Caught In-between Two Worlds: Ubuntu Identity and the African Diaspora

Molly Manyonganise

Abstract

Ubuntu is an African ethic which emphasises the goodness and value of humanity. Its philosophy is based on African cultures, and it stresses that one's destiny is twined both as a collective as well as an individual. In this case, individual actions must be taken cognisant of their implications for the collective. It is anchored on the belief that 'one is' because 'we are'. It has been expected that the ethic would have a universal appeal beyond Africa and African communities. However, outside of Africa and African communities, the utility of Ubuntu remains questionable. This paper, therefore, seeks to find out the challenges that Africans in the diaspora face as they try to maintain this collective identity in communities that are largely individualistic. Questions that arise are: How do Africans in the diaspora maintain their Ubuntu identity in alien contexts? To what extent are non-African communities in the diaspora ready to tolerate the ethics of Ubuntu that are exhibited by Africans in the diaspora? How do Africans in the diaspora navigate the need to remain African while at the same time being accommodative of those cultures that are largely foreign to them? Does the question of a crisis of identity arise in such situations? Theoretically, the paper is informed by the theory of Ubuntu. Narratives from Africans in the Diaspora through informal interviews and discussions provided data for the paper. Secondary sources were utilised to support primary data.

***Key words**: Ubuntu, Africa, African identity, diaspora, communities*

Introduction

Ubuntu is an African ethic which emphasises the goodness and value of humanity. Its philosophy is based on African cultures, and it stresses that one's destiny is twined both as a collective as well as an individual. In this case, individual actions must be taken cognisant of within the context of their implications for the collective. It is anchored on the belief that 'one is' because 'we are'. For Bolden (2014, p. 3), this belief needs to be understood as a strongly constructivist ontology in which a person's sense of being cannot be detached from the social context in which they find themselves. In this case, a person's moral worthiness is always viewed in relation to the group. Hence, the adage *munhu munhu navanhu* (Shona), *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* (Zulu/Ndebele). It has been expected that the ethic would have a universal appeal beyond Africa and African communities. However, outside Africa and African communities, the utility of Ubuntu remains questionable. This paper, therefore, seeks to find out the challenges that Africans in the diaspora face as they try to maintain this collective identity in communities that are largely individualistic. Questions that arise are: How do Africans in the diaspora maintain their *Ubuntu* identity in alien contexts? To what extent are non-African communities in the diaspora ready to tolerate the ethics of *Ubuntu* that are exhibited by Africans in the diaspora? How do Africans in the diaspora navigate the

need to remain African while at the same time being accommodative of those cultures that are largely foreign to them? Does the question of a crisis of identity arise in such situations? Theoretically, the paper is informed by the theory of *Ubuntu*. Narratives from Africans in the Diaspora provided data for the paper. Secondary sources were utilised to support primary data. While contestations around the meanings of 'diaspora' and 'identity' are beyond the scope of this paper, I wish to make the usage of these terms in this paper clear. Identity in this study is taken from Story and Walker (2016, p. 138) to "refer to specific sets of characterisations expressed in particular ways, to which both individuals and groups may subscribe in order to emphasise who they are and to distinguish themselves from others." Story and Walker (2016) further aver that Diasporas are distinguished by a shared claims of identity that both provide for internal cohesion and mark them from others. In the context of this study, it is crucial to establish how *Ubuntu* provides a reservoir of identity for the Africans in the diaspora. The use of the term 'diaspora is adopted from Zeleza (2005, p. 42). He argues;

> Diaspora is simultaneously a state of being and a process of becoming, a kind of voyage that encompasses the possibility of never arriving or returning, a navigation of multiple belongings. It is a mode of naming, remembering, living and feeling group identity moulded out of experiences, positionings, struggles and imaginings of the past and the present, and at times the unpredictable future, which are shared across the boundaries of time and space that frame 'indigenous' identity in the contested and constructed locations of 'there' and 'here' and the passages and points in between.

What is telling in Zeleza's conceptualisation of 'diaspora' is how he links its meaning to issues of identity. What this entails is that we cannot have a discursive analysis of Diasporas without referring to identity. The question that may arise then is how translatable is *Ubuntu* as a marker of identity in non-African contexts?

