JOHN SANNI

To Be Seen, or Not to Be Seen: Ubuntu and the Ethics of Migration

Abstract: The fear of trade-offs is a major concern when the challenges of migration are critically engaged. Who gets what, at the expense of whose works, what sacrifices have to be made, what do immigrants owe the host countries in terms of duties and obligations, and who is responsible for the lives of the immigrants? These, among many other questions, point to the complexities of migration ethics. This article defends the idea of being seen as an important ethical dimension of migration discourses. To be seen has often been considered and explored from the intellectual position of recognition, and, in some cases, misrecognition. More than these interpretations, there are ontological implications in the idea of being seen. This article harnesses various accounts of ubuntu in order to show what it means to be seen in sub-Saharan African societies. This will be followed by a philosophical exploration of the ethical implication of being seen for migration ethics. This article is novel in that it does not merely apply the idea of being seen to migration, but also interprets ubuntu as including the idea of being seen.

Keywords: *migration, ontology, ubuntu, misrecognition, African*

Introduction

Dispositions toward migration rest on a conceptual divide between the migrants and the hosts. Migrants in their various categories (i.e. economic migrants, refugees, social migrants, etc.) often fall within the conceptual category of strangeness, or better still, the unwanted Other. The formulation and legitimation of this conceptual divide can be traced, not only back to colonial history, but also to existing conceptions of strangeness and belonging, insider and outsider, and seen and unseen. These divisions have resulted in two analytical strands that favour national (statist) interest, on the one hand, and on the other hand, cosmopolitan arguments on migration. While these strands capture the practicality as opposed to the theoretical plausibility and historical justification of the discourses on migration, I consider it important to reconsider the theoretical plausibility of the migration discourses as they relate to ubuntu philosophy. In other words, I do not merely apply a philosophical framework in addressing the challenges that emerge in attempts to engage migration issues, I also seek to test the plausibility of ubuntu as a suitable philosophical theoretical tool for

addressing the challenges of migration. After establishing this theoretical framework, I will proceed to address how ubuntu philosophy justifies a conception of migration that promotes either being seen or not being seen.

My reference to ubuntu does not imply a nostalgic reference to the past, or an uncritical commitment to an African philosophical framework that is based on an understanding of a people's history or culture in a way that does not consider, or at least acknowledge, the existence of moral complexities and imperfect members of the social group. While complexity is an important part of African societies, I remain committed to the view that ubuntu philosophy provides a suitable moral framework for rethinking discourses on migration.

In what follows, I begin by critically engaging the historical origins of migration as it has come to be understood in contemporary discourses. Here, I will look at the epistemic rationale of European modernity, and how migration and colonialism were important parts of this modernity. Secondly, I highlight and present justifications for the two dominant trends in migration discourses, referring in particular to David Miller and Sarah Fine, who both represent the statist/non-relational and cosmopolitan/relational schools of thought. Thirdly, I refer to some dominant philosophical positions on ubuntu and propose a reconceptualization or emphasis that takes into consideration an understanding of ubuntu that promotes 'being seen' and justifies 'not being seen' as a necessary outcome of a pervasive disposition towards Others. Lastly, I advance an understanding of ubuntu, in relation to migration discourses, as seeing the Other.

European Modernity

Colonialism, especially the scramble for Africa, creation of colonies, and slavery, marks a pivotal point in the history of European modernity. This imperial history was influenced by a desire to colonise, impose worldviews and ultimately expand the ideological underpinnings of European modernity. These ideological world views include, but are not limited to, the conceptions of history, time, and spaces. These conceptions have bigger implications when one considers Achille Mbembe's notion of time, when he notes that 'Time is born out of the contingent, ambiguous, and contradictory relationship that we maintain with things, with the world, or with the body ...' (Mbembe, 2017:121). The European conception of time was justified, not only by the imposition of colonial worldviews, but also the erasure and rupture of existing conceptions of time within colonies. European modernity was driven by the desire to impose its world views by undermining and dismissing existing conceptions that potentially had the power to challenge its overall desires and goals. Europe's self-declaration as the 'centre' of a World History marks the appearance and inauguration of mo-

dernity, and the 'periphery' or 'margins' that surround this centre constitutes part of its self-definition (Dussel, 1993:65). This legitimised the use of force, and the imposition of imperial dehumanisation of African as a necessary tactic for affirming its super-humanisation. I draw from Freter's (2021: 2022) account of super-humanisation, by which he means the self-absorbed understanding of the West in ways that infra-humanises Africans. Infra-humanisation refers to '[...] a process by which people consider their ingroup as fully human and outgroups as less human and more animal-like' (Leyens et al, 2007:140). In other words, super-humanisation can also be understood as the West's commitment to retaining and sustaining its self-ascribed superiorisation in ways that delegitimise or undermine the humanity and realities of Others. Colonial modernity, and its intended universalising goal did not only lead to an arbitrary dismissal of existing worldviews that marked particular colonies in Africa, but also the infra-humanisation of Africans. Hafiz (2020:112) rightly observes that 'Western modernity sacrifices other times and their consequential needs/demands absolutely and indefinitely, according to a common-sense logic in the name of universal history, homogeneous time, and of Civilization's unfolding'. This aligns with not only the physical force that characterised slavery, but also with the ideological violence that was blind to the social, political and economic organisation that existed in African societies prior to colonial invasion, thus legitimising the imposition of colonial modernity in place of African socialisation.

