Ubuntu, Radical Hope, and an Onto-Epistemology of Conscience

Dalene M. Swanson

Abstract

Via the evocation of a lived narrative related to witnessing Middle Eastern refugees' attempts at entering into the European Union in September 2015, I draw connections between the political, ethical, spiritual and embodied, recognising their always-already be(com)ing enmeshed and relational. This narrative rendering enables an introduction to the African indigenous thought of Ubuntu. Ubuntu offers an ontological relationality of the human condition that brings into play the courage of radical hope and the hope of a more fully human existence, one that is more ethical and just than the globally-legitimised vulnerability and dehumanisation that the Middle Eastern 'refugees' struggling for safety and a viable existence are constituted within. Butler (2004, 20) reminds us that we are "constituted politically in part by virtue of the social vulnerability of our bodies", ones "attached to others", "at risk of losing those attachments", and in the sense of Ubuntu, thus also at risk of losing our humanity as a consequence. I argue that it is through these attachments, in the surface-to-surface embodiments of our souls, in our 'intersoular' states and Ubuntu ways of being and knowing, that we can find a radical, ethical and courageous hope in the onto-epistemology of conscience, and thus become human.

Keywords: Ubuntu; radical hope; onto-epistemology of conscience; refugees; intersoular embodiments

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Who counts as human? Whose lives count as lives?...And if we have lost, then it follows that we have had, we have desired and loved, that we have struggled to find the conditions of our desire....This means that each of us is constituted politically in part by virtue of the social vulnerability of our bodies – as a site of desire and physical vulnerability, as a site of a publicity at once assertive and exposed. Loss and vulnerability seem to follow from our being socially constituted bodies, attached to others, at risk of losing those attachments, exposed to others, at risk of violence by virtue of that exposure. (Judith Butler 2004, 20)

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Introduction: embodiment of crisis

A pair of worn and uncomfortable shoes lay on the platform of the train station in Vienna, abandoned as their owners had left in haste on a train bound for Munich. There were other objects too: a broken stroller, some torn cardigans, a broken backpack, and a few bags of leftover food. I had watched for the last hour as hundreds of Middle Eastern 'refugees' clambered onto trains bound for West Germany. I was to see even more desperate scenes in the Keleti train station in Budapest where thousands of people had been kept under the watchful eyes of the Hungarian police in a secured area on an underground platform: women, children, babies, men, young and old, all out of the sight of international tourists (Ben Brown, BBC News 4 September 2015). In early September, I attended the European Conference on Educational Research,(ECER 2015, in that city and

had travelled there via Vienna. After the conference, on my return journey to Vienna[92], the train came to an abrupt halt at Hegyeshalom on the Hungarian-Austria border. The Hungarian authorities decreed that no further trains were being allowed onwards into Austria as a consequence of the 'refugee crisis' (Nick Thorpe, BBC News 5 September 2015). Along with hundreds of refugees, I climbed from the train into the blazing sun and was herded by police over the tracks and across the border, with television cameras from stations across the world pointing their intrusive lenses into our faces. The refugees around me never flinched. They appeared to be now 'used to' this invasiveness. A young woman was walking beside me. She was with what appeared to be her partner, who was carrying their baby of around 3 months old. Perhaps recognising the signifiers that constituted me as a 'Westerner', since, for one, I was trailing luggage, she tapped me lightly on the arm and asked me, "Excuse me, do you perhaps know where they are taking us?" But at that moment, a policeman[93] separated me from the crowd, and when I turned my head back, the woman had disappeared. …

Her face and her question still haunt me…[94]

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[92] I had booked air and rail travel to the ECER conference in Budapest many months prior to the refugee crisis. My travels coincided with a significant increase in refugees attempting to cross into Schengen zone EU countries where Hungary became a focal point to this crisis.

[93] The Hungarian policeman could not speak English, and being unable to communicate with each other, he was unable to tell me at the time where the Hungarian police were directing the refugees. I later found out that the refugees were made to walk a number of kilometres in the heat to a 'processing centre' set up by the Austrian army, security services and Red Cross, where they were 'documented' and offered food, medical assistance and other facilities. I saw the army tents and make-shift processing centre when I travelled past this location using local ground transport on my way to Vienna.

