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DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.18820/24150479/aa51i2.3>

ISSN:0587-2405

e-ISSN: 2415-0479

Acta Academica • 2019 51(2):
41-63

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Gendered human (in)security in South Africa: what can ubuntu feminism offer?

First submission: 25 February 2019

Acceptance: 20 September 2019

Published: 09 December 2019

Gendered human security as a focus for protracted violence against women in a society in transition calls for urgent attention, especially in South Africa. The author summarises some tenets of ubuntu feminism and juxtaposes them with state-centric and people-centric discourses of human security and their link to development, gendered well-being and interpersonal violence. Inadequate attention paid to human interdependency as seen through an ubuntu feminist lens is linked to poor responses in addressing interpersonal and gender violence. The argument is made that an individualised, human-rights based approach is inadequate as a frame to find sustainable solutions to intractable gendered human insecurity. Looking at human insecurity and violence against women in South Africa, this article offers three arguments in favour of ubuntu feminism for renewed efforts to analyse the issue and locate adequate responses.

Keywords: South African femicide; gendered human security; security-development nexus; ubuntu feminism

Introduction and objectives

Outrage over the exploitation of women by peacekeeping and aid organisations (Edwards 2018; Grierson 2018; Karim and Beardsley 2016; Stern 2015) and local concerns about femicide in South Africa mean that gender-blind human security must be re-examined. International resolutions are unable to protect women from exploitation and harm. Similarly, national responses seem to have little effect. It can be concluded that women's insecurity poses problems in societies in conflict, post-conflict and those in transition, although the latter two are inadequately covered by international instruments. In fact, Meintjies, Pillay, and Turshen (2001) suggest that post-conflict is a misnomer in a context of extensive intra-state interpersonal violence. Specifically, the outcry against violence against women (VAW) in South Africa demands the acknowledgement that, despite the existence of many different policy instruments, the ease with which they are violated is a protracted problem.

Much has been written about the United Nations Security Council's (UNSC's) Resolutions 1325 and 2122 and the Right to Protect (R2P) doctrine (Kronsell 2012; Pratt and Richter-Devroe 2011; Stern 2015), with conclusions that these most liberal of instruments fail dismally in their purported aims of ensuring human security. Women's insecurity in general, and specifically in unstable contexts, is a lingering societal problem. In a society in transition such as South Africa, this demands urgent attention. Not only is the country in the process of rebuilding its social fabric, but it also is dealing with deepening inequality and a high incidence of gendered violence. These aspects are discussed in the fourth and fifth sections of this paper. Post-apartheid South Africa cannot claim generalised human security or gender-specific security, spurring the need for a fresh approach to the attainment of dignity that reaches beyond UNSC definitions (Gouws and Van Zyl 2015).

It is time for a more nuanced conceptualisation of gendered human security as a central concern for public policymaking. Questions demanding answers include: Is the 'human' in human security a gendered subjectivity? And if so, what notions of men, women, their interdependence, and security emerge from the debate? As will be demonstrated here, the interdependence of people within their social and spatial settings is overlooked in a universalised notion of human rights. The United Nations (UN) has enshrined a broader, human-rights-based conceptualisation of human security as embedded in a normative, liberal humanism. As demonstrated in the discussion of the narrower and broader conceptualisations of human security in the third section of this paper, the evolution of the concept of human security neglected fundamental human interconnectedness.

The discussion of some of the principles of ubuntu feminism in the second and final sections of this paper shows its potency in offering a fresh perspective

on stale conceptual, empirical, and policy debates on gendered human security. Ubuntu feminism as a theoretical lens is deliberately selected for its particular take on the obligated “social bond” (Cornell and Van Marle 2015: 3) between South Africans.

The objective of this article is to analyse human (in)security and its link to development and gendered well-being. Firstly, some central conceptual principles of ubuntu feminism are presented. Secondly, state-centric versus people-centric discourses of human security are discussed. Thirdly, a brief statistical overview of selected metrics of human security in South Africa is presented. This is followed by an overview of the problems of VAW in the country. Finally, three ways in which ubuntu feminism may offer new ways of thinking are discussed.