Referring to the blindness that characterised colonial modernity, it is important to note that visibility and invisibility was a power that the colonisers assumed in their encounter with the colonised Other. In other words, the power to be 'seen' or 'not to be seen' was assumed by the colonisers, and this legitimised colonial power at the expense of the invisibility of the colonised Others. Race was an important aspect of the colonial gaze that locked the Other within the expectations of modernity's imperial frame '... of primordial nonmodern origins waiting to be brought up to the present despite her absolute Otherness' (Hafiz, 2020:112). As such, colonialism did not only provide the conditions for visibility and invisibility, it also set the standard for humanity *par excellence*. Imperial modernity still informs the realities of existing coloniality within African societies through various instances of systemic visibility and invisibility informed by gazes emerging from biased foundations that present obscure realities of the Other. As Mbembe puts it, 'The colonial gaze ... serves as the very veil that hides the truth' (Mbembe, 2017:111). These realities have become normalised and justified in the supposed post-colonial Africa under the guise of sovereignty, motivated by international law (see Achiume, 2019:1509). Cases of sovereignty that justify border control do not only reveal the fact that colonial invasion is

a structure and not an event (Wolfe, 2006), they also show the continuous attempt to justify colonial power of visibility and invisibility.

The realities of visibility and invisibility are also evident in the incoherence that scholars like Tendayi Achiume, who focus on migration from the 'Third World' to the 'First', identify in international law and refugee law on migration. Achiume appears to argue that the conditions informing rights of restrictions on state's right to exclude non-national economic migrants and include refugees whose lives are threatened are not only contradictory but also historically unjustifiable (2019:1519). Achiume's critique stems from what I have referred to thus far as conditions of visibility and account of invisibility that sees particular group of people, in this case 'economic migrant', '... as a moniker for a category of international migrant that national populations across the world view generally with suspicion, occasionally with pity, and increasingly with hostility' (2019:1512). This is further complicated by hideous, complex and prohibitive visa restrictions that do not apply to countries of the First World.

The restriction of non-nationals often hinges on an account of sovereign self-determination (Achiume, 2019) that legitimises the prohibition of supposed 'political strangers'. While there are varying levels of inclusion of non-national economic migrants, the exclusion of economic migrants, as Achiume rightly observes, is inconsistent, especially when compared with the inclusion of refugees. This is based on the argument that economic migrants are not driven by fear for their lives. Moreover, on account of historical injustice, Achiume argues that '... First World nation-states have no right to exclude Third World migrants, for reasons tied to the distributive and corrective justice implications of the legacies of colonialism' (2019:157). On account of historical invisibility, the unjust neglect of Third World counties' self-determination and the imposition of colonial modernity, there is need to consider collective self-determination because of the salient harm of colonialism that remains a structure through the subordination of the Third World. This self-determination sometimes takes the form of migration, which I now consider in the next section.

Migration Discourses

Dominant discourses on migration have often neglected the historical subordination of the Third World by the First as a starting point. The starting point on migration has often been guided by self-determination informed by non-relationality. In cases of relationality, historical subordination that justified various forms of exclusion, including the instrumentalization of Africans to advance colonial modernism, is not alluded to. In this section, I will unpack dominant trends in migration studies, and the various ways exclusion constitutes an im-

portant dimension of migration restrictions. I will focus mainly on David Miller, representing the statist school and Sarah Fine, representing the cosmopolitan trend. Where necessary, I will allude to other scholars.

Most theoretical frameworks on migration often view migration in relation to three important sub-themes: push factors, pull factors, and trade-offs. Push factors are based on the conditions that initiate a desire to leave a country, mostly one's country of origin. These factors could be social, economic, and/or political. Pull factors are the conditions that attract non-nationals to a particular country. Trade-offs are mostly in relation to pull factors and in some cases, they affect countries with many push factors. Trade-offs look at the actual or potential economic, social and political implications of having non-nationals in a particular country. The fear of severe trade-offs is the justification for some strict immigration policies. The self-preservation of host countries is a major factor when determining the conditions of restrictions or acceptance of immigrants. In other words, the push-factors of an immigrant must align with the conditions of self-preservation of the host country. Migration theorists' relational and nonrelational dispositions are often on account of the foundation that I have considered here.

