Ubuntu: A Regenerative Philosophy for Rupturing Racist Colonial Stories of Dispossession

by

Devi Dee Mucina

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Graduate Department of Sociology and Equity Studies in Education

Ontario Institute of Studies in Education
University of Toronto

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Abstract

Let me share with you Ubuntu oralities. These stories will connect us in a familial dialogue about how we can and are regenerating beyond neo colonialism by using Ubuntu. Ubuntu is a philosophical and ethical system of thought, from which definitions of humanness, togetherness and social politics of difference arise. Ubuntu can also be viewed as a complex worldview that holds in tension the contradictions of trying to highlight our uniqueness as human beings among other human beings. My interpretation of our Indigenous Ubuntu knowledge communicates how my understanding of Ubuntu is influenced by my Maseko Ngoni and Shona ethnic identities. Another influence of my understanding of our Ubuntu worldview comes from the African languages of my familial communities which are the main tools that I draw on for accessing our shared meaning and creating new shared meaning. The geopolitical experience of being Black in Africa and then leaving Africa for the West also has influenced my understanding of Ubuntu. These are my strengths and limitations in engaging Ubuntu. I give you this information because it is not my aim to create a false dichotomy about Blackness; rather, it is my aim to enter our global contemporary Black academic discourse with another form of remembering Blackness. My remembering is grounded in my own experience which has found constancy through Ubuntu
languages and other social symbolic expressions. This cultural transmission process has allowed knowledge from my ancestors to cascade down to me. I believe that by sharing our social stories we build collective confidence to engage and challenge each other with respectful curiosity and, above all, with love. Love is the expression of relational care for our interconnectedness, which is the basis for researching our truths in our shared humanity. Ubuntuness has many ways of transmitting knowledge. This being said, for this work I will focus on how we can share our fragmented memories through our stories of family, community and nationhood, as a way of better understanding our Ubuntuness. This is the process of love creating possibilities beyond pain, isolation, abandonment and hate.
Acknowledgments

First, let me offer an Ubuntu greeting as a form of acknowledgement to our ancestors, our elders, our mothers, our fathers, our brothers, our sisters, those yet unborn and all of creation. “Sanibona” means “We see you,” but also implies that, at a deep spiritual level, I am never alone as my ancestors are always with me. Consequently, I see you with my ancestors. The response to this is “Yebo Sanibona” meaning, “Yes, we see you too.” Again, the implication is that you and your ancestors are in agreement about your observation of us. So, to our ancestors, to our elders, to our parents, to our sisters and brothers, to those yet unborn and to all of creation, “Sanibona.” To speak this way is to acknowledge our living relations while also honouring our ancestral spirits. We also remind ourselves to exercise caution because we know that the act of speaking can also be used to deny, refuse, ignore and silence our relatedness.

The act of centering Indigenous knowledge is itself a form of social political action and in this process I have been guided and supported by Dr. Njoki Nathani Wane. Her willingness to share and explore African systems of knowledge production has been immeasurably helpful to me. Dr. Tanya Titchosky has helped me understand that I can engage multiple issues in an honest open manner, allowing me to address the complexities of human interaction. She has also helped me interact with the power of words and social political interpretation. Dr. Ardra Cole played a crucial role in helping me develop a structure which allowed me to use Ubuntu knowledge in a way that made it accessible to my African community, while honouring our African ancestors. I feel privileged to have worked with such wise professors who thoughtfully challenged me and motivated me through their own research and through their willingness to encourage me to keep taking honest, bold steps when I felt tired and questioned the value of my work in a Western academic institution. For your support and hard work, thank you.
I know I could not have done this work without the support of my family, their love and their belief in the importance of this work. Amai (mother), your bravery is so great that I struggle to understand it. I thank you for giving me life. Baba (father), our love has been full of struggles but I would like to start off by thanking you for giving me an apology and, most importantly, for starting to help reunite our family. Dadakazi (female father), you are the glue that holds us together. Thank you Great Komba. Mandeep, I would like to thank you so much for being a dear friend, a great academic colleague but, more importantly, for being a partner in life and in parenting. You have helped me so much through this PhD process; I hope I can do the same for you. Finally I would like to thank my dear friends and family with special mention to all the Komba family members, Sanjit Bhalru and the Ferguson family.
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Millet Granary 1: Sharing Ubuntu Knowledge

There is no guarantee that what I say in these pages will have the power to change any other person. The only behaviours that I have the power to change are my own. This being said, I narrate the lessons I am gaining from my social actions of Ubuntu regeneration beyond colonialism. You may question why I share oratures\(^1\) of social actions of Ubuntu regeneration and my answer to you is this: Stories are our efforts to create honest open dialogue with each other and they are the base for creating advancement through critically regenerating our Ubuntu knowledge for the advancement of the global Black family. It is important that I am clear that at the centre of my storytelling is an open invitation to dialogue and meaning making because even our social individual\(^2\) stories are being fragmented. The individual Ubuntu memory, which is the basic unit of the collective memory, is still under attack from Western colonialism because to remember our Ubuntuness is to give power to our lived experience which becomes our philosophy after communal dialoguing about shared meaning. Knowing this fact, I actively privilege Indigenous Ubuntu knowledge as a way of expressing the importance of communal orality in drawing our attention to the power and wisdom of Blackness. My privileging of Ubuntu knowledge as the guiding framework for Black dialogue can be read as trying to impose a single Black solution. If such a question is worrying you, let me address it by turning to Samuel Oluoch Imbo (2002) who, in *Oral Traditions as Philosophy: Okot p'Bitek's Legacy for African Philosophy*, reminds us that the interpretation of Blackness should always be placed in a historical cultural context. In his own words he says:

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1 Verbal and vocally embodied knowledge production, meaning this knowledge was first shared and then encoded into memory through voicing techniques.

2 Please note, where you see individual I mean the social individual because the Ubuntu individual is collectively given meaning.
At stake is an authentic understanding of the social, religious, and intellectual developments taking place among the various peoples of Africa. A Western mindset that partitions the world into just two groups—the civilized and the primitive—effectively prevents the "civilized" from truly experiencing Africa and results in anthropologists setting out to prove a nonexistent preconceived model of society. (2002, p. 3)

Imbo (2002) seems to suggest that dichotomies grow from and support pre-established systems of thought as opposed to seeking understanding. In no way or form doesUbuntuness impose conformity. I have taken this to mean that the reading of the diverse forms of Black embodiment should be done in relation to individual and collective understanding of social place, geographical location, history, and cultural knowledge production so that we do not collapse the diversity of Blackness into an imposed singularity. What Ubuntuness brings to our individual and collective awareness is the knowledge of our relational interconnectedness. This means that my Blackness allows me to connect with other Black people, regardless of global location, because we are connected through our social relational interdependence. My own personal experience has taught me that Blackness is a marker of oppression and resistance. So, when I see other Black people during my daily activities, I greet them or give them a downward head nod. I would like to focus on this head nod and expose it as being a complex greeting which is embedded in a history of survival and resistance. The downward head nod, for me, is a way of saying I see you Blackness; it is my way of letting you know that I am in solidarity with you against the oppression of Blackness.

The upward head nod for me is a question that I direct to my sister or brother. It inquires about how s/he is holding up against the perils posed by neo-colonialism. In our contemporary society, the upward head nod has taken on an aggressive challenging quality because our youth are losing the historical memory of Black oppression which gave rise to global Black codified communication. For survival reasons our ancestors learned to communicate using few gestures.
Molefi Kete Asante (1996), in *Afrocentricity: The Theory of Social Change*, calls Black codified communication our “fraternal reactions to assaults on our humanity” (1996, p. 26). This means that I need to teach my son that when I give another Black person the downward head nod, I am giving that person strength and love. The opposite is also true; when I receive the downward head nod, I take strength and love from that person as their gesture has been codified to mean, “I see you Blackness and I feel your power.” The upward head nod can also be a question about what dangers surround the present environment. For example, in my early childhood in Zimbabwe hunger drove us to steal corn from White farmers’ fields while trying to avoid the ruthless beating we would get if we were caught by a White farmer’s guard. This meant, if I saw another child coming from the cornfield direction I would inquire about the dangers in that direction through an upward head nod, as speaking would draw attention to our location. A downward head nod by the other child meant it was safe and a shake of the head meant danger awaited me in the direction I was heading. I am sure other Black people could share their stories about their experiences of these common themes.

In the corn stealing story, we can also see examples of how colonialism has the strangest power to make us invisible through the economic materiality of Whiteness while also having the power to make us hyper visible in the materiality of crime and poverty. My Blackness is indeed a site of conflict. When I hear, ‘too Black’, ‘too light’, ‘too traditional’, ‘too African’, I sometimes contradictorily reply in anger, ‘too White to be Black’, ‘too Western to be Black’, ‘too Christian to be Black’, ‘too Muslim to be Black’, and, at times I say, ‘too African to be Black’. Yet, most of this conflict is made from an approximation to Whiteness about my Blackness. So I question, what is Whiteness? After sifting through the racist ideologies about White superiority, I have come to the same conclusions that others have come to. Whiteness is an ideological value about attaining a compulsory White able-bodied maleness, which is unattainable (McRuer, 2006;
Wane, 2009). No one is at the centre of this compulsory Whiteness and, yet, everyone is measured by their approximation to this compulsory White able-bodied maleness. This being said, this idealized Whiteness has its greatest appeal to those who see themselves as having a greater approximation to this Whiteness than others. For example, the White Anglo-Saxon male who perceives himself as being able-bodied will most vigorously defend Whiteness as compared to someone who feels a greater distance to the approximation of Whiteness based on values, gender, sexuality, ableism and so on.

Colonial compulsory Whiteness has distorted Blackness through violence, co-optation and seductive trickery but the most devastating colonial weapon has been the attempt to create Black mental genocide. The point I make here is supported by Samuel Oluoch Imbo who, in *Oral Traditions as Philosophy*, says:

> The real Africa has been distorted by Western scholars beyond recognition. Either because of a failure of memory or because of the wickedness of the storytellers, the stories of the traditional gods and ancient civilizations of Egypt and medieval kingdoms of Africa that began four million years ago in East Africa ceased to be an African story. European narratives rendered these African stories primitive and barbaric. p’Bitek is forthright about the racist history that emerges from the European lenses. (2002, p. 2)

Such racism has power over us only when we acquiesce to its demand for us to remain silent and pretend we are happy. How can we be happy fragmented by colonialism? How can we be happy dispossessed of our lands through colonial governmental structures and colonial state boundaries? How can we be happy when colonial tactics of divide and conquer have led to us abandoning each other in fear of colonial consequences? We are not happy but we are silent and marginalize the Black brave ones that speak out on our behalf. Such fear we must rupture. Let us use our stories to challenge the external colonizer and the internal colonizer who invade our minds. Let us rupture the colonially created racism, fear, abandonment and fragmentation. Let
our stories expose the shame of colonialism while illuminating our Ubuntu path of love. Each of us must fight the racist fear which invades our minds and then share the learning so that we create collective oppositional power to colonialism. Brothers and sisters, do not allow colonialism to undermine your sharing of your social actions of Ubuntu regeneration through and beyond colonialism. To succumb to colonial trickery is to accept colonial social isolation while believing the colonial lie that the White knight will come and rescue you from your misery. This is the greatest colonial trick because no one is coming to save you. You are the Black knight in shining armour, there is no greater living mortal that can save you, the source of power is you and realizing this is the beginning of your socially informed Ubuntu actions of regeneration beyond colonialism. Remember, all Ubuntu social action is doable because it has gained meaning after communal dialogue or because it is action that reflects the principles that have gained Ubuntu social meaning after communal dialogue. Before I say anymore to the global Black community, let me first address my son. I beg your pardon as I focus all my energy toward my son; he is my first and highest responsibility. This first story is for you son. “Sanibona” Komba.
Dear Khumalo,

Your arrival, son, has changed me. In an earlier period of scholarship, I focused my energy on addressing how Western colonialism silenced us from our traditional Indigenous Ubuntu past. The experience of that work led me to think about other ways that we can use to share our Ubuntu knowledge with our younger generations. As I hear and speak about our cultural knowledge, I am learning that we, the Ubuntu, have been and are in relation with other cultures and their knowledges (inclusive of human and nonhuman relations). Our shared social knowledge is gained through dialogue but is informed by our experience in a set geographical location. Through our relational contact we share with each other our unique stories, in hope of having our own contextual meaning valued in a shared humanity. In my engagement with other cultures, I have learned that Ubuntu knowledge is not exclusively known to the Ubuntu; it has common dimensions found in other cultures like the pursuit of equality, the practice of spirituality and the search for wisdom and knowledge. Ubuntuness is a complex worldview that holds in tension the contradictions of trying to highlight our uniqueness as human being among other human beings. Yet, in our social racial political world I find myself simplifying Ubuntu

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3 This Ubuntu pictograph from *Indaba My Children* (1964 p.672) by Vusa'mazulu Credo Mutwa serves as text among the larger Nungi collective. In my written text I use the sunrise symbolism to communicate that, the birth of our children is the start of our new future.
knowledge to being a specific Black\textsuperscript{4} knowledge which has contextual reference from Africa but connects us to the entirety of humanity through the teaching of our relational bonds.

This being said, there is nothing static about Ubuntu knowledge as it is constantly changing. My knowledge of my Ubuntuness is not identical to that of your grandparents and the knowledge of your grandparents is not the same as that of our ancestors. Ubuntu knowledge always changes in response to our lived experience while having a continuous philosophical dimension which allows us to use the lessons from our past to produce new specific Black knowledges for our use in our present political society. This is why your arrival, Khumalo, challenges me as an Ubuntu father to question, “What am I doing to ensure that my son knows his Ubuntuness which is our specific contextual production of Black knowledge?” This letter, Son, is my effort to give you and other Black children the lessons I have learned about our Ubuntuness, which is to say our Blackness.

Blackness, the spirit of eternalness,

Differentiation the illusion that creates self awareness,

Yet self Awarenesss is Ubuntu,

Ubuntu is the paradox of being human,

Yet, we do transcend the paradoxical conflict of Ubuntuness through SPIRIT,\textsuperscript{5}

\textsuperscript{4} In our many shades of Blackness we self define as Black to honour the power and challenges of experiencing the world from our Black social location. Hence, my social engagement with Blackness is focused on people of different shades of Blackness who identify as being Black.
Spirit is I am blackness,

I am boundless, limitless because I am the source,

Yet to know free will, individuation and uniqueness I must enter Ubuntu,

Time, Form and Space become the limits of my Ubuntu

This is the paradox of Ubuntu.

Dear Son, I want to tell you a story about how colonialism tried to impose its memory upon my Ubuntu memories. I know my story is set in days gone by but I am sure, from the low educational attainment of Black Children, which is reported to be at 40% in the Toronto District School Board\(^6\), that colonialism is still at work. I know that colonialism has reinvented itself again but I hope that you will see some of its strategies in my story. I was born in Zimbabwe because my Baba was in colonially imposed exile. As a child of a neo-slave (domestic worker), I rarely saw any African challenge the compulsory colonial White able-bodied\(^7\) power in Zimbabwe. All that I saw, for the most part, was the fear that led Blacks to be subservient to their powerful White masters. As a young boy, it seemed to me there were only two choices: I could be like the Africans, who appeared from my observation to be inferior to their White masters, or I could be like the Whites who appeared from my observation to be superior to the Africans. For me it was straightforward, I chose the latter because I wanted the power. However, I soon

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\(^5\) Spirit in the Ubuntu worldview is the energy flux in all things. It is the energy that creates the building blocks of all things and it connects all matter to the living energy source of Unkulunkulu (The Great Deviser or The Great Spirit).

\(^6\) The Star paper Available from: http://www.parentcentral.ca/parent/article/445172

\(^7\) McRuer, R. (2006), in *Crip theory: Cultural signs of queerness and disability*, talks about “Compulsory Able-Bodiedness” which made me think of how Blackness is viewed from a “compulsory approximation to Whiteness.”
learned from the school of colonialism that there was no choice for Africans; there was only the
privilege of being White and the despair of being Black in so called “Black Africa.” Yet,
strangely, their colonial power still enticed me even though I knew I would never be admitted
into compulsory able-bodied Whiteness. You see, colonialism had me believe that their second-
best position, which I could aspire towards as long as I worked hard to reflect compulsory able-
bodied Whiteness, was better than anything Black society could offer me. I only became aware
that what I was chasing was a bogus colonial illusion when I heard the White family that was
going to take over my guardianship from the orphanage, say to their White friends in their White
club in Zimbabwe: “The poor bugger is like a White boy born into the worst misery of
Blackness.”

The fact that they could have this discussion in earshot of me confirmed that they viewed
their Whiteness as a desired commodity which they were sure I wanted. As it was, I was only
allowed to stay with this White family on weekends and holidays because my Social Service
Worker had not completed the paper work to put me legally in the care of this White family. The
end of that weekend saw me back in the orphanage but, because I was unsettled by their
denigration of my Blackness, I ran away to an African reserve of Nyamapanda. In retrospect, I
ran away to the African reserve because I needed to have my social Black identity nurtured and
renewed. It was among these African relatives where we engaged in a process of communally
renewing our Black spirit through ceremony and, from this social engagement, I knew what it
was to have my Black spirit restored. It was among these African relatives where we
communally engaged in the process of speaking with our ancestors and, from this social
engagement, I felt connected to the energy flux of Blackness. It was among these African
relatives where we communally engaged in the process of respecting our Black knowledge and,
from this social engagement; I felt that I had power with Blackness instead of power over or
against it. It was among these African relatives where we engaged in communal Black love instead of the sporadic individualistic love of White people, who for the most part directed a sea of hate toward Blackness from their position of compulsory able-bodied Whiteness. Now, let me honestly say that this social experience of Ubuntu engagement has shaped and continues to shape my interactions with other people because it is one of my strong Ubuntu reference points.

I am not saying that everyone in the Black community loved me. However, I am pointing out that my Blackness among the Africans was a point of inclusion rather than a point of exclusion, as it is in the White society. When I was ready to confront White society, I went back to the orphanage and contacted my Social Worker. I told her that I did not want the White family to become my legal guardians. As afraid as I was of being alone and poor, I was not willing to allow my Blackness to be denigrated any further by me or any ideas of a compulsory able-bodied Whiteness. This is not to say I never faltered again but it was the start of change and, to this day, I am still working on acquiring my wholeness which is my Blackness, my Ubuntuness.

Dear son, I tell you all this so that you do not fall for the same insidious trickery of colonialism. In my case, I chased the illusion of compulsory able-bodied Whiteness which used my Blackness to put me in a subordinate position. With no one to inform me that this was the greatest trick of dispossessing me of my identity and cultural knowledge, I fell headlong into this trap. So I will ask you: Are you aware of the token illusion that colonialism is using to seduce you? Is it money, power, drugs, the knowledge of compulsory able-bodied Whiteness which is stolen from other people? Has anyone told you that the longest continuing universities were built in Africa? Check the Guinness Book of Records, an encyclopedia or any credible source. Yet, how many Black people know this? Interestingly, all that we know of Africa are the images of misery and poverty. They tell you that Africa cannot support itself but they tactfully neglect to
let you know why. They do not talk about the scramble for Africa, both past and present. Who points out that the same corporate players, who arrived so long ago, searching for raw materials are still doing it today? This does not exclude religious corporations for they want to steal our souls. They gladly point out that we are killing each other by the millions but nobody questions where the weapons come from. As so many are dying, how is it that the extraction of gold, diamonds and oil has increased? How is it that, regardless of how severe the wars are in parts of Africa, Coca-Cola, cigarette companies and drug companies are still able to get their products to the African markets? From our misery they make their profit. Know your whole history and you will find your whole truth and let that guide your actions.

Dear Son, do you see how the colonial system has made you and I believe that Blackness is worthless? We have become their faithful believers and we believe so much we even participate in our own destruction. We have been closed off to the fact that what is powerful about Blackness they have claimed for their own through their distortion and what is weak about Blackness they have over emphasized and over publicized, so you become embarrassed of identifying with your Blackness. Yet, this distortion can only occur on the surface because you cannot have world history without Blackness. You cannot have humanity without Blackness. Do you see the contradictions? Do you see the insidious trickery? It is all designed to stop you from looking at the richness of Blackness. All designed to make you fear your Blackness. Do not let anyone give you a limited, false category of what Blackness is because Blackness embodies much more than I am considering in this short dissertation work.

