

UBUNTU/HUNHU AND YOUTH BULGE: UNPACKING THE NEXUS

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Abstract

This study unravels the worldview of Ubuntu/Hunhu, an African interactive philosophy of humanity, in relation to the youth bulge. It gains its impetus from Afrocentric thinkers such as Fanon (1968), who holds that,

“each generation must, out of relative obscurity, discover its mission, fulfil it, or betray it.”

Attention in this analysis is on urban youths. Utilising three residential suburbs geographically located in the City of Gweru in Zimbabwe, the study argues that the cosmopolitan landscape’s re-socialising effect has far-reaching implications for human factor development. The critical pillars of Ubuntu/Hunhu, such as honesty, hard work, industriousness and moral rootedness, which, among others, promote norms and ideals, are slowly but surely being dislocated and marginalised in response to the encroachment of the ever-evolving globalisation and internationalism. Black youths have unconsciously become willing, cooperating partners in the demise of the existential philosophy that culturally developed an entire civilisation. It concludes that, while the external encroachment of Western modes and codes of socialisation and child development is now at the core, the person emerging from society as a cultural institution, cannot effectively and efficiently function. This study is guided and informed by lived and livable ontological experiences as enshrined in the Igbo proverbial adage: “What an old man can see sitting down, the youth cannot see standing up.”

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Keywords: *enculturation, human factor approach*

INTRODUCTION

Ubuntu/Hunhu is enshrined in the customs of Africans and demonstrates a key role in providing a firm foundation on which the lives of Africans are built. Attempts have been made to compare this concept with Western philosophy, but it is totally African. In African society, persons displaying *Ubuntu/Hunhu* qualities are generally caring, loving, kind, honest, trustworthy, humble, obedient, thankful, selfless, forgiving and exercise self-control. These individuals display qualities consistent with not being brutal, headstrong, greedy, proud, or blasphemous. Such qualities make them valuable in society. Lefa (2015) supports this by stating that *Ubuntu/Hunhu* is viewed as an act of being humane. Lefa (*ibid.*) adds that *Ubuntu/Hunhu* culture expresses humanity and aims to maintain a community that displays justice and care. Because of colonisation, African countries face challenges when it comes to adhering to *Ubuntu/Hunhu* practices due to Western influence imposed on Africans through the process of cultural exchange and interaction with foreigners.

Most African societies experience an uncontrolled youth bulge due to traditional beliefs and customs. They undergo uncontrolled birth practices because of cultural and religious beliefs. When a country has a high percentage of its population among the Black youths, it is said to have a youth bulge. (Harris and Roach, 2013). An uncontrolled youth bulge poses unforeseen challenges in a developing country, since youth make up the bulk of the population. Youth contribute directly to the economic development of a country. This is supported by Ganie (2020), who points out that a youth bulge can result in adverse development,

which can cause an increase in conflict. Conflict, if handled well, can be viewed positively as an opportunity for growth in the economic sector. Onyeiwu (2024) predicts that population growth in Africa in the period 2024 - 2050 will surpass half of the world's growth. At the same time, the population of Africa is predicted will have doubled by the year 2050. Onyeiwu (*ibid.*) predicts that in the coming ten (10) years, Africa will dominate in terms of employable workforce, beating India and China. If Black youths are left to develop independently, having a negative colonial mentality and despising their traditional beliefs and culture and favouring Western ideologies, Zimbabwe will face challenges when it comes to taming them.

Youth bulges have created challenges for most African countries as the Black youths mix and mingle with those from Western nations when they seek health, education and more appealing lifestyles in the diaspora, shunning services offered in their home countries. Due to globalisation, the Black youths who remain at home are the same, as the Western lifestyle trend has not spared them. In Zimbabwe, after A Level studies, Black youths flock to overseas countries such as India, China, Cyprus, the USA, Russia and the UK, in pursuit of higher and tertiary education degrees. Upon their return, they distance themselves from any cultural ties and assume Western culture.