Selective principles of ubuntu feminism

Hudson (2016) and Tripp, Marx Ferree, and Ewig (2013) acknowledge that feminism delinks human security from the state and champions a bottom-up approach. These authors argue that human security is a deeply gendered notion, but they tend to favour a people-centric, individualist stance (much like the UN’s broader conceptualisation of human security) and do not spell out how to achieve collective responsibility for human security. It is argued here that VAW, whether perpetrated during armed conflict or in a society in crisis, is learned behaviour. It is not innate to men or women, yet conflicts and interpersonal violence are often rooted in vested systems of power. Gqola (2015: 42–43) speaks of “interlocking systems of oppression” that cause social trauma and give rise to interpersonal violence. For these reasons, a theoretical lens able to look at a community-centred, collective understanding of mutual care is required. Five principles of ubuntu feminism are particularly useful for developing such a lens:

A feminist ethics of care, linked to a deep sense of belonging.

Centralising a mutually obligated life.

Regarding justice as equality.

Enabling a call to social action.

Avoiding the homogenisation of all women and focusing on the spiritual self.

These five tenets are not an exhaustive, mutually exclusive list or unique to ubuntu feminism, however, as will be shown in the discussion below, cumulatively, they offer key beacons for alternative, context-specific imaginings of human security.

Before articulating these five principles, the idea of ubuntu as it relates to human security needs further explication. Benhabib (2003: 195) says that each individual is “radically dependent upon the goodwill and solidarity of others to become who we are”. Masolo (2010) adds that ubuntu denotes shared interests in human welfare that enables cooperation and integration.

In its original conceptualisation, ubuntu is gender-blind but in fact Eliastam (2015), Manyonganise (2015), and Waghid and Smeyers (2012) note a historical patriarchal bias in ubuntu. Viviers and Mzondi (2016: 2) suggest that ubuntu subjugates women. In contrast, Isike (2017), Seehawer (2018), and Cornell and Van Marle (2015) see ubuntu feminism as a healing, reintegrative response to the critique of a gender-blind notion of interrelatedness. The reason why this theory offers reclaimed reconciliation, and is the first important principle of interest here, lies in its ability to link a feminist ethic of care (Gouws and Van Zyl 2015; Viviers and Mzondi 2016) with a deep sense of human belonging. Instead of a model of human security predicated on exclusionary rights for men, women, or whomever is deemed most vulnerable, ubuntu feminism calls for the kind of interconnectedness that emphasises linkages between people and communities through mutual responsibilities to care (Caswell and Cifor 2016; Cornell and Van Marle 2015).

Ubuntu feminism, as a specific offshoot of African feminism, centralises African meso-level epistememes of human co-responsibility for well-being (Cornell and Van Marle 2015), thereby offering a solution in which all genders can be sensitised to address the need for security. Hoffmann and Metz (2017) see ubuntu feminism as the freedom to relate (a positive, future-orientation), different from a freedom from (a negative, away-from-orientation) violence or insecurity. This second tenet of ubuntu feminism, namely its emphasis on the conjoined, mutually obligated nature of human existence, makes it a compelling vehicle for transformation.

The idea of mutual moral obligation is not unique to ubuntu feminism and certainly features in other philosophical stances about relational ethics. What ubuntu feminism adds is that the ethic of care is delinked from a women-only nurturing obligation and unambiguously steered towards a “collective project” that is always in the making because “there is always more work to do together in shaping our future” (Cornell and Van Marle 2015: 5).

The third principle of ubuntu feminism that offers hope is its insistence on casting justice as equality. As will be shown in the analysis of VAW, regarding gendered violence as a distinct category of interpersonal violence undermines efforts to address it. In a context of generalised socio-economic insecurity (as demonstrated in the fourth section of this paper), gendered human security remains an elusive, unsettled goal. Instead of instruments guiding punitive

policing, and militaristic and incarcerating actions, this ethic advocates in favour of restorative justice (Davies 2017).