[94] I am fully aware of the ethical conundrum faced in the privileged context of my encounter with this unfolding refugee situation. I acknowledge that there was a significant power relations differential between myself as someone privileged by being able to work, travel freely and reside in an EU country and those constructed by hegemonic discourses as 'refugees'. Here, the refugees are rendered stateless and subaltern others (Spivak 1988), living in conditions of severe precarity, decitizenised (Abdi and Shultz 2008) as a consequence of the deleterious situation beyond their control in the Middle East. The Middle Eastern countries from which many refugees originate have been turned into fragile states (David 1997; Price 2001) as a consequence of ongoing Western imperialism and 'hostile international environments' (David 1997) that have catalysed aproliferation of often internal sectarian, ethnic and ideo-theo-political conflicts in the region.

I am also aware that I inadvertently may be reinforcing the constructed othering of 'refugees' and contributing to the discourses of 'the refugee other', even as I attempt to speak to undoing the structural violence (Galtung

Spectres of the soul

Judith Butler (2004, 20) reminds us that loss and vulnerability come from the *textu(r)ality* of our flesh, of our being socially constituted bodies, not only through our constructed subjectivities as a *textual* condition. The textural in the textual cannot be fleshed apart. It is in our embodied and material encounters with others that we suffer loss and risk both vulnerability and violence. It is this soulful, embodied encounter with the other that makes us culpable, vulnerable, complicit, and responsible to. It is in the precise condition of our relationality with others that serves, in Derrida's (1994) terms, to haunt us and our good intentions (Swanson 2007a, 2009). It is in the consequences of the encounter as an activity, an event, or a practice, of what we decide or do not decide, of what we do or do not do, that enables or delimits the vulnerability and violence to others. This folding in, this intricately imbricated relationship and duo-ontology with the other, this multiple-ontology with diverse others, makes us both vulnerable and human together in an entanglement of embodiments and soulful bodies.

The Middle Eastern woman, whose name I yet do not know, will be writ on the spirit of my body always, calling me to attention by tapping lightly on me, and as I am marked as a Westerner in a situation that is always-already political and in which I, in my humanity with

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1969) that has constituted refugees in these terms. As Spivak (1988) notes, part of the problem lies with 'speaking for' and 'speaking about' the subaltern, rather than the subaltern speaking for themselves. I acknowledge here, that in this academic context, I may be reinscribing the power differential by speaking about and for the refugee at this moment. My intention, however, remains the counter-hegemonic purpose of drawing attention to the constructed injustice rather than an investment in its continuation. Further, language is never neutral or ethically 'pure' and one cannot stand outside of that with which one attempts to critically and ethically engage, thus one always-already reinscribes the conditions one attempts to thwart. However, disengagement is in itself a political stance, and does not side-step the ethical conundrum of 'to write' or 'not to write'. I therefore choose, from a standpoint of my own social justice commitments, to engage with 'the controversial', even as I acknowledge my always-already embodied complicity in the complex systems of power and their human and ecological effects for which all of humanity are invested, albeit differentially and on various scales. I also recognise that, given the problem of vantage point, such interpretive expression can only ever be contingent and partial.

I have written reflexively on these invested, embodied, ethical conundrums and their systemic interconnectedness with complex global ecologies of power. I have provided reflexive narrative engagement through my conceptual construct of 'moments of articulation' in developing a critical research methodology I refer to as 'critical rhizomatic narrative' (Swanson 2004, 2007b, 2007c, 2008, 2009).