Yes, my Ubuntu spirit has been weathered by colonialism but it has not been broken. My question to you son is: What stands out for you in this story? What does this story communicate? What does this story teach you? Where do you see power and where do you see weakness? How
are you ensuring that colonialism is not tricking you into slavery? Dear son, I am ready to help
you engage your Black power but let us ensure that we cross-reference what I teach you so that
you get a fuller picture of our communal Ubuntu knowledge, while transcending my colonially
imposed limitations. Learn from our successes as well as from our failures. Take all these
experiences of Blackness from past and present and use them as a blueprint to regenerate
yourself, to renew yourself and create a better future for you and the next generation. But most
importantly, remember that each experience of Blackness comes with responsibility. Take Black
knowledge respectfully and use it respectfully because it is sacred and because it connects you to
your Black ancestors. Do not fear to regenerate this knowledge because you are Kwaca (the
freedom spirit of dawn, the start of a renewed Black spirit). You are the source. You are
Blackness. The cycle of Ubuntu continues.

Your, loving Baba

Devi Dee Mucina Komba

My son, I beg your pardon as I now speak more inclusively to all our global Black
community. Let us begin rupturing colonially constructed stories that create fear of our voices,
fear of our knowledge, fear of social isolation, fear of honest critical self reflection and fear of
the power of our Blackness. Mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers and the unborn ones: Colonialism
has power over us if we accept its illusionary total power. The fragmenting and co-opting of our
knowledge as its own is its total insidious power. This truth that I give to you becomes a
revolutionary force that you feel and understand after you have analyzed your own story
repeatedly in relation to the colonial facts and the experience of other colonized bodies, using
Ubuntu philosophy. In this revolutionary Ubuntu process, do not be surprised to meet the colonizer that dwells within you. The internal colonizer within you has a foreign orientation, which means we can remove this internal colonizer.

The Ubuntu questions that should guide our actions are: Are we motivated by love? What is the consequence of our actions for our people? Can we keep using our actions to sustain our liberation? Can we guarantee our actions do not oppress other people? When articulating guiding principles, I state ‘we’ and this means that collectively we can all take the Ubuntu actions of liberation but, let me not mislead you, the actions of change are only achieved through the social self taking action. Each of us must attend to our own change while drawing strengths from the achievement of others and learning from the pitfalls of others. Our social path that we must walk with courage awaits us. In this letter I tried to highlight the power of Blackness from a relational responsible position while also highlighting the complexity of the external colonizer and the internal colonizer. The sharing of my analysis is by no means meant to reflect the correct way to analyze the story; I only give one analysis of a possible many. Yet, the more important analysis is the one you make because it will reflect your contextual position and learning. What you take and do not take from this story speaks to your needs as reflected by your political social context.

What I am challenging you to do is to reflect on the political social structure that gives you the base of interpreting meaning. Whose political social structure of interpreting shared meaning are you using? How does the historical foundation of this contextual political social interpretation of meaning impact your power to create shared philosophical engagements of meaning? The answers you generate from this section are important for motivating you to create social actions. Later, we will discuss more succinctly Ubuntu social actions of emancipation but for now let us proceed to provide an orientation for understanding the overall structure of how to
engage an Ubuntu oral teaching. Each Ubuntu teaching, like each drum, sets its own tone but, like a drum, each teaching must communicate with other teachings.
Before we can create a new world we must first unearth and destroy the myths and realities, the lies and propaganda which have been used to oppress, enslave, incinerate, gas, torture and starve the human beings of this planet. Facing the lies of history is a basic human responsibility. It is unpleasant to do, but liberating to accomplish. It liberates all of us.


It should now be clear that this dissertation is an anti-colonial Ubuntu project which challenges conventional research by using Ubuntu storytelling to highlight the issue which is: How do I, an Indigenous Ubuntu, who has been fractured and divided by colonial governance, foreign religious impositions and false arbitrary colonial state boundaries, (re)-member (bring my family together again) through the act of storytelling? In trying to answer this question, I also find myself explaining my Indigenous Ubuntu worldview. To this end, another aim of this dissertation work is to define what Ubuntuism is while explaining why and how it matters for Black people through storytelling. Dr. Yvonne Brown, in Bodies, Memories, and Empire: Life Stories About Growing Up in Jamaica 1943 – 1965, has captured the direction of my story with her haunting words when she says:

These real life stories are about my motherlust... They are about bodies and the breaking of flesh. They are about memory, history, and landscape. They are about migration of labour...They are about the psychological and socio-economic legacy of colonization on my life, and on the lives of other descendants of colony and empire. They are about the power of education to transform, harm, and heal, simultaneously. They are about the repression of knowledge about the

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8 The Ubuntu pictograph of the turtle (in Mutwa 1964 p. 676) I use to symbolizes the keeping of our ethnic stories, secrets, and knowledge production.
9 I write the word (re)-member in this manner because it demonstrates that I am in the process of reuniting with my fragmented family members.
exploitation of Africa. They are about miscegenation. They are about extreme brutality. They are about racism and human degradation. They are about struggle for dignity and wholeness. They are about making sense of my past in colony and empire. (2005, p. xiii)

Dr. Yvonne Brown’s story conveys her Black Jamaican experience while my story conveys my Black southern Africa experience. In my engagement with Dr. Yvonne Brown’s story, I have learned that our Black stories can speak to each other across generational times, geopolitical spaces and different contextual experience. Our stories bind us together through our relational Blackness and our struggle against colonialism.

Dr. Yvonne Brown, who uses stories as scholarship in her work, makes a salient point in her abstract which is true for my writing and research. She reports: “I use my body as a living archive from which to retrieve fragmentary details from inestimable amounts of data, stored in the conscious and the unconscious” (2005, p. ii). Brown goes on to concisely state: “My body signifies many stories” (2005, p.1). This to me means that my body and my mind hold stories about Blackness, Ubuntu, geopolitics, the imposition of a compulsory Whiteness and the dispossession of Black memory through colonialism; more importantly, my body and my mind remember the Ubuntu way. I want to use this Ubuntu memory to engage and re-jog other Black people’s memories about our Blackness as a way of regenerating our pride in our Blackness.

Our Ubuntu, like these stories that I share, are cyclical in nature. Meaning, these stories keep connecting with each other and the end could be the beginning and the beginning the end. This means the introduction is never concluded and the conclusion is an introduction. The telling
of this educational Black knowledge production is divided into nine oral Millet Granaries\textsuperscript{10}. Millet Granary One started with an engagement with the global Black community where my first teaching was for my son, Khumalo. In this letter I explicitly state that I am passing on Ubuntu intergenerational knowledge to him and other Black children. The Second Millet Granary introduces the structure of this dissertation. I also use this section to center my storytelling in our Ubuntu worldview while highlighting my location and relational responsibilities as a Black person speaking about a specific Blackness, Ubuntu. In the Third Millet Granary, I address the questions of using Black orality as the start of engaging my fragmented family through the storytelling perspective which I title Kwakukhona, meaning ‘we remember’. In the Fourth Millet Granary, I engage a discursive theoretical framework that allows me to speak about the challenges that I experience as an Ubuntu living in a colonially constructed statehood. But the more important part of this section is that I will highlight Ubuntu philosophy and theory as a road map for living an anti-colonial life. Millet Granary Five holds the letter that I write to Amai. In this letter, I engage Amai through my fragmented memories which I use to give an analysis of our experience. As I am aware that I cannot adequately speak for Amai, I leave some room at the end of this letter in honour of her analysis.

In the Sixth Millet Granary, I address and engage Baba through a long letter that I write to him. In this letter, I represent to Baba my experience and perceptions of living with him under colonial governance in Zimbabwe which led to our family consisting of just him and me. I confront the struggles we faced together and the struggles we faced against each other as a way to give context to how we separated and how I ended up in the orphanage as a ward of the state. I

\textsuperscript{10} Instead of chapters I use millet granary because they reflect the holding space of Indigenous life sustaining foods. This means that this work holds Ubuntu sustaining knowledges.
also share my experience of being in the orphanage, followed by my experience beyond the orphanage. I end this letter to Baba by speaking about how we started to help each other heal from colonial fragmentation and I leave room for Baba to speak beyond the grave. The Seventh Millet Granary holds the teaching of social actions of Ubuntu regeneration beyond colonialism. These are our teachings and they belong to all of us. In this section I only voice that which is already yours. The Eighth Millet Granary engages and presents existing stories which all have something to say about Blackness. All these stories highlight the complexities of talking about Black knowledge when colonial compulsory able-bodied Whiteness endeavours to dispossess Blackness. In the face of such adversity, it is the power of Blackness that has advanced Black education. Millet Granary Nine concludes this work by highlighting some key points from my learning position.

In this Millet Granary, I have highlighted my major goal which is to regenerate our relational familial bonds so that we may nurture our Black power to its fullest potential. I have also highlighted that engaging our orality on our own terms is the first step of honouring our Black power. Now let us continue on to the next section where I will clarify my specific contextual Blackness.
Centering a Specific Contextual Blackness

After harvest, the food processing period allows for the older generation to work hand in hand with the younger generations and, during this time, ancestral knowledge is shared. In this photograph my Dadakazi (female father) is shelling peanuts with her grandson while Baba relaxes. Both Dadakazi and Baba are transmitting Ubuntu ancestral knowledge through storytelling. At the end of the peanut shelling Dadakazi says: “It feels good to have the young interested in us once more.”

The storyteller is deep inside everyone of us. The story-maker is always with us. Let us suppose our world is attacked by war, by the horrors that we all of us easily imagine. Let us suppose floods wash through our cities, the seas rise... the storyteller will be there, for it is our imaginations which shape us, keep us, create us – for good and for ill. It is our stories, the storyteller, that will recreate us, when we are torn, hurt, even destroyed. It is the storyteller, the dream-maker, the myth-maker, that is our phoenix, what we are at our best, when we are our most creative.

-Doris Lessing, Nobel Lecture, December 7, 2007

Doris Lessing eloquently captures the power of storytelling when she conveys to us that storytelling is our way of engaging each other in challenging and meaningful ways. This means my stories will shatter our induced colonial silence\textsuperscript{11}. Yet my story does not belong to me alone because my story is nested in my family, which is nested in our community, which is nested in our Maseko Ngoni Inkata (unity of nationhood), which is nested in southern Africa among the

\textsuperscript{11} This being said, I also want to acknowledge that silence has also served as a protective force for Ubuntu.
Nguni and is one micro story of a larger macro story about Ubuntu families that have been stolen from Africa, fractured into fragmentation and exiled across the globe by colonialism. So my story becomes our story and our story becomes my story. This is why each social Black story is important to the diversity of our collective Black memory and education. Hence, as I analyze my (our) stories I engage you the reader in a conflict of interpretation about Ubuntu identity, belonging, ethnic boundaries versus colonial borders, and knowledges. I am hopeful that in our rivaled interpretations about what constitutes Ubuntu we will see beyond our own imposed limitations by entering the larger Black dialogues of Ubuntu. Charles E. Reagan and David Stewart, in their edited work entitled *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur: An Anthology of His Work*, remind me that: “To speak is to say something about something” (1978, p. 137). Now that I am saying something about Ubuntu, I am sure you and the rest of our Black communities will also have something to say about Ubuntu. In our collective dialogue we must use Ubuntu values to guide the kinds of regenerated social interpretations of Ubuntu meaning that we will live by. This being said, I also hope to be critical of the shortcomings and misuses of Ubuntu in addressing some of our contemporary Black realities. If Ubuntu is Black knowledge, then it is our responsibility to ensure that it serves us to live better informed Black lives in our interconnected global world.

Before I go on, I would like to highlight another Ubuntu teaching central to my oral storytelling. It is that land teaches us how to live and this teaching I have found among the Indigenous First Nations of Turtle Island (North America). The centrality of land to knowledge production in the Indigenous context was demonstrated by the work of Keith H. Basso (1996)  

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12 “Nguni, whose name means ‘people who have no land’. The Nguni was formed out of myriads of different tribes, and even today their language contains hundreds of words, which were taken over from these [other Ubuntu] tribes” (in Mutwa, *My people, My Africa*, 1969, pp. 47-48).
who conveys the power of land through the title of his work which states: *Wisdom Sits in Places: Landscape and Language Among the Western Apache*. I wonder what the land, which Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto is on, has taught this institute and the people who educate in it and those who are educated by it? As I speak from this land, which is First Nations land, about Blackness, may I tell you that the land is teaching me about their struggle and I extend my arms, voice and mind to the cause of the First Peoples of this land. As I speak to my community, may I also learn to hear you and respond to your communication efforts because I remember that I am your visitor. I hope you will teach us how to respect your lands. I also hope that our actions will communicate our respect and love of you. Let us talk from familial bonds because I can see that we are linked by so many stories which makes me question, where do I end and where do you begin? Could it be the sacred cycle of breath connects us all?

Since time immemorial the storying of our Ubuntu lives has been philosophized using Ubuntu meaning making tools and symbols like cave paintings, hieroglyphics, poetry, songs, proverbs, folktales, fables, the hum of the drum, the cry of the horns and a host of other social acts (Mucina, 2006). The process of philosophizing Ubuntu storying methods was developed to critique and strengthen our approaches of passing on knowledge from older generations to newer generation in an ever changing world. Our ancestors, knowing that change was the inevitable phenomena that it is, prepared our Ubuntu philosophizing approaches to address change while drawing on past lessons. As an individual who identifies as Ubuntu Abansundu (human beings who are Black) through my Maseko Ngoni community, my challenge is to speak to our Abansundu (Black) people using our own Ubuntu traditions which center our experience while using our own methods as the starting point. In 2008, at the age of 35, I went home for the first time and I knew I was home because I could identify my ancestral village and met my relatives, again, for the first time. Yet, just from my contextual location it is clear that my familial
knowledge is limited so I will not speak for my family, I will not speak for the Maseko Ngoni, I will not speak for the Nguni, I will not speak for the Ubuntu, I will not speak for Africans and I will not speak for humanity. I will speak for myself as one who is nested and interlocked into all these identities. This point was so aptly captured by Molefi Kete Asante (1996) in *Afrocentricity* where he tells us that:

You must always begin from where you are, that is, if you are Yoruba begin with Yoruba history and mythology; if you are Kikuyu, begin with Kikuyu history and mythology; if you are African-American, begin with African-American history and mythology. (1996, p. 7)

An important part of Ubuntu philosophizing is understanding that everything is connected in a cyclical manner. To understand this Ubuntu cyclical philosophy is to understand that everything is related. Cyclical Ubuntu storytelling is a form of processing and sharing cultural knowledge that cascades down to each of us from our ancestors. Let me also explain it in the following way. This story has no beginning because I was born into this story and this story has no end because it continues where I depart from the living realm. This means that I am sharing what I have learnt so far in this social world where Ubuntu teaching conveys to me that your learning may occur at the beginning of the story and the rest of the story may not be as educational for you at this particular point in time. Whereas, for example, for an African sister the educational moment may be in the middle of the story at this particular point in her life while, at a later date, when she revisits this story, the learning may be at the end of the story. This means that context, culture, time and experience add to the diversity of possible multiple responses to a single question in the Ubuntu worldview. For this reason, some Western Educated academics may find this Ubuntu researching technique difficult to accept and apply in Western scholarship because it is not based on one predictable response to a question (Okri, 1997). This same Ubuntu ability of being open to engaging multiple responses to a single question may make
the Ubuntu researching technique a liberating approach for some other Western Educated academics. So be comfortable with where you find meaning in this storytelling dissertation because it is likely to be different from other people.

The problem I bear in using the colonial English language is that in its vocabulary it leaves little room for the expression of equitable relational engagement in the way that Ubuntu languages do. This means that when I speak about Blackness it appears as oppositional to other relational engagements. It is not my intent to negate our other relations. The truth of the matter is that our Blackness is our connection to humanity because our Blackness highlights our contextualized differences which we can only identify through our collective sameness. Ubuntu philosophy states that our sameness and difference are the reflections of our relational bonds with each other.

Let me state that the wondrous complexity of our relational sameness and difference are not just theories and rhetoric, they are what make up the Ubuntu worldview. Ubuntu knowledge is our everyday struggle that we convey and give meaning to through our stories, as articulated through our educational relational engagement. It is this relational element in our Ubuntu worldview that allows us to reach across cultural boundaries. The astonishing nature of this phenomenon can be seen in the movement of stories and music across the globe. This means that, as I tell you about my story, it may start talking to you about your story and at this point my story becomes your story. In other words, stories have their own ways of entering many terrains in the service of making us matter to each other. Ben Okri captures this when he states:

"Storytelling is always, quietly, subversive. It is a double headed axe. You think it faces only one way, but it also faces you. You think it cuts only in one direction, but it also cuts you. You think it applies to others only, when it applies mainly to you. When you think it is harmless, that is when it springs its hidden truths, its uncomfortable truths, on you. It startles your complacency. And when you no"
longer listen, it lies silently in your brain, waiting. Stories are very patient things. They drift about quietly in your soul. They never shout their most dangerous warnings. They sometimes lend amplification to the promptings of conscience, but their effect is more pervasive. They infect your dreams. (2002, p. 43)

Paula Gunn Allen, in *Methodology of the Oppressed*, conveys that a story about you does not need to talk to you directly to fragment and dispossess you, as she shows through stating:

The only home/is each other/they’ve occupied all/the rest/colonised it; an/idea
about ourselves is all/we own. (2000, p.67)

If compulsory able-bodied Whiteness has colonized everything else and all we own about ourselves is an idea, we should ask what this idea is. I would argue from my social location that the idea we have of our selves is what we, the descendants of the old Ubuntu ethnic, call Ubuntu knowledge production which is founded on the experience of Blackness. Sankofa, Sankofa, Sankofa, I am going back to reclaim my past so I can go forward.

Thoughtfully, the Nigerian African scholar and storyteller, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie cautions me against relying on one story to understand a person, a family, a community, a nation and, for that matter, an entire race of people. In her lecture titled, *The Danger of a Single Story*, on TEDGlobal (July 2009), she states: “When we reject the single story, when we realize there is never a single story about any place, we regain a kind of paradise.” This is why my story should be read as one voice among many voices which all have stories to add to our collective power, remembering that no one story can speak for all of us.

13 Sankofa, the Adinkra cultural symbol which communicates that our historical past has something to teach us about our present and these teaching allow us to plan for our future.
In this section, I have located my specific Black storytelling to our Ubuntu social engagement structure. In the next section, I will locate myself as a way of honouring our Ubuntu tradition which holds that, to speak is to accept responsibility for the words we use. The way I intend to locate myself reflects the accountability structure which I hold as sacred as a Maseko Ngoni Ubuntu.
My location Represents My Relational Responsibilities

In this photo I meet for the first time some of my paternal family members in Malawi. We did not know of each other’s existence until this meeting. Baba and his sister reunited after 68 years of not having any form of communication. This family reunion is a first step in healing and changing beyond the actions of colonial fragmentation. The next step for us is to break the silence which keeps us separated as a family.

When I was in Swaziland trying to acquire information about our history as Ngoni using my family name, an elder made me share my family history for over three hours before he would acknowledge being a Masina. The elder told me that, before he could share any information with me, he needed to know the familial and communal structure to hold me accountable for any information that I misused. Being as most of my family is in Zimbabwe, Malawi and Mozambique, the elder had no way of confirming my accountability structure at that moment. He therefore decided to only disclose a certain amount of information while at the same time agreeing to accept me as a part of his family. This elder has agreed that as our family bonds grow, he may in the near future disclose his Swazi name and other ancestral knowledges. This example illustrates how Ubuntu hold each other accountable in the ways that we use traditional

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14 This Ubuntu pictograph in Mutwa 1964 p. 671 symbolizes the Nguni family
15 This name has also been presented as Mncina, Macina and Musina.
Ubuntu information. Through what I make public and how, I am made accountable to my family and both my family and I are accountable to our community.