Nicolaides (2015) and Cornell and Van Marle (2015) argue that ubuntu is much more than an ethical philosophy; it includes an ontology, epistemology, axiology, a spatiality, and a socio-political call to action. The fourth principle of ubuntu feminism suggested above is a call to liberating, transgressive social action (Davies 2017). Ubuntu feminism avoids a false distinction between non-maleficence (harm avoidance) and beneficence (a moral duty to do good). Both non-maleficence and beneficence form part of a larger interconnectedness that actively resists commodifying human security as the purview of those able to broker or buy it. Ogunjipe (1994) gives meaning to the axiology by explaining that fighting a war against men or reversing accepted gender roles are unable to resolve matters of violence and insecurity. Instead, the values espoused by ubuntu feminism call for accountable, relational, respectful transformation. Hudson (2016: 196), speaking more generally of the need for a radical feminist ethic in the human security discourse, mentions the need for a normative commitment to justice and healing.

The fifth principle of ubuntu feminism (listed earlier) is the challenge it offers to approaches that homogenise all women as being equally capable of overcoming subjugation. Ubuntu feminism embraces singularity and individuation (in the sense of an interactive free will), but not Western-styled individualism. Individual uniqueness, according to ubuntu feminism, is enabled only by its social embeddedness and relatedness (Cornell 2014; Davies 2017). Ubuntu feminism enables a remembered, spiritual self which exists beyond atomistic individualism or imposed binaries (Bostic and Manning 2015: 134; Hall, du Toit and Louw 2013: 29; Isike 2017: 353).

To further clarify why ubuntu feminism might begin to address gendered human security, the next section analyses the shift from state- to people- and women-centric understandings of human security.

State-, people- and women-centric views of human security

Earlier notions of human security were predicated on the protection of the nation state's borders (i.e. territorial security with the state as referent) and on peacekeeping. State-centric approaches de-secured certain categories of people as insufficiently fitting the definition of human and therefore unworthy of protection (Marhiah 2013). Women's interests were regarded as sufficiently represented by men, who were deemed as their natural protectors. A notion of patriotic, courageous, and aggressive men as protectors fed a macho, hyper-

masculine, androcentric discourse of human security (Sjoberg 2009; 2013). State-centric security was entangled in the imperial projects' narratives of progress and a so-called civilising mission at frontiers; hence, the emphasis on the protection of state borders (Hudson 2016; Pavone, Gomez and Jaquet-Chiffelle 2016).

What is the gendered human security portrayed in the state-centric approach? Following Nussbaum (2000; 2002; 2005), women emerge as subjects for biopolitical security that procures and safeguards their reproduction (bodies, sexuality) and production (visible and invisible labour) for the well-being of others. Biopolitical security procurement spawned many tools calibrating and measuring women-centric security threats such as women's safety audits, insecurity maps, and forbidden cities (International Centre for the Prevention of Crime 2008). This underscores Hudson's (2016: 197) point that gender produces and is produced by security practices.

Human security linked to people-centric development¹ was introduced by Ghali in the Agenda for Peace (UN 1992) and adopted by Annan as an international agenda in the Millennium Declaration (UN 1999). The 1994 Human Development Report (UNDP 1994) is hailed² as the first official use of the notion of human security as inextricably linked to development. People-centric human security, influenced by the ideas of vital freedoms and human capabilities as articulated by Sen³ (1999) and Nussbaum (1999; 2000), sees security as the freedom from fear and want. People-centric human security posits development as widening chances and choices to enjoy such freedoms. Moreover, people-centric human security advances the idea that people should be empowered to pursue this against a backdrop of assured economic, environmental, political, food, personal, health, and community security. People-centric human security is enshrined in the UN's Sustainable Development Goal 16 on peace, justice, and strong institutions.

Women were soon categorised as particularly vulnerable to insecurity, or as the bearers of culture, peace, and sustainable development, thereby conflating gender and women both conceptually and empirically in the human development notion of human security (Hudson 2016: 194, 200). The quaternity of women, peace, security, and development formed the backbone of the human security discourse. The Women in Development (WID) approach was introduced in the

1 Richmond (2010) recognises four generations of human security discourse, namely state-centric, people-centric, the liberal state as enabling people-centric security and a search for human emancipation beyond the state.

2 Gasper (2005) credits Mahbub ul Haq as the progenitor of people-centric human security. Oman (2010) awards this honour to Hannah Arendt.

3 Sen co-chaired the UN Commission on Human Security with Sadako Ogata and continued influencing the security-development nexus in the policy debate.

