Can the philosophy of *Ubuntu* contribute to healing of nature, self and society?

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Abstract

The erosion of the three interlocking dimensions of nature, social and self is the consequence of what Felix Guattari referred to as integrated world capitalism (IWC). In South Africa the erosion of nature, social and self is also the consequence of centuries of colonialism and decades of apartheid. In this paper I wish to explore how the African philosophy of Ubuntu (humanness), which appears to be anthropocentric, might be invoked to contribute to the healing of the three ecologies – how healing of the social might transversally effect healing of nature and the self. My theoretical exploration has relevance to education in South Africa given that national curriculum policy mandates that indigenous knowledge systems form part of the discursive terrains of all school learning areas/subjects

Introduction

Post-apartheid curriculum policy in South Africa mandates that both indigenous knowledge and environmental concerns be integrated into all school learning areas/subjects[i]. One of the principles on which the National Curriculum Statement (NCS) for Further Education and Training (FET) is based is: "valuing indigenous knowledge systems" (DoE 2003:4). Another principle is: "human rights, inclusivity, environmental and social justice" (DoE 2003:4). The former principle is elaborated as follows: "Indigenous knowledge systems in the South African context refer to a body of knowledge embedded in African philosophical thinking and social practices that have evolved over thousands of years". Furthermore, the ten values[ii] identified in South Africa's *Manifesto on Values, Education and Democracy* (DoE 2001) are purported to find expression in both the GET and FET curriculum statements. One of the ten values is Ubuntu[iii] (human dignity). Evidently, African philosophical thinking generally, and Ubuntu more specifically, are central features of post-apartheid curriculum frameworks. The inclusion of values such as Ubuntu is intended to restore through education values that have become eroded as a consequence of centuries of colonialism and decades of apartheid.

The struggle to have environmental education infused into the formal curriculum of South African schools has been a long one. As a consequence of the efforts on the part of both civil society and government, environmental concerns have been integrated into post-apartheid curriculum statements for all school learning areas/subjects. As mentioned, one of the principles underpinning the post-apartheid curriculum focuses on the importance of environment. Moreover, one of the critical cross-field outcomes also places emphasis on environment. Both of these are derived from the South African constitution. Informed by these principles and their embedded values the vision of the South African learner is captured as follows:

> The kind of learner that is envisaged is one who will be inspired by these values, and who will act in the interests of a society based on respect for democracy, equality, human dignity, life and social justice. The curriculum seeks to create a lifelong learner who is confident and independent, literate, numerate, multi-skilled, compassionate, with respect for the environment and the ability to participate in society as a critical and active citizen (DoE 2002).

The curriculum principle that embodies environment, frames it anthropocentric terms – it refers to a healthy environment (presumably for humans) and is associated with constructs such as human rights and social justice (which are decidedly anthropocentric). However, environment in the assessment standards[1] of several learning areas largely makes reference to the biophysical dimension (that is, non-human nature) (for detail see Le Grange 2010).

My interest in this paper is to explore the nexus of Ubuntu and environment (in this context, non-human nature). Specifically, I wish to examine whether Ubuntu could contribute to caring for environment or whether it militates against such an interest given that some, such Enslin and Hortsthemke (2004:25), have argued that by definition Ubuntu is speciesist. In my exploration I shall draw of Guattari's notion of three ecologies so as to provide a more nuanced understanding of Ubuntu. I divide the paper into three main sections: first I discuss Guattari's three ecologies; second I show how colonialism and apartheid contributed to the erosion of the three interlocking dimensions of environment in (South) Africa; third I discuss the notion of Ubuntu as a concrete expression of Ukama and how these notions relate to Guattari's three ecological registers; fourth I share some thoughts on ubuntu and education.

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[1] In the South African education system assessment standards are grade specific vehicles of knowledge, skills and values through which the learning outcomes are to be achieved.