Statist or nonrelational scholars of migration, like Miller, argue that host countries do not have moral obligations to admit immigrants, largely based on arguments emanating from self-preservation. Miller does not consider the various forms of migration; here I refer to 'regular migration' and 'irregular migration'. This distinction is very important. According to Tsion Abebe (2017: 2),

> 'Regular migration entails moving to another country after obtaining an official residence and/or work permit, which involves fulfilling the required procedures of the host country. Irregular migration implies moving to another country through unofficial means. Smugglers and traffickers play a major role in facilitating the journey of irregular migrants.'

These forms of migration often have effects on the host countries, and scholars like Miller are wary, not only about the negative implications of irregular migration, but also about the potential negative implications of regular migration on host countries. If one is to compare both forms of migration, it is plausible to argue that irregular migration has more negative implications to host countries than regular migration would have. This is because of obvious reasons, such as security, social, and economic, among other potential negative effects that undocumented migrations might have on host countries. The statist position could be interpreted, as Miller so clearly describes in his book, *Strangers in our Midst* (2016), as being the challenge is not merely or solely about the movement

of people from one country to another, but their activities and orientations and how these contribute to shape and adapt to the new space of the immigrates. For Miller, 'One way to answer the question is to say that the right to immigrants is fulfilled so long as the other human rights of the immigrants are protected in the society they enter' (Miller, 2016:14). He goes on to argue that the lack of willingness of host countries to trade off their rights for the rights of immigrants is a clear justification for closed borders (2016). Miller does, however, recognise the need to assist countries by providing resources and economic aid to help reduce the push factors.

The concerns and tensions highlighted by Miller contribute to the rise of new forms of self-determination, through categorisations and conceptions of othering, with identity distinctions between migrant and citizens, insider and outsider, and foreigners and residents, which have created a means to justify claims of space, strangeness, authority, residential superiority and migrants' inferiority, all contributing to the conditions of visibility and invisibility. The conditions of visibility legitimise the centre and justify the invisibility of the margins.

Scholars like Sarah Fine (2016) in her article, 'Immigration and Discrimination', Joseph Carens (2016) in his book *The Ethics of Immigration*, and Kieran Oberman's (2016) article, 'Immigration as a Human Right', among others, representing the cosmopolitan strand or relational theory of migration, contend that migration is a human right. In other words, they argue that the movement of people from one place to another for various reasons should be considered a human right. While cosmopolitan scholars are critical of Miller's statist position, their point of departure is not different in the sense of what they choose to consider and what not to consider. Like Miller, the cosmopolitan understanding and point of departure ignores the historical injustice and the conditions that justified epistemologies of visibility and invisibility that brought about the borders that now determined conditions of migration (Sanni, 2020). In spite of Fine's recognition of the racial foundation underlying social conception of exclusion when she notes that '[t]he racial category to which we are assigned (and with which we come to be identified) can and often does profoundly affect and frame our social and political lives. It configures our experiences in ways that serve to disadvantage some and advantage others' (Fine, 2016: 127). She engages the existence of racial exclusion as an ongoing reality, as opposed to tracing its foundation in colonial modernity. The conditions of exclusion or inclusion is not solely, as Fine claims, based on 'distinctions between people primarily based on beliefs about shared history and culture' (Fine, 2016: 128). The colonial infra-humanisation of Africans did not make a comparison of colonial cultures and African cultures in a way that revealed a distinction as a necessary

condition of colonial interaction. In other words, colonial modernity was not committed to identifying, accommodating and engaging with the distinctions in its encounter with Africa. Hence, the potential reality of invisibility from the gaze of the colonised other was not a fear the colonial modernity entertained.

Ubuntu and the Ontology of Visibility

The foundation of most social relational theories in African societies is informed by the ontology of visibility, and the conditions of invisibility often stem from individuals' commitment to the communal goals and rules that promote social cohesion. In this section, I focus mainly on ubuntu as an example of an African theoretical framework that prioritises visibility. The ubuntu communal framework stems from the imperative that a person is a person through other persons. As John Mbiti, among other scholars, put it, 'I am because we are and since we are, therefore I am' (Mbiti, 1969: 108–109). Mogobe Ramose also argues that 'Ubuntu [is] understood as be-ing human (human-ness); a humane, respectful and polite attitude towards others constitutes the core meaning of this aphorism' (Ramose, 1999: 37; see Molefe, 2019). This is similar to the position of scholars like Shutte (2001:22-23), who also note that,

> 'The self [is] something private, hidden within our bodies', in African settings, the self is outside the body, present and open to all. [It] is the result of the expression of all the forces acting upon us. It is not a thing, but the sum total of all the interacting forces. So, we must learn to see ourselves as outside, in our appearance, in our acts and relationships, and in the environment around us.'