***Ubuntu* in Africa as the Marker of identity**

Conceptualising an African identity is fraught with challenges. Moyo (2021, p. 79) opines that "the ideas of *Ubuntu* as the essence of Africanity draw on questions of identity, for example, who is an African? What is it to be African? Melber (2001, p. 6) argues that the very concept of African identity is contested. Geschiere (2001, p. 93) cited in Melber (2001, p. 6) opines that in African Studies, "the whole issue of belonging and its changing parameters is truly a nodal point, bringing together a wide array of preoccupations and aspects: cultural but also political and economic ones." Considering this, Ngwena (2018, p. 24) views "Africanness as "discursive concept with multiple genealogies and contingent

meanings some of which speak to affirmation and inclusion and some of which speak to othering and exclusion." Mama (2001, p. 9) is of the view that the idea of identity is an interesting one to most Africans, largely because it has remained so vexed. She argues:

> We seem to be constantly seeking the integrity and unity that the notion implies, without succeeding in securing or coming to terms with it…It relates to the contentious nature of the term in our upbringing as a site of oppression and resistance.

Mama (2001), thus, contests the notion of a common African identity. She disputes the existence of a conjoint identity in Africa. She further notes that Africa does not have the means to produce this kind of a common identity. For her, "identity is at best a gross simplification of self-hood, a denial and negation of the complexity and multiplicity of the roots of African communities." To this end, Ngwena (2018, p. 25) argues that "we are better served by a historically conscious concept of Africanness that marks a transformative identification poise; a poise that is not static but fluid and metamorphosing to mark the interval – an 'in-betweenness' – between reversal and the emergence of something that was not there before but is never quite fully completed – as is the case with any identity category. These arguments bring us to the ethic of *Ubuntu* which has been seen as binding the African continent with a common identity despite the diversity of the communities within.

Scholars writing on *Ubuntu* have argued that *Ubuntu* is at the heart of African way of life and that it influences the everyday activities of the people (Dolamo, 2013; Lefa, 2015). In general, the ethic focuses on people expressing their humaneness towards each other. Therefore, aspects such as love, tolerance, harmony, reciprocity, compassion, dignity among others are the anchors of *Ubuntu*. Bolden (2014, p. 2) describes it as a philosophy whose principles are harmony and hospitality, respect and responsiveness that express the interconnectedness of human existence. In a way, this shows that the ethic is collectivist in orientation.

While *Ubuntu* has been presented colourfully, some scholars have sought to bring out its limitations. For example, Bolden (2014) has highlighted the gap that exists between theory and practice. He notes that while theoretically the ethic is appealing, its implementation remains a pipe dream even within African communities, particularly now when African governments have been dogged with narratives of corruption, violence, vote rigging among many other ills. *Ubuntu* has failed to foster a universal sense of belonging among Africans. Notably, the increase in xenophobia within African societies brings to question the usefulness of *Ubuntu*. There is a tendency in African societies to use derogatory terms when

referring to those of other countries or ethnicities. For example, in colonial Zimbabwe, during the time of the federation, several people of Malawian origin came to work in Zimbabwe and they were popularly referred to as 'Mabhurandaya' or 'Manyasarandi', terms which emanated from the then capital city of Malawi and Nyasaland respectively. Its use in Zimbabwe tended to denote the 'foreignness' or *hutorwa* of these people. They were also known as '*Mabwidi*' which denoted people without rural homes. In the 1980s when the economy of Zimbabwe was in good shape, Mozambican immigrants running away from the effects of civil war in their country and were looking for work to survive were referred to as 'Makarushu' a term which was derived from the cashew nuts popularly found in Mozambique (Costa, 2019). Landau cited in Geschiere and Jackson (2006, p. 5) shows how in post-apartheid Johannesburg, resentment towards immigrants from Zimbabwe in particular, commonly referred to as 'Makwere-kwere' buttresses a joint sense of belonging among the various South African groups in Johannesburg as well as a stereotyping of the Zimbabwean immigrants. The use of the term 'Makwerekwere is derived from the way Zimbabweans speak. Hence, it is a derogatory term which conveys overtones of criticism and caricature. Within Zimbabwe, the Shona are derogatorily called '*masvina*' by the Ndebele while the Shona also refer to the Ndebele as '*Madzviti*'. From a gender perspective, Manyonganise (2015) has questioned why an ethic that is seen as promoting aspects of humaneness can be gender insensitive. She grappled with the ambivalence of the ethic showing that while it can be liberative, it is also oppressive especially to women. It is some of these shortcomings that brings into question whether we can apply the ethic beyond the borders of Africa when it is so clear that it is difficult to apply it within Africa itself.

