.1. The conceptual analysis of Environmental Social Work through Ubuntu.

Chigangaidze, R.K. (2023) 'Environmental Social Work through the African philosophy of Ubuntu: A conceptual analysis', *International Social Work*, 66 (6), pp. 1845-1856.

This article utilises the themes emerging from a review of literature on Environmental Social Work from 1991-2015 articles (Krings *et al.*, 2020) as a domain theory or a theory for analysis. As argued, philosophical methods include conceptual analysis, data analysis and synthesis (Marumo and Chikale, 2018), this paper establishes the relevance of Ubuntu philosophy through conceptual analysis, particularly, theoretical synthesis. The unique contribution utilises 10 Environmental Social Work themes to unpack Ubuntu's relevance to the domain. While van Breda (2019) introduces Ubuntu as an Eco philosophy in Social Work, this article reinforces the introduction by means of offering evidence from a thorough conceptual analysis. The paper advances van Breda's view through theoretical synthesis of Ubuntu from the following ten themes that emerge from a systematic review of Environmental Social Work by Krings and colleagues:

- animals, human-animal, human-environmental, or human- nonhuman relationships.
- Conservation or access to nature, wildlife and greenspaces.
- Climate change, global warming, or environmental degradation.
- Food (in) security and food (in) justice.
- Natural disasters or environmental crises.
- Eco-spirituality and eco-centric values.
- Industrial pollution, environmental hazards or toxins.
- Natural resources.
- Sustainable development, technologies, or policies, macro-level interventions.
- Sustainable practices (Krings *et al.*, 2020).

In exploring these ten themes, the paper gives reference to Ubuntu constructs of Ukama (relatedness), totemic ancestorhood and cooperative practices of promoting food security run by the chiefs (zunde ramambo). Emphasis is also given on growing drought resilient crops, fighting corruption in environmental issues, ensuring community development and the need to hand over a better planet to the future generations.

Social Work interventions should address the interconnections between 'nature and people' (O'Leary and Tsui, 2021: 159). The article evidently establishes that Ubuntu philosophy can offer a theoretical umbrella for Environmental Social Work. Mushunje and Matsika (2023) highlight an indigenous model of Environmental Social Work in Africa grounded on this text. Balestrery (2023) emphasise this article interconnects Ubuntu to social justice, human rights and sustainable

development as the worldview calls for people to unite in their responsibility of protecting the environment and ensuring food security. As an eco-philosophy, Ubuntu can advance the field of Environmental Social Work. However, it should be noted that the application of Ubuntu philosophy in Environmental Social Work does not undermine the relevance of other philosophies or Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) in this domain.

3.4.2. Eco-spirituality and Rights of Nature

Chigangaidze, R.K. (2023b) 'The Environment has rights: Eco-spiritual social work through Ubuntu Philosophy and Pachamama. A commentary', *International Social Work*, 66 (4), pp. 1059-1063. [https:// doi.org/10.1177/00208728211056367](https://doi.org/10.1177/00208728211056367).

and

Chigangaidze, R.K and Dudzai, C. (2023) 'Positioning the natural environment in Ubuntu's axiom 'Umuntu Ngumuntu Ngabantu': An Ecospiritual Social Work Perspective' in Mayaka, B., Uwihangana, C., and Van Breda, A.D., *The Ubuntu Practitioner: Social Work Perspectives*. Rheinfelden: International Federation of Social Workers, pp. 156-170.

Social workers are expected to care for the environment by higher authorities, including professional associations, the United Nations and for some, God (Ramsay and Boddy, 2017). Invigorated by the eco-spiritual approach, these papers connect Ubuntu philosophy to the Rights of Nature debates and social work practice. When investigating the relationship between nature and humans, and between humans and humans, Ubuntu (humanness) is the tangible form of Ukama (relatedness) (Terblanché-Greef, 2019). In eco-spiritual social work, the indigenous people believe that land and nature are inseparable and that spiritual, social and material are inextricably intertwined (Gray, Coates and Hethrington, 2007). Furthermore, Klemmer and McNamara (2019) propose that the Mother Earth is more than raw materials and that natural ecology poses a sacred and fundamental value outside its utility to people. The above publications enhance the reverence of the environment and situates the environment in Ubuntu's axiom of 'a person is a person through other people'. From a humanistic school of thought, the idea of *homo, sacra res homini* which consider man as an object of reverence in the eyes of other man is also expanded to the natural environment as it has rights and is personified if viewed in the spirit of Ubuntu.

Other scholars have personified the natural environment by utilising the philosophy of Ubuntu in Social Work and other fields (Mbiti, 2015, van Breda, 2019). This article further extends the scope of personifying the environment to connect the discourse to the rights of nature debate. Social work is a profession centred on human rights and should seriously consider the rights of our cousins, the Mother Earth. Ubuntu connects social work to rights beyond human and promotes that humans respect the natural environment as a divine being, our mother and cousin.

3.4.2.1 Rights of Nature (RON)

Humans are not the only beings capable of having rights because non-humans also have rights which corresponds to duties on our part (Brei, 2013). The articles advance that by personifying the environment, Ubuntu acknowledges that the natural environment has rights and should be treated with respect as it is seen as our cousin and a mother. The articles correspond with the view of United Nations that:

We recognize that the planet Earth and its ecosystems are our home and that ‘Mother Earth’ is a common expression in a number of countries and regions, and we note that some countries recognize the rights of nature in the context of promotion of sustainable development. We are convinced that in order to achieve a just balance among the economic, social and environmental needs of the present and future generations, it is necessary to promote harmony in nature. (United Nations 2012, p. 10).

Thus, the papers connect also to social development issues while addressing the Rights to Nature debate. Thus, the Rights of Nature are interconnected to conservation and meeting the needs of present and future generations. Van Breda (2019) supports that Ubuntu philosophy when considered considering social work practice can advance the concepts of social development as it fosters on the connection between the past, present and future generations.

3.4.2. 2. Ecofeminism

In advancing the Rights of Nature, the papers connect to ecofeminism and eco-spirituality in social work. Ecofeminism values femininity and the interrelation of the individual with the self, others and Mother Earth. It fights against the oppression of women and nature (Klemmer and McNamara, 2019). According to Besthorn and McMillen (2002) the concerns of ecofeminist spirituality include the resacralization of nature and an emphasis on the inherent ‘divine feminine’ in all living beings (Besthorn and McMillen, 2002). Ubuntu philosophy as mentioned before, views the natural environment as Mother Earth taking a feminist approach. The oppression of nature is therefore interconnected to the dominance of women symbolically. The exploitation of women is also seen as the dominance of nature.

3.4. Summary

This section has synthesized eleven articles and illustrated their coherence. The objectives of the thesis are also explored in this synthesis. Clinical issues are also integrated into environmental social work concerns through the philosophy of Ubuntu. The African worldview of Ubuntu has also been positioned within the humanistic school of thought in this section.

4. A synthesis of published papers

In exploring the relevance of Ubuntu philosophy in Social Work through the Humanistic Social Work perspective, the following themes run through several papers such that they are overarching ideas pulling together the whole body of knowledge. These themes are Value-based Social Work; Human Rights Based Social Work; Holistic Approaches to Practice; Environmental Social Work; Decolonial Social Work and Anti-Racial Social Work Practices. Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are also discussed as emerging in many of the papers in the quest to highlight the relevance of Ubuntu philosophy in Social Work practice.

4.1. Value-Based Social Work Practice

Social Work emerges from values and is a value-based profession as it strives for pursuing the humanistic values (O'Leary and Tsui, 2019). Social work's commitment to the vulnerable and oppressed people, individual wellbeing, and social justice which are all based on the profession's value system (Reamer, 2006 as cited in Chechak, 2015). Without commitment to values, social work professionals will become only social technocrats (O'Leary and Tsui, 2019). Nevertheless, social work still functions in a colonial context, influenced by Western values, principles and ethics (Udah *et al.*, 2025). The body of works highlight that self-determination, solely, is not an optimum value for social work without the need to realise the humanness and reverence in the other person.

Research has shown that Ubuntu philosophy aligns with the values of social work such as dignity and social justice (Udah *et al.*, 2025). It is important to note that the Code of Ethics of Social Workers in Zimbabwe emphasises that Unhu/ Ubuntu upholds values of empathy, human rights and human dignity. In the list of core values, the Code includes Ubuntu among social justice, human rights, competence, diversity and respect of human relationships (Mugumbate and Nyanguru, 2013). In this vein, Chigangaidze *et al* (2023) emphasize social work values such as human rights and social justice from an Ubuntu worldview. In addition, Chigangaidze (2021a) explores self-determination, human dignity, spirituality as well as pursuing social justice and human rights which are all anchored on the axiological base of social work. Chigangaidze and Chikanya (2023) offer an axiological reflection on Ubuntu Social Work benefits to both the practitioners and service users from the Clinical Social Worker's and Theologian's perspectives. Ubuntu-inspired Social Work is rooted on values and virtues of social justice, social connectedness, kindness and empathy which are linked to social work ethics. Social work values such as service, social justice, importance of human relationships, integrity and competence are all integrated in the above-mentioned values explored from an Ubuntu perspective. For example, Ubuntu's axiom 'a person is a person through other people' emphasises human relationships, service, social justice, human rights and other values relevant to social work practice (Chigangaidze, 2021a). Beyond social work, these works also extend to influence Humanistic Leadership through its emphasis on the importance of human

relationships (Gotsis and Grimani, 2024) which is also part of social work values. Thus, this body of works promote Value-Based Social Work Practice from an Ubuntu worldview.

4.2. Human Rights Based Social Work.

Considered together, these works advance Human Rights Based Social Work Practices. For example, focusing on Environmental Social Work (Chigangaidze, 2023b; 2022; Chigangaidze and Dudzai, 2023) promotes the human right to a healthy and sustainable environment. Exploring Ubuntu philosophy as a relevant worldview to addressing challenges associated with the COVID-19 pandemic highlights the need to promote food security, social justice, peace and health promotion (Chigangaidze *et al.*, 2022). In this context, emphasising the promotion of food security translates to the human right to adequate food and nutrition. The human right to attain physical and mental health relates to the defence of Ubuntu's application in clinical social work settings and challenges such as mental health and pandemics (Chigangaidze, 2021b; Chigangaidze *et al.*, 2022). Furthermore, Chigangaidze (2022) promotes the attainment of the highest level of physical and mental health by encouraging multimodal approaches to clinical assessments. Thus, these works contribute to Human Rights Based Social Work practices from an Ubuntu worldview. Human rights are essential elements of Humanistic Social Work (Stefaroi, 2016). Hence, integrating human rights and Ubuntu-inspired Social Work also advances the notion of positioning Ubuntu in Humanistic Social Work. However, it should be noted that Ubuntu philosophy pre-existed before Humanistic Social Work but for the purposes of theorising Ubuntu in Social Work, it is safe to position it under the third force of psychology at least as a starting point.

The articles (Chigangaidze, 2023b; Chigangaidze and Dudzai, 2023) point out that social work is a profession rooted in human rights and all students should be schooled in a basic human rights approach. The concept of rights is extended to nature which is an issue that is usually neglected in the field of social work. The paper offers a pathway, through indigenous knowledge systems such as Ubuntu philosophy, for Environmental Social Workers to consider extending the rights-based practice beyond human beings and consider the rights of our 'cousins'. Nwosiri (2017) accepts that Environmental Social Work has been dominated by Western philosophies that tend to oppress indigenous knowledge systems. By means of exploring the Rights of Nature through Ubuntu Philosophy, the article offers to the profession some ways through which the environment should be considered from human rights perspectives as it embodies the Mother Earth. In advancing the Rights of Nature, Ubuntu also promotes the human rights to clean, healthy, and sustainable environment.

As emphasised through the connection of the past, present and future generations; Ubuntu philosophy also promotes the rights of all these generations. The past generations when considered through Ubuntu philosophy are part of the Environment and their rights must be respected. Unborn babies are also considered to have rights (van Breda, 2019). The rights of future generations are

upheld through Ubuntu as it is essential to leave a better Earth to the coming generations than how the forefather handed it to us. Taking care of the environment is part of respecting the rights of the living dead from an Ubuntu perspective. Thus, preservation of nature is not only an act of Environmental Social Work, Sustainable Development, but also Human Rights Based Social Work.

4.3. Holistic Approaches to Practice

The Humanistic school of thought as mentioned earlier acknowledges the concept of *homo integralis*, - which considers the human being to have several possible motivations and from a holistic approach (Melé, 2016). Social workers recognise the importance of wholeness of persons and their processes of development. The International Association of Schools of Social Work (2018) 'Global Social Work Statement on Ethical Principles' 7.1 as cited in Opatrný and Gehrig (2021, p. 81):

Social workers recognize the biological, psychological, social, cultural, and spiritual dimensions of people's lives, and understand and treat all people as whole persons. Such recognition is used to formulate holistic assessments and interventions, with full participation of people, organizations, and communities that social workers engage with.

Emphasis in clinical social work is given to holistic assessments. In defending the application of Ubuntu philosophy in Clinical Social Work, clinical theories and models such as the Biopsychosocial Model (Engel, 1977), the Multimodal Theory (Lazarus, 1989), Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), Transactional Analysis (Berne, 1966) and Humanistic Theories are utilised in exploring the relevance of the African philosophy in this domain (Chigangaidze, 2021a; 2021b; 2022; Chigangaidze and Chinyenze, 2022). In the same vein, Chigangaidze and Chinyenze (2022) agree that historic factors should be considered in assessments as Van Breda (2019) argues Ubuntu interconnects the past, present and future generations. Moreover, the works explore the relevance of Ubuntu in different clinical issues such as mental health (Chigangaidze 2021b; 2022), COVID-19 pandemic (Chigangaidze *et al.*, 2022) and Disabilities (Chigangaidze *et al.*, 2024). The application of Ubuntu in Clinical Social Work practice encourages assessing the impact of environment and spirituality on wellbeing (Chigangaidze, 2022). However, there is lack of ubuntu-inspired Diagnostic tools like the Diagnostic Statistical Manuals in Social Work practice.

4.4 Environmental Social Work

The connection between Environmental Social Work and Clinical Social Work, from Ubuntu worldview is emphasised by two modalities of wellbeing: the physical environment and spirituality (Chigangaidze, 2022). Analysing the works from Humanistic Social Work perspectives, Environmental Social Work as discussed in these works (Chigangaidze, 2023a; Chigangaidze and Dudzai, 2023; Chigangaidze, 2023b) promotes the construct of *homo, sacra res homini* which is to view another human being with reverence. The natural environment is personified as *Mother Earth*

and viewed with reverence. Eco-spirituality, Rights to Nature and sustainable development are discussed in the context of Ubuntu philosophy. Mushunje and Matsika (2023) highlight an indigenous model of Environmental Social Work in Africa grounded on these texts. Balestrery (2023) emphasise this article integrates Ubuntu to social development, social justice and human rights as the worldview calls for teamwork in protecting the environment and ensuring food security. Developing from Van Breda (2018) Ubuntu-inspired eco-spiritual social work, these works extend the debate to the Rights of Nature and concepts of Decolonial Social Work as well as Sustainable Development as shall be discussed below.

The philosophy of Ubuntu invites us to interrogate the nature of embodiment by redefining what is meant by the concept of ‘we’ to include other species of life and the environment (Taiwo, 2022). The articles (Chigangaidze, 2023b; Chigangaidze and Dudzai, 2023) examine a deep eco-spiritual stance to explain the connection of Rights to Nature and Ubuntu philosophy. As discussed, ukama/relatedness is not only limited to the human-human relationships but extends to the natural environment. The Earth is personified and seen as a ‘divine’ being, hence, it should be treated as a cousin, a member of a clan, worthy of the care like our mother (van Breda, 2019). Thus, the articles connect the natural environment in the axiom ‘a person is a person through other people.’ In Ubuntu, the environment is part of the persons that contribute to the process of ‘becoming’ as it is seen as a cousin. The environment as emphasised in the article, is seen as a place where gods and ancestors reside, hence, it should be given reverence. Through Ubuntu philosophy, Earthly objects such as mountains and rivers are given divine respect.

4.5 Decolonial Social Work and Anti-Racist Social Work

Nayoo (2020) as cited in Bhangyi and Makoha (2023) refers to decolonial social work as processes of unbundling the colonial social work practice and education rooted in Western perspectives and shifting to a social work education grounded in African theories that are anchored on local socio-political, economic and eco-spiritual infrastructure of life, provision of social welfare and dealing with social problems. Increasing immigration and the rising demand for cultural diversity in the global community calls for the need to decolonise social work education and practice (Udah *et al.*, 2025). Van Breda (2019) argues that social workers seeking to develop an African framework for decolonial social work practice focus repetitively on Ubuntu for aid. Chigangaidze *et al* (2023) discuss the role of Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) in advancing decolonial social work as IKS is part of the knowledge base of the profession as evident in its Global Definition (IFSW and IASSW, 2014).

Western hegemony in social work has resulted in the limitation of the environmental discourse in social work education and practice (Boetto and Bell, 2015; Chigangaidze, 2023a; Gray *et al.*, 2007). Decolonial social work also involves integrating African worldviews that are rooted on eco-spiritual infrastructure of life (Noyoo, 2020). As such, Chigangaidze (2023b) expatiates the view

that the environment has rights from an Ubuntu-informed eco-spiritual perspective. In another work, Chigangaidze and Dudzai (2023) position the natural environment in Ubuntu's axiom 'a person is a person through other people' through an eco-spiritual perspective. These publications have also been cited in the book: *Ubuntu Philosophy and Decolonising Social Work fields of Practice in Africa* (Twikirize *et al.*, 2023). Thus, by contributing to the eco-spiritual discourse of social work through Ubuntu philosophy, these publications advance decolonial social work practices and literature.

Decolonial social work, from an African perspective, unbundles the colonial social work education rooted in Western thinking shifting to a social work education guided by African worldviews (Nayoo, 2020). In this context, Western thinking in the form of Humanistic theories, Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979); Biopsychosocial Model (Engel, 1977), Transactional Analysis (Berne, 1966), Multimodal Theory (Lazarus, 1989) and the Global Definition of Social Work have been unpacked from an African worldview (Chigangaidze *et al.*, 2023; Chigangaidze, 2022; 2021a; 2021b; Chigangaidze and Chinyenze, 2022). Hence, the above evidence that the works advance decolonial social work practices and literature, though limited to the African context.

Moreover, these works also showcase the link between Ubuntu and Anti-Racial Social Work practices. For example, the works also discuss the Greek concept of *philoxenia* which literally translates to loving a stranger, and how this concept is viewed from Ubuntu's axiom 'a person is a person through other people' (Chigangaidze *et al.*, 2023; Chigangaidze, 2022). This aligns with the Humanistic concepts of *homo, sacra res homini* which is to view another human being with reverence. In -addition, the aspects of respecting human dignity, diversity as well as the promotion of emancipatory social work practices are discussed from an Ubuntu worldview (Chigangaidze *et al.*, 2023). The works highlight the importance of social connectedness and the need to emphasise human rights and human dignity in a multi-cultural setting (Chigangaidze, 2021a). Thus, these works advances both Decolonial and Anti-Racist Social Work Practices by promoting the human dignity of all people.

4.6 Connecting to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to all 11 papers

Sustainable development is a holistic and integrative concept that interconnects between fundamental dimensions and values for progressing towards a healthy, prosperous and happy society all over time (Rambaree, 2020). The 2030 Sustainable Development Goals Agenda has five areas of importance which are well known as the 5Ps signifying People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace and Partnerships. Bell and Boetto (2024) highlight that Chigangaidze (2023a) articulates social work is committed to advancing sustainable development through processes underpinned by the African worldview of Ubuntu.

Table 1: Publications and Sustainable Development Goals

Sustainable Development Goal (SDGs)	Publication and notes
SDG1: No poverty	Chigangaidze <i>et al</i> (2023) discusses how social cohesion, empowerment and liberation of people facilitates for the fight against poverty from an Ubuntu worldview. In defending the application of Ubuntu in Mental Health (Chigangaidze, 2021b) highlights the need for social advocacy against poverty for the improvement of mental health.
SDG2: Zero Hunger	Ubuntu-informed practices can enhance food security for the enhancement of life (Chigangaidze, 2023a; Chigangaidze <i>et al.</i> , 2024; Chigangaidze <i>et al.</i> , 2022).
SDG3: Good Health and Wellbeing	Ubuntu-inspired social work practices promote holistic assessments and mental health interventions (Chigangaidze, 2021b; Chigangaidze, 2022).
SDG 4: Quality Education	Chigangaidze <i>et al</i> (2022) calls for partnerships and knowledge exchange between Social Work Education institutions.
SDG 5: Gender Equality	The works (Chigangaidze and Dudzai, 2023; Chigangaidze, 2023b) addresses issues to do with ecofeminism and appreciates that oppression of the earth is inherently linked to dominance of women.
SDG 6: Clean water and sanitation	Chigangaidze (2023a; 2023b) highlights the need for clean water and sanitation. Rights of Nature are against contamination of water bodies.
SDG10: Reduce inequality within and among countries	All the works give emphasis on fighting inequalities, promoting social justice and human rights. Promoting human dignity and viewing a person with reverence.
SDG 11: Sustainable cities and communities	Ubuntu and the Rights of Nature (Chigangaidze and Dudzai, 2023)
SDG 13: Climate action; SDG 14 life below water, SDG 15 life on land	Environmental Social Work focus on fighting climate change. (Chigangaidze, 2023; Chigangaidze, 2022b).

Ubuntu philosophy and its relevance to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as evidenced in this thesis is highlighted in the Table 1. Hence, these works acknowledge that indigenous knowledge systems such as Ubuntu promotes the fulfilment of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

4.7 Spirituality in Social Work Practice

Spirituality emerged from the Latin word ‘spiritus’ which means ‘breadth of life’ and can be defined as ‘a way of being and experiencing that comes about through an awareness of a transcendent dimension and that is characterized by certain identifiable values in regard to self, others, nature, life, and whatever one considers to be ultimate’ (Elkins *et al.*, 1998, p. 10). The separation of the spiritual realm from clinical, casework, community, and groupwork traditions of social work remained steadfast despite several calls to integrate it in practice (McVeigh, Hollier and Ravulo, 2025). The mission of Humanistic Social Work includes increasing spiritual wellbeing (Stefaroi, 2016). One of the main ideas of humanistic approach is the transpersonal domain which looks at the aspects of spirituality, transcendence and compassionate social action (Schneider *et al.*, 2015).

Ubuntu as evidenced in this thesis promotes spirituality in Clinical Social Work, Environmental Social Work, Human Rights Based Social Work, Value-Based Social Work and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). For instance, in Clinical Social Work; Chigangaidze (2022) interrogates the modalities of the Multimodal Theory through the philosophy of Ubuntu. The idea behind the inclusion of the two modalities (person-physical environment relationship and spirituality) is to ensure that the multimodal assessment is holistic in addressing clinical needs thereby improving the quality of people’s well-being. In Environmental Social Work, the body of works (Chigangaidze, 2023a; 2023b; Chigangaidze and Dudzai, 2023) articulates on eco-spirituality and the Rights of Nature. Spirituality from an Ubuntu way of life interconnects the living-dead (ancestors) with the present and the future. The living-dead (ancestors) reside also in the Environment that needs to be handed over to future generations in a better form than before (Van Breda, 2019). This body of works (Chigangaidze *et al.*, 2023) has shown how these spiritual components interconnect to Sustainable Development.

Essentially, spirituality is connected to Value-Based Social Work Practice by means of emphasising the divine nature of the human being through Ubuntu’s axiom, ‘I am Because you are, you are because I am’. This relates to the constructs of identifiable values of respecting self and others -all of which are important components of the definition of spirituality. Ébalé and Mulemi (2022) highlight that all values and behaviours that usher in the state of our oneness and togetherness, like sharing, caring, compassion, solidarity and harmony are epitomized and conceptualised in Ubuntu. In practicing these values, one respects the dignity of the person. It is noted that:

Man (sic) was declared “Human” as soon as the element of “divine” (image) goodness (likeness) was instilled in him. This divine element that transformed man (matter) into human being was nothing but a humanness, “ubuntu” that manifested the “Image and likeness” of God in each individual person of the human race (Broodryk, 2002, p.1)

From a humanistic perspective, it has been stated that Ubuntu promotes the *homo, sacra res homini* which means seeing the other person with reverence. Ubuntu is a kind of divine element that highlights the existence of God in a human being (Gade, 2012). Ubuntu is a ‘spiritual way of being’ (Swanson, 2007, p. 10). Respecting oneself, others, nature and the ultimate are divine, and the spiritual way of living from an Ubuntu perspective. Thus, there is no room for xenophobia and racial attacks in the philosophy of Ubuntu. Hence, Value-Based Social Work is interconnected to Anti-Racial Social Work through Ubuntu (a spiritual way of life).

4.8. Summary

This section has synthesised seven important themes emerging from the analysis of this body of works (11 articles on Ubuntu Social Work) and highlights the relevance of this research to Social Work knowledgebase. These themes are Value-Based Social Work; Human Rights Based Social Work; Decolonial Social Work, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); Holistic practices to Social Work Practice and Spirituality in Social Work. Ubuntu as a spiritual way of being connects spirituality to all these aspects of Social Work.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

Social work education and practice continue to marginalise Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) and cultures (Tamburro, 2013). Western colonisation and Eurocentric knowledge of what it means to be a person, and the nature of human suffering have globally dominated social sciences including social work (Asakura *et al.*, 2023). The dominance of Western theories in social work practice has also resulted in the limitation of Environmental Social Work debates in the profession (Boetto and Bell, 2015; Gray *et al.*, 2007). This thesis offers an alternative to Western theories in the form of African philosophy of Ubuntu. The thesis holds that Ubuntu is applicable in Clinical Social Work and calls for holistic approaches to practice. The relevance of Ubuntu philosophy in Environmental Social Work is established and discussed in line with eco-spirituality, Rights to Nature and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The applicability of Ubuntu philosophy in social work is demonstrated through its alignment with the global definition of social work. Decolonial social work is also promoted by showing the relevance of an African worldview in Social Work. The use of Ubuntu philosophy in social work extends and reinforces eco-spirituality and holistic practices in Social Work. Ubuntu philosophy is an example that there are indigenous knowledges that are relevant to social work practice.

In a world that is experiencing more pandemics, wars, domestic violence, poverty and social inequalities; it is essential to reflect on Ubuntu principles and value systems that promote generosity, social justice, human rights, solidarity, love, peace and humanness. This thesis promotes communality and condemns egoistic ideas. Human Rights Based Social Work is emphasised through the value systems of Ubuntu philosophy. The thesis highlights that Ubuntu-inspired social work can help fight against COVID-19 pandemic, environmental injustice, poverty, remnants of colonialism and oppression. It should be noted that establishing the relevance of Ubuntu in Social Work should never be treated as limiting the philosophy to the profession alone as it is relevant to other disciplines such as law, politics, health to mention but a few. Again, establishing Ubuntu's relevance to the social work profession should not undermine the relevance of Indigenous Knowledge Systems in the world but be considered a step towards global mindfulness, multicultural practice and critical reflections. Ubuntu philosophy calls for practitioners to treat all people with dignity, promoting their human rights, appreciating holistic approaches to practice with a social developmental perspective. Humanistically, Ubuntu philosophy promotes the concept of *homo, sacra res homini* which calls for looking at the other person with reverence, and *homo integralis* of viewing the whole person.

Utilising critical appropriation, theoretical synthesis and conceptual analysis; this thesis has explored the relevance of Ubuntu philosophy in Social Work through the Humanistic Social Work perspective. The thesis expatiates the relevance of Ubuntu philosophy to Social Work domains such as Environmental Social Work, Clinical Social Work, Human Rights Based Social Work, International Social Work, Social Development and other domains. Establishing Ubuntu's

relevance to Social Work should never be viewed as undermining any philosophy but as a step towards multiculturalism and global mindfulness. When the 11 articles are synthesised, there are seven important themes emerging from the analysis of this body of works and its relevance to Social Work knowledgebase. These themes are Value-Based Social Work; Human Rights Based Social Work; Decolonial Social Work, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); Holistic practices to Social Work Practice and Spirituality in Social Work. Ubuntu as a spiritual way of being connects spirituality to all these aspects of Social Work. Thus, the application of Ubuntu in all these fields of Social Work practice justify why the worldview is a humanistic and theoretical alternative to decolonise social work.

5.1 Limitations and Future Research

Every research has its own share of limitations. This research has methodological limitations to conceptual analysis and critical theoretical appropriation to explore why Ubuntu Philosophy is a Global South theoretical alternative to decolonise social work. Future research can utilise interviews and surveys to explore the views of Ubuntu Social Work practitioners on the efficacy of the philosophy as a theoretical alternative to decolonise social work.

The research is also limited in the scope of its lens as it focused only on the Humanistic-Existential Social Work perspectives as a branch that influences Social Work value systems, principles, ethics and practices; however, future research can explore Ubuntu philosophy from other perspectives in Social Work such as the psychodynamic approach. In addition, more comparative research could be explored on the efficacy of Ubuntu to inform Clinical interventions. This research will require pre-training of Transactional Analysts and Ubuntu Social Workers on Ubuntu and Transactional Analysis, respectively; then compare the efficacy of the philosophy in informing Clinical Social Work interventions inclusive of assessments from the perspectives of social workers.

As an analysis of 11 articles, this research is limited in its scope of body of works of the relevance of Ubuntu philosophy as a humanistic and theoretical alternative to decolonise social work. The author has published more work on the subject but due to the limitation of time, space, funding and thesis guidelines only 11 articles were analysed to comprehend the main aspects of Ubuntu philosophy though not fully exploring all its elements – which can take a generation, if it is ever possible. There is much space for collaboration and further exploration of this subject in Social Work and beyond the profession.

5.2 Recommendations for Social Work Practice and Education

Social Workers and other related helping professionals can utilise Ubuntu Philosophy to advance Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through its emphasis on interconnecting the past, present and the future (leaving the Mother Earth much better than how ancestors handed over to the contemporary generation), community-based projects, peace-building and respecting human relationships.

The integration of Ubuntu Philosophy in Social Work Education and Practice can enhance the understanding and advancement of Human Rights Based Social Work due to its emphasis on the importance of human relations as explained through the constructs of ‘a person is a person through other persons’ and *homo, sacra res homini* (seeing another person with reverence).

Ubuntu Philosophy can be utilised to enhance aspects of Environmental Social Work such as respecting Rights of Nature, Eco-spirituality and positioning the Environment within the other in the axiom, ‘a person is a person through other people’.

Social workers can utilise Ubuntu philosophy to promote Value-Based Social Work practice as it fosters human relationships, human rights, empathy-driven practice, competence, professionalism and service beyond self.

Social workers seeking to decolonise social work practice can turn on Ubuntu Philosophy as an Indigenous Knowledge System (IKS). Thus, IKS constitute an important element of the Social Work theoretical framework and practitioners, educationists and students need to critically reflect on its applicability in practice.

Anti-Racist Social Workers can utilise Ubuntu philosophy through its emphasis on *homo sacra res homini* and the view of everyone is part of the global community.

Beyond Ubuntu Philosophy, this body of works is an example of how Indigenous Knowledge Systems form an important part of Social Work’s knowledgebase. Thus, Social Workers should utilise their indigenous knowledge systems where possible to decolonise social work practice.

Social Workers interested in integrating spirituality in practice can also reflect on Indigenous Knowledge Systems such as Ubuntu philosophy in education, practice and research.

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Publications:

The publications were published in different journals with different page sizes. It has not always been possible to follow the PhD submission guidelines for page layout.

Establishing the relevance of the Ubuntu philosophy in social work practice: Inspired by the Ubuntu World Social Work Day, 2021 celebrations and the IFSW and IASSW's (2014) Global Definition of Social Work

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Abstract

The philosophy of Ubuntu has gained momentum in the social work fraternity to the extent that the theme for the World Social Work Day, 2021 celebrations read, ‘Ubuntu: I am Because We are – Strengthening Social Solidarity and Global Connectedness’. Through the use of a qualitative research approach, underpinned by a document analysis method, the article initiates a discourse which expounds on the philosophy through the lenses of the IFSW and IASSW 2014 Global Definition of Social Work. Substantially, it proffers justifications that cement the relevance of the Ubuntu philosophy in both the practice and theoretical frameworks of social work.

Keywords

Global social work and social development agenda, IFSW and IASSW 2014 Global Definition of Social Work, solidarity and global connectedness, Ubuntu philosophy, World Social Work Day 2021 celebrations

Introduction

The social media were flooded with posters on ‘Ubuntu: I am Because We are – Strengthening Social Solidarity and Global Connectedness’ during the celebration of the World Social Work Day in 2021. This theme runs from March 2021 to March 2022 and many activities such as conferences and presentations on Ubuntu are shaping the profession moving forward. Ubuntu is the first theme of the new Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development (2020–2030) and further

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provides the global profession an opportunity to examine an indigenous knowledge from the African continent (Mayaka and Truell, 2021).

For several years, social work academics have called for the need to theorize the philosophy of Ubuntu in social work education and practice (Chigangaidze, 2021a, 2021b; Dudzai, 2021; Kurevakwesu and Chizasa, 2020; Kurevakwesu and Maushe, 2020; Mabvurira, 2020; Mugumbate and Chereni, 2019; Mugumbate and Nyanguru, 2013; Mupedziswa et al., 2019; Zvomuya, 2020; Mugumbate and Nyanguru, 2013). Ubuntu speaks to the moral qualities of a person, especially features such as considerateness, kindness, generosity, empathy, and forgiveness (Chigangaidze, 2021a; Mugumbate and Nyanguru, 2013; Van Breda, 2019). Ubuntu also refers to the African worldview of seeing oneself through others. Van Breda (2019) submits that the concept entails a pattern of inter-connectedness between people in the form of a philosophy or a worldview.

Ubuntu philosophy has been considered in other disciplines through which social work as an eclectic profession is connected. For example, psychologists have called for the application of Ubuntu in their own profession (Hanks, 2008). In the management field, likewise, Ubuntu has been held as a valuable framework for both theory and practice (Karsten and Illa, 2005; Prinsloo, 2000; West, 2014). The Ubuntu ideology has also been applied in the domains of education, law, environmental science, and medicine (Chemhuru, 2019; Chibvongodze, 2016; Engelbrecht and Kasiram, 2012; Grange, 2012; Letseka, 2012). The impetus for this article is therefore to critically reflect on this African philosophy of Ubuntu, considering the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) and the International Association of Schools of Social Work's (IASSW) 2014 global definition of social work.