Guattari's ecosophy

In his book, *The Three Ecologies*, Guattari argues that capitalism has expanded to a globalised form which he calls Integrated World Capitalism (IWC). For him, the symptoms of increasing domination of IWC is evident in the sufferings of three interlocking elements/domains of self, society and nature - the suffering of the earth is evident in the suffering of self, society and nature. Guattari (2001:27) writes:

> The earth is undergoing a period of intense techno-scientific transformations. If no remedy is found, the ecological disequilibrium this has generated will ultimately threaten the continuation of life on the planet's surface. Alongside these upheavals, human modes of life, both individual and collective, are progressively deteriorating. Kingship networks tend to be reduced to the bear minimum; domestic life is being poisoned by gangrene of mass-media consumption; family and married life are frequently 'ossified' by a sort of standardization of behaviour; neighbourhood relations are generally reduced to their meanest expression…. It is the relationship between subjectivity and its exteriority – be it social, animal, vegetable or Cosmic – that is compromised in this way, in a sort of general movement of implosion and regressive infantilization.

Guattari emphasizes that IWC is not only engaged in the destruction of the planet's biophysical base and the erosion of social relations, but also engaged "in a far more insidious and invisible penetration of people's attitudes, sensibility and minds" (Pindar & Sutton, 2001:6). Guattari refers here to the homogenizing effects of IWC's ideological arm (the mass media) which is producing a human subjectivity which is domesticated, that is, passive, dull and boring. The mass media is IWC's most powerful non-violent weapon for achieving social control across the globe. As Pindar & Sutton (2001:6) point out: "…everyone nowadays has a television set. Many people in the Third World will have televisions long before they have proper irrigation." One effect of the mass media is the erosion of human subjectivity in all its uniqueness – a notion that Guattari calls "singularization" (Guattari, 2001:33). What is occurring is a process of desingularization resulting in the normalization of subjectivity. For Guattari singularity is threatened in a similar way to species of plants and animals that are endangered. Desingularization does not, however, mean that individuals are passively shaped by IWC and its technological arm, the media. Put differently, desingularization does not simply concern the passive shaping of "people's attitudes, sensibility and minds" through

socialization, but rather that IWC and the dominance of the mass media limits the discourses available to them.

Guattari (2001:27) argues that political groupings and those in authority appear not to understand the full implications of the state of the planet since they remain content at offering technocratic solutions to problems such as industrial pollution. He argues that clarity on issues of suffering in the three ecological registers (the environment, social relations and human subjectivity) might only be gained through an ethico-political articulation, which he calls *ecosophy*. For Guattari, ecosophy shares with traditional ecology a concern for biological species and the biosphere, but also recognizes that 'incorporeal species' are equally endangered and that an entire 'mental ecology' is in crisis. Key for Guattari is that the three ecological registers are inextricably bound up with one another.

Guattari (2001:41) points out that the breakdown of human relations with the socius, the psyche and the biophysical world is due not only to what he calls, "objective pollution", but also the result of a fatalistic passivity towards these issues by both individuals and institutions such as governments. Moreover, he argues, that it would be wrong to distinguish between action on the psyche, socius and biophysical, but that the erosion of these three interrelated domains should instead be understood as a process of desingularization – the neutralization of democracy. Guattari argues that nature cannot be separated from culture and that we need to think transversely if we are to comprehend the interactions between the three ecological registers. He writes:

> Just as monstrous and mutant algae invade the lagoon of Venice, so our television screens are populated, saturated, by 'degenerate' images and statements. In the field of social ecology, men like Donald Trump are permitted to proliferate freely, like another species of algae, taking over entire districts of New York and Atlantic City; he 'redevelops' by raising rents, thereby driving out tens of thousands of poor families, most of whom are condemned to homelessness, becoming the equivalent of dead fish of environmental ecology (p.43).

For Guattari the three ecological registers originate from a common ethico-aesthetic discipline and that the forces which act upon them are similar. However, they are distinct from the point of view of the practices that characterizes them – the different styles that produce the three ecologies he calls *heterogenesis* (Guattari 2001:69). Heterogenesis involves processes of

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continuous (re)singularization, that is, a "singuralization of subjectivity as opposed to a transcendent, universalizing and reductionist homogenization" (Guattari 2001:90). Furthermore, he points out that whilst large institutions such as that of the State operate by homogenizing (macropolitical consensus) they could also be simultaneously "defeated by heterogeneous formations whose singularity cannot be represented (micropolitical dissensus)" (Guattari 2001:90).