For Shutte, the conception of the person is never hidden, in the sense that there is an emphasis on autonomy, in African societies. On the contrary, the self is always outside, revealed through relationality. Ramose (2005: 83-84) reiterates this point when he writes,

> 'Ubuntu is the root of African philosophy. The being of an African in the universe is inseparably anchored upon ubuntu. Similarly, the African tree of knowledge stems from ubuntu with which it is connected indivisibly. Ubuntu then is the wellspring flowing with African ontology and epistemology. If these latter are the bases of philosophy, then African philosophy has long been established through ubuntu. Our point of departure is that ubuntu may be seen as the basis of African philosophy. Apart from a linguistic analysis of ubuntu, a persuasive philosophical argument can be made that there is a "family atmosphere", that is, a kind of philosophical affinity and kinship among and between the indigenous people of Africa. No doubt there will be

variations within this broad philosophical 'family atmosphere'. But the blood circulating through the "family" members is the same in its basics. In this sense, ubuntu is the basis of African philosophy.'

Ramose identifies important aspects of ubuntu that highlight its ontological and epistemological foundation that is dominant, in diverse ways, among African societies. Ubuntu is the basis of relationality in most African society. The viability and plausibility of ubuntu, as presented by scholars like Ramose, has been questioned, especially as it pertains to its realisability in contemporary African societies is concerned. Matolino and Kwindingwi argue that 'ubuntu, as an ethical theory that is taken to be natural to the people of sub-Saharan Africa … can only be fully realised in a naturalistic and traditionalistic context of those people' (2013: 203). Prior to this, other scholars like Van Binsbegen (2001) and Richardson (2008) have criticised ubuntu for advancing conformity and denying humanity to non-autochthonous individuals within the community of persons. This argument stems from the complex conception of community in multicultural African society, and how this makes it irrational and uncharitable to impose a homogenous way of being.

The arguments by Van Binsbegen and Richardson, and later by Matolino and Kwindingwi, do not undermine the credibility of ubuntu as a moral theory of recognition that 'a person is a person through other persons' (Shutte 1993: 46). What their arguments do is to challenge ubuntu's viability in a multicultural African society. And in response to this, Matolino and Kwindingwi insist that ubuntu can only be fully realised in a naturalistic and traditionalistic context of the sub-Saharan people. In a multi-cultural society, and in relation to the conditions of visibility and invisibility, the implied question in the critique is that in a multi-cultural African society, can ubuntu's moral theory be considered a useful theory of visibility and invisibility? The assumption here is that there is a particular kind of gaze that informs ubuntu's ontological and epistemological stand point that could potentially alienate the Other.

Ubuntu: To be seen or not to be seen?

In light of the core ideas of ubuntu and the critiques, it is important to further unpack the conditions of visibility and invisibility in ubuntu theory, and how these inform the framing of ubuntu as a moral theory of visibility that is relevant for discourses on migration. Mbembe, while referring to Merleau-Ponty, observes that '… time emerges in the gaze directed toward oneself and toward the Other, the gaze that one casts on the world and the invisible. It emerges out of a certain presence of all these realities taken together' (Mbembe, 2017: 121). Mbembe's position speaks to the conditions of visibility in the sense that it often

arises from the social imaginary of a given people, and with ubuntu theory, the basic foundation is in the ubuntu maxim that advances the self-humanising as emerging from the humanising of other persons.

It is from the humanising of others that the moral dimension of ubuntu is revealed. This is why scholars like Menkiti (1984) maintain that personhood is a status that one could fail at. He further notes that the community is an integral part of individual personhood in the community (Menkiti, 1984: 174). By this, Menkiti suggests that the individual is always committed to the goal of the community. Pantaleon Iroegbu (2005: 442) also notes that the commitment to communal service and belonging are ends towards which members of the community must strive. Re-enforcing this position, Edwin Etieyibo (2014) and Thaddeus Metz (2022), among others, argue that the moral rightness or wrongness of an action hinges on whether it promotes human flourishing or not, in the sense that it upholds social structure and fosters smooth co-existence. Within African societies, the gaze at the Other, in the sense of individual commitment, is often weighed against the goal of the collective. Literature on ubuntu retains the insight that exclusion or marginality, in African societies, is justified as an affliction of social failure or refusal to show practical commitment to the collective goals.

The understanding of community is not an abstract entity without a face. On the contrary, and as already highlighted, the individuals constitute the communal. As rightly articulated by Kwame Gyekye (1987: 208),

> 'Communalism is the doctrine that the group constitutes the main focus of the lives of the individual members of that group, and that the extent of the individual's involvement in the interests, aspirations, and welfare of the group is the measure of that individual's worth. This philosophy is given institutional expression in the social structures of African societies.'