For over a century now, the social work profession has been concerned with the unique and specific characteristics that define its core mandate in society (Hill et al., 2017). The 2014 global definition (a revision of the 1982 and 2000 definitions) was developed over a period of years, through critical conversations and consultative discussions in every region of the world (Ng, 2014; Sewpaul and Henrickson, 2019). The global definition for social work has now been unpacked through the profession's ontological frameworks (Ornellas et al., 2018). In this article, themes extracted from the IFSW and the IASSW's 2014 Global Definition of Social Work will be used to expatiate on the African philosophy of Ubuntu. In so doing, the relevance of Ubuntu in the profession's education and practice will be ratified and expanded. The article will consider how social work education and practice reflect on the 2021 World Social Work Day's theme.

Contextualizing the 2021 World Social Work Day celebrations

The 2021 World Social Work Day celebrations have come at a time when the global community is facing the worst pandemic ever. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated socio-economic inequalities (Chigangaidze, 2021c; Krouse, 2020). The global community is off-track to curb climate change, and it is witnessing a generation of inequalities in human development on the rise. Evidently, COVID-19 has hit a world which is already in a crisis, which is characterized by unresolved tensions between humans and technology, between people and the planet, and between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots' (United Nations Development Programme, 2020). Besides climate change and technological adjustment issues, the world is facing military conflicts at various levels including those between nations, political groups, and rebels. For example, there are conflicts and high risks of destabilization in Ethiopia, Mozambique, India, Pakistan, Haiti, Yemen, Colombia, the Sahel, Belarus to mention but a few (Bynum et al., 2021). Ethnic violence is also on the increase. There is also, the murdering of black people by police officers in the United States of America, for example, popularizing the Black Lives Matter movement. Apart from that, corruption

is evidently rampant, particularly in most parts of the Global South (Chigangaidze, 2021a; Dudzai, 2021).

The celebrations also came after the publication of a new version of the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development (IFSW, 2020) which can be summarized in the following points:

1. The failure to address worsening inequality is increasing instability and undermining social relationships.
2. Planning for sustainability and wellbeing for all in healthy environments benefits individuals and humanity.
3. Valuing and involving people in decision-making, respecting local knowledge, and indigenous knowledge produce better and sustainable interventions.
4. Demonstrating support for respectful relationships and building on people's strengths create the best outcomes.
5. Respecting the practice experience of practitioners in social work and development strengthens the effectiveness of social policy.
6. Ensuring a positive working environment with relationship-based management draws out the best in practice.
7. Resourcing education, training, and continuing personal development and research are crucial both for organizational effectiveness and for professional practice.

(Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development, Fourth Report, 2020, p. VIII cited in O'Leary and Tsui, 2021).

This exposition will also consider the above points in reflecting on the theme, 'Ubuntu: I am Because We are – Strengthening Social Solidarity and Global Connectedness' through the Global Definition of Social Work of 2014.

The Global Definition of Social Work

This article will utilize the IFSW and IASSW's Global Definition of Social Work, which states that

Social work is a **practice-based** profession and an **academic discipline** that **promotes social change and development, social cohesion** and the **empowerment and liberation of people**. Principles of **social justice, human rights, collective responsibility** and respect for **diversities** are central to social work. Underpinned by **theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledge**, social work **engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing**. (IFSW and IASSW, 2014)

The elements in bold type in the definition above are the themes that the article will utilize to reflect on the philosophy of Ubuntu. Essentially, these themes are inter-related and inter-twined such that one can hardly explore the other without giving reference to one or more of the elements. The following sections will thus reflect on Ubuntu through the lenses of the Global Social Work Definition. Thereafter, the implications of such a reflection will be given.

Practice-based

Social work is a practice-oriented profession that has its foundation in the profession's ethical framework which provides the 'how-to' and 'how-not-to' in relating to service users, colleagues, and other human service agencies (Cairns et al., 2018; Pasini, 2016). Reflective of ethically

grounded social work practice, Ubuntu provides a framework for the profession's decision-making processes (Mabvurira, 2020). The Ubuntu orientation also exists in professional social work practice (Mugumbate and Chereni, 2019). According to O'Leary et al. (2013) and Trevithick (2003), social work is a relational profession in its scope of practice and Ubuntu provides fundamental roots of relationality, both in its axiological and ontological background. Ubuntu further appreciates the practical wisdom of the elders in the same way that the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development values the practice of social work practitioners as a vital tool for sustainable development. For this reason, the value of Ubuntu has been applied in all methods of social work practice such as social casework, groupwork, community work, and social development practice (Mugumbate and Chereni, 2019; Mupedziswa et al., 2019). In addition, research has advocated for Ubuntu-oriented therapies for counselling families that are affected with HIV/AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa (van Dyk and Matoane). Ubuntu-inspired social work practice is relevant in fighting against the COVID-19 pandemic (Chigangaidze et al., 2021). Social work has a vital and well-established role in supporting medical and public health services during the pandemic (O'Leary and Tsui, 2020). Thus, Ubuntu has a role to play in all fields and methods of social work practice.

Academic discipline

In the past half of a century, African philosophy has successfully established itself as an academic discipline (Rettová, 2016). This has created an enabling environment for African wisdom to secure academic relevance. It appears as if such a move has also facilitated the journey to restore the spirit of Ubuntu. Dudzai (2021) in concurrence argues that such an endeavour should start by including the philosophy of Ubuntu in social work academic studies. Resultantly, there has been a growing body of literature on Ubuntu in social work and the philosophy is finding its way into the curriculum of the profession (Chigangaidze, 2021a; Mupedziswa et al., 2019; Van Breda, 2019). In encouraging the generation of literature thereof, the *African Journal of Social Work* published a special issue on Ubuntu in 2020. The theme for the 2021 World Social Work Day, 'Ubuntu: I am Because We are – Strengthening Social Solidarity and Global Connectedness', was again a call to advance the discourse on Ubuntu to critical levels in both social work theory and practice.

All these efforts are being made in recognition of the relevance of Ubuntu as a concept and an approach which provides for significant opportunities for social work practice in Africa and beyond, in the contexts of both its academic and practical applicability. The application of Ubuntu is now worldwide with Ubuntu software being developed in the United States of America (Mugumbate and Nyanguru, 2013). Put simply, Ubuntu provides a framework for social work across Africa through which learners and practitioners can develop their skills, competencies and techniques (Mupedziswa et al., 2019). There is therefore growing evidence for the adoption of Ubuntu pedagogically and in practice settings, although it is still at its infancy stage and yet to reach its critical level (Mugumbate and Chereni, 2019). This is a call for books to be written to endorse the relevance of the Ubuntu philosophy and to accelerate the production of the much-needed literature. Ubuntu-gogy, defined as the art and science of teaching and learning undergirded by humanity towards others, transcends pedagogy (the art of science of teaching), andragogy (the art and science of helping adults learn), ergonagy (the art and science of helping people learn to work), and heutagogy (the study of self-determined learning) (Bangura, 2005). Ubuntu has potential to advance the academic discipline of social work through Ubuntu-gogy.

Social change and development

Research has shown that when social workers and related stakeholders infuse Ubuntu in their practice, this strengthens the delivery of services in communities as part of the social development landscape (Mabasa, 2020). Social workers as the key links between human welfare organizations and social development agencies require this Ubuntu attribute if they are to effect sustainable change. In addition, Ubuntu is rich in advancing social capital – the sum of inter-personal links and civic participation of a person which is essential in promoting social and economic development (Migheli, 2017). The connection between Ubuntu, social work and social development has been well established in the profession's knowledge-base. This connection also relates to the person-in-environment perspectives and how community resources can be utilized to advance social development. This is because Ubuntu holds humans accountable for sustainable development as it strives to ensure a better tomorrow for future generations through conserving nature and community resources. In support, Van Breda (2019) noted:

Ubuntu can significantly enhance social work's understanding of, and promote the achievement of, sustainable development through the recognition that our embeddedness in the human community is not merely in the present community, but also in both past and future communities. (p. 445)

Hence, the philosophy of Ubuntu is relevant in understanding development as a phenomenon of the past, the present and the future generations. This is because social development enhances the aspects of social cohesion, respecting diversities, collective responsibility, and social justice and human rights (Ghai, 2001). All these elements are fundamental to the philosophy of Ubuntu and will be discussed in this article as they are infused in the Global Definition of Social Work.

Social cohesion

Chigangaidze (2021a) is of the opinion that Ubuntu is a philosophy that promotes mutuality, dialogue and social cohesion. It has also been argued by Quan-Baffour that Ubuntu may not only promote peer-support, but also social cohesion in a country polarized by racism, apartheid, ethnicity and xenophobia. As the axiom states, 'I am because we are', the emphasis is on the inter-personal transactions and seeing oneself through relating with others. The emphasis is on how one communes with others and how others contribute to an individual's personhood. The Ubuntu philosophy is anchored in the notion that humans are social beings that are inter-dependent. Reflecting on how Ubuntu advances social cohesion, Molefe echoed, 'Ubuntu, construed within the theoretical prism of development ethics, imagines a robust society as one that creates and provides material, social, and political resources for individuals to be able to pursue moral perfection' (p. 111). Thus, for Ubuntu, social cohesion is attainable through collective responsibility and the ability of the society to function as one while addressing individual and community needs.

Again, Ubuntu is anchored in relational mutuality or inter-dependence (Chigangaidze, 2021a). For example, the *AbaBemba* (people of the Bantu kingdom known as Bemba) believe in peer-to-peer mutuality translated into collaborative work, exchange of gifts, sharing of food and that these activities increase social cohesion (Mukuka, 2013). Likewise, the *nhimbe* practice in Zimbabwe is one good example of how Ubuntu advances social cohesion (Mbwire, 2017). *Nhimbe* is a practice where families in rural areas of Zimbabwe assist one another in diverse socio-economic development projects. *Nhimbe* projects are used not only for food security but may also be useful in facilitations towards conflict prevention and peacebuilding. The *nhimbe* practice also resembles several

other Ubuntu practices in different parts of Africa, such as *harambee* in Kenya, *ujamaa* in Tanzania and *chilimba* in Zambia to mention but a few. These practices also foster building relations while fighting against poverty.

Notably, both Ubuntu and social work are centred on the ideas of relationality. The functionalist, systems approach and relational processes are well rooted in the philosophy of Ubuntu. This is because we are humans who belong, participate and share with and among each other (Murithi, 2006). Emphasis is given that:

The philosophy of Ubuntu promotes teamwork and collaboration, meaning this principle promotes group cohesiveness and group support. Its cornerstone is a deep sense of belonging to a group, be it the extended family, the clan, or the community. This principle further seeks to promote the worthy and dignity of all human beings, with an emphasis on self-respect. Ubuntu works on the premise that everyone must contribute towards community initiatives and aspirations and, by implication, towards national development. (Mupedziswa et al., 2019: 21)

Thus, Ubuntu advances group cohesiveness and togetherness through its emphasis on the sense of group belongingness, human dignity, seeing self through the existence of others and promoting everyone's contribution to community development. It is through social cohesion that people can form collective responsibility, an element which will be expanded on later in this article.

Empowerment and liberation of people

It can be argued that Ubuntu bears a sense of liberation as it cultivates communality, perseverance and the courage to fight all forms of oppression. It promotes notions of equity, unity, democracy and empowerment of marginalized groups (Dudzai, 2021; Mugumbate and Nyanguru, 2013). In support, Berghs (2017) argues that the philosophy, for example, locates disability politically within the wider socio-economic structures and aims to liberate people from these domains. Therefore, Ubuntu can be accredited as the spirit that fostered team spirit among Africans in the fight against unjustified social unjust practices such as colonialism. Ubuntu, as aforementioned, encourages the empowerment of people through group work activities such as *nhimbe*, *ujamaa* and *harambee* and can enhance community participation, ownership and sustainability in socio-economic development. By promoting peace and conflict resolution, these practices also ensure food security and sustainability. Consistent with social work practice, inherent to Ubuntu are the ideologies of fighting to preserve the human dignity of people, especially the vulnerable members of the community. Ubuntu further supports the protection, recognition, enablement and empowerment of minorities for the sake of the common good (Nyerere, 1968). In addition, the principles of Ubuntu fight against stigma and discrimination associated with mental health issues, which is again part of social work practice's obligations. For example, Ubuntu emphasizes that people with mental illness should be well supported and cared for by their families and the wider community rather than being institutionalized (Engelbrecht and Kasiram, 2012). Economically, Ubuntu advocates for the equitable distribution of wealth (Mugumbate and Nyanguru, 2013). The African worldview promotes hard work, accountability, transparency and sustainable use of wealth. One is accountable to the wellbeing of the other person and the future generations.

It is for these reasons that social workers seeking to promote an African theory for decolonial social work practice turn repeatedly to Ubuntu for aid (Van Breda, 2019). The celebration of World Social Work Day in 2021 is a reminder of the need to decolonize social work in several geo-political regions and emphasize tapping indigenous knowledge systems (IKS). It is a call for

social workers to critically reflect on their mandate as catalysts for social change and not agents of social control. Sue (2006) reiterate this, arguing that social work emphasizes political, social, economic, and cultural emancipation of individuals, groups, and communities. Social work has a commitment to stop discrimination and help call out racism and discrimination (O’Leary and Tsui, 2020). Emancipatory social work is thus directed at increasing awareness of external sources of oppression and/or privilege for the enhancement of self-esteem and the courage to confront structural sources of marginalization, oppression and exclusion (Sewpaul et al., 2015). Again, social work has a critical role in empowering and facilitating safety for women and children (O’Leary and Tsui, 2020). Indeed, the celebration of World Social Work Day in 2021 is a call for solidarity and global connectedness in fighting social inequalities across the globe. International social work organizations may consider establishing networks and teams that hold governments accountable on humanitarian missions against poverty, kidnappings, politically sanctioned executions of innocent citizens and corruption which is rampant in some parts of the world. The celebration is a needed reminder for the social work profession to again reflect on how it can achieve its emancipatory role in the face of these and other global challenges.

Social justice and human rights

In line with upholding social justice and human rights, the value of Ubuntu respects the sacredness of life (Chigangaidze, 2021a). As aforesaid, Ubuntu emphasizes relationality, respect, considerateness and humanness, which are all elements that promote the enjoyment of human rights. Ubuntu is also oriented towards the attainment of community rights and how individual rights can be collectively addressed. For example, Ubuntu is what motivates communities to participate in the *zunde ramambo* in Zimbabwe – projects run by chiefs to enhance food security and assist those that are in need. In this case, Ubuntu promotes the attainment of the human right to adequate food and nutrition. Previously, this article considered how Ubuntu promotes social development and social change. It is essential to note that Ubuntu advances the attainment of the human right to development as it is people-oriented and focuses more on communality rather than egotism. Furthermore, Ubuntu teaches the importance of safeguarding the environment and ensuring its sustainability for future generations (Chemhuru, 2019; Chibvongodze, 2016; Van Breda, 2019). In safeguarding the environment, the human rights to a clean and healthy environment are advanced. The orature of Ubuntu includes warnings that contamination of water bodies such as rivers and dams defile the ‘gods’. Thus, just like social work practice, Ubuntu advocates for the human rights, inclusive of clean and safe water, to sanitation, and hygiene. Social work’s commitment to social justice and human rights means it has a role in protecting the vulnerable people in the community (O’Leary and Tsui, 2020). Ubuntu philosophy and other emancipatory theories can help the profession advance the values of social justice and human rights.

Collective responsibility

The term Ubuntu has been previously limited to mutual aid where there is collective responsibility to help those in need (Van Breda, 2019). In essence, Ubuntu is the spirit that binds groups together (Mupedziswa et al., 2019). Teamwork, multi-disciplinary work, and multi-agency work advance social work practice, and these are significantly embedded in Ubuntu aspects of cooperation and sharing (Nefale and Van Dyk, 2003). Mugumbate and Nyanguru (2013) further submit that Ubuntu has a significant relevance in the application of social work with communities as it infers that the community lives as a collective. It is therefore an African concept that gives expression to deeply held African ideals of one’s personhood, being rooted in one’s inter-connectedness with others

(Van Breda, 2019). Africans have an Ubuntu philosophy which culturally calls on individuals to promote the welfare of collective society. Paradoxically, some African leaders and government regimes poorly perform when using public funds, as evidenced by their advancement of selfish, egoistic and sectional interests rather than on collective human welfare (Asamoah and Yeboah-Assiamah, 2019). As previously mentioned, Ubuntu advocates for the fight against corruption that is rampant in several governments especially in the Global South (Chigangaidze, 2021a; Dudzai, 2021). Honouring this value can cultivate a spirit of transparency, accountability and political will – tenets which have lost meaning in most governments. This also positions Ubuntu as an effective tool to educate the corporate world on corporate social responsibility as this ensures equality, empowerment and equity (Nicolaidis, 2014). The celebrations of World Social Work Day in 2021 are a wake-up call that social workers across the globe have a collective responsibility to fight inequality, corruption and human suffering. Social workers by virtue of their profession should spearhead discussions that can lead to programmes and initiatives that facilitate the realization of collective social justice. Emphasizing their 10 gentle reminders to social workers in the pandemic, O’Leary and Tsui (2020) insist on core values of international exchange, mutual trust and mutual help. These values are all essential elements in both Ubuntu and social work practice. It is important that social workers collaborate throughout the globe, engage with people and structures in enhancing the welfare of all people.

Respect for diversities

Regarding diversity, Ubuntu does bring to the world the human face to every aspect of life (Mugumbate and Nyanguru, 2013). In education, Ubuntu can be used to elicit sharing experiences, support and cooperation among learners from diverse backgrounds (Edwards, 2018; Quan-Baffour, 2014). In agriculture, the philosophy of Ubuntu promotes the cultivation of diverse crops for the enhancement of food supplies. This is possible because Ubuntu identifies the ‘other’ as an extension of self. It acknowledges the construct of *philoxenia*, which literally translates as loving a stranger (Koenane, 2018). Respect for diversities significantly reflects on notions of human rights, equality, social justice, inclusion, social development and collective participation. In social work, the respect for diversities enriches multi-cultural social work practice (Sue, 2006). Respect for others is thus a part of the Ubuntu ethics which is relevant to guiding decision-making processes in social work (Mabvurira, 2020).

The discussion above further supports the proposition that the 2021 World Social Work Day celebrations are a plea for schools of social work to ensure and facilitate national, regional and knowledge exchange programmes, research and entrepreneurship for students to appreciate different cultures in preparation for international social work practice. Social work professionals must be able to emancipate themselves from the cultural conditioning of their personal and professional training, to understand and accept the diverse components of their clients and their communities (Sue, 2006). The celebrations offer moments of reflection if social work educators are:

- Preparing students to practise beyond their cultural and geo-political boundaries.
- Ensuring that the curriculum of social work education is inclusive of diverse backgrounds such as race, religion, culture and other segments of intersectionality.
- Preventing the exacerbation of socio-economic inequalities through social work education and practice.

While respecting diversities is of notable significance, the Global Social Work Statement of Ethical Principles (GSWSEP) proposes that the paramount value in social work practice is human

dignity (IFSW, 2018). Thus, social workers should not condone or participate in violations of human dignity in the name of respecting diversities (Sewpaul and Henrickson, 2019).

Theories of social work, social sciences and humanities

Ubuntu has successfully been applied in social work theories such as the person-in-the environment perspective (Van Breda, 2019), humanistic-existential theories (Chigangaidze, 2021a) and the ecological systems theory (Mugumbate and Chereni, 2019; Mupedziswa et al., 2019; Van Breda, 2019). In fact most of Ubuntu's tenets are compatible with social work ethics and ethical theories (Mabvurira, 2020; Mupedziswa et al., 2019; Sekudu, 2019). In addition, Ubuntu can be construed through the theoretical lenses of development ethics (Molefe, 2019) and has also been linked to psychological theories. Ideally, Hanks (2008) has long advocated for the adoption of a new humanistic psychological paradigm which is based on the principles and values of the African collectivistic philosophy of Ubuntu. As stated previously, Ubuntu is part of a growing body of theoretical frameworks in several other fields such as health, environmental science, political science, education and technology (Chemhuru, 2019; Chibvongodze, 2016; Grange, 2012; Letseka, 2012). While Ubuntu is yet to reach its peak in terms of its contribution to social work theories, some theories of social work, social sciences and humanities point to personhood, the ideas of person-in-environment (PIE) and an ecological systems thinking which are vital in exploring the theme 'people and structures'. These concepts will be discussed later in this article.

Indigenous knowledge

Regarding its knowledge base, social work literature views its work with indigenous people from cross-cultural, anti-oppressive or structural perspectives (Grey et al., 2007). Despite efforts to adapt the social work curriculum to better accommodate indigenous people's needs and cultural traditions, the profession has not developed its knowledge or approaches in tandem with indigenous people. As already mentioned, most social workers who seek to decolonize social work practice from Eurocentrism turn to the philosophy of Ubuntu for aid and contextual relevance (Van Breda, 2019). Mugumbate and Chereni (2019) argue that Ubuntu can also be traced in history as it exists in African orature, for example, in songs, stories, folklore, poems, epics, humour, and jokes since time immemorial. Studies show that indigenous African proverbs which espouse the Ubuntu-as-Unity philosophy contain principles and values which the continent can benefit from in its pursuit of integrated sustainable development (Thakhathi and Netshitangani, 2020). The source of indigenous knowledge in the African setting are the elders and *svikiros* (spirit mediums) (Mugumbate and Nyanguru, 2013). Indigenous knowledge systems are therefore essential in social work theory and practice as they inform socio-cultural differences in line with the principle of individualization (Chong, 2014; Green and Baldry, 2008; Hertel, 2017; McCauley and Matheson, 2018). In addition, research has shown that indigenous knowledge systems are of great significance in social work's response to collective recovery in collective trauma (King et al., 2017).

Gray et al. (2007) laments that indigenous voices are present in several emerging bodies of social work literature, such as literature on spirituality and eco-social work, but most social workers do not hear them because they are more inclined to turn to the anti-oppressive or cross-cultural practice literature, predominantly in the United Kingdom and United States, respectively, when assessing issues of diversity in social work. Ubuntu, on the other hand, appreciates eco-social work and spirituality (Van Breda, 2019) which are part of the indigenous voices in social work literature. Appreciating indigenous knowledge systems in social work practice is

thus empowering as it relates to anti-oppressive frameworks, thereby ensuring clientele participation. It is also through accepting the value of IKS that social workers enhance their cultural competencies in practice. Furthermore, degrees in Social Work based in IKS are being established, for example, the Master of Social Work based in Indigenous Knowledge Systems was developed as a lived programme that builds community and social support systems while deconstructing colonialist and oppressive structures (Hart et al., 2014). An Ubuntu-inspired adult education process denounces social structures in which people are treated as ‘things’. It appreciates people as co-producers of knowledge and that learning and working are accomplished through peer alliances (Quan-Baffour and Romm, 2015). Acknowledging the utility of IKS is closely linked to issues of empowerment, liberation of people and respecting diversities. These sections are therefore intrinsically related in the philosophy of Ubuntu. It is part of the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development to respect and value indigenous knowledge systems to produce better sustainable outcomes (O’Leary and Tsui, 2021). Thus, there is potential for the establishment of Ubuntu Social Work courses and degrees that are based on the African philosophy.

People and structures

Evidently, Ubuntu encourages the engagement of people and structures to solve problems and enhance wellbeing. An integrated framework of Ubuntu involving the individual, family, community, societal, environmental and spiritual levels has been proposed in social work’s interventions on child welfare by Mugumbate and Chereni (2019). Their argument emerged from the realization that Ubuntu is rooted in the engagement of people and structures in solving human problems. Van Breda (2019: 447) also acknowledges that Ubuntu provides ‘fresh and potent ways to advance ecological and particularly eco-spiritual social work in Africa, by drawing on indigenous ways of understanding the inter-connectedness of people and earth ...’. Furthermore, Hanks (2008) advocates for the adoption of Ubuntu programming within treatment milieus, especially child and adolescent residential facilities as promising alternatives to contemporary therapeutic modalities. Ubuntu equally emphasizes the utility of family, society, communities and governments in addressing human needs and solving problems. In advancing communality, Ubuntu also echoes the concepts of *mushandirapamwe* (working together) to end hunger and poverty through engaging people in development projects.

Addressing life challenges and enhancing wellbeing

Social work seeks to address these life challenges through engaging people and structures. We argue in this article that Ubuntu is applicable in addressing life challenges ranging from the political, economic, social, technological, legal to environmental domains. Ubuntu can provide an ideal framework for the fight against poverty, pandemics, stigma and discrimination, social injustice, corruption, effects of climate change and other challenges (Chigangaidze, 2021a, 2021b; Chibvongodze, 2016; Dudzai, 2021; Mugumbate and Nyanguru, 2013). In addressing these challenges, Ubuntu also attends to people’s wellbeing. The construct of ‘wellbeing’ is a term used to describe an individual or a group, with reference to the social, economic, psychological, spiritual and medical dimensions. The philosophy of Ubuntu has been regarded as the principle for caring for each other’s wellbeing (Mugumbate and Nyanguru, 2013). As such, Ubuntu advances the holistic approach to appreciating human welfare and wellbeing (Chigangaidze, 2021a). Mugumbate and Chereni (2019) put forward an Ubuntu inspired life cycle model for the wellbeing of a child which is construed within an ecological system. In defending the application of Ubuntu in clinical social

work, Chigangaidze (2021b) expatiates how social workers can utilize the African philosophy engaging people and structures from the micro, meso, exo, macro and chrono systems in mental health interventions.

Implications

Exploring Ubuntu through the lenses of the Global Definition of Social Work illustrates a clear relevance of the philosophy within the profession. Ubuntu may not be merely comprehended within the profession's axiology but also through its ontology. The appreciation of Ubuntu as part of the theme to celebrate World Social Work Day in 2021 is a reminder for unity, collaboration, respect for diversity and compassion driven practice. It is a plea to fight social injustice and preserve humanity for the enhancement of social functioning at individual, group and societal levels of interaction. Ubuntu is the spirit that connects social workers together in their learning, practice and reflection. This article ratifies the plea by many social workers to adopt Ubuntu as part of the theoretical framework of social work practice. Social workers are reminded to stand in solidarity against corruption, inequality, racism and all forms of discriminatory practices for the enhancement of social functioning among individuals, groups and communities to defend the profession's value of social justice. Ubuntu can also provide a framework to strengthen the welfare of people, even in the aftermath of the pandemic. Ubuntu therefore fits well in the holistic advancement of the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development – without which, social work practice may fail to bring to reality a just society. This article calls for the advancement of Ubuntu in enhancing the academic discipline of social work. Establishing the relevance of Ubuntu through the Global Definition of Social Work highlights that the philosophy has room in the profession. Utilizing the philosophy of Ubuntu in this article does not translate to undermining other indigenous knowledge systems but is a clear example of how IKS can help advance the profession. The challenge that Ubuntu philosophy and the Global Definition of Social Work face is that both are relatively new to a profession that is in a world of individualism and charity-based philosophies. Wherever there is suffering, inequalities and injustice there are social workers. Let us use our heart, head and hands to give our service users hope and dignity, even though we may not be able to solve all the problems in our societies (O'Leary and Tsui, 2021). Unity, love, peace, gentleness, humanness and considerateness can see us through pandemics, wars and inequalities. Therefore, social workers need to patiently and systematically contribute towards social solidarity and global connectedness.

Conclusion

We have in this article utilized the Global Definition of Social Work to explore Ubuntu thereby clearly illustrating the relevance of the African philosophy to the profession. Inspired by the theme for the 2021 World Social Work Day celebrations, 'Ubuntu: I am Because We are – Strengthening Social Solidarity and Global Connectedness', we remind social workers across the globe to unite, collaborate with other relevant professionals to fight corruption and all other forms of inequalities, respect indigenous knowledge systems and engage people as well as systems in addressing social ills. Considering the contexts of the celebrations, especially COVID-19 and poverty, this article appreciates the nexus between Ubuntu and the new Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development. We conclusively submit that there are great rewards that can be yielded from the adoption of the Ubuntu philosophy in social work education and practice as evidenced by the exploration in this article. Ubuntu in practice can offer the global world hope, love, unity, creativity and resilience to fight daily challenges.

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An exposition of humanistic- existential social work in light of ubuntu philosophy: Towards theorizing ubuntu in social work practice

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ABSTRACT

The article stimulates a discourse for theorizing ubuntu as part of a humanistic-existential approach in social work. The article expatiates on the ontologies and axiology of the humanistic-existential approach in light of ubuntu in an effort to theorize the latter through a comparative analysis of the two. Nine features of the humanistic-existential approach are explored: self-awareness, self-determination, human dignity, holism, the pursuit of social justice and human rights, motivation, social cohesion, spirituality, and death. The article calls for theorizing ubuntu philosophy in social work practice and education. It contradicts with other claims that deny ubuntu its place in the humanistic-existential approach.

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Introduction

Humanistic theories used within social work practice originated from humanistic psychology, which emerged as a response to the psychodynamic and behavioral theories (Teater, 2015). The humanistic theories are partly a tacit rejection of and response to the orthodox, psychoanalytical thought of the time: namely that a person's destiny was determined in childhood (Carvalho & Cordeiro, 2018). The humanistic group is sometimes called the “third force to psychology” after the psychodynamic and behavioral schools (L. Hoffman et al., 2016). Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow are considered to be the spiritual fathers of these approaches (Kramer et al., 2009). Clark Moustakas (1923–2012) and Rollo May (1909–1994) also contributed essentially to the humanistic-existential approach (Watson & Bohart, 2015).

Humanism has meant different things to many scholars, but its amalgamating thread is a concern for the dignity, worth, responsibilities, rights, and fulfillment of the person (Sutich & Vich, 1969). Humanistic theories emphasize the ultimate good of humans and their ability to be cooperative, constructive, searching for meaning, and possessing the ability to reach self-actualization (Cain, 2011; Comer, 2013; Melé, 2009). In extending the term

“humanism,” Melé (2016) defined characteristics of humanism which include wholeness, comprehensive knowledge, human dignity, development, common good, sustainability, and spirituality. In other words, he explored that common good fosters on both individual liberty and relationality as it appreciates dialogue, innovation, cooperation, oneness, and participation in social life. Melé also appreciated that in stewardship-sustainability, humanness cherishes the concept of peace and congruence with the ecological system. Humanistic characteristics include generosity, compassion, altruism, social, and emotional intelligence (Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

Existential and humanistic approaches to the study of human behavior are usually integrated into one, *The Humanistic-Existential Approach*, mainly because the two are phenomenological (value subjective experience rather than objective reality) in their orientations (Jones-Smith, 2012; Winston, 2015). Humanistic psychology is also rooted in philosophies such as those found in Buber’s (1970) I and Thou and Satre’s (1973) version of existentialism which all connect the individual with the surrounding milieu (Lemberger & Lemberger-Truelove, 2016). Existentialism is a “humanism” and focuses on the inevitable human experiences such as death, anxiety, and absurdity (Winston, 2015).

Considering the above, it is important to note that the humanistic-existential approach has influenced the fields of psychology (Bohart & Greening, 2001; L. Hoffman et al., 2013; Hanks, 2008; Winston, 2015), psychiatry (Griffith, 2014; Henrichs & Hum, 2020; Remmers, 2020), nursing, (Carvalho & Cordeiro, 2018) and management (Laszlo, 2019; Lee, 2019; Melé, 2016, 2009). The Literature is also rich in the contribution of the humanistic-existential approach to aspects of spirituality (Aanstoos et al., 2000) and social work practice (Goroff, 1981; Payne, 2011, 2005; Stefaro, 2016; Teater, 2015). The humanistic-existential approach has been applied in community practices, peacebuilding efforts, management, law, as well as other macro practices that represent its focus on communality (Blackshield, 1965; Melé, 2016; Miller, 2015; Moss, 2015; Pfuhl, 1985; Stefaro, 2016).

Social work researchers in Africa have realized the relevance of ubuntu in the profession (Mugumbate & Chereni, 2019; Mupedziswa et al., 2019; Rankopo & Diraditsile, 2020; Van Breda, 2019; Zvomuya, 2020). Although Hanks (2008) acknowledges that ubuntu does not cure all ills, she still calls upon psychologists to adopt the philosophy. She argues that ubuntu provides a new layer that is nurturing and protective- a holistic muffle of interconnection that will help practitioners triumph over the trials and tribulations of the world of disarray. It is in this background that I consider examining the axiological and ontological nature of the humanistic-existential approach to social work in the light of ubuntu philosophy. The purpose of this paper is to endorse ubuntu as a relevant theoretical framework in social work practice by means of a comparative analysis of the humanistic-existential approach [that

which has already been theorized] and the African philosophy [that which is to be theorized]. I also contribute to the call for *the ubuntuification* of social work practice – in other words theorizing the philosophy of ubuntu in social work. In doing so, I consider the exposition of the values and features which is the quintessence of the humanistic-existential approach to social work in light of ubuntu.

Conceptualizing ubuntu philosophy

Ubuntu embodies the prototypical essence of humanness, specifically the respect and love of others that guides all aspects of daily life (Hanks, 2008). Ubuntu echoes the thought of acceptable ideas and deeds (Mugumbate & Nyanguru, 2013). Ubuntu is rooted in the sayings, “I am a person because you are, I am because I share and participate” and “I am because of others.” There has been a broad consensus among scholars that ubuntu is an African philosophy expressing humanness in values of compassion, solidarity, harmony, consensus, hospitality, sympathy, and sharing among others. The philosophy is known in various languages in Africa including *bomoto* (Congo); *gimuntu* (Angola); *umunthu* (Malawi); *vumutu* (Mozambique); *vumunhu*, *vhutu* (South Africa); *humhunu/ubuthosi* (Zimbabwe); *bumuntu* (Tanzania); *umuntu* (Uganda) to mention but a few (Mupedziswa et al., 2019). The African philosophy of ubuntu like the humanistic-existential approach has been applied in peacebuilding, community development, management, law, and others several fields (Asamoah & Yeboah-Assiamah, 2019; Auchter, 2017; Cornell & Muvangua, 2012; Du Plessis, 2019; Lutz, 2009; Msengana, 2006; Metz, 2018; Radebe & Phooko, 2017; Tutu, 2000).