I also locate myself in my writing as a way of respecting other Black knowledges that are different from the ones that I have acquired from our communities. My contextual knowledge reflects my nested multiple identities (Ubuntu, Maseko Ngoni, Shona and Komba) which intersect and interlock to give me voice here (Canada) while talking about there (Africa). I have an insider voice to being Ngoni and Shona by the mere fact that I have parentage from these two distinct ethnic communities, which share a one-ness through their common ancestral Ubuntu roots. I have also lived in these Ubuntu communities and traveled to other Ubuntu places as a way of connecting with some of our lands. Yet, I am also limited by the fact that I did not grow up in my traditional paternal family under the Inkatha (strength of working in unity or arguably nationhood) of the Maseko Ngoni in Lizwe la Lizulu (Land of the Zulu located on the border between Malawi and Mozambique). I was raised in Zimbabwe under my Mashona maternal family. Being as both my Ngoni and Shona cultures are paternal, my staying with my maternal family was tolerated as a familial visit until I was three years old. From three years on I lived with my Baba on the streets of Harare, in Black townships with families that were kind enough to take me in and when Baba secured employment I was hidden in the servant’s quarters. This was my reality until I was found living on the streets of Harare by social services and placed into an orphanage at nine years old. Hence, my formative years were spent on the streets of Harare as a beggar and my teen years were in an orphanage. These experiences at times made me feel like a cultural outsider in Zimbabwe while my experience of homelessness and poverty made me a cultural insider to the experience of colonial fragmentation and dispossession.
As silent as Baba was about his past, he did let me know Lizwe la Lizulu from his memories which helped me feel and know that I belonged to the Maseko Ngoni. However, when I arrived in Lizwe la Lizulu, commonly referred to as Lizulu, a certain amount of my outsidersness was exposed as I lacked the knowledge of certain common cultural practices. It would therefore seem that my insider voice is limited by my contextual experience. Even Baba made it clear that my experience in Canada affects how I am seen in relation to my family members in Lizulu. For starters, everyone was a little more understanding of my poor language skills and were forgiving of the cultural practice mistakes that I made because I was not born in Lizulu.

All these people are my paternal family members in Mozambique and every single one of them is connected to me by blood and by totem name, Komba. Until this meeting none of these family members existed for me. All I had was the name Komba from Baba’s stories.

In trying to understand the meanings of my names, I have come to appreciate the power of naming people, things, actions and the unknown. The act of naming is a powerful sacred endeavor for us as Ubuntu. This means that the renaming and changing of our Ubuntu worldview by colonizers was a tactical colonial strategy for dispossessing and fragmenting us from our relational knowledge production. Interestingly, as we were forced to abandon our naming sacred power, as a tactic we fully kept the sacredness of our clan names, totem names and Inkatha
names (Unity and strength of nationhood) through making these names our surnames. These survival strategies highlight the political nature of naming the sacred without a dialoguing ceremony. An example of this is reflected in the surname that I use. At our family reunion, my surname sparked conflict. Janet, Baba’s sister who I address as Dadakazi (female father), said this to me: “The name you are using is not our family name. Ask your Baba where this name comes from.” I do not think I would be wrong if I stated that Dadakazi’s statement showed a high level of antagonistic challenge toward Baba. I also interpreted her statement, which was followed by an echoing silence, as having an ambush quality to it. To this challenging engagement Baba remained uncomfortably quite. Baba’s lack of response made me remember the tactical silence that he employed with his White masters to ensure the conflict ended without him losing his job. In a flash I was questioning myself: was Baba using his old tactics in this familial conflict? I felt uncomfortable because I did not know how to react in this familial situation. Seeing as Baba had been cornered into giving a response, I started to talk about something else so that Baba would not have to be forced to explain himself. I am sure Dadakazi knew what I was doing because she followed my lead and started to engage me in the new conversation I had started. This naming conflict highlights the importance of names in my family but I would argue that naming is a challenging endeavour for all humans.

Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* echo this human desire of naming as a way of giving meaning but a challenge is raised when Juliet questions Romeo: “What’s in a name” (W., Craig, W. J., & Dowden, E., 1912, p. 325)? To this question I would answer - nothing and everything. Nothing because without the name I still am, on the other hand, also, everything because it is a social marker that connects me to a relational familial social network. Ubuntu names are sacred because they tell a story about something. To honour the meaning of a name we engage in a dialectical dialogue before giving the name as this ensures a common shared meaning. This
means among my people, the Maseko Ngoni, the appearance of my names show how I am first and foremost accountable to my family members and ancestral spirits, which also include all of our lands. Secondly, I am accountable to our communities (going beyond humans to include all other beings in the web of life) as what I say is a reflection of our relational ties, which are born of our social interaction. Thirdly, I am accountable to Inkosi ya Maskosi Gomani IV, who is the Paramount King of all Maseko Ngoni from Lizwe la Zulu. In an izibongo (praise) by Chikumbutso Mkwamba Ngozo and Enoch Timpunza Mvula, we see how Kanjedza Inkosi ya Makosi Gomani IV’s name connects him to his history and to his ancestors:

Hail! Inkosi ya Makosi Gomani IV….You are the son of Willard Bvalani Nkhwende Kwacha Phillip Gomani, The defender of independence and freedom, Conqueror of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland; Willard Gomani, the son of Zitonga Phillip Gomani, Zitonga Philip Gomani chaser of British colonialists With his spears and knobkerries. Zitonga Phillip Gomani, the son of Gomani Chikuse. Chikuse, the collector of men and cattle. When the victims cried war, he thundered on them, The cattle he had already taken. The people he had already taken. Chikuse the son of Mputa, Mputa, he who appeared to the waters of the Zambezi, Then crossed the Zambezi and settled at Domwe. Mputa, the aggressor and the lightening, The lightening that struck on all tribes along its path to Songea, Songea land of the Matengo, the Ambo, and the Mtumba. He who took away their spears and shields, He whose ashes were thrown into a river in Songea. Kanjedza Gomani, our lion and king. Your are indeed the descendant of Mputa, Mputa, the son of Ngcamane Maseko; Ngcamane Maseko, the son of Nsele Maseko, Nsele Maseko, the son of Luhleko Maseko I, Luhleko Maseko I, the son of Ntshangase Maseko, Ntshangase Maseko, the son of Mafu Maseko, Mafu Maseko, the son of Sidwabasiluthuli Maseko, Sidwabasiluthuli Maseko, the son of Maseko Khubonye Ndlovu, Maseko Khubonye Ndholu, the son of Ndlovu Ntu, Ndlovu Ntu, founder of the Ngunis….Maseko, when the white ones killed our Inkosi ya Makosi, The colonialists thought the sun had set for us at Chiole, But Maseko, God in heaven, the creator of all things, the great spirit, Made the sun rise at Lizulu, Lizulu, land of the Zulus. Let us go, Maseko, let us go! Let us go home! They asked him, "Ngcamane, where are we off to?" He said, "We are going where people never die, There people are killed with age, There people eat meat and drink milk, There people do not grow thin, There beautiful and polite women are abundant. Let us go to Lizulu. Hail! Your Majesty! Hail! Our lion! Hail! Our hero and Chief of chiefs! (2008, pp. 9-10)
This izibongo highlights how an Ubuntu name communicates to us a person’s rights and responsibilities. My familial responsibilities are reflected in my names, which are Devi David Peter Dee Mucina Komba. In my naming story there are gaps of silence that have been given to me by my Baba and by my maternal family. So, I give you the fragments as they have come to my awareness from my memory and from familial sources. When I was about two or three years old, my maternal family asked my Baba to come and take me as they could not care for me on the reserve of Chendambuya in the district of Makoni. It is under these circumstances that I hold my first awareness of my Baba and the name Devi that he uses to hold me accountable to my actions. David is the intended name my Baba wanted me to have but it seemed no one in our community was willing to call me by this name. Instead, they Africanized it to Devi but, when I was young, I maintained the usage of David when engaging White people. Peter is the name given to me by my maternal family in Zimbabwe where I was born. My maternal family named me Peter because my paternal family, who were meant to organize my naming ceremony as dictated by Ubuntu tradition, were not a part of this story. As to why my paternal family was not a part of this important ritual, there is silence and distance cannot account for the silence between my maternal and paternal family.

My Ambuya (maternal grandmother) once told me that in the absence of my Baba, I became his shadow because I was the only real evidence of his ever having been present among them. After my Ambuya shared these words with me, she was silent; her silence was heavy because on her tongue sat heavy words which she was not willing to share with a child. As an adult, I have interpreted Ambuya’s silence as an effort to protect me from the harsh realities of colonialism. What I find interesting is that, as I reflect on my Ambuya’s words and tone, I sense that she viewed herself and her family as victims of colonialism while viewing Baba as an associate of colonialism. My maternal family believed that Baba was being rewarded by
colonialism in the White spaces that he worked for White people while they starved and suffered. Baba, on the other hand, believed the colonial lies that the White settler’s media propagated about how well the White government was taking care of Africans on reserves. Such colonial trickery induced silence about how colonialism fragmented our indigenous governance institutions. Family is the foundation of Indigenous institutions; break the family and we struggle to find our voice.

The power of colonialism is that it keeps working on breaking our Ubuntu families while, on the margins, it allows us to reflect on our social actions within the framework of its own memory. Meaning, we never question how colonialism triggered our total silence even though now and again we remember how colonialism used its insidious power to personally silence us. Baba demonstrated this when he conveyed to me that, in Zimbabwe, the demand of maintaining a neo-slave job in a White community not only kept him away from his young family but did not pay him enough to survive comfortably. Afraid of losing his job, Baba missed my naming ceremony and, not knowing what to do after the naming period had lapsed, my maternal family started calling me by Baba's name, Peter, as a way of naming the unnamed one. Interestingly, when I lived with my Baba, which was in the absence of my maternal family, he too would tell me (especially when he was angry with my behaviours) that I was the embodied visitional representation of my maternal family. In this family fragmentation, created by colonially induced silence, the name Peter connects me to my maternal family, whose family totem is Mojuru, which means termite. I also want to acknowledge that what I write and say here will impact my relations with my maternal family.
Baba’s name of Mucina marked him as a visitor to Zimbabwe which meant he did not feel entitled to establish a home in Zimbabwe. On the other hand, Baba did not even attempt to invest in building a home in Lizulu because, after the death of his mother, Falacon\textsuperscript{16}, in 1938, he was threatened with death by members of his extended family. Dadakazi (female father) is the first to break the silence about this family tragedy in support of the story Baba shared with me about why he left his family. Dadakazi conveys that Baba rightfully stayed away as the only option for preserving his life. Baba informed me that my clan name of Mucina comes from his junior mother, Amanat. At first, I thought she was the younger sister of Falacon Baba’s birth mother but Dadakazi says she does not know where the name Mucina came from. A few days before we left Zimbabwe for Malawi, Baba had this to say about the Mucina clan name:

My junior mother told me to take her clan name of Mucina and make it my own. My younger brother was given the clan name of Komba and I as the elder child was given the name of my junior mother because she did not have any children and she wanted to ensure that her clan name was used beyond her by ensuring that a family male had this clan name. Let me also say that my mother did not die of natural causes and the family members that were responsible caused me a great

\textsuperscript{16} I did not know this was my Great Grandmother’s name. I only knew that she died before Baba left his family.
deal of suffering. This is why I was reluctant about going back to Malawi but after
some reflection I know these people are long dead. I am also worried that if I
leave Zimbabwe I will lose contact with my children. (August 6th, 2008 personal
communication, Baba)

Let me start by responding to Baba’s last point. Baba states that one of his fears about
leaving Zimbabwe is that he will lose contact with his children. I understand his fear from a
Ngoni and a Shona cultural perspective which conveys that if a man has not paid the bride-prize
for a woman then, in the eyes of these two communities, that woman and that man are not
married. Children from this co-habitation belong only to the woman and the man has no rights in
relation to these children. These children cannot be given the father’s clan name and are only
allowed to have the mother’s clan name. Regardless of age or the wishes of these children, they
are strongly encouraged to stay with the mother’s family until the bride-prize is paid. The general
message here is that if the paternal family wants children to carry their names from one
generation to another then they must thank the maternal family and the woman for this right and,
in our cultural case, this is done through the bride-prize. It is hoped that the bride-prize is set
within the means of the paternal family, which is reflective of the Ubuntu relational spirit. Baba
never introduced himself to the family of his children when his new wife was alive and I cannot
imagine how he would approach the issues of bride-prize for a woman who died. This
explanation does not, however, begin to address the fact that Baba had no resources for starting
this process. Before Baba died he asked me to finish this process on his behalf because he
wanted to make his family whole.

The other part of Baba’s story shows how a problem can change cultural practices and,
therefore, perhaps, change is the only constant. Baba took his junior mother’s clan name in an
effort of ensuring that this name among the paternal family was not lost. It is also possible that
Baba was facilitated in the taking of the Mucina clan name because he felt stripped of the dignity
of his family name when family members threatened to kill him over his inheritance. It is under this mystery that I share the surname of Mucina with Baba. Either way, through this name change Baba was able to distance himself from the shameful acts that were associated with his family name in Lizulu. This, to me, conveys clearly that among the Ubuntu, when a name becomes associated with shameful acts, family members try to disassociate themselves from the stained name because, as Baba told me many times: “A name tainted is a name forever lost.” This is how our family cohesion crumbled. Still, honest honourable individuals can transcend a tainted family name through the collective will of the community to immortalize such individuals. For example, Baba has never let me forget that the name Komba connects me to the spirits of my paternal family. When I pray to my ancestors, I direct my prayers to the great spirits of my Seano (totem) of Komba17 (Bush Baby).

Another important spiritual ancestor for me is Gogo (Grandmother) Amanat Mucina and it is my sense that our ancestral and familial bonds are deeper than was communicated to me. Baba addresses her as mother. Without asking Baba, I changed my surname from Dee (my grandfather’s name) to the praise name that Baba used to honour me (Gogo Amanat Mucina’s name). I will admit that this has raised questions among our paternal family, who I met for the first time at the age of 35, in August 2008. My Dadakazi has begun to take the leadership role in beginning the spiritual and physical healing from past injustices while working toward regenerating family relations. Dadakazi, your Ubuntu spirit inspires me, thank you Indovukazi (great female elephant).

17 Komba is a Swahili word for Bushbaby and Isinkwe or Nhathini Umntwana is the equivalent in Zulu.
My names reflect where I have been and who I have been in connection with but, for Baba when his name marked him for forced erasure, that name became nothing. This erased family name I have discovered and it has been told to me who and what Baba was running away from. Such a name I will allow to remain silent, too much has fragmented us. It is time to focus on that which unites us. Yet, when Baba took me to our village it was our family name that connected us to the family that I never knew I had. It was also a name that gave me new familial relations in Swaziland. The power of a name is sacred when all is as it should be but, in our relational political colonial world, for the most part, a name is a peculiar thing that reflects tensions. Sankofa, Sankofa, Sankofa, I am going back to reclaim my past before the great Maafa.\(^\text{18}\) Most things that need to be located have now been located. In the next harvest granary, I will take you deep into the heart of Ubuntu oral traditions so that I can immerse you in Ubuntu knowledge production. This means you have a general overview of the structure of Ubuntu Orality and from this knowledge base I can proceed to give you a specific structure that I will use

\(^{18}\)“... a Swahili word meaning disaster, terrible occurrence or great tragedy. The term refers to the 500 years of suffering of Africans and the African diaspora through slavery, imperialism, colonialism, invasion, oppression, dehumanization and exploitation” [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maafa](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maafa).
in my storytelling without causing you too much confusion. After all, my motivation is not academic trickery. My motivation is familial sharing.

19 The Sankofa bird is an Adinkra cultural symbol of using past knowledges to inform the present and regenerating the present knowledges so that they address our future.
Millet Granary 3: Kwakukhona as a Method of Engagement

Storytelling is mainly done in the evening around the fire place, after the day’s work. Most of the story teachings that I have were given to me around this photographed fire place. While warming myself with the fire, I heard about olden times, colonial times and now I must create a new fire place in a new place like my Baba did before me. From this new fire place I will teach my children to draw from the past on their way forward.

As I reflect back to this fire place, I now understand that knowledge is the codified essence of experience after communal discourse about its meaning within a specific worldview, while using specific language symbolism. Stuart Hall (1997), in *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, clearly communicated that the continual process of knowledge making, philosophizing and encoding into memory is one of the important acts of living as a human being. This being said, I would be a liar if I told you that Indigenous Ubuntu governance has no oppressive or marginalizing practices, because it does. However, as these Ubuntu institutions are a reflection of us, we have a duty to make sure that they also reflect our reality and, where they fail to do so, we should come together and create a solution. This is how you create responsible democratic participation. No other people can give another people

20 This Ubuntu pictograph symbolizes conversion (in Mutwa 1964 p. 678) which is the aim of this work.
democracy and freedom. These things are achieved through a process of self-driven action and self reflection about our future aspirations. Let us not allow colonialism and neo-colonialism to fragment us any further. Ben Okri says that: “Our lives have become narrow enough. Our dreams strain to widen them, to bring to our waking conscious the awareness of greater discoveries that lie just beyond the limits of our sights” (2002, p. 4). The narrowing of Blackness inevitably narrows what humanity is and this is the opposite of my aim. Yet, modern-day trends of academic discourse have labelled the work of individual historical remembering as navel-gazing and, in so doing, the experience of the individual, especially the colonized individual, has been rendered unreliable (Okri, 1997). In other words, the individual memory is not worth listening to because there is too much mystery in it. So who do we listen to?

The politics of state society have determined who we need to listen to. Again I will take us back to Ben Okri, who conveys to us who has been sanctioned to speak, when he states:

The acknowledged legislators of the world take the world as given. They dislike mysteries, for mysteries cannot be coded, or legislated, and wonder cannot be made into law. And so these legislators police the accepted frontiers of things. Politicians, heads of state, kings, religious leaders, soldiers, the rich, the powerful [the scholars in high academics] — they all fancy themselves the masters of this earthly kingdom. They speak to us of facts, policies, statistics, programmes, abstract and severe moralities. But the dreams of the people are beyond them, and would trouble them. (2002, p. 4)

I do not legislate to anyone how to live. I only share my experience and remembered fragmented knowledge in hope to educate our children to love their Blackness because it is a source of great power. The stories that I will share using the Ubuntu philosophy show that the power of our Black knowledge has been the cause of our being silenced, being dislocated, being disconnected, and being erased from our own history. In an effort to dispossess us of our Black knowledge,
compulsory able-bodied Whiteness has endeavoured to make our own Black minds turn against themselves by creating doubt about the existence of Blackness as a powerful force.

I want you for a minute to consider the implication of Jared Diamond’s (1997) Pulitzer Prize winning book, entitled *Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fate of Human Societies*. Jared Diamond in his prologue states:

> Authors are regularly asked by journalists to summarize a long book in one sentence. For this book, here is such a sentence: ‘History followed different courses for different peoples because of differences among peoples’ environments, not because of biological differences among peoples themselves’. (1997, p. 25)

Yet, he abandons this position when Black knowledge proves to be too powerful and contradicts his theory of *Guns, Germs, and Steel*. So what does he do? He becomes the racist that he claimed he was not. He starts to play the biology game. The same biology game that, he said in his prologue, was not a viable explanation for the difference among people. In the case of Black Africa, he makes it his foundational position for explaining Blackness. Chapter 19 of Jared Diamond’s book is entitled: “How Africa Became Black” (p. 376). In this chapter, as communicated by his title, we encounter his racist scholarship which he tries to use to discredit Black knowledge, while at the same time he appropriates it as anything but Black knowledge.