In summary, Guattari, suggests that through transverse thinking interactions between the three ecologies may be understood – that suffering in one particular domain is reflected transversely with suffering in the other domains. Moreover, that (re)conquest in one domain serves as a catalyst for conquests in the other domains. But, such conquests are not to be achieved through consensus but rather through dissensus, through the exercise of creative autonomy, leading to "a gradual reforging and renewal of humanity's confidence in itself starting at the most miniscule level" (Guattari 2001:69). The power of the miniscule or singular event has been documented in the field of physics as early as the 19th century and evidenced by Maxwell's words:

> the system has a quantity of potential energy, which is capable of being transformed into motion, but which cannot begin to be so transformed till the system has reached a certain configuration, to attain which requires *an expenditure of work*, which in certain cases may be infinitesimally small, and in general bears no definite proportion to the energy developed in consequence thereof. For example, a rock loosed by frost and balanced on a singular point of the mountain-side, the little spark which kindles the great forest, the little word which sets the world a-fighting, the little scruple which prevents a man from doing his will, the little spore which blights all the potatoes, the little gemmule which makes us philosophers or idiots. Every existence above a certain rank has its singular points: the higher the rank, the more of them. At these points, influences whose physical magnitude is too small to be taken account of by a finite being, may produce results of the greatest importance. All great results produced by human endeavour depend on taking advantage of these singular points when they occur (quoted in Pindar and Sutton 2001:11).

(South) Africa's suffering in the three ecologies
The interchangeable lenses of Guattari's three ecologies are useful for apprehending Africa's suffering generally and suffering in South Africa more specifically. Africa's suffering is

evident in Guattari's ecological domains of self, society and nature. The degradation of the natural environment is evident in staggering statistics provided in the Geo-2000 report. For example:

- An estimated 500 million hectares of land have been affected by soil degradation since about 1950, including as much as 65 per cent of agricultural land
- Africa lost 39 million hectares of tropical forest during the 1980s, and another 10 million by 1995.
- Fourteen countries are subject to water stress or water scarcity, and a further 11 will join them in 2025 (UNEP 2000).

With respect to South Africa, Bond and Hallowes (2002) show how the environment has suffered because of apartheid-capitalism. Evidence of this include: the maldistribution of water; pollution of water sources; structural damage to water ecosystems; oversupply of coal generated electricity; inefficiency in energy use due to apartheid geographical segregation and urban sprawl; overgrazing and inefficient farming methods on peripheral land, leading to soil erosion, desertification and degradation wetlands, and so on (for detail see Bond and Hallowes 2002: 35-46). Furthermore, Khan (2004:15) points out that during apartheid black South Africans became alienated from conservation matters because they perceived it as elitist and marginal to their struggle for survival. Environmental degradation is likely to continue in South Africa because of macro-economic unresponsiveness. As Bond and Hallowes write:

Post-apartheid macroeconomic policy, as spelt out in the Growth, Employment and Redistribution (Gear) strategy, contains just one token mention of 'environment responsibility' in the attraction of new foreign investments, but no provisions to reverse any structural economic features associated with the legacy [of apartheid-capitalism].

In the social domain we have witnessed the break down of kinship networks and associated cultural values such as *ubuntu*[2]. In Africa there are high incidences of civil wars, genocide,

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[2] *Ubuntu* is an African word comprising one of the core elements of a human being. The African word for human being is *umuntu* which is constituted by the following: *umzimba* (body, form, flesh); *umoya* (breath, air, life); *umphefumela* (shadow, spirit, soul); *amandla* (vitality, strength, energy); *inhliziyo* (heart, centre of emotions); *umqondo* (head, brain, intellect), *ulwimi* (language, speaking) and *ubuntu* (humanness) (Le Roux 2000: 43). The humanness referred to here finds expression in a communal context rather than the individualism prevalent in many Western societies (Venter 2004: 151). Battle (1996:99) presents the concept *Ubuntu* as a concept that originates from the Xhosa expression: *Umuntu ngumuntu ngabanye Bantu.* "Not an easily translatable Xhosa

dictatorships and autocratic rule that are connected to human suffering. Chinweizu (1987:3) points out that through cultural assimilation programmes of Arabs and Europeans, Africans have become severed from their ancestral traditions and alienated from their "natural"[3] African identity. A South African neatly captures her alienation from her cultural traditions:

> (A)lthough I am an indigenous Xhosa scholar, versed in our traditions, in many ways I am a beginner in tuning into and drawing on indigenous educational philosophies because I have been schooled in Eurocentric epistemologies. Thus living within, beside and in the face of European tradition makes opportunities for a fully indigenous, cultural, personal, social and spiritual life a daily struggle against the framework of Eurocentric dominance (Goduka 1999:27-28).

Environmental degradation and the erosion of human solidarities have produced unprecedented levels of poverty in Africa, to the extent that it is predicted that Africa is the only continent that is expected to experience a rise in poverty levels this century (UNEP 2000). Of course, not all of Africa's suffering is the consequence of colonialism, however, much of its geopolitical, socio-economic and environmental development have been shaped by the colonization of the region and its subsequent partition in 1885 among several European countries (UNEP 2000). In South Africa, social relations continue to be impacted negatively as a consequence of gross racial, gender and class inequalities that are legacies of apartheid-capitalism.

But, the self has also suffered as a consequence of colonization. I refer here not only to material suffering, but mental suffering – what wa Thiong'o (1986) and Chinweizu (1987) refer to as the colonization of the mind and the need for its decolonization. Chinweizu (1997:2) draws on Shakepeare's *The Tempest* and in particular his parable on colonialism, referring to Prospero (ruler of the island), who upon return to his own country handed power over of his colony to Ariel, "his obedient native auxiliary, but not to Caliban who had fought against his rule". Chinweizu (1997:9) suggests that decolonizing of minds might be viewed as a battle between the Ariel and Caliban tendencies within each (South) African since no African who has lived in the last 100 years has escaped the taint of the colonial experience. This notion is, perhaps, evident in Goduka's words, quoted earlier.

concept, generally, this proverbial expression means that each individual's humanity is ideally expressed in relationship with others and, in turn, individuality is truly expressed.
[3] I use scare quotation marks here because identity is imagined/constructed rather than natural

Ukama, Ubuntu and the three ecologies

From the discussion so far it is evident that the three ecologies are closely interrelated, that is, that they need to be understood transversely. Guattari's lens helps us in understanding that suffering in one ecological domain, as a consequence of colonialism and apartheid-capitalism (in South Africa's case), will also manifest in suffering in the other two ecologies. A reverse inference would be that healing in one domain might transversely effect healing in the other two ecological registers. It is in this context that I would like to assess Ubuntu's potential to effect healing in the three ecologies.

As mentioned, *Ubuntu* originates from the Xhosa expression, *umuntu ngumuntu ngabanye Bantu*. There are similar proverbial expressions in Zulu, Sotho, Tswana and other African languages. Though not easily translatable, the proverb means that each individual's humanity is ideally expressed in relationship with others and, in turn, that individuality is truly expressed. In Shona there is a broader concept *Ukama* which means relatedness – relatedness to the entire cosmos. Murowe (2009:316) argues that *Ubuntu* (humanness) is the concrete form of *Ukama* (relatedness) in the sense that "human interrelationship within society is a microcosm of the relationality within the universe".

Murove (2009:316) points out that etymologically *Ukama* is an adjective constructed U-kama – U- is an adjectival prefix and -kama and adjectival stem. *Kama* is a verb meaning to milk a cow or goat, and in Shona the idea of milking suggests closeness and affection. Furthermore, those that are related by blood or marriage are *hama* which is a noun (Dale 1994:127). However, in Shona and many other African languages the meaning of Ukama is not restricted to marital and blood ties (Murove 2009:316). The meaning of Ukama extends to ties with all people, not only with present generations but also with past and future generations. Gelfand (1973) notes that the concept of 'brotherhood' (humanhood), and inseparable oneness with the ancestors, are brought about through ritual practices of the Shona religion. He points out that Ukama is an articulation of anamnestic solidarity because a person 'owes his (sic) personality and character to his *mudzimu* (ancestor) (Gelfand 1981:8). The immortality of values through anamnesis is neatly captured by Bujo (2001: 34-35):