Monda (2017) explains that historical events such as colonialism and racism in Zimbabwe generated frustration among African people whose culture was looked down upon and discarded as non-existent by European colonial ideology. He further alleges that under colonial rule, Africans suffered severe abuse and loss of identity and Africa was laid bare in terms of its identity, language,

culture and heritage. The fact that Zimbabweans have become independent, this article advances the need to review cultural values rooted in the pre-colonial period in search of our lost traditional, religious and linguistic identities. The definitions of Africans from a Western perspective that they were primitive, removed their self-esteem and painted a black picture of their origins. This led to the post-colonial quest for true African identity. The question that requires an answer is what qualifies Africans to be called Africans.

As stated by Fanon (1968), colonialism destroys and corrupts culture, for instance, teaching the colonised to consider their past as unworthy or evil. This mirrors what happened in Zimbabwe. What follows is a challenge that colonised people are facing in rejecting, regaining or producing a new culture after the colonial process. This is proving difficult as individuals believe that the superiority of European culture justifies colonialism. However, colonialists treat all of Africa as one homogenous group, ignoring differences in traditions and the rich cultural backgrounds of different ethnic groups. Fanon (*ibid.*) calls for a national culture through which developing a new culture will begin to shape a new nation. This demands the inclusion of *Ubuntu/Hunhu* in the re-socialisation process of Black youths, to eradicate colonial characteristics and refocus on child development.

Fanon (*ibid.*) details three stages in the cultural trajectory of the colonised intellectual. In the first stage, the brain simulates the colonist and follows colonial preferences. This is a stage of trying to mimic Europeans and praising their culture. As Fanon (*ibid.*) argued, culture derives from national consciousness. Therefore, there is need for a national culture in Zimbabwe which is in

harmony with the desires and aspirations of the nation. Zimbabwe is independent and has the liberty to refocus on national culture in its quest for intellectual independence.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

After the colonisation of Zimbabwe, the question of who Zimbabweans are as a nation remains critical in African philosophical thinking. During colonial times, the Africans' geopolitical and cultural identity, including that of Zimbabweans, became Western-oriented. This led post-colonial African philosophers to refocus on recovering Africa's lost identity. African independence signalled the introduction of a new era in African philosophy, where the values of traditional and universal philosophy were unified. After attaining independence in Zimbabwe, it is shameful and denigrating for Zimbabweans to perpetuate a Westernised colonial mentality in an era where calls for homegrown remedies to colonial-instigated challenges are being made. Zimbabweans need to pass on knowledge to their descendants, the Black youths.

Ubuntu/Hunhu philosophy in Zimbabwe is part of the traditional knowledge embodied in the African philosophy. The country's identity is found within that African philosophical concept. Zimbabwe's *Ubuntu/Hunhu* derives its inspiration from an African cultural background, language and religion. Given the erosion of this valuable philosophy, the study seeks to find out the extent to which European philosophical thinking has helped to dilute strong African philosophical values.

In Zimbabwe, the Black youths look down upon traditional customs regarding religious beliefs, food tastes, dressing, mode of

transport, choice of schools, language spoken and mannerisms. This is exacerbated by the choice of schools the Black youths attend, where Western culture is hammered in the youngsters to the extent that learners are humiliated for failing to embrace Western cultural aspects. In such schools, intelligence is measured by how much one has embraced Western culture. Unknowingly, parents play a major role in the formulation of negative attitudes towards national culture. There is strong need for re-socialisation of the Black youths to change their mind-set towards the Zimbabwean national culture. Black youths emulate and imitate Western culture as much as possible, some bleaching their skins to appear like Westerners.

The research aims to analyze the extent of the impact of colonisation on Zimbabwean Black youths and suggests ways to enhance the humanisation of Zimbabweans through the implementation of the *Ubuntu/Hunhu* philosophy to enhance the recovery of their lost identities.

The seeks to establish how Western influence destroyed *Ubuntu/Hunhu* through colonisation, assess the extent to which urban Black youths lost their identity due to colonisation, identify the limitations and challenges posed by identity loss, and identify solutions to loss.

