Education at the Margins: Ubuntu at our Core

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Abstract

Jesuit Commons-Higher Education at the Margins (JC-HEM) offers a Jesuit education for students living at the margins in Kakuma Refugee Camp, Kenya; Dzaleka (Za-lēka) Refugee Camp, Malawi; and in Amman, Jordan. I have enjoyed teaching (and learning from) our diverse learners in our Program over the past few years. Having fled their warring homelands, our learners' families, careers and lives scatter like shrapnel and fall to the dust of their forsaken refugee camps. In Kakuma Refugee Camp alone, there are more than 100,000 refugees most of whom have lived there for many years. The students in our three-year program indeed feel like the “chosen ones” and are a paragon of leadership and education for the others in the camps. With volunteer faculty from many Jesuit universities teaching online liberal arts curricula, the JC-HEM students and faculty together bring their passion for (freedom through) education, a need for strengthened community within and beyond the Camps. As the lead faculty of several communication and leadership courses, I awaken a bit more to our interconnectedness and mutual learning with each new student and course. Nelson Mandela reminds us, “Ubuntu: I am who I am because of who you are to me.” This paper reveals my students’ and my own online learning woven together in Ubuntu, various Jesuit teachings and many other scholars’ theories.

[Editor’s note: the first 52 students from the JC-HEM program graduated this fall with diplomas from Regis University.]
Our learners are from Somalia and Sudan, the Congo and from Kenya, from Ethiopia and Burundi. Tucked away in the mountains of Conifer, Colorado, I log on and breathe in; “Ubuntu,” I inhale, asking God to guide me as I enter Malawi or Kenya at the start of each day. Honoring God’s invitation, I pray that I may show up as my “merriest Mary” to our virtual classroom. Born of privilege and with a bit of God’s sweet grace, I walk beside our learners, listening, learning, guiding; together we craft a new pedagogy.

In this essay, I will weave together my narrative with Critical Realism of Bernard Lonergan, S.J., Heart of a Teacher of Parker Palmer, Orality of Walter Ong, S.J., passive diminishment of Teilhard de Chardin, S.J., and other scholars’ works and how these have guided and shaped my spirituality which in turn illumines my experiences as a grateful member of the faculty for the Jesuit Commons-Higher Education at the Margins Program. Lonergan has become an inspiring companion for me on this JC-HEM journey – a guide through my myriad peak and plunging experiences. Being present to the painful refugee reality of our students seizes my breath, quiets my tongue, causing me to pause in the in-between spaces of my day. I find myself tangled up in utter gratitude for our relationships and the program simultaneously juxtaposed with anguish and inquiry toward the myriad horrific injustices that our learners are faced with each day.

In our Ignatian Faculty Scholars Program at Regis University, we considered how our various pedagogical styles and paradigms can be enhanced by a deeper understanding of Bernard Lonergan’s work. He argues that human consciousness has four basic operations: the activities of experiencing, the activities of understanding, the activities of judging and the activities of deciding. Although Lonergan’s many-volume works are well above my humble head, I very much appreciate his synthesis of how these activities work together, how we are propelled from one set of operations to the next because of our desire to know. In particular, Lonergan illuminates for me the habit of noticing that is something much more than experiencing – why and how we make meaning… noticing how we embrace, neglect, prioritize, enjoy, detest, appreciate our experience – raising questions about the way I am experiencing things the particular way that I do, and how that affects other experiences.

The Rice Rations Rationale

I was waiting in line again just the other day -- patiently waiting for my “café mocha with extra, double whipped cream!” I started thinking of my Jesuit Commons students, my daily companions. I was imagining their experience of waiting in line; waiting for their rice rations. So, Lonergan (with me in the coffee shop!) invited me to reflect and relate, to notice what I’m noticing; to illuminate my meaning-making and how this impacts who I am and who I am in relation to my Jesuit Commons students. Can I get nearer the perspective of a person who waits in line in Kakuma or Dzaleka Refugee Camp for rice rations? I tagged this thought: the rice rations rationale. What might be wandering through my mind and heart as I’d wait for rice? What impact does such oppressive, vulnerable submission have on how I carry myself through the day? Who am I -- with my coveted café mocha held warming both hands? Who am I -- longing for dry rice in a tattered bag? The monthly allotment of rice, beans and oil doesn’t last even for two weeks – I wonder about the mindset of this person as she waits… and waits again. For not enough.

Each day our JC-HEM students log in to our Program seemingly not desperate; they show up overflowing with hope and eager to express gratitude; they begin their posts and greetings with grace in the spirit of “enough.” How can such optimism survive and thrive in that parched refugee camp?! Very rarely do they bring their traumas and their pain; they don’t ever show up to class as “PTSD;” or “victimized.” The Spirit of grace rises from our students’ words, echoing throughout and fortifying our Forum. Cleverly, they weave our course concepts into their lives as heroic leaders and competent intercultural communicators; they share the profound impact that learning has on their daily realities and our journey together toward justice. We keep showing up knowing that our mutual sharing, learning and education are indeed the companionship needed for lasting change. Ubuntu; I am committed to meeting you each day. Daniella Patience sends me her assignment with an intentional introductory greeting from the Camp, “I am happy to write to
you this morning with the sun shining and the sky is blue with white cloud. Thanks and peace to you and your loved ones. Patience.”

Logging on with and from the Sunrise

Fresh coffee in hand, I meet my students. Logging on, I smile as I recall Parker Palmer’s invitation to teach from my heart. He has commissioned me to show up fully present, fully alive and integrated so I can invite others into the same. “Teaching, like any truly human activity, emerges from one’s inwardness, for better or worse.” So, I sit in silence at the beginning of every day. Settling and re-situating in God’s love, I am ready. When we teach, Palmer says, we project the condition of our soul onto our students, the subject and our way of being together.