The Utility of *Ubuntu* Beyond Africa: Narratives from the African Diaspora

Ubuntu has emerged as a global darling in a space that desires diversity of worldviews and global naturalism (Moyo, 2021, p. 85). In this vein, Desmond Tutu, the South African theologian described *Ubuntu* as a gift that Africa gives to the world and insisted that it can be applied beyond the borders of Africa. Bolden (2014, p. 1) views *Ubuntu* as the alternative to the individualistic and utilitarian philosophies of the West. However, as Africans traverse the African boundaries, it becomes important to examine if they have been able to effectively present this gift to the non-African contexts that they find themselves in. Kanwangamalu (1999, p. 24) has called for a socio-historical study of the concept of *Ubuntu* so that we can establish its applicability in Western contexts as well. For him, focusing on the roots of concepts such as humanitus (humanity), humanismus (humanism) and caritus (dearness, affection, caring) would enable us to examine how these relate to *Ubuntu*. However, Moyo (2021, p. 73-74) has questioned the translatability of *Ubuntu* in contexts outside of Africa. He argues:

> …in global context that already others, and those “othered” are often the ones who have been vulnerable, how do they make their system claims on the world that has favoured those in the dominant? The relational piece of *Ubuntu* has been personalised to those who are the “in” crowd, [who] enjoy the claims to communitarian inclusions, while those who are outsiders are excluded. In a colonial global world, the harsh exclusions remain structured in the historic categorisations, race, gender, class, ethnicity, immigrant status, regions/locality, etc. In a world where “aggressive” individualism is entrenched, how is the well-being of those othered become realised.

The above questions are critical as one navigates Africanity as an identity within foreign contexts. In this section, this paper, therefore, presents the experiences of some Africans in the diaspora, mainly in Europe. Their lived experiences reflect the challenges of upholding the philosophy of *Ubuntu* in non-African contexts. For example, when Africans greet each other in the morning, afternoon, and evening, they do not just do it for the sake of it but seek to find out the welfare of the other person. In Shona, when it is morning, they ask ‘*Mamuka sei*? (How did you wake up). Such a greeting is meant to understand how one would have slept. The expected response is ‘*Tamuka kana mamukawo*? (We have woken up well if you woke up well). In other words, one is saying I can only have had a good sleep if yours was good too. This position concurs with what Gwakwa (2014, p. 357) posits when he argues that one’s wellness depends on the wellbeing of others. For Namisango *et. al*. (2021, p. 234), the high level of interdependence within *Ubuntu* communities creates an atmosphere in which it is easy to offer and ask for help. For example, such a greeting creates space for any of the people greeting each other to open up if they would have had any mishaps at any time of the day or night. What this entails is that the next time they meet, they check on how the other person is faring with the disclosed challenge. If that person is sick, they would be able to check on how they would be feeling. Experiences in the diaspora have shown that non-Africans find this awkward. One interviewee narrated how she had asked a white lady whom she had heard was not feeling well how she was then feeling after meeting her. There was no response to her question, and she repeated it. The lady reluctantly responded. After leaving the lady a friend told this interviewee to never ask that question again because issues of someone’s sickness were a matter of privacy. Asking after one’s health was deemed intrusion into one’s privacy. The interviewee said she was shocked because in her African context not asking after one’s health having known that they were not feeling well is deemed uncaring and inhuman. Namisango *et. al*. (2021, p. 234) experienced the same when one of their co-workers asked her why she constantly asked about the welfare of her family members though she had never met them. In their final analysis, they concluded that the *Ubuntu* greeting differs from the Western one because the latter appears to be brief, formal and privacy conscious.