> African ethics are articulated in the framework of anamnesis, which involves remembering one's ancestors. A narrative community, fellowship here on earth renews the existence of the community of the ancestors. This establishing (poeisis) in turn

implies the praxis which efficiently continues the remembrance of the ancestors and gives dynamism to the earthly fellowship. Consequently, ethical behaviour in the Black African context always involves re-establishing the presence of one's ancestors; for one who takes the anamnesis seriously is challenged to confront the ethical rules drawn by the ancestors, in order to actualise anew the 'protological foundational act' which first called the clan (sic) fellowship into life.

Murove (2009:319) adds that through anamnesis, "human actions are sensitised to all dimensions of existence – past, present and future" and that "the connecting thread in all three dimensions of existence is the moral values that have been inherited, treasured and passed on to future generations". In short, the concept Ukama embodies an inseparable oneness between past, present and future generations. But, Ukama also means humanity's relatedness to the the natural (biophysical) world, which is advanced through totemic ancestorhood. Junod (1939:112), who conducted ethnological studies of baPedi aptly notes:

Totemism shows well one characteristic of the Bantu mind: the strong tendency to give a human soul to animals, to plants, to nature as such, a tendency which is at the very root of the most beautiful blossoms of poetry, a feeling that there is a community of substance between various forms of life

It is against this backdrop that Murove's (2009:317) assertion that, "Ukama provides the ethical anchorage for human social, spiritual and ecological togetherness", might be understood. I would add that Ukama is a term that encapsulates Guattari's three ecological registers, and more. Put differently, suffering witnessed in the three ecologies is essentially an erosion/breaking of Ukama. Moreover, that the idea of oneness of humans with nature expressed in Arne Naess's (1973) deep ecology, and the notion of wholeness of the earth expressed in James Lovelock's gainism (1995) have resided among African people for many centuries through notions such as Ukama. Also, the erosion of Ukama might be understood as a consequence of several forces including, modern science and technology (Beck 1992), colonial-capitalism (Murove 2009), enlightenment humanism (Biesta 2006), the Judeo-Christian faith (White 1977), apartheid-capitalism (in South Africa's case) (Murove 2009), and more recently, integrated world capitalism (Guattari 2001).

As noted Ubuntu (humanness) is a concrete expression of Ukama, that is, humanness needs to be understood relationally. In other words, humanness is an expression of interconnectness

between people and between people and the biophysical world. Moreover, humanness is not humanism and is in fact antithetical to it. As Ramose (2009) writes:

> Humanness suggests both a condition of being and the state of becoming, of openness or ceaseless unfolding. It is thus opposed to any, '-ism', including humanism, for this tends to suggest a condition of finality, a closedness or a kind of absolute either incapable of, or resistant to, any further movement.

Humanness is therefore inextricably bound up in the human being's connectedness with other human beings and with an ever changing and complex (biophysical) world. In other words, Ubuntu involves 'coming into presence' (Biesta 2006:9) of self in a changing social and biophysical world. The sense of wholeness and interconnectedness of self with the social and natural by implication means that caring for others also involves a duty to care for nature. Ubuntu, therefore is not by definition speciesist as Enslin and Hortshemke (2004:) suggest, but is rather an ecosophy that connects the self, social and nature (the three ecologies). Cultivating Ubuntu, by definition involves healing of self, social and nature.