Just beyond my 15” computer screen, I look to the East. As I watch the sun’s sweet rising each morning, I know that my students have already been working for several hours. Just a bit beyond my valley and the foothills of the Rocky Mountains in front of me, I look toward Africa. Then, online, I greet men and women who live in refugee camps in Malawi and Kenya. “The entanglements I experience in the classroom are often no more or less than the convolutions of my inner life. Viewed from this angle, teaching holds the mirror to the soul where I can gain self-knowledge.” Palmer continues,

“and knowing myself is as crucial to good teaching as knowing my students and my subject. In fact, knowing my students and my subject depends heavily on self-knowledge. When I do not know myself, I cannot know who my students are. I will see them through a glass darkly, in the shadows of my unexamined life — and when I cannot see them clearly I cannot teach them well. When I do not know myself I cannot know my subject — not at deepest levels of embodied, personal meaning. I will know it only abstractly, from a distance, a congeries of concepts as far removed from the world as I am from personal truth. We need to open a new frontier in our exploration of good teaching: the inner landscape of a teacher’s life. To chart that landscape fully, three important paths must be taken — intellectual, emotional and spiritual — and none can be ignored. Reduce teaching to intellect and it becomes a cold abstraction; reduce it to emotions and it becomes narcissistic; reduce it to the spiritual — and it loses its anchor to the world. Intellect, emotion and spirit depend on each other for wholeness.”

Similar to Palmer, Ignatius invites me into cura personalis, caring for the mind, body and spirit of myself and those in my midst. In working with and learning from our students, we transcend the mere exchange of information; it is indeed in giving that we receive. But, we’ve entered into the realm of kinship and belongingness. “Ubuntu — I am who I am because of who you are to me.”

As my daughter, Sophia feeds the tiny Chickadee in her palm, they are both simultaneously giving and receiving delightfulness. Such gifts are
mutually trusting and honoring, learning, freeing and inviting others into the same.

And we hope the other will come again tomorrow to our meeting place of life-giving and mutual companionship.

**Mass on the World**

My son’s middle name is Teilhard. I hope to keep Pierre Teilhard de Chardin’s work and life ever before me. I am reminded of Chardinian *passive diminishment* as I grow more acquainted with my limitations, my limited resources, my inability to “fix” the broken refugee camps. I am humbled into knowing deeply that my invitation is to journey with, not fix anything; rather, to be.

Present. Show up fully alive and available. Teilhard’s *Mass on the World* symbolizes his sacrificing of the whole world as his altar and on it, he offered to God all the labors and sufferings of my brothers and sisters in the refugee camps.

“One by one, Lord, I see and I love all those whom you have given me to sustain and charm my life. One by one also I number all those who make up that other beloved family which has gradually surrounded me, its unity fashioned out of the most disparate elements, with affinities of the heart…I call before me the whole vast anonymous army of living humanity; those who surround me and support me…through their vision of truth or despite their error, truly believe in the progress of earthly reality and who today will take up again their impassioned pursuit of the light.

A student and companion from the first course that I taught for JC-HEM is Geoffrey Ntama; his last name means “lamb.” I told him of the sheep that we raised because growing up with a name like Mary, I was destined to have a little lamb with fleece as white as snow. I told him how the sheep would pull my daughter Sophia up the driveway on snow skis. She’d harness them up like sleigh dogs and away they’d go. Then, once at the top of the long driveway, she could easily ski down; they’d pull her up again until they were tired at which point they’d run back to the barn. Geoffrey, like most of my friends, found this quite comical. I later told my students how Deron Teilhard’s friend asked him, “how are your sheep?” He very matter-of-factly replied, “Oh, Curley and Coconut are in the freezer; do you want to eat them for dinner with us?” The JC-HEM students respond, “Kweli?!” True?

Geoffrey shared with me several photos and personal stories; This photo is on my fridge; our children know that this is part of our family, our circle of prayers and sharing.

Photo credit: Geoffrey Ntama. Geoffrey and his wife Inshuti Murara Valerie are a paragon of intentional forgiveness and peace-making.

Of his youngest daughter, Kennia, he says, “She is growing up well and she is very talkative and hard player, especially hiding (what we call, “cache cache”) with us. And I am expecting our children to be the solution of the tribalism as they are the fruits of Unity and Reconciliation.

Their Mummy is from HUTU (the Rwandan Tribe who killed my people) TUTSI of Rwanda in 1994 genocide, and after that, they came in exile in DR Congo-former Zaire and start killing the Tutsi who
were in East of DR Congo, (including my Family members). So, my Daughters are the seeds of Unity and reconciliation among HUTU & TUTSI from Rwanda & DR Congo, and they will start to supply and build the mood of peace and be the beginning of the Unity among the people who are affected by tribalism. I started training them, because I don’t need to see the past in their future.”

Pictured above: Ntama’s friend Mary (right) and her family; they belong to the Turkana tribe of Northern Kenya, Kakuma Refugee Camp. Photo Credit: Geoffrey Ntama

In The Divine Milieu, Teilhard de Chardin poignantly says that each of our lives is woven of two threads; one thread of “inward development, through which our ideas and affections and our human and religious attitudes are gradually formed” and the other thread of “outward success by which we always find ourselves at the exact point where the whole sum of the forces of the universe meet together to work in us the effect which God desires.” And we find ourselves here today, in this place, with a colorful people, in this space to learn and discern how to live our way into the effect which God desires.