The ethos of *ubuntu* emphasizes on communal values, human dignity, sharing, teamwork, social cohesion, social justice, human rights, and respect among others (Broodryk, 2008, 2006; Letseka, 2012; Mugumbate & Nyanguru, 2013; Timpson et al., 2014; Tucker & Masango, 2017; Tutu, 2000). Ubuntu has been conceptualized as “humanness, personhood and morality” (Letseka, 2012, p. 48). The African worldview of humanness is that which refers to as ubuntu (Eze, 2008; Shutte, 2008). The philosophy of ubuntu captures the underlying African world-view that expresses Africa’s egalitarian, humanistic, interconnected, communitarian, and participatory democratic values (Elechi et al., 2010). Ubuntu has been explored through the humanistic ethical point of view (Tschaepé, 2013). Ubuntu has already been labelled a humanistic philosophy and these claims that I seek to justify and emphasize the need to integrate ubuntu in social work and other professions.

It is important to note that ubuntu originated from the Bantu people of Southern Africa although the philosophy is now shared in most parts of the continent. Whilst the origins of ubuntu are distinctly African, parallels have been drawn with similar concepts in other societies, including the Jen

philosophy amongst the Chinese, the Filipino philosophy of Loob, and the Russian concept of Obschina (Bolden, 2014).

Appreciating the axiology and ontology of humanistic-existential approach

This article is based on the arguments of Stefaroi (2016) who presents the axiological and ontological nature of the human-existential (positive) approach and he links these to the axiology of ubuntu. It is vital that I set the parameters of my argument as follows:

Essentially, the humanistic-existential (positive) direction/theory represents the socio-human (micro-) community through features such as organizational culture, high functionality, high cohesion, unity, solidarity, adaptability, resilience, high autonomy, resistance to crisis and challenges, good management, etc., while the humanistic-ontological-cultural/spiritual approach/theory of community highlights ideas and features as people-centered community, dominance of inter-personal relationships of attachment, love, respect, dominance of the practices and customs of mutual helps, social/group/community solidarity, harmony, unity, inter-personal congruency, socio-human, moral and cultural integration/cohesion, the presence/dominance of people with personality and behavior traits like altruism, empathy, kindness, goodness, tolerance, understanding, charity, helpfulness etc. (Stefaroi, 2016, p. 109)

Considering the above statement, it is clear that ubuntu philosophy is inherently a humanistic-existential approach. To refuse ubuntu a place in the humanistic-existential approach or to refuse the link between the latter and the former is to deny the humanness-orientation of both perspectives.

This article appreciates that the contemporary humanistic field is synthesized into three ontologies that integrate humanness from the individualistic scope to the communal scope. According to (Schneider et al., 2015) the ontologies are:

- Existential psychology: emphasizes situated freedom and responsibility.
- Transpersonal psychology: emphasizes spirituality and compassionate social action. Stefaroi (2016) says it also involves concepts such as self beyond, systematic trance, altered state of consciousness, and religious conversation.
- Constructivist psychology: involves culture, political consciousness, and meaning.

Thus, the humanistic-existential approach involves in its ontology the issues of communality, socio-cultural structures, belief systems, and also the transcendent. The scope of this article is therefore to justify that indeed ubuntu is a humanistic-existential philosophy.

Reflectively, Payne (2011) in Stefaro (2016, pp. 64–65) emphasizes the most important principles of humanistic social work which are:

- Accountability.
- Achieving personal and social equality.
- Achieving caring and creativity.
- Developing self and spirituality.
- Developing security and resilience.
- Ensuring developments in research.

Consequently, Stefaro (2016) highlights that humanistic social work services operate mainly with terms and phrases that cultivate the diminishing of customer's suffering, distress, and unhappiness while increasing spiritual well-being, improving personal and community development as well as ensuring moral development and socio-human integration.

Social workers reflect in action [reading, interventions, research etc] in ways that link to literature (Ferguson, 2018) and work of (Melé, 2016; Goroff, 1981; Payne, 2011; Stefaro, 2016; Schneider et al., 2015; Teater, 2015) in humanistic-existential work, I consider exploring nine themes that integrate other essentials of the approach. The author conceptualizes nine themes as a way to stimulate the discussion of theorizing ubuntu from a humanistic-existential perspective. I appreciate that there are several themes that can be utilized but for the purpose of this paper, the nine themes aim at integrating the core values of the humanistic-existential approach. I, therefore, present the following nine themes:

Self-awareness

The humanistic-existential approach emphasizes that people are capable of self-awareness (Burns, 1983; Krill, 2014). In addition, Stefaro (2016) and Teater (2015) highlight that one of the core values of the humanistic theory is that human beings are conscious they are aware of being aware both of oneself and in the context of the other. In their exploration of *Humanistic/Existential/Phenomenological Psychotherapy*, Watson and Bohart (2015) elaborate that if people are aware of their feelings, thoughts, and emotions, they will be informed about their needs and how to behave in responding to others and their environment. For Satre, a human being first of all exists, encounters himself or herself, surges up in the world, then defines himself or herself afterward (Baird & Kaufmann, 2008). Self-awareness also reflects the Johari window and how it emphasizes on learning from others who are part of the community thereby strengthening the axiom, "I am because you are." The humanistic-existential approach to self-awareness extends the concept of self from the personal self to the communal self in which the community is entitled to a sense of (both) personal, and shared identity (Stefaro, 2016).

The humanistic-existential self-awareness also reflects on Adler's concepts of a community feeling and of social interest (Ansbacher, 1992; Moss, 2015). In the same vein, at the heart of self, ubuntu realizes that humans need to identify with self and others (Jolley, 2011). Consciousness is a key component in the ubuntu philosophy (Wilson & Williams, 2013). Ubuntu emphasizes the interconnectedness of self with society (Le Grange, 2012) which is only adequately attainable if individuals are aware of themselves and their responsibilities to others. R. J. Khoza (2011, p. 439) theorizes that ubuntu as a construct is based on the axiom "one's humanness, one's personhood, is dependent upon one's relationship with others" also reflecting that self-awareness is attained in light of others. Zvomuya (2020) pinpoints ubuntu as the foundation of one's identity and a sense of self which are based on the ethical teachings passed from generation to generation through enculturation and socialization. Hence, ubuntu fosters self-awareness which is a reflective feature of humanistic-existential social work.

Self-awareness is essential to both the social worker and the client. It helps practitioners and clients realize their strengths and weaknesses, their biases and attitudes so that these do not hinder the therapeutic process with the client (Compton & Galaway, 1994). Self-awareness helps practitioners to practice in their scope of competence and refer to other professionals whenever conflicts of interest emerge. Social workers strive to ensure that they enhance client's self-awareness through motivational interviewing and non-directive approaches to counseling so that they realize relapse triggers and their strengths and weaknesses in order to utilize these in recovery management. Self-awareness at both individual and community levels helps to foster resilience in the face of disaster. The construct of self-awareness involves the ideals of appreciating one's opportunities, resource systems, threats, and weaknesses. It involves learning about resources that are at the disposal of self as an individual or the community.

Self-determination

It is evident in the literature on the humanistic-existential approach that people have the power to choose and to direct their own actions (Burns, 1983; Carvalho & Cordeiro, 2018; Stefaro, 2016; Watson & Bohart, 2015). Assuming that human beings have the potential to deal with their problems, the humanistic-existential approach realizes that people can decide their solutions provided there is an optimum milieu. The humanistic approach emphasizes on one's own ability to make decisions and attaining personal achievements (Hergenhahn, 2009). Human beings have the ability to make decisions, therefore they also have a responsibility to the consequences of their decisions (Stefaro, 2016). However, to say that the humanistic-existential approach is individual-oriented in its focus on self-determination is to limit the perspective only to the micro practice. Humanistic social work respects the

value of community self-determination (Stefaroi, 2016). Thus, this paper puts forward the notion that the humanistic-existential approach reflects on both personal self-determination and communal self-determination. In addition, the humanistic self-determination theory (SDT) emphasizes relatedness as one of the three needs of decision-making and motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

In consideration of this, it is conceivable to highlight that ubuntu also respects self-determination. Chuwa (2014, p. 38) observes that ubuntu as an African philosophy appreciates the value of self-determination for each community member at the same time specifying its limitation in the common good. Ubuntu has been criticized by other scholars for its collectivist orientation which is incompatible with the value of individual freedom that is among the most promising ideals in liberal tradition (Metz, 2011). Atuned to these criticisms, Msengana (2006, p. 93) postulates that inasmuch as ubuntu is a collective entity, it does not disregard individual freedoms and rights. For her, ubuntu is clearly a democratic philosophy of life which puts the human being at the center. Inherent to social work is the profession's principle of self-determination. Social workers promote the client's socially responsible self-determination (National Association of Social Workers, 2017). However, it should be noted that self-determination 'whether through the perspectives of ubuntu or the humanistic-existential approach' is limited in the sense that it should not intrude into the safety of community members. Cognizant of these and other considerable expositions, I contend also that ubuntu is fundamental to humanistic social work.

Human dignity

The value of human dignity is respected in the humanistic-existential approach (Hanks, 2008; Pfuhl, 1985; Stefaro, 2016). Human dignity is at the core of any humanistic intervention and it involves valuing the humanness of the person, respecting individual worth and uniqueness, the individual's human rights, and the sacredness of humanity. The respect for human dignity emphasized in the humanistic-existential approach emulates the philosophy of ubuntu. Literature is alive to the fact that ubuntu values and promotes human dignity (Broodryk, 2008; Gade, 2011; R. Khoza, 2006; Mangaliso, 2001; Van Breda, 2019). In effect, ubuntu advances the concept of human dignity or "humanness" (Murithi, 2007, p. 282). Ubuntu as a praxis framework calls for the respect of self and others. It reflects on the sacredness of human beings. In the same vein, social workers respect the inherent dignity and worth of a person (National Association of Social Workers, 2017). The respect of human dignity clearly oscillates well between the values of social justice, human rights, and the principle of self-determination. The humanistic social worker can meet the values of human dignity and rights through interventions of empowerment, social change, and social progress. The social worker can

assume roles as an advocate, enabler, negotiator, counselor, and mediator (Stefaroi, 2016). A close scrutiny of the value of human dignity in the humanistic-existential approach in light of ubuntu philosophy clearly reflects on the importance of the African philosophy as a “new” force in social work.

Holism

The humanistic-existential approach focuses on the wholeness of life and human beings (Melé, 2016; Stefaro, 2016). Practitioners who are oriented in the humanistic-existential approach see the person as an integrated whole, with physical, intellectual, emotional, social, and spiritual dynamics (J. Hoffman, 2010). Humanistic social work is interested in holistic caring processes rather than a limited focus on interventions (Payne, 2011). In his work, Melé (2016, p. 41) argues that the whole person can be termed *homo integralis* – which entails considering the human to have a variety of possible motivations, a wide rationality, emotions, freedom, personality and character shaped by moral traits, the capacity to learn, sociability, openness to transcendence, and other modalities. In light of the above, it is imperative to appreciate Tschaepe (2013) who observes that *ubu* – specifies a oneness, while *ntu* specifies a wholeness. He adds that *ubu* is oriented toward *ntu* as “being becoming whole.”

Hanks (2008) comprehends that ubuntu is holistic in nature. One African scholar has conceptualized the African holism as follows:

It is in holism that Africans, especially the Igbo people, define their vision of life, relationship and interactions with human beings and nature. In this vision, all lives are valued, respected and protected. Hence, Africans regard all lives as agnate of one another and as such promote the interdependent of one and the other. (Okoro, 2019, pp. 4–5).

From the above statement and other explorations, the African holism covers all spheres of life. Thus, the philosophy of ubuntu appreciates the biological, psychological, cognitive, social, and spiritual modalities of life. Wholeness is the hallmark of an African perspective on life in its totality and the concept of a person (Msengana, 2006).

It is clear that the humanistic-existential approach to social work practice reflects on the philosophy of ubuntu as it involves the aspects of holism. Ubuntu philosophy, speaks greatly of the interconnectedness of spirituality as witnessed by the need to perform rituals and appease the living dead (Mabvurira, 2016). The African philosophy also respects the connection of human nature and environmental space (Chibvongodze, 2016). Ubuntu also respects the interconnectedness of the community with its members. Social work as a profession, in its emphasis on holism, is rooted in the biopsychosocial approach, the ecological systems thinking, and the person-in-the-environment perspective. It is therefore relevant for social work practitioners to tap

into the rich philosophy of ubuntu as it appreciates the holistic modalities of human welfare.

Pursuit for social justice and human rights

Lemberger & Lemberger-Truelove (2016, p. 1) highlight that for those practitioners who are influenced by humanistic psychology there appears to be an intuitive yet equivocal base for social justice work. Payne (2011) and Goroff (1981) link the concept of humanistic social work with the intrinsic humanistic principles of human rights and social justice. Humanistic social work recognizes the need for practitioners to fight the oppression of people (Goroff, 1989). The pursuit of social justice and human rights resonates well with the philosophy of ubuntu. Research has shown that ubuntu promotes social justice (Elechi et al., 2010; Kgatla, 2016; Metz, 2015). Ubuntu has the potential to contribute to the “multiculturalization” of human rights in order to make them truly universal (Murithi, 2007). Once more, Van Norren (2014, p. 262) posits that in property law ubuntu is also used to combat social injustice. Social work axiology has profoundly accepted the concepts of social justice and human rights which are also pivotal in the humanistic-existential approach and ubuntu philosophy.

Ubuntu reflects on social justice through the notion of humanness. Young people who are nurtured into ubuntu morality are more likely to treat others with fairness and justice at all times (Letseka, 2014). The axiom, “I am because you are” ‘which is of great essence to ubuntu’ helps to respect human life, reduce human suffering, and enhances respect for humanity. Ubuntu is inherently interested in how one relates to himself/herself, God or spiritual deities, society, and the environment. Muwanga-Zake (2009, p. 414) pronounces that ubuntu is “tact, sacred, and embedded in practices, relationships, and rituals.” In addition, ubuntu has been explored in the contexts of pastoral ethics of being a brother’s keeper, thereby showing its capacity to enhance fairness and justice in the community. *Umhuka* (*acting like an animal*) is the opposite of ubuntu (Mugumbate & Chereni, 2019) and accounts for anti-social behaviors, injustice, violence, and acts of racism such as xenophobic attacks. Ubuntu defines human relationships in terms of universal brotherhoods of all (Okoro & Nkama, 2018). According to ubuntu, no individual’s rights are greater than the other’s (Van Breda, 2019). African humanism constitutes all human beings into one universal family created in the image of God. When people see each other as God’s image like themselves and treat them as such, it will reduce all kinds of human rights violations, afflictions, marginalization, and outright denials of their entitlements (Obioha & Okaneme, 2017).

Social workers are major stakeholders in the maintenance of any nation’s social fabric as well as the protection of vulnerable groups in communities. The promise for a humanistic social work practice involves

the recognition by social workers that we are either oppressors or are being oppressed; it specifically calls for the recognition that social work is a political profession (Goroff, 1981). While Van Norren (2014) realizes that ubuntu is not merely an obsolete philosophy from the past but has practical relevance, Murithi (2007, p. 285) reflects “ubuntu” as a call to put our principles in action so as to practice politics in principle. Social workers have been called to involve themselves in political activism and conscientizing the masses about their rights (Muchanyerei, 2017; Mtetwa & Muchacha, 2013). Social workers should advocate for living conditions conducive to the fulfillment of basic human needs and should promote social, economic, political, and cultural values as well as institutions that are compatible with the realization of social justice (National Association of Social Workers, 2017). Thus, the exposition continues to show that the philosophy of ubuntu is fundamental in humanistic social work practice.

Motivation

The humanistic–existential approach to social work also involves the Maslow’s theory on motivation, usually known as the hierarchy of needs. Mawere et al. (2016) argue that the Maslow’s theory of the hierarchy of needs is not applicable to many settings in Africa, past or present. They noted that in Southern Africa, behavior is motivated by the pursuit of relationships, strengthening of community, acknowledgment of authority, sharing, and avoidance of shame. Mthembu (1996, p. 220) agrees, “Africans believe that the only wealth is that which is shared and rendered visible to the entire community.” Ubuntu is also linked to worker motivation techniques (Van der Wal & Ramotschoa, 2001). Hague-Helgestad (2011) argues that ubuntu management motivates Africans to be productive and emphasizes spontaneous warmth, community enhancement, and tends not to focus on individual acquisition of wealth.

However, the world is motivated by egoistic desires. Oxfam (2018, p. 2) states that 82% of the world’s wealth acquired in 2017 went to 1% of the world’s population. Oxfam showed that if the wealth was spread evenly throughout the world, this could end global extreme poverty seven times over. This shows that economic rewards are increasingly being concentrated on the top and ubuntu is not being applied in business. It should be noted that African communities also suffer from high levels of corruption from political leaders – a behavior which is opposite of ubuntu as it can be classified under *umhuka* (acting like an animal). It shows that people are motivated by wealth rather than the values of ubuntu. This paper argues that ubuntu has the potential to end poverty only if it is adequately adhered to as a philosophy because it enhances the aspects of sharing and strengthening the community as motivation factors.

Social cohesion

The concept of social cohesion consists of elements including solidarity, shared loyalty, and the interdependence of people (Fenger, 2012 as cited in United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2016). Bohart and Greening (2001) highlight that various humanistic practitioners have published on a range of social issues that promote international peace and understanding. Krill (2014) argues that affirming the necessity of dialogue is one of the principles of existential social work. According to Melé (2016) and Stefaro (2016) humanistic work cherishes the concepts of social cohesion, peace, and mutual understanding. I argue in this paper that it is through the reflections of the humanistic-existential work that organizations such as the United Nations were established. The objectives of such establishments are to build on solidarity, peace, and mutual understanding. J. Hoffman (2010) emphasizes that for the humanistic-existential approach, people must learn to exist with themselves (intrapersonal), with others (interpersonal), and existentially with the world to develop an authentic sense of connectedness. Mindful of this, I acknowledge the work of Okoro and Nkama (2018) which posits that ubuntu is an ideal philosophy of social cohesion which is against xenophobia. The spirit of ubuntu is what binds groups together (Mupedziswa et al., 2019). Ubuntu philosophy strives on sharing, mutual understanding, participation, and respecting one another which are all essential in social cohesion.

The African philosophy of ubuntu focuses on the importance of community, altruism, solidarity, sharing, caring, and hospitality (UNDP, 2016) that all promote unity and peace amongst people. Ubuntu speaks greatly of forgiveness and reconciliation (Tutu, 2000) all of which are key elements in social cohesion. Ubuntu involves a good disposition toward fellow beings (Mthembu, 1996, p. 216). A human being achieves humanity through his/her relations with other human beings (Eze, 2008). Living harmoniously within an African community is a moral obligation ordained by God for the promotion of humanity and life (Metz, 2007). In practice, social work promotes social change and social cohesion (Stefaro, 2016). Social cohesion has two main dimensions which are: reducing disparities, inequalities, and social exclusion; and strengthening social relations, interactions, and ties (UNDP, 2016). The treatise on the humanistic-existential approach to social work speaks heavily on social cohesion which is a key concept in ubuntu. The profession of social work has a mandate of ensuring peace in the society and emphasizing on mutual understanding. Social work promotes social cohesion, empowerment, and liberation of people (O'Leary & Tsui, 2020; Stefaro, 2016). It would be an injustice to reject the influence of ubuntu in the future as well as contemporary social work practice and education.

Spirituality

Humanistic existentialism can respond to the issues of spiritual transcendence (Krill, 2014; Stefaro, 2016). Spirituality is the realm of existence that permits us to connect to the world in an intimate manner. The existential theory is unique among counseling theories due to its philosophical framework which broadens its scope to include universal questions that are both psychological and theological in nature (Eliason et al., 2010). In the article, *The case for Existential (Spiritual) Psychotherapy*, Schneider (2015) conceives that existential psychotherapy has deep spiritual roots that acknowledge transpersonal psychology. In reflection of this, ubuntu is an African philosophy that promotes spirituality (Openhim, 2012; Zvomuya, 2020). The theology of ubuntu is deeply rooted in African spirituality- a spirituality that is central to life and transforms all human relations (Membe-Matale, 2015). The virtue of African theistic humanism does not lie largely on the fact that Africans permanently religious, but rather believe in God's existence and the fact that their fellow humans are God's images like themselves (Obioha & Okaneme, 2017).

The ontology of ubuntu has a darker underside which Ashforth (2002, p. 12) as cited in Barolsky (2012) has explored in terms of a "paradigm of witchcraft" that assumes people are capable of causing harm through supernatural means. In view of this, the humanistic-existential psychology bears that humans tend to be suspicious of others. The profession of social work is greatly becoming interested in spiritual matters and one of the gray areas it should further explore is the phenomenon of witchcraft and its impact on the biopsychosocial and spiritual well-being of the clients. It should also explore on positive interventions that are spiritually centered.

There are calls to adopt the ubuntu-informed eco-spiritual social work which involves preventing air pollution, reducing our reliance on plastics, and ensuring sustainable farming methods (Van Breda, 2019). The ubuntu-informed eco-spiritual social work calls to reinforce the works in environmental management in which ubuntu has been used as a philosophy for ecological justice (Chibvongodze, 2016; Le Grange, 2015, p. 2001). Africans believe in the sacredness of the environment and that bad things can befall those that contaminate the environment hence the relation between spirituality and ecological justice in ubuntu. The spirituality field of ubuntu like the "pachamama concept" respects the mother earth as it is the source of food and water. Pachamama concept is found among the Andean cultures in which they believe in a deity that is generous with gifts of nature such as food, water, and the sun (Molinie, 2004). It appreciates that spirituality is essential even in the preservation of nature and any defilement of the environment can be punishable by the deity.

According to social work scholars (Mabvurira, 2016; Matthews, 2009; Mugumbate & Nyanguru, 2013; Senrich, 2013), there is a strong association between spirituality and social work practice. As part of a holistic approach to

the African perspective, spirituality is also an area pivotal in ubuntu-informed social work practice. Thus, the phenomenon of spirituality evident in ubuntu and the humanistic-existential approach to social work echoes the relevance of the African philosophy in social work. Taking an account of this and other factors, it is not bizarre to utilize the ubuntu philosophy as a theoretical framework of social work practice and education.

Death

I have explored on what many people might want to view as the positive aspects of the humanistic-existential approach in previous sections of this disquisition. The following examines a difficult but relevant theme to explore, a phenomenon that is relatively difficult to accept when it visits a household – the issue of death. A distortion of existentialism is an assumption that is pessimistic and even nihilistic because it emphasizes on awareness of death (J. Hoffman, 2010). An exploration of death is intrinsically related to the existential meaning of one's own life for the individual to lead a purpose-driven life. Death is not an intimidator but an inevitable reality. Nilsson (2018) shares that existential social workers have at their disposal tools such as the Frankl therapeutic approach to existential analysis (i.e., logotherapy) as well as spiritual – sensitive modalities (prayer and mindfulness).

Ubuntu relates not only to the contemporary community but also to the preceding and following communities, that is, to ancestors and descendants (Ekore & Lanre-Abass, 2016; Van Breda, 2019). Ubuntu accepts that people will one day face death. The phenomenon of ubuntu goes beyond the earthly life to consider life after death as ancestors (living dead) holding those living on earth accountable for their actions mainly because of the desire to become an ancestor after death. Additionally, ubuntu fosters unity even in families that are enemies when the common enemy death comes (Baloyi & Makobe-Rabothata, 2014). Ubuntu emphasizes that people gather together to bury the dead and share in the grieving process while comforting one another. Ubuntu also emphasizes on the notion of taking care of orphans as an element of child protection and welfare. The theme of death shows the need for social protection interventions that include child welfare. The theme of death speaks greatly to grief counseling, poverty alleviation through empowering orphans, food security measures especially when the breadwinner is the one who has passed on. Thus, it is vital to consider the *ubuntification* of social work practice and education as it has proved to be fundamental in humanistic social work.

Implications

Whereas the philosophy of ubuntu existed before the theorization of the humanistic-existential approach, it is essential to utilize the latter in the

process of theorizing the former. The themes have shown that ubuntu philosophy is in part a humanistic-existential approach. This article has stimulated a discourse of theorizing ubuntu philosophy as a humanistic-existential approach. Ubuntu has proved itself relevant through humanistic-existential themes such as self-determination, self-awareness, human dignity, the pursuit for social justice and human rights, social cohesion, motivation, spirituality, and death. The paper argues that the ontologies and axiological reflections of the humanistic-existential approach to social work practice mirror the African philosophy of ubuntu as reflected by the nine themes explored in this disquisition. In this regard, the paper advances the framework of ubuntu as a humanistic-existential approach as a step toward theorizing the African philosophy. It emphasizes that it would be doing injustice to the African philosophy if it is denied a place in the humanistic-existential approach. The article contradicts the notion stated by Molefe (2015) that there is no humanism in the African moral tradition because humanism lacks spiritual property. The article acknowledges that the humanistic field involves transpersonal ontology which appreciates both naturalistic and supernatural claims. This paper advances for the adoption of ubuntu philosophy as part of the humanistic-existential approach as a step toward theorizing the African philosophy.

Conclusion

I have considered the exposition of humanistic-existential approach in light of the African philosophy of ubuntu. The article has explored nine features of the humanistic-existential approach to social work in light of ubuntu philosophy – self-awareness, self-determination, human dignity, holism, the pursuit of social justice and human rights, motivation, social cohesion, spirituality, and death. The themes show that ubuntu is relevant to social work as these are reflective of the axiology and ontologies of an already theorized humanistic-existential approach. The article has also explored on the axiology of social work and ubuntu as it reflected on themes such as self-determination, the pursuit of social justice and human rights, and human dignity. I call for the *ubuntufication* of social work practice and education. I have considered that the philosophy of ubuntu is germane to humanistic social work. If Africa and the whole world are to succeed in addressing social work concerns such as poverty, social injustices, and also political instability the humanistic-existential philosophy of ubuntu should be upheld and put into practice.

Disclosure statement

Author declares no conflict of interests.

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The views shared in this paper do not represent the institution to which the author is affiliated to but are his own.

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Defending the African philosophy of ubuntu and its place in clinical social work practice in mental health: The biopsychosocial and ecological systems perspectives

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ABSTRACT

While other scholars argue that there seems to be a disjuncture when it comes to applying ubuntu in clinical social work, the impetus of this discourse is to reflect on ubuntu as a philosophy applicable to clinical social work interventions in mental health. Assuming that clinical social work is based on the biopsychosocial and ecological models, it explores how ubuntu is relevant in the assessment, diagnosis, treatment, and prevention of behavioral, emotional, and mental disorders. The article calls for the adoption of ubuntu philosophy to the theoretical framework of clinical social work practice in mental health.

KEYWORDS

Ubuntu philosophy; clinical social work; interventions; mental health; biopsychosocial and ecological systems

Introduction

The construct of mental health includes “subjective well-being, perceived self-efficacy, autonomy, competence, intergenerational dependence, and self-actualization of one’s intellectual and emotional potential, among others” (World Health Organisation, 2001, p. 5). Clinical social work is the professional application of social work theory and methods to the diagnosis, treatment, and prevention of psychosocial dysfunction, disability, or impairment, including emotional, mental, and behavioral disorders (Barker, 2003; Simpson, Williams, & Segall, 2007). Clinical social workers are obligated by the code of ethics to be culturally competent. As a philosophy applicable in clinical social work, ubuntu can be described as the capacity in the African culture to show compassion, reciprocity, dignity, humanity, and mutuality in the interests of communality in light of justice and mutual caring (Broodryk, 2008; Khoza, 2006; Mangaliso, 2001; Van Breda, 2019). Ubuntu is “tact, sacred and embedded in practices, relationships and rituals” (Muwanga-Zake, 2009, p. 414).

The African philosophy of ubuntu respects humanity in all its totality and emphasizes on the holistic conceptualization of phenomenon (Hanks, 2007; Tschape, 2013; Tutu, 2000). The concept of ubuntu/botho/unhu is as old as humanity itself and is an integral part of African ethics (Dolamo, 2013). In

effect, ubuntu advances a framework of human dignity or “humanness” that resonates with the notion of human rights (Murithi, 2007, p. 282). Ubuntu is a philosophy that originates from sub-Saharan Africa where Bantu people live. *Umhuka* (*acting like an animal*) is the opposite of ubuntu (Mugumbate & Chereni, 2019). The concept of ubuntu assumes that human beings like to peacefully coexist with one another and are committed to utilization and sharing of locally available resources in their social environment for individual and collective gain (Rankopo & Diraditsile, 2020). Two frameworks of ubuntu have been put forward by Gade (2012): the moral quality of the human being and the concept of interconnectedness which are all relevant in clinical social work as these reflect on the practitioner who operates in an integrated social agency.

There has been considerable work on the concept of ubuntu and social work practice in general. Zvomuya (2020) explored ubuntu as an international turning point for social work profession looking through the new lenses from the African pot of knowledge. Mabvurira (2020) has examined the philosophy of ubuntu as a guide for ethical decision-making in social work, while Rankopo and Diraditsile (2020) highlighted the interface between ubuntu and social work practice in Botswana. At an earlier time, Mupedziswa, Rankopo, and Mwansa (2019) considered ubuntu as a Pan-African philosophical framework for social work in Africa, while Van Breda (2019) expatiated on developing the notion of ubuntu as an African theory for social work practice. Beforehand, Mugumbate and Chereni (2019) expounded on using the African ubuntu theory in social work with children in Zimbabwe.

In the fields of psychology and nursing, the concept of ubuntu has also been considered. The role of ubuntu in families with mental illness in the community has been scrutinized (Engelbrecht & Kasiram, 2012). The ubuntu concept has been studied as a paradigm for humanistic psychology (Hanks, 2007). Ubuntu as a cultural method of mental health promotion has been evaluated (Edwards, Makunga, Ngcobo, & Dhlomo, 2004). Google search scholar shows no known literature on the reflection of ubuntu philosophy mindful of clinical social work interventions in mental health. Inasmuch as Mupedziswa et al. (2019, pp. 33–34) argue that ubuntu can be used as a framework for practice at the macro and meso levels, but there seems to be a disjuncture when it comes to the tenets of social work practice at the micro level (clinical work), I seek to reflect on the relevance of ubuntu in clinical social work. Mupedziswa et al. (2019, pp. 33–34) tend to limit clinical social work practice to the micro practice and this becomes problematic. Assuming that clinical social work practice is based on the biopsychosocial model (Chigangaidze, 2020a; Harkness, 2011, p. 228; Ragesh, Hamza & Sajitha, 2015, p. 166) and the ecological systems thinking (Teater, 2014; Tosone, 2004), I consider the framework of ubuntu as relevant in the light of clinical social work interventions in mental health.

Ubuntu and clinical social work interventions in mental health

Interventions in mental health should promote an individual's ability to enjoy life and create a balance between life activities and efforts to achieve psychological resilience (Snyder, Lopez, & Pedrotti, 2011). Clinical social work interventions include assessment, diagnosis, treatment, and prevention of behavioral, emotional, and psychological disorders. The reflection of ubuntu as a philosophy appropriate to clinical social work interventions in mental health is considered in the following sections.

Ubuntu and clinical social work assessments in mental health

The concept of ubuntu considers that human beings like to peacefully coexist with one another (Rankopo & Diraditsile, 2020). In the same axiology, ensuring peaceful coexistence of human beings is central to clinical social work assessments in mental health. The profession considers the reciprocal impact of people and their environments in assessing human behavior (Ragesh, Hamza, & Kvns, 2015). Clinical social workers are interested in assessing how an individual interacts with others in the community and how the environment influences his or her behavior. Ubuntu, in the same vein, has a strong characteristic of reciprocity (Khoza, 2006; Van Breda, 2019) which is an essential element in clinical social work assessments in mental health as shown above.

The aspects of interconnectedness are an integral framework to the philosophy of ubuntu (Gade, 2012). Clinical social work assessments in mental health include the evaluation of client's risks to self and others. The assessment of such risks is clearly a delineation of valuing peaceful coexistence of human beings which is intrinsically enshrined in the philosophy of ubuntu/unhu/botho. It is evident that the philosophy of ubuntu guides clinical social work assessments in mental health practice. Ubuntu values how communities influence the welfare of individuals. The African philosophy of ubuntu is consistent with the notion of community (Mupedziswa et al., 2019, p. 34). Utilizing the biopsychosocial approach (Engel, 1977) and the ecological systems theory (Brofenbrenner, 1979), clinical social workers are interested in how communities, socio-economic factors, and political issues trigger individuals' mental health problems. The traditional African healer utilized the biopsychosocial and spiritual model in his or her own way of assessment. African traditional healers inferred from the perspectives of biological, social, psychological, and supernatural causal evidence (Prinsloo, 2001). Mental health problems such as substance abuse do not occur in a bubble, rather these are affected by environmental factors which include family, community, and cultural issues (Vakharia & Little, 2017). Mental health is shaped, to a greater extent, by the social, economic, and physical environments in which people live (Gulbenkian Mental Health Platform & World Health Organisation, 2014).

In assessments, clinicians utilize ecomaps (Ray & Street, 2005) and genograms to depict the community resource systems as well as family support networks that mental health clients can utilize in ensuring recovery and prevention of relapses. Emphasis is given that assessments in clinical social work involves the home setting in which mental health clients reside. Clinical social workers often conduct home assessments to have an appreciation of how clients are being accommodated and evaluate their psychosocial functioning in the community, among other reasons. Research has shown that social support and connectedness (which are all key elements in ubuntu) are essential components to mental health (Kernahan, Bettencourt, & Dorr, 2000). It is therefore crystal clear that ubuntu is a framework that is applicable in clinical social work practice as evidenced on how it essentially fits in the profession's assessments in mental health.

Clinical social worker's assessment in mental health involves collating history from significant others and use it also as part of the information to formulate a clinical diagnosis. The practitioners acquire information from how significant others perceive the client. That which significant others interpret as deviating from societal norms and expectations is what the clinician single out in the process of case formulation. The mental health clients are interviewed on how they make sense of the world around them in ruling out of psychosis (delusions and hallucinations). Ubuntu philosophy calls for an interpretivist epistemology in which an inductive appreciation of how individuals and groups make sense of the world around them (Bolden, 2014). Enquiring on how individuals perceive the world around them is key in clinical social work assessments in mental health and is also part of the ubuntu philosophy.