The study primarily was conducted to raise awareness amongst the Black youths of the destructive effects of colonialism in terms of African cultural erosion. Black youths would benefit from a knowledge of the traditional practices they shun in preference of Western-oriented tendencies. Also, the Black youths would evaluate themselves in terms of, for example, their preferences in

dressings, language, religious beliefs and culinary tastes. This way, attitudes might change in relation to their lifestyles.

A re-look at globalisation unearths the negative effects on the Black youths in Zimbabwe who have unconsciously contributed to the slow death of African cultural values embedded in the *Ubuntu/Hunhu* African philosophy. The findings will assist parents and guardians in the socialisation of their children in line with the principles of national culture expectations. The Ministry of Youth, Sport, Arts and Recreation in the Government of Zimbabwe will benefit immensely as it must come up with policies on the implementation of actions to inculcate *Ubuntu/Hunhu* in the re-socialisation process.

In the world, some Eastern countries which embraced socialist ideologies are making efforts towards improving the livelihoods of the citizenry through sharing resources, a characteristic consistent with African *Ubuntu/Hunhu*.

Education and socialisation play critical roles in the socialisation of the youth. Mpofu and Sefotho (2024) researched *Ubuntu/Hunhu* in education. Their findings indicate a deep connection between *Ubuntu/Hunhu* philosophy and inclusive education ideology. The data analysis indicates that both *Ubuntu/Hunhu* philosophy and inclusive education values are based on respect for the diversity of humanity. These are principles of *Ubuntu/Hunhu* which are upheld and respected in Zimbabwe.

Bhuda and Marumo (2022) examine existing literature on *Ubuntu/Hunhu* philosophy and explore how it can inform research. The study argues that *Ubuntu/Hunhu* philosophy has the

capacity to rebuild indigenous cultural values through research. The current research aims to focus on the restoration of lost cultural practices through re-engaging *Ubuntu/Hunhu* in the re-socialisation process of the Black youths.

Chibango (2024) points out that unique same-sex relationships are complex in Zimbabwe because of the prevailing hostile legal requirements, as well as the cultural and religious beliefs. Findings reveal that people who engage in such types of relationships felt left out and threatened in their places of worship. These findings reveal that although there are diverse views on the issue, African churches should protect the choices of the people implicated in such kinds of relationships and ensure their safety. These eyebrow-raising same-sex relationships, which are a contested issue in Zimbabwe, affect mostly the Black youths. Based on the principles of *Ubuntu/Hunhu*, these types of relationships are debatable, as they are based on Western beliefs.

Khosa-Nkatini (2024), focused on the process of mourning a deceased person in the Tsonga culture and how women are affected. The research studied the communal and spiritual aspects of VaTsonga's *Ubuntu/Hunhu* mourning practices. The research helps us to understand some Zimbabwean cultural practices which the Black youths shun.

West (2014) analyzes *Ubuntu/Hunhu* and the moral principles of business to explain the role *Ubuntu/Hunhu* can play. The study interrogates the relationship between business ethics and *Ubuntu/Hunhu* philosophical practices. The study contributes greatly to how Zimbabwean Black youths can be shaped through ethical business practices.

Mshayisa *et al.* (2024) explores how African religion participated in providing kinship care under *Ubuntu/Hunhu* principles in South Africa. The study realises that African religion helps in the preservation of both traditional and individual identity. Furthermore, through African religion, the youth undergoing kinship care are assisted with psychosocial support and helpful childhood practices through relatives offering care, as well as the ancestral community they come from. African relatives taking care of the youth who lost their parents have been proven to offer care as a religious duty. Knowledge of spirituality has a massive impact on youth in Zimbabwe by inculcating communal values rather than individualistic tendencies.