1970s in an attempt to include women as development beneficiaries, to be followed by the Women and Development (WAD) approach a couple of years later which problematised class inequality and oppressive international power relations. In the 1980s, the Gender and Development (GAD) approach responded to these earlier ideas by questioning the flawed distinction between productive and reproductive work. Women-centric views of the security-development nexus have seen women and girls becoming the focus and faces of development as is clearly demonstrated in the World Bank's reporting on gender equality (Calkin 2015a; b).

Numerous other organisations further shaped the people-centric and women-centric notions of human security (Akuffo 2011; Calkin 2015a; Gysman 2018). Article 20 of the Southern African Development Community's (SADC 2008) Protocol on Gender and Development demands that states enforce legislation that prohibits gender-based violence (GBV). The African Union's (AU's) Agenda 2063 articulates a women-centric human security by declaring 2010 to 2020 Woman's Decade (Make Every Woman Count 2016).

The South African Constitution guarantees the full spectrum of human rights and, in Section 9, forbids unfair discrimination based on all possible social positionings. South Africa undersigns various international and regional human rights treaties. South Africa's National Development Plan (National Planning Commission 2012: 386) suggests in Chapter 12 that perceptions of insecurity and fear have a negative impact on the country's economic development by preventing people's ability to achieve their full potential. The plan also suggests that this is worse for women.

Notwithstanding the attempts at a people-centric, rights-based notion, human security remains linked to the idea that failed states⁴ are unable to ensure these freedoms and to deliver human security as a public good (Pavone et al. 2016; Tadjbakhsh and Chenoy 2007). Moreover, a human rights perspective positions a woman as a bearer of universal, inalienable rights and entitlements that must be protected and empowered within a context allowing for self-determination and autonomy. A human rights notion of human security is infused with the neoliberalist notion of individuals as free agents acting in an enabling, inclusive market of rights (Caswell and Cifor 2016; Marhia 2013). From such a rights-based vantage point, any woman living in poverty, experiencing social exclusion because of her race, nationality, sexual orientation, childbearing ability, physical disabilities, marital status, religion (and the intersectionality of these), and

4 Dingli and Purewal (2018) and Richmond (2010) refer to low intensity citizenship created in shallow states that inculcates rather than prevents violence.

suffering emotional, physical, sexual and economic violence, cannot be said to be enjoying human security (Nzayisenga, Orjuela and Schierenbeck 2016; Pratt and Richter-Devroe 2011). Women-centric security cannot exist in situations where the right to women's autonomy is dependent on protection against threats to personal security.

People-centric approaches failed to enable timely humanitarian intervention in Bosnia, Rwanda, Libya, Haiti, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Somalia, Darfur, East Timor, Liberia, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Sierra Leone. Both the state-centric and people-centric approaches tended to portray a women-specific vulnerability that warrants perpetual, external protection. The embeddedness of women's vulnerability in an unquestioning acceptance of patriarchal power illustrates that women will remain at risk as long as they are regarded as victims locked into dependence. Equally so if they are venerated as risk-averting economic actors, planet-saving eco-warriors or peacemakers extraordinaire (Calkin 2015; Pratt and Richter-Devroe 2011).

In contrast to both these approaches Robinson (2011), Tickner and Sjöberg (2011), and Marhja (2013) challenge scholars to think of gendered human security as a deep appreciation of human interdependence, intersubjectivity, connectedness, and relationality. These, as explained earlier, are some of the tenets of ubuntu feminism.

The debate over state-centric versus people-centric notions of human security has divided scholars into three broad groups, namely those who regard the expanded definition as too vague to enable useful analysis or policy-making, those who prefer the narrower definition, and those who vehemently defend the broader, people-centric approach (McCormack 2011; Tadjbakhsh and Chenoy 2007). People-centric commentators such as Hammerstad (2000), Alkire (2003), Robinson (2005), Tadjbakhsh and Chenoy (2007), and Gasper (2005) note that beyond the freedom from fear and want (negative freedoms), the avoidance of indignity, humiliation, and despair must be considered. Such dignity is linked to basic social coping capabilities based on safety and social support (Parmar et al. 2014).

