



African Journal of Social Work
Afri. j. soc. work
© National Association of Social Workers-Zimbabwe/Author(s)
ISSN Print 1563-3934
ISSN Online 2409-5605

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Indexed & Accredited with: African Journals Online (AJOL) | University of Zimbabwe Accredited Journals (UZAJ) | SCOPUS (Elsevier's abstract and citation database) | Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ) | Society of African Journal Editors (SAJE) | Asian Digital Library (ADL) | African Social Work Network (ASWNet) | Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) - South Africa | SJR | CNKI - China | Journal Publishing Practices and Standards (JPPS) | EBSCO | DOI

Social work ethos in indigenous Shona music: a qualitative content analysis of the song Mugariro (Ephat Mujuru, 1994) through Ubuntu philosophy and *Ukama* construct in Zimbabwe

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ABSTRACT

Several analysts working within the dominant Western paradigms are unwilling to evaluate and examine their indigenous perspectives as they find their structures to be culturally dependent rather than logical. Inspired by the principles of decolonial social work, this article analyses the song *Mugariro* (a way of living) by Ephat Mujuru, 1994, through the African philosophy of Ubuntu and its construct of *ukama* (relatedness/ relationality). Utilizing qualitative content analysis, this paper latently explores the song *Mugariro* and reflects on themes such as a good way of life, *Ukama* (relatedness/ relationality), an extension of *Ukama* to non-humans, global citizenship and spirituality in social work. The paper calls for social workers willing to work towards decolonial social work to tap into the knowledge in their localities and integrate it with social work knowledge where possible.

KEY TERMS: Music; Ubuntu philosophy; *Ukama* (relatedness/ relationality); *Mugariro* (a way of life); Decolonial social work

KEY DATES

Received: July 2023

Revised: September 2023

Accepted: November 2023

Published: December 2023

Funding: None

Conflict of Interest: None

Permission: None

Ethics approval: Not applicable

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Current and previous volumes are available at:

<https://ajsw.africasocialwork.net>



How to reference using ASWNet style:

Chigangaidze, R. K. (2023). Social work ethos in indigenous Shona music: a qualitative content analysis of the song *Mugariro* (Ephat Mujuru, 1994) through Ubuntu philosophy and *Ukama* construct in Zimbabwe. *African Journal of Social Work*, 13(6), 285-293.
<https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/ajsw.v13i6.2>

INTRODUCTION

For a long time, social work theory has been a monopoly of the global North (United Kingdom) and West (United States of America) (Mathebane & Sekudu, 2018). This has led social work academics to call for decolonial social work practice and education (Mabvurira, 2020). Decolonisation calls for the grounding of theories and anchoring them on the reflections that non-academics make about social life as they live it as well as elaborating theory with them instead of about them (Mathebane & Sekudu, 2018). Essentially, social work educators have been advised to examine and produce literature that reflects on the historical and cultural experiences of groups that have been omitted in the social work curriculum (Daniel, 2011). African social workers who seek to decolonize social work education and practice turn to Ubuntu philosophy for aid (Harms Smith & Rasool, 2020; Van Breda, 2019). If social work theory is to decolonize in Africa, social workers should appreciate African values and belief systems (Mabvurira, 2020). It should be stated that several analysts working within the dominant Western paradigms are unwilling to evaluate and examine their indigenous perspectives and find their structures to be culturally dependent rather than logical (Bhuda & Marumo, 2022). Nevertheless, Afrocentric or African -centred way of living pre-exists Western knowledge and civilisation (Bent-Goodley et al., 2017). The essential elements of African -centred thought include recognising the importance of family and community, encouraging individual and collective functioning, promoting fundamental goodness of all people, understanding the role and significance of spirituality, and acknowledging the interdependence of people (Bent-Goodley et al., 2017). As aforementioned that decolonisation emphasizes grounding theories and anchoring them on reflections that non-academics make about social life, the impetus of this paper is to expatiate on the relevance of Afrocentric way of thinking in social work practice through a directed qualitative content analysis of the song entitled *Mugariro* by Ephant Mujuru. Music plays a significant role in the being of Africans at work, in politics, in their socioeconomic engagements, in religious worship, moral life and in integral development (Mbaegu, 2015). Utilising Ubuntu journalism theory, music has been highlighted as having the power to promote peace, human rights, social justice and cohesiveness (Sauti, 2021). Additionally, music has functions of motivation, articulating bad and good behaviours, portraying admiration, love or hate, instilling courage or need for hard work (Jonga, 2020). Spiritually, music includes references to the Supreme Being, ancestral spirits, creatures and objects of nature connected to life experiences of society (Sipiyiye & Chigidi, 2022). Music has the potential to reach millions and reach them directly, appealing on an intellectual and emotional level (Reiter, 2009).