others, am also by implication culpable as such Westerner, I am called to account and to respond. I am thus reminded (Butler 2004, 20): "Each of us is constituted politically in part by virtue of the social vulnerability of our bodies – as a site of desire and physical vulnerability, as a site of a publicity at once assertive and exposed". Being caught up for a few intense moments in an embodied mangle of the practiced political[95], I can only glimpse very briefly into the experience of the Middle Eastern refugees and gain a partial insight into the extent of their vulnerability, as intrusive, phallic camera lenses are thrust in our faces. The consumption of the refugees' pain, vulnerability and suffering is metaphorically evident in the photographic materiality of the camera lenses, as a form of weaponry to enable the perpetration of symbolic violence (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992) against the 'refugee other', drawing in the image to be projected by the also always-already politically complicit television bulbs behind the sheen of the screen[96]. The resonance in shape and form of the broadcast media's protruding lenses and the rifles carried by the police and army personnel monitoring and herding the refugees is profound. The violence (Arendt 1958; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992; Butler 2004, 2009; Galtung 1969) against the vulnerable takes many a similar shape, mode and form.

The Middle Eastern woman and all those, either fleeing or who cannot flee, symbolically carry with them the courage of hope(lessness), the hope(lessness) of courage. Between the powerful political elite, and others who in their presumption of privilege have turned a blind eye on the ever-deepening injustice, are the wistful, incorporeal vestiges of those 250 000 Middle Eastern souls that have not made it this far, that have loved and lost or loved and

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[95] Drawing on Andrew Pickering's 'mangle of practice' (1995).

[96] It is to be noted that much televised focus (and breaking news items) was, and still is, given over to the Middle Eastern refugee crisis, most especially in Europe, which has witnessed the highest impact. These news items through their force and distribution have often reinforced the constitutive othering of the Middle Eastern refugee, and have arguably contributed to the anti-migrant rhetoric, keeping in place the supremacy of Western Enlightenment presumptions of the Middle Eastern 'barbarian' or 'savage' (Said 1979). The heightened islamophobia in certain quarters across Europe and elsewhere have at their roots these Enlightenment presumptions of Eurocentred superiority.

been lost.[97] Encircling, are all those that have not been seen or heard by the megaphone of the 'hyper-Real', who have not been available in the flesh here, this day, in this intensity of the political moment, for the consumption of their pain.

It is in this critical interstice where the ethical, the human, the corporeal, and the spirit(ual) come together in an intersubjective entanglement of investments that are implicated and have implication in ways of being and knowing. It is also within this liminality that alternative or indigenous thought, such as that of the African onto-epistemology of *Ubuntu* (see Ramose 2002a, 2002b, 2002c; Swanson 2007b, Tutu 1999), offers an opening into affirming an ethical way of being in the world – one which is at once embodied and spiritual. It is also one which invests in hope, which is borne of great courage and even greater ethical and politico-spiritual commitment. It is not a utopian hope, but a radical hope of authentic alternative and possibility (Swanson, 2015). Here, the body, the soul, and the ethical are enmeshed.

Embodiments of the soul

Michel Serres (2008) argues for the senses and the body in its fullest capacities and texturalities to be the site of the soul, that the soul is intricately embedded within the flesh and that the flesh is the realisation of the soul. Brown (2011), in describing the value of Serres's work, reminds us that for Serres, the self is on the surface, on the skin, sensual and sensory. The spirit of the self is not only part of some internal recesses, hidden away within the body. Serres (2008, 26) notes:

> *I caress your skin, I kiss your mouth. Who, I? Who, you? When I touch my hand with my lips, I feel the soul like a ball passing from one side to the other of the point of contact, the soul quickens when faced with such unpredictability.*

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[97] Besides the more than 250 000 Syrians who have perished in the Syrian conflict thus far, mostly civilians, (Aljazeera August 2015) and many Middle Eastern refugees have drowned at sea attempting to cross on rickety boats to reach the safety of Europe.