Previous research unearthed the importance of *Ubuntu/Hunhu* in African religions and philosophy, reconciliation and forgiveness, African culture and politics, moral globalisation and implications for personhood and African governance. (Mandela, 1994; Tutu, 1999). In a speech, Mbeki (1998) expressed,

"I am an African. I owe my being to the hills and the valleys, the mountains and the glades, the rivers, the deserts, the trees, the flowers, the seas and the ever-changing seasons that define the face of our native land."

The speech brings out the closeness of African *Ubuntu/Hunhu* with nature. As stated by Chibvongodze (2016), the perception of *Ubuntu/Hunhu* connects humans with others and with their environment. Growing up in an African environment creates a bond between nature and the self.

Research carried out so far has not focused on *Ubuntu/Hunhu* and the youth bulge, but specifically targeted Black youths in urban

locations, assessing the impact of the encroachment of globalisation on them. This study contributes to existing research by unpacking the connection between *Ubuntu/Hunhu* and the emerging explosive young black population in Africa.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The research is based on the *Ubuntu/Hunhu* Philosophy. The philosophy is communal in nature and indigenous to the people of Africa. It is linked to the habits, customs and beliefs of ethnic African people, from the pre-colonial period before the introduction of Western culture (Babatunde *et al.* 2024). True to the African sense of humanness, Sibanda (2014) contends that in the Zimbabwean context, *Ubuntu/Hunhu* is a summation of characteristics which determine a complete person. Inculcation of traditional values amongst the Black youths through the socialisation process ensures that they grow up in their rightful minds.

Ubuntu/Hunhu is regarded as an African viewpoint of humanity. People from other nations acquire knowledge from it, as it sheds light on the African way of manoeuvring the lifestyle landscape. Broodryk (2002) reiterates that *Ubuntu/Hunhu* is a worldview to promote orderliness in a society and ensures an understanding of *Ubuntu/Hunhu* from the viewpoint of indigenous African philosophers and community members. *Ubuntu/Hunhu* focuses on the ability of people to live together as a community, working communally and not as individuals. It disregards the spirit of individualism, which leaves each man to himself, leading an independent life.

Kgari-Masondo and Chingwanangwana (2025) highlight that the philosophy aids in eradicating tribalism, poverty, corruption and

other social ills because it embodies a sense of respect, love, care, peace, human rights and equality among all people. Mugumbate and Chereni (2019), on the Orature Framework based on the *Ubuntu/Hunhu* Theory, express the view that in Zimbabwe, *Ubuntu/Hunhu* is carried in folklore, songs, stories, poems, jokes or humour, irony, proverbs and puzzles. It is a rich spoken custom and shares real-life experiences from African traditions. This research focuses on the relationship between *Ubuntu/Hunhu* and the youth bulge.

METHODOLOGY

The qualitative research paradigm guides the study. The choice of qualitative research was made because it is effective in a natural setting where humans are the primary data-gathering instruments. In this research, Black youths from urban residential suburbs were used to gather data.

The research design used is primarily a case study of three (3) high-density residential suburbs in Gweru. As this is a qualitative study, a case study design was found to be appropriate, with a mixed methods approach to data collection, implemented through observation, interviews and questionnaires. A case study is appropriate for investigating lived experiences using various data-collecting instruments such as interviews and observation. The feature of a case study design lies in its strength as a tool for in-depth investigation of the phenomenon under study. Case studies allow the selection of key cases which are analytically studied in detail. This is supported by Crowe *et al.* (2011), who explain that a case study is a useful approach to use in situations requiring an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon in its natural framework.

Typical case sampling was used to select the high-density residential areas as well as the Black youths who displayed characteristics of identity loss. Nyimbili and Nyimbili (2024) explain that typical case sampling requires taking a distinctive sample for a specific occurrence. It is helpful when a research targets investigating an occurrence considered average for members of a population. The presence of a nearby university proved irresistible in selecting the residential areas and research participants.

Participants were drawn from 20 (twenty) male and female Black youths, comprising high school students, students from tertiary institutions and employed and unemployed Black youths from the selected residential areas.