Servant Leaders

Often when I share the fruits and mission of JC-HEM, someone raises a question or two that is disconcerting and too bitter for my optimistic spirit. They wonder why we are focusing resources in Africa; or, what is the desired goal for those who have lied in refugee camps without a strategic plan for “success” or “happily ever after”? Are we placing more value upon our values than theirs by educating them our way? How do you measure your assistance? And then, gently reminding me of the importance of our work, I hear within my soul the voice of Fr. Greg Boyle, S.J. insisting that united, we stand against those who believe that some of us are less valuable than others, that some of our lives matter more than others. Boyle is a paragon of servant leadership. Robert Greenleaf coined the term Servant Leadership and defined it as being, “servant first; it begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. The best test is: do those served grow as persons; do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants?” Thus, we are all simultaneously becoming educated and educating others in the spirit of servant leadership.

Our students are natural servant leaders; all of them whom I’ve come to know have within their core essence a deep desire to grow in community, to serve and care for each other. As I grow in my own desire and development for servant leadership, I see it illuminated and bursting forth in the dark and dusty camps. We are serving, learning from and teaching peacemakers like Geoffrey Ntama. I share with the students my experiences, knowledge and love of learning. Although we attempt to quantify and grade the education of our students, to measure their performance against a scoring rubric, much more is happening through servant leadership than can be graded. The core experience for students and teachers is the gift of love and time, reading and re-grading, affirming and walking with them on their journey. Perhaps there is no rubric to tally how well I believe in them; perhaps there’s the big abacus in the sky for that count. The most important and fundamental raison d’être is to love, to be a companion, alert and awake to what’s present, and then to journey together into “what’s next?” Palmer reminded us that love is the core of teaching. This is the place where we find out who we are as children of God, as loved.

So, I believe this is what JC-HEM is about. There are components of our work and life that, in faith, are significant and meaningful whether or not such good can be totally defined. A dear companion, Steve Hutchison challenges me, “Is this not what God calls us to do? Is it not what is behind the question of, ‘Who do you say that I am?’ His
question is a ploy. It brings out our inclination to tell Jesus who he should be, who we want him to be, rather than who He is… the One who loves unconditionally, never feeling a desire to ‘get back’ when facing injustice and suffering. When we bring unconditional love into our teaching and relationships, we are teaching the most important lesson… a lesson applicable each moment of each person’s life.”

I am thriving from myriad relationships that call me into a deeper sense of what it is for me to be both student and teacher rooted in love: Sylvain is “my brother” in Kakuma, a member of the Mushi Tribe, a stellar law student and later a companion in my Interpersonal Communication class where he wrote this self-introduction:

“Thank you for your hospitality and for the opportunity to let you know who I am.

I am Sylvain Ruhamya, from the Democratic Republic of Congo. I was born in Bukavu, a town in Eastern Congo on July, 19th 1981. I joined primary school in 1987 and I completed in 1994. I went to a Jesuit school in the same town where I graduated in 2000 during the time we were aggressed by "rebels". In this context of war I pursued my University for five years in the faculty of Law but I never attended the graduation since I was exiled before it happened due to the assassination of my father and all the physical and moral torture I went through.

I adore learning. I believe that I am not a looser living in the camp as single and only one as a member of the big family I harmoniously lived in for more than twenty years. I miss my mum, who is very far away from me just because of persecution we went through. I miss my brothers and sisters who are scattered in the world as the wind.

In the refugee set up, I have learned how to be independent, humble and cooperative, just the way the philosophy summarized in the context of Ubuntu demonstrates it.

For all injustice, victimization and discrimination that I have witnessed, I came to realize that Kakuma Refugee Camp was meant for people like me in order to learn how to solve, address and prevent those kinds of problems by interacting with people from more than 10 nationalities. The camp is a University on its own. In our countries, it was not possible to cohabit with specific people but we learned how to live with them in the camp and life goes on smoothly. I have understood that it is not because of so and so that I am a refugee. It is beyond our perception and there is a purpose for that. Only one thing is important: to work on challenges in order to be a better and a greater person like it happened with Ignatius of Loyola.

Hadn’t I come to the camp, I wouldn’t learn leadership effectively, the way I experience with JC-HEM program. I have touched “UNITY IN DIVERSITY”. In fact, I learned English language with people who have never gone to school, who attended partly and this process prepared and molded me to become a language teacher in the camp. I have a dream: I’ll be a University Lecturer. I believe in this: “They have taken my home but they will never take my future”.

We are actually blessed to live in the camp which the most heterogenic or the most multinational in the world. I thank God for my presence here. My life has got a meaning in the camp.”

Jeremiah’s 29th chapter, 11th verse reminds me, “For I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.” And as our plans unfold, we hold each other in Ubuntu. Thank you, Sylvain for living and sharing your faith with me. I am a better me for having known you. I know you have had many moments, hours even years of pain and suffering; for you to hold strong to such hope is extraordinary. You are my teacher; you are a paragon of servant leadership amidst a place of suffering juxtaposed with potential for goodness and (as few can draw upon so clearly as you) the abundance of opportunity for growth in community, in Ubuntu. Asante sana, thank you.
Jesuit Commons – Higher Education at the Margins

I am marginalized (from reality) if I pretend we’re not all connected. “Ubuntu” means, we matter to each other. Mandela reminds us, “I am who I am because of who you are to me.” Jesuit Commons brings together folks in refugee camps, volunteers and faculty, Georgetown and Gonzaga, Regis, Xavier and Canisius, Saint Louis U, Marquette and Santa Clara. Many Jesuit Universities come to the dialogue; it’s rich and stimulating; the participants are all served by and simultaneously serve and learn from each other. Our questions and answers morph into new questions as we co-create and shape new ideas; we integrate and synthesize our course materials into our lived experiences that are vastly different and surprisingly similar.