For Serres, to know is not to slather off the body from the mind and situate that Cartesian knowing within the mind (Swanson 2007c), but to embrace the active/actioning/enacting body in order to understand, and to know more fully (Brown 2011). For Serres, it is through embodied activity and sensory perception that we come to know, through the scent of a blooming plant, the texture of the soil, the touch of another's skin. It is by being engaged in such activities that one can feel where the soul lies. In the bursting into being through the embodied soul, we come to a presence of knowing. In this way, the Middle Eastern woman's light tapping on my arm calls me to attention, and in this moment and this action, the symbolic potential for an intersubjective soulfulness is called forth and inter-bodily revealed. It is in such a moment where the perceptual and sensory effect and force of the world blends with one's own, not only in some deep recess that we are interconnected, but we are in touch and in tune with each other - even if only fleetingly - in this countenancing of each other, in the very lightest of touches. It is an inter-ontological encountering that is surface to surface, human to human, evoked through the environmental context in which that encounter manifests and reveals, and is, I believe, always-already political as a consequence. As Brown (Ibid., 24) reminds us, for Serres, it is on this local, "surface soul" that "the multiple rainbow-coloured, slowly-changing light plays". The cognitive and the embodied, the affect and the effect, lie together, quivering with knowing and feeling. They lie in the poetics of the embodied encounter and the political recognition, a small, infinitesimal 'political' in a human touch, in the circumstance, in the rush of blood to the heart, the brain, the neurons, and the skin that is a response to another's vulnerability, and in the infinitely political haunting that follows. It is here where a trans-political knowing plays, as with Serres's rainbow-coloured light. It is this situated inter-embodied encounter that harkens an affective intersubjective knowing. It is where the situated, the embodied, and the political each come together. As Serres (Ibid., 80) notes:

Knowing things requires one first of all to place oneself between them. Not only in front in order to see them, but in the midst of their mixture, on the paths that unite them … Touching is situated between, the skin is the place where exchanges are

made, the body traces the knotted, bound, folded, complex path, between the things to be known.

It is in this complex path, between things, and in the inter-embodied understandings, that we also realise our complicit politicalness as be(com)ings.

At the same time as my encounter with the Middle Eastern woman in Hegyeshalom, Kingsley and Diab (4 September 2015) published an account in *The Guardian* of Syrian refugees' decisions on taking to sea in order to find a route to Europe. It includes an account of the select number of items they carry with them in such a desperate situation, leaving behind their lives, histories, heritage, and possessions in order to do so. Their interview with refugee, Abu Jana, reveals the courage of hopelessness that attends his decision to chance a treacherous crossing by boat with his family. As Kingsley and Diab write the following, they incorporate Abu Jana's expressions of his lived experience:

"I don't think the rescue mission has any effect on my decision or others' decision to go by sea," says Abu Jana, a pseudonym that means 'father of Jana'. "Because at the very core of the decision to go there is risk. So the decision to go by boat won't be changed for let's say a 10% increase in risk."

His recent life explains why he is so desperate. He left his job as an officer in the Syrian army after witnessing a state-led massacre in the early months of Syria's 2011 uprising. The decision makes him a wanted man in Syria, so he can't return. Nor can he get a passport from the Syrian embassy in Cairo.

That means he can neither travel legally, nor find work in Egypt, or enroll at a university. It also means he can't get a proper rental contract. Many other Syrians are in similar positions in Egypt: if they've received documents known as "yellow

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cards" from the UN's refugee agency, then the Syrian embassy refuses to renew their passports.

But Abu Jana's plight is even more severe than most. It's left not just him in a bureaucratic no man's land – but his two young daughters too. With no valid paperwork himself, he cannot get them a birth certificate, so legally they don't exist and when the time comes, they will find it hard to enrol at school.

"For all these reasons, I decided to leave," he says. *"I want to go by sea."* **And he reckons many other Syrians in Egypt will be of a similar mentality**. *"Let me tell you something,"* Abu Jana says. *"Even if there was a [European] decision to drown the migrant boats, there will still be people going by boat because the individual considers himself dead already. Right now Syrians consider themselves dead. Maybe not physically, but psychologically and socially [a Syrian] is a destroyed human being, he's reached the point of death. So I don't think that even if they decided to bomb migrant boats it would change peoples' decision to go."*