Another area that has shocked some black Africans is in hospitality. Gathogo (2008, p. 3) defines African hospitality as an extension of generosity, giving freely without strings attached. Olikenyi cited in Gathogo (2008, p. 3) opines that hospitality is a vital aspect of African existence. An interviewee narrated how he was shocked that after being invited for dinner at a restaurant, he was expected to pay for his meal. He explained how lucky he was that he had carried money with him for this lunch. On being asked why he was shocked he explained that in Africa when one extends their invitation to someone, it is a foregone conclusion that they would pay for everything. He said he dreads to think of what could have happened if he did not have money on him. For him, this is a clear example of how cultures clash and he says he has taken it upon himself to warn his black African brothers and sisters not to quickly accept these invitations if they do not have money to pay for the food.

The *Ubuntu* ethic somehow promotes hierarchy in gender relations as well as stipulates specific gender roles for women and men. Most African societies are largely patriarchal, and men are perceived as having authority over women and children within and without their households. Women are expected to be submissive to their husbands and never to challenge them. Furthermore, within African societies, there are certain duties that a man is never expected to perform unless he has been bewitched through love portions. This is expected of African women in the diaspora as well. Tinarwo and Pasura (2014, p. 521) argue that “within transnational diaspora communities, women’s bodies and their sexualities are not only symbols of homeland traditions, and cultural markers that distinguish migrants from the indigenous population, they are also sites of ideological and material struggles between different actors.” However, African women have found new freedom from African patriarchy in their host countries which is embedded in those countries’ legal statutes. Writing about Zimbabweans in Britain, Tinarwo and Pasura (2014, p. 521) note that as the “Zimbabwean patriarchal traditions compete with liberal and egalitarian values in Britain, the diaspora becomes a site of cultural conflict.” Such conflict stem from the African cultural expectation of what it means to be an African woman or man, but which identity finds no legal or social support in the host countries. In most cases, African men find their masculinity challenged as they lose control of their wives mainly because they cease to be the sole providers of the family as women also venture into paid work. One interviewee narrated how she found going to work more liberating. She said:

> My husband was the first to migrate to Britain. It took long before I joined him together with the children. When I finally came, I found out that he had a child with another woman. I kept quiet because I depended on him financially. I had never worked formally my whole life. Other African women encouraged me to look for work. Ever since, I

> have been able to make my own independent decisions about how to spend my money. From then, I have seen that my husband respects me because I do not look up to him for anything
> (Field Notes, 16 November 2021).

Creese (2013, p. 165), thus, notes that migration affords legal, economic, and social opportunities for women to resist male and extended family control more effectively. She further notes that as domestic workloads intensify alongside long hours in the labour market women draw on local discourses of women's rights to renegotiate more equitable domestic relationships with their husbands. In this case, gender relations among African couples are continuously reconfigured. In Tinarwo and Pasura's opinion, the boundaries of gendered practices and sexual behaviours that are viewed as acceptable or unacceptable, good, or bad seem to be shifting within these communities (2014, p. 521). This shows that western contexts have produced a crisis of masculinities while enabling new forms of empowered femininities.