A BRIEF BACKGROUND OF THE ARTIST

Ephant was born in Manicaland Province, near Zimbabwe's border with Mozambique in 1950. He is well known for playing *mbira dzevadzimu* (thumb piano for the ancestors). Before he joined the ancestors, he described himself as a musician who talks about the philosophy of life (World Music Central, 2021). Mujuru died in 2001 following a cardiac arrest after landing at London -Heathrow airport, on his way to teach and perform in the United States of America. As a traditional musician from Zimbabwe, Ephant Mujuru embodied the struggle of his generation as he was born under colonial rule in Southern Rhodesia and he was raised in traditional Shona culture, with his grandfather mastering the *mbira dzavadzimu*, an instrument used to tap wisdom from the ancestors (ibid). Ephant was known beyond the borders of Zimbabwe for his cultural music and promotion of peace. In this paper, his song *Mugariro* is analysed in view of Ubuntu philosophy, especially the construct of *ukama* (relationality) and integrated in social work theory with the aim of decolonising social work practice in Africa. The paper intends to show how one African song links to a broad range of social work approaches and fields.

UBUNTU AND UKAMA (RELATEDNESS)

Ubuntu is the capacity in the African culture to show compassion, dignity, harmony, reciprocity and humanity in the interests of building and maintaining community (Nussbaum, 2003). The African worldview of Ubuntu is gaining prominence in most academic fields and discourses especially in social work, law, politics, theology, sport, public policy, health and many others (Goldman, Thomas & Molose, 2009). Ubuntu exists in African orature, for example, in songs, stories, folklore, poems, epics, humour, and jokes since time immemorial (Mugumbate & Chereni, 2019). According to Mbigi (1997) the five key values of Ubuntu are survival, compassion, solidarity, spirit, respect and dignity. From an Ubuntu perspective, the relationship between the individual and the community is one of interdependence and mutual nurturing (Fagunwa, 2019). Ubuntu expresses common humanity, interconnectedness and the responsibility of individuals towards each other (Nussbaum, 2003). The idea of promoting harmony for human good and wellbeing is deeply rooted in the African philosophy of Ubuntu (Chigangaidze & Chikanya, 2023). Ubuntu has been described as a complex relationship between people, country, environment and spirituality (Mbiti, 1969).

Ukama is a construct of Ubuntu philosophy which means relatedness or relationality (Swilling, 2020). For the Shona people and other Africans, the meaning of *ukama* should not be limited to those who are related by blood

or marriage but to the past, present and future generations; also, to the animals and the environment (Le Grange, 2012; Murove, 2009). In support that *ukama* is beyond the blood ties, Mugumbate and Nyanguru (2013) acknowledge that a mother is a mother for the whole community, a child is everyone's child, and it is the responsibility of every person to ensure that the wellbeing of the other person is enhanced. Ubuntu philosophy can be utilised to strengthen the values of social work practice, enhance Eco-social work practice, advance humanistic social work, promote human rights, guide child protection welfare and fight corruption (Chigangaidze et al., 2022; Dudzai, 2021; Kurevakwesu & Maushe, 2020). This paper will analyse the song *Mugariro* in reflection of Ubuntu and *ukama*.

METHODOLOGY

Qualitative content analysis was utilised to analyse *Mugariro* which is a song by Ephant Mujuru and the spirit of the people. Qualitative content analysis is a method that systematically describes the meaning of qualitative material (visual data, verbal data, data sampled from other sources, or data collected by the researcher). Meaning is often complex, holistic and context dependent (Schreier, 2012). The content analysed in this qualitative analysis include verbal data and the significance of the musical instrument used in the song. Qualitative content analysis involves critically analysing content (literature, music, news, media) to bring out its deeper meaning and relevance to a particular field. Direct qualitative content analysis starts with the theory, defines codes from the theory or during the analysis process (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). In this case, the theory utilised was the philosophy of Ubuntu, particularly focusing on the construct of *ukama*. It should be noted that Ubuntu philosophy has been regarded as a theory in social work as it informs practice and helps understand the world (Van Breda, 2019).