Hortshemke and Enslin (2005:67) are suspicious of the claim made by, for example, Ramose (2002:230) that a kind of philosophical affinity and kinship exists among indigenous people of Africa – in other words, they are critical of Ubuntu as an existential reality. They argue that Ubuntu, "appears to be contradicted or at least weakened by the staggering incidence of genocide, patriarchy, dictatorships and autocratic rule, corruption, sexism (and practices of genital excision), heterosexism and homophobia, and environmental degradation (and connected with this, human suffering) on the continent of Africa" (Hortshemke and Enslin 2005:67) . All of these are indeed challenges Africa faces, and they are very serious ones. However, the presence of these challenges do not negate Ubuntu, but is rather indicative of the destruction/erosion of Ubuntu as a consequence of colonialism, modern science and technology, enlightenment humanism, apartheid-capitalism and so on. Also, the presence of atrocities in some parts of Africa does not mean that Ubuntu as a value does not reside among at least some of Africa's people and also does not negate the existence of such as value among African people prior to colonialism. But, let me by way of one example, illustrate why I disagree with the argument that Hortshemke and Enslin (2005) present. The incidence of genocide is not a uniquely African problem, but rather indicative of the crisis of humanism (i.e. the Enlightenment idea of what it means to be human). The problem with humanism is that is focuses on the on the essence or nature of the human being and not on what Heidegger

referred to as the being of the human being (the existential being). When what is human is defined then it becomes possible to define the other as non-human or less human. Levinas (1990) argues that the crisis of humanism began with inhuman events in recent history:

> The 1914 War, the Russian Revolution refuting itself in Stalinism, fascism, Hitlerism, the 1939-45 War, atomic bombings, genocide and uninterrupted war … a science that calculates the real without thinking it, a liberal politics and administration that suppresses neither exploitation nor war … socialism that gets entangled in bureaucracy (p.279).

The holocaust, apartheid, genocides in Bosnia, Rwanda and Cambodia forcefully remind us of the effects of humanism. But let us look more closely at the genocide in Rwanda. The Rwanda genocide can be traced back to colonial perceptions of the Tutsi, Hutu and Twa as being three distinctive tribes, a perception beginning with Nile explorer, John Hanning Speke, who developed a theory of 'conquest of inferior by superior tribes (for detail see Weldon 2009). Missionaries and respected anthropologists gave credence to these theories and the Tutsi, for example, were described as having Caucasian skulls and closer to the white man than the negro – the Huta, therefore defined as other and inferior (Weldon 2009:186). These ethnic differences were further entrenched during the Belgian colonial period and it is against this background that the Rwandian genocide needs to be understood.

It is important though to note that Ubuntu is not an entirely unique concept and that there might be similar concepts in other contexts. As Ramphele (quoted by Enslin & Horsthemke 2004: 24) writes: "*Ubuntu* as a philosophical approach to social relationships must stand alongside other approaches and be judged on the value it can add to better human relations in our complex society." My argument is that because it does reside among at least some Africans and because it has become part of the conversations of many South Africans it could (and should) be harnessed and restored as an ecophilosophy that can contribute to greater environmental consciousness on the part of (South) Africans and so that it can add value to existing approaches to address environmental problems.

Furthermore, I wish to note that a call for the restoration of Ubuntu does not suggest turning back the clock, a return to 'old' ways of living, but rather harnessing Ubuntu to create new ways of living in contemporary (South) Africa. Guattari (2001) argues that we cannot create new ways of living by reversing technological advancement and go back to old formulas,

which were pertinent when the planet was less densely populated and when social relations were much stronger than they are today. But, new ways of living are to be found in responding to events (associated with IWC) as potential carriers of new possibilities. As Pindar and Sutton (2001:9) write:

> It isn't a question of exchanging one model or way of life for another, but of responding to the event as the potential bearer of new constellations of Universes of reference. The paradox is this: although these Universes are not pre-established reference points or models, with their discovery one realizes they were always already there, but only a singular event could activate them.

Guattari further argues that IWC pervades contemporary social life and is delocalized and deterritorialized to the extent that it is impossible to locate the source of its power. Efforts to create new ways of living might therefore been viewed as processes of reterritorialization, that is, reclaiming the local and also the uniqueness of individuals and institutions such as schools, municipalities and so on. The resingularization referred to here might result in individuals and institutions that are paradoxically more united and increasingly different. Processes of resingularization through an expanded view of ecological niche (Guattari's ecosophy) promise to produce understandings which could enrich and transform our sense of ourselves and our relationship to the planet. Ubuntu can inform such an expanded view of ecological niche.