The role of the community is not to assume a privilege zone that bifurcates between the 'centre' and the 'margin' in such a way that "the very notion of centres is fundamentally predicated on the relational production of margins, borders, and zones of exclusion" (Cons and Sanyal, 2013: 7). Different from this, the role of the community is to advance goals that promote unity and collective purpose, well-being and aspirations. The gaze of the collective towards the individual is one that, in most cases, the individual permits as part of his/ her consent to communal goals. The role of the group in African consciousness, says Sono (1994: 7), could be

> 'overwhelming, totalistic, even totalitarian. Group psychology, though paro-

chially and narrowly based..., nonetheless pretends universality. This mentality, this psychology is stronger on belief than on reason; on sameness than on difference. Discursive rationality is overwhelmed by emotional identity, by the obsession to identify with, and by the longing to conform to. To agree is more important than to disagree; conformity is cherished more than innovation. Tradition is venerated, continuity revered, change feared and difference shunned. Heresies [i.e. the innovative creations of intellectual African individuals, or refusal to participate in communalism] are not tolerated in such communities.'

Sono's account of African consciousness offers some insights into group psychology as a major attribute of inclusivity in African societies. The commitment to tradition is seen here as a binding force for conformity, sameness, in ways that frown upon different. Sono's account is partially true, especially from a strict communitarian perspective, but is not the case when one considers the moderate communitarian account of relationality. Scholars like Matolino and Kwindingwi appear to emphasise the need to reconceptualise the gaze, understood as the ontological status of the Other, as that which can be seen as it is and not based on the subjective social reality that bifurcates according to the ontological standards of inferiority, by virtue of not belonging to a particular cultural group, and superiority, by virtue of belonging. This appears to be the critique of ubuntu that scholars like Matolino and Kwindingwi advance. They seem to imply that the negative bifurcation is inevitable in the adoption of ubuntu in a multicultural society. Thus, the argument is that ubuntu can only be fully realisable in a traditionalistic and naturalistic context.

If Matolino and Kwindingwi's position, among others, is true, then the conditions of visibility and invisibility within the ubuntu framework is not any different from the statist position, where the emphasis is to preserve the goals, identity, and aspirations of clusters of similar cultural groups, as opposed to a genuine openness to difference. Even in a multicultural society, the goal will be to identify and advance the familiar. This idea resonates with Barth's (1969) position when he notes in his work on ethnicity, that there is always a strong inclination within cultural or ethnic relations to identify the other that defines the self. While Barth considers the process of identifying the Other that defines the self an important form of dialogical co-authorship, it could also be the basis for defining the margins through exclusion and various forms of marginalisation. The core claim that can be deduced from Matolino and Kwindingwi's position is that since ubuntu as a relational theory is potentially exclusionary, its viability as a persuasive theory of relationality is contestable.

Attempting to resolve the potential pitfall of exclusivist tendencies in ubuntu, scholars redefined the conditions of visibility to mean '... affirm one's humanity by recognising the humanity of others in its infinite variety of content and form' (Van der Merwe, 1996:1). Other inclusivists' accounts argue that being an individual, by definition, means 'being-with-others'. 'With-others', as Macquarrie (1972: 104) rightly contends, '...is not added on to a pre-existent and self-sufficient being; rather, both this being (the self) and the others find themselves in a whole wherein they are already related'. And Ndaba (1994: 14) points out that

> 'the collective consciousness evident in the African culture does not mean that the African subject wallows in a formless, shapeless or rudimentary collectivity... [It] simply means that the African subjectivity develops and thrives in a relational setting provided by ongoing contact and interaction with others.'

The type of community that has been associated with ubuntu, thus far in the article, has generally been '... construed to mean that to be a human be-ing is to affirm one's humanity by recognising the humanity of others and, on that basis, establish humane relations with them' (Ramose, 1999: 37). It is important to notice the inclusion that Van der Merwe makes to the understanding of ubuntu when he notes that it entails '... the recognising of the humanity of others in its infinite variety of content and form' (1996: 1). Van der Merwe appears to challenge the conditions of visibility that is limiting to a particular form or content. Ramose's position stems from an ontological disposition of reciprocity to the other as the main condition for mutual recognition. The variety of content and form that Van der Merwe alludes to, one should say, must confirm and be committed to the primary condition that entails the recognition of the humanity of others, in a way that renders Others visible and recognised as part of the centre. The violation of this fundamental condition is a plausible justification for invisibility. It is safe to say that ubuntu advances visibility (being seen), and the conditions of invisibility stems from individuals' lack of reciprocity or charity towards communal goals. It is important to note here and to recall my earlier references to Etieyibo (2014) and Metz (2022), that the lack of reciprocity brings about invisibility in a community when an individual deliberately ignores or does not commit to the goals that constitute the fabric of harmonious living in the community. The conditions of invisibility could sometimes, especially in extreme case, lead to excommunication from the community.