In Kingsley and Diab's account, in Abu Jana's testimony to already being metaphorically dead, he structures an embodied relationship with those in a position to respond ethically that would afford him life. This structuring proceeds his situation as it is one in which he is historically, circumstantially, by being Syrian in these contemporary times, constituted. By not responding with ethicality and compassion, the indifferent, more privileged citizen continues to render him and his family effectively dead, which contributes itself to the heightened chance of their drowning as they cross the sea in an attempt to reach Europe, and in this sense the indifferent privileged citizen is complicit – complicit in (in)difference. When the geopolitics of national identity takes precedence over humanity and principles of human decency, then it can be argued that Abu is rendered a ghost, and in the inter-embodied relations 'we', as collective representatives of indifference, become the dead flesh of Abu in this surface-to-surface 'intersoular' relationship. Since the relationship is

devoid of a metaphorically living soul, we therefore interlocute with ghosts and spectres of failed possibility (Derrida 1994), which is also the failure of a collective human ethic. The failure has embodied consequences, and the implications for the embodied soul, greater than metaphorical death, for it constitutes our collective souls as always-already dead. The response to a call to an ethic of care is an investment in life.

My encounter with the woman from the Middle East was an 'intersoular' witnessing, a shared human-to-human exchange that forever binds us and, in particular, one which always-already tied me ethically as a Westerner to her plight and to that (in)finite moment as invested in its full ramifications of the political. The short-lived moment as she disappeared into the crowd and my lost chance to answer and respond to her need, metaphorically highlights the impossibility and untenability of the wider political context – one arguably unable to provide the opportunity for ethical resolution. From a Spivakian hyper-self-reflexive position (Kapoor 2004), as a Westerner currently living within the geographical boundaries that mark the limits of an historical imaginary invested in European Enlightenment that produces an inferior non-European, oriental other (Said 1979; Spivak 1988, 1990), it is a context fraught with a dangerously anti-refugee mongering. The coincidence, the lost opportunity, the democratic weakness of the historical moment to afford any transformative political options, and the embodied semiotics of our situated encounter positioned as we were as differentially-constructed subjects of the colonial condition, all meshed together in that circumstance to invoke metaphorical ghosts. These ghosts mark the absences of presence (Derrida 1994), and consequently the loss of possibility along with a dehumanisation, not only of 'the other' but of ourselves. For we, as humanity, are never fully present to ourselves. We instead carry the absences of those presences and live with ancestral ghosts that take up the shadows of who we are (Swanson 2007a, 2009), for it is in our relationality to others that these shadows become manifested. It is in this sense of the diminishment of self being tied to the diminishment of the other that the African humanist philosophy of Ubuntu (Ramose 2002a, 2002b, 2002c; Tutu 1999; Swanson 2007b) is tied. The self gains its humanity through honouring the humanity in others. Without this wider commitment to an ethic of care for the other, we cannot

consider ourselves human. In this sense, the collectivist humanist philosophy of Ubuntu doesn't depend on a coherent, stable, singular notion of self, but on an onto-epistemological relationship of transcendent humanity that is at once defining of what it means to be human, but also is at the root of self-reflective and self-reflexive consciousness and a sense of committed conscience.

Western thought is invested in a pre-eminent belief in an individual self, resonant with what Mannheim (2000) might have referred to as Enlightenment 'individualistic liberalism'. Here, a notion of the self as one which is fully and coherently human and potentially autonomous is reflected in Jacque Derrida's thinking. Derrida speaks of a notion of singularity, which rests on an aloneness and a uniqueness of the individual self in his/her response to an other or set of others. Derrida notes: "as soon as I enter into a relation with the other, with the gaze, look, command, or call of the other, I know that I can respond only by sacrificing ethics, that is, by sacrificing whatever obliges me to respond, in the same way, in the same instant, to all the others (Derrida 1995, 68.). In this Derridean singularity, we can witness and recognise human suffering, one which is often avoided. In recognising one's responsibility to other human suffering, there is a sacrificing that arises – tied to death and finitude, for Derrida, one which leaves us as being entirely alone. For Derrida, this responsibility is about being isolated and caught up in one's own singularity at the very moment we respond to the call from the other. Oppositely, it can be argued that in much African indigenous thought (Ramose 2002a, 2002b, 2002c; Swanson 2007b; Tutu 1999), such as that of Ubuntu, this call from the other and one's response in recognition to one's sense of responsibility for the other is one which transcends a perceived singularity invested in the individual self and a notion of sacrificial choice. This is not an investment with the other as premised on sacrifice necessarily, but one which makes one more fully human. It is more of a gain, not a loss, even if that gain is abstractly spiritual in nature. The embodied soul is more fully human in its ontological relationship with the souls of others. While on the one hand it is a humbling of the self, what I have previously referred to as a 'humbling togetherness' (Swanson 2007b), and in that sense, a diminishment of an overly bloated choice-imbued conception of 'I', it is also at once an enriching of one's humanity by being