Within the African ethic of *Ubuntu,* it is the duty of parents to discipline their children. It is not surprising for parents to beat their children as a form of disciplining them. However, in most western countries corporal punishment has been criminalised (Zimbabwe has also followed suit though most parents turn a blind eye to this). In western countries, several black African parents have had to answer to charges of physically abusing their children, some to the extent of losing the custody of their children to social welfare departments. One such parent living in the United Kingdom, narrated how she lost custody of her daughter after beating her because she had discovered that she was sleeping around with men and had started visiting stripping clubs while skipping school. Instead of the system partnering with the mother on how to rehabilitate the child, they accused her of child abuse and was almost deported back to Zimbabwe. The child was taken away from her and was adopted by the owner of a stripping club to which this child was frequenting. Thus, Namisango *et. al*. (2021, p. 236) aver that "many Africans agree that reprimanding one's child for bad behaviour in Western countries is overly restricted" mainly because "children have been taught to have the upper hand in decisions related to their lives regardless of the consequences of those decisions." Writing on Canada, Creese (2013) has noted that both [African] men and women lament their weakened authority over children. Such practices have left African parents powerless and in despair especially as fathers clash with their children (sons in particular) on how to represent proper African masculinity (Creese, 2013, p. 165). Some have resorted to taking their troublesome children back to their African countries of origin while others have taken trips to their African countries with the sole purpose of disciplining their children without the fear of being jailed or deported. They find African contexts as spaces that restore their authority over their children particularly because, though most African

governments have adopted the discourse on children's rights, they have also demanded that this be done within the confines of *Ubuntu* where the authority of parents is not trivialised.

The practice of sex and sexuality is another area that has not only confounded but confused some Africans in the diaspora. While in most African societies, the discourse on sex and sexuality is shrouded in secrecy and the very act of sex is treated as taboo, the reverse is true in most Western societies. In Africa, sex is the preserve of marriage and there are consequences for such acts outside of marriage. Though gendered, the preservation of a girl's virginity was/is a gift to be given to one's husband. As Africans adapt within the western communities, they find that sex is not taboo and, in most cases, there are no boundaries restricting it. Young people are not monitored, and they can engage in sexual activities at will. Due to this laxity, a number of Africans have been criminally charged for engaging in sexual activities with people who would have told them they were not interested in engaging in sexual intercourse, yet they would have allowed them to enter their bedrooms, or they would have agreed to visit them to their own homes. Patriarchy system has socialised African men to believe that usually when a woman says 'no' to sex, she means 'yes'. Yet in Western societies, it does not matter that the two are in a relationship, if the other says they are not interested in engaging in the sexual activity, their choice must be respected.

Western colleagues have questioned how black Africans have been raised when it comes to issues of borrowing and not willing to pay back unless someone makes a follow up. While this practice may not be the norm for all Africans, its prevalence has been noted. It stems from the fact that within African culture, when one is deemed to have more and a poor person borrows with the promise of paying back, at times they were expected to give though knowing that the promise of paying back would never be fulfilled. For the poor person, the promise to pay back is just a way of not coming out in the open that they are asking the thing for free. From an *Ubuntu* perspective, the lender does not make a follow up because it is upon the borrower to try to pay back or to update the lender on their progress in making restitution. However, within western communities, once one borrows, they must pay back. Narratives of bad debts by black Africans abound and at times people are told behind their back to not lend so and so money because they do not pay back.

Interacting with some black Africans in the diaspora, one gets the sense that they at times envy the individualism of the Western communities particularly when it comes to financial responsibilities towards extended family members. As Namisango *et. al*. (2021, p. 237) note, as black Africans in the diaspora adapt, "they may find themselves picking up some individualistic tendencies to fit with work or community contexts, often leading to a one-sided cultural adaptation as individuals from *Ubuntu* communities seek to fit in." In a discussion with a colleague, (I was trying to organise bedding for a

relative who had travelled from Kwekwe with the assumption that he would return before end of day but had been unable to do so. Being away from home, I was trying to give instructions on how people at home could make his stay comfortable). This colleague of mine did not take this lightly and questioned why this relative of mine had not put in place contingent measures in place just in case he would fail to go back to Kwekwe. From the perspective of my colleague, that is how Western societies overtake us because they do not just throw money everywhere but follow a strict budget. For her, this sudden visit by my relative meant that we would go overboard on our budget because he was encroaching on our monthly budget. From the ethic of *Ubuntu*, this is very unAfrican. The Shona in particular have a proverb which says 'Mweni mupfuuri haapedzi dura' (A visitor is a passer-by; he/she does not deplete the granary). From this reaction, one gets the sense that most Africans in the diaspora feel burdened by their relatives at home particularly those who look up to them for financial assistance. In this case, they tend to question the communal nature of *Ubuntu* when it comes to assisting their extended family. In another discussion, she questioned the whole idea of African communalism. She said:

> I don't agree with the concept of African communalism because we use each Other. For example, when contributions are called for, you find that you may continue contributing for other people's problems, but when it's your turn, nobody comes forth. So, for me, I subscribe to the individualism of Europeans. Each person should solve their own problem not *kuda kushandisana* (not to use each other (Field notes, 20 November 2021).