The analyst or researcher positioned himself as an academic who have experienced both the Afro-centric way of life (through birth, upbringing and reading) and the Western perspectives (through education, immigration as well as historically and indirectly through colonisation). Reflective of such experiences, the analyst is aware of his personal experiences and attempts to take a neutral stance in the analysis. The analyst appreciates that there are other academics who are more adept in both domains (Westernised perspectives and Afro-centric worldviews), thus, the analysis is done with humility and acknowledging that there are elders with far much more wisdom and knowledge than the researcher. The research is ethically for teaching purposes and preservation of valuable indigenous knowledge that may be lost in time if not recorded.

Song selection and justification

As qualitative researchers we work to some extent by insight and intuition. There are moments of illumination that allows things to come together. The problem is that we could be wrong (Miles & Huberman, 2004). Furthermore, social workers reflect in and on action (Ferguson, 2018). As a well published author in the philosophy of Ubuntu and its application in Social Work, the mental illumination that struck my mind while listening to the song *Mugariro* is its axiological reflection of the African philosophy. The song struck the attention of the researcher in his hobby of listening to folk or country music. The idea to test this insight and intuition emerged from a sense of euphoria and to the realization of the name of the song. The song *Mugariro* was also purposively selected as its name translates to a way of living and a way of life. The song clearly portrays the ethos of life: enhancing a standard of life for all creation. In terms of axiology (the study of values) the song clearly highlights an emphasis of respecting life and life for all creation. Ubuntu as a philosophy is passed from one generation to another through songs. The exact number of songs Ephant released is unknown to the writer but some of these songs included *Nyama Musango* (Meat in the forest), Rhythms of Life to mention but a few. Ephant noted that when the mbira is played, it brings two worlds together, the world of our ancestors and the world of today.

Dealing with personal biases

The researcher utilised manifest and latent content analysis to interpret the lyrics and the significance of instrument in the song *Mugariro*. Manifest analysis emanates from the raw data. The lyrics in this song as presented on the table clearly emphasize *ukama* (relatedness) in their raw state. Furthermore, the researcher listened to the song for over twenty times taking down notes and reflecting. This allowed for saturation of data to ensure smooth categorization and abstraction (Elo et al., 2014).

FINDINGS

The findings of the analysis of *Mugariro* by Ephant Mujuru are presented as themes: spirituality, *ukama*/relatedness, *ukama* and animals, global citizenship and inclusivity in all ages.

Table of themes and lyrics

| <i>Theme</i> | <i>Method of analysis</i> | <i>Lyrics in Shona</i> | <i>Lyrics translated in English [translation here and onwards is mine]</i> |
|--|---------------------------|--|--|
| <i>Ukama/ relatedness</i> | Manifest | Hama dzangu..... Hama woye..... Hama dzangu..... | My relatives..... My relatives..... My relatives..... |
| A good way of life or living | Manifest | munoda mugariro wakadiniko? Mugariro wakanaka | What kind of living/ life do you desire? A good way of life/ living. |
| <i>Ukama/ relatedness to the animals</i> | Manifest | Kana mhuka ... Kana svosve... Kana shiri... dzinoda mugariro wakanaka | Even animals... Even ants... Even birds... Desire a good way of life/ living. |
| Global citizenship | Manifest and latent | ...pasi pano ...pasi pano Munhu wese.... | ...on this planet/ Earth ...on this planet/Earth Everyone..... |
| Anti-ageism | Manifest and latent | Nyangwe chembere... Nyangwe harahwa... Nyangwe jaya... Nyangwe mhandara.. Munhu wese ... | Even an older woman Even an older man Even a young man Even a young lady Everyone..... |
| Spirituality | Latent | mbira dzeVadzimu [Instrumental significance] | Thumb piano for ancestors [instrumental significance] |