with and for the humanity of others. I offer some discussion and deeper definitions in the following section.

Ubuntu – a Southern African indigenous humanism

A Southern African indigenous philosophy and way of being that has had some recognition from more critical standpoints in the possibilities it holds for viable alternatives to the global conditions of world capitalism, modernism and global inequality, to a world in greater touch with itself, is that of *Ubuntu* (Ramose 2002a, 2002b, 2002c; Swanson 2007b, 2015a, 2015b; Tutu 1999). Commensurate with the rise in global, economic and ecological crises over the last few decades, much indigenous thought has come to offer a third space (Bhabha 2004) in providing other possibilities than the current societal paradigms and hegemonies of being. Ubuntu philosophy, with its emphasis on a social African humanism and spiritual way of collective being, provides the possibilities for replacing, reinventing and reimagining alternatives to the current destructive path of increasing global injustice, as it also offers opportunities to decolonise discourses of otherness and individualistic Western/ European Enlightenment thinking that has, in some instances, led us to this place (Said 1979; Spivak 1988; Bhabba 1994). The project needs to go further than mere decolonisation however. In the wake of global capitalism's common sense mechanisms that render other options irrational, unviable or irrelevant, it is often a difficult task to assert alternatives in the spaces left behind. It is insufficient to decolonise these discourses in themselves. It needs to go further than mere decolonising, but instead to a principle of indigenising so that previously silenced voices from below, from that of the local, from non-Western perspectives, from alternative and more ethical philosophical positions, may effect democratic change. While other forms of indigenous thought and philosophy have resonance with Ubuntu or might also offer important contributions (Asante 1987; Bell 2002; Masolo 2002; Nkrumah 1996; Nyerere 1968; Oruka 1990; Ramose 2002a, 2002b, 2002c; Senghor 1961; Serequeberhan 1991; Wright and Abdi 2012), these Ubuntu and related African indigenous forms and their distinctiveness in focusing on an ethics of collective care away from more individualistic interpretations is what gives them an important place in the decolonising project (Swanson 2015a, 2015b).

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Ubuntu is short for an isiXhosa proverb in Southern Africa. It comes from the phase, *Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*, a person is a person through their relationship to others. Ubuntu is recognized as the African philosophy of humanism, linking the individual to the collective through 'brotherhood' or 'sisterhood'. It makes a fundamental contribution to indigenous 'ways of knowing and being'. With differing historical emphasis and (re)contextualisation over time and place, it is considered a spiritual way of being in the broader socio-political context of Southern Africa. This approach is not only an expression of a spiritual philosophy in its theological and theoretical sense, but as an expression of the quotidian. In this sense, it is a way of knowing that fosters a journey towards 'becoming human' (Vanier 1998) or 'which renders us human' (Tutu 1999), or, in its collectivist sense, a greater humanity that transcends alterity of any form (Swanson 2015a, 2015b, 2007b).