This may prove Bolden (2014, p. 5) correct when he observes that the ethic of *Ubuntu* is prevalent in those societies that are facing significant social, economic, and political upheavals. In this case, the black Africans who are thriving economically in western countries tend to disregard some of the ethos of the ethic. The paradox, however, is that the same black Africans would seek the assistance from those at home to do errands for them in their absence (not withstanding that some relatives have spent money sent to them on the things not meant for the money which has strained relationships). Nussbaum (2003, p. 22) notes that *Ubuntu* holds that the self is rooted in the community, and no one can be self-sufficient, and that interdependence is a reality for all. Hence while trying to detangle themselves from this notion of interdependence, most Africans in the diaspora quickly note that they cannot do away with their kith and kin back home. They continue to rely on them on certain aspects of their lives. Namisango *et. al*. (2021, p. 237), observe that "individuals from *Ubuntu* backgrounds will attempt to assimilate in an individualistically structured organisation by going halfway *ubuntuism* and half-way individualism." In this case, Ubuntu becomes a site of struggle where identities are configured and reconfigured as Africans in the diaspora trudge through their existence.

Who are we? Grappling with a Crisis of Identity

Bolden (2014, p. 6) questions the utility of *ubuntu* beyond one's community and group even within the African setup where urbanisation and globalisation have blurred these. When living in Western countries, one's African way of life is greatly challenged. The question of who are we? When in the diaspora is not very easy to answer. It reflects the crisis of identity that black Africans face in foreign contexts. It is a crisis of trying to fit while at the same time being different. Maintaining one's Africanness can never be easier in such circumstances. Moyo (2021, p. 65) note that "human encounters with various cultures from within and outside the African continent have led to clear changes in expressions of *Ubuntu*." Namisango *et. al* (2021) have shown how black Africans in the Diaspora navigate the challenges that come with being an African in the diaspora particularly as they try to maintain their African identity. For example, Africans in the diaspora have resorted to creating Ubuntu associations within their dotted communities in the diaspora. Such associations have provided a feeling of being home away from home. It is within such associations that Africans help each other in whatever way possible. They assist each other financially, by babysitting each other's children, attending funerals, offering advice among other things. At times even when they do not know each other, when they pass each other in the street, black Africans can just nod to each other as a way of confirming that we are one people. Ulysses Dube in a discussion about the nod on Twitter said, "that nod we give each other as people that look like each other in a sea of people that don't look like us and we understand, I see you, I validate you, we got this" (Twitter handle). In response, Chengeta concurred when he said "And the nod is more prevalent in these foreign lands among black people. A nod that says I see you! (Twitter handle). Hence, Creese (2013, p. 157) observes that although migrants from sub-Saharan Africa have diverse language, ethnic, religious, national, and colonial histories, in some specific contexts Pan-African diasporas are emerging across multiple divisions and identities. For her, this is made possible by the fact that these new African diasporas refer to imagined notions of Africa as a continental homeland particularly in the context of similar experiences of unbelonging in new spaces of settlement.

Long stays in the diaspora eventually lead to hybrid identities that emanate from traversing multiple expectations and assumptions (Creese, 2013, p. 167). For example, children born and raised in the diaspora may not feel very much connected to *Ubuntu* culture. Though they are aware that they are African, the majority tend to align more with their new citizenship and may often want to be recognised as British, German, Canadian among many others. The change in citizenship laws in most western countries has exacerbated the challenge. For example, if a child is born to Zimbabwean parents while in Britain, that child is automatically British by virtue of place of birth. Furthermore, the poor socio-economic climate back home, for example, in Zimbabwe, might push these children to opt to have foreign

citizenship of host countries that have better economic opportunities. This presents the children with several challenges as they endeavour to navigate their multiple identities arising from such a scenario. Creese (2013, p. 167) notes that:

> such children must navigate their place as citizens of the host country as well as part of the local African diaspora by negotiating three competing sometimes incommensurate influences namely (1) the values, beliefs, and practices located within their families and the local African community; (2) mainstream culture [in host countries] and social institutions and (3) the legacies and contemporary cultural forms…

For Creese, this makes it hard for the children to live up to parents' expectations of what it is to be African.