DISCUSSION

Ukama/relatedness

Ephat asks the question, ‘*hama dzangu munoda mugariro wakadiniko pasi pano?*’ which translated ‘my relatives what kind of life would you want on this planet?’ (Translation is here and after mine). The backing vocalist responds by saying, ‘*tinoda mugariro wakanaka*’, translated to mean ‘we want a good way of life’. The emphasis on *hama* (relatives) refers to the Ubuntu construct of *ukama* (relatedness/ relationality). Ephat emphasises ‘*munhu wese anoda mugariro wakadiniko pasi pano?*’ meaning ‘everyone desires which kind of life on this planet?’. The song emphasises the need for a good way of life that is peaceful and fruitful. *Ukama* is all about enhancing life and being there for the other person. The axiom of Ubuntu, ‘*umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*’ translated ‘a person is a person through other persons’ expresses that a good way of life can only be provided in the presence of other people as all persons are interdependent to the community. Ubuntu connects a leader to the followers in an

interdependent relationship that identifies the leader with the followers' welfare (Mumley, 2007). For the people to have a good way of life, the relationships between all people should be enhanced and maintained. Through the construct of *ukama*, Ubuntu advances the notion that though one can exist in a community as an individual, no one can live alone as an island without others (Chigangaidze & Chinyenze, 2022; Breed & Semanya, 2015). Thus, the emphasis on enhancing each person's way of life is the realisation that we are interdependent on each other and can never live alone as islands.

The Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development recognise that demonstrating support for respectful relationships and building on people's strengths create the best outcomes (IFSW, 2020). Social work to a greater extent than many other professions, is founded on the value of human relationships (Kennedy, 2019). Emphasis is given for social workers to have a good working relationship with colleagues, clients, families, other professionals and institutions (Winter, 2019). The emphasis on good relationships in *Mugariro* relate to the need for social workers to enhance relationships for the enhancement of life.

A good way of life/living

In advancing the concepts of good living and relationality, the song *Mugariro* acknowledges that every human being desires a good life. The African worldview of Ubuntu is embedded on the ethical principle of promoting good way of life through mutual caring and sharing between and among humans and non-humans (Mabele et al., 2022). In their systematic review, Ewuoso and Hall (2019) argue Ubuntu is a relational ethic which prizes relationships of interdependence, fellowship, reconciliation, harmonious relationships and other-regarding actions such as compassion and other morally right virtues that aim to promote harmonious living. In addition, research is meant to enhance life and the philosophy of Ubuntu emphasizes on good relationships between the researchers and communities in enhancing wellbeing (Bhuda & Marumo, 2022). *Mugariro wakanaka* which translates to a good way of living, latently implies one should not cause the suffering of the other. Ubuntu-driven people should create a milieu in which all people have a good way of life: a life that promotes human rights, wellbeing, mutuality, peace, collaboration, interdependence, enhancing physis (the energy of life) and sustainability.

The profession seeks to address life challenges through engaging people and structures (International Federation of Social Workers and International Association of Schools of Social Work, 2014). Thus, social workers promote the enhancement of people's wellbeing through addressing socio-economic inequalities. A good way of living relates to peace, prosperity and a functional society which social work profession aim to enhance through research and practice. As shown in this theme, the song *Mugariro* is rich in meaning in which when latently analysed can effectively suit to the aims and goals of social work as a profession.

Ukama (relatedness) and the animals

The song *Mugariro* extends the desire to live well to our 'cousins' the animals. Ephant sings, '*kana mhuka dzinoda mugariro wakadiniko pasi pano?*' translated to mean 'even animals desire which way of living'. The response, '*mugariro wakanaka*' to signify 'a good way of living'. The song mentions that even ants and birds need a good way of living on this planet. Emphasis is given that all creatures require a good way of living on the planet Earth. Furthermore, the song gives reference to '*pasi pano*' which can be translated to mean this 'land' or this 'Earth' signifying a clear reflection to ecology. As aforementioned, in environmental ethics, the concept of *ukama* or Ubuntu connects relationships between people as well as relationships between people, the environment, inclusive of animals (Le Grange, 2012). Ubuntu calls us to consider the planet Earth as a member of the community mainly because the planet is a divine being with whom we have a reciprocal relationship, and that we were made from the planet (Van Breda, 2019). The idea of being related to animals is reinforced by African use of totems that reflect respect for animals and the environment (Chigangaidze, 2022a). A clan can be given a totem in relation to the animal which they should cherish and value to prevent the animal's extinction from the planet. In extending to the desire of animals to have a good way of life, the song *Mugariro* clearly positions animals as our relatives, our cousins and as beings that should be respected.