Ubuntu and diagnosis in clinical social work in mental health

Diagnosis is a procedure used to identify the presence, nature, and cause of a disorder from its onset, course, and constellation of signs and symptoms (Harkness, 2011). Clinical social workers are licensed to diagnose mental disorders, and this also makes them liable for their diagnosis (Reamer, 2003). Stigma associated with mental illness label can have devastating social consequences (Martinez, Piff, Mendoza-Denton, & Hinshaw, 2011). The stigma associated with the diagnosis of mental health problems may reduce the adherence of clients to therapy (Link & Phelan, 2006 cited in Martinez et al., 2011). The diagnosis of mental illness is disempowering to the client, especially when it is disclosed with lack of information (Pitt, Kilbride, Welford, Nothard, & Morrison, 2009). Inscribed in clinical social work values of respecting human dignity and individual worth, the practitioners educate the clients and the significant others on the diagnosis. Au fait of the above, ubuntu is anchored on maintaining the humanness of human beings, and one of the objectives of clinical social work interventions in diagnosis is to ensure

that the process does not dehumanize the client. Clinical social work can embrace its social justice aim in mental health services by ensuring that client's self-esteem and respect needs are met (McLaughlin, 2011).

Ubuntu and clinical social work advocacy

Ubuntu revolves around fairness and justice (Elechi, Morris, & Schauer, 2010; Kgatla, 2016; Letseka, 2014). It is a framework known for advancing human rights (Murithi, 2007). Clinical social workers are advocates for social justice (Berzoff & Drisko, 2015; Berthold, 2015; McLaughlin, 2009), showing that ubuntu as a philosophy is applicable also in this domain. Social workers such as Sheafor and Horejsi (2008) divide advocacy into cause (advancing the cause of a group) and case (redressing power imbalances and promoting the rights of marginalized individuals). The literature highlights that individuals receiving treatment from mental health facilities encounter complex social justice issues concerning human rights, access to resources, stigmatization, marginalization, and poverty (World Health Organization, 2019; Tawiah, Adongo & Aikins, 2015; Engelbrecht & Kasiram, 2012). Social justice is to be understood as occurring within relational contexts such as provision of mental health services, and social workers are agents through which basic human needs and human rights can be actively addressed (McLaughlin, 2011). Furthermore, Fraust (2008, p. 299) argues that "the clinical social worker has expertise in both mental health and advocacy, and is therefore the most qualified person to be a patient advocate in a community mental health center." Therefore, the ubuntu philosophy is also essentially applicable to clinical social work advocacy in mental health interventions.

Ubuntu and clinical social work with groups

Group work is a "goal-directed activity with small treatment and task groups aimed at meeting socio-emotional needs and accomplishing tasks. This activity is directed to individual members of a group as a whole within a system of service delivery" (Toseland & Rivas, 2012, p. 11). Group therapies help stabilize psychiatric symptomatology (Garte-Wolf, 2011). The spirit of ubuntu, in the same light, is what binds groups together (Mupedziswa et al., 2019, p. 32). Group work in health-care settings provides a platform for the installation of hope, universality, and altruism (Kelly, 2017). Ubuntu fosters selflessness (altruism), solidarity, and the installation of hope to fellow human beings. The philosophy of ubuntu advances sharing and participation, which are essential in clinical social work group therapy in mental health. In addition, groups tend to be made up of people from diverse backgrounds who may band together with the impetus to deal with life challenges, something that is inimical to African culture (Mupedziswa et al., 2019). Thus, ubuntu can be

considered as an essential philosophy applicable to clinical social work practice in mental health.

Ubuntu and family therapy

Family therapy involves working with the significant others as well as the client – in other words, it focuses on the relationships within which the client’s problem behaviors/symptoms are manifested – and is also known as systematic therapy (Burbach, 2018). Considering this therapy in clinical social work, I appreciate the *Ukama* view of ubuntu, which says that individuals belong to the family and whatever they do, they consider the family (Mugumbate & Chereni, 2019). Again, one of the reflections of ubuntu points to the Jomo Kenyatta’s *Harambee* concept – to pull together, to work together as a family. It illustrates togetherness, which is one of the cornerstones of any successful family (Dolamo, 2013). Clinicians can use the platform of family therapy to educate the family members on the mental illness and reconcile relationships broken during the episodes of psychosis. Ubuntu advances greatly on the elements of forgiveness and reconciliation (Tutu, 2000). Forgiveness and reconciliation are essential elements of therapy (Macaskill, 2005; McCullough, 1997). When family members forgive one another, it promotes recovery, hence the need to involve family in mental health treatment. Research has shown that the involvement of family in mental health treatment through family therapy has better therapeutic outcomes (Baucon, Whisman, & Paprocki, 2012).

Evidence supports that clinicians utilize family therapy to encourage mutual understanding and identify and alter unhealthy patterns of family interaction (Burbach, 2018) – and these aspects of mutual understanding are inherently linked to the ubuntu philosophy. Family therapy helps the clinician to see the client in the milieu of his or her resources, family, and wider social support systems. The clinical social work interventions with families in mental health reflect critically on the framework of ubuntu. On the same note, it is important to emphasize that the “collectivist” and “individualist” cultures hold differing views on the role of family participation and involvement with mental health services. Even so, research still posits that family therapy in mental health is applicable in all cultures if clinicians are culturally sensitive and competent (Canino & Inclan, 2001). Respecting other people’s culture and being able to effectively contribute to their welfare is indeed a prerequisite in the ubuntu philosophy.

Ubuntu and assertive community therapy (ACT)

Assertive community treatment is an intensive and highly integrated approach for community mental health service delivery (Dixon, 2000). The main objective of assertive community treatment is to promote the participants’ independence, rehabilitation, and community integration and prevent chances of

relapse (Test & Stein, 1976). The multidisciplinary team approach to assist the participant or the client is holistic in nature (Cupitt, 2009). The clinical social worker's participation in the assertive community treatment reflects on the attributes of ubuntu – working together to achieve common goals and tapping into the community resources. Ubuntu is fundamentally linked to the notions of cooperation and working together (Rankopo, Osei-Hwede, & Modie-Moroka, 2007). The interventions of the clinician in the assertive community treatment advance healthy social interaction processes which are also promoted by the ubuntu philosophy. It is crystal clear that ubuntu is even traceable to the clinical social worker's participation in assertive community treatment.

Ubuntu and behavior change interventions in mental health

Clinicians utilize interventions such as motivational interviewing during behavioral change consultations in primary care (Murphy, Mash, & Malan, 2016). Clinical social workers are faced with behavioral addictions such as substance addiction, gambling, and sexual addictions. Addiction behaviors are reflected in Mugumbate and Nyanguru (2013) as the opposite actions of ubuntu. Addictive behaviors often cause relationship problems in societies and affect the health of the client. Ubuntu is embedded in enhancing societal relationships and good behaviors. Practice wise, the role of clinical social work is to enable behavior change of mental health clients through therapies such as cognitive behavior therapy and motivational enhancement therapy. Clinical social work interventions target to bring about positive behavioral change. In doing so, clinical social workers also engage the involvement of significant others, also emphasizing the aspect of family which is a key concept in the African philosophy. Clinical social workers also explore the environmental factors, leading to negative behaviors, and in this inference, the community becomes an important domain. Similarly, the community is also of great importance in the philosophy of ubuntu as highlighted before.

Social skills training is also considered as part of behavioral change interventions in mental health. Mueser and Bellack (2007, p. 551) agree, “social skills training is currently the most potent intervention for helping individuals develop more rewarding and meaningful relationships and for promoting social integration in the community.” Clinical social workers are interested in enhancing social interaction processes (Berzoff & Drisko, 2015). Reflective of enhancing social skills, ubuntu essentially advances mutual understanding and behavior that promotes relationships in communities. It is important to reflect that ubuntu promotes dialog, fellowship, and interactions that strengthen the community and families. Ubuntu is a philosophy that holds individuals together and enables them to reciprocally communicate.

Anger management is accentuated in assisting mental health clients to deal with frustrations and angry outbursts. Behaviors that are promoted by ubuntu are gentleness, kindness, and patience. Clinical social work interventions in anger management tend to enhance individuals to be able to manage anger. Working with the clients to deal with anger helps in the reduction of violence which accounts for *umhuka* which is the opposite of ubuntu. Therefore, ubuntu is a philosophy of positive behavior, and clinical social workers strive to help their clients alter negative behaviors with positive ones. Hence, the view that ubuntu is a philosophy relevant in clinical social work interventions in mental health is convincing.

Ubuntu and clinical social work research in mental health

Many social workers have been at the forefront of clinical research in mental health (Thyer, 2002). The ethical principles of clinical research include autonomy, non-maleficence (individual should not harm or put the other person at risk), beneficence (promote positive benefits by doing well to others), justice, and advocacy (Polgar & Thomas, 1995). These ethical principles are rooted in the spirit of ubuntu. The role of research in clinical social work as an intervention method is generally to enhance the living standards of mental health clients. Research promotes good life, enhances interventions, and provides a platform for community participation – aspects that are central to the philosophy of ubuntu. Mugumbate and Nyanguru (2013) argue that ubuntu is like an umbrella research ethic. It is clear that clinical social work research in mental health reflects on the philosophy of ubuntu.

Weaknesses of ubuntu as a philosophy in clinical social work interventions

There is no theory, philosophy, or concept without flaws. Ubuntu as a philosophy cannot be a one-size-fits-all solution to the challenges that the African society faces today (Nzimakwe, 2014). There is no solid framework for the philosophy of ubuntu or standardized diagnostic manual tools for the diagnosis of mental disorders. Ubuntu seems to mean anything that one chooses (Lutz, 2009). In his work, Mabvurira (2020) cites the argument of Viviers (2016) that skeptics of ubuntu criticize it for being vague, anti-individual, and a pre-scientific tribal system that is irrelevant for modern society. In opposition to some of the suggested weaknesses, I advance that ubuntu is not at all “anti-individualistic” as it identifies the individual within the community context (Chigangaidze, 2020b; Mugumbate & Nyanguru, 2013). Ubuntu appreciates that there is no community without the individual. It is focused on the collection of [individuals] who reciprocally interact for the enhancement of society.

Clinical social workers can collaborate in research and drafting an assessment tool that is congruent to the ubuntu philosophy. Assessments in clinical social work are guided by theories. Insofar as ubuntu philosophy existed before clinical theories, it can be critically analyzed considering these theories. The analysis of ubuntu as a philosophy applicable in both clinical and developmental social work will catalyze its theorization in social work practice.

Conclusion

The ubuntu philosophy has immense contribution to the clinical social work interventions in mental health. The reflective analysis of ubuntu as a philosophy of humanness shows that it is essentially relevant in clinical social work assessment, diagnosis, treatment, and prevention of behavioral, emotional, and psychological disorders. The paper calls for clinical social workers to reflect on ubuntu philosophy in practice to ensure that mental health clients attain the dignity they deserve. A reflection of ubuntu in clinical social work interventions targeting mental health clients promotes the provision of care, group therapy, tapping into community resource systems, and family responsibilities in the rehabilitation process. Ubuntu as a philosophy cements the biopsychosocial approach and the ecological systems thinking to clinical social work practice in mental health. It would be injustice not to accord ubuntu to its place in the clinical social work practice. Even in the face of its weaknesses, a critical exploration of the axiology of ubuntu reflects on the philosophy as intrinsically relevant in the clinical social work practice as it aids to the enhancement of clients' psychosocial functioning. The paper also argues that it would be unfair to limit clinical social work practice to the micro level as it is rooted in the biopsychosocial and ecological systems thinking.

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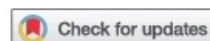
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Utilising ubuntu in social work practice: ubuntu in the eyes of the multimodal approach

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ABSTRACT

African social workers and psychologists have called for the utility of ubuntu philosophy in the fields of social work and psychology. Ubuntu is an African philosophy that is based on humanness, kindness, communality, socio-structural issues such as social justice, and human rights. This paper explores the philosophy of ubuntu guided by the seven modalities of the multimodal approach, which are behaviour, effect, sensation, imagery, cognition, interpersonal relationships and drugs/biology. The article suggests that ubuntu as an African philosophy has potential to contribute two modalities in addition to the seven modalities in the multimodal approach by the South African psychologist Arnold Lazarus. It argues that ubuntu contributes two domains in assessments and these are as follows: the person-physical environment relationship and the spiritual relationship. Given the emphasis on eco-spiritually informed social work, this paper calls for the adoption of these two modalities for the assessment and intervention plans in social work practice.

KEYWORDS

Ubuntu philosophy; multimodal approach; social work; psychology; spiritual relationship; person-physical environment relationship

The African philosophy of ubuntu has been conceptualised as a comprehensive “African worldview based on the values of intense humanness, caring, sharing, respect, compassion and associated values, ensuring a happy and qualitative community life in the spirit of family” (Broodryk, 2008, p. 17). Ubuntu depicts a holistic approach towards the human person (Dolamo, 2013; Hanks, 2008; Tschaepe, 2013; Tutu, 2000). This is a worldview that emphasises humanity in all its universality and uniqueness (Edwards et al., 2004). Ubuntu echoes the thought of acceptable ideas and deeds (Mugumbate & Nyanguru, 2013). It essentially views the person in the context of the community, which is also significant to the perspective of the person-in-the-environment in social work practice. The ubuntu philosophy has immense contribution of the social work profession among other professions (Chigangaidze, 2021; Mabvurira, 2020; Metz, 2015; Du Plessis, 2019; Zvomuya, 2020).

Social work is a practice-based profession and an academic field or discipline that advances social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and emancipation of people. It is based on the principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities (International Federation of Social Workers [IFSW], 2015). Social work practice emphasises a holistic approach (Devaux,

2014; Tosone, 2004). The profession has continuously encouraged the aim of attending both the needs of individual clients and the ways the community and society respond to those needs. Thus, there has always been a simultaneous concern in social work for individual well-being and the environmental factors that affect it (Reamer, 1995). Social work practice has an emphasis on the attainment of social-change and aspirations towards wellness in individuals, community and global domains (Chan & Sage, 2019; Devaux, 2014; Tosone, 2004). Social work practice is underpinned in theories from the fields of humanities and social sciences, medicine, economics, philosophy and other fields as it is eclectic in its nature. One theory that influences social work practice is the multimodal approach to assessment by the South African born clinical psychologist Arnold A. Lazarus.

The multimodal approach is deeply rooted in the cognitive behaviourist and the biological approaches to human behaviour. It is based on the perspective that humans are biological beings that think, feel, act, sense, imagine and interact. Therapy should therefore address the seven reciprocally influential modalities that are well known by the acronym BASIC I.D.: behaviour, affect, sensation, imagery, cognition, interpersonal relationships, and drugs or biology (Lazarus, 1981). The multimodal approach is not entirely individualistic in its scope. This is a multi-level approach (Bjorck, 2007). The modality of interpersonal relationships accommodates the communality nature of the multimodal approach. The use of community resource systems, how the individual contributes to the community, and how the society benefits from the individual are essential. The multimodal method is applicable in group therapy (Lazarus, 1989). The impetus of this article is to reflect on ubuntu in the lenses of these seven modalities. In doing so, this paper also emphasises integrating ubuntu with the multimodal approach in relation to social work practice. This paper reflects on ubuntu in the following modalities:

Behaviour

Arnold A. Lazarus rooted in the behaviourist perspectives appreciated that there are acceptable behaviours in a society (Bjorck, 2007; Lazarus, 1981). The realm of behaviour involves the need to alter negative behaviours such as overeating, violent behaviour, drug abuse, risky sexual behaviours and withdrawal (Shaughnessy, 2018). The modality of behaviour is interested in addressing the behaviour which makes the client unhappy and that which causes interactional problems in the community. The domain of behaviour is the summary of real action that appears in daily activities such as behaviour, habits, and reactions (Kustyarin, 2019). Put simply, behaviour is unhealthy if it does not facilitate for the optimum integration of the client into the community. Behaviour is dysfunctional if it limits the client's relationality to others.

In the same domain of behaviour, ubuntu is the opposite of anti-social behaviours and vengeance (Mugumbate & Nyanguru, 2013). Ubuntu is against violence, xenophobia and other destructive behaviours as it promotes *philoxenia* [to love a stranger] (Koenane, 2018). Behaviours that cause suffering to humanity are in the class of *umhuka* [to be an animal] (Mugumbate & Chereni, 2019). The philosophy of ubuntu promotes the behaviours that make life worthwhile, promote health and reduce human suffering. Ubuntu advances for the alteration of negative behaviours with positive humane behaviours (Chigangaidze, 2021). Social workers are professionals who are part of a multidisciplinary rehabilitation

team that focuses on behaviour change programmes for the alteration of negative behaviours with positive behaviours through interventions such as motivational interviewing, for example, in substance abuse. It is apparent that the philosophy of ubuntu is pivotal in the domain of behaviour change as highlighted in the lenses of the modality of behaviour in the multimodal approach.

Affect

The modality of affect involves questioning what emotions (affective reactions) are predominant. It reflects on issues to do with anger, anxiety, depression, combinations thereof and to what extent of, for example, irritation versus rage (Lazarus, 2002). The interest of the multimodal approach also lies in how a person behaves when experiencing these emotions. In the same vein, the philosophy of ubuntu has been identified as a cultural method of mental health promotion (Edwards et al., 2004). Ubuntu informs us that being human is predicted on the life quality of relationships, which are determined by the frequency of positive and negative emotions (affective) and cognitive evaluation for one's purpose in life (Tov & Diener, 2007 in Wilson & Williams, 2013). Ubuntu promotes essential and optimal humanity as it advances on 'cardinal virtues' such as love, temperance and fortitude essential for good-quality dialogue (Edwards et al., 2004).

Ubuntu is against rage and all other forms of aggression classified under umhuka [being an animal]. The African philosophy advances the enhancement of psychosocial functioning that promotes pleasant emotions through good communication and creativity. Ubuntu promotes positivity in dialogue that brings forth positive energy and thereby impact on the effect of individuals. Musical performances such as Jit in Zimbabwe, the Congolese rumba and Tanzanian guitar styles have positive impact on the effect. Besides music, ubuntu also involves storytelling that promotes laughter and engagement of the listeners. The orature of ubuntu has it that storytelling even at childhood would enhance the children's social skills. Social workers are inherently interested in social skills training of their clients, and emotional responses are usually modelled through these interventions. Emotional intelligence is essential in social work practice as evidenced by the principle of controlled emotional involvement. Understanding and handling one's own and others' emotions is a critical aspect at every stage of the social work task: engagement, assessment, observation, decision-making, planning and intervention (Morrison, 2007). A reflection of ubuntu through the modality of effect proves that the philosophy is intrinsically related to social work practice.

Sensation

The modality of sensation explores if there are specific sensory complaints, for example, chronic pain and tremors. The domain of sensation also covers positive and negative sensations, for example, visual, auditory, tactile, olfactory and gustatory delights in the client report (Lazarus, 2002). In the same light, the ubuntu philosophy appreciates that a person knows her own body because she learns it subjectively through her senses (Eklund, 2008). Bodily experiences are of great significance in the African philosophy of ubuntu. This article acknowledges that "empathy through ubuntu makes Nguni indigenous healers speak of a gut feeling, umbellini. Gendlin (1996) describes this bodily felt sense as an essential therapeutic moment in the process of healing" (Edwards et al., 2004, p. 21). In relation to social work

practice, practitioners have a great contribution in ensuring a therapeutic milieu for children with sensory processing problems (Cermak & Groza, 1998). Social workers can utilise cognitive behaviour therapies to complement pharmacological interventions to deal with some hallucinations in schizophrenia (Gregory Jnr, 2010).

Imagery

The dimension of imagery explores the fantasies and images that are predominant, the client's self-image and the significance of these images. It explores if these images are flashbacks of traumatic events or pleasurable events (Lazarus, 2002). Imagery has a place in the African way of living. The modality of imagery amongst the Bantu people where ubuntu originated can be witnessed through their rock art and the drawings found in the caves even up to this age. This art is great exhibit that ubuntu respected the modality of visualising and portraying perceptions in the form of images. Rock art has a wide and varied distribution in Africa in diverse styles (Prins & Hall, 1994). This paper appreciates that traditional therapists in Ghana use indigenous arts in therapeutic interventions in addressing the modality of imagery (Pyne et al., 2013). Thus, Africans appreciate the modality of imagery and how it can be used in therapy. Trauma-informed social workers also utilise guided imagery interventions to help their clients learn to relax, self-soothe, and express or manage feelings (Knight, 2015). Thus, the domain of imagery in the multimodal approach is evident in ubuntu-informed therapies of Africa.

Cognition

The modality of cognition relates to the client's main attitudes, values, beliefs and opinions. It explores the decision-making processes. It also considers the negative automatic thoughts that undermine his or her functioning (Lazarus, 2002). In the same way, ubuntu as a philosophy is inherently rooted in values, beliefs and worldviews on humanity. Ubuntu values decision-making that integrates the individual in a communitarian way. Ubuntu promotes thoughts and decision-making processes that promote unity, love, peace, social cohesion and community development. The philosophy of ubuntu promotes the socialisation of people into positive thinking that is integrative of both communal needs and individual needs. The cognitive theory provides an essential panorama in the social work practitioner's requisite broad perspective on human development and functioning in the environment (Greene, 1991). Increasing numbers of clinical social workers use cognitive behavioural techniques in their interventions (González-Prendes & Brsebois, 2012). In these interventions, social workers are interested in altering negative thoughts with positive thoughts that are integrative of both the individual and community well-being. It is clear that ubuntu has a place in the modality of cognition that is part of the multimodal assessment.

Interpersonal relationships

The domain of interpersonal relationships is concerned with the significant other's in the client's life, what he or she expects from them, and what does he or she in turn give or do to them. It is a component that reflects on what relationships give pleasure or pain to the client (Lazarus, 2002). In the same vein, the tenets of ubuntu/botho/ unhu demonstrate the

interplay between individuals and their respective families and communities (Dolamo, 2013). The African worldview of life places value in kinship systems that hold vast networks of relationships that bind everyone together (Mbiti, 1970). The philosophy of ubuntu advances the importance of relationships (Mabvurira, 2020; Van Breda, 2019; Zvomuya, 2020). A person with ubuntu qualities interacts with others in harmony and respect. Ubuntu implies that the meaning in life is dependent upon the quality of human relationships and on good-quality dialogue as found in human relationships that are emphasised in psychotherapies (Edwards et al., 2004).

Ubuntu promotes socio-humane integration that provides a platform for bonding with others (Metz, 2007; Mugumbate & Nyanguru, 2013; Mupedziswa et al., 2019; Murithi, 2007). The African philosophy advances our interconnectedness, our common humanity, and the responsibility to each other that flows from our connection (Nussbaum, 2003). This is essentially interested in promoting relationality by means of encouraging acts that advance harmonious living together of people in the community (Metz, 2011; Metz & Gaie, 2010; Rankopo & Diraditsile, 2020). It is more critical in ubuntu in understanding a person as located in a community where being a person is to be in a dialogical relationship with this community (Eze, 2008). To be a “human being is to affirm one’s humanity of others and, on that basis, establish humane relations with them” (Ramose, 2003, p. 231). It is inherent in social work practice as it is in ubuntu and the multimodal approach to appreciate the person in his or her social environment. Hence, claiming a place of the ubuntu philosophy in social work assessments holds water.

Drugs/ biology

The D in the acronym BASIC I.D stands for drugs or biology. This modality is focused on the biological functions of the client, and his or her physical health, drug use, and other lifestyle choices (Dwyer, 2000). It explores the role of comorbidities, the intake of substances, and how these issues affect other modalities. Reflecting on the African philosophy, ubuntu appreciates the biological dimension to life (Mbiti, 1970). African traditional healers also infer from the perspectives of the biological domain (Prinsloo, 2001). African traditional healers have always used medicinal plants way before orthodox medicine (Gurim-Fakim, 2006). For example, Africans have used cannabis as a traditional medicine for various health conditions (Semenya & Maroyi, 2018). About 90% of the Ethiopian population use herbal medicines for their primary healthcare (Mahomoodally, 2013). Hence, the domain of biological perspectives was existent to the African community even before the emergence of the theories. Social workers appreciate the biological perspective in the biopsychosocial approach (Devaux, 2014; Tosone, 2004). Social workers play a pivotal role in adherence therapies that are hinged on the biological modality of the multimodal approach. Social workers have also increased their attention on the clients’ physical exercises (Williams & Strean, 2006) which also help address the biological modality.

Two weaknesses of the multimodal approach in light of ubuntu

The multimodal approach like any other assessment framework has its own weaknesses. First, the multimodal approach fails to account for the role of the physical environment in human behaviour. Second, it never mentions the modality of spirituality as a domain

influential in human personality. In seven modalities of the acronym BASIC I.D, the aspects of behaviour, effect, sensation, imagery, cognition, interpersonal relationships, and drugs or biology are covered. These modalities do not account in any manner known to the author, meaning that the spiritual domain has the potential to influence these seven modalities. This paper calls for the integration of ubuntu with the multimodal approach by means of adding two modalities as follows:

- Person–physical environment relationship.
- Spiritual relationship

This paper in the next section will explore the role of these two modalities in social work assessment. It will also justify the need to add these modalities by expatiating how these two, respectively, impact other modalities.

Person–environment relationship

Ubuntu reflects on the notion that Africans rely upon the natural world for existence (Ottosson & Grahn, 2005; Soga & Gaston, 2015; Van den Berg & Van den Berg, 2011). Frequent and extreme climate change can contribute to an increase in the prevalence of post-traumatic stress disorders, anxiety disorders, secondary trauma and other mental health problems (Clayton et al., 2017). The physical environment remains in large part underdeveloped in most research programmes in social psychology (Meagjer, 2020). Studies of stress pay little attention to features of the physical environment in which work is performed (Vischer, 2007). The causal links between environmental change and human health are complex because they are indirect, displaced in space and time and dependent on a number of modifying forces (World Health Organization, 2005).

Exposure to the green environment has shown great benefits in the modalities of behaviour, cognition, sensations and interpersonal relationships (Ottosson & Grahn, 2005; Soga & Gaston, 2015; Van den Berg & Van den Berg, 2011). Clinical social workers utilise adventure therapy, which is an experiential intervention that combines outdoor, adventure-based activities and group process (Tucker, 2009; Tucker & Norton, 2012). Ubuntu philosophy encourages an eco-spiritually informed social work practice that values the green environment (Van Breda, 2019). According to the African perspective, the environment is a source of life as it provides food, water, and energy and even connects with the spiritual modality. It is essential that social work practitioners consider the person-physical environment relationship in their assessment and intervention frameworks.

Spiritual relationship

African beliefs are rooted in spiritual powers and their influence on humanity (Asare & Danquah, 2017). Ubuntu emphasises spirituality as a central part of life and relationality (Koenane, 2018; Membe-Matale, 2015; Van Breda, 2019; Zvomuya, 2020). The spiritual

life of Africans and some scientific practices are integrated (Aderajew, 2019). Hallucinations that are part of sensations also lie behind many mythological traditions and religious epiphanies (Vary, 2017). This paper acknowledges the following:

While the question of God's existence certainly cannot be answered by science, there is, nevertheless, a growing body of empirical evidence coming from neuroscience, psychology, cognitive science, and related disciplines, suggesting to some the existence of underlying physiological mechanisms that subserve spirituality. (Seybold, 2010, p. 89)

Thus, there is an association between spirituality and psychological domains such as cognition, sensations, imagery, and interpersonal relationships.

There are several calls to adopt the spiritual modality in social work practice and the clinical practice (Matthews, 2009; Stefaro, 2016; Schneider, 2015). Spiritual psychotherapy is designed to balance body, mind and spirit, bringing one to a state of personal empowerment. It is a way used by trained practitioners to reflect on the clients' past experiences, work towards transforming the client's view of the past, live in the present and create a better future (Safara & Bhatia, 2010). If social work is truly human oriented, spiritual issues should be addressed in connection with the psychosocial functioning of the clients. Social work education needs to prepare students for competence in existential counselling and the exploration of spiritual issues in interventions.

Implications

The exploration of ubuntu considering the seven modalities by Arnold Lazarus shows that the African philosophy is reflective of social work facets of assessments and interventions. It shows that ubuntu as a philosophy can be integrated in social work practice. This disquisition has shown the weaknesses of the multimodal approach considering the philosophy of ubuntu. The African philosophy adds two modalities to the multimodal approach: person-physical environment relations and spiritual relations. Au courant of all these issues, this paper proposes for the utilisation of ubuntu in social work assessments and care plans by means of infusing the philosophy with the multimodal approach. Adding these two modalities to the multimodal approach gives birth to an *ubuntu* multimodal approach with nine modalities of social work assessments and care plans. These are:

- Behaviour
- Affect
- Sensation
- Imagery
- Cognition
- Interpersonal relationships
- Drugs/ Biology
- Person-physical environment relationship
- Spiritual relationship.

The paper suggests that these nine modalities be adopted as an *ubuntu* multimodal approach in social work assessments and care plans.

Conclusion

Social workers in Africa have called for the utilisation of ubuntu in social work practice. In this disquisition, Ubuntu has been explored through the seven modalities of the multimodal approach in this disquisition. The article argues that ubuntu is relevant in the light of all seven modalities that are behaviour, effect, sensation, imagery, cognition, interpersonal relationships, and drugs or biology. Ubuntu adds two modalities to the multimodal approach and these two are person–physical environment and spiritual relationship. To this end, this article calls for the integration of ubuntu concepts with the multimodal approach to behavioural assessments and interventions. If social work practice is to withstand the trials and tribulations of this contemporary as well as the future world, it has to appreciate the need to address these nine modalities: behaviour, effect, sensations, imagery, cognition, interpersonal relationships, drugs or biology, person–physical environment, and spiritual relationship.

Notes on contributor

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Chapter 9

Ubuntu Social Work Benefits both the Practitioner and Service Users: An axiological Reflection of a Clinical Social Worker and Theologian.

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Abstract

Ubuntu philosophy values kindness, empathy, forgiveness, social justice, compassion, human rights and social connectedness. An Ubuntu Social Work practitioner is expected to exhibit these values in practice. Reflecting on the axiology of Ubuntu, this chapter explores the scientific benefits of the aforementioned values. It argues that Ubuntu Social Work promotes health, social development and sustainability. Of essence, the reflection posits that Ubuntu Social Work is scientifically beneficial to both the practitioner and service users. Ubuntu Social Work values connects both the practitioner and service user in ways that transform society. Finally, the chapter explores the ripple effects of Ubuntu when put in practice. As a philosophy, Ubuntu should be understood from its value system for it to change the world.

Keywords: *Ubuntu values; Social Work; Health and wellbeing.*

The concept of Ubuntu is an integral part of African ethics which emphasizes humanness, kindness, considerateness, empathy, human rights, generosity,

sharing, respect, forgiveness, altruism, compassion, benevolence, and other virtues (Chigangaidze, 2021a; Ngomane, 2019; Letseka, 2000). Ubuntu echoes the African thought of acceptable behaviours and ideas (Mugumbate & Nyanguru, 2013). In its very nature, Ubuntu is a multi-faceted, multi-layered, and complex construct (Chigangaidze, 2021b, 2021c; Coatzer et al., 2018). Ubuntu brings to the world the human face to every aspect of life (Mugumbate & Nyanguru, 2013). Ubuntu says something about the person's character and conduct (Samkange & Samkange, 1980). The construct of ubuntu can be referred to as the attainment of personhood (Molefe, 2019).

In the past decades, Ubuntu has generated much interest in most disciplines that aim to enhance human welfare. It is generally accepted that the African worldview of Ubuntu can shape community responses to disaster (van Breda, 2019). In addition, there are many similarities between the ethics of nursing care and Ubuntu (Nolte & Downing, 2019). Ubuntu can be considered as a value in social work (Mugumbate & Nyanguru, 2013). For many scholars, Ubuntu is regarded as consonant with the values and ideas of social work, notably empathy, human solidarity, and human dignity (Van Breda, 2019). This chapter will explore the benefits of Ubuntu Social Work practice from the values of the African philosophy. It will consider the scientific benefits of kindness, empathy, social connectedness, social justice, spirituality, and forgiveness.

Kindness

Intrinsic to the African way of life in Ubuntu is kindness (Broodryk, 2002). Kindness is not an easy construct to define and conceptualise. This chapter acknowledges that the concept of kindness implies familiarity and recognition that one should treat others as one would relate to one's own family and friends (Patel, 2019). Performing acts of kindness lead to a greater good for self and others as it promotes wellbeing, self-awareness, purpose in life, social support, and an enhanced positive effect (Boellinghaus, Jones & Hutton, 2013; Dunn, Akin & Norton, 2014; Patel, 2019). There is a strong

association between kindness and enhanced feelings of happiness and wellbeing (Rowland & Curry, 2019). In addition, kindness help enhance resilience against stress-related effects on health (Poulin & Holman, 2013). Kindness is an expression that emphasises people's interdependence. For Sampson (2003: 147), 'everyone relies on others, including the kindness of strangers, for her or his survival and well-being.' Furthermore, the effects of kindness seem to promote the essence of Ubuntu- the greater good and health of the community. One of the broader effects of kindness is that it is socially contagious (Tsvetkova & Macy, 2014). Put simply, people who receive help from others are more likely to help strangers in the future. Noteworthy, Ubuntu shouldn't be confused with kindness as it goes much deeper. Ubuntu recognises the inner worth of every human being starting with the individual (Ngomane, 2019). The African philosophy has other values including empathy. In the next section, this chapter will show how empathy promotes human health and well-being.

Kindness is essential in building professional relationships at the workplace. It increases the sense of connectivity and positive outcomes with fellow professionals and clients. Kindness relates to other values of social work such as acceptance, a non-judgmental attitude, and respect for human dignity. Kindness in social work relates to a balance between empowerment and mindfulness. Kindness addresses the area of mindfulness in social work practice. Kindness is being present at the moment, accepting an individual holistically, and utilising a strength-based perspective in tailoring solutions with the clients. Thus, kindness in social work involves respecting the human dignity of every individual without considering their past and their social status. It is about being purposely present to actively listen, help and empower the individuals, groups, and communities that we work with as social workers.