Language is a critical identity marker. Some parents in the diaspora are endeavouring that their children maintain their language. This is very challenging in foreign contexts where children use the language of the host nation in schools. However, some of the parents have devised ways of making sure that their children speak their indigenous languages. For example, while the children use the language of the host country at school and work, at home rules have been put in place to ensure that they speak their own languages well as a way of expressing and practicing their cultures. This has assisted these children to blend easily when they visit their relatives back home (Africa) since they can communicate in their indigenous language. Some parents have resorted to utilising online language applications so that children born in foreign countries can learn their indigenous languages. In the United States, Makoni (2020) notes an increase in the demand for courses on African languages by those Africans who were born in America. Citing Trifonas and Ararossitas (2014, p. xiii), she argues that African languages are associated with processes of identity negotiation and cultural inheritance through language. Thus, for her, African languages are not used as a form of communication, but rather as a symbol of social identification. In concurrence, Bourchard (2020, p. 15) is of the view that for Africans in the diaspora, their indigenous languages play a symbolic role of identity marker which gives them a sense of belonging to an African community. Some Zimbabweans in the United States of America have expressed their preference of attending churches that preach completely in Shona. In this case, language and not territoriality gives them an authentic African identity and belonging. It also offers a form of resistance to attempts at assimilation by host nations.

The other way that Africans in the diaspora have endeavoured to maintain their African identity is by way of marriage. It is true that while in the diaspora, a lot of intermarriages have taken place. However, most

Africans have resorted to either marrying fellow Africans in the diaspora originally from their own countries or from other African countries. Epstein and Pomerantz (2012, p. 6) note that migrants prefer to marry within their communities. Alternatively, they opt to go back to their countries of origin and find marriage partners. Even when the partners are found in the diaspora, they always go back to their countries of origin to observe all the marriage rituals. The payment of *lobola* remains key in buttressing this African identity even when marriages are conducted in foreign contexts. As Story and Walker (2016, p. 137) observe [marriage] as other markers of identity "draws attention to a connection with a place that is distant in time or space, and might be curated differently at home and abroad, leading over time to a divergence in expressions of belonging." By either following traditional African marriage processes in the diaspora or by going back home to get married, Africans in the diaspora seek to maintain a connection with their homeland.

Conclusion

This paper was premised on the notion that Africans in the diaspora are caught in between two worlds which greatly challenges their *ubuntu* identity. From this premise, the study discussed the core values of *ubuntu* as those anchored on one's humaneness in relation to the community to which one belongs. Through narratives from Africans in the diaspora, the study showed the challenges of practicing *ubuntu* outside the borders of Africa. While Western contexts were shown to be challenging spaces for the ethic, the study showed that some Africans have utilised these contexts to challenge the oppressive aspects of *ubuntu.* The formation of u*buntu* associations was shown to be one way that Africans in diaspora are trying to navigate the crisis of identity while in foreign lands. To some extent, such groups restore their dignity of being African away from their homelands. For those who have stayed long in western countries, they must contend with issues of hybridity. At times they must accept that their children or grandchildren may never again subscribe to the *ubuntu* ethic. What is clear from this study is the fact that, despite all the challenges, an *ubuntu* worldview remains relevant to Africans in Africa as well as those in the diaspora. Going forward, more research may be required on establishing what practical steps can be taken to ensure that an ethic that is so dear to Africa is sustained in non-African contexts for the maintenance of an African *ubuntu* identity.

References

Bolden, R. (2014). Ubuntu. In D. Coghlan & M. Brydon-Miller (eds) *Encyclopedia of Action Research (*pp. 1-9). London: Sage Publications.