To survive such a constant attack on Blackness, Malidoma Patrice Somâe (1994), in *Of Water and The Spirit*, reminds us that due to slavery, colonialism, neo colonialism and the marking of our bodies as an inferior being, some of us have had to forget the power of our Blackness as a way to survive while, on the other hand, some of us have had to remember our Blackness and our spiritual past as a way to survive too. To those Black people who have remembered our African ways, I hope the stories that I will share encourage you to keep
educating us, the segments of our Black communities that have forgotten our Blackness as a means of survival. To those Black people who have had to forget, suppress and hide their Blackness in order to survive, I hope my primer of “Many millet granaries ago,” conveys to you that we are still here, we are still strong, and we still remember who we are, even if it is only in fragments. If we share our fragmented stories, we get a fuller and richer picture of our Black knowledges which helps us understand who we are. The Ubuntu have always used the art of oral storytelling to extol the power of experience as a teaching tool. I can use no other research tool as this land mass called Africa is the first story and Ben Okri assures us:

Africa breathes stories. In Africa everything is a story, everything is a repository of stories. Spiders, the wind, a leaf, a tree, the moon, silence, a glance, a mysterious old man, an owl at midnight, a sign, a white stone on a branch, a single yellow bird of omen, an inexplicable death, an unprompted laughter, an egg by the river, are all impregnated with stories. In Africa things are stories, they store stories, and they yield stories at the right moment of dreaming, when we are open to the secret side of objects and moods. (2002, p. 115)

Here I quote Ben Okri’s narration of stories in an effort to explicate that stories enable the encoding of my embodied forms of knowing and learning, as expressed by Stuart Hall (1997). To me, an Ubuntu, orature is a functional and viable (re)-search approach that one ignores at one's own peril. History reminds us that oral storytelling is done with the purpose of maintaining cultural continuity while, at other times, stories allow for cultural directional change. A story can allow a culture to regenerate itself. Storytelling honours our memory (sacred history) while at the same time validating our Ubuntu spirit of change because the only constant in our lives is change. Put simply, our stories are our efforts to create shared interpretation structures about experience so that change has shared meaning.

Allow me to illustrate the teaching power of Ubuntu storytelling in context. If an elder (in most cases Grandmother) was to utter the following introduction words, in Shona “Paivapo”, in
Ndebele “Kwakukhona”, or in Zulu “Kwesukasukela”, the meaning is always the same, “Once upon a time” or “Many, many millet granaries ago”\(^{21}\) and, upon hearing this primer, old and young Ubuntu begin to draw nearer to the elder. These phrases are very specific in that they let us know that the story is based on historical happenings in olden times. In response to the storytelling prompting of “Paivapo,” in Shona the audience respond by saying, “Dzepfundu”, which is to say, “I am ready to learn” or “I am ready to receive your teaching.” Each time the elder introduces a new setting in the story, different characters, or conveys the objectives of the characters in the story, she draws in the audience by saying “Paivapo.” Another point communicated by “Dzepfundu”, as prompted by “Paivapo”, is that, through their response, the audience is actively acknowledging their understanding of how this structure of Ubuntu social engagement is functioning as an orientation for teaching in their interaction with the elder. This prompting goes on until the elder is convinced that the audience and her are synchronized in their orientation towards the teaching methods of that particular story.

This synchronization of storyteller and audience is also exemplified among the amaZulu where Mthikazi Roselina Masubelele (2008), in her dissertation titled *The Role of Bible Translation in the Development of Written Zulu: A Corpus-Based Study*, makes reference to *Zulu Oral Traditions* by Canonici, N. N. (1996, p. 55):

Zulu storytelling follows a specific pattern. It has an opening formula which the storyteller usually uses which begins thus: Kwesukasukela! (Once upon a time, it happened) to which the audience’s response is Cosi (small quantity). During the storytelling the audience will be active participants, joining in song and using various facial expressions and gestures that correspond with what is happening in the story. At the end of the story the storyteller will wind up her tale using a concluding formula, which will vary from one storyteller to the other, the most

\[^{21}\] Timothy Wangusa (1989) uses this storytelling device in, *Upon this mountain, African writers series*, takes the reader back into history using, “Many, many millet granaries ago.”
popular being Cosi cosi iyaphela (This is the end of our story), and the audience will respond by saying Siyabonga! Yaze yamnandi indaba yakho (We thank you! What a nice tale it was!). (Masubelele, 2008, pp. 59-60)

The traits that stand out about Ubuntu storytelling are its ability to engage through interactive performance. Both the storyteller and listener are actively engaged by the fact that they have very specific functions to perform in the making of the story. The performance of the story makes it whole in the Ubuntu structure. The repetitive quality of the storytelling helps the listener have markers which help facilitate the collection of important lessons embedded within the story. A friend put it this way, the markers of an African story are many but the lessons are few.

“Once upon a time…” since the dawn of human societies, Nobel Laureate Toni Morrison has poignantly and reflectively stated, no other universal words pay noble homage to human memory than this. In her own words, “this opening phrase of what must be the oldest sentence in the world, and the earliest one we remember from childhood, is the foundation stone of things memory –one of the principal ways in which we absorb knowledge” (as expressed by Linda Goss and Clay Goss in Jump Up and Say!: A Collection of Black Storytelling, 1995, p. 15). Unquestionably, for Toni Morrison and most chroniclers of societal unfolding events, storytelling is an important faculty of engaging critical regeneration and honest self-criticism while offering a collective vision for a community’s manifest destiny. My storytelling aim is to make my Black stories talk to other Black people in complex, challenging and sometimes contradictory ways. I want us to be comfortable and uncomfortable with each other’s stories as this keeps us engaged with each other. Baba always reminded me that it was the move from comfort to discomfort and then inquiry that made good teaching from storytelling. Now that we are in rhythm about Ubuntu oral methods, let me give you my specific method.
My inquiry is a deliberation on telling and an actual telling. Throughout the text I am a reluctant storyteller in process, carefully considering the questions; Why tell? How to tell? What is it like to tell?


Inspired by Roewan Crowe’s quote, in the early stages of my writing I found myself questioning why I was telling our stories, especially when speaking from my own location only seemed to highlight my own contextual experience. On top of this I was actively supporting the regeneration of Ubuntu knowledge by the global Black community. Myself questioning and self doubt was at times great. At such times of questioning I was tempted to change my work but, somehow, the following Maseko Ngoni proverb made me believe that I was on firm ground for speaking to our people. The Maseko Ngoni proverb states: “The story of one cannot be told without unfolding the story of many” and, to further diversify our many Ubuntu voices, I am also using written sources as a guide for establishing and introducing a wider understanding of Ubuntu. The point here is that these are Ubuntu stories and they collectively belong to us.

The fact that I am using my Ph.D. dissertation as a way to engage Ubuntu is in itself evidence that the Ubuntu storytelling context is changing. Most of the stories that I have of Ubuntu teaching were given to me using the oral storytelling approach but I share these stories and my own using the written narrative approach. The written narrative part of oral storytelling is the change which is allowing me to move away from the active live performative function of oral storytelling. In our written globally connected world, the written narrative approach has gained more currency over the live performative storytelling approach, even in most of Africa. The advantage of this written form is that it can be transported across the globe and can be read by a wider audience. The power of this written storytelling approach has been conveyed by Michael White (2007) in *Maps of Narrative Practice* where he informs us that stories have the power to
change the way we live our lives by understanding the attached meaning we bestow upon specific stories. So through my usage of written storytelling I have lost the live performative engagement of oral storytelling, but on the other hand I can talk to a broader diverse Black community. This is the reality of writing. It can never take the place of a live performative oral storytelling. The dynamic engagement of live oral storytelling is so powerful it can never be surpassed by any other form of communication. This being said, functionability has led the way and here I am writing.

As a way of orienting my Ubuntu methods within a Western institutional perspective, I need to point out that in traditional Ubuntu orality, the storyteller does not give an analysis of the story s/he is telling. The storyteller leaves the analyzing of the story to each individual listener because the storyteller knows that each individual will gain something different from the story. Each listener will bring their experience to the analyzing of the story which will reflect their own contextual position based on age, gender, values, sexuality, political knowledge, and social position. Let me illuminate the structure of Ubuntu storytelling by giving you a story in the Ubuntu context.

To you my audience I say, “Paivapo.”

And you, my audience, respond to this prompting by saying, “Dzepfunde.”

Now let me start the story in the following manner. On one of my many travels I found myself in a village far away from home. Being a stranger in this village, I began to find my way towards the Chief’s home so that I could introduce myself and seek refuge. Seeing a group of young girls coming from the river with balanced clay pots of water on their heads, I felt confident that they would know how to direct me to the whereabouts of the Chief’s home. Respectfully, I enquired from the girls the whereabouts of the Chief’s home and to my surprise
they immediately stopped conversing among themselves. I could sense that they were afraid of talking to me. Fearing that I was transgressing some unknown cultural interaction established between the different age ranges and possibly genders, I started to look for a male who appeared to be in my age range. As I was doing this, I heard from the direction of the sunrise a voice that said: “Come toward my voice and I will reveal myself to you.” As I walked towards the sunrise’s direction, I could clearly see an old hut. At the entrance of the hut the door was open and I hesitated to enter. Sensing my fear, an old woman emerged from within and, while standing aside from her hut entrance, invited me. She offered me water to wash off my dust and then a large bowl of cool fresh water to drink. Before I could fully adjust to the light in the hut, steaming hot food was placed before me.

“Above you mother,” I said, as a way of honouring our ancestors and this elder mother for feeding me. She responded by saying, “What is there to thank.” From the same pots that my food had come from, the elder mother served herself a small amount of food to demonstrate that she meant me no ill intent.

I ate until I could eat no more and, to wash my food down, the elder mother offered me what she called her best beer. Indeed, it was good; it was the best beer I had ever tasted. As I enjoyed the beer the elder and I talked about my travels. At some point our conversation ended and the elder offered to show me around the village but, before we set off, she told me that if anyone asked who I was, we were to say I was her grandson from her first daughter who lived in southern Africa. Seeing as this was the direction I had come from, I saw no great harm with the elder’s story.
With elder mother narrating the story of where I came from to the village, most people were welcoming and friendly towards me. Yet, wherever we went in the village, I heard people singing this same song:

Someone would start the song thus: “My kinfolk I die.”

Other people near the song starter would respond thus: “If I am going, let me go.”

And the song starter would conclude thus: “My kinfolk come and see how I die.”

And to this singing invitation the other people near the song starter would conclude: “If I am going, let me go.”

Let me interrupt the story here. As a storyteller this is a good time in the storytelling to engage and create a performative participation with you my audience, I will sing the same song that I have just narrated to you with an inviting strong call voice: “My kinfolk I die,” and to this invitation you, the audience, will respond by singing: “If I am going, let me go.” I then conclude my call part of the song by singing: “My kinfolk come and see how I die,” and you, the audience, conclude your answering part by singing: “If I am going, let me go.” To ensure we are synchronized in this call and answer song we may repeat the full song about 4 or 5 times. When we are done this exchange, I may ask where we are in the story. At this point it is now your responsibility as my audience to take an active role in orientating me to the story so that I can continue from where I left off.

Some songs may also require dramatized performance as a way of making a point or entertaining the audience.
Let us assume that you as the audience have orientated me so that I can resume this story. After hearing this same song so many times, I inquired from elder mother what the people were trying to communicate. To this inquiry, elder mother responded by saying: “In this matter we dare not speak out; however, because you are leaving early tomorrow morning I will give you this mango to eat just before you lay your head down to dream and in your dream this mango will tell you everything. This mango will tell you everything because it was there the night the killing started.” Of this matter we speak no more until I am about to go to sleep. Elder mother reminds me to only eat the mango when I am about to fall asleep.

Just when I cannot keep my eyes open because sleep invites me to enter the dream world, I eat the mango. My waking world and my dream world seem one. I am aware that I am in a minibus and a soldier is asking each passenger to whisper in his ear which political party each passenger supports. We are all aware that those who are giving the wrong answer are being killed, raped and mutilated outside the minibus. The bodies of the dead are piling up high outside the minibus. Fearfully, I ask no one in particular, why this is happening to Ubuntu by the hands of Ubuntu and a woman with a child on her lap whispers: “Please, shhh brother or he will think we are trying to fool him and then for sure he will kill us all without giving us a chance to guess the right party. So please, shhh.”

I look to the other side of the minibus and I see the elder mother outside the minibus. She is lying in her own blood. She stands up and I recognize that this is the mango tree in front of elder mother’s hut. Slowly and painfully her life blood is oozing out through her ears and mouth. I want to tell her to hang in and wait for me because I know where she is but I am afraid to speak. She looks at me with understanding for my situation and then I hear her voice in my ear like a whisper, she says: “Ask the mango, boy child; it will tell you everything.”
I wake up and look around for the elder mother but I can find no sign of her. I go outside and see the mango tree; it is full of green mangos, except for one small, beautifully ripe, yellow mango. The contrast of its yellowness and its touch of red blush makes it irresistible to me. Standing on tiptoes I pick the mango from its hanging branch. I am aware of the spiritual presents of elder mother. My story ends here but I hope you keep growing while my story remained stunted.23

At this point, I invite you, my audience, to comment and give analysis of your interpretation of the meaning of the story. Starting in early childhood, Ubuntu children learn the art of analyzing a story by observing older siblings or relatives demonstrate diverse analysis of a given story. As the young children hear the diverse and sometimes contradictory analysis of the same story, they learn that responsible self expression is welcome among the Ubuntu. In most situations, when everyone has shared their opinion and analysis of the story, the storyteller will even go as far as asking the analysis of a newborn baby. Younger siblings will jokingly speak for their newborn. The point being the skill of analyzing a story or teaching begins at a very young age and the benefits of doing this is that children learn analytical skills and oral skills at a very young age.

Another explanation that I need to give is my adoption of written English as the medium to communicate my Ubuntu narratives. Like any other community in the world, the Ubuntu have used many forms of communication to share ideas from one period to another. In an edited work of Tejumola Olaniyan & Ato Quayson (2007), *African Literature: An Anthology of Criticism and

23 The concluding structure of this story is informed by the structure used by Timothy Wangusa (1989) in *Upon this Mountain.*
Theory, Alain Ricard has a chapter entitled “Africa and Writing”. Alain Ricard has this to say about the history of writing in Africa:

Africa is everywhere inscribed. From rocks to masks, sculptures, pyramids, and manuscripts one needs but a stubborn and narrow-minded commitment to alphabetic writing to deny that the continent has left graphic marks of its history everywhere. Graphic representation is indeed present... Africa is the continent with the largest number of recorded rock art paintings: from the Drakensberg and the Matopos in Southern Africa to the Air in the Sahara, the continent seems to have been populated by crowds of painters eager to record, to pray, or to celebrate. (2007, p. 7)

Alain Ricard’s (2007) work reminds me that Africa has been writing for a long time. This means that, when scholars say that they cannot find evidence of writing in certain parts of Africa, they are only telling us that they cannot find evidence of their own cultural understanding of writing. Africa has many diverse forms of writing that it has been practicing since time immemorial. We have to be careful that we do not narrow what writing is because we want to impose our form of writing as the absolute standard of symbolic expression. To impose a single form of writing is to lose some forms of knowledge which could be important for the advancement of humanity as a whole. If I could have written these stories in any of our Ubuntu languages, I would have started there and then translated them into English for our diverse global Black family members who do not know these Ubuntu languages. But I cannot do this, as my technology equipment which I use to address my dyslexia, is in English only. This is why my starting point is in English; however, this also means that I must be intentional in the usage of the little Zulu, Shona and Nyanja languages that I have because I use them less and less in Western global academic institutions. In Western global academic institutions, Indigenous Ubuntu ways do not enjoy the recognition of being useful scholarship. Our Ubuntu languages are not taught and when they are taught, it is never on a full-time basis because they are always vulnerable to economic pressures. Our Black languages, our Black histories, our Black politics are forever
being considered because they are on the margins and are always being defined as non-essential work.

In the little spaces allotted to us, like the University of Toronto, Ontario Institute of Studies in Education, we can talk about how Ubuntu orality is a living history; meaning, it allows for change, how Ubuntu has both a functional aspect and an aesthetic quality. We can talk about how the Ubuntu cave paintings are sacred knowledges. We can talk about how, in the Ubuntu worldview, the intelligence of nature is recognized because we believe that nature holds bodies of knowledges. Yet, in trying to talk about these things, another problem arises for the African writer. Chinua Achebe (1988), in *Hopes and Impediments: Selected Essays*, addresses this problem in the following manner:

One of the most critical consequences of the transition from oral traditions to written forms of literature is the emergence of individual authorship. The story told by the fireside does not belong to the storyteller once he has let it out of his mouth. But the story composed by his spiritual descendant, the writer in his study, “belongs” to its composer. This shift is facilitated by the simple fact that, whereas a story that is told has no physical form or solidity, a book has; it is a commodity and can be handled and moved about. But I want to suggest that the physical form of a book cannot by itself adequately account for the emergent notion of proprietorship. At best it facilitates the will to ownership which is already present. This will is rooted in the praxis of individualism in its social and economic dimensions. Part of my artistic and intellectual inheritance is derived from a cultural tradition in which it was possible for artists to create objects of art which were solid enough and yet make no attempt to claim, and sometimes even go to great lengths to deny, personal ownership of what they have created. (Achebe, 1988, pp. 47-48)

Let me remind you again that the story was here before me; I was born into the story, I have gained from the story, I have added to the story, I am sharing this story with you and I am giving you this story, which was given to me, because I will leave the story but this story will go on. This is our story; we co-author it. It is a story with no beginning and it is a story with no end. It is just, simply, our story. This is why when I speak about my story I am speaking about the
period I am active in our story. This idea is also found in *The Truth About Stories: A Native Narrative*, by the Cherokee Indigenous scholar and storyteller Thomas King who challenges the Western notions of property ownership. Thomas King says about the story he has shared with his readers: “It's yours. Do with it what you will. Tell it to friends. Turn it into a television movie. Forget it. But don't say in the years to come that you would have lived your life differently if only you had heard this story. You've heard it now” (2003, p. 29). I too say this is your story; do with it as you will.

In honour of Ubuntu oral narratives, I will share my stories from the traditional storyteller position and will assume the position of storyteller, if I may be so bold. As the storyteller, I assume the role of educator which, I have been told by our elders, is not dependent on age as it is determined by the knowledge and wisdom that one has to share. As I still have a lot to learn from the stories that I share, I will analyze them with the aim to educate myself while sharing this process. How I analyze these stories as a learner and listener is not meant to reflect a specific way in which to analyze the stories. I only offer my analysis as a way of reflecting my learning in this specific context at this specific timeframe in my life. An even more important analysis will be the one that you make as the reader because it will reflect your learning in your specific context. In this work, I acknowledge that I am both researcher and subject which makes this work very hard. As committed as I am to truth, in some instances, its emotional impact may limit me in that there are some things I will not talk about because it hurts too much to remember and I would rather forget. There are also some things I cannot talk about because colonialism has taken them away from me and I cannot remember them. But I will share what little remembering that stands out in my mind as educational.
In my effort to make my work a little more accessible to a wider Black audience, I am using arts-informed research methods as they enhance my scholarship beyond a single way of engaging knowledge production. J. Gary Knowles and Sara Promislow (2008), in the *Handbook of the Arts in Qualitative Research: Perspectives, Methodologies, Examples, and Issues*, inform us that arts-informed research is an appropriate approach when:

- it is congruent with one’s worldview, an acknowledgment that knowing through the arts is more than mere knowledge about the arts;
- it makes inherent sense given the focus and substance of the research;
- it fits one’s artistic skills and expertise;
- there is an obvious potential to develop exceptional insights and knowledge; and
- it presents opportunities to reach audiences that are not normally very accessible to academic researchers. (Knowles and Promislow, 2008, p. 518)

An arts-informed research approach seems to be one way of liberating the Western educated scholar but many scholars in the global, contemporary Western state societies have leveled harsh criticism towards arts-informed research because arts-informed scholarship is viewed as compromising the reputation of scientific academic pursuit. I would argue that surely no academic can deny the relationship between arts-informed methods and all disciplines of academic pursuit. Who could imagine architecture without art; medicine and biology without the aid of art; or geography, engineering, mathematics and literature without art? I do not believe any of these disciplines would have developed without art and, in present day high-minded academic pursuits; all disciplines are aided with some form of art. I therefore will not waste any time debating the role of arts-informed research in scholarship; instead, I will focus on explaining how I use arts-informed research to enhance my storytelling beyond the written word.

In the book *Provoked by Art* (2004), Stephanie Springgay and Rita L. Irwin have a chapter which they entitle, “Women Making Art: Aesthetic Inquiry as Political Performance” and it is from this work that I draw my working definition of arts-informed research. Stephanie
Springgay and Rita L. Irwin convey arts-informed research as follows: “By shifting the boundaries between art and research, we awaken the "political," the acts / art that provoke personal and social change, challenging us to perceive the unknown in new ways, and to bring forth the complexities of aesthetic inquiry” (2004, p. 71). So art encourages us to trouble that which we perceive. In the process of troubling or questioning our perception, we enter the realm of phenomenological interpretation. This means we question our interpretation of meaning because interpretation is an ongoing social political activity which we do to make meaning between us, among us and against other meanings.