Empathy

One can showcase ubuntu by empathising with others (Nussbaum, 2003). Empathy, and ultimately compassion, is a neurological state that can be identified in the brain activity of the individual who witnesses the suffering of the other (Bernhardt & Singer, 2012). It promotes forgiveness (Wieseke et al., 2012). By motivating prosocial behavior and reducing aggression and providing a basis for moral development, empathy plays a vital role in human life (Meyza et al., 2017). Research has shown that empathy has a positive role in the physician-patient relationship and promotes good health outcomes (Decety, 2020). Empathy can be enhanced through shared decision making which is also a pre-requisite in Ubuntu-informed practices. Similarly, shared decision-making empowers clients by inviting them to consider the pros and cons of different treatment options including no treatment (Hashim, 2017). Ubuntu is about making a pact to listen more and understand others (Ngomane, 2019). Empathy is a condition for effective therapy as stipulated by the humanistic theories and connects well with the African philosophy of Ubuntu.

The concept of empathy is a fundamental factor in many professionals such as social workers, doctors, nurses, and psychologists. Empathy has been positioned together with unconditional positive regard, acceptance, and the need to create a therapeutic milieu for the client's growth and healing (Rogers, 1957). Empathy in social work involves paraphrasing, summarising, and reflecting on the meaning of what the clients have explored. Empathy inherently considers the effects of neoliberalism, and egoistic ideologies and promotes the idea of considering the welfare of others. An empathic way of being with the other person has several constructs as it involves being sensitive, moment by moment, to changing felt meanings which flow in other people; it means temporarily living in another's life, moving about it without making judgments; it means sensing meanings which the other is aware of and communicating the sensing of the person's world to the person (Rogers, 1980).

Empathy in Ubuntu makes the Nguni healers speak of the gut feeling of *umbellini* which is a bodily felt sense that healing has taken place (Gendlin, 1996). In emphasis, Chigangaidze (2021c) connects empathy in ubuntu to the sensational modality of the multimodal approach in that *umbellini* involves the bodily felt sensation of the other person's experiences. There is no doubt therefore that empathy plays a pivotal role in the wellbeing of people, and if taught and applied to life, will lead to positive emotions which will not only add to psychological health but also lead young people towards better inter as well as intrapersonal understanding. Furthermore, Ubuntu calls for social workers to utilise sociological imagination in empathising with their clients. It is important to reflect on how social structures affect an individual's wellbeing. Social workers need to look at individuals in the context of their positionality and at the same time appreciate their humanity. Ubuntu advances the use of empathy in social workers' advocacy for social justice and human rights for the enhancement of people's welfare. If we remain silent in the face of people's oppression as social workers, our ability to empathise with others would be ineffective. Having an awareness of the individual in relation to community systems and tracing individual troubles in the context of broader sociological issues. As Ubuntu connects the past, present, and future; empathy driven by this philosophy focuses on understanding the individual in these timeframes. Empathy is at the epicentre of interventions that focus on social change, transformation, empowerment, and development. Thus, in Ubuntu, empathy is a prerequisite for healing and ensuring the enhancement of people's welfare.

Forgiveness

Forgiveness includes a change from negative to positive cognitions, emotions, motivations, and behaviours towards the perpetrator (Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000). The positive emotions and behaviours include empathy and compassion (Kadiangandu et al., 2007). Empathy and compassion are essential values in the African philosophy of Ubuntu (Chigangaidze et al,

2021; Mugumbate & Chereni, 2020; van Breda, 2019). The interconnectedness of these values demonstrates how Ubuntu as a philosophy promotes health: each value augmenting the other in its functionality to promote human wellbeing. This reflection acknowledges that:

If granting forgiveness is a gift that can keep a good man from turning bad, then generally forgiveness must be a good thing. And, good things have good effects. With human beings, good effects typically translate into well-being. One form of well-being is health. Thus, there has been growing scientific and therapeutic interest in the possible connections between forgiveness and well-being, or more specifically, health.

(Bassett et al., 2016: 28).

Correspondingly, forgiveness is not just emotionally uplifting but it enhances our health (Ngomane, 2019). Thus, forgiveness is associated with promoting health and wellbeing through its therapeutic benefits.

Conflicts are frequently occurring in this contemporary world and these lead to immeasurable problems such as distress, mental health conditions, displacement of families, and poor health in general (Ho & Fung, 2011). Conflicts are usually a result of unforgiveness and require forgiveness to minimise their occurrence. Ubuntu, as a collectivistic worldview is characterised by the need to maintain social harmony and minimise conflict which might influence the community members to be more forgiving (Hook et al., 2009). Ngomane clearly shows an example of forgiveness by one advocate of the African philosophy of Ubuntu:

Nelson Mandela is a clear example of a man able to forgive what appeared to be unforgivable acts against him. When he was asked to provide a list of people he wished to invite to his inauguration dinner as a president of South Africa, he insisted his former jailer Christo Brand was invited, much to some people's surprise. By then, he and Christo had become good friends. This relationship was public knowledge and allowed people in South Africa to reconsider whether they were able to forgive perpetrators of harm in their own lives. (Ngomane, 2019: 144-145)

Ubuntu promotes forgiveness and social connectedness which fosters harmony. It has been argued that Ubuntu is an African theology promoting the idea that people are only humans in communities in the full expression of Koinonia (Greek word for fellowship). Fellowship can fully be attained through acts that heal relationships such as forgiveness. In promoting forgiveness, Ubuntu advances the notion of reconciliation. Reconciliation is a central part of the social work mandate as the professionals are called to 'address barriers, inequalities, and injustices that exist in society' (Kreitzer & Jou, 2010). Social workers work in settings where they can promote forgiveness. For example, social workers in criminal justice systems can encourage reconciliation projects and offer therapeutic interventions in the rehabilitation of offenders and their reintegration into the community. In addition, social workers have often been offended by service users and their families. For example, social workers working in mental health institutions have been socially and emotionally shouted at by service users. As practitioners in the field, several times we have offended one another and found it difficult to forgive. The more bitterness people keep towards each other, the more unprofessional we become. Ubuntu fosters the constructs of forgiveness and reconciliation which are vital elements for the social work profession. The profession of social work is well positioned to promote forgiveness as it is situated in settings where people have been offended and are emotionally hurting. Again, Ubuntu promotes self-reflection in the areas of forgiveness.

Social workers need to forgive themselves and others before engaging in therapeutic interventions to ensure the countertransference of positive energy in reaction to the client's transference. For example, a social worker is a parent of a teenager who has substance use problems and has been stealing money from the bank account to fund his addiction. The social worker has been bitter and angry at his/her child. The same social worker, while dealing with his/her domestic issues, receives a case of a client with similar challenges at work. The social worker must reflect if his unforgiveness will not impact the

therapeutic relationship with the client. Essentially, whether his bitterness will not be displaced by the client who is also abusing substances. Unforgiveness of any nature, either by the client or the social work practitioner can hinder therapeutic relationships.

Social Justice

Noteworthy, the primary determinants of the public's health are social- the level of health inequality is related to the level of social inequality in the larger society (Wallack, 2019). Similarly, health is determined not so much by what medical practitioners do to the patients, but by arrangements in society (Marmot, 2017). In advocating for change, Wallack (2019:903) clearly states, "significant change requires us to shift from just understanding problems as personal, individual, or behavioral to responding to problems as linked to social, economic, and political structures." Likewise, the World Health Organisation (2008) acknowledges that social injustice is killing on a grand scale. The State must create conditions in which people can be healthy (Wallack, 2019). Similarly, the ideology of botho (ubuntu) philosophy disapproves of "any form of anti-social, disgraceful, inhuman, and criminal behaviour, while at the same time promoting the idea of social justice for all" (Rankopo & Diraditsile, 2020: 2). In addition, ubuntu-informed justice court systems appreciate that the offender might be a victim of socioeconomic conditions and the main aim of the justice system should be a restoration of relationships, healing and reconciliation in the society (Elechi et al., 2010).

Social justice extends beyond human health and wellbeing to issues of environmental sustainability (American Nurses Association, 2015). The African viewpoint of Ubuntu is also an ecophilosophy that respects the interdependent relationships between nature and humans (Chigangaidze, 2021a; Chibvongodze, 2016). Again, social justice theory appreciates that social identities do not exist in isolation from race, class, sexuality, skin colour, gender, and other factors (Breunig, 2019). Ubuntu theology promotes multi-racial reconciliation (De Grunchy, 1999) and inclusivity of diverse groups of

people (Chigangaidze et al., 2021). Ubuntu philosophy sees everyone as an equal and with human dignity (Ngomane, 2019). Essentially, the ideology of Ubuntu emphasizes equal distribution of wealth, respecting human dignity, and fighting corruption (Chigangaidze, 2021a). Ubuntu captures the worldview that promotes Africa's egalitarian, humanistic, communitarian, interconnectedness, and participatory democratic values (Elechi et al., 2010). Ubuntu as a collectivistic approach embedded in sustainable development, can best impact social development practice (Mupedziswa et al., 2019; van Breda, 2019). Social development is one pathway to fighting social injustice (Banerjee, 2005).

Compassion

Compassion moves from the experience of emotion to action, in that, it is often accompanied by the acknowledgment and motivation to ameliorate someone's feelings. In addition, Patel (2019) argues that compassion is how care is given, through relationships based on empathy, kindness, respect, and dignity (Patel, 2019). Ubuntu encourages people to drop their judgments and embrace compassion and understanding (Ngomane, 2019). Compassion is how care is given, through relationships based on empathy, kindness, respect, and dignity. It refers to a deep awareness of the suffering of another coupled with the wish to relieve the pain and this often flows naturally (Chochinov, 2007). Ubuntu calls on us to believe and feel that: Your pain is My pain, my wealth is your wealth, and your salvation is my salvation (Nussbaum 2003). Our interconnectedness, our common humanity, and our responsibility to each other flow from our connection. Social work is compassion driven and ethically reflects how care is given. The profession emphasises compassion-driven leadership and Ubuntu can help strengthen the modalities of social work interventions and leadership.

Social connectedness

The foundational gesture of Ubuntu is the manner of giving, as a reciprocal act of sharing resources, deep connectedness, and solidarity (Nolte &

Downing, 2019). Being connected to other human beings is an essential survival need that can be equated to food and without it, it stimulates the physical pain connections of the brain (Lieberman & Eisenberger, 2009). There is growing evidence of the role that social relationships play in protecting against cognitive decline (Haslam et al., 2015). Social connections enhance resilience against negative and stressful experiences on mental health (McKenzie et al., 2018). No one would be successful in life without a few stable social relationships. Ubuntu as argued by Battle (1997) is an African theology promoting the idea that people are only humans in communities in the full expression of Koinonia (Greek word for fellowship). Fellowship can fully be attained through acts that heal relationships, for example, forgiveness. Through ubuntu, the importance of principles of reciprocity, inclusivity, and sense of shared destiny is highlighted. In Ubuntu, the community exists within emotional and relational bonds on which people depend to fulfill their own potential, rather than being composed of detached rights-bearing individuals with little connection to the broader community (Nolte & Downing, 2019). Social isolation is a major threat to people's wellbeing and affects suppressing the immune system (Haslam et al., 2015). Individuals with the lowest level of involvement in social relationships are more likely to die than those with greater involvement (House et al., 1988).

Humanistic theories such as Maslow hierarchy of needs focus on the need for belongingness in human survival. Psychologically it is essential for people to be socially connected, have a sense of belonging, and enhance psychosocial functioning. Social work focuses its interventions on every level of the ecological systems approach and a biopsychosocial-spiritual model which all emphasise the individual's connectedness to the micro, meso, exo, macro, and chrono systems. Social connectedness is evident in social work assessments guided by the person-in-the-environment perspective. Community resource mapping and networking are all strategies that emerge from an Ubuntu understanding that the community has a responsibility of addressing the needs of its individuals.

Spirituality

Ubuntu is a state of wellness that connects human beings to other beings in the world. Ubuntu has been described as a belief system since belief has been argued to influence attitudes and behaviour (Damane 2001). Spirituality refers to the way individuals seek and express meaning and purpose and the way they experience their connectedness to self, to others, to nature, and to the significant or sacred (Puchalski, et al.,2009). Spirituality and social concern cannot be separated but in fact, are inversely interconnected. Nolte & Downing argue that spirituality lies in a person's connection to other people and the universe, and the strong personal faith that drives each individual. There is growing evidence indicating that Spiritual practices are closely associated with better wellbeing. Ubuntu, personal and communal spirituality are often the most dominant domains in a guide for living healthy and offers a framework for the right action within most communities. Whilst spirituality can mean many things in popular usage and is often understood differently by different people, research suggests that spirituality is important in the general well being of people and their mental health (Richards & Bergin 2005). In this chapter, we regard spirituality as a quest for personal meaning within a community, which includes intellectual, ethical, social, political, aesthetic, and other dimensions (Mamman & Bukari 2016). This will enable us to have a quality of reflection that is holistic in scope, especially with the nature of interconnectedness of ubuntu and spirituality. In social work practice, spirituality has emerged as an important subject, and theories such as the biopsychosocial theory have been extended to cover the domain of spirituality.

Application to social work practice

Since its inception, the social work profession has been about kindness, social justice, social connectedness, compassion, and empathy. Ubuntu Social Workers should have compassion for themselves and others. The issues of self-care regimes, peer support, and networking in social work are grounded in the African philosophy of Ubuntu and can be seen through its values as

well. Ubuntu can help add value to compassion-driven leadership in community development projects, workplaces, and learning institutions. Research on kindness in the workplace is increasing and Ubuntu Social Workers can utilise organisational social work / industrial social work theories in integrating Ubuntu values in the workplace for the enhancement of service provision. Ubuntu values strengthen collaborative working and anti-oppressive practices through the principles of social justice and social connectedness. It should be noted that Ubuntu is a political philosophy, and its values aim to fight political injustice and oppression. Ubuntu is about sacrifice and going an extra mile for the benefit of others. Social workers need to think about how their kindness, social connectedness, social justice orientation, empathy, and other essential values impact their clientele and generations to come. Ubuntu connects the past, present, and future; when applying these values, social workers need to think about the future of their service users while appreciating their present circumstances and being informed by how the past shape their clientele's welfare. These values are complementary to each other and form the basis of our practice as Social Workers. Indeed, these values should be our everyday life in and out of the workplace.

Social work professional values and ethics promote a non-violent approach to dealing with violence as well as supporting reconciliation in post-conflict situations (Kreitzer & Jou, 2010). Furthermore, compassionate presence is proposed as a way of practicing social work that is grounded in our humanitarian roots and current research (Stickle, 2016). Ubuntu values have been present in our practice as social workers. These values and ways of life can benefit both the practitioner and the clientele system. One act of kindness can change how the client sees the world. Ubuntu Social Work is deeply rooted in the view that its value systems are transferrable. There is some form of 'transference and countertransference', consciously or unconsciously, of the Ubuntu values when practiced with an open heart and

desire to enhance life. These values form the basis of our ethical principles as social workers, theologians, and other helping professionals.

Conclusion

Ubuntu -inspired social work is deeply rooted in the values and virtues of kindness, compassion, empathy, social justice, social connectedness, spirituality, forgiveness, and others. Fundamental to the daily practice of social work are the principles and ethics that are based on such values. This chapter is an axiological reflection of how Ubuntu values enhance both the health and wellbeing of the practitioner and the service users. All social workers need to consider these values to promote service provision, enhance wellbeing and strengthen relationships. Let us remember that as we practice Ubuntu, we are being kind to ourselves and others. Therapeutic relationships with the people we serve begin with the application of the Ubuntu values. Ubuntu as a way of life gives us a sense of purpose and promotes our wellbeing and relationships. Ubuntu values reinforce the ethos of social work practice.

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What it means to say, ‘a person is a person through other persons’: Ubuntu through humanistic-existential lenses of transactional analysis

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ABSTRACT

Ubuntu is a relational philosophy which is best known through the axiom, ‘*umuntu ngubuntu ngabantu*’ a person is a person through other persons. Transactional Analysis (TA) as a relational theory as well, is used in this paper, to expand on the understanding of the Ubuntu proverb. Existential life position, ‘I’m OK, You’re OK’ and constructs of TA such as transgenerational scripts, stroking and physis are utilized to expand on the meaning of ‘*umuntu ngubuntu ngabantu*.’ Based on the provisions of TA, the African axiom is connected to aspects of child development, parenting, communication, sustainable development, spirituality and ecological social work. Significantly, the discourse argues that ‘*umuntu ngubuntu ngabantu*’ should never be divorced from the values of the African philosophy which include kindness, forgiveness, hospitality, humanness, social justice, human rights, social solidarity, liberty and other positive virtues. Thus, this paper is a plea for a TA and ubuntu informed social work practice that can entangle humanity from the negative transactional scripts whilst reinforcing the positive ones. To its end, the paper questions what this generation will be remembered for when it becomes the living dead (ancestors).

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Transactional Analysis (TA) as described by its forefather Eric Berne provides a framework for “answers to the questions posed by the Four Horsemen of Apocalypse: war or peace, famine or plenty, pestilence or health, death or life” (Berne, 1972, p. 3). Eric Berne’s TA is a personality theory and a system for understanding human behavior. TA has been utilized in several fields including peace building (Landiche, 2012; Salters, 2015), health promotion (Maclachlan et al., 1997); spirituality (Chandran, 2019); communication and other disciplines. In all these fields, it has been emphasized that our personhood is witnessed in the way we transact. Existentially reflecting on Berne’s work, all the life positions represent ways in which we are fallen and reflect our solicitude for others (Nuttall, 2006). This paper will offer a synergy on the features of TA and Ubuntu, conceptualize the Humanistic-Existential Approach, explore the

names ‘Transactional Analysis’ and ‘Ubuntu,’ and expound on the humanistic-existential concepts of TA that are in the African philosophy of Ubuntu. In so doing, the paper will ratify the dictum that the philosophy of Ubuntu is a Humanistic-Existential Approach (Chigangaidze, 2021a) and the explorations that TA is in the same “third force” of psychology (Clarkson, 1993).

TA has put emphasis on several themes such as the ‘existential’ life positions, scripting, ego states, games people play, re-decision and contamination. Stroking as a theme in TA is an essential component for human motivation which is key in humanistic-existential theories. TA emphasizes on concepts of social responsibility, physis, dialogue, peacebuilding and social justice (Massey, 2006). This disquisition seeks to expatiate on the humanistic-existential concepts of TA in the African philosophy of Ubuntu. The African viewpoint of Ubuntu is gaining momentum in Social Work at a Global level. The World Social Work Day 2021 celebrations were on the theme, “Ubuntu: I am Because We are- Strengthening Social Solidarity and Global Connectedness.”

TA works within the same “humanistic-existential framework of values” (Clarkson, 1992, p. 1 as cited in Nuttall, 2006). The TA family has “a common premise in our statement of faith’: I’m OK, You’re OK,’ a philosophical base reflecting our ultimate values” (Newton, 2003, p. 321; Nuttall, 2006). We appreciate the writings of the forefather of TA:

In so far as actual living in the world is concerned, transactional analysis shares with existential analysis a high esteem for and a keen interest in, the personal qualities of honesty, integrity, autonomy and authenticity, and their most poignant social manifestations in encounter and intimacy. (Berne, 1966, p. 305)

The above statement is reflective on the axiology of Ubuntu even though it explains on the value systems of TA. The African philosophy of Ubuntu promotes the same values of honesty, integrity, sharing, teamwork, social justice and human rights. Ubuntu has been described in three concepts, “humanness, personhood and morality” (Letseka, 2012, p. 48 as cited in Chigangaidze, 2021a).

The ‘Person’ controversies and conceptualization

There are several conceptualizations on the construct, ‘person’. Abantu have been used to mean “black people” particularly when the word abantu is a personification of Ubuntu qualities (McDonald, 2010). In writing about the meaning of persons, Gade noted

... South Africans have diverse views on *who* count as persons (*abantu* in the Nguni languages). While some are of the view that all members of the *Homo sapiens* species are persons, others suggest that it is only those who are black, those who have participated in particular rituals, or those who behave within specific moral parameters, who are persons. (Gade, 2017, p. 5)

It is crystal clear that there are different views on how the construct, “person(s)” is conceptualized. This paper will conceptualize the human being in 3 levels through the axiom ‘a person is a person through other persons,’ directly translated to ‘*umuntu ngubuntu ngabantu*’ or ‘*munhu munhu nevamwe*.’ This axiom seems to be articulated for the first time in the 1990s, in the context of the South African translation process after apartheid (Gade, 2017).

When a baby is born, people ask “*munhui?*” meaning “what is the sex of the person?” (Tagwirei, 2020). In this context, a baby without being initiated through any ritual is a ‘person/*umuntu/ munhu*.’ A human being with the body is a person but ‘a first level person’ who has the potential of becoming a whole being. There is change in intonation when one pronounces the second ‘*munhu*’ /person in the saying, “*munhu munhu nevamwe*.” This second level is the human being who exhibits the values of Ubuntu. As shown by the sayings, ‘*munhu uyu imbwa*’ or ‘*hapana zvemunhu apa*’ which means ‘this person is a dog’ or “this person isn’t a person.” The person who is referred as a dog is not yet a person at the second level which denotes humanness or Ubuntu. Evidently, the first and second ‘person’ in the axiom are different in meaning. Again, it should be stated that the concept ‘person’ means the soul. According to Ramose (1999) the soul is the real person. Amongst the Shona, when one dies, they say, ‘*Hakuchina munhu*’ meaning, “the person has departed.” Hence, the soul can also be regarded amongst the concept of *nevamwe* /other persons as the ancestors. Therefore, guided by the components of TA, this paper will expound on the meaning of, ‘a person is a person through other persons.’

Conceptualizing the Humanistic-Existential Approach

Humanistic psychology has been referred to as “the encounter culture,” with a “sensitivity to others’ needs” including emotional self-expression (Ryback, 2011, p. 413). Humanistic psychology is rooted in the philosophies such as those in Buber’s (1970) I and Thou, and Satre’s (1973) version of existentialism which all connect the individual with the surrounding milieu (Chigangaidze, 2021a). It was characterized with Carl Rogers as hunger for close relationships (Ryback, 2011). The humanist underscores on human capacities and potentials such as creativity, self-growth, basic need-gratification, self-actualization, psychological health and identity (Myers, 1993). As a “third force” in psychology, it is concerned with topics such as love, creativity, self, growth, organism, basic need-gratification, self-actualization, higher values, being, becoming, spontaneity, play, humor, affection, naturalness, warmth, objectivity, autonomy, responsibility, meaning, fair-play, peak experience, courage and related concepts (Clarkson, 1993). Whereas humanistic theories have focused on

the positive aspects of human beings, the existential domain appreciates that human beings can become destructive. That is to say, the Humanistic-Existential Approach integrates both the positive and negative aspects of humanity.

What is there in the names?

The term “transaction” (i.e. exchange) became part of the branding in TA (Napper, 2009). It has been defined by Freedman et al. (1980) as a unit of social intercourse consisting of a stimulus and a response. A transaction “is an energetic and/or material exchange between people or between one person and his or her environment. During a transaction, one person relates to another person and/or to his or her environment” (Rath, 1993, p. 207). Transactions represent the way people show their concern for others and how they authenticate each other through human demeanor (Groth, 1996, p. 59). TA is an issue of relationality, interactions and communication. Everyday people are always transacting, and it is through these transactions that they acquire their identity and authenticity as humans. The term ‘Transactional Analysis’ relates to the examination of transactions, interactions, and how one socializes with his or her past, present, the other and the community. Thus, the name Transactional Analysis puts emphasis on evaluations of the self, others and community. It has been described as systematic phenomenology (Berne, 1987). Transaction as a word reflects on reciprocity, dialogue, communication, learning, socialization and economics.

From a bird’s view, Ubuntu better describes the underlying African worldview that expresses Africa’s egalitarian, humanistic, interconnectedness and communitarian values (Elechi et al., 2010). It should be noted that the word ‘worldview’ relates to the “way a person tends to understand his or her relationship with social institutions, nature, objects, other people and spirituality” (Barker, 1999, p. 522 as cited in Mupedziswa et al., 2019). According to the African worldview, we live in a communicating and vibrating universe that is always transacting messages (Mkhize, 2018). Ubuntu is a “word from the Southern African Nguni language family (Ndebele, Swati/ Swazi, Xhosa and Zulu), *omundu /muntu* in the case of the Swahili language” (Nafukho, 2006, p. 409). Some refer to Ubuntu as the presence of the divine power directing a person to pursue good behavior and restrain from bad behavior (Van Breda, 2019). The word ‘Ubuntu’ is elastic and pregnant with meaning as it is used in every aspect of Bantu people. In the Shona language of Zimbabwe, a person is said to have the qualities of Ubuntu if the individual exhibits warmth, empathy, understanding, communication, interaction, participation, reciprocation, harmony and a shared worldview (Mabvurira, 2020). Ubuntu also means human excellence in southern Africa and usually a certain kind of

communication (Metz, 2016). Ubuntu has been described in three domains “humanness, personhood and morality” (Letseka, 2012, p. 48). Notably, Tschaepe (2013) highlights *ubu* is oriented toward *ntu* as ‘being becoming whole.’

The article explores Humanistic-Existential concepts of TA in ‘Ubuntu’ inspired social work practice. It is essential at this point to clarify what the name ‘social work’ underpins. A social worker is a practitioner operating at any level (micro, meso & macro) for the enhancement of transactions between the individual and others, individuals and systems, and systems and systems (Zastrow, 2010, 1995). The profession of social work has been defined as:

a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central to social work. Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledge, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing (Edwards, 2014).

The definition is rich in the values of Ubuntu and transactions that are present between the individual and social structures. It is all about the transactions of engaging people and structures to enhance wellbeing.

The Unit of Analysis

The principal activity of the transactional analyst is the analysis of transactions for the purpose of contractually improving people’s lives (Steiner, 2003). Berne highlighted transactions as central to social-psychiatric analyses (Cornell, 2015; Massey, 1996). From the very name ‘transactional analysis’ as indicated above, it reflects on transactions being the unit of analysis. In the same line of thought, the African philosophy of ‘Ubuntu’ is centered on the analysis of transactions. It is a relational philosophy that focuses on how one interacts with the others in a communal way. It is these transactions that people can say ‘*uri munhu ane hunhu*’ (you’re a person with Ubuntu/botho). Ubuntu decenters the individual as the prime unit of analysis and centers rather on relationships [transactions] between people (Van Breda, 2019). Thus, this paper will show how Ubuntu comprehends social relations and will illustrate on the transactions that make up a ‘person’ (first level) to being a person (second level). It will define and contextualize what other persons/*nevamwe*/through others mean.

Often avoided by many scholars of the African philosophy is that Ubuntu acknowledges that transactions can occur also within the individual (mentally) even before the person interacts with other people. These transactions occur in the form of transgenerational scripting, ones’ parenting, adult ego state and child ego state as will be seen in this discourse. A person’s parenting [that

which affects the parent ego state] in Shona often referred to as ‘*marererwo*,’ adult ego state [that which facilitates social control] *kuita semunhu mukuru ane hunhu* and child egostate [our recorded childhood experiences] explaining our *hwumwana* [being a child] affect his or her personhood. This paper will bring a new deepened understanding of *umuntu ngubuntu ngabantu* or *munhu munhu nevamwe* which means a person is a person through others. The impetus of this social and academic intercourse is to expand Ubuntu beyond its nucleation and unpack its depth in terms of meaning and significance. This paper accentuates relationality as the core of humanistic-existential concepts of TA present in Ubuntu. All other constructs of the two approaches are centered on transactions hence it becomes the fulcrum of this humanistic-existential debate. Considering transactions being the unit of analysis in TA and Ubuntu, we appreciate that social work is anchored on analyzing and intervening at these conjunctions as stated with the global definition of the profession.

Social Responsibility

The “I’m OK, You’re OK” paradigm is so central to TA and it implies a social responsibility to make people, their relationships and the world around as healthy as possible (Thunnessen, 2014). According to Massey (2006) people exercising responsibility construct both what occurs between them at an intrapersonal level and the quality of group life (interpersonal level). The neopsychic egostates involves experiences of making decisions, creativity, constructive problem solving, and goal attainment expand on social responsibility. Responsibility implies attending to self, other and the community. The aim of TA is social control, in which the adult retains the executive in dealings with other people who may be consciously or unconsciously attempting to activate the person’s child or parent ego states (Berne, 1961). Social responsibility is certainly a pivotal domain and the drive for TA. Reflecting on the same concepts through the African philosophy, it is visible that Ubuntu echoes the African thought of good ideas and deeds that promote common good, respect for others and no harm to humanity (Mabvurira, 2020; Mugumbate & Nyanguru, 2013). These ethics of non-maleficence and beneficence are at the heart of Ubuntu and cement social responsibility.

Ubuntu is at the center of enhancing one’s responsibility toward others and the community. Like the “I’m OK, You’re OK” of TA, which is pregnant with the concepts of social responsibility, the “I am because you’re” of Ubuntu is also inherently reflective of the deontological obligation to take care of self, others, and the community at large. In addition, Samkange and Samkange (1980, p. 6) proffers, “The attention one human being gives to another: the kindness, courtesy, consideration and friendliness in the relationship between

people; a code of behaviour, an attitude to other people and to life is embodied in ‘*hunhu*’ or Ubuntu.” Hence, ‘Ubuntu’ is pregnant with thoughts and considerations of others which is a key aspect of TA.

Dialogue

TA is effective in communication enhancement and peace building (Landiche, 2012; Salters, 2015). Individuals communicate from a particular ego state at any given moment and these interpersonal communications are referred to as transactions (Berne, 1961). Transactions show the life position of a person and TA strives to have people at the position, ‘I’m OK, You’re OK’ which is congruent to the Ubuntu axiom, “I am, because You’re.” This discourse appreciates that:

True ‘Ubuntu’ incorporates dialogue by intertwining both relationships and closeness. It preserves the other in his or her uniqueness, without letting him or her slip into the distance. It never reduces the other person to a static, figure, number, characteristic, conduct, or function but, instead, acknowledges and respects every individual in society. The ‘Ubuntu’ concept of life is a process of realization through others; it simultaneously enriches the self-realization of others. (Nafukho, 2006, p. 410)

In congruence of the above, ‘Ubuntu’ is clearly a philosophy that promotes respect, responsiveness and communication between two or more people. Thus, both TA and ‘Ubuntu’ emphasize on the importance of dialogue as the platform for human interaction. It is through dialogue that each person finds himself or herself.

Physis

Berne (1968, pp. 369–370) as cited in Noriega (2010, p. 202) defined physis as “the growth force of nature, which makes organisms evolve into higher forms, embryos develop into adults, sick people get better, and healthy people strive to attain their ideals.” The fundamental existential position of “I’m OK, You’re OK” reflects the belief that people are born with an “inherent tendency for health and healing” (Steiner, 2003, p. 180). TA bears a concept of physis—a drive toward health and wholeness (Newton, 2011, Newton, 2007). Evident in the aspect of stroking is the advancement of emotional health which is key in physis (Getty, 1976). This concept of physis is apparent in the philosophy of ‘Ubuntu’ which is rooted in the concept of human excellence. ‘Ubuntu’ demands for the preservation of life. ‘Ubuntu’ is rooted in the notion of healing (Edwards, 2014). ‘Ubuntu’ integrates relationships of humanity and the ecological environment with the impetus of enhancing livelihoods and promoting health (Chigangaidze, 2021a; Van Breda, 2019). From an African point of view, all categories of being including umu-ntu (human person) and

izi-nto (material objects), participate in -ntu, the life energy or spirit popularly known as 'Moya' (Mkhize, 2018). It is this 'Umoya or Moya' that reviews the physis of TA in the African philosophy of Ubuntu.

Stroking

Eric Berne defined a stroke as a 'unit of human recognition' (Solomon, 2003). Strokes are either positive or negative. An exchange of strokes constitutes a transaction which is the unit of social discourse (Berne, 1984). Stroking accounts for any physical contact or symbolic substitution such as a gesture, glance, or word (Getty, 1976). People need strokes to survive physically and psychologically (Massey, 2006; Steiner, 2003). Strokes work in the modalities of behavior modification and reinforcement through the elements of contingency management that are within the processes of stroking. In other words, stroking authenticates and disapproves behavior. In effect, stroking amounts to telling another: "I know you're there!" (Jongeward & James, 1973, p. 60 as cited in Getty, 1976). It should be noted that Ubuntu's axiom, '*umuntu ngubuntu ngabantu*' is deeply rooted in stroking. It resembles that a person is a person through other people [who stroke him/her]. Drawing back on the definition of a stroke, 'unit of human recognition,' Ubuntu realizes that for one to be a person other people must recognize him or her as such. This paper argues that without this 'unit of human recognition' there is no 'Ubuntu' to talk about.

The South African greeting, "*Sawubona!*" meaning 'I see you' illustrates 'Ubuntu' (Ngomane, 2019). The greeting is loaded with stroking. The African philosophy of 'Ubuntu' is rich in understanding strokes even beyond the greetings. Among the Shona, when an adult diverts from 'Ubuntu,' the person is likely to receive a negative stroke, '*musaita sepwere itai semunhu mukuru*' (don't behave like a child but be like an adult). In the same light, TA fosters on 'adult control' that is the adult ego state taking control of the Parent and Child ego states. Again, the adult can be seen as '*munhu akabvakusina vanhu*' (someone who came from where there are no 'people') and or '*haana kurerwa mushe*' meaning the person's upbringing is not optimum with that of Ubuntu.

In addition, marasmus which is an infant condition also known as hospitalism, comes from lack of physical stimulation (stroking) – lack of proper feeding (Thompson, 1976). Similarly, 'Ubuntu kulya /kudya' meaning that if one has eaten, the person can live out 'Ubuntu' (Mukuka, 2013). Noteworthy, an infant though a person cannot become a 'person' without the feeding process, hence, '*umuntu ngubuntu ngabantu*' applies. The infant needs others to become a person. Food is part of the humanistic physiological needs that is required in human motivation (Maslow, 1954). Closely related to stroking in Ngomane (2019, p. 21) writes:

Ubuntu tells us we are only who we are thanks to other people. Of course, we have our parents to credit for bringing us to the world, but beyond this there are hundreds- if not thousands- of relationships, big and small, along the way, which teach us something about life and how to live it well. Our parents or guardians teach us how to walk and talk. Our teachers at school teach us how to read and write [through stroking]. A mentor might help us find fulfilling work. A lover might teach us emotional lessons, both good and bad- we learn from all experiences. Every interaction [stroking] will have brought us to where we are today.