In their refugee camp, they stand, behind others standing, waiting for rice – in the baking sun, hungry; dusty sweat dripping down their fatigued backs; no dignity or voice; certainly, no choice. And drastically juxtaposed, just a few weeks ago, many of the students missed class at Kakuma Refugee Camp; the heavy rains make travel impossible.

The rain is too heavy, too much, too long, too fast; the Kenyan soil is hard and unreceiverive. The water’s too deep to cross to class. How can this be? These people who fetch and carry jugs and vats of water on their backs, on their shoulders or atop their heads – how can this same scarce resource mercilessly pour down in a destructive flood?!

Photo credit: Welongo Muzabel, JC-HEM student and Director of SAVIC Solidarity and Advocacy for Vulnerable Individuals in Crisis in Kakuma (April 2013)

One woman told me she was on her way to class, she walked for an hour to get to our lab; she was stopped by an overwhelming large muddy mess; she longed to find a way to cross; sad, she was stuck. Again. She couldn’t cross. She returned to her hut. She told me that she was sorry. I told her that I was sorry. And, we’ll continue learning and working toward a just world for all people.

While considering the water ration rationale, I recall working on my Master’s Thesis many years ago at SLU. A Jesuit, some colleagues, my daughter Claire and I went for a couple summers to work with a Jesuit mission in Ecuador, South America. Besides learning how to hold my breath through freezing cold showers, not letting the contaminated water enter my mouth, knowing that sometimes the Quito government would arbitrarily turn off the water mid-shower… a decade and a
half later, I still savor agua caliente. Every single shower! While there, I studied the ways that we enter into the lives of those whom we serve; from a justice-orientation, how do those of us from privileged lives invite others into dialogue and mutual learning? I thank God for my cleansing hot shower that rolls down my privileged back at the start of each morning. I search for ways to be in kinship as we journey as companions, taking steps toward justice so that everyone may have clean water, nutritious food and meaningful work.

In between studies, our Jesuit Commons students gather firewood from the bush near the camps. Cut, split, carry and stack, they labor for wood every day. Wood for cooking their rice today; rice tomorrow; and rice the next. Until the bag is empty. Again.

I can (almost) relate: my home is heated with wood; we use chainsaws in our private pine forest many weekends through the year, splitting each piece with an axe in hand, stacking it too, for cozy woodstove winter warmth. Nevertheless, I seek to make meaning, to find moments of similarity and solidarity, living on common ground with my Jesuit Commons companions. I wonder why this is - perhaps by design, that we long to relate, connect and identify with the other – to understand and unite; my well water and wood, or holding a child with a fever – our interiors are the same; while our worldviews are so diverse. From Conifer to Kenya, we all shed salty tears; we all laugh and dance; we all want, ultimately – to matter to those in our midst. As Mother Teresa reminds us, “The problem is, that we’ve forgotten that we belong to one another.”

Such kinship is found in our belongingness in Ubuntu.

Cultivating Kinship

I share with you my student and brother Holly. He is a delightful, poetic, bright and analytic thinker. He is from Sudan. Reading Holly’s essays, I told him that Chris Lowney would be proud of how well he embodies and is living Heroic Leadership. Together, we explored the four pillars of Leadership: self-awareness, ingenuity, love and heroism. In a Camp of more than 100,000 people, Holly cleverly integrates the pillars into his world and beyond. Kakuma literally means, “forgotten place.” Holly’s synthesis of Lowney’s Heroic Leadership transcends what I thought I knew about leadership. Holly’s presence in our class, in my life invites me into being a better me. Our Program based in Jesuit principles, cultivates Kinship. Juan Ramón Moreno, S.J., reminds us, “In every drawing near, there is a moment of receiving, of allowing oneself to be taught by the other who offers me his or her reality.” Thank you my dear brother Holly, for challenging me into deeper integration of heroic leadership into my life. My local students at our Colorado campuses thrive as I set up service-learning opportunities to work with JC-HEM students. Such mutual enrichment of curricula and each other strengthens what we are learning about the course content, each other and ourselves.

Last semester while playing soccer, Holly broke his right wrist. As a strong striker, he frequently scores winning goals; sadly though, he didn’t score any goals that game. He spent several days in the hospital in pain; eventually released from what he said is like “a filthy prison.” Hmm, why was he there for several days; I wondered and imagined that the bones must be severely crushed or a rod
When Holly went back for a check-up a couple of days later, they determined that the bone had not set properly; (no surprise there; inept, unjust healthcare!); they’d have to re-break it. Ouch. Another salty tear sliding down my cheek, tasting more injustice that Holly’s radius, if tended to properly, would have healed as he deserves.

Grappling for words, journeying with Holly, I told him of the cannon ball, Ignatius’ broken and also re-set leg and how this lead to Ignatius’ conversion and turning point in his vocation. Holly was delighted with such companionship with St. Ignatius. I was, too. Amani Kwako, peace be with you, dear Holly.

I want Holly, Ifrah, Welongo and Mohammed to show up each day - that Malaria or flooding waters won’t again keep them away. Zawaldi and Sud: I pray you make your way to class. You fled your homeland, watched your village burn and your sister being raped. I honor your presence in our Forum. I honor your desire to learn and to share, to grow beyond the nightmare from which you fled -- being the only one left… in your family of nine. Jesuit Commons is the family table around which we now unite and share, grow, learn and lead others in kinship.

Their new Regis University IDs say who they are. For many, this is their single document or proof that they indeed…are. Left in their burned village of days long ago, torched in the fire, lives gone up in smoke, this Regis ID gives each of them a new face and place, a hope and hard work, even more powerful than their hunger and strife. Their photos capture their longing and hope in who we together can be… for they are now “us,” Regis University… in kinship, are “we.”