Migration and the Ubuntu Ethics of Visibility

In this section, I explore the implications of an ubuntu ethics of visibility for theorising migration. The conditions for theorising visibility bear on the reality of invisibility in two ways: historically, through the impositions of colonial mo-

dernity, and systemic, through existing structures of invisibility. Hafiz (2020: 116) rightly observes that

> 'The imperial frame ... relies on the borders. It refers to a particular mode of seeing the world, self and other that reproduces the not-so-old construction of infrahumanity – that carceral spectrum of human value which arrived with the European Renaissance through to the Enlightenment and liberal modernity/coloniality – and its deep structural divisions, inequalities, and violence.'

The carceral spectrum that Hafiz alludes to originates from the totalisation of particular world views in a way that does not make these worldviews or realities visible. A reality that echoes the words of Ralph Ellison (1952) in his book *Invisible Man*, 'I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me... because of a peculiar disposition of the eyes of those with whom I come in contact. A matter of the construction of their inner eyes'. The implications and the construction of the gaze of colonial modernity still weigh heavily on Africa. As rightly observed by Mbembe (2017:1) 'Europe is no longer the center of gravity of the world. This is the significant event, the fundamental experience, of our era. And we are only just now beginning the work of measuring its implications and weighing its consequences'. While the validity of Mbembe's claim is contestable, especially as it pertains to Europe no longer being the centre of gravity, there is still a relentless commitment on the part of the West to hold the centre. As such, it is arguable to still attest to the fact that the residues of colonial modernity continue to contribute to the challenges in Africa today. These challenges contribute to the push factors that necessitate migration.

Discourses on migration that do not consider the injustice of invisibility brought about by colonial modernity contribute to the invisibility of the African other by taking on the seeing power to render visibility and invisibility to realities of a historically and systematically oppressed people. According to Achille Mbembe (2017: 111) '... the people who we choose to see or hear do not speak for themselves, but are spoken for, made intelligible in our language. Instantiated colonial power consists in having the power, the sovereign power, to see and not to see, and render invisible what one chooses not to see'. In addition, Mbembe also maintains '... that the impact of 'seeing power' is that the person we have chosen not [to] see and hear cannot exist or speak for themselves' (2017: 111). Even though Mbembe does not allude to the ethical framework of ubuntu, his position is relevant in the sense that it implicitly refers to it, especially when one thinks about the ethical underpinnings of ubuntu that are grounded on harmonious co-existence where the power to see or not to see is not limited to a group in ways that are detrimental to the collective. As I have already highlighted in an

inclusivist account of ubuntu, the condition for visibility is based on a commitment to collective flourishing. This is different from the Western gaze, where the conditions of exclusion or inclusion is often based on the seeing power of the one who speaks on behalf of Others who have been chosen to be or not to be seen or heard. This is what Muneeb Hafiz describes, in his article, 'Smashing the Imperial Frame: Race, Culture and (De)Coloniality', as 'non-human condition' (2020: 137). Referring to Fanon and W.E.B Du Bois, Mbembe concludes, '... the person dispossessed of the faculty to speak is constrained always to think of himself, if not as an "intruder," then at least as someone who can only ever appear in the social world as a "problem"' (Mbembe, 2017: 111). This dispossession of the faculty to speak must be understood in this context within the framework of invisibility and visibility that I have painted in this paper, and my use of Mbembe's work here is to emphasise how visibility, through the ability to speak, is important for harmonious flourishing in African communities in ways that bifurcate communities into centre and margins.

It is important to add that while the centre defines the margin through exclusion and various forms of marginalisation, the margins also define the centre. The margins define the centre through the ways they self-identify, struggle against, co-opt, strive for, and reject their marginal reality (Khalili, 2016; Mc-Nevin, 2011). In fact, the margins are everywhere, and they vary on the basis of the degree of marginality. According to Das (2004), the margin gives the centre power through its mystery and reification more than its desire for institutional and economic equity.

Theorisations on migration points to the fact that 'The Black Man [Woman] is a shadow at the heart of a commerce of the gaze' (Mbembe, 2017:111), an eternal problem, and an intruder. Colonial condition of visibility, as I have argued thus far, reveals that 'For the Black Man [and Woman] to be seen and for him to be identified as such, a veil must have already been placed over his face, making it a face "bereft of all humanity". Without this veil there is no Black Man [and Woman]' (Mbembe, 2017:111). The desire to be human has been a battle that the Third World has grappled with for decades. This battle continues in systemic ways through various contemporary forms of exclusion, marginalisation and biases that further infra-humanises Africans. The power of the colonial gaze consists fundamentally in the power and self-absorbed desire to see or not to see. This power is outward-looking and never inward-looking, because of the inextricable networks of meaning that are unique and that contribute to the social world view that justify and enclose the outward gaze (Mbembe, 2017: 11).