Nobel Prize laureate, Archbishop Desmond Mpilo Tutu, who, in 1995, became the chairman of post-apartheid South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, was a strong advocate of the philosophy and spiritual power of Ubuntu in the recovery of "truth" through narratives of atrocities from the apartheid era. He also viewed it as necessary in the more important and subsequent processes of forgiveness, reconciliation, transcendence and healing that arise through the cathartic process of truth-telling. In this sense, the extension of notions of 'truth' in respect of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's mandate exceeded a forensic notion of 'truth-finding' to include three others of truth-seeking that encompassed personal or narrative truth, social or dialogic truth, and healing or restorative truth (Marx 2002, 51). A sense of African epistemology resounds through these postulations of 'truth' in their formulation and exposition. As a philosophical thread of African epistemology, Ubuntu focuses on human relations, attending to the moral and spiritual consciousness of what it means to be human and to be in relationship with an-Other. This is voiced in the (TRC) Commission's announcement that "It shift the primary focus of crime from the breaking of laws or offences against a faceless state to a perception of crime as violations against human beings, as injury or wrong done to another person" (in Marx 2002, 51). Again, the TRC's imperative of truth-seeking is underscored by a conception of African

epistemology and Ubuntu in its incorporation of personal or narrative truth, social or dialogic truth, and healing or restorative truth (Marx 2002; Swanson 2015a, 2015b, 2007b).

As I have grown to understand the concept as a lived expression of growing up in South Africa, Ubuntu is borne out of the philosophy that community strength comes of community support, and that dignity and identity are achieved through mutualism, empathy, generosity and community commitment. The adage that 'it takes a village to raise a child' is aligned with the spirit and intent of Ubuntu. Just as apartheid threatened to erode this traditional African way of being – although in some instances it ironically strengthened it through galvanising collectivist support and creating solidarity amongst the oppressed - so increasing industrialisation, urbanisation and globalisation, threatens to do the same. These are some of the discourses in which global citizenship gets caught up, inadvertently advancing these modes of colonisation rather than resisting them. The appropriation of African knowledge and cultures is part of the globalising project while genuflecting to its inclusion. Nevertheless, disregarding their viable contribution to the wellbeing of local communities in Africa as well as to a world in various forms of social and ecological crisis is shortsighted. Generally accepted, African ways of knowing tend to be enacted and conceptualised as circular, organic and collectivist, rather than linear, unitised, materialistic and individualistic, as is often attributed to Western perspectives. Traditional African thought in its various enacted forms is said to seek interpretation, expression, understanding, and moral and social harmony, rather than being preoccupied with verification, rationalism, prediction and control, as reified through Western Scientific norms (Asante 1987; Bell 2002; Watkins 1993). In this sense, and most often vocalised in resistance to colonising capitalism, a more communalist / communitarian philosophy and way of being has been espoused as appropriately in alignment with African worldviews and ways of being (Bell 2002; Nkrumah 1966; Nyerere 1968; Oruka 1990; Senghor 1961; Serequeberhan 1991; Tutu 1999). However, this has not been without troubling a notion of 'community' in the African sense in a global modernistic context, at least for some (Masolo 2002). Within such a collectivist philosophy, the affective, relational and moral philosophical tenets are fore-fronted and, in

the context of post-colonisation, the source of much African epistemological self-consciousness (Swanson 2015a, 2015b, 2007b).

Ubuntu undoubtedly emphasises responsibilities and obligations towards a collective wellbeing. On a global scale, greater co-operation and mutual understanding is necessary to a sustainable future for all with respect to the ecological, moral and social well-being of its global citizens, human and otherwise. Ubuntu provides legitimising spaces for transcendence of injustice and a more democratic, egalitarian and ethical engagement of human beings in relationship with each other. In this sense, Ubuntu offers hope and possibility in its contribution to human rights, not only in the Southern African context, but also across the globe. In support of this assertion, I note the words on human rights of Tim Murithi, Programme Officer at the United Nations Institute for Training and Research. In writing on a culturally inclusive notion of human rights and its implications for a new international charter, Murithi (2004, 15) draws on the philosophical underpinnings of Ubuntu towards this end. He says:

The moment perhaps has come then where new life can be given to the global campaign for human rights by reformulating the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In particular, together with a re-emphasis of the provisions relating to social and economic justice, which have been virtually neglected for the last 52 years, it is necessary to re-articulate our aspirations to human rights much more in the language of obligations, which in turn would then infer an unambiguous call to action. In essence, a re-articulation of human rights from an Ubuntu perspective adds value to the human rights movement by placing more of an emphasis on the obligations that we have towards the 'other.'