Thus, it is evident that the concepts of stroking are in both ‘Ubuntu’ and TA as a ‘unit of recognition’ indicating that the African philosophy of Ubuntu can help in understanding human behavior and decolonize social work practice in Africa. However, stroking is not the only construct of TA that can show the relevance of ‘Ubuntu’ in Social Work practice but aspects such as transgenerational scripting can help expand this discourse to another level.

Transgenerational Scripting

In TA, individuals and families manifest in their ancestors’ influence even without having met them through the concept of transgenerational scripting. This is because of unconscious communication that runs between family generations (Noriega, 2010). The behaviors that run-in families from generation to generation can also be explained through transgenerational scripting. Gayol (2019, pp. 279–280) states, “Transgenerational scripts are unconscious systematic patterns that people repeat in families, groups, and organizations through beliefs, emotions, and behaviours that recreate the history and life events experienced by their ancestors.” The Shona sayings, *‘akatodza madzibaba ake’* he behaves like his fathers clearly reflects on the concepts of transgenerational scripting. The African thinking of ‘Ubuntu’ is deeply reflective of the ideas of transgenerational scripting. In this vein, ‘Ubuntu’ is the foundation of one’s identity and a sense of self which are based on the ethical teachings passed from generation to generation through enculturation and socialization (Zvomuya, 2020). In addition, the orature of Ubuntu is passed from one generation to another through folklore (ngano), songs (nziyo), teasing (zvituko), proverbs (tsumo), irony (dimikira) and poems (detembo; Mugumbate & Nyanguru, 2013).

As a way of life, Ubuntu calls for people to consider their history (in their ancestors) and future (in their descendants) and to live in a way that honors the former and ensures the welfare of the latter. Thus, Ubuntu relates not only to the present community but also preceding and following communities, that is, to ancestors and descendants. One’s personhood is also considered with person’s relationships with the ancestors (Van Breda, 2019). Regarding the African world view, people appreciate that they were brought into this world by their parents who also had their parents (Ngomane, 2019), hence the axiom,

‘umuntu ngubuntu ngabantu.’ In the African understanding, ones becoming is traced from the past as well- the ancestors. ‘*Umuntu ngubuntu ngabantu*’ is far much broader than the process of becoming after birth. It connects the individual to the ancestors- the living dead. The proverb highlights a connection of the person’s past as well.

Similarly, social workers use genograms in assessments to understand these transgenerational scripts (Chigangaidze, 2021b). We argue in this paper that, social work is well positioned in breaking unhealthy transgenerational scripts and altering these with positive behavioral traits. Social work as a profession that is concerned with understanding the historical context of an individual, group and society through the chronosystem of the ecological systems approach can facilitate awareness and redecision in clients by means of psychosocial education (ibid). Social work interventions may consider the present in connection with the past, explore the roots of behavior, empower people through reflective genograms. Intergenerational systems have always been a part of the ‘Ubuntu’ inspired social work (Van Breda, 2019). These concepts of transgenerational scripts tend to explain behavior from a behavioral perspective and social learning approach than the genetics or hereditary pathway. Put simply, scripts are acquired through early childhood experiences and affect the life of the individual, his or her parenting style thereby impacting on the person’s children until it becomes transgenerational.

In both TA and Ubuntu, social workers can tap into the fountains of behavior modification and behavior change principles. In view of TA, Gayol (2019, p. 280) postulates:

Transactional scripts may be sane or toxic. In the former, themes of belonging, acceptance, development, productivity, success, love, and equity are repeated, among other things; in the latter, themes of over adaptation, dependency, code pendency, abandonment, rejection, danger, suicide, homicide, and incarceration, among others, abound. A treatment plan of working with transgenerational issues in psychotherapy requires awareness of both types of scripts to reinforce the first and change the second through an empathic relationship with the client and using various techniques designed to facilitate integration into the client’s Adult ego state.

The above statement clearly reflects on the need to facilitate an alteration of negative transactional scripts and reinforce positive ones through behavior modification techniques. ‘Ubuntu’ has been regarded as a philosophy promoting positive human behavior traits that enhance human welfare and discourage negative behaviors (Chigangaidze, 2021b; Mugumbate & Chereni, 2019). This paper cautions readers and authors of Ubuntu on using the axiom, ‘umuntu ngubuntu ngabatu’ which means ‘I am because You’re’ or ‘I am a person because of other people’ without referring to the axiology and ontology of the African worldview. Using this axiom without the values of humanness is meaningless. Using ‘Ubuntu’ depended on the axiom alone leaves room for people to think that raising children in unacceptable

environments of deviant behaviors is Ubuntu. The ‘*umuntu ngubuntu ngabantu*’ should never be divorced from the values of the African philosophy which include kindness, forgiveness, hospitality, humanness, social justice, human rights, social solidarity, liberty and other positive virtues. Thus, this paper is a plea for a TA and Ubuntu informed social work practice that can entangle humanity from the negative transactional scripts whilst reinforcing the positive ones.

Spirituality

Transactional analysts are guided by a pilgrim’s model in exploring spiritual elements a client brings during consultation process (Saruhan, 2019). The pilgrim model is an analytical tool to help people from any belief tradition to use structural and functional ego states to analyze the sacred journey based on an individual’s development. TA can advance an understanding of spirituality and its complex interfaces with religiosity and religious psychopathology (Mellacqua, 2016). In the same vein, ‘Ubuntu’ advances spirituality in understanding human life (Chigangaidze, 2022, 2021a; Van Breda, 2019). For “Ubuntu,” spirituality also brings about the life energy which is ‘*moya*’ (Mkhize, 2018) and ‘*physis*’ in TA. There is no ‘*umuntu ngubuntu ngabantu*’ without the *moya*- a spiritual force, a healing power and a force of growth. In TA, the *physis* is significant in healing as life energy and brings growth. Spirituality has gained interest in the field of social work (Van Breda, 2019). The African spirituality will help in teamwork which promotes the advancement of peace building (Masango, 2006). TA has also been used in teamwork and peace building activities.

Concern for child development

TA can be very useful for child therapy and in educational contexts (Hay & Widén, 2015). TA is concerned about offering an optimum environment for child’s emotional and physical growth (Pierini, 2014). TA can help foster parents develop therapeutic parenting skills that facilitate effective child development (Douglas, 2018). Parents and Child ego states are predominantly influenced by messages recorded in early childhood (Pierini, 2014). The child ego state, for example, is a set of thoughts, feelings, attitudes and behavior patterns which are traces of the individual’s own childhood (Berne, 1961). The parent ego state is a set of regulations and rules, standards, norms and codes, preconceptions and assessments extracted from individual’s parents or significant others. It is the childhood memories and experiences about the parental instructions (Rahiman & Kodikal, 2020). According to Carl Rogers, a Humanist, the development of self or the self-concept begins in childhood and is influenced by parenting styles (Rogers, 1961). This aligns the

concept of childhood experiences of TA within the humanist approach. In the same vein, it is strengthened by 'Ubuntu' that children become human beings through others, especially, the family and community (Mugumbate & Chereni, 2019). It is through the transactions between a child, the family and the community that mold the child into a human being. The child is stated to have become a being through the way he/she interacts with others. This extends the understanding in TA, of the life position, 'I am not OK, You're OK' – a child requires the interaction of other people to reach the position, "I am OK, You're OK." The adults and the community can facilitate the OK ness of a child. The child learns to fully integrate into the community through others who have already been socialized as such. In addition, Kurevakwesu and Chizasa (2020) call for a 'six-tier system' that encourages a communitarian perspective to raising children. 'Ubuntu' emphasize on a community perspective to child development as it fosters, 'it takes a village to raise a child' (Mugumbate & Chereni, 2019).

Implications

The discourse of '*umuntu ngubuntu ngabantu*', a person is a person through other persons is of essence to social work profession as it pictures the person in the context of the past, present and future. It shows that a nucleated Ubuntu is limited and the axiom, '*umuntu ngubuntu ngabantu*' connects to the chronosystem – considering the variance of time and generations through transgenerational scripts. The paper connects *umuntu ngubuntu ngabantu* to the domains of spirituality through the construct of '*moya*.' In this correspondence, the aspects of parenting, childhood experiences, person's social responsibility and the essence of stroking have been identified within the dictum, "a person is a person through other persons." The African philosophy of 'Ubuntu' has launched the Global Agenda of Social Work and Social Development (2020–2030; Mayaka & Truell, 2021). In connecting the dictum of 'Ubuntu' to the past, present and future, the paper reinforces the responsibility of the present generation to ensure the being of the unborn generation through selfless acts of preserving the environment and human relations that foster continuity of humanity. The axiom 'a person is a person because of other persons' is loaded with meaning that requires unpacking. It connects those being born with the departed. Thus, 'Ubuntu' promotes sustainable development through its focus on the past, present and future (Van Breda, 2019). Given the violent effects of political instability, poverty in plenty provisions, human rights abuses and social injustice occurring in this global community, the paper questions the contributions this generation will make in ensuring the personhood of the unborn. What values, principles and responsibilities will be passed on to those coming beyond our existence?

Conclusion

The African proverb, ‘*umuntu ngubuntu ngabantu*’ a person is a person through other people which is enshrined in the ‘Ubuntu’ philosophy is of great significance to social work practice. It connects social work to the framework of the past, present and future which are important in contextualizing the person-in-the environment perspective, a historical analysis or the reflection of how ancestral history has impacted one’s personhood and how these can influence future generations is essential. In this view, *umuntu ngubuntu ngabantu* in this paper links to an understanding of ‘Ubuntu’ to aspects of sustainable development, spirituality in social work, ecological social work, child development, psychology, communication, ethics, philosophy and other domains vital to the profession. The paper emphasizes the need for all humans to reach the life position, ‘*I’m OK, You’re OK*’ through the axiom *umuntu ngubuntu ngabantu* a person is a person through other people. ‘Ubuntu’s’ axioms should be understood in reference to the philosophical axiology and beyond the present to both the living dead (ancestors) and the future generations. What strokes are we giving people in life and in practice? What legacy are we living for the generations coming beyond ourselves? is an essential question to ask ourselves as individuals, family members, community members and participants of the global world. What shall we be remembered of as we become the living dead (ancestors) in the coming future? Food for thought.

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2 The relevance of *Ubuntu* in disability

A political, economic, social,
technological, legal, and environmental
(PESTLE) analysis

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Introduction

People with disabilities face a myriad of challenges, including health issues, lack of access to essential services, discrimination, and stigma, which is where the philosophy of *Ubuntu* can play a significant role in enhancing their well-being. Almost every person will be temporarily or permanently impaired at some point in life, and those who survive to old age will experience aggravated difficulties in functioning (World Health Organisation & The World Bank, 2011).

People with disabilities make up at least 15% of the global population (Kemp & Miller, 2022). Persons with disabilities have double the risk of developing conditions such as diabetes, obesity, poor oral health, depression, asthma, and stroke (World Health Organisation, 2023). Several people with disabilities do not have equal access to education, healthcare, and employment opportunities and do not receive the disability-related services they require. People with disabilities are denied autonomy, for example, when they are confined to institutions. They are subject to violation of their dignity through subjection to violence, prejudice, and abuse because of their disability (World Health Organisation & The World Bank, 2011). In addition, Sen (2009) argued that disability and poverty have a reciprocal impact on each other. People with disabilities face discrimination and stigma. Considering these challenges, the philosophy of *Ubuntu* has been proposed to offer practices that can enhance the health and well-being of people with disabilities (Berghs, 2017).

As a response to these challenges, the African worldview of *Ubuntu* has been proposed as a potential solution to promote the health and well-being of people with disabilities. *Ubuntu*, a people-centred philosophy deeply rooted in African culture, is gaining traction in various disciplines and has the potential to positively impact the lives of people with disabilities (Chigangaidze, 2022). The philosophy is at the heart of the African way of life and impacts on every aspect of people's well-being. It is perceived as the 'soul force' that

drives almost every facet of societal life in African societies and the mould which cements relationships within communities (Lefa, 2015). Mugumbate and Nyagura (2013) submit that *Ubuntu* brings the human face to every aspect of life. *Ubuntu* promotes humanness in all aspects of life: political, economic, social, technological, legal, and environmental (PESTLE). Fostering the virtues of forgiveness, solidarity, human dignity, human rights, spirituality, and compassion *Ubuntu* has been considered a political philosophy which promotes peace and sustainability (Strozenberg et al., 2015). *Ubuntu* can then be described as the capacity to express compassion, reciprocity, dignity, humanity, kindness, mutuality, and solidarity in the interest of building and maintaining communities with justice and mutual caring (Tutu, 1999).

Some scholars believe that the five pillars of *Ubuntu* involvement include family, community, society, environment, and spirituality (Nicolaidis, 2021). In applying *Ubuntu* to clinical practice, Chigangaidze (2022) is of the view that *Ubuntu*-inspired practitioners assess people from a holistic approach which includes modalities of behaviour, affection, sensations, imagery, cognition, drugs/biology, interpersonal relationships, person–environment relationship and the person–spiritual relationship. Literature from the field of sexual health has shown that *Ubuntu* can provide concepts for enhancing safe sexual practices among youths and curb the discrimination and stigma against people living with HIV in Africa (Tarkang et al., 2018). In nursing, *Ubuntu* represents an important care philosophy which can foster holistic nursing, especially when the inner driving force of the nurses is primarily to care for patients (Muhammad-Lawal et al., 2022). The relevance of *Ubuntu* in the field of disability has been considered through social and environmental justice (Berghs, 2017). Considering the above reflections, the impetus of this chapter is to explore PESTLE relevance of the African philosophy of *Ubuntu* in the field of disability studies and the lives of people with disabilities. PESTLE analysis is known in the business area but is utilised in this chapter as the lens to consider the applicability of *Ubuntu* in disabled persons. The chapter stimulates further debate and recommends evaluations of how African societies have utilised the philosophy of *Ubuntu* after colonialism and the westernisation of their lifestyle. In considering PESTLE applicability of the *Ubuntu* philosophy, this chapter emphasises the axiology, epistemology, and ontology of *Ubuntu* in exploring the philosophy's relevance in the lives of people with disabilities.

Methodology

This chapter employs conceptual analysis to examine the relevance of *Ubuntu* in disability and its potential to guide disability interventions. It should be noted that *Ubuntu* is also a theory that can guide and inform social work practice (van Breda, 2019). Thus, in analysing the relevance of *Ubuntu* in disability, this chapter also theoretically synthesises the *Ubuntu* philosophy through the lens of PESTLE analysis. Unlike other frameworks

such as SWOT analysis, PESTLE analysis classifies issues as political (P), economic (E), social (S), technological (T), legal (L) and environmental (E) (Basu, 2004). In this conceptual analysis, researchers are well saturated with the theory of *Ubuntu* as they live in the communities that value and practise *Ubuntu*. The researchers have been part of the people who heard *Ubuntu/Hunhu* stories passed from their forefathers through oral tradition. The philosophy of *Ubuntu* is passed from one generation to another through the use of stories, songs, idioms, and proverbs (Chasi, 2020; Chisale, 2020). The researchers for over two decades have been brought up in this context, and as part of members in a community practising *Ubuntu*. Thus, in terms of epistemology, the researchers also utilised reflections from their lived experiences. To emphasise objectivity, the researchers made use of already published work on the *Ubuntu* philosophy. As people who also read about the *Ubuntu* philosophy, the researchers purposely reflected on the work written by other scholars.

Having explored the methodology of this research, it is essential to delve into the specific domains where *Ubuntu* plays a critical role in informing disability policies and interventions, starting with its political relevance.

Political relevance

In the political domain, *Ubuntu* is linked to indigenous political philosophy and locates disability within the context of human rights and sustainable development. Samkange (1980) connects *Ubuntu* or *Hunhu* to Zimbabwean indigenous political philosophy as a bedrock upon which political decisions should rest. Likewise, *Ubuntu* locates disability politically within the wider ecological practices of sustainability such as Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the aspects of human rights (Berghs, 2017). Considering concepts such as *Zunde raMambo* (Chief's Kraal) emphasises the role of political leaders in the provision of food to the marginalised and vulnerable members of the society such as persons with disabilities. *Zunde raMambo* is a traditional social welfare system in Zimbabwe which involves able-bodied members of the community working together to produce food for the aged, persons with disability, and orphans (Stathers et al., 2000). This practice is one of the traditional social welfare systems which are embedded in the ethos of the *Ubuntu* philosophy. Arranged by the Chief as the political leaders of the land, community members would gather and ensure that vulnerable members of the community have access to food. Thus, *Ubuntu* positions political leaders at the centre of promoting food security among the people with disabilities. This traditional social welfare system was not used by the Chiefs to gain political ground, a case which may be experienced in today's generation. The true tenets of *Ubuntu* encourage political leaders to focus on the lives of the marginalised first before considering their political campaigns. Chiefs were not supposed to be driven by egoistic desires but were custodians and stewards of ancestral belongings (Samkange, 1980). It is clear from the

traditional social welfare systems of *Ubuntu* that traditional political leaders have the responsibility of ensuring food security for people with disabilities and enhancing their welfare. Therefore, the *Ubuntu* systems and projects such as the *Zunde raMambo* prioritise disability within the politics of the land as these mandate political leaders to take responsibility for the welfare of people with disabilities.

Additionally, *Ubuntu* has been included in the epilogue of the Post-Apartheid Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Cornell & van Marle, 2005). Politically, human rights and dignity of all people are enshrined in the preamble of the Constitution. Enhancement of the quality of life of all citizens and nurturing the potential of all people are all enshrined in *Ubuntu* and are within the preamble of South Africa's Constitution. Dalamo (2013) posits that *Ubuntu* has in the past been utilised by political leaders such as Julius Nyerere, Jomo Kenyata, and Kenneth Kaunda. For example, Kaunda promoted the work of giving basic needs to people with disabilities as part of Zambian humanism (Cleaver et al., 2019). Thus, *Ubuntu*-inspired leaders have always promoted the welfare of people with disabilities. In South Africa, *Ubuntu* was rekindled at the end of the apartheid by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission with the aim of promoting national healing, encouraging unity of purpose, inclusivity and anti-oppressive practices (Abdullah, 2013). The renowned anti-apartheid figure, Archbishop Desmond Tutu (1999) emphasised *Ubuntu* values such as forgiveness to usher in peace and national development. *Ubuntu* thus ultimately promotes sustainable peace and tranquillity among people (Strozenberg et al., 2015). The African worldview calls for forgiveness among political rivalries to avoid further persecution, violations of human rights, and physical torture that would directly or indirectly lead to disability. By extension, *Ubuntu* connects political violence to the prevalence of disability, secondary to the physical injuries sustained during political fights, hence, the need for peace.

There is a close relationship between conventional humanism and *Ubuntu* because this philosophy advocates for inclusivity of persons with disabilities in decision-making, policy formulation, and the empowerment of the vulnerable members of society so that they can express their feelings. Dolamo (2013) identifies *Ubuntu* as a philosophy which promotes the working together and pulling together of talents /ideas for the enhancement of the community. Berghs (2017) in concurrence supports that the African philosophy of *Ubuntu* is inclusive and accepting of all members of the community, including people with disabilities. Inclusivity is an essential element in disability policing as they seek to promote the involvement of people with disabilities in political platforms such as parliamentary debates. *Ubuntu* values forgiveness, gentleness, kindness, solidarity, human rights, and solidarity (Chigangaidze, 2022). Thus, from the value system and the nature of *Ubuntu*, the section of this chapter has established the role of the African philosophy of *Ubuntu* from the political domain of disability. As the political

relevance of *Ubuntu* in disability has been established, let us now examine how this philosophy connects with the economic domain.

Economic relevance

The *Ubuntu* philosophy has significant implications for economic development. *Ubuntu* is also focused on economic development, for example, Julia Nyerere's *ujamaa* is a socialist idea based on the *Ubuntu* philosophy which promotes an understanding that family is the building block of community development (Dolamo, 2013). One of the aims of such initiatives as *ujamaa* is to strengthen the economic growth of vulnerable groups of society, such as people with disabilities. The promotion of economic growth in *ubuntu*-oriented interventions has always been promoted and recorded in literature. For example, Mugumbate (2020) articulates Jairos Jiri's *Ubuntu*-informed model of social care which involved, among other issues, the promotion of enterprises (*ushavi* meaning workmanship) for income, job creation, and economic sustainability among the disabled people in society. Another good example includes *mishandira pamwe* (collective working) to advance economic growth and support people with disabilities. The hope in *Ubuntu* is to promote collectivism in projects such as those in agriculture to achieve sustainable development. *Ubuntu* is therefore structured to promote hard work thereby contributing positively to society. By doing so, people with disabilities are not looked down upon, but are seen as equal people who can also participate and contribute economically to the community through workmanship (*ushavi*). People with disabilities are supported in the activities that they can do. It can be submitted that *Ubuntu* realises the capacities of people with disabilities and promotes teamwork which helps them to explore investment opportunities between themselves.

Social thought

The *Ubuntu* philosophy also plays a crucial role in shaping social thought and attitudes towards people with disabilities. In *Ubuntu* theology, there is neither abled nor disabled, child nor adult, white nor black, because all human beings are made in the image of God (Chisale, 2020). The philosophy looks beyond the physical make-up of a person and acknowledges that all people are human. *Ubuntu* literally means humanness and advances critical issues of diversity and anti-oppressive practices. It should be noted that:

Humanness would need to transcend ability and similarity in bodily features. Humanness would also need to accept multi-diversity in terms of physical traits (skin complexion, height, weight, presence or non-presence of limbs, functional or non-functional limbs, etc.), sensory capacities (hearing, vision, etc.) and so on. Humanness, which the elders equated to *Ubuntu*, should about acceptance of another human being

in all shapes and forms, affording people with disabilities the same care, dignity and teachings that will make Zulu society into *abantu abaqotho* [principled people with *Ubuntu* values].

(Ngubane-Mokiwa, 2018: 2)

Thus, *Ubuntu* promotes social acceptance of people with disabilities and advances the need to respect their human dignity.

Some of the teachings of *Ubuntu* are found in proverbs, idioms, songs, and stories across Africa. Chisale (2020) underscored that African folktales have always promoted the inclusion of people with disabilities and of treating them with human dignity. Proverbs across Sub-Saharan Africa for instance warn against laughing at people with disabilities. For example, a common Shona phrase, '*seka hurema hwafa*' (laugh at disability after you are dead) is used among Zimbabweans. Similar proverbs are also used in Swahili, especially in countries such as Tanzania and Kenya (Devlieger, 1999). One of the prominent *Ubuntu*-inspired musicians, the late Oliver Mtukudzi (Chasi & Tagwirei, 2020; Kyker, 2016) in his song *munhu* cites *munhu munhu chete asina kubarwa ndiani* translated 'a person is a person, who has not been born?' latently signifies that people with disabilities are also human beings, they were born like everyone else and need to be treated with dignity. *Ubuntu* is also reflected in idioms such as 'it takes a village to raise a child,' and when applied to childhood disability, a sense of belonging can be fundamental in safeguarding against alienation and victimisation of children with disabilities (Ned et al., 2022).

Nicolades and Shozi (2012) argue that if one acts unkindly towards a person with a disability, he/she automatically loses her *Ubuntu*, therefore, she can no longer be referred to as a person. This is because those with *Ubuntu* are expected to be generous, hospitable, friendly, caring, and compassionate (Tutu, 1999). In traditional African perspective, as evidenced in *Ubuntu*-inspired thinking, disability is recognised and respected, and in some cases, disability has been viewed as possessing divine powers (Masitera, 2020). The African person is a communal being who is inseparable from others and incomplete without the community (Munyaka & Mothlabi, 2009). For example, the work of Jairos Jiri on disability in Zimbabwe has been attributed to the philosophy of *Ubuntu* because he believed in taking the disabled person(s) as part of his family, connecting and interacting with them in his own shelter. Mugumbate (2020) highlights that the work of *Baba* (meaning Father) Jairos Jiri was rooted in the *Ubuntu* concept of *ukama* 'being related.' *Ukama* in this sense is not only limited to blood ties as *Baba* Jairos Jiri went further to assist people beyond his blood ties. Evidently, in *Ubuntu*, everyone is related, and helping someone is to help a relative.

The *Ubuntu* philosophy highlights the critical role of significant others and the broader community in supporting individuals with disabilities, regardless of their impairment or condition. *Ubuntu* again expresses the importance of significant others in everyone's life, despite one's impairment or condition

(Mutswanga, 2017). Moreover, *Ubuntu* emphasises on communitarian approaches to helping people with disabilities (Mugumbate, 2020). From an *Ubuntu* worldview, the idea of disability grants may not be successful if it neglects the family and focuses only on the individual (Nhlapo et al., 2006). This is because the *Ubuntu* philosophy focuses on holistic interventions that aim at empowering society in its totality. Disability interventions informed by *Ubuntu*, therefore, empower family members on how best to support people with disabilities. For Akabor and Phasha (2022), *Ubuntu* does not put people in cubicles. Instead, it situates them within a web of relationships. Enshrined in the axiom, ‘a person is a person because of other persons,’ *Ubuntu* suggests the empowerment of those who care for people with disabilities. Thus, the philosophy of *Ubuntu* is socially applicable in the care of people with disabilities.

Technological adaptability

As the importance of social relationships is emphasised by *Ubuntu*, this philosophy also adapts to technological advancements to further enhance the lives of people with disabilities. The integration of the *Ubuntu* philosophy with modern technology opens new possibilities for improving the lives of people with disabilities. With the various advancements in technology, *Ubuntu* has also entered the world of computers (Mugumbate & Nyanguru, 2013). *Ubuntu* is now applicable to the technological domain of improving the lives of people with disabilities. Tapping from cultural resources such as the support of the *Ubuntu* philosophy, with the sense of fostering harmonious relationships, has proven to be a good and empowering approach to assistive technologies in disability services (Mji & Edusei, 2019). It has a relational philosophy which promotes the use of technological aids that help people participate and engage in community activities. The African way of life in *Ubuntu* encourages inclusivity and enhancement of life and considers issues to do with affordability and accessibility of technological equipment to the general population. Mugumbate and Nyanguru (2013) add that *Ubuntu* is driven by the belief that software should be free and accessible to all. Accessibility is therefore a major focus when it comes to the promotion of life for people with disabilities. It is critical to note that the values of *Ubuntu* also appreciate that people with disabilities should have assistive technologies such as wheelchairs, hearing aids, and other equipment that should be easily accessible and affordable to people with disabilities. In addition, *Ubuntu*’s relevance to the education systems is overwhelming and considering the utility of assistive technologies in improving life experiences for people with disabilities in schools, colleges, and universities will be essential. Resultantly, *Ubuntu* is all about making life worthwhile and empathising with the other person. Fundamental to the philosophy of *Ubuntu* is the integration of children with disabilities into the community as they are considered part of society. Assistive technologies, from an *Ubuntu* perspective,

can therefore help the reintegration of people with disabilities as they will be empowered to participate in communal activities. From the *Ubuntu* way of life, technology should promote a healthy well-being and avoid harm to the people it is intended for. Thus, *Ubuntu* also considers bioethics when utilising the use of technology in enhancing life experiences for people with disabilities. Beyond technological adaptability, the *Ubuntu* philosophy also has significant implications in the legal framework surrounding disability rights and policies.

Legal framework

Beyond technological adaptability, the *Ubuntu* philosophy also has significant implications in the legal framework surrounding disability rights and policies. From a legal perspective, the *Ubuntu* philosophy aligns with various ethical theories, advocating for the dignity and rights of people with disabilities. The philosophy advances the value of human dignity and human rights, especially through the emphasis of the axiom ‘a person is a person through other people.’ The axiom involves relationality issues and treating others as you want them to treat you thereby enhancing the concepts of human rights. Generally, *Ubuntu* translates to humanness and in its deeper sense, it relates to morality and personhood which are all key elements to the adherence to legal policies. Across the African region, *Ubuntu* encompasses a communal approach where perpetrators, victims, and the whole local population take part in the legal system. Thus, persons with disabilities are not only endline beneficiaries of the output of legislation but key actors in its formulation, interpretation and use. Critically, persons other than persons with disabilities formulating, interpreting and applying legal instruments should be intentional about being disability-centred.

The African worldview of *Ubuntu* is structured to promote deterrence, prevention, rehabilitation, restoration, and reintegration (Mayaka & Truell, 2021). Thus, *Ubuntu* clearly fosters relationships that strengthen adherence to legal statutes, thereby maintaining peace and order. In addition, *Ubuntu* is considered by most African societies as a divinely inspired positive action that advances respect for life as this is linked to the sacredness of the Creator and ancestors. One who does not respect life is seen as someone without *Ubuntu*. In respecting humans as divine creatures, *Ubuntu* emphasises that one is expected to respect all people, including people with disabilities. This is so because people are regarded as possessing a superlative and a non-instrumental value (Nicolaidis, 2021). Since *Ubuntu* is against the stigma and discrimination of people with disabilities, it is legally ascribed in *Ubuntu*-inspired hearts that the rights of the people with disabilities need to be respected. As aforementioned, *Ubuntu* as a way of life, prohibits any individual to laugh at any person with disabilities. It is taboo for one to abuse people with disabilities. After examining the relationship between *Ubuntu* and disability within the legal domain, it is important to explore the significance of the

Ubuntu philosophy within the environmental domain and its implications for disability.

Environmental relationship

From the *Ubuntu* perspective, the environment plays a crucial role in the well-being of individuals, including those with disabilities. The principles of *Ubuntu* instruct humans to be accountable to other humans in the way they relate to the environment and use resources (Etieyibo, 2017). Thus, when applied to disability, *Ubuntu* questions environmental pollution which predisposes people to disability. For example, it is forbidden to leave pits uncovered where children and other people pass through because this causes harm that can ultimately contribute to disability. In addition, the African philosophy of *Ubuntu* is embedded in the *ukama*/relation concept between the environment and people (Chibvongodze, 2016). There should be mutual respect and co-existence between the environment and the people thereof. *Ubuntu* emphasises that the environment has to be integrated into the care plans for an improvement in the well-being of people with disabilities. In agreement, Mandipa (2013) forwards that environmental accessibility should address some of the challenges faced by people with disabilities in moving around and participating in society. Thus, in disability, *Ubuntu*-inspired assessments and care plans should focus on how people with disabilities can access their environment and what adaptations can be made to ensure an enhanced person–environment relationship. Having explored the environmental relationship in the context of *Ubuntu* and disability, this chapter now concludes with a summary and implications of the findings.

Conclusion

This chapter concludes that the *Ubuntu* philosophy can be applied to care for people with disabilities across various domains. The ethics of *Ubuntu* have also been found to promote values of kindness, holistic care, social justice, human rights, solidarity, peace, and mutuality. Considering such an axiological base, *Ubuntu* is applicable in the care of people with disability from all spheres of life and promotes issues to do with sustainability, enhancement of life experiences, and a communitarian approach to interventions. Guided by songs, folktales, and the axiom of *Ubuntu*, this chapter considered how the African philosophy of *Ubuntu* condemns issues of social injustice, discrimination, and maltreatment of people with disabilities. Reflective of the idea that *Ubuntu* is an inclusive philosophy that promotes the participation of people with disabilities in social policy formulation, the chapter promotes the involvement of people with disabilities in all areas of life that affect them: politics, economics, social components, technological sector, legal, and environmental domains. In conclusion, embracing the

Ubuntu philosophy fosters a human-centred, environmentally responsible, and inclusive approach that empowers people with disabilities, ultimately enhancing their quality of life.

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Ubuntu Philosophy as a Humanistic–Existential Framework for the Fight Against the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

Ubuntu has been identified by several scholars as a philosophy that provides a framework to fight health disasters such as COVID-19. Ubuntu refers to the African worldview of seeing oneself through others. It refers to the pattern of interconnectedness between people in the form of a philosophy or worldview. Ubuntu explores concerns about cosmic and global context of life. This article stipulates that Ubuntu can provide ways to deal with challenges that emerge with the COVID-19 pandemic. Ubuntu fosters the integrated components of humanity as it appreciates the biological, psychosocial, spiritual, and environmental aspects of life. The article explores several themes such as self-awareness and societal responsibility, holism, spirituality, health promotion, food security, social justice and human rights, generosity, sharing, and teamwork. Others have advanced that Ubuntu is a philosophy to adopt in the fight against epidemics, and we seek to broaden the debate by exploring Ubuntu axiological and ontological humanistic–existential themes. Finally, the article calls for the adoption of Ubuntu philosophy in psychological and social work interventions in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic.

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Keywords

COVID-19, Ubuntu philosophy, humanistic–existential, health promotion

Ubuntuism is an African philosophical framework that is characterised by interconnectedness of all things and beings; the spiritual nature of people; their collective/individual identity and the collective/inclusive nature of family structure; oneness of mind, body, and spirit; and the value of interpersonal relationships (Mungai, 2015 as cited in Zvomuya, 2020). The philosophy is known in different languages in Africa including *bomoto* (Congo); *gimuntu* (Angola); *umunthu* (Malawi); *vumutu* (Mozambique); *vumuntu*, *vhutu* (South Africa); *humhunu/ubuthosi* (Zimbabwe); *bumuntu* (Tanzania); *umuntu* (Uganda) to mention but a few (Mupedziswa et al., 2019). *Ubuntu* is rooted in the sayings, “I am a person because you are, I am because I share and participate” and “I am because of others.” There has been a broad consensus among scholars that *Ubuntu* is an African philosophy expressing humanness in the values of compassion, solidarity, harmony, consensus, hospitality, sympathy, and sharing among others (Mupedziswa et al., 2019). *Ubuntu* is considered as a philosophical base for researching indigenous psychology (Mkabela, 2015).