Bourchard, M.E. (2020). Redefining Forro as a marker of identity: Language contact as a driving force for language maintenance among Santomeans in Portugal. *Multilingua*. DOI - https://doi.org/10.1515/multi2020-0082. Accessed on 11 October 2021.

Costa, C. (2019) The Cashew value chain in Mozambique. https://openknowledgeworldbank.org. Accessed 11 July 2022.

Creese, G. (2013). Gender, Generation and Identities in Vancouver's African Diaspora. *African Diaspora*, 6(2), 155-178.

Dolamo, R. (2013). Botho/Ubuntu: The Heart of African Ethics. *Scriptura*, 112(1), 1-10.

Epstein, G.S. & Pomerantz, R.L. (2012). Assimilation through Marriage. *Discussion Paper 20/12*. Centre for Research and Analysis of Migration.

Gathogo, J. (2008). African Philosophy as Expressed in the Concepts of Hospitality and Ubuntu. *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*, 130(1), 39-53.

Geschiere, P. & Jackson, S. (2006). Autochthony and the Crisis of Citizenship: Democratisation, Decentralisation, and the Poitics of Belonging. *African Studies Review*, 49(2), 1-7.

Gwakwa, M. (2014). The Melting Pot: Where are We! The Demise of the Extended Family System in Zimbabwe: The Case of Chivhu Rural Communities in Chief Neshangwe Area. *European Scientific Journal Special edition*, 6(2), 353-363

Kanwangamalu, N.K. (1999). Ubuntu in South Africa: A Socio-linguistic Perspective to a Pan-African Concept. *Critical Arts*, 13(2), 24-41.

Lefa, B.J. (2015). *Ubuntu in South African Education*. Paper presented to the Faculty of Education and Social Sciences, Cape Peninsula University of Technology. South Africa: Mowbray Campus.

Makoni, B. (2018). Beyond Country of Birth: Heritage Language Learning and the Discursive Construction of Identities of Resistance. *Heritage Language Journal*, 15(1), 73-96.

Mama, A. (2001). Challenging Subjects: Gender and Power in African Contexts. In S.B. Diagne, A. Mama, H. Melber & B. Nyamjoh (eds.). *Identity and Beyond: Rethinking Africanity*, Discussion Paper 12. Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, pp. 9-18.

Manyonganise, M. (2015). Oppressive and Liberative: A Zimbabwean Woman's Reflections on *Ubuntu*. *Verbum et Ecclesia*, 36(2), 32-38.

Melber, H. (2001). Beyond Africanity? An Introduction. In S.B. Diagne, A. Mama, H. Melber & B. Nyamjoh (eds.) *Identity and Beyond: Rethinking Africanity*, Discussion Paper 12. Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet pp. 9-18.

Moyo, O.N. (2021). *Africanity and Ubuntu as Decolonising Discourse*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.

Namisango, F., Eyaa, S., Kansiime, P. & Tusasiirwe, S. (2021). Ubuntu in the Diaspora: Its Conservation and Comparison with other Worldviews. In J. Mukuni, & J. Tlou (eds.). *Ubuntu for Enhancing Intercultural Communications* (pp. 228-241). USA: IGI Global.

Ngwena, C. (2018). *What is Africanness: Contesting Nativism in race, culture and sexualities*. Pretoria: Pretoria University Law Press.

Nussbaum, B. (2003). Ubuntu: Reflections of a South African on our Common Humanity. *Reflections*, 4, 21-26.

Pasura. D. (2011). A Fractured Transnational Diaspora: The Case of Zimbabweans in Britain. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468.2010.00675.

Story, J. & Walker, I. (2016). The Impact of Diasporas: Markers of Identity. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 39(2), 135-141.

Tinarwo, M.T. & Pasura, D. (2014). Negotiating and Contesting Gendered and Sexual Identities in the Zimbabwean Diaspora. *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 40(3), 521-538.

Zeleza, P.T. (2005). Rewriting the African Diaspora: Beyond the Black Atlantic. *African Affairs*, 104(414), 35-68.