My biggest inspiration for using arts-informed research as a storytelling method comes from the great anti-colonial work of Aime Cesaire, the Black scholar who used Surrealism to break free from the limitations of Western academic scholarship and develop the Black theory of negritude. Cesaire himself, in an interview with Rene Depestre at the Cultural Congress of Havana in 1967, described Surrealism as his detoxification process in disalienating himself and reclaiming his African heritage (Cesare, 2000). I on the other hand am not developing any new theory, as Ubuntu theory is an already an old African theory. Yet, to talk about Ubuntu in a Western academic institution I have had to use alternative Western genres that allow me to step out of Western paradigms so that I can step into Africanness and introduce Ubuntuness without confusing you the reader. Such is the contradiction and irony of being an African Ubuntu in a prestigious Western academic institute. I hope this process will become less tedious as more Blacks across the globe begin to share their stories and memories about what Steve Biko (1996) called the ‘inward-looking process’ of Black Consciousness, in his scholarship titled I Write what I Like.
The point of writing from an ‘inward-looking process,’ which is to think about what motives me to create positive change, was reflected on at an earlier time by Wendell Phillips’ letter of April 22, 1845, which he addressed to Frederick Douglass. He wrote: “You remember the old fable ‘The Man and the Lions,’ where the lion complained that he should not be so misrepresented ‘when the lions wrote history.’ I am glad the time has come when the ‘lions write history’” (Douglass, 1968, p. xv). The point I have taken from Wendell Phillips' letter is this. By writing about our storytelling structure could I be creating a discourse, which challenges other Ubuntu’s to remember their Indigenous knowledge? Could this research have implications for the African Diaspora in Canada and elsewhere globally? For me the answer to these questions is an unequivocal yes, as I believe Ubuntuness is an expression of loving Blackness. So let us now engage this Ubuntu storytelling structure

Baba Mukulo (male elder) taught me that if I wanted to help our community I needed to first heal and help myself (to be internally focused) before all else. At the time Baba Mukulo shared this wisdom with me, I could not understand his words. Yet, years later here in Canada, I am reflecting on his words and I see the connection between what he said and the Ubuntu rituals of coming to age. The rituals of coming to mature age are marked as times of self-discovery. Self-discovery is the process of understanding the meaning of the social self in relation to the other. Ubuntu philosophy communicates this as, “I am because you are.” The ritual ceremony of coming to age is held away from the larger community as a way of encouraging the social individual to think about the meaning of individual and collective relations. During the alone time of the ceremonial rituals, Baba reported posing the following questions to himself: “What makes these relationships important to me? What do I give and what do I take?” For me it is clear that these sacred ceremonial rituals are about understanding the interconnectedness of all Ubuntu relationships. To give emphasis to the interconnectedness of all Ubuntu relationships, the
coming to age ritual ceremonies are conducted in sacred natural places with the aid of spiritually wise selected elders. This means these elders have been through this process of coming to age and have been taught the skills of how to help each individual’s chi (spirit) commune with the self of other spirits in the life flux as known by Ubuntu.

Baba reported that this sacred ceremonial ritual helped him experience the relational oneness of all living things. This oneness is the formless energy we call spirit. To see the spirit in air, water, earth, fire, trees and other elements in the web of life is to see relational sacred power. This is to be spiritually Ubuntu because you see that, “you are through others” which can also be expressed as, “I am because you are.” This Ubuntu ceremonial ritual experience was had by my Baba but was robbed from me by the colonial governance structures with the aid of their religious institutes. This is why I treat my academic work on Ubuntuness as a regenerated ceremonial ritual which is directing me toward my Black self-discovery, performed away from my African home and community. Sisters and Brothers, it is known in the Ubuntu worldview that the acquisition of my Black history is a pre-requisite for my-self examination which is itself a requirement for seeing my relational bond with the larger community.

Sadly the researching methods of compulsory able-bodied Whiteness still try to cohesively steal away my memories and stories by employing diversionary trickery and lies. Whiteness endeavors to establish itself as the only viable memory while deposing my Ubuntu memories as primitive, barbaric and uncivilized (Mucina, 2006). This insidious form of compulsory able-bodied Whiteness keeps trying to condition me into believing that its research methods are my methods. Yet, as Whiteness tells me that its research methods are my methods, it also paradoxically keeps reminding me that I am not White. I am reminded of my otherness to compulsory able-bodied Whiteness when they speak about the “tribal” violence in the “dark
continent” or when they talk about how the corruption in Africa cannot be brought under control. These catchphrases signify that Blackness is being measured as an approximation to compulsory able-bodied Whiteness which creates doubt about our knowledge.

My Ubuntu heart remembers all that is important like the stories of Baba Mukulo and Mama Mukulo which have helped me deal with the challenges of colonialism by giving me Ubuntu teachings as reference points for engaging my world differently. Ubuntu stories have helped me stay grounded to my Ubuntu roots. Yet, I cannot help but struggle with the following questions: Does it matter that I cannot write in any Ubuntu language? I wonder, if we were telling this story in ChiNgoni would it be the same? What would be different? What has been lost in translation? Is the story in the right context? Am I philosophizing about it in the right way? When did I start dreaming this unAfrican dream? Fragmented memories take me home to that place where my spirit comes from. Where the problems are all ours and the finger pointing is only directed in our direction. But can I ever have this dream back? Do I accept change while learning from the lessons of the past?

Ben Okri (2002) calls this metamorphosis of exile, a process he explained in the following way: “Exile is a fleeing from one dream to another one. In the process we change, we metamorphose, and our new shapes are never settled” (2002, p. 54). If Ben Okri is right and I am sure he is, I should ask, what can my unsettled stories teach you? It is my hope that my unsettled stories will teach you to love yourself, to love your memories, to love your Blackness, to love your spiritual ancestors because they can guide you and I also want you to love humanity while being wary of the abusers and the usurpers. Whether I like it or not, all our actions are connected by the web of life. What compulsory able-bodied Whiteness has done has affected me and what I am doing will affect compulsory able-bodied Whiteness. So I acknowledge that my efforts to try
and decolonize will not only affect me, they will also affect Whiteness. Now that we are linked by this story, where do I end and where do you begin? Could the sacred spiritual cycle of breath connect us into one, Ubuntu? The next millet granary is very important because it is in this millet granary that we come to understand the many philosophical meanings of Ubuntu.
The starting point for orientation is the point from which the world unfolds... Orientations are about how we begin; how we proceed from “here,” which affects how what is “there” appears, how it represents itself (p. 8). So what is “East” is actually what is east of the prime meridian, the zero point of longitude. The East as well as the left is thus oriented; it requires its direction only by taking a certain point of view as given (p. 14). The direction we take excludes things for us, before we even get there (p. 15).

-Sara Ahmed (2006, pp. 8, 14, 15)

If orientations are about how we begin then I want to point out that in my decolonizing process I purposefully take Ubuntu theory as the given starting point that shapes how my storytelling gives us a more culturally situated picture about the Ubuntu worldview. As part of centering Ubuntu, I use a discursive theoretical framework because it allows me to engage my many political arenas. A good example of this is highlighted in the way that I use the anti-colonial theory of Aime Cesaire to highlight what colonialism is in the Ubuntu context, which then allows me to enter the Ubuntu worldview in a more meaningful way. The key concepts that I use to address the Ubuntu worldview are Ubuntu as a people; Ubuntu as a theory; Ubuntu epistemology; Ubuntu honouring theory and Africana phenomenology theory.

Aime Cesaire’s anti-colonial theoretical work, entitled *Discourse on Colonialism*, serves to illustrate how the colonial institutions were justified and how this justification continues to be perpetuated. The most important function of his work is that it serves to deconstruct the false memory that colonialism is still trying to impose on me. Cesaire reminds me what colonialism is with this poem:

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24 Using Ubuntu Pictograph’s from *Indaba, my children* by Vusa’mazulu Credo Mutwa to communicate that the Ubuntu spirit guides my work.
My turn to state an equation: colonization = "thingification." I hear the storm. They talk to me about progress, about "achievements," diseases cured, improved standards of living. I am talking about societies drained of their essence, cultures trampled underfoot, institutions undermined, lands confiscated, religions smashed, magnificent artistic creations destroyed, extraordinary possibilities wiped out. They throw facts at my head, statistics, mileages of roads, canals, and railroad tracks. I am talking about thousands of men sacrificed to the Congo-Ocean.” I am talking about those who, as I write this, are digging the harbor of Abidjan by hand. I am talking about millions of men torn from their gods, their land, their habits, their life—from life, from the dance, from wisdom. I am talking about millions of men in whom fear has been cunningly instilled, who have been taught to have an inferiority complex, to tremble, kneel, despair, and behave like flunkeys. They dazzle me with the tonnage of cotton or cocoa that has been exported, the acreage that has been planted with olive trees or grapevines. I am talking about natural economies that have been disrupted—harmonious and viable economies adapted to the indigenous population—about food crops destroyed, malnutrition permanently introduced, agricultural development oriented solely toward the benefit of the metropolitan countries; about the looting of products, the looting of raw materials. They pride themselves on abuses eliminated. I too talk about abuses, but what I say is that on the old ones—very real—they have superimposed others—very detestable. They talk to me about local tyrants brought to reason; but I note that in general the old tyrants get on very well with the new ones, and that there has been established between them, to the detriment of the people, a circuit of mutual services and complicity. (Cesaire, 2000, p.42-43)

In this short, accessible, clear poem, Cesaire makes plain what so many theories and academics have failed to communicate in clear accessible language. In the Black context, Cesaire communicates to all that colonialism is the gaining of power through Black dispossession. Black dispossession was hidden and silenced by White concept of discovery, as is illustrated in the case of Cecil John Rhodes who in colonial society “created” Rhodesia after “discovering” the territory. How did Cecil John Rhodes accomplish such a feat? How did he make so many nations and people disappear so that he could claim discovery of a country using the concept of terra nullius? How could Cecil John Rhodes claim terra nullius when he had to contend with the resistance of our ancestors? To get African lands he had to use trickery, bribery, outright theft and killed our ancestors without fear of consequence because he and his countrymen had convinced themselves that they were dealing with primitive people. Curtis Cook and Juan D.
Lindau, in *Aboriginal Rights and Self-Government: The Canadian and Mexican Experience in North American Perspective*, convey how the principal of primitiveness was conceptualized in Rhodesia as a colonial tool of dispossession that used vague and arbitrary standards:

By the second decade of the twentieth century, British colonial law had come to rely on a presumptive division of the world into “civilized” and “primitive” in order to justify unilateral assertions of sovereignty by colonists. Seminal for this version was the 1919 decision in Re: Southern Rhodesia of the Law Lords of the Privy Council of Great Britain, the highest judicial authority in the Empire. (2000, p. 151)

Curtis Cook and Juan D. Lindau show that the White colonizers developed their tools of colonialism and conquest among a specific Indigenous people in a specific geographic location and then transported those colonial techniques to other geopolitical locations. The White colonizing techniques were always being refined before being passed on to their kith and kin. Cesaire reports how White colonialists eased their conscious about the evil things they did to Black people by saying that our “good backward nature” was somehow responsible for encouraging them to colonize us. Cesaire captures this point when he makes the following reference:

Since, the Rev. Tempels notes with obvious satisfaction, ‘from their first contact with the white men, the Bantu considered us from the only point of view that was possible to them, the point of view of their Bantu philosophy’ and ‘integrated us into their hierarchy of life forces at a very high level’. (2000, p. 59)

Rev. Tempels generated his racist remarks by distorting Ubuntu philosophy and making it seem like Black people could not distinguish between White people and Gods. To adequately address the racist distortion created by the Rev. Tempels, let me use Ubuntu theory. The Ubuntu philosophy teaches us that we should treat a stranger like a god because we will never know when we may find ourselves in their territory. It is hoped by treating a stranger like a god, one
will receive the same treatment when away from home. So Ubuntu courtesy and hospitality became the marker of Ubuntu ignorance in the eyes of the colonizers and today this legacy still haunts us. Fearing being labelled as backward and primitive, we have abandoned our Ubuntu ways but, if we are to know ourselves as Ubuntu, we must take our power (Ubuntu) and use it to struggle to determine who we are and where we are going. All Ubuntu life is connected by the cycle of reciprocal relationships; no relationship is greater than the other. I value my relationship with my family in the same manner I value the trees, waters, rocks and other animals. Each relationship I have sustains my life in a balance that is beyond my creation. So let us engage who the Ubuntu are as a people.
Ubuntu as a People

The term Ubuntu has a linguistic history among Black people in Africa. Yet not all Black people identify as being Ubuntu. This I believe shows that Ubuntuness is a reflection of one contextual expression of Blackness and does not undermine other expressions of Blackness. The amaZulu of South Africa refer to a person as Muntu and people as Ubuntu. The maShona people of Zimbabwe call a person Munhu and they refer to people as Vanhu. The Chichewa people of Malawli refer to a person as Munthu and people as Watu. I highlight these three examples as a way of showing that Black people have been self identifying as Ubuntu since time immemorial.

The Zulu high priest, Credo Vusa'mazulu Mutwa (1969) in *My People, My Africa*, tells us that:

> The Black people of Africa called themselves, and any other people on earth, the Bantu, Watu or Abantu. This loosely means “people” or “human beings”. People of Europe and parts of Asia are called Abantu abamhlope, meaning literally “human beings who are white”, while we ourselves Abantu abansundu, or “human beings who are dark brown.” (1969, p. 18)

Mutwa also informs us that the contraction ntu in Ubuntu or Muntu has its roots in the word “ntu-tu-ut, which is an onomatopoeic word to describe the steps of a creature walking on two legs instead of four legs” (1969, p. 19). In my 2006 MA thesis, *Revitalizing Memory in Honour of Maseko Ngoni’s Indigenous Bantu Governance*, I address our roots in a chapter, which I titled Origins of Our Ancestors. In an effort to clearly show how Ubuntu history is Black history, I will revisit some of the points that I made while adding new information.

Stories of sacred memories and modern scholarship are in agreement on the point that the Ubuntu people migrated from a northern direction towards southern Africa. Donald R. Morris, in *The Washing of the Spears*, accepts that the Ubuntu were in Egypt and other parts of north and west Africa but has concluded thus: “No one knows from whence the Bantu came, and by the
time modern man turned scientific scrutiny on the problem a century ago, the layer of evidence were irrevocably tangled” (1965, p. 27). On the question of the Ubuntu origin, Donald R. Morris makes the following point: “The origin of the Negroes has been the greatest enigma. The variation within the Cushites, or a combination of Cushites with either Bushmen or Pygmies\(^{25}\) has been considered” (1962, p. 12). Hence, the white powers have rendered us invisible by the usage of the term ‘Negroid.’ A Negro is homeless, languageless and cultureless (Malcolm X, 1967). Robert O. Collins, in *Problems in African History* (1968), makes the following claims:

The term Bantu was first coined by Dr. Wilhelm Bleek in a book published in 1862 entitled *A Comparative Grammar of South African languages*. Bleek observed that nearly every language spoken on the southern third of the African continent used prefixes, which could be attributed to a set of what he called “proto-prefixes,” presuming a generic relationship and implying an aboriginal source. (Collins, 1968, p. 57)

I state very forcefully that Bleek did not make a new discovery, he simply reported the knowledge that our ancestors had shared with him. White settler society, with its kith and kin, has made claims of discovery since first contact and they continue to do so at our expense. They have taken up our knowledge as their own and they have been so effective that I even found myself trying to censor my own Baba's teaching because I feared that if his teaching contradicted their writings I would be considered a revisionist. They have created the illusion that it is impossible for us to talk to each other without first talking to them. This is why, Sisters and Brothers, I am saying: Sankofa, Sankofa, Sankofa, I am going back to reclaim my past before the great Maafa.

\(^{25}\) Bushmen is a derogative word which once again was invented by the white man. Our brothers and sisters that they call bushmen are known as San (called the BaTwa by Bantu) and Khoi-Khoi, while the BaMbuti and Ik, just to name a few other Indigenous who again the white man reduced to the label of pygmy.
Cheikh Anta Diop, in *The African Origin of Civilization: Myth or Reality*, accurately summed up the Black truth when he stated that the ancient Egyptians were in fact Black people and these Black people are the ancestors of the Black Southerners. It is said that a picture is worth a thousand words. So, as evidence, I will display some images from Diop’s work as proof that the Ubuntu have had a presence in all of Africa since time immemorial.

Sanusi (High Priest), philosopher and historian Credo Vusa’maZulu Mutwa has knowledge only available to the chosen few healers and spiritualists. Wisely, he sheds light on the origin of the Ubuntu using the intergenerational knowledge given to him as a custodian of sacred Ubuntu knowledge. He tells us that:

Now the common stock, the ancestral tribe from which all Negroid tribes of Africa sprang, was known as the Ba-Tu, or the Ba-Ntu. Legends say that the stock lived in the “Old Land”. This was far back in the bone and stone ages. Where was this “Old Land”? It is where the “Old Tribes” are still found today—all the tribes of the land of the Bu-Kongo right up to the southern parts of the land of the Ibo and

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26 In The African Origin of Civilization: Myth or Reality by Cheikh Anta Diop, p. 19

27 I hope Cheikh Anta Diop has silenced the critics with these images, not to mention the volumes of his published scientific researched scholarship.
Oyo (Nigeria). These are the tribes who identify themselves with the prefix Ba. They are Ba-Mileke, Ba-Mbara, Ba-Kongo, Ba-Ganda, Ba-Hatu, Ba-Luba, Ba-Tonka, Ba-Saka, Ba-Tswana, Ba-Kgalaka, Ba-Venda, Ba-Pedi, Ba-Sutu and Ba-Chopi. The southern offshoot of the great Ba-Pedi, Ba-Venda, Ba-Kgalaka and Ba-Tswana are the oldest Bantu tribes south of the level of the Limpopo and their histories within these regions go back to a thousand years B.C. All these tribes are direct offshoots of the great Ba-Ntu nations that lived in the “Old Land”, as a properly organised tribe, a full 4500 years ago, reckoned according to the genealogies. (1969, p. 19)

Oral traditions tell us that we have old roots in North Africa as we have been living in these lands since time immemorial. Mutwa’s knowledge about the Olden Ubuntu has been supported by the scientific work of Murdock in his book entitled, *Africa: Its People and Their Culture History* (1959).

Murdock identifies most of the olden ethnic groups as having a linguistic foundation to what has been identified as Bantu Languages and, to prove this point, he uses the above map to show how the olden ethnic groups are more densely populated according to geographic population figures and anthropological evidence. Meaning, the Ubuntu migrated from high density population areas

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to areas of low density population. The major areas that Murdock identifies as the oldest Ubuntu civilizations are located in the central great lakes areas, which are arguably the oldest Ubuntu civilizations. The next major move was to North Western Africa followed by North Africa while small groups went to southern Africa. Let us now engage the theory of Ubuntu.
Ubuntu Theory

In Western society, Ubuntuness was unknown and in most African academic institutions, which function from a Western Eurocentric scholarly worldview, Ubuntuness was dismissed as simple African thinking. But the world became interested for a moment when Bill Clinton was quoted speaking at the British Labour party conference in 2006; the BBC reported Bill Clinton as saying “Society is important because of Ubuntu.” The reporter, Sean Coughlan, then plays on the ignorance of his audience by showing that “nobody” knows what this Ubuntu is or cares to know. He states: “But what is it? Left-leaning sudoku? U2's latest album? Fish-friendly sushi?”

In between his mockery of Ubuntu he tells his audience that: “Mr. Tutu's identification with ubuntu has given rise to the idea of "ubuntu theology" - where ethical responsibility comes with a shared identity. If someone is hungry, the ubuntu response is that we are all collectively responsible.” Sean Coughlan than makes it clear that even this small idea of Black Africa has been co-opted when he reports that:

Ubuntu has also entered the language of development and fair trade - with campaigners using the word in aid projects for Africa in ways that suggest this will be an African solution for African problems. Ironically, says Rob Cunningham, Christian Aid's programme manager for South Africa, just as the word is taking off in Western society the values it embodies are in decline in the land of its origin. "In my conversations with partner organisations and the communities they work with, and among older people, there's a deep sense of loss of ubuntu," says Mr Cunningham. "To me, it means sitting down in a Zulu hut in KwaZulu-Natal sharing scarce food and a brew and a few stories." There are ubuntu education funds, ubuntu tents at development conferences, ubuntu villages, an ubuntu university - and it's now the name of an open-source operating system. Expect to hear more from ubuntu in the future. (news.bbc.co.uk)29

29 http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/magazine/5388182.stm
The reporter, Sean Coughlan, communicates to us that compulsory able-bodied Whiteness is giving legitimacy to a simple Black idea, while also laughing at the fact that compulsory able-bodied Whiteness is making a big deal out of nothing. So what is Ubuntu from an African context?