FINDINGS

Three quarters (75%) of youth showed they held Western ideologies through their dressing, language, religious beliefs and culinary tastes. They dressed in tight-fitting ripped jeans, used unnecessary English spoken in a British tone, displayed hatred for African Traditional Religion (ATR), expressed excessive dislike for traditional food, practised skin bleaching and engaged in Western-oriented leisure. Fayemi (2020) argues that in Africa, bleaching the skin is wrong morally, as it creates unstable relationships and gives users an artificial personality. Skin bleaching goes against the moral practices of *Ubuntu/Hunhu*. Although 75% of the youths displayed Western-oriented ideologies, in terms of culinary tastes, Muyonga *et al.* (2017) are convinced that most of the traditional African foods have exhibited health benefits, which include lowering cholesterol and preventing cardiovascular diseases. Popular fast foods, usually associated with wealth, have proven

dangerous for the body. Some of the health conditions associated with eating these foods include being overweight and obesity. This phenomenon unfolded amongst the youth observed and interviewed in three urban residential suburbs in Gweru, Zimbabwe, who preferred Western meals over traditional meals.

Birtles (2022) points out that African dressing portrays more than mere cloth. People dress to communicate different opinions and traditional outfits can portray a nation's past, beliefs and characteristics. The patterns, insignia and designs on outfits portray different stories and commemorate valuable events which conserve ethnic traditions. Therefore, complications arise for Black youths who imitate Western dress without understanding the message it communicates to community members. African traditional dress stands as a powerful testament to the continent's enduring strength, creativity and rich cultural diversity. African attire holds a crucial place in Africa's collective identity, representing African tradition. The attire maintains the deeply rooted cultural significance, celebrating the diverse embroidery of African life.

Twenty-five percent of youths showed they were traditionalists through dressing, language, religious beliefs and culinary tastes. They preferred clothing that covered their bodies, used indigenous languages when communicating, believed in (ATR), enjoyed traditional foods, displayed pride in being African and made leisure choices such as hunting with dogs and playing traditional games. Religiousness is viewed as:

“a personal search for understanding answers to decisive questions about life, about meaning and about the relationship to the sacred and

superior. This may lead to the development of religious rituals and formation of community” (Koenig *et al.*, 2018).

Resultantly, religion functions significantly in modelling the livelihoods of the youth as they develop into adulthood. Youth who believe in ATR display a better understanding of their lifestyles and the cross-cultural relationships existing in communities. Once traditional cultural values are inculcated in youth, mental development initiates a change in worldview. Findings indicate the presence of individuals who hold on to cultural practices and a willingness to exacerbate *Ubuntu/Unhuism* practices by holding on to pre-colonial ATR practices.

Traditional Zimbabwean foods, which traditional youth relished, include *sadza*, a common delicacy made from maize meal, *hohwa/amakhowa*, African wild mushrooms, *hwiza*, *harurwa*, *ishwa/imbhombo*, *inhlwa*, which are insects (locusts, aphids, termites), *mutakura/mangai*, a dish made from peanuts, maize and beans, as well as *muboora*, a dish made from pumpkin leaves. Youth who showed they were traditionalists displayed pride when communicating using local indigenous languages. They displayed confidence and handled indigenous languages well. They did not feel belittled when using local languages. Findings indicate cultural erosion because of the imposition of Westernised philosophy and the degradation of African indigenous philosophy in terms of our traditional identity.

Questionnaire results indicated that 75 % of Black youths in urban areas are influenced by Western ideologies of individualism as reflected in their preferences, as opposed to the concept of collectivism reflected in the *Ubuntu/Hunhu* African ideology.

Resultantly, in the 4th Industrial Revolution, where the gap between the 'have' and the 'have-nots' is widening and capitalism is emerging at lightning speed, there is a need to reconsider enculturation to revive our lost African culture and identities, thereby cultivating compassion towards others in the economy, as individualism is fast destroying business ethics in Africa.