The experts said what? Well, what do you think? I ask them again for they are in disbelief that I really want to know how or even why to engage with the author. “My writing voice?” What’s that? I invite them to share and engage, to listen and learn, to reflect and discern. I invite them to illuminate for me the context and frame for how this all makes meaning for them. Students share books and computer time; they meet in groups to discuss Orwell and Mandela, Ignatius, and Wangari Maathai.

Can you imagine the flavors of perspectives in our online forum of our Hutus and Tutsis, our Dinkas and Turkana Tribes?!

### The Unprivilege of Privilege

The students in our Program are providers in community health - caring for each others’ wounds; or they’ve taught elementary education for decades - vast knowledge they share. My classes are blessed with talented women’s advocates, too; they’re champions for human rights; they help women suffering from rape or partner violence. Our learners are peace makers coordinating dialogue between heated tribes. To read their posts upon the Forum, they are mighty skillful in their approach to disagree. Amazing mediators they are born from a keen sense of knowing oneself in relation to the Other. My students are much more motivated (as their survival depends upon it!) than I’ve ever had to be to navigate through negotiation, conflict resolution and peace-making. Indeed, I am the student in their midst. I’ve been “privileged out of” such Othering; so I surround myself in community with those who know and live Ubuntu. I am amidst experts in compassion and empathy!

We’ve all heard before of the “Golden Rule: Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” There is also the Kantian philosophical approach of developing a categorical imperative such that one would “Act only on the maxim through which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law.” However, Emmanuel
Levinas switched the ethical imperative to maintain that one should do unto an Other as he/she would have you do unto him/her. Levinas’ ethic is distinctly different from the former two. For, both the Golden Rule as well as Kantian ethics place the focus upon the moral agent or self; whereas the Levinasian paradigm of ethics shifts the focus to the Other. Our learners are sitting beside, living next door to people whose tribe have tortured and killed their families and spirits. Many of our learners on their strife-paved road are more motivated to learn peaceful engagement than most other people in the world. They are masterful and keenly aware of how to weave together the threads of pain with those of faith and peace. With my limited perspective, it would seem as though a person in such a desperate lifestyle would hoard and hide. On the contrary, I know them to be utterly caring and compassionate, working for peace as if their lives depend upon it. Their sense of othering is masterful, organic and alive. They and Levinas teach, “do unto others as they would have you do unto them.”

So, looking into the mirror, I smile when I know what matters, really matters, is how we live connected lives, how we serve each other well. The magic markers of our lives, our vanity, fall away in that mirror when we ponder why we’re here; I celebrate that Kakuma’s muddy mess matters to me. I see that my mirror is muddier… without them. Without them, my greying hair or multiplying wrinkles are my primary mirrored concern; with them, I wonder whether there will be enough rice today. I learn from the Muslims, the many different tribes, their ancient traditions are rich with how to live and to thrive. So many new ways to celebrate through dance, food and song; I bask in their real beauty for which we all long. A Lonerganian approach “seeks to help us realize our potential as transcendent knowers and shapers of our world and of the world of others in all the good and best possible ways.” We have all enjoyed the moments of “ahh-ha!” where, as Gaetz says, “a new mode of conscious emerges;” Such evokes then a “new operation to kick in” with me -- a new way of being transcendent.

When sharing on our Forum about why Holli was away with his broken hand, another student, Achayo boldly chimed in “Oh, not to worry, dear Holli; for if you want to win, you must simply pay the price.” In the on-line forum, the conversation continued: “Your team is proud of you, besides, that’s soccer’s risk. You just have to be happy it could have been much worse... We asked if his fingers stick out of the cast, yes?! then surely he can still type; ‘your paper is still due; you can do it!’” In our Jesuit Commons space, her voice is growing strong! I love and honor you, Achayo. Thank you very much, apwoyo matek lamera, my dear sister; I am learning much from your presence.

This past fall, I woke to an unfamiliar sound, a scratching sound outside. I lifted my head up from my comfy pillow, I leaned over to peer out the window to see the antlers of a great bull elk bumping his impressive rack on my house as he nibbled the final green leaves and stems from my lilac bush below. A good morning greeting that I carry with me as I log in to Jesuit Commons. I am who I am because of who the elk and bear are to me. I become more fully me as I allow God’s gifts to matter – as I experience, understand, judge and decide. Lonergan and God invite each of us to order our lives such that we may journey and realize how our lives are interconnected, we know we need each other. Ubuntu.

Perhaps from this land of milk and honey, I bring a paradigm of abundance and plenty. Perhaps from their life of famine and fear, they bring the humility, the strength and fortitude that I lack. Together, we meet, I smile and I say, Ubuntu to you, to me to us all; Ubuntu, we are who we are because of each other. Ubuntu, you matter to who I become. Ubuntu, my wellness depends upon yours. “Sawa bona,” (I see you); “Sikhona,” (I am here), you reply. Ubuntu is kinship in our Jesuit family.

Dialoguing our way into Liberation

I share with you my friend and student, @N1-LOSI:

I ask, “Why do you refer to yourself as ‘@N1-LOSI’?” “N1” is short form of “Natir one” refers to my village where I was born and LOSI is also short form of LOSILANG, a small town in Kotido, Uganda where my father was born . . . together, these make up me.”