The lack of consensus can animate the search for comprehensive alternatives, but also has important negative consequences. One such negative consequence is the normalisation of the notion that interpersonal violence is a direct threat to development (Lakhani and Willman 2014). Akuffo (2011) describes how the AU used militarised interventions in the name of protecting human security on the continent with a spillover into the policies of the SADC. McCormack (2011) sees the exchange of aid for alliances in the so-called war on terror as a disengagement by rich nations from global concerns for development. She suggests that human security interventions mostly take the form of minor projects that benefit small

groups of people but are unlikely to lead to any deeper social transformations. Even people-centric notions of human security can thus encourage aggressive, pre-emptive protection against a de-humanised other, similar to the state-centric views.

Jansson and Eduards (2016) differentiate between “gendering security” and “securitising gender”. Increasing the number of female and gender-sensitive peacekeepers or law enforcers (police, security and judicial staff)⁵ falls under the banner of gendering security. Such an approach not only misses the root causes of gender insecurity as based in structural inequality, but also supports the false premise of VAW disappearing under the influence of greater femininity to counter hyper-masculinity. As pointed out in the discussion of some of its principles, ubuntu feminism would push against such a homogenised view of all women equally able to shoulder the entire burden of overcoming their subjugation. Instead, it would refocus attention for security on a collective project (Cornell and Van Marle 2015: 5). Securitising gender implies that one looks at the human security of a society in a gendered way and this is the goal of the next section.

Human Security in South Africa

Using Hastings’s (2011) idea of a human security index,⁶ some broad trends can be identified for South Africa indicative of a human security deficit. Following the logics of intersectionality, black women are worst affected by poverty (StatsSA 2017b). Table 1 shows that the relative insecurity of women is most striking in poor wages, unemployment rates, those with no formal schooling, adult literacy rates, some health indices and social stressors. For example, although maternal mortality has been declining nationally, the rate shown in Table 1 is far beyond the target of less than 70 deaths per 100 000 live birth set by the Sustainable Development Goals.

5 Hendricks (2012: 15) shows that South Africa has increased women’s representation in the defence forces, police and peacekeeping missions since 2011.

6 Data shown in Table 1 do not strictly follow Hastings (2011) and are not intended to render a final index of human security.

Table 1: Some indices of human in/security in South Africa

Component	Measure	General indices or data for men	Observations specifically about women
Economic fabric index	Poverty	55.5% of the population earns less than R992 per person per month (StatsSA 2017b)	The median wage for employed women in 2015 was 77.1% of the wage for employed men (StatsSA 2016b)
	Unemployment	25.3 % for men in 2018 (StatsSA 2018d)	29.3% for women in 2018 (StatsSA 2018d)
	Proportion of population receiving social grants	45.5% of households receive at least one form of social grant (StatsSA 2017b)	Women are often systematically excluded from obtaining grants (Gibbs et al. 2017).
Social fabric index A: Education	% Adults aged 25 to 64 with no formal schooling. Overall, 6% of South Africans aged 25 to 64 years have no former schooling and in this group, 55.3% are females and 44.7% are males.	Males 44.7% (StatsSA 2016a)	Women 55.3% (StatsSA 2016a)
	% Adults aged 25 to 64 with post-secondary school education	Males 48.0% (StatsSA 2016a)	Females 52.0% (StatsSA 2016b)
	Adult literacy rate	Males 95.4% (World Bank 2018)	Females 93.4% (World Bank 2018)
Social fabric index B: Health	Life expectancy at birth	61.1 years for males (StatsSA 2017a)	67.3 years for females (StatsSA 2017a)
	Maternal mortality rate	Not applicable	134 per 100 000 live births in 2016 (WHO 2018)
Social fabric index C: Social stress	Children (birth–17) living in poverty	66.8 % in 2015 (StatsSA 2017b)	Not disaggregated by gender
	Adolescent birth rate	Not applicable	71 births per 1 000 women aged 15–19 in 2016 (StatsSA 2018b)
	Xenophobia	Xenophobic violence in May 2008 led to 62 deaths, 670 people wounded, unspecified numbers raped and more than 100 000 displaced (UNHRC 2015)	Not disaggregated by gender