There are calls to adopt the African philosophy of *Ubuntu* as a framework for interventions in the COVID-19 pandemic (Mwansa, 2020; Sambala et al., 2020). *Ubuntu* can create a basis for dialogue and mutually enhancing discourse between global bioethics and indigenous cultures (Chuwa, 2014). There has been an increasing interest in the philosophy of *Ubuntu* regarding psychological and social work practice (Chigangaidze, 2021a; Kurevakwesu & Chizasa, 2020; Zvomuya, 2020). Most African academics who seek to decolonialize psychology and social work practice have depended on the philosophy of *Ubuntu* as a starting point (Hanks, 2008; Van Breda, 2019). The philosophy of *Ubuntu* has been considered in nursing, environmental management, and business ethics (Chibvongodze, 2016; Sambala et al., 2019). *Ubuntu* philosophy has been considered in health promotion and mental health (Chasi & Omarjee, 2014; Engelbrecht & Kasiram, 2012). In appraising the third force of psychology, Hanks (2008) has called for the adoption of the African humanism in the form of *Ubuntu* in psychology. The philosophy of *Ubuntu* has gained momentum in the social work fraternity to the extent that the theme for World Social Work Day 2021 celebrations read, “*Ubuntu: I am Because We are—Strengthening Social Solidarity and Global Connectedness.*” Moreover, Washington (2020) has advanced *Ubuntu* psychology of healing psychic trauma of Africans in America as well as throughout the diaspora and on the continent of Africa. It is in this context that we consider reflecting on the African philosophy of *Ubuntu* as a way forward in

the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond. In doing so, we ratify the calls to adopt Ubuntu philosophy in COVID-19 interventions. Utilising philosophical reflection, we also explore the components of Ubuntu that are vital in the management of this pandemic.

The COVID-19 Pandemic

A lion's share of COVID-19 articles has explored the origins, clinical features, prevalence, and psychosocial affect of the COVID-19 pandemic (Fuentes, 2020; Krouse, 2020; Rahimi & Abadi, 2020; Rotham & Byrareddy, 2020). We are indeed in a midst of a devastating crisis, with countries implementing lockdown measures (Amin, 2020; Manderson & Wahlberg, 2020). Socioeconomic determinants such as poverty, high crime neighborhoods, poor access to healthy foods, limited education and skill level, and high unemployment adversely affect health and increase the risks of being infected by the virus (Krouse, 2020). The overwhelming nature of COVID-19 has caught many countries unprepared and has severely exposed social inequalities in global health, economic, and social welfare institutions (Banerjee & Bhattacharya, 2020; Henrickson, 2020). Multitudes of people are affected by this pandemic. Social activities, physical health, economic productivity, and political stability are threatened by this small and invisible pathogen (O'Leary & Tsui, 2020).

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has predisposed many families to excessive food shortages (Reeves & Rothwell, 2020). It has led to increased levels of anxiety as people become extremely concerned about their lives and livelihoods (Thakur & Jain, 2020). Migrants and refugees will be particularly vulnerable during the pandemic due to increased stigma, discrimination, and restrictions on their movements and rights (Krouse, 2020; Sengupta & Jha, 2020). The population density in slums is remarkably high and accelerates the proliferation of the COVID-19 virus (Wasdani & Prasad, 2020). This shows how sociostructural inequalities can exacerbate the spread of the virus. COVID-19 is associated also with an increase in suicidal behavior (Jani, 2020). There has been a call for collaborative interventions to fight the COVID-19 pandemic (Pan American Health Organization & World Health Organization, 2020). The responses to COVID-19 tend to promote "technological" and "scientific" solutions to the extent of overshadowing other approaches, including the social (Gupte & Mitlin, 2020).

Ubuntu as a Humanistic–Existential Approach

Western ethics are rooted in the individual—the autonomous and responsible decision-making individual—but African morality relies on the community.

However, this is not to say that there is no individual viewpoint in Africa, or that the community decides in the name of the subject: it is, rather, a position that views an individual as being nothing without the community, and the community being nothing without the individual (Bidima, 2002). Inasmuch as humanistic–existential theories are Western, their focus is on both the individual and the community (Payne, 2011; Stefaroi, 2016). Likewise, Ubuntu is a philosophy that emphasises the relationality between the individual and the community. The axiom that Ubuntu emphasises, *umuntu ngubuntu ngabantu*, means that a person is a person through other people. Relatedly, humanistic characteristics include human dignity, wholeness, social responsibility, generosity, compassion, stewardship-sustainability, altruism, peace, social, and emotional intelligence (Melé, 2016; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). In the same vein, Ubuntu emphasizes similar humanistic values (Letseka, 2012; Mupedziswa et al., 2019; Van Breda, 2019).

Considering the above, we seek to conceptualize African Ubuntu philosophy as respecting the following components that are significant in fighting the COVID-19 pandemic:

- Holism
- Self-awareness and social responsibility
- Generosity, sharing, and team spirit
- Social justice and human rights
- Health promotion
- Environmental justice and personal hygiene
- Food security
- Spirituality

It is with this understanding that we seek to explore the relevance of Ubuntu philosophy to the COVID-19 pandemic. The following section will explore the above elements and how they relate to the fight against COVID-19 pandemic.

Holism

A “re-examination of indigenous knowledge systems can bring us back to our roots and refresh us with their purity and holism” (Edwards et al., 2004, p. 17). An Ubuntu based healing practice has, as its goal, “personal integration, environmental equilibrium, social harmony and harmony between the individual and both the environment and community” (Kasenene, 1994, p. 2 also cited in Chuwa, 2014, p. 28). Ubuntu is holistic in nature (Hanks, 2008). *Ubu-* in the word Ubuntu specifies a oneness, while *-ntu* specifies a wholeness. Ubu is oriented toward ntu as “being becoming whole” (Tschaepe,

2013). Wholeness is the feature of an African view in its totality and the concept of a person (Msengana, 2006). In Ubuntu, any attempt to effect healing cannot ignore human and environmental healing (Chuwa, 2014). Put simply, Ubuntu fosters the integrated components of humanity as it appreciates the biological, psychosocial, spiritual, and environmental aspects of life. The COVID-19 pandemic is beyond the biomedical approach and requires that spiritual, socioeconomic, psychological, and technological interventions be considered (Amin, 2020; Chigangaidze, 2021b; Rogers & Power, 2020; Wasdani & Prasad, 2020). There is need to address the biopsychosocial, environmental, and spiritual elements of humanity in addressing the problems associated with this pandemic.

Self-awareness and Societal Responsibility

The African philosophy of Ubuntu emphasizes the interconnectedness of self with society (Le Grange, 2011). Ubuntu as a construct is based on the axiom “one’s humanness, one’s personhood is dependent upon one’s relationship with others” (Khoza, 2011, p. 439). This axiom illustrates the need to safeguard others from infection. If it so happens that one has tested positive of COVID-19, they should bear societal responsibility to safeguard others by means of self isolation. Ubuntu’s emphasis on humanity suggests that whatever is good to humanity is good to Ubuntu, and whatever harms humanity harms Ubuntu (Mabvurira, 2020). The philosophy of Ubuntu emphasizes brotherly care and concern for others (Broodryk, 2008; Molose et al., 2018; Mugumbate & Nyanguru, 2013). Ubuntu becomes a safeguarding philosophy in this matter and calls on individuals and groups to protect each other from infection.

Ubuntu is about safeguarding humanity, and any behavior seeking to spread the virus knowingly becomes *umhuka* (being an animal)—the opposite of Ubuntu. In Western communities, this can translate to deviant behavior. Communality is one of the inherent values in the philosophy of Ubuntu (Mupedziswa et al., 2019). The concept of social responsibility, in Ubuntu, is engraved in the value of communality. In the interests of societal responsibility and safeguarding humanity, when one tests positive or presents with symptoms of infection, they are expected to self-isolate, adhere to lockdown regulations, access medical treatment, and wear a face mask. Thus, it is *umhuka* to knowingly spread the virus to others or to risk doing so by not self-isolating.

Furthermore, Ubuntu promotes the practice of the village taking care of the sick and ensuring their safety. It should be noted that Ubuntu safeguards human life first and emphasises the safety of the community. Using Ubuntu

to promote public health is more important than individual well-being (Sambala et al., 2020). In the same manner, Ubuntu promotes social responsibility in those who are sick. Thus, in Ubuntu, the healthy and those who are sick have a relational mandate to safeguard public health for the greater good of community. Ubuntu promotes one with “normative principles for responsible decision-making and action, for oneself and for the good of the whole community” (Ntibagirirwa, 1999, p. 104). The ethically mature people in Ubuntu do things not because they are expected to do so, but because it is the right thing to do for both themselves and the community (Chuwa, 2014).

Generosity, Sharing, and Team Spirit

Ubuntu reflects the human characteristics of generosity, caring, and consideration toward others (Broodryk, 2008; Mabvurira, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic is severely affecting poor families (Banerjee & Bhattacharya, 2020; Krouse, 2020; Reeves & Rothwell, 2020). Living conditions during the apartheid in South Africa were difficult and marginalized families only survived on account of Ubuntu, as the community responded by sharing with those in need (Mhlaba, 2001). In the same spirit of Ubuntu, communities should provide for marginalized families while adhering to the COVID-19 regulations. Ubuntu calls for extended family members to cater for the welfare of their relatives even in difficult moments. Ubuntu means we are in this together; your problems are also our problems, and therefore we help one another out of a crisis. The African people learn how to survive through brotherly care and not individual self-reliance. Through a collective and collaborative spirit, Africans have developed a shared will to survive. Ubuntu principles are marked by their humanity and advancement of team spirit (Molose et al., 2018). We should insist on the values of international exchange, mutual trust, and mutual help. We can learn from one another and share experience and expertise (O’Leary & Tsui, 2020).

There are calls for developed countries to express gestures of generosity to developing nations, especially those in Africa. The United States of America and China should focus on sharing knowledge, resources, and experiences; collaborate and engage in resource mobilization like they did in the fight against Ebola Virus Disease and help African countries to fight the pandemic (Christensen, 2020). We mourn the decision of the United States of America to withdraw funding to the World Health Organization (Rauhala et al., 2020) at a time of crisis. Generosity and sharing will help lighten the burden of the pandemic, especially in developing nations. We acknowledge that efforts of generosity and sharing should not be hindered by corruption, which is rampant in developing nations. Ubuntu is against selfishness and promotes

considering others (Mugumbate & Nyanguru, 2013). Thus, when gestures of generosity and sharing are expressed, governments and authorities should protect the interests of people and not widen health inequalities through corruption and stealing from the same donations.

Social Justice and Human Rights

“Ubuntueness” is a call to put principles in action to practice politics with conscience (Murithi, 2007, p. 285). Ubuntu revolves around fairness and justice (Kgatla, 2016). Ubuntu is about rendering to others what they deserve, respecting human dignity, and ensuring equality and equity. The African philosophy of Ubuntu has the capacity to contribute to the universalism of human rights through “multiculturalization” (Murithi, 2007). It is inherent in the philosophy of Ubuntu to respect human dignity (Akinola & Uzodike, 2017; Broodryk, 2008; Sambala et al., 2019; Van Breda, 2019). The outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic has also seen a rise in racial discrimination, stigmatization, oppression, and domestic violence (Kumar, 2020; Lokot & Avakyan, 2020). Human rights are essential in shaping the pandemic response, both for the public health emergency and the broader impact on people’s well-being (United Nations, 2020; World Health Organisation, 2020). Psychologists and social workers have been called to fight against social injustice and oppression during the pandemic (O’Leary & Tsui, 2020). Thus, Ubuntu is a relational philosophy to promote peace and dialogue thereby enhancing social justice and human rights (Okoro & Nkama, 2018).

Health Promotion

Ubuntu is intrinsically related to the notion of health promotion (Chasi & Omarjee, 2014; Sabone, 2009). Importantly, other scholars observe that:

Through its emphasis on essential humanity and human essentials, *Ubuntu* constitutes our original method of promoting health that is concerned with fundamental structures of being human, without which our human species would not survive in its present form: the giving, receiving and sharing of human care, support, companionship, help and healing. This is the essential theme of all the caring, helping professions such as nursing, medicine, psychology, social work, and theology. It is also the basis of all other academic and professional disciplines, from biochemistry through law to sociology. (Edwards et al., 2004, 19-20)

The above sentiment expresses that *Ubuntu* is fundamentally related to health promotion as it values the virtues of sharing, giving hope and care, help, and healing. Social workers are calling communities and governments to adopt these same virtues during the pandemic and while observing COVID-19 prevention regulations (O’Leary & Tsui, 2020).

Environmental Health and Personal Hygiene

The concept of *Ubuntu* relates not only to human–human relations but also to human–environment relations (Chibvongodze, 2016). *Ubuntu* respects the mother earth and, in this way, essentially reflects some elements of the “Pachamama” concept from Ecuador (Chigangaidze, 2021a). *Ubuntu* emphasizes ecological justice and environmental friendliness, as these also ensure the sustainable survival of humanity on earth. It is from the environment that we attain food, water, and air. *Ubuntu* advocates for sustainable provision of water and sanitation services, which are vital in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. Relatedly, *Ubuntu* emphasizes issues of personal hygiene and cleanliness, which are also essential in the fight against COVID-19 pandemic. One of the lessons drawn from the COVID-19 pandemic is that of regeneration and not extraction: producing in balance with nature, rather than destroying the ecosystems on which humans depend (Brescia, 2020). Increasingly, social work has brought attention to eco-justice issues, especially the need to protect the environment and prevent the proliferation of diseases (O’Leary & Tsui, 2020).

Food Security

The philosophy of *Ubuntu* encompasses the concept of *Zunde ramambo* in Zimbabwe and other parts of Africa. *Zunde ramambo* emphasizes working together to grow food that is kept for distribution to those in need (Mugumbate & Nyanguru, 2013). In line with environmental justice, one of the reasons *Ubuntu* respects nature because it is the source of food and sustenance for human survival (Samkange & Samkange, 1980). The COVID-19 pandemic has also become a threat to food security for many households (Matias et al., 2020; Reeves & Rothwell, 2020). Malnutrition due to lack of food access has also been implicated in the severity of complications associated with COVID-19. It is important that communities, government authorities, nongovernmental organizations, and businesses consider humanitarian interventions that enhance food access during and after this pandemic. *Ubuntu* preserves humanity through ensuring food security as evidenced by concepts such as the *zunde ramambo*.

Spirituality

Spirituality has been conceptualised as a “personal quest for understanding answers to ultimate questions about life, about meaning, and about relationship to the sacred and transcendent, which may (or may not) lead to or arise from the development of religious rituals and formation of community” (Koenig et al., 2001, p. 18). Spirituality in the COVID-19 pandemic is a source of hope, encouragement, and positive energy. Religiosity and spirituality seem to have a pivotal role in the relief of suffering, in health outcomes, and in minimizing the consequences of social isolation (Lucchetti et al., 2020). The theme of spirituality is essential in the management of pandemics. Current interests in spirituality are evident in social science and theological scholarship (Chigangaidze, 2021a; Mabvurira, 2020; Nowakowski-Sims & Kumar, 2020; Van Breda, 2019). Ubuntu emphasizes that it is the African way of life to be spiritually accountable to the welfare of others in the community. African spirituality helps in teamwork, which promotes the advancement of peace building (Masango, 2006) that is pivotal in any response to a pandemic.

Implications

Psychologists and social workers have called for the adoption of Ubuntu in the professions’ theoretical framework and axiology (Chigangaidze, 2021a; Hanks, 2008; Mabvurira, 2020; Mkabela, 2015; Mupedziswa et al., 2019; Van Breda, 2019; Zvomuya, 2020). This article has offered a broadened scope for the use of Ubuntu as a theoretical framework for addressing COVID-19 and other pandemics. It is essential that psychologists and social workers reflect on ways in which the philosophy of Ubuntu affects human behavior in the social environment. Essentially, Ubuntu philosophy appreciates the perspective of the person-in-the-environment, which is beyond the biomedical approach. We have argued that the philosophy of Ubuntu can contribute to an effective framework in the fight against health pandemics. Utilising the reflection on Ubuntu themes, we have addressed the relevance of this African philosophy in eco-spiritual, developmental, clinical, humanistic–existential, critical psychology, and social work, among other fields. Contextualising Ubuntu as a humanistic–existential approach is not to limit its application in other schools of thought such as the biological and behavioral approaches; in fact, Ubuntu can facilitate a biopsychosocial approach. The application of Ubuntu to psychological and sociological scholarship is still in its infancy. There is significant potential in applying Ubuntu within both practice and education.

Conclusion

In this article, we have posited that Ubuntu is a philosophy that is relevant in addressing the COVID-19 pandemic. We have explored several themes of Ubuntu related to the COVID-19 pandemic. We explored the relationship of Ubuntu to holism; self-awareness and social responsibility, generosity, sharing, and teamwork; social justice and human rights; food security; spirituality; environmental health and personal hygiene; and health promotion. We call for the adoption of Ubuntu philosophy in psychological and social work interventions in the fight against COVID-19 pandemic. Ubuntu inherently relates to the humanistic–existential concern with human welfare. Fellow colleagues: the pandemic requires team spirit, holistic service provision, and addressing socioeconomic injustices.

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Environmental social work through the African philosophy of Ubuntu: A conceptual analysis

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Abstract

Social work has been involved with the interactions between human beings and their environment since its inception. Environmental social work can expand the profession beyond its boundaries. Similarly, Ubuntu is the philosophy that has the potential to provide global messaging for the interactions between human beings and their environment. Utilizing concept analysis, this article endeavours to expand Ubuntu philosophy to the concept of Environmental Social Work. Notably, Ubuntu is relevant in the components of human relations to nature, food security, climate change, natural disasters, sustainable development and ecospiritual social work. Unequivocally, Ubuntu is a philosophy relevant to Environmental Social Work.

Keywords

African spirituality, conceptual analysis, environmental social work, Indigenous knowledge systems, Ubuntu philosophy

Environmental issues have been included within the social work profession since its inception (Krings et al., 2020). The social work profession puts efforts on several levels such as micro, meso, person-in-environment (PIE), intra-organizational, intergenerational and international, but has paid a lot less attention to the sustainability of our natural environment (O’Leary and Tsui, 2021). In concurrence, Krings et al. (2020) mourns that the profession shifted its focus towards micro-level therapeutic interventions such that social workers began to limit or ignore the influence of natural and built environments on human health. Fears over environmental destruction and a general sense of disconnection from nature are finding traction in social work’s knowledge base, trainings and activism (Jeffery, 2014). However, the integration of the natural environment into social work education is arguably still in the developmental stage, with some social work academics offering insight for theoretical transformations to take place (Boetto and Bell, 2015). The domination of Western theories in social work has contributed to a limitation of the environmental discourse in the profession (Boetto and Bell, 2015; Gray et al., 2007).

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Ecological justice contends that modern Western culture, with its obsession with material consumption, desire for higher standards of living and continuous economic growth, has become suicidal (Besthorn, 2012). Environmental injustice is defined as society's failure to ensure the equitable distribution of the Earth's resources in addressing human needs, simultaneously providing for the well-being of people and planet Earth today and in the future (Dominelli, 2014). Environmental social work can help social workers act in a way that mitigates or prevents future environmental injustices. Ensuring the involvement of community groups in the formulation of environmental policies is one of the preventive strategies that social workers can use to prevent future environmental injustices (Teixera et al., 2019). It has been emphasized that socio-economic and environmental challenges in one country are connected with global patterns (Besthorn, 2011).

Social workers seeking to develop an African philosophy for decolonial social work practice from the Western theories turn to Ubuntu for aid (Mabvurira, 2020; Van Breda, 2019). The African philosophy of Ubuntu emphasizes characteristics of humanness such as kindness, interconnectedness, generosity, love and mutuality (Mugumbate and Nyanguru, 2013). Within the Ubuntu philosophy, *ukama* essentially means relatedness between humans and the environment, albeit it is often used to refer to human-human relationships (Grange, 2015). Ubuntu is a philosophy that promotes environmental health for sustainable development (Chibvongodze, 2016; Chigangaidze, 2021a; Mukuka, 2013; Samkange and Samkange, 1980; Van Breda, 2019). Utilizing conceptual analysis, this article seeks to expand on the 10 Environmental Social Work themes drawn from 497 articles between 1991 and 2015 (Krings et al., 2020). Thus, Ubuntu will be used to analyse the concepts extracted from the literature review of the 497 articles on Environmental Social Work by Krings et al.

Reflection on my Blackness, age and Westernization

Van Breda (2019), who introduces the philosophy of Ubuntu to ecospiritual social work, reflects on his Whiteness and appreciates he considers the subject as an 'outsider', but he writes humbly and respectfully. In this article, the author writes on the same subject, as a Black African, an 'insider' advancing the same concepts also in a humble and respectful manner. Fundamentally, as an 'insider' the author confirms the arguments of an 'outsider' (Van Breda, 2019). The elders are the known custodians of Ubuntu knowledge and having to write about the African philosophy as one who has lived among Africans for only a generation is in itself daunting and humbling. To balance the arguments and in advancing Ubuntu philosophy, the author acknowledges that he uses Western research and categorization as one taught from a Westernized pedagogy because of globalization. Furthermore, African academics can be blamed for not making the African philosophy of Ubuntu known beyond the borders of the continent (Samkange and Samkange, 1980). In the same manner, this article also blames other ethnocentric academics outside Africa, who failed to consider other non-Western forms of knowing. As one of the African social work scholars, the author assumes a difficult task to expand the African philosophy in Environmental Social Work, though in a humble and respectful manner acknowledging that there are elders who understand this philosophy better and there are academics with far broader knowledge. However, the author's authority to write on the philosophy is in him being African, having lived between both worlds – Black and White communities, and immensely exposed to the Ubuntu literature as well as Westernized social work literature. As such, the author is aware of reflections of personal biases and the prerequisite to strike a balance in the discourse to theoretically synthesize Ubuntu in Environmental Social Work.

Methodology

Conceptual analysis is a technique used to identify the attributes, properties or dimensions of a concept (Fawcett, 2012). Concepts can relate to an abstract idea or mental image (Myburgh and Tommaro, 2013). Put simply, a concept is a phrase that summarizes the essence of a phenomenon. It is conducted to enhance appreciation of the meaning of a concept beyond simple dictionary definition (Fawcett, 2012). There are four types of conceptual analysis papers, namely theory synthesis, theory adaption, typology and model (Jaakkola, 2020). For the purposes of summarizing and integrating current understanding of Environmental Social Work, this article will utilize the theory synthesis type. Jaakkola (2020) specifies three research design considerations for theory synthesis in conceptual analysis. The starting point is identifying the concept; for instance, in this article it is 'Environmental Social Work'. Second, the choice of the domain theory/theories which is mainly literature that can be argued to address the concept/phenomenon being considered. In this article, the domain theory is based on the 10 themes from a literature review of 497 Environmental Social Work articles published between 1991 and 2015 (Krings et al., 2020). This literature review was chosen as the domain theory because it covers huge volumes of articles that allowed data saturation for the reviewers. It also covered the literature written over more than two decades, giving it a good scope in terms of timeframe. The literature review covered themes from micro to macro which makes it difficult to find theme differences in Ubuntu philosophy. The third consideration for the research design is the choice of method theory. Ubuntu philosophy has become a social work theory (Van Breda, 2019). The selection of the method theory was influenced mainly by the fact that Ubuntu is the current theme for the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development and signifies the highest level of global messaging within the social work profession for the years 2020–2030 (Muyaka and Truell, 2021). Again, the author's background as stated above also influenced the choice of the method theory. However, checks and balances were maintained to avoid personal biases by consulting a vast range of Ubuntu literature within and outside the Social Work profession (see References).

Ubuntu as a method theory of analysis

The African philosophy of Ubuntu has gained much recognition in the profession's literature in the past decades (Chigangaidze, 2021a; Dudzai, 2021; Mugumbate and Chereni, 2019; Mugumbate and Nyanguru, 2013; Mupedziswa et al., 2019). As an explanatory theory (worldview) and a practice theory (guiding practice), the philosophy of Ubuntu has been expanded in ethics, sustainable development and ecological or ecospiritual social work (Van Breda, 2019). Clearly, this philosophy has been identified as relevant to ecospiritual social work which is one of the themes of Environmental Social Work. In emphasis, Mugumbate and Chereni (2019) expound on the philosophy in relation to Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems approach. At the micro level, Chigangaidze (2021b) extends Ubuntu's applicability in the multimodal approach to clinical work by extending two modalities, which are the person to physical environment relationship and the spiritual dimensions. This article endeavours to expand the relevance of the Ubuntu philosophy in Environmental Social Work.

The domain theory

Considering empirical studies, theoretical work and position papers, Krings et al. (2020) have come up with 10 themes from the articles of Environmental Social Work. The 10 themes extracted from the review are as follows:

- Animals, human–animal, human–environmental, or human–nonhuman relationships.
- Climate change, global warming, or environmental degradation.
- Conservation or access to nature, wildlife, or green spaces.
- Ecospirituality and ecocentric values.
- Food (in)security or food (in)justice.
- Industrial pollution, toxins, or environmental hazards.
- Natural disasters or environmental crises.
- Natural resources including land, water and fossil fuels.
- Sustainable development, technologies, or policies, macro-level interventions.
- Sustainable practices (e.g. individual-level interventions such as reducing environmental footprint, recycling).

This article endeavours to establish Ubuntu philosophy as a relevant philosophy applicable to Environmental Social Work.

The analysis

Animals, human–animal, human–environmental or human–nonhuman relationships

The philosophy of Ubuntu, as aforementioned, includes the concept of *ukama* (relatedness) among humans and the interconnectedness between humans and the natural biophysical world, which is advanced through totemic ancestorhood (Grange, 2015). People–nature mutuality, in Ubuntu, has always been a multidirectional relationship with animals, birds and plants; albeit Mugumbate and Nyanguru (2013) mention that *umhuka* (being an animal) signifies anti-social behaviours against Ubuntu. The relationship of African people with the animals, plants and the environment in general is sacred as it is seen as the source of life, healing, food, water and energy. For example, *ing'uni* (a honey bird) that had seen a beehive would look for people, guide them for as much as 3 km, and show them a hive so that people could harvest the honey (Mukuka, 2013: 150). Fears over environmental destruction and a general sense of disconnection from nature are finding traction in the social work knowledge base, activism and training (Jeffery, 2014). Concomitantly, there is need for social workers to know about the significance of companion animals in the lives of their clients (Whipple, 2021). Several aspects of human–animal interaction are relevant to social work, including the social support roles of animals, therapeutic benefits of animals and compassion fatigue among veterinary staff (Hoy-Gerlach et al., 2019). Ubuntu can provide researchers and practitioners with a knowledge base on the Human–Animal Bond (HAB) in social work practice.

Climate change, global warming or environmental degradation

Climate change, global warming and land degradation are destabilizing communities across the globe, and social work theorists need to find ways in which the global social work community can act to address these challenges (Alston, 2015). One of the ways social work theorists can utilize in learning about climate change is through the philosophy of Ubuntu, as argued:

African-centred ecophilosophy, political ecology and traditional ecological knowledge can play a significant role in restoring forest systems, water systems, agricultural lands, degraded wetlands, and bioremediation of electronic and industrial waste, nonsensically imported from Western countries by African elites to gain access to foreign currency. (Densu, 2018: 47)

In support, several academics have posited that African people consider the seasons of nature, the movement of stars, solar cycles, animal behaviours and the condition of trees to grapple with practical problems of everyday life and future problems (Kelbessa, 2005; Mugambiwa, 2017; Mukuka, 2013). Thus, the African ontology can be a source of an Indigenous knowledge system that can inform Environmental Social Work practice, especially in this decade in which the value of Indigenous Knowledge Systems has been emphasized within the Global Social Work and Social Development Agenda 2020–2030 (International Federation of Social Workers [IFSW], 2020). In addition, this article will discuss how Ubuntu can help deal with the effects of climate change such as droughts and other natural disasters.

Conservation or access to nature, wildlife or green spaces

The world still needs the wisdom of Ubuntu for successful nature conservation as it promotes biodiversity and the desire for harmony between people and for balance with nature (Foggin, 2021). Through the Shona concept of *ukama*, inherent in Ubuntu, Africans are committed to ecological conservation (Murove, 2004). There is no sustainable development to talk about without conversation of nature, wildlife or green spaces. In traditional African communities, where the author was nurtured, it is a prerequisite for members of the community to ask for permission from the chief whenever they want to go hunting or gathering fruits from the sacred forests. These laws aim to conserve nature, wildlife and green spaces. The concept of conservation is expansive as it connects to issues of sustainable development which will also be discussed later in this article. However, it should be stated that Ubuntu as a philosophy to conserve the environment has suffered relegation because of colonialism and contemporary emphasis on scientism (Mawewe, 2011). There is need to reconsider Ubuntu in environmental conservation in this contemporary society (Foggin, 2021).

Ecospirituality and ecocentric values

The core assumptions and principles of ecospirituality include that the Earth is sacred, wholeness (unity consciousness), interdependence, creativity, diversity and inclusivity (Gray and Coates, 2013). From the African perspective, God, ancestors, animals, living and non-living objects coexist together in harmony (Luyaluka, 2016; Murove, 2004; Tangwa, 2004). Within the African spirituality, the Earth is a divine person, comparable to a human being (Van Breda, 2019). The principle of spirituality in Ubuntu signifies the connection of people and the cosmos. People are connected to animals living or dead, rocks, insects, the land and so on (Schreiber and Tomm-Bonde, 2015). Also, it is generally accepted in the African ontology that the physical environment is given reference as it is the habitat of the supreme forces in the hierarchy of ontology (Chemhuru, 2019; Ikeke, 2013). It has been underlined in Ubuntu literature that nature is considered as ‘the goddess earth’ or ‘the divinity of the earth’ and is often called ‘Mother Earth’ (Mbiti, 2015: 36 cited in Van Breda, 2019). Thus, it is a divine responsibility to take care of the environment. Caring for the environment connects us with our ancestors and the Creator. Spirituality has had an ongoing existence in the profession of social work and its connection to Environmental Social Work is emerging (Gray and Coates, 2013). In Ubuntu, as argued by Van Breda (2019), ecospirituality is connected to sustainability and social development, which will be expatiated later in this discourse. Considering the above, Ubuntu, as a highest level of global messaging (Muyaka and Truell, 2021), can offer a theory for social workers to understand ecospirituality and ecocentric values.

Food (in)security or food (in)justice

An estimated 795 million people experience chronic hunger worldwide and some 2 billion people suffer from hidden malnutrition; food insecurity remains to be one of the pressing humanitarian challenges of our time (International Labour Office, 2019). According to Kapwepwe (2005, cited in Mukuka, 2013), *Ubuntu kulya* means if one has eaten the individual can live out Ubuntu and be moral in behavioural conduct. Ubuntu emphasizes the need to ensure food security to ensure human dignity. It has always been taboo in African communities to throw away food and misuse food. Among the Shona, Ubuntu-informed practices like the *zunde ramambo* (King's granary) involves growing and storing grain largely to cater for the disadvantaged people in the community, namely poor people, widows, people with disabilities and orphans (Ringson, 2017). In addition, Ubuntu is rich in food generosity values that highlight collective preservation of food and encourages sharing with the vulnerable, the traveller, the old and the physically challenged (Mukuka, 2013). Modern governments have, however, stolen the concepts of these Ubuntu practices for their capitalistic gains (Ringson, 2017). Afrocentric social work should focus on decolonizing concepts like the *zunde ramambo* and restore their traditional focus (ibid.). Reflectively, Ubuntu connects issues of food security to behavioural sciences, morality, political science and environmental sustainability, which are all connected to social work practice. Ubuntu requests people and communities to engage in teamwork and community projects that enhance food security.

Industrial pollution, toxins or environmental hazards

The African culture declares the Earth is sacred. It condemns all acts that desecrate the Earth, such as exposing the Earth to toxic waste, spilling blood (homicide) and indiscriminate use of land (Donkor, 1997). From an Ubuntu perspective, caring for the environment through reducing pollution, decreasing our reliance on plastics and ensuring sustainable farming methods is about treating the Earth as a member of our clan, as one of us, deserving as much respect as our mother or cousin (Van Breda, 2019). Defiling the environment, in Ubuntu, provokes the wrath of the ancestors and God because the environment is sacred and is regarded as their habitat. The philosophy of Ubuntu chooses life first before wealth. One does not kill to gain wealth. Industrial pollution is often related to the need to make profits at the expense of human and nonhuman life. Social workers advocating against industrial pollution, toxins or environmental hazards can turn to Ubuntu for aid.

Natural disasters or environmental crises

The environment poses complex but clear challenges, for example, natural disasters such as bushfires and earthquakes can contribute to longer term economic effects, while immediately threatening life and physical as well as mental health (Liu and Flynn, 2021). Ubuntu predicts that life faces ongoing challenges, including natural disasters and environmental crises, and that people need communal coping mechanisms to minimize damage (Muyaka and Truell, 2021). The African philosophy of Ubuntu has the major goal of attaining stable humanitarian goals for all (Nussbaum, 2003). Furthermore, Ubuntu can influence societal responses to disaster (Sapirstein, 2006). Ecospirituality rituals are also practised among the communities that practise Ubuntu in times of natural disasters such as droughts (Van Breda, 2019). Spirituality can be utilized as a coping mechanism in times of trauma (Hodge, 2015). Ubuntu connects ecospirituality in enhancing resilience against the effects of natural disasters. In times of drought, Ubuntu calls for the cultivation of drought-resistant crops such as *rukweza* (finger millet), *mapfunde* (sorghum) and *mhunga* (pearl millet) (Grange, 2015). The cultivation of drought-resistant crops ensured the provision of food to

the communities during these difficult seasons. From reserves of *zunde ramambo* mentioned earlier, the King would also assist in ensuring the provision of a human-dignifying commodity. Ubuntu is the spirit that prevailed in the times of Cyclone Idai in Zimbabwe as families donated food and clothing for those affected. Van Breda (2019) adds that, Ubuntu guides the relationship-centred resilience and responses to disasters. Hence, the philosophy of Ubuntu can help inform social work interventions in times of natural disasters.

Natural resources including land, water and fossil fuels

Ubuntu as an ecophilosophy emphasizes preservation of land and other natural resources as part of ancestral legacy. Essentially, it is well known that:

In African tradition, the social order begins with the occupation of the land inherited from ancestral-founder lineage. This ancestral heritage is the actual soil where the Africans are born and raised, grow, and organize their own descent and immortality. This land is more than a birthplace, it is a living environment, the total environment which has witnessed rituals sacralizing birth, childhood, adolescence, adulthood, healing process and death. This land is truly a spiritual universe. (Montilus, 1989: 33).