Ubuntu is a philosophical theory that guides our action in order to maintain all our relational bonds within an Ubuntu worldview. We need to remember that ideas and philosophies created in one language cannot always be adequately translated into another language without losing some meaning because each language speaks to a specific contextual symbolic encoding. Knowing these language translational limitations, here are some Ubuntu philosophical principles taught to me by my family and community:

- I am a reflection of the existence of my ancestors - I exist because they exist or as we say “Umuntu ngumuntu ngubuntu” – A person is a person through other people or we could also say, ‘A thing is a thing through other things.’ Meaning all things know each other in relationship to each other.
- We come from the energy flux and are the energy flux. This is why the circle is important to the Ubuntu spirituality. The circle shows that we are one.
- We respect and give thanks for all of our relations because all elements are part of the energy flux that makes up life.
- We try to live Ubuntu life with the aim of finding integrity and wholeness in the balance of nature, which is to see the energy flux in everything.
- To each person, place, animal, or object we ask for permission before taking and give thanks for that which we have received. These prayers are directed to the spirit of the
desired object. These prayers explain our actions and give justification for our actions because we respect the spirit of all things.

- Birth and death reflects the life cycle in all things and in all places.
- The spirit of the land and the spirit of the water we honour in special ways. In fact, it is said that the experience we have with specific elements helps us to develop language and knowledge as an effort to respect the space we occupy.
- Our traditional governance institutions are inclusive of nature as a decision making relational member of Ubuntu. We honour the intelligibility of nature.
- We honour the dead because they live in a parallel world to that of the living.

Now that we have some shared meaning of what Ubuntu theory is, let us go deeper and engage the Ubuntu epistemology.
Ubuntu Epistemology

I have learned from my Ubuntu elders to see the spirit of the creator in everything. Paradoxically, I have also been taught to understand that “the creator is distant, unconcerned with the affairs of mankind, except indirectly via animal and spirit emissaries” (Burnham, 2000, p. 2). I am of the creator yet I cannot fully understand my own nature and the rock is of the creator but I cannot speak for it as I do not understand it. In the Ubuntu epistemology, a force that may be perceived as evil in one context may be good in another context and vice versa. This is why we say that we are in a relational cycle with everything on this earth. Our job is to figure out how to nurture that relationship in a specific way and at a specific time. This is why the memory of our ancestors is important to keep alive. To know an ancestor is to invite their spirit to guide you when you need help. We do not need to keep inventing knowledge that was already invented by our ancestors. If we work with our ancestors, we can perfect this knowledge and move forward.

How do we know our ancestors exist? How do we know their spirits are with us? To answer this question my Baba Mukulu (Elder male that I address as big or senior father) once said to me:

I know I exist because you exist. I can see you, I can feel you and I know my mother exist because I am here. I am of her and my father. Both my parents are of their parents. You can see how this relationship connects me with the living dead. Dreaming becomes at times another way to communicate with the dead. Now, would you believe me, if I told you as old as I am that my grandparents visit me in my dreams? Other relatives that I have never met come to me in my dreams and advise me. All dreams are communications. You have to work out the message. (Baba Mukulo, personal communication, 1981-2)
Baba Mukulo’s story has helped me make sense of the African epigram, “We exist because they exist”, as he has demonstrated our relational link to our ancestors and how they are central to our practice of spirituality. Our ancestors are still with us in spirit but are a step closer to 

_Unkulunkulu_ (The Great Deviser, The Eternal Spirit or The Creator) who we don’t know but experience in all of creation. Others have defined The Eternal Spirit as the known energy in all things and it has also been perceived as the greater source of all energy. Arguably, our inability to comprehend Unkulunkulu has led some of our Ubuntu to represent The Great Deviser in many forms including:

…as bi-sexual, with two heads, one growing out of the top of the other, facing in opposite directions, which again symbolizes that God is all things in all time. In the old days figures of this type were carved at the top of long poles, which were then erected in the centre of the village clearing, to be used to measure the time of day from the shadow they cast. (Mutwa, 1969, p. 133)

The ancestral spirits that we know by name, we pray to them because they can help us. For example, they can inform us about the wishes of Unkulunkulu. Spirits can also be more than just people; the spirits of animals, plants, sacred places and sacred waters can speak to us and advise us. Owen Burnham, in _African Wisdom_, reports that the African world:

…is a world in which wisdom and knowledge are the keys to survival in the multi-dimensional spiritual universe where we are never far from the past, present and the future as represented by the ancestral spirits that are all around us. (2000, p. 12)

Our ancestors are motivated in their actions by their love for us. We are a continuation of their legacy or, put another way, we are a reflection of their existence. Our well-being is their well-being. To pray to them is to communicate with loving parents who know and understand us very well. In the spirit world they are in a better place to understand Unkulunkulu and because they have been here on earth they can understand us.
As we are in a different time dimension from our spiritual ancestors, we cannot see them unless they choose to make contact with us (Burnham, 2000). At times, we can communicate with our ancestors and not be aware of it; like when we feel the world is as it should be, the premonition we get about a dangerous situation that is about to happen or when we feel compelled to communicate with a total stranger. All these unexplained interaction are the results of our ancestors intervening or, at times, not intervening. The Ubuntu world is a mystery and we are taught to respect death without fear because it is a homecoming to our true natural form, which is spirit. In the world of the living we learn lessons and teach lessons but our time in the living world is not determined by us, it is determined by Unkulunkulu (the energy in all things).

In order to honour our spiritual connections and relationships, we offer libations. Before killing for food, we ask through prayer for the animal or plant spirit to give us its flesh. What we receive we are thankful for and, to show our gratitude, we make sacrifices to the ancestral spirits in hope that they will communicate our thankfulness to the spirits of the animals and plants who give up their lives to feed us. We hope that by showing our gratitude our ancestral spirits will ensure that all the things that share our world and nurture us will come back and continue to share the world with us again. I do not believe we should be buried in cement because, when we die, we too should feed the earth and the creatures of the earth in the same manner that they feed us. This is the cycle of life. It is important that I state very clearly that I have never been told or taught that we make offering or sacrifices of any kind to Unkulunkulu. To make any kind of offering to Unkulunkulu would be unacceptable to the teachings that I have been given because Unkulunkulu is of everything and everything is of Unkulunkulu. As Mutwa (1986) conveys to us, there is nothing that we can give Unkulunkulu for s/he is ever present in the world.
Another guiding Ubuntu principle that I remember from the stories of Baba Mukulo conveys that our ancestors struggled with the idea of living with difference among each other. So, you can imagine how difficult this concept of living with differences is when we start to speak across cultures, across religious beliefs, and across racial lines. Yet, we have to try to live with differences because our humanity depends upon it. The most obvious of these contradictions is that my ancestors moved away from southern Africa in an effort to avoid war with their relatives, the amaZulu, but they in turn brought war and devastation to other ethnics as far up as central Africa. Baba affirms this view when he states: “We are the product of aggression in defense, they (non-Ngunis) know of our fury, for we were wounded innyath (buffaloes)” (Personal communication, 2003). Baba’s point is supported in Witchcraft, Violence, and Democracy in South Africa, by Adam Ashforth, who in reference to “negative ubuntu” makes the following point:

To the adage ‘A person is a person through other people,’ the negative corollary of ubuntu adds: ‘because they can destroy you.’ That is, a person can survive only to the extent that others in the community choose not to destroy him or her. How they might do so is less important than the fact that they can. And when they do, whether by physical or by occult violence, the demand for justice inevitably arises. (2005, p. 86)

Adam Ashforth’s point is that our ancestors, like some of us still do, were committing crimes against Ubuntu because they could. Military might became the ultimate power. It is at such times when Ubuntu is being misused that we need to take action because no worldview system is infallible. We should never allow ourselves to misuse our power.

Even in the extreme cases when we can justify killing in self defense, Baba says, “we should never take life lightly and we should always remember, no matter the circumstance, killing is and should always be a very regrettable act because the warrior that kills has one less
relative” (Baba, Personal Communication, 1982). In present state society, old conflict resolution strategies like moving away in an effort to preserve life cannot be accomplished easily. The idea of living with difference has become even more crucial. I share these facts for no other reason than to help unite our Ubuntu communities. It would seem Karl Deutsch has hit our nerve when he, in *Nationalism and its Alternatives*, states that: “A nation is a group of persons united by a common error about their ancestry and a common dislike of their neighbors” (Deutsch, 1969, p. 3). Brothers and sisters, let us not hold on too tightly to our unique Black identities because the Ubuntu (African people) known as Nguni, who are ancestors of the Maseko Ngoni, are a result of Ubuntu legendary leaders and battles; of migrations and geographical displacement; of bloody ethnic feuds and kin-group formations.

Yes, the Ngoni have been created from the ashes of war but our languages, our spirituality and our memories connect us to our other Ubuntu relatives from North Africa to South Africa and from East Africa to West Africa. We are one people, we are Ubuntu. All of this the Ngoni know and have shared with us, their children, because memory is history and history is memory. Stories from our history tell us that there is great diversity that makes up what is Ngoni. Let us embrace the multiplicity as the diversity which will ensure our survival in an ever-changing world. Those who would try to create a singularity of the Ngoni identity will only neglect our other identities and undermine other valuable Ubuntu knowledges. Baba captures this problem when he states:

The problem for us as Maseko is that we have different memories from different parts of Africa and some of us have tried to impose our single inkatha [nation/kingdom] memory as the Ubuntu blue print for Maseko Ubuntu governance. But we know this cannot be Ubuntu as Ubuntu philosophy states, “we exist because you exist.” Thus, the idea of a single inkatha dominating a region does not make sense because inkatha is how the people unite and make sense of themselves without dominating each other or the land. The land
dominates us and it cannot be any other way for us. (Personal Communication, 1981-2)

To have paradoxes and contradictions is to be human amongst other humans. We speak of Ubuntu unity, yet we identify ourselves as Maseko Ngoni and, in so doing, we create outsiders. It is the existence and acknowledgement of those who are outside of our inkatha (unity, strength and nationhood) that makes our existence possible (Mucina, 2006). But we should also ask who is silenced by our inkatha, who is an outsider of our inkatha and how did they come to be outsiders while we are insiders? If it is our experiences and knowledges that give us our diversity, then let us support all our knowledges without creating a hierarchy of importance and power. Let us be proud and remember our other relatives. Let us remember that we were and are one family; let us remember the love of Ubuntu and let this love guide us to unity. We know the truth of what is being spoken here because we can recognize it, which is to say we remember it. In this section we have engaged Ubuntu epistemology and the political struggles we have to watch for when trying to live an informed Ubuntu life. Now let us engage how we use Ubuntu as an honouring theory.
Ubuntu Honouring Theory

When we arrived at new places to which we had travelled to visit relations, Grandpa would gather the soil of the land, letting it rest on his palm. Squatting froglike in the characteristic pose of ancestral address, he would mix the soil and the water. Of these muddy waters he would have us drink. It was an initiation and a rite that united us with our new spaces and released the spirit. Locked in childhood innocence, we felt safe, we felt happy, as the soft scent of decaying vegetation tickled our nostrils.

- Yvonne Vera in *Why Don’t You Carve Other Animals* (1992, p. 48)

This story by Vera communicates to me that the Ubuntu people of Africa know that the land is intelligible. We understand that the land has knowledge which is important for maintaining the balance of all life. As a child, when I was about to go out and play in the forest with other children, Baba would say to me: “Remember, there are sacred places in the great forest, always be respectful while you’re in there.” From this, I understood that the forest was a sacred place with power and that I was at its mercy when I entered its domain. The first time I entered a truly large forest, I was with some friends. At the edge of the forest, before we entered, the other children automatically began to ask the great forest for permission to enter and safe passage within her boundaries. I automatically followed suit because, from Baba's teachings, I understood the intelligibility of nature.

As we walked into the forest one of the older children reminded us all that it was forbidden to kill anything without asking permission from the spirits of the forest and, once we had killed, we had to also thank the spirit of the animal that had delivered itself to us. However, on this occasion we were only interested in having fun. Having found the perfect swimming pool, we played in it for some time and then went out to find some wild fruit to eat. While eating a monkey orange, I noticed that part of it was rotten and that it was riddled with worms. I threw the monkey orange down and yelled, “yuk, that’s disgusting!” Everyone came to a stop. I looked
around and saw the fear on the other kids faces. One of my friends informed me that I needed to pick up the monkey orange and place it down more respectfully. I did this without questioning but, when I was asked to apologize for being rude, I refused.

My thinking at the time was that these kids had gone overboard and my own sense of power and self importance stopped me from apologizing. The other kids pleaded with me to apologize for my behaviour but I refused. As we were leaving for home, none of the other kids wanted to walk behind me as they believed that the forest spirits would not show me the way out because of my behaviour. They begged me to apologize one last time before we started for home and I told them that I did not believe anything was going to happen to me. After walking for about an hour we realized that we were lost because it had taken us less than half an hour to get to the pool.

We spent another hour and a half trying to find the path out of the forest. When we realized that our efforts were not paying off, we all climbed some trees to see if we could identify where our end destination was. From the tops of the trees we could all clearly see that we needed to go southwards for 20 minutes at the most. After walking for about another half an hour we all realized that the only way we would get out was by praying to the spirits of the forest and asking for help. I started the prayer by apologizing for my errant behaviour and then we all joined hands and asked for help to get back home. After this prayer, we found our way to the edge of the forest within 15 minutes and when we got home everybody knew what had happened to us. To this happening Baba simply said, “I hope you have learned to be careful when you are out in sacred places” and we never talked about it again. Our elders in our respective communities have taught our people that we are dependent on the land for our survival. This is why we have learned to honour our lands through our ceremonies and rituals. Let us use Ubuntu
to move forward in relationship with all. Now let us use Black meaning making theory as a point of global engagement.
Africana Phenomenology Theory

Paget Henry, in *Africana Phenomenology: Its Philosophical Implications*, informs us that Africana phenomenology is not well known because it is not a Western philosophy and, more to the point, it is not Western phenomenology and speaks to the African experience (2006). Consequently Paget Henry leads us to question what Africana phenomenology is and his response to this question is as follows:

By phenomenology, I mean the discursive practice through which self-reflective descriptions of the constituting activities of consciousness are produced after the "natural attitude" of everyday life has been bracketed by some ego-displacing technique. An Africana phenomenology would thus be the self-reflective descriptions of the constituting activities of the consciousness of Africana peoples, after the natural attitudes of Africana egos have been displaced by de-centering techniques practiced in these cultures. (2006, p. 1)

The Ubuntu philosophy starts with the Africana phenomenological position of, I am because you are. This position communicates that self-reflection and meaning making occur in a social relational world. As social beings, it is important to understand that we make social meaning of our world through older meaning created by our ancestors. On the old meanings we construct new meanings and, with parallel meanings of the new and old, we construct more meanings. My opinion is affirmed in *I Write what I Like*, by Steve Biko, which conveys Black Consciousness as an 'inward-looking process' which allows one to honour one's identity in relation to the other (1996). The benefits of a 'inward-looking process' as a starting point for understanding Ubuntu is that the self begins to understand its political centrality to communal African politics.

In order to understand the Ubuntu organization of meaning, African phenomenology investigates the interweaving arenas of embodiment, time, space and action. These socially
created phenomenon help ground our interpretive relation to experience. The act of philosophizing the experience we gain through our body is conceived of as embodiment; meaning, how we experience space and occupy it. The process of change created by newness and dying, between day and night or winter and summer, can be understood in relation to the concept of time. Place gives rise to the concept of occupation which is reflective of our geopolitics in relationship to space. We do things in order to create change or, I could say, our doing creates change. Hence, action is connected to purposeful change. Yet, purposeful change is such a contested interpretation and making it measurable becomes subjective and controversial. This is why in the Ubuntu worldview the main theoretical occupation is interpreting relational bonds and trying to understand how change, the constant fact, impacts everything. Yet, of such Ubuntu phenomenology we hear little because Black people are preoccupied with addressing racism.

Paget Henry illuminates this point in the following manner:

Rather, the occasion for reflection has been the racist negating of the humanity of Africans and the caricature of "the negro" that is has produced. Unlike European phenomenology, these Africana reflections have been interested in clarifying the systemic error producing foundations of the European humanities and social sciences that have had to legitimate and make appear as correct this racist reduction of African humanity. (Henry, 2006, p. 4)

The colonial thinking of compulsory Whiteness, that we have been fighting since contact, is reflective of the thinking used by Robert Horwitz who is reflecting on Thomas Aquinas’ (1966) *Summa Theologiae* with reference to John Locke’s *Questions concerning the law of nature*, where he states from a Western educational perspective: “A rational creature therefore possesses a share of the eternal reason, whereby it has a natural inclination to its proper act and end, and this participation of the eternal law in the rational creature is called the natural law” (Locke, J., Horwitz, R. H., Clay, D., & Clay, J. S., 1990, p. 13). Here we encounter a problem of interpretation; in that, we should ask how we determine embodiment, time, space and action
without being limited by Western arguments of rational, reasonable and purposeful action. I am aware that, at the inception of these arguments of rational, reasonable and purposeful action, specific persons are being excluded from the imaginable persons who were rational and reasonable. An American physician by the name of Samuel A. Cartwright, in 1851, claimed that the fleeing of Black slaves from captivity was not reasonable or rational. According to Samuel A. Cartwright, this behaviour was in fact reflective of a Black person’s mental illness. Samuel A. Cartwright defined this so called mental illness as a medical condition which he called “dрапетомания” or the disease causing Negroes to run away (Diseases and Peculiarities of the Negro Race, 1851). Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze (1997), in his edited work called Race and the Enlightenment: A Reader, reminds us that great Western thinkers were not willing to imagine Black people as rational or reasonable beings and in fact used our Blackness as the grounds for labelling us as primitive. David Hume in 1776 argued “I am apt to suspect, the Negroes and in general all the other species of man (for there are four or five different kinds) to be naturally inferior to the whites” (Eze, 1997, p. 35). Immanuel Kant in 1724 used the racial category as the absolute marker of oppression when he stated, “This fellow was quite black…a clear proof that what he said was stupid” (Eze, 1997, p. 35). In my review of my engagement with compulsory able-bodied Whiteness, I have learned an important lesson which was put in the following way by Rod Michalko and Tanya Titchosky in “Putting Disability in Its Place”, which was published in Embodied Rhetorics: Disability in Language and Culture:

The question of ‘where we speak from’ is thus fundamental to the question of self identification (p. 205)…. The sighted person does not indicate that the door is open. A sighted person, ‘knowing’ that the blind person well have ‘trouble’ opening the door, opens it. The sighted person does not indicate that the door is

open. The blind person ‘should see’ that the door is open. But not seeing this, the blind person tries to open it. The sighted person is surprised. Both stand groping. The door to the building remains open, but the door to any interactional development of what it means to be blind, remains closed tighter than ever. (2001, pp. 205, 215)

Here is what I find fascinating from an Africana phenomenological perspective. The orientation of the discussion by Rod Michalko and Tanya Titchosky is set in the field of disability but its implication for equality, the intersections and interlockingness of oppression, marginality, racism and sexism is larger than disability only. It is about people who are in diverse forms of relationships to each other. Yet, from our diverse social relationships with each other we try to impose our single interpretive meaning on others even if our own interpretive meaning contradicts our own experiences. This is especially true in the White context where they know that Blackness and disability are the markers of unwantedness but can never answer the question of, unwanted from what? On the other hand disability has used the experience of Blackness in the same manner it has used feminism, to draw skills and strength in addressing issues of disability as a marker of inequity. I would like to follow this tradition of borrowing between disability and Blackness and set Rod Michalko and Tanya Titchosky’s words within a race discourse. Let me replace Blind person with Black person and Sighted person with White person and review the new context of interpretive meaning that arises: “The Black person ‘should see’ that the door is open. But not seeing this, the Black person tries to open it. The White person is surprised. Both stand groping. The door to the building remains open, but the door to any interactional development of what it means to be Black, remains closed tighter than ever.” I have read many writers that highlight the problem of Africa and give us their solution as to why Africa is the problem. A word is seldom uttered about Blackness. Yet we all know that from the position of compulsory Whiteness, Blackness is their problem.
Africana phenomenology could prove very useful because it helps me question what is sayable and doable about Blackness within the nexus of social interpretation and meaning making. Africana phenomenology challenges me to think about who is missing in our reasoning, who is being labeled as unwanted and what does unwanted come to mean? African phenomenology allows me think about the fact that if interpretation is the creation of meaning then meaning should also lead me to the question of interpretation. In other words, if all Ubuntu are affected by the interpretation of meaning, can we explore how certain Ubuntu voices are empowered and authenticated while certain voices are disempowered? What would it mean in our social interpretation of meaning to have certain voices which have been disempowered into silence speak from an empowered position? African phenomenology does not just help me question, it also helps me think about how I might validate the social interpretation of other Black people. For example, I can talk about my story of disability as a way of engaging Blackness in relation to disability. Let me be honest, I am uncomfortable with putting Blackness and disability together because there is a history of viewing Blackness as disability. Yet I cannot be silent about disability within Black communities. These are the tensions that I must navigate when I make Blackness and disability rub up against each other in our neo-colonial global state society. Now that we are linked by this story, where do I end and where do you begin? Could the sacred spiritual cycle of breath connect us into one, Ubuntu? I hope we have grounded each other in our Ubuntu meaning making and Ubuntu interpretation of meaning because the stories that I will now share may challenge and decenter us. In which case, having our Ubuntu orientation becomes important for grounding us in Black power. As a way of preparing myself for talking to Amai, (mother) let me engage African feminism as a way of opening myself to her reality.
African Feminist Theory

They are all slaves, including us. If their masters treat them badly, they take it out on us. The only difference is that they are given some pay for their work, instead of having been bought.