The data shows that there are horizontal social inequalities in South Africa that affect both men and women. Bringing ubuntu feminism to bear on these quantitative indices, it is easy to see that these cannot fully account for social justice as a process. Grayson (2008) warns that although quantitative indicators are valued as global measures of human security and offer analytical possibilities to uncover causal links between variables, such quantification restricts human security to that which is measurable. He suggests that standardised quantification dismisses the value of local forms of knowledge about security. McLeod (2015) adds that quantification of human security tends to include gender as a mere empirical category, thereby precluding a deeper grasp of human interdependencies or the prolonged effects of historical, socio-economic, political, and physical trauma inflicted on men and women.

Sporadic reactions to social injustice as reactions to quantified measures tend to miss the mark of what should be regarded as intolerable and inhumane. Women's and men's marches, days of activism and women's months cannot begin to undo the extent of intrastate interpersonal violence witnessed in some societies during times of reconstruction and generalised human insecurity. To further delve into the debate, VAW as a specific type of gendered insecurity is discussed next.

Gendered insecurity: VAW in South Africa

VAW in South Africa has taken on such proportions that the word 'femicide' has entered everyday conversation. Reports link VAW to the symptoms of a country in crisis (Sibanda-Moyo, Khonje, and Brobbey 2017), an act of war which renders it "one of the most violent places in the world for women to reside" (Watson and Lopes 2017: 1) and an epidemic that must be understood in order to be bio-behaviourally predicted and prevented (Health and Development Africa 2013).

Social media has, for example, through the #MenAreTrash and the #TheTotalShutdown campaigns, afforded femicide a status that O'Manique & MacLean (2010: 463) call an "emergency epistemology", feeding what Gqola (2015: 79) calls the "female fear factory". Moreover, the #MenAreTrash campaign shows how seamlessly a narrative of disposable humanity (the idea that all men are irredeemable sub-humans) was incorporated into gendered human security.

A study comparing trends between 1999 and 2009 concluded that although homicides declined over this period, intimate partner femicides and rape-related homicides proportionately increased (Medical Research Council 2012). There have been problems with accurate and correctly disaggregated data from police statistics and the Victims of Crime surveys in the last few years (Centre for the

Study of Violence and Reconciliation 2016; Africa Check 2018). Notwithstanding these issues, Statistics South Africa (StatsSA 2018c: 7) draws the astounding conclusion that femicide is a rare phenomenon in South Africa. This is based on a narrow definition that regards femicide as “the killing of females by males because they are females” (StatsSA 2018c: 7). It excludes cases of women homicides where the deceased identified as LGBTQI. The same report (StatsSA 2018c: 22) suggests that conservative attitudes and beliefs, especially those held by women, prevents the fight against VAW. Whereas the relative rarity of femicide (irrespective of its lexical or operational definition) is not disputed here, its centrality in the psyche of South Africa and its place in the larger backdrop of gendered insecurity (i.e. femicide as the most extreme form of VAW) are of vital importance.

Sexual violence and rape reached extraordinary levels in the 1990s, prompting the government to declare the prevention of violence against women and children a strategic policing priority, although the full implementation of this commitment has not yet been achieved (Smythe 2015). Other initiatives included, *inter alia*,⁷ the promulgation of the Domestic Violence Act in 1998, a Policy Framework and Strategy for Shelters for Victims of Domestic Violence in 2002, Anti-Rape Strategy in 2003, Service Charter for Victims of Crime in 2004 and Strategy for the Engagement of Men and Boys in Prevention of Gender-based Violence in 2009 (Sibanda-Moyo et al. 2017). Others were Social Development Guidelines on Services for Victims of Domestic Violence and Guidelines for Services to Victims of Sexual Offences in 2010, the establishment of the National Council Against Gender-Based Violence (NCGBV) in 2012, which stopped functioning in 2014 (Commission for Gender Equality 2015), the Integrated Programme of Action Addressing Violence against Women and Children for 2013 to 2018, the creation of the Department of Women in the Presidency in 2014, Thuthuzela Care Centres, White Door and Green Door Safe Spaces and Khuseleka One Stop Centres (Sibanda-Moyo et al. 2017; Watson and Lopes 2017).