Ubuntu, especially the inclusivist kind, proposes an alternative to colonial mo-

dernity's and existing systemic conceptions of visibility and invisibility that is unique to both the statist and the cosmopolitan trends of migration. In light of the fact that the conditions of visibility and invisibility solicit judgment originating from the history and particular social reality, the ubuntu framework of relationality presents a double understanding of judgment that, while prioritising the community, considers the well-being of the individual who forms the community. This gaze is committed to seeing in a genuine way. The conditions of visibility or invisibility must be guided by a double introspection on the social realities of the personal and the foreign. This double introspection is lacking in statist and cosmopolitan accounts because they both ignore the social, political and economic effects of colonial modernity, and how they constitute the foundation of push-factors for migrants. Sono rightly observes that due to an extreme emphasis on community in African societies, ubuntu democracy risks being abused in a way that legitimises 'tyrannical custom', especially when presented in a form of 'totalitarian communalism', to 'frown upon elevating one beyond the community' (1994: xiii). Like every social relational framework, there are potential risks of misconduct, and that is what Sono alludes to. The nature of an inclusivist ubuntu is one that is committed to respect for human/individual rights and related values, and an honest respect for social and individual differences (Sindane, 1994: 7; Degenaar, 1996: 23). This inclusivist account of ubuntu opens up a new challenge to the conditions of relationality in the theorisation of ubuntu. This challenge advances an open disposition to the conception of identity and difference within ubuntu framework.

 The conditions of relationality must move away from 'forms of belonging rooted in narratives of blood and soil' (Hafiz, 2020: 118) to an alternative place of unity, a disposition towards migration must entail a commitment and concomitant disposition to multiplicity and diversity. This disposition also encompasses what Adolfo Albán Achinte's (2008: 85-6) embodied – 'the redefining and re-signifying of life in conditions of dignity'. The core of the argument I present here is that discourses on migration must engage historical instances of infra-humanisation and consider dignity, in various forms and conceptions, as the foundation of relationality. Ubuntu – understood as a framework of relationality driven by the fact that the *Other* is the generator of the Self and vice versa - presents a convincing point of departure for challenging absolutized conditions of relationality. As Fanon (2001: 54) would say, humanity can only be recovered by would-be postcolonial subjects through a new relation to the land that 'will bring [...] bread and, above all, dignity', but also, as Hafiz (2020: 129) argues, through 'an expanded notion of space which makes those attempts to construct impenetrable boundaries of culture and difference seem absurd'.

Discourses on migration must be deeply committed to critiquing narratives that promote infra-humanisation by expanding the conditions of invisibility without taking into account historical injustices and the systemic oppression in Third World countries.

Conclusion

Theorisations on migration – especially the ethics of migration – must be committed to "Smashing the imperial frame", as Hafiz contends; it requires advancing the cracks – those spaces for decolonization – that have long formed in it by reconceiving time, space, conditions of relationality, and self (Hafiz, 2020: 120). I have highlighted in this article that dominant theorisations on migration have been blind to the biases, and thus promote conditions, based on these biases, to further infra-humanise and undermine the history, especially the imposition of colonial modernity, that inform existing systemic conditions and realities of visibility and invisibility. Ubuntu, as I have argued, provides an alternative disposition to the conditions of visibility and invisibility. These conditions are grounded on relationality and collective well-being that cannot be undermined with egocentric goals. On account of historical invisibility, the ethics of migration needs to be reconceptualised to account for historical injustice that constitutes the imperial frame. Statist and cosmopolitan theorisations on migration are still victims of this imperial frame that does not only infra-humanise, but also conceives of the conditions of visibility and invisibility from a subjective, narrow, and totalising understanding of power informed by trade-offs that potentially threaten the West's place in the centre.

John S. Sanni
Senior Lecturer, Philosophy Department,
University of Pretoria, Pretoria, South Africa
Visiting Research Fellow, Centre for Interdisciplinary and Intercultural Studies, College of
Fellows, University of Tübingen, Tübingen, Germany
Email: john.sanni@up.ac.za

◎ the global justice network

References

Achiume T (2019) Migration as Decolonisation. Stanford Law Review. 71/6: 1509-1574.

Abebe TT (2017) Migration Policy Frameworks in Africa. Institute for Security Studies. Available at: https://issafrica.org/research/africa-report/migration-policy-frameworks-in-africa (Last accessed on: 10 July. 2024).

Barth F (1969) Ethnic Groups and Boundaries. The Social Organization of Culture Difference. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.