The study established that:

- i Western influence destroyed *Ubuntu/Hunhu* through colonisation.
- ii urban Black youths lost their identity due to colonisation and embraced Western philosophy.
- iii identity loss resulted in Africans identifying themselves with Western culture, shunning their African culture.
- iv Enculturation can help revitalise the seemingly dying African culture embedded in *Ubuntu/Hunhu* philosophy.

LIMITATIONS

The sample size was small, considering the large population of youth in high-density areas. The, youth who displayed the required characteristics could not have been part of the sample population. Martínez-Mesa *et al.* (2014) support the observation by pointing out that an inadequate sample size may fail to reflect the perceived results with tolerable accuracy.

Some youth viewed the researcher with suspicion during interviews. This resulted in some critical information being withheld, compromising the findings of the study.

Other youth refused to respond to some questions, such as on food preferences, citing personal reasons. This could have been caused by the fact that the researcher resides in the same area as

the participants. It is recommended that studies be carried out in areas different from where the researcher resides. To counteract the challenge, the researcher used questionnaires to do away with the idea of withholding information.

Constraints such as fear of reprimands from parents may have affected the findings, as some students feared the researcher might engage parents and divulge responses, such as those on spirituality. That could have been a result of the fact that the researcher was once a secondary school teacher in the area where the research was carried out.

CONCLUSION

The pillars of *Ubuntu/Hunhu*, such as honesty, hard work, industriousness and moral rootedness, which promote norms and ideals, are slowly playing a peripheral role due to the infringement of globalisation. Black youths have unconsciously become willing cooperative partners in the dying of the philosophy that culturally developed a complete civilisation. Their lives revolve around the idea that imitating European culture means one is closer to civilisation. This kind of indoctrination helped colonise the Black youths' mentality, perpetuating Westernisation at the expense of *Ubuntu/Hunhu*. This notion helps to suppress the re-socialisation process aimed at doing away with Western tendencies. Mugumbate *et al.* (2023) lament that in the pre-colonial era, families and communities took pride in the delivery of social services from one generation to another and these have cascaded to the youth in existence today. It was the duty of the immediate and extended family members, the community and religious institutions to provide the required services.

Based on research on South African education, Ngogi (2018) explains that a well-developed multicultural curriculum is very important since it integrates principles which a school is expected to impart. These expectations come from members of the community, whose intention is to change how students are trained. A multicultural curriculum recognises language diversity and promotes the idea that all languages and dialects are valid communication systems for some groups. The newly adopted heritage-based curriculum in Zimbabwe promotes a multicultural curriculum.

The study concludes that while the external intrusion of Western modes of socialisation and child development is now at the centre, the person coming out of society as a cultural association cannot effectively and efficiently function. This is because they are individualistic and are social misfits in a community which expects communal practices. Lutz (2009) writes that in the words of Nyasani,

“Virtues such as patience, optimism, mutual sympathy and empathy are eminently characteristic of the African way of life and certainly point to a peculiar mode of existence that extends the realm of the individual potentialities to embrace the life of others and their concerns.”

This is echoed by Desmond Tutu, the late Archbishop of Cape Town in the Anglican Church of Southern Africa who says that *Ubuntu/Hunhu* is very difficult to translate into Western culture. It reflects the core of humanity. People praise others by saying they have *Ubuntu/Hunhu*. This shows that they are benevolent. They impart knowledge, skills and possessions with others.

This study advances the need to re-examine the pre-colonial period and salvage the lost racial, ethnic, national, religious and linguistic identities. To understand *Ubuntu/Hunhu* principles, one must shun the Western ideology of humanity and resort to Bantu philosophy, which reflects the Bantu comprehension of personhood. The principles of *Ubuntu/Hunhu*, though innately convincing, encounter real-world challenges when translated into daily practice. The forces of modern life, characterised by individualism and a fast-paced lifestyle, present problems when integrating *Ubuntu/Hunhu*'s principles into our daily lives (Bunkechukwu, 2023). This arises from the idea that globalisation in the modern world, in which Africans migrate to European countries in search of better educational facilities, health and employment, has caused drawbacks in the implementation of *Ubuntu/Hunhu*.

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