- Buchi Emecheta in, *The joys of motherhood* (1979, p. 51)

Bought like meat, my Amai (mother); it is not a thought that I have ever seriously considered but this could be because of my African male privilege. Being a male, the thought of being married off is laughable and the thought of being forced into marriage because of monetary gain is inconceivable to me. But if you speak about marrying someone in order to escape poverty, my Black male ears hear you very well. So in Amai’s silence the quote from Buchi Emecheta’s story has left me questioning, was my Amai bought against her will? Could such a happening explain her actions of allowing my maternal family to give custody of me to my Baba, especially when stories by Yvonne Vera in *Why Don’t You Carve Other Animals* communicate the following about the experience of Zimbabwean women:

…There are so many women with no husbands but with a lot of children. I do not want to be one of them. The country is in a state of confusion. Who knows what the rules are anymore? Who knows what to do? Who knows what is really important? We only know our loss and our fear and our silence. We know we are women asked to bear children. We know that to bear children will bring us suffering. This land must be watered with the blood of our children and with the saltiness of our tears before we can call it our own. What shall I tell my child about his father who is absent? (1992, p. 44)

Like Baba, other African fathers were absent from family life because the colonial White system had forced, lied and cajoled them into neo-slave jobs. All the knowledge that I gained from my formative early years was heavily influenced by my Baba’s male dominated perspective. I, therefore, knew my Amai through the memories of my Baba. I would not be exaggerating if I stated that from Baba’s stories my Amai was the calculating money stealing
woman who abandoned her child and her husband with the aid of her parents when the money was gone. My Baba always said:

What kind of woman would leave my two beautiful children – Misheck and Mary to die alone while she tried to satisfy her sweet tongue? To think her own family helped her turn into a prostitute. So they as a whole family could enjoy the things money bought them. The White man’s ways and money had taught them that materialism was more important than people.

In the orphanage, I was also primarily raised by males. Hence, my motherlust, my sense of abandonment and my sense of disconnection all became associated with my perception of my Amai’s inability to fulfill her role as a woman and as a mother. But could African feminist thought challenge my male position and perspectives? Could African feminist thought help me meet my Amai from a Black feminist position and perspective? Could I understand my Amai’s story if I reflected on her experiences using a discourse that is not familiar and comfortable to my Black maleness? Could I listen to her when she comes to me from the spirit world to communicate her unique contextual location? Could I know my Amai anew?

Could African feminist theories allow me to honour all the wonderful women who have mothered me, even the White ones? Dr. Njoki Wane (2000), in her work titled Reflections on the Mutuality of Mothering: Women, Children, and Othermothering, talks about how other women (and men in some situations) care for children in our communities. She makes it clear that mothering is more than the biological act of creating a child and it is more than the gender roles society prescribes. Dr. Njoki Wane informs us that, “Our mothers, aunties, sisters and community mothers carried us on their backs” (2000, p. 108) and this community mothering she calls other-mothering. Meaning, we are all responsible to mother beyond our own biological children. Dr. Njoki Wane has put it thus:
Within African communities, mothering is not necessarily based on biological ties. Established African philosophy suggests that children do not solely belong to their biological parents, but to the community at large. This philosophy and tradition inform what we refer to as “other-mothering” and “community mothering.” Significantly, even in the face of Western conceptions of mothering, which often view community-mothering practice as deviant and negligent, African understandings of mothering continue to thrive. Throughout the African Diaspora, Black women care for one another and one another's children regardless of their cultural backgrounds. (2000 p. 112)

Highlighting my experience of being at times other-mothered across racial lines, again exemplifies the contradictions that exist in our racist contemporary Canadian society. Just when I am comfortable seeing the racism of compulsory able-bodied Whiteness, very small and at times large individual acts challenge me to have hope. Albeit slowly, the racist White world is changing; my Baba reminds me that his experience of compulsory able-bodied Whiteness is not the same as mine. Baba’s point has implications for mothering in the Canadian African Diaspora. Again I return us to Dr. Njoki Wane’s work on other-mothering. She informs us, in the Canadian context, that:

Although I focus on Black women who mother children and one another, such practices exist beyond gender and racial boundaries. It is not unusual to find young boys mothering their younger siblings and uncles and fathers mothering their nieces and or nephews. My mothering experiences in Toronto have also shown that women from different racial backgrounds may step in as othermothers or community othermothers. (2000, p. 12)

So to all the Black and White women who have other-mothered me, I say thank you for other-mothering me. What you have taught me, I will perform for my children and our community children.

This being said, for me no-one can fill my Amai’s role. When I cry, Amai, I know who I am calling and it is this Amai that I want to meet. It is this Amai, the thinking and feeling person who is an African Black woman. A fallible human being who makes mistakes, who has dreams,
whose desires motivate her and whose fears can freeze her or make her fight. I want to meet the real contradictory Amai who I cannot shape into my idealized African personification of perfect Amaihood. African feminist thoughts can help me move from my privileged maleness to a place of uncertainty. African feminist works such as: *The Joys of Motherhood* by Buchi Emecheta (1979), *Nervous Conditions* by Tsitsi Dangarembga (1988) and *Why Don't You Carve Other Animals* by Yvonne Vera (1992) are helping me become uncomfortable and challenged, so that I may try learning to listen and hear about Amai with an African feminist sensibility.

How can I be whole if I never interpret the world from my other half which is the feminine African self? Maleness is half of my feminine self, which I am connecting with by making myself available to learning from and by hearing the diverse stories of our Black women. Amai, from the realm of the dead may you help me reflect you so that your truth may be heard. I need your story, Amai, because it is an important part of the story that I use to heal myself. I am using our stories as medicines to fight hate, pain, isolation and the desire for revenge. This is why Shauna Singh Baldwin says in *What the Body Remembers*: “Stories are not told for the telling, stories are told for the teaching” (2000, p. 50).
In my search to find my way I cause you endless troubles

As I ask you to hear this challenge,

Answer that inquiry

All the while expecting unconditional love from you

Yet there is no love for you

My mischief does not let you rest peacefully

But today I will try to open myself to hearing from you

The first aim of this millet granary is to talk to the invisible spirit of Amai through a letter that I write to her. The second aim of this millet granary is to share specific concrete examples of how colonialism has created a matrix which fragmented my family just as it has fragmented many Black families. During a discussion, Dr. Wane mentioned that the Ubuntu family is one of the basic foundational unit that makes up the Ubuntu governance. Hence, its health is reflective of the health of Ubuntu collective governance within a set geopolitical context. My family story is of the Ubuntu reality but it does not and cannot capture the whole Ubuntu experience with colonialism but it will tell you how colonialism has fragmented my family which, by extension,

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31 This Ubuntu pictograph symbolizes the Goddess Mother (Ma) who is the creation source of all things (in Mutwa 1964, p. 671).
is a reflection of how colonialism has fragmented Ubuntu governance on a macro level. As a social being, I share my political reality as a way of reaching out further to our larger Black community because my story is one of their stories which reaches out to them in a sharing manner.

Ubuntu worldview theory, like other theories that seek to communicate the human experience truthfully, has at times created tension for me between the ways I knew my parents as a child and the ways I am learning to discover them as an adult. For me, it is this experience of living in the tension of colonialism and Ubuntuism that has caused me to be reflective of how I am living in our social world. In an effort to honour and communicate with my Amai, I write this oral narrative letter to her. Our learned Zimbabwean sister Tsitsi Dangarembga (1988) has captured our conditions in the neocolonial reality as being what she calls *Nervous Conditions*. But my aspiration, brothers and sisters, is not to give you definitions of what we have been made into. On the contrary, my intention is to highlight the way forward for us as Ubuntu. Vassanji (2003) in his novel entitled, *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall*, highlights a very viable approach for liberating and regenerating ourselves beyond the colonial mimicry which we embody for the most part. Vassanji makes the following admission through a character in his novel, who states: “I have even come upon a small revelation—and as I proceed daily to recall and reflect, and lay out on the page, it is with an increasing conviction of its truth, that if more of us told our stories to each other, where I come from, we would be a far happier and a less nervous people” (2003, p. 2). The words of Vassanji ring true to my ears but I would also like to remind him that the telling of stories is not a new phenomenon in Africa because we have been telling stories since the dawn of time. It is just that colonialism has undermined this way of knowing and sharing knowledge. Colonialism with its racism and biased impositions has rendered oral history as outdated and unreliable sources of knowledge when compared to
modern-day Western scholarship. Thankfully, these colonial positions are being challenged by Indigenous scholars who are demonstrating the biased nature of Western scholarship (p'Bitek, 1984; Achebe, 1988; Cesaire, 2000; Okri, 1997; King, 2003). Amai, through this letter I struggle to speak to you. I am writing to the invisible you while reflecting on the past visible you. I am not sure this is fair but I do this in the hope of making us a happier and a less nervous people. Truthfully, Amai, I write this letter as a way of speaking to you beyond fragmentation.

Dear Amai (? - 2003),

I open my mouth to speak to you but my throat is dry

My stomach is cramping up, my head is throbbing with pain

Yet my sweat is icy cold

What is this obnoxious smell that I emit?

Could it be fear?

Could it be frustration?

Could it be love?

Could it be hate?

I pick up a pen to write to you

I remember that I am dyslexic

I set up my laptop

But I cannot abandon the pen
It is the security officer of that which is in my head

So I dictate when I cannot get the brain and the pen to coordinate

But right now I cannot get to the problem because my throat hurts

My stomach is cramping up

My head is pounding away

And

My armpits are trickling with icy cold sweat

And yes, I am unsettled by my own smell

But There Is So Much To Say.

Yet I cannot start with my own words so I will start with the words of another:

Oh, the flesh of your flesh and the blood of your blood is yearning for you. The splinter of your bone is craving for reunion, Aayyolee. Like when I was a child, I'm hungering for the caresses of your hands and thirsting for the whispers of your love. I long for you like one in darkness longs for daylight. I crave you like a starved body craves food. I long for the sight of you like a thirsty person in the Sahara longs for the sight of an oasis. I reach out for you but this cold winter grips me harshly. And my heart bleeds. Yes, my heart bleeds, Aayyolee too! Why should this ugly hateful curtain of mist drop between us? Why should this eternal-looking darkness swallow us? When will this enveloping and choking night dissolve away? When will we rejoice in that magical togetherness and be lost in our familiar bliss once again? (Kuwee Kumsaa, 1994, pp. 23-24)

Amai, let us thank our dear sister Kuwee Kumsaa because she has given me the motivating energy to articulate the start of this letter and, as you know, the start of generating the directional
path of any dialogue is always the hardest part. Now that sister Kuwee Kumsaa has opened the way, let me continue.

The earliest image that I have of you, I have learned is not of you. I was telling Maiguru (your elder sister) that I have a memory of you carrying me on your back in a shawl towel. I am looking at the back of your head and I am amazed by the beauty of your Black hair which is braided in cornrows. The contrast of the pink and White dress on your beautiful Black skin is mesmerizing. As I am telling this story, I noticed that Maiguru and Sisi (sister who is the daughter of Maiguru) exchange a knowing look. I ask if something is incorrect and Maiguru tells me that the image I have described is not of you. It is of Sisi, who cared for me as is the traditional Shona way. I am disappointed at hearing this news because it confirms that I have no memory of you. I have nothing that connects me to you in a way that is born of my memory. For the longest time I blamed you for this erasure. How was I to know that this was the insidious trickery of colonialism which fragmented our family and then pitted us against each other?

All this was achieved through the harshest, most pain-full and most humiliating manner to ensure that we draw less and less from our past memory. Albert Memmi asserts that the colonial reality makes it seem like we are doomed to lose our memory and he (Memmi) can advance this position because he knows that:

Memory is not purely a mental phenomenon. Just as the memory of an individual is the fruit of his history and psychology, that of a people rests upon its institutions. Now the colonized's institutions are dead or petrified. He scarcely believes in those which continue to show some signs of life and daily confirms their ineffectiveness. He often becomes ashamed of these institutions, as of a ridiculous and overaged monument. (Memmi, 1965, p. 103)

Amai, I hope you will forgive me for not seeing beyond the colonial facade. Baba, who is both a victim and a survivor of colonialism, could not see beyond his own suffering or was it too
painful for him to face your hard truth and still go on living? So much is unknown yet so much is known.

Amai, I cried for you because I wanted you, needed you, desired your warm touch and because I was lost without your motherly wisdom. But Baba's response to my cries for you was always the same in its substantive content. Baba had one of two responses: he was either icy cold about you, which in my books qualified for the gentler side, or he erupted like a scary volcanic mountain which, in its fury of manifestation, threatened to consume me to the point of nothingness. At times like this I only wished I had never brought up the subject of you but I could never stop myself because you are my bones, you are my flesh, you are my heart and, most importantly, you are my soul. I do not believe you could find the point which distinguishes you from me because I am of you.

Yet, Baba would say metaphorically: “You and I are like a pair of trousers and a belt. We need each other, we support each other. For how can a pair of trousers stay up without a good belt? I am the trousers and I am dependent on you the belt to keep me up” (Baba, personal communication). I wonder what Baba would have said if I had pointed out that a pair of trousers and a belt could not stay up without a body. Thus, the three (trousers, belt and body) make one and this one makes three. Regardless of the play on words, it was his inevitable next attack which always silenced me while making me the follower of his party line: “She was a whore who killed my babies but she did not do it alone. It was her parents' fault. They could not stand to be out of sugar, so they made her sell her body” (Baba, personal communication).

Amai, let me state that the telling of our stories is an important step toward our healing from colonial oppression as it allows us, the peoples who have Ubuntu knowledge and are struggling to live it because of the imposition of colonialism, to have the space to analyze these
experiences and speak about them from our own philosophical and theoretical perspectives. In my writing, I directly and rightfully blame our spiritual and physical injury squarely on colonialism. I take such bold steps, Amai, because I still remember the childhood hurt of loving an absence you; I yearned for your love but the lack of observable reciprocal evidence of the love that I had for you threatened to destroy me. So, to survive your absence, I started to accept the stories that Baba bombarded me with because at the time they were easier to live with than the truth. What would I have done knowing that colonialism was responsible for the fragmentation of my family? Could Baba have believed that he was giving me the lesser of two evils? Could I have survived the truth? Dearest, dearest, dearest, Amai how did you survive this colonial nightmare? Did you direct your blame on Baba like he directed his on you? Did you see the true cause of our suffering, colonialism? Was your suffering so intense that giving it an analysis was only adding salt to an already throbbing and festering wound?

Amai, I can only speak for myself and cannot speak for Baba. As a child it was easier to project my suffering as being caused by you. The truth, Amai, was too ugly to face because it reflected my weakness and vulnerability. So when you remember the hateful words of scorn from Baba, please remember that anger is fear turned inside out. Now that both you and Baba are in the spirit world, you no doubt see the truth and forgive each other for the misdirected hurt you caused each other. I, for my part, write to you now acknowledging my failures and begging your forgiveness. I know I took part in humiliating you publicly so it is only fitting that I publicly apologize for my behaviour. My miseducation started with Baba’s stories of you but I took it to the next level of rejecting you when I said, “I have no Amai and I do not need one. Especially one that abandoned me and has never tried to visit me. No, I do not need such an Amai, all I need is my Baba because he is both Baba and Amai to me. No matter how hard things get I know he will never abandon me. I have never known any Amai who has done anything for me.”
Now I will admit, Amai, that I did not understand the implications of everything that I said but I certainly understood the shock value that it created. In most cases the outrageousness of my response stopped any further discussion or questions on the subject. I also knew that when I put on this show it made Baba very proud. When Baba was accused of disrespecting you, he would respond by saying: “If my son is to survive this hard cruel world he must learn to deal with the ugly facts that make up our reality and truths” (Baba, personal communication). Amai, if I am asked how colonialism is implicated in our spiritual and physical injury can I share this story?

I wonder if Baba ever spoke the truth about his colonial experience with you? I wonder if he ever talked about how he was emasculated by colonialism and I wonder if he ever drew links between your experience and his experience? I wonder if he was aware that he was reproducing the same oppression that he experienced at the hands of White settler society with you? Did he ever tell you why he could not send money to you, besides telling you that he could not find work? Well, I heard one of the reasons when he was trying to explain how White settler society dehumanized and humiliated him. Whenever all the neo-slaves (domestic servants) started to share their stories about colonial exploitation, Baba would share numerous stories about how he was exploited. But this story always stood out in my mind and it is only now that I'm seeing the connection that it has to your suffering and the heroic acts that you did in order for me to survive. I remember Baba saying:

After searching the different White neighbourhoods for any kind of work, for over a year and a half, I found work as a gardener and a laundry wash boy. The promised work pay was great and, on top of that, this Madame and Bass (Boss) were providing me with food as well. This job was evidence that my ancestors were watching over me and I was sure I would now be able to put something in my family's hands. My manhood was restored and I made sure I was early for work every single day and I stayed late on the job until they sent me home. I made sure that when the Madame or Bass called I was there in less than a minute and I
was especially attentive to the needs of the Madame because if she was not happy there was no possible way that I would keep my job. If the Bass likes you and the Madame dislikes you, then you lose your job. The Madame must be happy at all cost.