Annually, the country holds a 16 Days of Activism campaign against VAW. The Department of Social Development (DSD 2013) implemented an Everyday Heroes initiative and created a high-tech 24-hour GBV Command Centre in 2014 that can geo-locate victims (Commission for Gender Equality 2015). There are an abundance of national policy responses and interventions by the state, even with some involvement by civil society, to GBV and VAW – albeit that these are often fragmented, poorly coordinated, inadequately resourced and even duplications.

South Africa is labelled as a society with a deeply entrenched rape culture (Gqola 2015). Gender Links and the Medical Research Council (2011) found in a

7 See Meyiwa, et al. (2017) for an extensive list of legislative responses.

Gauteng-based study that 75.5% of the male respondents admitted to having perpetrated violence against a woman in their lifetime, while 51.3% of the female respondents reported having experienced some form of GBV. Women identifying as gay, lesbian, bisexual, homosexual, or transgendered are subjected to corrective rape at an average rate of 10 LGBTQI women per week (Koraan and Geduld 2015; Wells and Polders 2006).

VAW seems endemic, with high rates reported of sexual violence against female learners,⁸ often perpetrated by male teachers (Centre for Applied Legal Studies et al. 2014). The practice of *ukuthwala*, a traditional form of marriage negotiation in which the girl is abducted by a man and his accomplices (in the past often a collusion by consenting partners to ensure familial consent to the marriage) has been distorted into sexual assault, aggravated robbery, forced child marriages, child labour, and human trafficking (Maduna 2017; Matshidze, Kugara and Mdhuli 2017).

Well-publicised instances of femicide fuel social media campaigns of outrage.⁹ On average, the national femicide rate for 2010 was five times higher than the global average (Africa Check 2017; 2018). Recurrent reasons are offered for the intractable high levels of VAW in the country. The Commission for Gender Equality (2015: 21) references a state-commissioned investigation which cites reasons such as patriarchal power disparity, cultural norms, and gendered economic inequalities. Interpersonal violence is used to resolve conflicts, often fuelled by alcohol abuse and hidden by doctrines of privacy.

VAW as the reassertion of masculinity or as patriarchal backlash to control women should be juxtaposed with the evidence of widespread insecurity as discussed in Table 1. Such reasoning homogenises all men as violently vengeful perpetrators and women as eternal victims. The pre-occupation with examination and measurement of these assumed causes of interpersonal violence inscribes and re-inscribes scripts of insecurity on the bodies of assumed victims and perpetrators, thereby locating it within certain groups. Ubuntu feminism would embrace the possibility of different permutations of multiple, complex patriarchies, co-existing with matriarchies, that change over time. Such an understanding renders the patriarch-as-sole-provider-and-thus-controller discourse hopelessly outdated (Isike 2017; Mazibuko and Umejisi 2015; Rabe 2018).

8 Both male and female learners report sexual abuse at schools in South Africa (Optimus Foundation 2016).

9 These include the murders of Ntombizodwa Dlamini, Gill Packham, Jubulile Nhlapo, Karabo Mokoena, Reeva Steenkamp, Siam Lee, and Zolile Khumalo.

What ubuntu feminism offers for a gendered approach to human security

In the second section of this paper, five assumptions of ubuntu feminism were presented. To conclude, three possibilities from the theory are considered. Taken together, the possibilities open productive vistas to look at South African interpersonal violence. As demonstrated above, VAW has not responded to current ways of conceptualising, measuring or preventing gendered human (in)security. It has been argued in this paper that too broad a definition of human security can lead to a situation where policymakers try to prioritise everything, leading to stagnation and a lag in policy direction that would see securitisation usurped by militarisation. Appending gender or women's issues to existing approaches has proven unsuccessful. A security discourse ruinously modulated by neoliberalist social control strategies cannot resolve South Africa's interpersonal violence.

The first possibility to shift the perspective on human security offered by ubuntu feminism is the enablement of a textured understanding of hidden power relations, particularly in its conceptualisation of belonging and a mutually obligated life (tenets one and two discussed earlier). Relative deprivation and the way in which poverty creates specific vulnerabilities are offered as reasons for gendered human insecurity (Braidotti 2017). Statistics on human insecurity in the country show that, in some instances, women are more insecure.