Boucher D (2022) Introduction: language and decoloniality in context. In: Boucher D (ed). Language, Culture and Decolonisation. Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers: 1-17.

Cons J and Sanyal R (2013) Geographies at the Margins: Borders in South Asia – an Introduction, Political Geography 35/7: 5–13.

Das V (2004) The Signature of the State: The Paradox of Illegibility. In: Das V and Poole D (eds) Anthropology on the Margins of the State. Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research Press: 3–35.

Degenaar J (1996) The Collapse of Unity. In: Du Toit CW (ed) New Modes of Thinking on the Eve of a New Century: South African Perspectives. Pretoria: UNISA Press: 5-27.

Dunne RJ (2005) Marginality: A Conceptual Extension. In: Dennis R. (ed.) Marginality, Power, and Social Structure. New York: Emerald Publishing: 11–28.

Dussel E (1993) Eurocentrism and Modernity (Introduction to the Frankfurt lectures). Boundary 2 20/3: 65–76.

Ellison R (1952) Invisible Man. New York: Random House.

Etieyibo E (2014) Post-Modern Thinking and African Philosophy. Filosofia Theoretica 3/1: 67–82.

Fanon F (2001) Wretched of the Earth. London: Penguin.

Freter B (2021) Decolonization of the West, Desuperiorisation of Thought, and Elative Ethics. In: Imafidon E (ed), Handbook of African Philosophy of Difference: The Othering of the Other. Springer: 1–24.

Freter B (2022) Decolonial Philosophical Praxis Exemplified Through Superiorist and Adseredative Understandings of Development. In: Chimakonam JO et

al. (eds), Essays in Contemporary Issues in African Philosophy. Springer: 209-226.

Gyekye K (1987) An essay on African Philosophical Thought. New York: Cambridge.

Hafiz M (2020) Smashing the Imperial Frame: Race, Culture, (De)coloniality. Theory, Culture and Society 37/1: 113-145.

Iroegbu P (2005) Beginning, Purpose and End of Life. In: Iroegbu P and Echekwube A (eds), Kpim of Morality Ethics. Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books: 440–5.

Khalili L (2016) The Politics of Pleasure: Promenading on the Corniche and Beachgoing. Environment and Planning D: Society and Space 34/4: 583–600.

Leyens JP et al. (2007) Infra☐humanization: The wall of group differences. Social Issues and Policy Review 1/1: 139–172.

Mbiti J (1969) African Religions and Philosophy. London: Heinemann.

Macquarrie J (1972) Existentialism. London: Penguin Books.

Matolino B and Kwindingwi W (2013) The End of Ubuntu. South African Journal of Philosophy 32/2: 197–205.

McNevin A (2011) Contesting Citizenship. New York: Columbia University Press.

Mbembe A (2017) Critique of Black Reason. Durham: Duke University Press.

Metz T (2022) A Relational Moral Theory: African Ethics in and Beyond the Continent. New York: Oxford University Press.

Molefe M (2019) An African Philosophy of Personhood, Morality, and Politics. Palgrave Macmillan.

Ndaba WJ (1994) Ubuntu in Comparison to Western Philosophies. Pretoria: Ubuntu School of Philosophy.

Oberman K (2016) Immigration as a Human Right. In: Fine S and Ypi L (eds). Migration in Political Theory: The Ethics of Movement and Membership. Oxford: Oxford University Press: 32-56.

Ramose BM (1999) African Philosophy Through Ubuntu. Harare: Mond Books Publishers.

Richardson RN (2008) Reflections on Reconciliation and Ubuntu. In: Nichol-

son R (ed) Persons in Community: African Ethics in a Global Culture. Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press: 65–83.

Sanni JS (2020) Decolonising Borders: Re-imagining Strangeness and Spaces. Theoria: A Journal of Social & Political Theory 67/163: 1-24.

Shutte A (1993) Philosophy for Africa. Rondebosch: UCT Press.

Shutte A (2001) Ubuntu: An Ethic for a New South Africa. Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications.

Sindane J (1994) Ubuntu and Nation Building. Pretoria: Ubuntu School of Philosophy.

Sono T (1994) Dilemmas of African Intellectuals in South Africa. Pretoria: UNISA.

Van Binsbergen W (2001) Ubuntu and the Globalisation of Southern African Thought and Society. Quest 15/1–2: 53–89.

Van der Merwe W L (1996) Philosophy and the Multi-cultural Context of (Post) Apartheid South Africa. Ethical Perspectives 3/2: 1-15.

Wacquant L (1996) The Rise of Advanced Marginality: Notes on Its Nature and Implications. Acta Sociologica 39/2: 121–39.

Wolfe P (2006) Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native. Journal of Genocide Research 8/4: 387-409.