@N1-LOSI has a clever manner of connecting various essays, assignments and our previous
courses; he sees the connections among and between the authors’ works coupled with our own lived experiences. @N1-LOSI shares his deep passion for learning and commitment to sharing his knowledge and education with others in the Camp. I’m reminded of Paulo Freire’s attention to genuine dialogue which is necessary in the task of liberation\(^3\) – genuine dialogue invites critical thinking about one’s world. JCHEM beckons and inspires @N1-LOSI into dialoguing and learning more so he can do more, give more and be more: Magis.

I used to enjoy regular visits with Walter Ong, S.J. while we were both at SLU. We had many rich dialogues about dialogue: “I have to sense something in the other’s mind to which my own utterance can relate. Human communication can never be one-way. It not only calls for response, but is shaped in its very form and content by anticipated response.”\(^3\) Engaging in intercultural online communication in our courses, we have myriad opportunities to anticipate the other’s response and then shape our messages, thus. Perhaps this feels comfortable despite the infinite plausible misunderstandings because we all enter with honor and gratitude and anticipating such in return.

As I enter into dialogue with Ifra, I carry the image in my mind of who she is, where she is, how her various cultures shape and express who she is. I “sense something” in Ifra’s mind, as Ong nudges me into deeper community and connection. Cultural differences can appear to be a cloak of barriers to relating and listening. I listen deeply to what matters to Ifra. I listen with anticipation to what she is saying and what she is not saying. I have come to believe that the primary purpose of my teaching vocation is to cultivate the individual (and collective) gifts of our learners and of myself such that we live as invitations for each other to become and live fully who God intends for us to be.

The listening that we do while engaging a person from another culture is an encounter with someone whose point of departure is another worldview. A person’s “worldview establishes how
people perceive themselves, each other, and their places in the universe and serves as an underlying pattern for interaction with a culture” (Taylor & Nakayama 2013). My worldview and Ifra’s worldview are radically different, so when we engage one another in the JC-HEM forum, the limitations of my own worldview are highlighted and I become aware of both how constricted my own worldview is and how expansive my worldview can become when I can see through Ifra’s eyes.

Drilling down further into a worldview perspective, Swigonski’s Standpoint Theory focuses on how gender, race, and class influence the circumstances of individuals’ lives, especially their positions in society and the kinds of experiences those positions foster. My own life experience as a white woman in an affluent country entitles me to beliefs about my own ability to self-determine my career, my relationships, and where I live. Ifra’s life experience as a Somalian woman who escaped from her country during a genocide campaign to live in a Kenyan refugee camp entitles her to a different set of beliefs. My encounter with Ifra as a JC-HEM instructor expands both my worldview and now the way I think I know about Somalian women so that my operations in relation to Ifra and others. Ifra shared beautifully and poignantly with me in her essay about her motivation for participation in this Program. Like many of our students, she is committed to ensuring that her education primarily benefits her community. I am struck by the collectivistic commitment to kinship. Ifra is teaching me, showing me: Ubuntu lived. Marian Wright Edelman reminds us, "Education is for improving the lives of others and for leaving your community and world better than you found it.” Ifra knows and lives this paradigm of being a woman in service to others.

**They’re Tracking Changes on My Heart**

I’ve enjoyed teaching (and grappling with) Intercultural Communication for many years and delight in the journey toward becoming interculturally competent. Kim asserts that this ongoing process is anchored within the individual’s “internal system that is at the core of intercultural competency, which is manifested in definitive affective, behavioral, and cognitive abilities such as empathy, adaptive motivation, perspective taking, behavioral flexibility, and person-centered communication. Kim further associated “intercultural identity…A stranger who has developed an intercultural identity does not identify exclusively with his/her particular social group, but with other groups and subgroups as well, thus reflecting a more inclusive perspective.” Integral to my journey of sisterhood, I recognize the stages of and steps toward homophily and unity. I perceive our growing kinship as we work together; there is something very liberating as well as equalizing about our laboring together. We all contribute to the Forum; they write and re-write; they re-re-vise their revisions; I grade and “track changes” on their papers; I re-read their sacred thoughts with my heart lodged in my throat; the learners “track changes” on my soul; we’re enjoying mutual learning and simultaneous teaching. This, I believe
is what Gaetz and Lonergan are pointing to for my “new mode of conscious emerging” as my “new operation” kicks in, in communion with JCHEM. This is the meeting place of Kim, Martin & Nakayama, Taylor, Buber and Ong, Swigonski and Gaetz, Levinas, Lowney and Lonergan with my students and me. This is where Lonergan shows me the journey into judging as I consider others’ theories, refine mine in dialogue with others as we find value and continue toward and into Lonergan’s deciding and choosing to live fully engaged with JCHEM, seeing how enriching our Program is for the common good and for me, AMDG (Ad Majorem dei gloriam).38

In Teaching with Heart and Soul, Parker Palmer explains,

“although I spent most of the sixties in Berkeley, I did not learn about the powers of heart and soul sitting in a hot tub in northern California. I have learned about them over the years by drawing as close as someone like me can to the experience of oppressed people. I mean people who, by definition, have had every external form of power stripped from them: they have no money, no status, no access to influence, no heavily armed nation-state.

How have such "powerless" people managed to foment deep-reaching social change in so many parts of the globe—from Eastern Europe to Latin America, from South Africa to the black liberation movement in our own country? By drawing upon and deploying the only power that cannot be taken from us: the power of the human soul, the human spirit, the human heart. Far from being socially and politically regressive, "heart and soul" language, rightly understood, is one of the most radical rhetorics we have.