Land is a sacred resource that is revered in the African tradition as it covers attachments of birth, health, human development and death. For Ubuntu-inspired social work practitioners, it is important to understand their clients in relation to the cultural attachment of the land they possess, especially in times of counselling displaced populations. A good example is that of people displaced due to natural disasters, who have lost their properties, including their land. Significantly, Ubuntu emphasizes their culturally associated attachments to the land (a place where ancestors are resting). Thus, social work practitioners and academics can explore ways through which displaced persons deal with these culturally associated attachments to the destroyed land.

Besides, natural resources, land, water and fuel fossils are safeguarded through taboos. Mabvurira (2020) argues that taboos among the Shona are meant to protect water bodies. For example, the Shona taboo *ukachera mvura nechirongo chitema tsime rinopwa*, which means if you fetch water with a sooty black pot, the well will dry up. Chibvongodze (2016) admits that in Zimbabwe, there are Ubuntu-informed practices that include cultural taboos preventing hunting, cutting down of trees and fishing, allowing the land to recover from human activities. Natural resources, from an Ubuntu point of view, should be preserved for the benefit of future communities. Ubuntu-inspired social work practitioners should focus on sustainable development through ensuring the preservation of natural resources. However, a major threat to the sustainable use of natural resources is corruption and wars motivated by imperialism and individualistic ideologies (Yates, 2012). The article extends the discussion to Ubuntu-related sustainable development issues in Environmental Social Work.

Sustainable development, technologies or policies, macro-level interventions

Sustainable development ‘encapsulates both inter and intra-generational equity, natural resources must be used and allocated equitably and must be preserved for the benefit of present and future generations’ (Church, 2012: 528). In the same vein, Ubuntu emphasizes social justice, equitable distribution of resources and environmental responsibility (Chemhuru, 2019; Chibvongodze, 2016; Chigangaidze, 2021a). Relevant to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Ubuntu as a philosophy and quality of life, connects the relationship between people, planet and prosperity (Church, 2012). Significantly, it underscores the need for social solidarity and empowerment which are vital

elements of sustainable development. Ubuntu calls for people to unite in their responsibility of safeguarding the environment, ensuring food security and leaving an improved Earth to forthcoming generations – all which are prerequisite elements of sustainable development. Noteworthy is the fact that Ubuntu is an African spirituality that highlights sharing and cooperation with the impetus to solve problems faced by people in the community (Murithi, 2006). The environmental problems are both faced and prevented in a sense of togetherness which promotes social solidarity for sustainable development. Inherent in Ubuntu is the culture to ensure the attainment of the best interest of the community and helps in fighting corruption (Chigangaidze, 2021a; Dudzai, 2021). Corruption affects effective environmental policy formulation (Pellegrini and Gerlagh, 2006). In another connection, Ubuntu fosters on forgiveness, peace, diplomacy and reconciliation which are elements that prevent political violence and war (Murithi, 2006). Environmental sociologists cannot comprehensively explain the relationship between humans and the natural world without theorizing a link between natural resource extraction, armed violence and environmental degradation (Downey et al., 2010). In addition, Ubuntu is against the spilling of blood to attain natural resources as it affects community development (Mukuka, 2013). Ubuntu as an African philosophy advances social justice and human rights, which are central to sustainable development (Chigangaidze, 2021a; Van Breda, 2019). The African philosophy integrates the concepts of health as a human right and the environment. It is generally accepted in the African philosophy that treating the environment badly contributes to health problems because it angers the ancestors and affects community health. As Ubuntu promotes environmental sustainability, it advances the construct of the human right to a clean and safe environment. Thus, the link between Ubuntu and sustainable development through Environmental Social Work is valid and broad. Social workers, as agents of social justice and human rights, fight against corruption, promote sustainability and guard against oppression associated with the environment as stipulated above.

Sustainable practices (e.g. individual-level interventions such as reducing environmental footprint, recycling)

At the micro level, Ubuntu practices involve teaching children concepts of environmental sustainability. For example, the age group of *rika* in Swahili involves age passage training rites on community responsibilities such as environmental sustainability, among other prerequisites (Muyaka and Truell, 2021). Similarly, for Terreblanche (2018), Ubuntu is rooted in intergenerational ethics that emphasize handing over the Earth to future generations in an improved condition and individuals are not the owners of the Earth in the African perspective of life. The emphasis is that the concept of *ukama* connects the person with the ancestors (past), current generation (present) and upcoming generations (future). As a communitarian approach, Ubuntu philosophy promotes the individual's connectedness to the community and how individuals' behaviours, including environmental friendliness, can enhance community well-being. The African philosophy of Ubuntu can offer a knowledge base for social work practitioners who want to promote sustainable practices at individual levels.

Implications of the analysis

Prominence has been given to the need to promote Environmental Social Work to extend the boundaries of the profession. It has been stated that social work should not limit itself to human relationships:

Connecting people is one of the long-standing missions of social work practice. However, our vision should also cover home and habitant – the globe. It seems that the intervention of social work should also

cover the linkages between nature and the people, and aim for harmonious relationship between them. (O'Leary and Tsui, 2021: 159)

Furthermore, social work scholars have called for the development and testing of theories and interventions to help practitioners and researchers engage with environmental issues globally (Krings et al., 2020). This article has tested the African philosophy of Ubuntu and its application to Environmental Social Work utilizing the concepts drawn from a literature review of 497 articles on the concept by Krings et al. (2020).

The African philosophy of Ubuntu has proved to be relevant in Environmental Social Work. Utilizing Ubuntu in analysing Environmental Social Work ratifies the African philosophy as a theory relevant in Social Work practice. It emphasizes that Ubuntu is an ecophilosophy that can provide a theory for environmental sustainability, food justice, dealing with natural disasters, ecospirituality, conservation, or access to nature and climate change. Indeed, Ubuntu is given the highest prominence in the global messaging for social work in the years 2020–2030 (Muyaka and Truell, 2021). Ubuntu, as a philosophy and theory in social work, can extend the margins of social work as it offers a theory for Environmental Social Work – a field of the profession with potential to extend social work boundaries (O'Leary and Tsui, 2021). Ubuntu can help expand the profession's integration to development studies, agriculture, environmental science, philosophy, history, religion and other disciplines. Again, Ubuntu-inspired Environmental Social Work can help advance the attainment of justice in communities. Ubuntu connects justice to the ecological. In a practical sense, no matter how social work conceptualizes its idea of justice, in the end all justice is ecological (Besthorn, 2012).

The importance of respecting Indigenous Knowledge Systems such as Ubuntu has been underscored in the Global Social Work and Social Development Agenda 2020–2030. Overall, the indigenization of the profession of social work by infusing Ubuntu as a principle promoting social development requires social workers to be culturally sensitive and competent (Mabasa, 2020). Environmental social work through Ubuntu connects with behavioural studies (how food injustice causes maladaptive behaviours), environmental sciences, clinical social work (e.g. the therapeutic role of animals and nature) and disaster management to mention but a few. Van Breda (2019) implies that Ubuntu has great potential to be a far more fundamental and theoretical domain for social work in Africa. Ubuntu has emerged in social work theory and has great potential to shape the global profession going forward (Muyaka and Truell, 2021). Ultimately, Ubuntu is a novel theoretical umbrella covering extensive sets of theories in Environmental Social Work. However, there is a dire need to enquire about Ubuntu from the African elders who are better custodians of the philosophy in deepening the applicability of Ubuntu in Environmental Social Work. To broaden this discourse, researchers can consider documenting this philosophy from the Indigenous Knowledge System custodians – the elders. Noteworthy, there is a need to apply the African philosophy to the frameworks of literature reviews covering the literature outside the time context considered in this article.

Conclusion

Considering that Environmental Social Work literature from 1991 to 2015 has been summarized in 10 topics, this article utilized these topics as the conceptual model to establish the relevance of Ubuntu philosophy in this field of the profession. Evidently, it has been established beyond any reasonable doubt that the African philosophy can offer a theoretical umbrella for Environment Social Work both in practice and education. As Environmental Social Work connects to several domains such as health, social development, political science, geology, clinical practice,

anthropology, sociology, history, religion, spirituality and philosophy, Ubuntu has also proven to be expansive and relevant in these domains. Without any hesitation, this article recommends the advancement of Ubuntu in Environmental Social Work as it connects people with their past, presence and future; their spirituality, their purpose in life and their cousin – the Environment. Ubuntu is a philosophy, a way of life, a quality of life, a spirituality, a value of social work and an ontology that can further our practice as social workers. Ubuntu philosophy can be synthesized with existing Environmental Social Work theory as shown in this article. This social and academic intercourse is but just the beginning of a new era in Environmental Social Work.

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Author biography

Robert K Chigangaidze is a versatile social work lecturer with special interest in developmental-clinical social work, critical reflection, Ubuntu, humanistic social work, social justice and mental health. He has authored several articles on Ubuntu, developmental-clinical social work and the COVID-19 pandemic.

The environment has rights: Eco-spiritual social work through ubuntu philosophy and Pachamama: A commentary

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Abstract

Ubuntu has launched the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development, 2020–2030. This commentary stipulates how ubuntu can reinforce the Pachamama rights and its significance to social work practice. The African philosophy of ubuntu has potential to enhance the framework of understanding environmental rights from an eco-spiritual social work perspective and integrating the concepts of Pachamama rights. Clearly showing the link between Pachamama and ubuntu, this paper reminds social workers to advance the Rights of Nature.

Keywords

Eco-spiritual social work, Mother Earth, Pachamama, Rights of Nature, ubuntu

Social work is a profession rooted in human rights and all its students should be schooled in a basic human rights approach (Healy, 2008; International Federation of Social Workers [IFSW] and International Association of Schools of Social Work [IASSW], 2014). Today, human rights are an integral part of the social work profession's mission and constitute one of its central ethical orientations (Vega et al., 2019). Evidently, the profession has focused mainly on human rights and avoided the Rights of Nature. More so, it has been predominated by Western philosophies that tend to suppress indigenous knowledge systems and philosophies such as ubuntu (Nwosimiri, 2017). Indigenous knowledge systems are present in most social work literature, such as the writings on environmental and spiritual social work but most practitioners ignore these systems in favour of Western philosophies (Gray et al., 2007). The Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development emphasises valuing and involving people in decision-making, respecting local knowledge to produce better and sustainable outcomes in social work practice (IFSW, 2020).

The rapidly growing network of global communication, interconnected economies, expanding migration patterns and increasing awareness of our relatedness has resulted in a renewed focus in

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social work education on the need to understand the world beyond our own political, socio-cultural and geographical boundaries (Hawkins and Knox, 2014). Ubuntu is the current theme for the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development and signifies the highest level of global messaging within the social work profession for the years 2020–2030 (Mayaka and Truell, 2021). Most African social workers who seek to decolonise social work practice turn to ubuntu for aid (Van Breda, 2019). Ubuntu as a philosophy advances the notions of social justice, human rights, environmental justice, spirituality and social development, which are all essential components of the social work profession (Chigangaidze, 2021; Mugumbate and Nyanguru, 2013). The African philosophy of ubuntu emphasises the relations between humans and their environment (Chibvongodze, 2016).

Earth jurisprudence has the potential to ensure the regulation of human activities to support mutually beneficial relations among humanity, other-than-human species and Earth processes at the expense of short-term economic gain (Koons, 2012: 389). Social workers must challenge the narrative that allows people's share of the Earth's resources to be usurped for a minority (Ramsay, 2020). Environmental social work will not only enhance the content of social work practice, but also extends its boundaries (O'Leary and Tsui, 2021). Social workers deal with people who are affected by environmental problems and aim to address the socio-economic inequalities associated with environmental crises. This paper stimulates a new debate in eco-spiritual social work in that it extends the Rights of Nature debate to Social Work.

Ubuntu and eco-spiritual social work

It is generally accepted among the African people that the Earth is a living being, a habitat of God and the ancestors, hence the environment is given respect as the habitat of the highest forces in the hierarchy of ontology (Chemhuru, 2019; Mbiti, 2015). The African philosophy of ubuntu posits that caring for the Earth is not only stewarding the Earth out of respect for our ancestors and for the benefit of future generations. It is also about treating the Earth as a member of our clan, as one of us, worthy of care like our mother or cousin (Van Breda, 2019). Furthermore, *ukama*, a component of ubuntu, means not only human–human relatedness, but humanity's relatedness to the natural (biophysical) world which is advanced through totemic ancestorhood (Grange, 2015). Thus, the philosophy of ubuntu personifies the environment. The Earth is seen as a divine being, the *Mother Earth* and should be treated as a cousin, a relative from a *ukama* (relatedness) perspective of ubuntu.

Pachamama

Pachamama is often referred to as an *Earth Mother* or *Mother Earth*, a type of goddess, and a fertility goddess who presides over agriculture, embodies the mountains and causes natural disasters (Dransart, 1992). As the Earth's generative power, Pachamama has been described as the very construction of life itself (Tola, 2018). In this context, Pachamama is seen as a mother, a goddess and a queen. Pachamama is revered by the indigenous peoples of the Andes (Dransart, 1992). In addition, Pachamama is perceived as a benevolent mother whose 're/productive powers, including "gifts" of oil, gas and lithium, are placed under state control' (Tola, 2018: 34). Thus, Pachamama is used in this paper, to cement the argument put forward by the African philosophy of ubuntu—the Environment is a living being, a Mother, the habitat of gods and ancestors. The environment has been personified using ubuntu and Pachamama, hence, invoking the framework of Rights of Nature becomes inevitable.

The Earth/ Environment/ Pachamama has rights

Calls for the Rights of Nature (RoN) have proliferated in the global discourse, especially at conferences countering climate change (Rawson and Mansfield, 2018). Currently, the Rights of Nature are being debated in the juridical, sociological and ethical fields (Berros, 2021). Some sub-federal public authorities in the United States and governments of Ecuador and Bolivia recognise the RoN (Humphreys, 2017; Tola, 2018). The constitution of Ecuador (Articles 10 and 71–74) emphasises the rights of ecosystems to live and flourish, gives people the mandate to petition on behalf of nature and requires authorities to remedy violations of these rights (Republic of Ecuador, 2008). Also, the global bodies such as the United Nations have recognised the RoN:

We recognize that planet Earth and its ecosystems are our home and that ‘Mother Earth’ is a common expression in a number of countries and regions, and we note that some countries recognize the rights of nature in the context of promotion of sustainable development. We are convinced that in order to achieve a just balance among the economic, social and environmental needs of present and future generations, it is necessary to promote harmony with nature. (United Nations, 2012: 10)

Similarly, ubuntu-inspired eco-spiritual social work emphasises respect for Mother Earth and leaving our environments better for the future generations (Van Breda, 2019).

Relatedly, there is growing literature on the role of indigenous knowledge systems in the preservation of the environment. It is important to note:

For Indigenous Peoples, land and nature are inseparable and the spiritual, social and material are inextricably entwined. Everything is connected. The environment is sacred and people are expected to live in harmony with nature as the nurer of all life. Land shapes their cultural identity and well-being. This is a social and economic reality. Indigenous people have a special relationship to the land and their traditions prompt them to work at being good environmentalists, which is an expertise of benefit to all lands and peoples. (Gray et al., 2008: 52)

Considering that the social work profession recognises the importance of indigenous knowledge systems and has also acknowledged ubuntu as a theme to launch the 2020–2030 Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development, it should not distance itself from the debate of the Rights of Nature (RoN).

Conclusion

The paper has shown that social work is a human rights-based profession since its inception but still must acknowledge the Rights of Mother Earth or Pachamama. If social work is serious about the role of ubuntu and other indigenous knowledge systems such as those from Bolivia, it must contribute to the Rights of Nature debate. This reflection has reinforced the utility of ubuntu invoking the rights of Pachamama as acknowledged in Ecuador and Bolivia. Ubuntu has potential to impact the eco-spiritual social work field and beyond. Ubuntu is an African philosophy of relatedness (*ukama*) between humans and other humans, humans and the biophysical environment. This paper integrates spirituality, rights, indigenous knowledge systems and social work. Fellow colleagues, let us not be selfish, to think that we are the only holders of rights.

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Chapter 8

Positioning the Natural environment in Ubuntu's Axiom 'Umuntu Ngumuntu Ngabantu': An Ecospiritual Social Work Perspective.

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Abstract

Over the past decades, there is an increasing interest in the meaning of 'umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu' or 'a person is a person through other persons.' Utilising an Ubuntu-inspired Ecospiritual Social Work perspective, this chapter aims to critically reflect on the meaning of 'umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu.' As an ecophilosophy, Ubuntu is holistic and illustrates the interconnections between human beings and the natural environment. In exploring the significance of the natural environment through Ubuntu philosophy, issues of radical equalitarian ecological justice, sustainable development, climate change and public health are explored. The chapter underscores that 'umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu' is philosophically inclusive of the environment as part of the 'others' and as part of 'umuntu.'

Keywords: *Ubuntu; Ecospiritual Social Work; Umuntu; Natural Environment; Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*

Kubvira makore akawanda neanoraudzira, pane chidokwa dokwa chekuda kuziva kuti zvinomborevei kuti, 'munhu munhu nekuda kwevamwe.'

Tichishandisa mafungiro nemaonero ehunhu, nekuwadzana kwevanhu nezvisikwa zvose uye nemweya, chikamu chinotarisa zvakadzama mayererano nokudyidzana kwavanhu nezvimwe zvisikwa zvose. Chikamu chino chinosimbisa pfungwa yokuti hapana chisikwa chiri nani kupinda chimwe uye kuti munhu azove munhu, zvimwe zvisikwa zvinotovawo nebasa mukuvandudza kuve munhu. Zvakatipoteredza nezvisikwa zvose zvine nzvimbo mudingindira, 'munhu munhu nekuda kwevanhu' nokuda kwekuti zvinovandudza utano, mweya neraramo yedu.

Introduction

Over the past decades, there is growing interest on the meaning of 'umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu' (Ewuso & Hall, 2019; Okyere-Mank & Konyana, 2018; Eze, 2010). Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu literally means 'munhu munhu nevamwe vanhu' in Shona and 'a person is a person through other persons in English (Shutte, 2001: 2). The axiom, 'a person is a person through other people' is an affirmation of one's humanity through the recognition of the 'other' in their uniqueness (Eze, 2010). The meaning of Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu has recently been expatiated from Eric Berne's transactional analysis perspective (Chigangaidze & Chinyenze, 2022). That is to say, the axiom has been explored through the constructs of stroking, transgenerational scripting, and physis among other elements of Transactional Analysis. For Metz (2007), 'umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu' has descriptive senses to the fact that one's identity as a human being, casually and even metaphysically, depends on a community. Ubuntu promotes the spirit that one should live for others (Munyaka & Motlhabi, 2009). A person with Ubuntu has a sense of compassion, community, and shared concern for the rights of others (Muthukrishna & Ebrahim, 2014). The term Ubuntu, has in most parts, been limited to mutual aid but scholars such as Van Breda (2019) have extended it to ideas of ethics, ecospirituality, and sustainability. In the same view, Chigangaidze (2022) illustrates that Ubuntu personifies the natural environment and evokes the Rights of Nature.

Conceptualisations of the relationship between humans and the natural environment are present in the philosophical and social-scientific literature (Flint et al., 2013). The African philosophy of Ubuntu emphasizes the consolidation of the human, the natural environment, and the spiritual (Chibvongodze, 2016). In addition, Ewuso and Hall (2019) are of the idea that Ubuntu as an expression of 'communing with others' involves a fundamental connectedness of all lives in the natural and spiritual environments. Becoming more fully human does not mean caring for only human beings but also the entire biophysical world (Le Grange, 2012). The natural environment is also the home of human beings (N'kulu-N'Senha, 2019).

The fundamental meaning of 'umuntu' or 'person' in the Bantu metaphysics is 'life force' (Jahn & Grene, 1961). This life force is present in the environment (Mkhize, 2018). A human being is always in motion, a human being continues to conduct an inquiry into existence, experience, knowledge, and truth. Hence, to be umuntu is to have motion, it is to be uku-Ba (becoming a Spirit), to come into being, to happen, and to transform (Mkhize, 2020). The environment is well known as a source of life that provides energy, water, food, and air as the habitat of ancestors. Thus, the environment can be regarded in this sense as (umuntu). Furthermore, Ubuntu kulya or kudya means for one to exhibit Ubuntu, one should have eaten. Hence, the environment as a source of food contributes to the attainment of personhood. It is safe to argue, therefore, that the environment is part of other persons that are in the axiom 'umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu.' Among the Shona, the song, 'mvura naya naya tidye mupunga' translated to mean that rains should pour for us to eat rice is familiar to the young children who could dance in the showers of rain knowing that this would bring a good harvest of grain. Thus, the environment is a source of energy, food, water, and air which are vital for survival.

The impetus of this chapter is to show that the natural environment is part of 'umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu' through the lens of Ecospiritual social work. In

so doing, this chapter seeks to show the connectivity of humans to the natural environment, their commitment to nature, and their interconnectedness through the Ubuntu axiom, 'umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu'. Ubuntu reflects on the interdependence of human beings and the natural environment (Chibvongodze, 2016; Chigangaidze, 2022). Interests in nature as a therapeutic milieu has ancestral foundations, for example, Roman texts suggest that there are health benefits to the countryside and greenspaces (Franco et al., 2017). There is increasing focus on the potential role of the natural environment in the general health and well-being of humans. Research shows several physical, psychosocial, and spiritual benefits of interacting with nature (Keniger et al., 2013). The multi-sensory experiences of nature are essential because the monotony of stimulation can be a source of stress (Franco, 2017). Physiological benefits of the natural environment include reduced cortisol levels, reduced headaches, faster healing, reduced occurrences of diseases, and reduced mortality rates from circulatory diseases (Keniger et al., 2013). From an Ubuntu perspective, healing involves treating the environment as well. The interaction between the environment and personal or community health is essential. If the environment is not treated, then it is difficult to attain and confirm that one has been totally healed. Therefore, the axiom 'a person is a person through other persons' or 'umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu' can be understood within the context of the environment given the role of the environment to human wellbeing.

Ecospiritual social work

The social work profession has been blamed for ignoring the natural environment or accepting a shallow ecological conceptualization of nature as something separate from human activity (Besthorn & Canda, 2002). There are calls for the social work profession to act toward environmental justice (Chigangaidze, 2021; Dominelli, 2014; Klemmer, 2020). It has been stated that deep ecology offers social work a fundamental view of the person/environment construct and argues for a shift in the way humanity perceives its relationship with nature (Besthorn & Canda, 2012). Ecospirituality

emphasizes that individual identity and well-being are dependent upon the well-being of the Earth and everything on it. It underscores a sense of responsibility for oneself and the collective whole (Gray & Coates, 2013). An eco-social work perspective argues that human beings are social and organic, intrinsically embedded in interdependent relationships within the larger ecosystem (Hoff & Pollack, 1993). In Ubuntu, ecospirituality is connected to issues of social development and sustainability in that the environment is meant to be handed over to the next generations in an improved state (van Breda, 2019). There are indigenous thoughts that species are in kinship relationships with human beings, and that all life is sacred (Kopriva, 2014). Ecospirituality in social work, especially through the lenses of Ubuntu philosophy, highlights that the environment is the habitat of God and our ancestors (van Breda, 2019). Thus, from an Ecospiritual social work perspective, human beings and the environment are symbiotically interrelated. The environment impacts the biopsychosocial and spiritual facets of human beings.

The Environment personified.

In Ubuntu, personhood, or humanness 'is in a symbiotic relationship, or is inextricably bound up, with the dynamic (bio)physical and spiritual words' (Ewuso & Hall, 2019, p. 97). *Umntu ngumuntu ngabantu* illustrates the relatedness of an individual to others through the 'ukama' (relatedness) perspective. In Ubuntu, the natural environment is related to human beings through the ukama perspective (Chibvongodze, 2016, Chigangaidze, 2022). The Earth (natural environment) is to be treated as our clan, our mother, or our cousin (van Breda, 2019). In addition, the environment is related to human beings through totemic ancestorhood (Le Grange, 2012). It is generally accepted among the Shona people that the human being was created from the soil (part of the Earth). Among the Karanga and other Shona ethnic groups, during burials, pastors recite a popular phrase, 'ivhu kuvhu, dota kudota, guruva kuguruva' which can be translated as, 'soil to soil, ashes to ashes, dust to dust' (Chitakure, 2021). The assumption is that the body has

returned to its place of origin which is the soil from which God created man. Furthermore, the natural environment is what connects people with their ancestors and their unborn future generations (Chigangaidze, 2022; van Breda, 2019). Again, the names of the clans are derived from the natural environment. Chibvongodze (2016, p. 159) highlights that:

In many parts of Zimbabwe, the name of a clan is derived from the identities and mannerisms of wild animals. This sharing of clan names with animals stimulates a sense of affinity between the people and the wild animals, such that the personal and social identities of individuals become signified by a certain type of animal (Galaty, 2014). It is common among the Shona ethnic group of Zimbabwe to name their clans after animals. Shoko mentions some of the clan names which are; Mhofu (Eland), Samanyanga (Elephant), Simboti (Leopard), Shumba (Lion), Dube (Zebra), Hungwe (African fish eagle), Hove (fish), Soko (Monkey) and so on (Shoko, 2007).

Chibvongodze further argues that it is the duty of the clan to bear the animal's name to protect that animal from harm and extinction. People who feel more connected to nature are likely to show pro-environmental attitudes and behaviours (Fretwell & Greig, 2019). Therefore, it is crystal clear that the connectivity, interdependence, and commitment of human beings to nature influence even the naming of clans. Thus, the dictum that the natural environment is part of 'umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu' is in this sense justified.

Positioning the environment in 'umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu'

In this chapter, we position the natural environment in 'umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu' in two ways:

1. As part of the 'others'
2. As umuntu / the first person in 'umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu' or 'a person is a person through other people.'

Natural environment as part of others

The axiom, 'umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu' or 'a person is a person through other persons' involves the natural environment as part of 'others' in the phrase. Terblanché-Greeff (2019, p. 97) explains the dictum, 'A person is a Person through others' in the following context: Here the word 'person' (small letter 'p') refers to individual humans whereas, "Person" (capital letter 'P') refers to personhood, self-hood, and humanness as a 'person' should strive by interacting with others (humans, non-humans, and nature).

Thus, in this case, the natural environment has a place in 'umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu', or a person is a person through other persons. The environment is included as part of the 'others' in the Ubuntu axiom, 'umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu.' As aforementioned, the natural environment is the source of life energy that sustains life in all human beings. The natural environment is a source of life, water, energy, food, and air. Put simply, one does not attain Ubuntu without interacting with the natural environment.

Case examples

- Plants, animals, and rivers form essential elements of the African religious ontology and identity (Mbiti, 1969).
- The environment is the place where ancestors and gods who play a key role in the lives of people reside. The environment is seen as a divine being with the potential to influence human behavior. The natural environment is used to communicate with the ancestors who have a role in our being.
- Totems and clan names are often derived from the names of animals and the natural environment. Thus, the identity of African people also reflects the environment. Naming clans from the natural environment depicts an understanding of how the environment contributes to our identity.
- The world has been devastated by the COVID-19 pandemic which has been described as an environmental disease. The virus is spread through the infected environment (air with the infected person's droplets, and

surfaces where these droplets have landed). When the environment is infected then we are also infected and affected. Measures to control the COVID-19 pandemic included social isolation and social distancing which are key elements in our personhood. The environment in this context becomes an integral part of the 'others' that contribute to our personhood.

- In the African context, the cleansing of the environment is a necessity for holistic healing to take place. From an Ubuntu perspective, any attempt to heal an individual cannot ignore human and environmental relationships (Chuwa, 2012). Thus, Ubuntu philosophy adds to the concept of environmental embodiment by appreciating that environmental factors can affect body systems in ways that contribute to diseases and affect human functionality.

Natural environment as 'umuntu'

The natural environment itself exudes a spirit of Umuntu. By umuntu, it means that the environment in its natural form demonstrates elements of humanity such as humaneness, life, and reciprocity. The natural environment shows humaneness by naturally having a consideration for the people that occupy and surround it. People who occupy and surround the natural environment benefit from the environment they occupy by deriving livelihoods sustained by natural resources such as minerals, food, and medicines from natural herbs. It is the natural environment that produces these different resources for human use which shows that the environment in its natural form has a consideration for the life, wellbeing, and socio-economic survival of the people around and within that environment. Umuntu is also characterised by life. The natural environment values human life and the life of other living organisms since its components such as vegetation support human life by supplying oxygen. The natural environment in its various components is a living organism that supplies life to other components such as human beings that surround it. Umuntu is also exuded by showing reciprocity. Generally, human beings can survive by being

reciprocal. No individual has everything that they need. One must lose something to gain something from other people. This is evident even within the natural environment since the natural environment loses some of its components to also gain something from the people that occupy it. The natural environment supplies oxygen and gains carbon dioxide from humans and animals. The natural environment supplies food and in return, people take care of the natural environment by preventing harmful activities such as deforestation which harm the life of the natural environment. For the environment to continue to produce life energy it requires people to take care of it. In Ubuntu, the environment is meant to be given to the next generation in a much better state than the way it was handed over to us by our ancestors (Van Breda, 2019).

Implications for social work practice

The interventions of social work should cover the linkages between nature and the people and aim for a harmonious relationship between them (O'Leary & Tsui, 2021). Social workers must challenge the narrative that permits people's share of the Earth's resources to be usurped by a minority. Social work should support and champion the establishment of hybrid businesses that work to care for people and the environment (Ramsay, 2020). If the person is oriented towards communitarian well-being, the commodification and misuse of non-humans and natural resources are detrimental to the attainment of Ubuntu (Terblanché-Greeff, 2019). The misuse of the natural environment affects the well-being of human beings. Social work as a profession is inclusive of Ecospiritual practices that include advocating for the rights of nature and the protection of the environment. Social work initiatives and research involve working together with environmentalists and other scientists in protecting the environment and formulating policies that ensure environmental sustainability. Social workers focus on advancing social justice issues and environmental justice is a key element in the day-to-day practice of fighting the aftermath of environmental degradation. It is known that the most vulnerable

communities suffer the most from the effects of environmental degradation and it is these communities that social workers work with daily. Thus, social work practice needs to strike a balance between protecting people and nature through engaging in projects that fight global warming. Furthermore, social workers are educators who can raise awareness in communities through community dialogues, community outreach projects, and sustainable development initiatives on the protection of nature.

Environmental pollution is a growing public health concern worldwide and adverse pollutants are associated with the prevalence of several cancers and diseases (Xu et al., 2015). Parasitic infections are the leading cause of child morbidity affecting low-income populations and can be transmitted because of an unhealthy environment (Garbossa et al., 2013). Social work in public health focuses its practice on the prevention of diseases, the protection of the environment to alleviate the prevalence of diseases, and the utilisation of the environment (physical, social, spiritual, political, and economic) in providing a therapeutic milieu for individuals, groups, and communities. Social workers need to consider natural therapies such as engaging with their clients in green spaces, and assessing how environmental issues are linked to the morbus prevalence.

The focus of social work has been to address the psychosocial environment, but this chapter is part of other calls to consider the influence of the natural environment on the wellbeing of individuals, groups, and communities. Social workers may consider strengthening partnerships with environmental health practitioners, public health specialists, and other multidisciplinary professionals in addressing environmentally inflicted diseases. Furthermore, issues of climate change and natural disasters are of the essence to an Ubuntu social work practitioner as these aggravate inequalities and mostly affect poor communities. Ubuntu social work practitioners play a major role in disaster preparedness, policy formulation, resource allocation and budgeting, and therapeutic interventions in the event of an unfortunate

incident. Ubuntu-informed social work practice narrows down on how ideas of neoliberalism are linked to environmental degradation and the suffering of communities. Thus, if the environment is infected our well-being is affected. Thus, Ubuntu social work practice calls for policy formulators to think of how their decisions can affect the environment and people in the present and future timeframes. Placing the environment in the axiom, 'umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu' is an essential way to acknowledge that our humanness is dependent on the environment.

Human beings have been blamed for environmental pollution and land degradation affecting the welfare of current and future generations. For humankind to survive the environmental crisis, the synergism between the ecology of human societies and the natural physical environment will become a fundamental component of social work and all related professions' theorizing and interventions (Klemmer, 2020). Our interactions with our cousin or our mother, Mother Earth should be considered to leave this planet in a better form to the next generations. Ubuntu represents the highest level of global messaging within the social work profession for the years 2020-2030 (Mayaka & Truell, 2021). Ubuntu requires that social workers understand the natural environment from the axiom, 'umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu' to comprehend the interconnections between people and the environment. This understanding reinforces the construct that the natural environment has rights (Chigangaidze, 2021) and radical equalitarian ecological justice (Besthorn, 2012) because of the personification of the environment. The moment we respect the natural environment as one of us, major catastrophes in the name of climate change will be reduced.

Perceiving the environment as part of 'umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu' connects to the thinking of Global Citizenship (whether we live locally, regionally, or internationally; we are all interconnected with the environment), and issues of climate change connect us all. Whether one decides to deny that the natural environment is our roots or not, our interconnection with nature is beyond human intellect. Ubuntu philosophy

accepts that our physical, psychological, social, and spiritual wellbeing is integrated into the natural environment which bears the physis (life energy). As the highest level of global communication for social work for the years 2020-2030, Ubuntu connects us to the calls of co-building a new Eco-social World: Leaving No One Behind which is the main theme for Global Social Work and Social Development 2022. It should be noted with caution that the axiom 'umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu' is far much richer than just this environmental perspective. It is applicable from sociological, political, technological, legal, and economical lenses. This phrase is applicable in social work, political science, legal studies, environmental science, philosophy, education, and medical sciences.

Conclusion

This chapter has positioned the environment as part of Ubuntu's axiom, 'umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu' or 'a person is a person through other persons' from an Ecospiritual Social Work Perspective. The African philosophy of Ubuntu has gained interest in social work and has launched the 2020-2030 Global Agenda of Social Work and Social Development. Positioning the environment in the Ubuntu's axiom connects the philosophy to some of the themes of this Agenda, for example, working towards environmental sustainability. The chapter has positioned the natural environment as part of 'others' and as part of the first person 'umuntu'. Furthermore, the chapter advances the construct that the environment has rights, and appreciates the environment as a divine being and creation of God. To its end, the paper advocates for the respect of the environment for the benefit of human wellbeing, sustainability, and public health issues. Let us remember our roots and that we cannot do without Mother Earth. The natural environment is divine and connects us to generations before and after us. Our food, shelter, water, energy, and other vitalities are embedded in the natural environment which plays a major role in our human dignity and our expression of Ubuntu.

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