There is no denying that basic human needs must be met so that people can function with dignity. However, an explanation stuck in a hydraulic notion of rights feeds the narrative that men act with violence because they are sugar daddies, blessers, envious of women's success or their privileged status as recipients of development aid, that they act out because of mental illness or want to shed familial care burdens. The same narrative then sees women as victims exploiting men to afford luxuries (are blessees) and as vulnerable to exchanging sex for resources. Such an explanation reifies an exclusionary human security with rights bestowed to some to the detriment of others. In terms of policy, remedies are then confined to the narrow spheres of professional and public empowerment. The textured understanding enabled by the ubuntu feminist lens offers a bigger discursive space for alternative imaginings of opportunities for resilience (Cornell 2014). The burden for a care ethic, and not for "abstract justice" (Cornell and Van Marle 2015: 4) then falls equally on both men and women.

Secondly, the call to action of ubuntu feminism (discussed as the fourth principle earlier) demands remedies that avoid reliance on hegemonies, imposed paradigms or innate human goodness (Waghid and Smeyers 2012). Because of ubuntu feminism's centralisation of a fully human, symbiotic, cooperative interconnectedness (Bostic and Manning 2015: 134), intersecting, multidisciplinary

efforts are championed. Abandoning flawed state-centric and people-centric human security implies recognising that gender-sensitive transformation is not a monolithic project. Part of building a democratic culture is that analysts and policymakers become responsive to needs (not only rights). Efforts to address VAW will be futile without the richness of a ubuntu feminist analysis of multiple, conflicting claims to dignity, diversity, history and interpersonal duties. The five principles of ubuntu feminism represent a powerful alternative to internecine, media-friendly, consumer-ready, gender-warfare social mobilisations.

Thirdly, ubuntu feminism, true to its theoretical heritage, values local knowledge and experience refracted through historical, contextual and everyday dynamics. This is not unique to ubuntu feminism, but coupled with its call to action, it enables analytical tools resistant to territorialising, universalising and essentialising tendencies (Lugones 2010; Waghid and Smeyers 2012). Ubuntu feminism does not reify an apolitical, sanitised, or romanticised view of the everyday as gender-neutral (Cornell and Van Marle 2015). This would miss the mark, because as Hudson (2016: 196) suggests, male leaders still speak for women in many rural areas. Instead, ubuntu feminism favours the emancipatory potential inherent in an unreserved appreciation of and respect for both distinctiveness and diversity, the present and the past (Nicolaidis 2015: 204; Venganaï 2015: 151).

The first two possibilities of ubuntu feminism mentioned above have particular implications for the training of development practitioners, gender-mainstreaming experts, and policy evaluators. Additionally, such training should have a strong interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary aspect. The ubuntu feminist call to action requires a normative commitment for those wishing to address intrapersonal violence to build bridges between academic research and training, development practice, the lived experiences of communities and the institutional level of policymaking and implementation. For example, academic culture should recognise, invite, and support creative improvisation in research and in university-community partnerships. Infusing training with insights from ubuntu feminism will encourage knowledge producers to become competent, critical and engaged researchers of collective wellbeing and relational human interdependency.

The three possibilities offered by ubuntu feminism can be juxtaposed with the axes of the colonial matrix of power which it seeks to unsettle, namely power, knowledge and being. The multidisciplinary, critical efforts to understand and transform called for in ubuntu feminism, and the five theoretical impulses as discussed here, speak to a different form of future-oriented (Cornell and Van Marle 2015: 8) knowledge.

Conclusion

The discourse on human security and the securitisation of VAW in South Africa demonstrate many disquieting paradoxes. The persistence of generalised human insecurity and interpersonal violence despite the hegemonic presence of broad-based human rights analytical and conceptual tools, underlines the dire need for a new vision of human security. Ubuntu feminism offers a fitting departure point for the arduous, extant and worthwhile task of reimagining what it means to be human in South Africa today. The case argued here must not be misconstrued as romanticising ubuntu feminism. On the contrary, its call to action and the dire state of human insecurity in South Africa shame attempts to silence or ignore its potency.

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