Despite our cultural bias that all power resides in the outward, visible world, history offers ample evidence that the inward and invisible powers of the human spirit can have at least equal impact on our individual and collective lives. That simple fact is one that our educational institutions ignore at their—and our—peril.”39

It is with much gratitude that I enjoy this journey of companionship with Jesuit Commons students and faculty; I’m experiencing and understanding; I’m judging and deciding about the powers of heart and soul. When you call me, “Merry Mum,” I know that you know that I honor you. We’re bonding our kinship across several time zones, through your barbed wire fencing and over the corruption-flavored rice. Your strength of Spirit and eagerness to learn are lived witnesses of Ignatius’ Magis: doing more, learning more so we can be more for the common good and the greater glory of God.40

As I experience life (gathering wood, standing in line for coffee, admiring the elk at my window) Lonergan and Ignatius invite me to use “all of my senses and elements of consciousness, including imagining, dreaming and intuiting.” To pause and breathe in mindfully the present, I gain deeper insight to what’s involved in this Critical Realism. Then, I understand the meaning of my life more clearly when in relation to JC-HEM students. I can better make sense out of my experience of my place in line and in my world, when my place in my world is in relation to my students in line for coffee or rice, expanding the ‘my’ of my world so I am not only teaching, but the student-teacher dyad necessitates a mutuality of inter-connected learning. I am teacher and learner; the students are learners and teachers. The scope of my noticing expands beyond my bubble, now overlapping the worlds of those I can read about daily in the news—because I am noticing with my heartfelt and connected being, rather than dismissing because the tragedies are too overwhelming to connect being, rather than dismissing because the tragedies are too overwhelming to connect.

But is it essential to understand that contemplation is a very powerful tool, and it is a shifting from the left side of the brain to the right. But is it essential to understand that imagination is not the same as fantasy. Fantasy is flight from reality, to a world where we create images for the sake of a diversity of images. Imagination grasps reality. In other
words, depth of thought and imagination in the Ignatian tradition involves a profound engagement with the real, a refusal to let go until one goes beneath the surface. It is a careful analysis (dismembering) for the sake of integration (remembering) around what is deepest: God, Christ, the Gospel. The starting point, them, will always be what is real: what is materially, concretely thought to be there; the world as we encounter it; the world of the senses so vividly described in the Gospels themselves; a world of suffering and need, a broken world with many broken people in need of healing. We start there. We don’t run away from there. And then Ignatius guides us and students of Jesuit education, as he did his retreatants, to enter into the depths of that reality. Beyond what can be perceived most immediately, he leads one to see the hidden presence and action of God in what is seen, touched, smelt, felt. And that encounter with what is deepest changes the person.”

I find meaningful dialogue with the other faculty in our JC-HEM Program; this exchange and mutual learning is integral to my involvement in the Program, why I am motivated to fortify the Program and serve in my role. Educated and teaching in the Jesuit tradition for many years have afforded me the opportunity to continually seek more clarity about my underlying values and motives. This is how I grow toward the final step of Lonergan’s Critical Realism; I decide what to do; I make thoughtful, informed choices that affect my life and how I see my choices impact the lives of others, determining how my life choices contribute toward the common good. I make daily decisions about how and when I use, share or reduce resources. My choice to participate in this Program anchors me in this Critical Realism of awakening to, understanding, judging and deciding how to celebrate the infinite gifts that I’ve been given. Jane Addams reminds us, “The good we secure for ourselves is precarious and uncertain until it is secured for us all and incorporated into our common life.”

Lonergan guides me through the daily opportunities and choices to bask in and make excellent use of the gifts within and around me.

(Mary’s and) Man’s Search for Meaning (in Malawi)

A creative and engaging project that the students and I enjoyed, in Dzaleka Refugee Camp last Spring, was the co-creation of a mosaic “Arrupe Hall” sign that hangs proudly on the side of the computer lab and learning center. Our shoulder-
to-shoulder planning and placement of mosaic tiles and colorful stones symbolizes our intentional engagement with the concrete, the multi-colored imagination and the reflective spirit of creation.

While in Arrupe Hall in the middle of the day, in the middle of the week, the computers’ hums quieted, the lights went out and I watched in awe as the students peacefully packed up their belongings to gracefully move our class outside. Without hesitation or even a hint of frustration, they lead me to their organic garden where we’d continue grappling with our own and Frankl’s *Man’s Search for Meaning*. Under the heat of that Malawian mid-day sun, I was surrounded by men and women who knew a hell of a lot more about Frankl’s *Search for Meaning* than I ever would. Sitting upon wooden benches on the comforting, grounding and bumpy earth, amidst the light-green, baby lettuce and stagnant heat in the Dzaleka garden, we all sought and shared Meaning.

Within a couple days of journeying with my students and Frankl in his concentration camp, I then dared visit a colleague in the filthy Lilongwe Prison. His wife had been tortured and murdered. Whenever anyone is killed, the police take everyone near the scene of the crime and put them in prison. “Guilty until proven innocent” ensures the cycle of corruption and increasing revenue as people pay their way back to freedom. My heart and mind swirled with compassion crashing up against my anger at the injustice and sorrow for his small children and I felt horror how she lived in her final moments of life; these feelings were all muddled up with waves of guilt that I live such an idyllic existence with more feelings swirling alongside my fear – so, I reach for subconscious comfort and reassurance that I’m o.k.; I feel my hidden wallet strapped to my thigh where I protect my passport, MasterCard and a few kwacha under my skirt. I startle to the nervousness that at any moment one of the barbaric, heavily-armed guards could take me into a dungeonous closet. I gulp in anxiety. I inhale faith and a bit of hope. And I breathe in mindfulness of the Holy Spirit’s presence. My clenched jaw softened and relaxed. Holding my hand to my heart, I return to God’s love within. Finally allowed into the cell, I hugged the innocent prisoner, my brother. The only pair of blue eyes within the ugly concrete walls, tears gently rolled down in accompaniment. I said, “I’m so sorry” from my humble (wanna-be-)solidarity and intentional sisterhood. In Mandela’s *Ubuntu*, he proclaims that when one of us is harmed, we are all harmed. Thank you, Nelson Mandela for your articulation and life that inspire mine. The killers extracted her eyeballs and teeth. The gods
proclaim that such sacrificial offering promises grand wealth. He shared with me his anger and pain of the reality that his children have not only lost their mother; but, now their dad is in prison, too, instead of being at home grieving together. I'm still angry at this multi-layered storm of hatred. At the core of my primal being, I felt powerlessness and pain; juxtaposed within the Spirit, I paused and acknowledged my overwhelming sense of peace in God's presence. Grace. Visitors are only allowed to enter if they bring food for their prisoner; luckily, Protasia and I had our luncheon leftovers and a bottle of water in the pickup truck.