In social work, many indigenous communities view the land with familial reverence (such as Mother Earth, Pachamama) and describe the land as a relative (Billiot et al., 2019). Scholars of environmental social work emphasizes on the importance of privileging voices outside the dominant Western perspectives and voices of those who are not traditionally considered adept in addressing environmental and social inequalities (Teixeira et al., 2019). This paper has considered the voices of Ephant Mujuru a musician who sang about social life in Africa, particularly Zimbabwe. The song *Mugariro* corroborates the writings of Chigangaidze (2022b) that the Earth/Pachamama has rights because from an Afrocentric perspective, Mother Earth is our cousin. Indigenous knowledge systems such as those in the song *Mugariro* have a place in environmental social work theory and promote environmental wellbeing. Emphasizing the need for a good way of life for all creatures, *Mugariro* can be linked to the Sustainable Development Goals 14 (life below water) and 15 (life on the land). Social workers play a major role in the attainment of Sustainable Development Goals and enhancing the life (Rice, Fisher & Moore, 2022).

Ubuntu promotes the relationship between people and the non-humans, past generations, the present generation and the future. The African philosophy advances that the current generation should leave the land in a better form for the future generations (Van Breda, 2019). Emphasis is given in the song *Mugariro*, that animals and all creation require a good way of life on the planet earth. In relation to social work practice, practitioners have been encouraged to work in partnerships with other disciplines to safeguard the environment (Billiot et al., 2019; Boetto & Bell, 2015). There is a clear link on the lyrics of *Mugariro* and the promotion of environmental social work. The song *Mugariro* can be utilised to better understand and expand the ethos of environmental social work in Zimbabwe, especially among the Shona speaking people.

Global citizenship, Ubuntu and ukama

The song *Mugariro* continually refers to the planet Earth and the view that every person on the planet desire a good way of life. The phrase '*pasi pano*' which translates 'on Earth' or 'on this land' is frequently mentioned in the song. Emphasis is given that every person, animal or creation requires a good way of life on this planet Earth. Global citizenship as a concept recognises that the worldwide community of humanity is conscious of respecting every person on Earth (Attfield, 2018). The idea of global citizenship is to have that global mindfulness of how local societies and the global community are reciprocally linked for the enhancement of life in its totality. Global citizenship is underpinned on appreciating cultural diversity and recognising the interconnectedness of the relationships between people and their environment (Nussbaum, 1997; Ikeda, 2010). *Ukama* as a construct of Ubuntu emphasises on social solidarity, respect of all life, enhancement of life experiences and the promotion of cultural diversity (Chigangaidze, 2022a). The song *Mugariro* emphasizes on the view that everyone desires a good way of living on this planet, and this literally translates to the calls of global mindfulness which is a concept that is essential in global citizenship. Ubuntu philosophy connects the person (an individual) in a community set up and the broader creation. It encompasses issues of hospitality, empathy and social solidarity. In Ubuntu philosophy, it is important to welcome strangers and make them feel at home.

The contemporary world is fraught with challenges emerging from long history of colonisation and exploitation of one another and the planet (Clarke & Bird, 2021). Ubuntu has been utilised in international migration discourse as it denotes to brotherhood, neighbourliness, benevolence, human dignity, equal treatment and respect, human rights and tolerance towards outsiders (Caprari, 2019 cited in Murenje, 2020). Essentially, social work has advanced the theoretical frameworks of anti-oppression, anti-discrimination, promotion of human rights, global citizenship and International social work (Boetto & Bell, 2015; Jones & Truell, 2012). Social work as a global profession involves itself in global issues that affect all people including refugees and marginalised groups.

Anti-ageism

Ageism is usually associated with the unfair treatment of older adults, but it should be noted that the concept can be directed to any group of people, when age is taken as a major attitude-determining factor (Azulai, 2014). In the song *Mugariro*, emphasis is given that people of all ages desire a good way of life. Specifically, the song pinpoints out that '*chembere [female older adult], harahwa [male older adult], jaya [young male] and mhandara [young unmarried women who has never had sex]*' desire a good way of life on this planet. Thus, the song considers a wide range of age groups and indicates that people of every age desire a good way of life. The construct of *munhu wese* translated to mean *everyone* in this song can be explored through the category of age. The philosophy of Ubuntu respects the welfare of all age groups (Mugumbate & Nyanguru, 2013). *Ukama* cuts across all age groups and generations. The song advocates for equality and promotion of wellbeing in all ages. It is imperative to respect all life and all people regardless of age. The song assumes an anti-oppressive stance and includes people of all ages.