It is in this investment with a 'collectivist human rights' ethic, informed by Ubuntu philosophy, that I now return to the narrative of the Middle Eastern woman refugee. It is

here where the embodied and the spiritual meet the ethical and hopeful, in a call for postcolonial justice. It is here where ways of being and knowing might inform a politics of conscience that would open up politico-embodied and spiritual alternatives to global injustices of the kind witnessed in the Middle Eastern wars and refugee crisis.

Radical hope and an onto-epistemology of conscience

I return to the Middle Eastern refugee and her question asking where her and her family might be taken. I think of how she feels that I might know how to provide her with an informed answer. Being a Westerner, I may in her mind have privileged access to such knowledge, where she in her decitizenised status (Abdi and Shultz 2008) would most likely be denied, rendered through the Western orientalising gaze (Said 1979) as an 'inconvenience' to the EU political authorities. Her life and respect of that life, in Butlerian (2004) terms, is not a grievable one, at least to some degree. She is, for Butler, exposed through her vulnerability. In recapitulation: "Loss and vulnerability seem to follow from our being socially constituted bodies, attached to others, at risk of losing those attachments, exposed to others, at risk of violence by virtue of that exposure" (Ibid. 2004, 20). I think of her seeming capitulation to her own lack of control over her life and that of her family's. I think of the normalisation of this differential relation of power within the West premised on a general conception of one-to-another's relative humanity as construed by a conception of the nation state. In accordance with the postcolonial condition, the nation state remains one of the most powerful constitutive forces of identity construction and of the constitution of ideals on human rights (Abdi and Shultz 2008; Kapur 2006). If you are a Syrian refugee in this historical moment, then it is conceived as being acceptable that you are in a state of precarity and that your safety is at the behest of another more powerful, principally Western and European nation state within which the right to protection within that nation state as a citizen is enshrined[98]. You are not an equal to the European citizen, you are always-ever a guest, and your rights and humanity is constantly displaced (both figuratively

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[98] While this is not exclusive to the European context, it is the most pertinent, as it is mostly to Europe that the refugees in fragile states such as Syria, Libya and Iraq seek to come. In places such as Turkey, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia, internal ethnic and sectarian differences often prove significant obstacles and treatment of refugees of particular ethnic origin has often been suspect.

and literally). You exist within a mediated relation to a margin, one where the investment in physical borders becomes an investment in the geography of the body. Who you are, where you are, what nation state you belong to, and what historical moment you live in each decides your rights and thus also your humanity. You would need to ask where the more powerful 'they' are taking you to. Here the embodied soul is a soul of the political, and the ethics of the human is political. In this way, Ubuntu philosophy is an African humanism that offers political possibilities. It has a capacity for decolonising a normative condition of state-legitimised dehumanisation. It offers a politics for an ethics of care.

Jonathan Lear (2006) argues that radical hope is more than mere optimism. It is a manifestation of courage, but consequently also of human excellence. Judith Butler asks who counts as human, and whose lives count. Ubuntu offers an ontological relationality of the human condition that brings into play the courage of a radical hope and the hope of a more fully human existence, one more ethical and just than the globally-legitimised vulnerability and dehumanisation that the Middle Eastern refugees struggling for safety and a more viable existence are constituted within. This is a dehumanisation that they endure, but which diminishes the humanity of all of us. Butler (2004, 20) reminds us that we are "constituted politically in part by virtue of the social vulnerability of our bodies", ones "attached to others", "at risk of losing those attachments", and in the sense of Ubuntu, thus also at risk of losing our humanity as a consequence. For it is through these attachments, in the surface-to-surface embodiments of our souls, in our 'intersoular' states and Ubuntu ways of being and knowing, that we can find a radical hope in the onto-epistemology of conscience, and thus become human.

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