Some thoughts on ubuntu and education

The inclusion of indigenous knowledge/African values in post-apartheid curriculum framework sees the null curriculum becoming the explicit curriculum or a blind spot becoming a blank spot. Wagner (1993) argues that *blank spots* are what scientists know enough about to question but do not answer, and *blind spots* are what they don't know enough about or care about. The reality that ubuntu is now at least part of the conversations of South Africans, including classroom conversations makes it possible to harness it in developing an ethics of care, not just for one another but for nature too.

Education is in part aimed at 'cultivating humanity' (Nussbaum 1997) – not only affirming humanness but cultivating it (making us more human). Ubuntu helps us to appreciate that to be human means to care for self, the other and nature – that the self is inextricably bound up in relations with the other and the biophysical world. The mainstreaming (its inclusion in

formal school curricula) of Ubuntu makes it possible to affirm the socio-cultural frameworks of (South) Africans learners - frameworks that have been denigrated over more than 300 years. The inclusion of Ubuntu in the school national curriculum affirms the dignity of all South Africans, serving as the basis for an ethics of care for environment. Guattari helps us to understand the interrelatedness of the three ecologies and that change gets transversely effected – change in one of the dimensions could serve as a catalyst for change in the other dimensions. In multicultural contexts, the conversations (including classrooms ones) are not meant to be easy but are rather complicated ones – that restoring confidence in humanity requires disagreement/dissensus. And, moreover, that the miniscule level (for example, the micro-level of classroom interactions) where the flame could get ignited that can set the world alight – make it a better place.

Furthermore, Ubuntu's anti-humanism and its idea of becoming (unfolding) resonates very strongly with Biesta's (2006) notion of education as 'coming into presence'. Biesta (2006:9) provides an alternative to the Enlightenment understanding of education which is based the idea that rational autonomous persons need to be produced. The educator in this instance takes on the role of midwife so as to release the rational potential of the human being. In contrast, his idea is not based on the educator producing or releasing anything, but that education "should focus on the ways in which the new beginning of each and every individual can come into presence" (Biesta 2006:9). He goes on to argue that this is not a version of child-centred pedagogy:

> (W)e can only come into presence in a world populated by others who are not like us. The "world," understood as a world of plurality and difference, is not only the necessary condition under which human beings can come into presence; it is at the very same time a troubling condition, one that makes education an inherently difficult process. The role of the educator … has to be understood in terms of a responsibility for the "coming into the world" of unique, singular beings, and a responsibility for the world as a world of plurality and difference (Biesta 2006:9).

Coming into presence as singular beings involves taking responsibility for the world, or as Arendt puts it, "to love the world enough to assume responsibility for it". Ubuntu is at the heart of such an idea of education because it concerns a condition of being, that becomes/unfolds in relationship with the other (other human beings and the biophysical world).

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[i] In the South African education system the term 'learning area' is used in the General Education and Training (GET) band and the term 'subject' in the Further Education and Training (FET) band.

[ii] The ten values in The Manifesto on Values, Education and Democracy are: Democracy, social justice and equity, non-racism and non-sexism, Ubuntu (human-dignity), an open society, accountability (responsibility), respect, the rule of law, reconciliation.

[iii] *Ubuntu* is an African word comprising one of the core elements of a human being. The African word for human being is *umuntu* which is constituted by the following: *umzimba* (body, form, flesh); *umoya* (breath, air, life); *umphefumela* (shadow, spirit, soul); *amandla* (vitality, strength, energy); *inhliziyo* (heart, centre of emotions); *umqondo* (head, brain, intellect), *ulwimi* (language, speaking) and *ubuntu* (humanness) (Le Roux 2000: 43). The humanness referred to here finds expression in a communal context rather than the individualism prevalent in many Western societies (Venter 2004: 151). Battle (1996:99) presents the concept *Ubuntu* as a concept that originates from the Xhosa expression: *Umuntu ngumuntu ngabanye Bantu.* "Not an easily translatable Xhosa concept, generally, this proverbial expression means that each individual's humanity is ideally expressed in relationship with others and, in turn, individuality is truly expressed.