Protasia shared her Parable of the Palm Tree in her beautiful African oral tradition, she tells of the Palm Tree's strength in healing that comes from deep within – from our core being/roots. Offering individual and group healing, for vulnerable individuals having been abused, her narrative gracefully draws upon the understanding that the one who harms others, has himself been harmed; thus we invite the healing power of forgiveness. And here we were, in kinship, voluntarily in the center of hell and healing -- in the Lilongwe Prison.

As the JC-HEM students have chores and family needs waiting for them at home each day during their lunch break, I enjoyed several gracious offers to accompany them to their homes, meet their families and share meals with them. Exchanging smiles and hugs, our hearts connected in a mutual gratitude for each other. Embodying a sacredness about being in communion with Christ incarnate, I breathed in the holiness of their humble abodes, their space in the Camp. We offered up prayers of thanksgiving, poured the heavy pitcher of water over each others' hands - just like the servers of the Eucharist at Mass. I was sitting with Christ Incarnate in Dzaleka!

Parched and hungry, we enjoyed boiled, home-grown potatoes from their modest garden patches, Daniella gave me a dainty hand-beaded necklace with hundreds of carefully strung teeny-tiny pink beads. Her mom, sisters and she spoke of their pending resettlement to Australia, hoping to leave the Camp where they’ve been for too-many-years long. We discussed the current news of another student whose wife just had a stillborn baby, released from the hospital and grieving, she soon passed away from hemorrhaging that was not diagnosed or tended to. Ouch. My mind quickly recalls
my low-risk pregnancies and homebirths, skilled midwives and physicians, supplies and tenderness, expertise and healthy babies. Again, I long to experience, understand, judge and decide for myself in relation to others.

JC-HEM student Antoine Birhange Masirika invited us for a delightful dinner with his family. Dzaleka Refugee Camp May 2012. Photo Credit: Tom McFarland

Antoine’s family sacrificed their duck for our meal. I was humbled and honored. What a gift to share such a delicious and precious gift. Having butchered and shared my family’s lambs and chickens, I related to this ritual but felt a heightened lavishness in the midst of the scarcity of food, that they would share with me their family duck.

With Thich Nhat Hahn’s words in my soul, “We are here to awaken from the illusion of our separateness.” 45

We sat there as the mamma duck and her baby waddled across the threshold of the doorway just as we were feasting. The sustenance of Ubuntu filled their home, our bellies and our hearts. 

Notes
1 Mary Lawrence, “Education at the Margins: Ubuntu at our Core,” presentation for Jesuit Commons: Higher Education at the Margins World Conference, Regis University, March 5-8, 2012.
2 My JC-HEM students introduced me to and modeled for me the meaning of the Zulu word, Ubuntu. As we embrace each other in human dignity, we grow in Ubuntu. For my birthday then, I gathered several of my friends in Colorado and together we celebrated our interconnectedness and Ubuntu by making a 3’ x 5’ mosaic that hangs on the side of my barn.
5 Ivan Gaetz on Bernard Lonergan (1904-1984): Thoughts on His Method and Its Application to Education (p. 4).
6 CTED1000 Leadership Principles Online Forum Discussion, Daniella Mamba, (May 2012).
8 Ibid., 92.
9 Ibid.
12 Ibid.
Lawrence: Education at the Margins

13 Geoffrey Ntama, personal communication (2012).

14 Teilhard de Chardin, “Divine Milieu.”

15 Greg Boyle, SJ, “Nothing Stops a Bullet like a Job,” video of presentation at Santa Clara University, CA.


17 Palmer, The Courage to Teach.

18 Steve Hutchison, personal conversation (June 2012).

19 Sylvain Ruhunya, JC-HEM student online forum discussion Spring 2012.


22 Mother Teresa in Greg Boyle, SJ, “Nothing Stops a Bullet like a Job,” http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gBMxL8i4oZY.


25 Holly Ghaisen, JC-HEM student online forum discussion Fall 2011.

26 Emmanuel Levinas, in Mary K. Timm-Harrison, Who Do You Say That I Am?

27 Ibid.

28 Ivan Gaetz, “Bernard Lonergan (1904-1984): Thoughts on His Method and Its Application to Education,” paper presented at the meeting of Ignatian Faculty Scholars Program, Denver, CO.

29 Ibid.

30 JC-HEM online forum discussion, Fall 2011.

31 @NI-LOSÍ, JC-HEM student online forum discussion, Fall 2011.


35 Swigonski in Mary K. Lawrence Master’s Thesis (2000).


38 Tellechea Idigoras, Ignatius of Loyola.


40 Tellechea Idigoras, Ignatius of Loyola.


44 Protasia Gathendoh, Jesuit Relief Services, interview with Mary K. Lawrence sharing her parable, The Parable of the Palm Tree, personal interview (May 2012).


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