The COVID-19 pandemic presented as challenging to all age groups but particularly devastating to adults aged 65 and above due to ageism. It is crucial that social workers reflect on their attitude towards the aging (Azulai, 2014). There is need to promote gerontological social work and the infusion of aging throughout the social work curriculum (Berg-Weger & Schroepfer, 2020). Past studies have shown elements of ageism in social work practice in the health care. For example, social workers spending less time with elder oncology patients and more time with younger ones (Rohan et al., 1994). Ubuntu philosophy and *ukama* as shown in the song *Mugariro*, promotes equality of all ages which corresponds well with the United Kingdom's Equality Act of 2010 in which age is an important factor to equality. The Afrocentric way of thought as exhibited in the song *Mugariro* has had an anti-oppressive stance to fellowship which social workers can tap into as part of decolonial social work practice.

Spirituality

Ephat Mujuru and the Spirit of the People play *mbira dzevadzimu*. Matiure (2011) argue that *mbira dzevadzimu* is a musical instrument commonly associated with the Zezuru, a sub-ethnic group of the Shona of Zimbabwe and can ensnare the spirits in spirit mediums. *Mbira dzevadzimu* in its communities of origin has a collective, spiritual purpose, an enduring relevance, and rich lore (Tenzer, 2021; Garfias, 1979-1980). Spirituality is an important element in the philosophy of Ubuntu and relates to how the ancestors' impact on the lives of the present and future generations (Chigangaidze, 2022a; Van Breda, 2019). *Mugariro* is a song that connects the wishes of the ancestors to the current generations. The emphasis of *mbira dzevadzimu* is to tap into the wisdom of the ancestors, demonstrate the ancestral desires and instructions for people to live in harmony and have a good standard of life. Ukama acknowledges that people should live together in harmony with their forefathers, others and their Creator. Breed and Semanya (2015) accept that one of the interesting aspects of Ubuntu philosophy is that ancestors still form a part of the community. In social work theory and practice, spirituality is key in understanding the connection of humanity and earth through the concepts of Ecospiritual social work (Van Breda, 2019). Spirituality helps social workers think beyond the present and connects practice with the past and future generations. As aforementioned, if social work theory is to decolonize in Africa, social workers should appreciate African values and belief systems (Mabvurira, 2020). Hence, *Mugariro* is not just a social song that promotes peace but a spiritual instruction from the ancestors.

IMPLICATIONS

Inspired by decolonial social work approaches, this paper has qualitatively analysed *Mugariro*, a song by Ephat Mujuru and the Spirit of the People. Utilizing the African philosophy of Ubuntu and its construct of ukama, the paper explored the relevance of the song in social work theory and practice. *Mugariro* as an African song that depicts deep meanings of an African way of life, has a place in social work literature and can be utilised in localizing the ethos of social work profession in Africa, especially in Zimbabwe. If African social workers are to work towards decolonial social work, one method is to tap into the depictions of African songs that emphasize on the African way of life and integrating these with social work theories. This analysis has linked *Mugariro* to the concepts of global citizenships, human rights, rights of Mother Earth, relational-based social work, environmental social work, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and anti-discriminatory approaches to social work. African songs that exhibit an African way of life have a lot to offer in localizing social work in different parts of Africa. This paper is a call for social work educators to utilise local songs that promote cultural relevance and a good way of life in line with social work so that students can appreciate local knowledge.

CONCLUSION

Music is central to the African way of life mirroring societal experiences, emotions and desires. This article has qualitatively analysed *Mugariro*, a song by Ephat Mujuru and the Spirit of the People. Directed by the African philosophy of Ubuntu and the construct of Ukama, this article has explored themes such as a good way of life, Ukama (relatedness/ relationality), relationality to animals and all creation, global citizenship and spirituality. In addition, the paper has connected the song *Mugariro* to the ethos of social work practice such as enhancing life experiences and wellbeing, human rights, promoting the rights of nature, emphasis on relationships, environmental social work, sustainable development goals (SDGs) and anti-discriminatory approaches. There is rich content in the songs inspired by the African philosophy of Ubuntu and African social workers who are willing to localize social work practice can consider integrating the depictions of such music content in their approaches to social work. Decolonial social work is embedded on grounding theories and anchoring them on the voices of how non-academics view social life. Thus, this paper anchored social work theory on the voices of musicians who composed the song *Mugariro*. It is important for social workers to reflect on local voices, and these include Ubuntu-inspired music.

Notes

Mugariro (1994) Song by Ephat Mujuru and the Spirit of the People. Released in Zimbabwe. Genre: folk, world and country.

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