So when she started to put her underwear as laundry I was a little surprised because usually White women do not like Africans touching their panties. They are happy to have you wash the husband's underwear but will not allow you to touch theirs because this is like touching their womanhood. But I did not care what I did as long as I had a job. Every now and again the Madame would come and watch me do the laundry and at times she would chat with me while I did the laundry or the gardening. It was therefore not unusual or alarming when she came to talk to me while I was washing her panties. Still dressed in her bathrobe, she asked me to stop the washing and come and help her in the house. When we got into the bedroom she dropped the bathrobe and, while standing naked in front of me, commanded me to remove my clothes. As this was not the first time that this had happened to me, I simply fulfilled my male role and went back to work. Whenever the Madame had an itch, I just simply scratched it for her and went back to work. But Madame was not happy with the services rendered. She also felt that I needed to pay her my whole monthly earning as a sign of my honour and privilege for serving her. When the Bass asked why she was taking my money from me, she simply responded by saying, “I have given him a loan to build a home in his village for his family. So we have calculated that for the next four years he will have to give me all of his earnings.” This of course meant that if I left her services or misbehaved she could now get the police after me. As if she needed a legitimate reason to get me arrested. (Baba, personal communication)

Baba became their slave through their governmental structures which allowed for heinous laws like “The Master and Servants Act” to exist. This law and others like it made it a criminal offence for a Black employee to disobey his/her White employer (Meredith, 1979). On the other hand, you, Amai, were forced through their colonially enforced Land Apportionment Acts to live on reserves that they had created after stealing your lands. The colonial White settler’s audacity in Zimbabwe was adequately captured by Doris Lessing in her seminal novel, The Grass Is Singing. A quote from the book reads:

The biggest grievance of the White farmer is that he is not allowed to strike his natives, and that if he does, they may - but seldom do - complain to the police. It made her furious to think that this black animal had the right to complain against her, against the behaviour of a White woman. (Lessing, 1950, p. 126)
Amai, as you know, colonialism gained our lands through what has been identified as possession by dispossession (Harvey, 2005). Meaning, colonial White settlers took our arable lands so they could profit off them. As for their question on how to placate the threat that the dispossessed “natives” posed, their kith and kin had developed a White workable solution in Canada. The Canadian solution for dispossessing and disconnecting the “natives” of their lands was workable because the White settlers could identify the “natives” through their colour which differentiated them as nonwhite. This is why the solution was to put the “natives” on reserves (Cook and Lindau, 2000). The immediate benefits of this solution was that it made it easier to control the “natives” while giving the illusion that White settlers were helping the “natives” become civilized.

The truth was that the reserve system ensured that we, the “natives”, were not a threat to White interest. The colonial reserve system kept us busy trying to survive its harsh conditions, as it still keeps us busy now with its neo-colonial structural adjustment programs. As we focus on colonial goals we are drained of the energy we need to work toward our own total directional Ubuntu destiny. We have suppressed the fact that we are of the whole African continent. Colonialism has limited our identity and our vision of relational bonds to colonial boundaries and, in so doing, compulsory able-bodied Whiteness has taken people who were able to sustain themselves and turned them into exploitable dependants. In this colonial carnage, Amai, you and Baba did what was necessary to survive even though the colonial system was stacked against both of you. Amai, could I share this story as evidence of how colonialism has stolen our lands, controlled our actions with its laws, enacted violence upon us, treated us as sexual objects and, in its actions of oppression, has further divided us against each other which has only advanced spiritual and physical injury upon us?
I see now that it is these oppressive practices by White settler society in Zimbabwe which led to the African uprising against the colonial system. I, who was born to you during the liberation war, now have these questions. What made you marry Baba, one of many migrants from Malawi in Zimbabwe? Did you know that these Malawian migrants who were in Zimbabwe were perceived as “Uncle Toms” (traitors to the liberation cause)? Why did you risk being perceived as a traitor for marrying a Malawian migrant labour, who worked for less when the leadership of the Black liberation struggle was asking the Zimbabwean people to resist being exploited by colonial structures? It was clearly understood around the rural areas that death was the fitting penalty for any Zimbabwean who embraced these migrant traitors. Fanon, in *The Wretched of the Earth*, illuminates our self-destruction in the following manner:

> While the settler or the policeman has the right the livelong day to strike the native, to insult him and to make him crawl to them, you will see the native reaching for his knife at the slightest hostile or aggressive glance cast on him by another native; for the last resort of the native is to defend his personality vis-a-vis his brother [and in this case wife]. (1963, p. 54)

Amai, did our liberation fighters in Zimbabwe know that our Malawian parents were in Zimbabwe because colonialism was exploiting their region as well? Did anyone mention that divide and conquer was colonialism’s greatest tactic? Amai, what was it like to try to raise children while a war was raging around you, having no home of your own, struggling to feed your children without any source of income? Let me say, Amai, I am ready to hear your story but I must warn you that some of the pain from the past has scarred me and I am learning to live with these scars while also learning to renew beyond these colonial scars. In a way, I am trying to understand the circumstances and motivations that guided your actions but I do this lightly because if I do it heavily I will want answers to questions like: What was behind your decision for not coming to visit me when I did everything possible for us to meet? Did you know how
much I wanted and needed you? Why did you not come, why did you not come, Amai? Did you know I made Baba send you that money so you could come but you never came; why did you torture my heart? You sent your brothers and your sister when I wanted you. Did they tell you that their presence only further confused me because I did not want them, I only wanted you? Did they tell you that they could not quench my thirst because I wanted:

.... my mother the proof, my mother who circulates within me, my mother who was in me as I was in her.... Here, in the invisible inside, I no longer know if I'm the subject of the verb in the past tense, in the present, or if today is really the day before yesterday whereas erstwhile is a part of the future....The most surprising is not that I, I will die, it is that I was born, that I am not you, and that I am me. I would like very much to know that me [which is you]. (Cixous, 1998, pp. 86-87)

Amai, did you know that my relationship with Baba was volatile from the start and as I grew older he tried every trick to mould me into a perfect Black English boy because he believed my survival was dependent on my ability to assimilate into White society? I had to learn how to be acceptable to White society. Baba used all means necessary to ensure that I embodied compulsory able-bodied Whiteness in my behaviour and I am sure that if he could have changed my pigmentation to make me White he would have done it. He would demonize all that was Ubuntu and praise all that was Christian and White. Any resistance that I put up against his efforts would result in the severest form of verbal abuse and, on a number of occasions; he beat me until I was unconscious.

Amai, I am not claiming that I was an easy child to father. I know my ancestors gave me an unbreakable spirit; I embody resilience and resistance. I am because my ancestors are me; without my ancestors there is no me and without me there are no ancestors. Our existence is one and the same. So, when I ran away from home, I was resisting being White washed and because I ran away I had to stay away as a way of preserving my life. Alone, in the middle of the night,
fear would threaten me and, as terrified as I was, I knew my life was in the hands of our ancestors. Due to the imposition of Christian spiritual colonialism, there were times when I would pray to our ancestors and, for good measure, I would also pray to Jesus to do his thing because I was afraid of going to their hell. Amai, by the time I was seven years old I had learned how to sleep alone in bushes, on the streets and in waste paper bins. I ate food from the garbage bins and, when I needed to, I stole food from where ever I could find it. All this I did in order to survive.

In 1982 I was picked up after a grocery store owner had reported that I was sleeping in the shopping mall’s waste paper bin. The social workers who took me off the street soon learned that I was not safe in the care of Baba because, when they took me home, Baba openly threatened to kill me. The social workers placed me at an orphanage called St. Joseph’s House for Boys while they assessed my case. On April 02, 1982, the Harare Juvenile Court, using the doctrine of children’s protection and adoption act (chapter 33), admitted me as a ward of the state under section 21 (1) (a) of the child in need of care. The Harare Juvenile Court named St. Joseph’s House for Boys as my legal guardian. Once I was in the orphanage, which primarily cared for European and mulatto boys, I did everything possible to reduce my Black connection as I was trying to fit in with the other boys who only highlighted their White connection. The European worldview that Baba had tried so hard to make me assimilate into, now became the barrier which reflected to me his neo-slave status. Baba had left the responsibility of trying to keep in touch in my hands; why, I do not know. The only thing that is clear is that we started to drift apart. Contradictorily, the more I tried to integrate into White settler society, the more it reflected to me that I could never be a part of it. Yet, the lies of colonialism still made me want acceptance from it and being in this position made me vulnerable to White sexual predators.
Thus, all of us by day were the scorn of White society but by cover of night we all became potential victims of abuse and exploitation.

Amai, in the orphanage the warden, who we shall call Dianne because that is her name, taught me that I was either an usurper or I was the usurped but I also came to realize, through experience, that a good usurper must know firsthand the humiliation of being usurped because it makes you merciless in your usurpation efforts. So, let me give you the context, Amai. This particular White female warden had been brought into the orphanage because of all the forms of abuse and sexual exploitations that White male wardens had performed on the boys. Under her welfare, we were supposed to be safer. I was a 13-year-old who was disconnected from his community and family structure. Thus, the special attention that Dianne paid me made me feel wanted and special.

It all started with after dinner invitations to her apartment under the guise of discussing the structural issues of the orphanage from my viewpoint as a boy in the orphanage. At first we did talk about orphanage structural issues but very soon Dianne was sharing her private life with me. At the time, I felt honoured with the fact that she trusted me with such intimate details about her private life. I had never had such an intimate relationship with an adult and I valued our friendship and relationship very dearly. Every Friday night she began to make me dinner and when I came back late from school she would have snacks for me in her apartment. Food was always a big deal in the orphanage as there was never enough, so I was amazed at my good fortune. I had a mother figure who was a great friend and she fed me the most amazing meals. At the time, I believed this was as close to heaven as I could ever be. Dianne even started giving me driving lessons and coming to all my rugby games. She knew all about my relationship with Baba and had assured me that, when my court review date came up, she would make sure the
social workers and the court understood how important it was for me to stay in the orphanage so that I could continue to thrive to my potential. When the social worker recommended that I spend more time with Baba, Dianne told me we could just disregard this as there were not enough social workers to enforce and follow up any recommendations made about any of the boys care.

You, Amai, on the other hand, were demonized in the most severe manner possible. Dianne always informed me that if she had a son like me she would never have given me up. How strange is this, a White woman telling a Black child that she would never have given him up; yet, strangely enough, she in reality had done the very act she condemned you for. Speaking from a White privileged position, Dianne stated that her reason for leaving her son with her husband was to ensure that, through her husband's wealth, her son got every single opportunity that she was not able to provide as a single White female. Could you have given me to Baba because you believed he was in a better position then you to care for me? On this point, Dianne could not extend her White feminist thinking to you because you, as a Black woman, were not worthy of White reflection. Dianne, instead, validated her reality as real and meaningful while dismissing your reality as pointless. You were a no-body to her and, therefore, we were better off not thinking about you. But you, Amai, I now believe, sensed the danger that I was in so you made Baba bring you to the orphanage. Did you know that this was the first time that Baba had ever visited me at the orphanage? After so many years of craving you, I had learned to live and do without you but here you were expecting me to welcome you with open arms. You wanted a relationship. You wanted to change my world again. Amai, I know this letter is divulging all but bear with me because deep down I know you are part of me and you know I am part of you. Allow me to continue, Amai.
Do you remember that, by the time you decided to connect with me, the gap between us had widened so much that I did not know you; I did not want to know you. Or did I want to know you? My world became overwhelmed with confusion and the only thing that was clear was my anger so I denounced you as my Amai (but remember, I have also said that anger is fear turned inside out). I told you that you had let too much time go between the time when I actually needed you and now, that I had learned to cope without you. I remember you cried as I spoke these harsh words to you. Your only response was: “Nothing I did was easy; I tried to raise three children with nothing” (Amai, personal communication). After this, you left and I imagine you probably felt disappointed but, unbeknown to both of us, our spiritual connection had been re-established and this shared spirit would guide us in future interactions.

Feeling distraught and confused about my encounter with you, Amai, I went to Dianne to seek comfort but she rebuffed my calls for support and understanding. In fact, she spoke more intensely about herself and her family problems. She talked incessantly about how her marriage had fallen apart because she had fallen in love with a former boy from the orphanage. She also told me that as soon as the ex-boy had found out about her pregnancy he had wanted nothing to do with her. As Dianne could still sense that my mind was on you, she shocked me into focusing on her totally by saying she was sure that she was having a miscarriage. I, wanting to help, offered to drive her to the hospital but she told me that it was too late as she could not save the child. I asked her what I could do to help her and she told me she just needed me to be a good friend and be there when things got tough. Wanting to be a good friend, I begin to spend all my extra time with her and in return she made sure that if any trips or events were offered to the boys from the orphanage I was given special treatment. Meaning, I was offered all possible opportunities made available to the boys by the communities first before any other boy was considered. Unbeknown to me, I was being ambushed for sexual abused. I have heard that to
ensnare a monkey in a gourd, you need something shiny to attract it. Happily I walked into the trap. Amai, could I share this story as evidence of how colonialism has fragmented our family, undermined our memories, tricked us, humiliated us, pitted us against each other after abusing us emotionally and physically?

Amai, as part of my special treatment I was chosen as one of four boys to go on a Lions Club trip. We went to Kariba and, after being away for the whole weekend, Dianne was so excited to see me that she made a special dinner which she served with an expensive wine. As the evening was ending and I was ready to go to bed, Dianne asked me if I thought it was okay for friends to kiss. I told her of course it was okay and I went over and kissed her on the cheek. Dianne held my hand and drew me in front of her. She then told me that she meant real passionate kissing on the mouth. I will admit that when she started kissing, I did not resist and in fact enjoyed it immensely. The only thing that was missing was that I wanted the other boys to see my experience and share with me my good fortune. I knew the other boys would never have believed that the warden had kissed me and let me fondle her everywhere. The further we went the happier I was because I knew this was the stuff that made for great stories. But as I was leaving, Dianne told me that I could never tell a soul about what had happened because she would lose her job and go to jail and I, on the other hand, would end up in reform school. Everyone in the orphanage feared reform school because there were stories about boys being beaten and raped on a daily basis. I, therefore, kept my mouth shut.

Amai, by the time I was one of the senior boys, Dianne made sure I had a room right above her apartment as this made it easy for her to call me down. She also made a copy of her apartment key so I could get in and out without being easily observed. But, needless to say, one cannot keep a secret in a home of 55 boys and 11 staff so we will just say that everyone kept
their mouth shut. It seemed like I had a win-win situation. She gave me money, food, sex and brought me things from the UK as she made frequent visits to see family. My best friend in the orphanage, who made it clear that he had figured out what was going on, was given a special apartment with a self-contained kitchen so that he could entertain his guests. He also had free access to any of Dianne’s three Volkswagen vehicles.

Amai, it’s amazing how bribery can buy loyalty. Dianne had also told my friend that, when we graduated, she was going to buy a house in which we could all live together and we were not to worry about jobs because she was confident that through her network in White settler society she would get us jobs. When I started to see that the relationship was built on abuse and exploitation, I began to express doubt. To keep me in order, Dianne exerted pressure through intimidation which she directed at me and at my friend. After a while, she realized that intimidation and fear did not work so well on me so she went back to the old trick which had always worked on me. This was my fear of being responsible for another human being’s suffering or death. Knowing this fear of mine, Dianne made me believe that, if I left her, she would kill herself or go crazy.

Not wanting to be responsible for the death of anyone but also knowing that I could not play this game anymore, I dedicated my time to finding a way out of this craziness. Even my high school headmaster had suspected that I was being sexually abused by the warden. To the headmaster's credit, he called me into his office and asked if anything was going on between her and me. I remember my headmaster saying: “If you have any problems, I can only assist you if you disclose to me what is going on; I cannot act on suspicion alone when the consequences of my actions have great ramifications” (Headmaster, personal communication). Knowing my headmaster, I knew that if I disclosed to him the truth he would take decisive action but I could
not determine the outcome of his actions. Believing that if I disclosed the truth I would end up in reform school, I chose to deny that anything was going on between Dianne and me.

Amai, I therefore suffered quietly but, unbeknownst to me, the situation with Dianne was having a negative impact on my health and I only became aware of the severity of my problem when I went to see the doctor because I had tonsillitis. At this doctor's visit, it was discovered that I had high blood pressure and, after monitoring my condition without any improvement, I was started on a medication regime to control the high blood pressure. Counseling sessions were also arranged but none of these interventions could help me because I could not disclose my real problem due to fear. So out of desperation I began to track you down, Amai. Is it not interesting to notice that at the highest level of my distress I came looking for you? Amai, could I share this story as evidence of how colonialism has stolen our lands, controlled our actions with its laws, enacted violence upon us, treated us as sexual objects and, in its actions of oppression, has further divided us against each other which has only advanced spiritual and physical injury upon us?

My search for you, Amai, led me to Maiguru's home; she then connected me to the rest of my maternal family. My meeting with my Ambuya (maternal grandmother) was a bittersweet experience as I did everything possible to make her sense that I was still very angry for, what I perceived as, their abandonment of me. Before I left to find you, Ambuya told me that she would ask the ancestors to show me the way and she added that she was confident that the ancestors would do their job because was I now not standing before them. Sekuru (maternal grandfather) did not say much to me. When I arrived, Sekuru asked me to come and stand in front of him so that he could see me (even though he was blind). As I stood in front of Sekuru, I heard him say: “Is this you, Peter?” and I respond by saying: “Yes, Sekuru, it is I.”
After a moment of awkward silence I noticed that Sekuru was crying and I knew that I was loved. Sekuru did not need to say anything, his tears honoured me and made me feel that no one had wanted our family to fragment but we had all done what we needed to do to survive. I will not say that everything was forgiven and forgotten but this exchange with Sekuru spoke to me on a spiritual level which allowed me to have a certain level of empathy for my maternal family. Before I left, Sekuru told me that he and Ambuya were now ready to go to their ancestors with not so heavy hearts. He also told me that time would lead to healing through the understanding that I gained with age. Amai, if I should be asked how storytelling creates healing, re-establishes familial bonds, revives memory, supports understanding, moves us beyond anger, gives us voice to fight against injustice, bears witness to our survival, brings hope to our fragmented families and ensures that an evil is not repeated by forgetting about the past, can I share this story?

Amai, after visiting with you I know that I came back to spend a night with Sekuru and Ambuya but I cannot remember that experience. I have no image or memory of it but I remember coming back. Could it be I do not remember anything because all that needed to be remembered had entered my soul already? Amai, if you can see Sekuru and Ambuya thank them for me for understanding my childish ways. I am still trying to digest the meaning of all their words and because I have written them down I find that I can worry more about meaning than trying to hold them whole in my mind.

The morning that we set out for your home, Amai, we left at four o'clock in the morning. Dark as it was, we were able to find our way because the stars were so bright. After eight hours of hard walking in the blazing sun, we arrived at your home just after noon. We were all starving and very thirsty for water. Very nervously you invited us into your hut and right away I noticed
that your hut was poorly constructed using corn stocks as walls. Sitting inside your hut I could see outside very clearly. There was nothing in your hut that the poorest thief would have taken. I had never seen such poverty, never even imagined it possible. From the dryness and isolation of the land, I could not imagine where you got your drinking water from. For miles and miles around you there was not a single being because this was hushed territory and here you were alone with a baby. If I had any questions for you, Amai, the reality of your surrounding robbed me of my voice. When you gave us a water mug to share, I became acutely aware of how precious water was in this place. As I drank the water, I became aware that I was not as thirsty as I had imagined. From the single pot sitting over the fire in the middle of your hut, you spooned out a few kernels of corn and placed them in each of our hands. I knew that each kernel of corn that you gave us compromised your reserves but I could not turn down this gracious offer that you were using to re-establish our familial bonds. As we ate, I knew that there was no place for us to sleep and there was definitely not enough food to feed all of us. So when you asked when we were leaving, I knew that we had to leave right away.

Even though the full impact of that visit did not manifest itself until some years later, I believe when I went back to the orphanage I was not the same person. You had opened my eyes to a reality that you had protected me from. I am sorry that I never got my act together sooner so that I could have helped try to alleviate some of the poverty that ultimately killed you. Amai, if I should be asked how storytelling creates healing, re-establishes familial bonds, revives memory, supports understanding, moves us beyond anger, gives us voice to fight against injustice, bears witness to our survival, brings hope to our fragmented families and ensures that an evil is not repeated by forgetting about the past, can I share this story?
It seems my visit with you, Amai, made me more confident and confrontational and I knew that there was nothing colonialism and White settler society could take from me. I was even now aware of Dianne's sexually predatory nature because it became clear that I was not the only boy that she was doing this to. They say knowledge is power and the more I learned the more I was able to slowly wean myself from Dianne. But, unfortunately, from this process I had learned how to use and usurp other people. White women became my target because Dianne had taught me to use them first before they used me. This is how I came to Canada by using and usurping a White woman. For this I am sorry and I apologize.

Amai, I thank you for your fighting spirit because without you there would be no me. In retrospect, it would seem to me that I am fighting where you left off. Colonialism has fragmented us as a family, co-opted us and pitted us against each other. By undermining our memories it has undermined our ways of knowing. While we point fingers at each other about who has transgressed what boundaries and who has undermined what family values, colonialism takes advantage of this confusion and continues to decimate all our Ubuntu governance; but we will not let this happen anymore because we are now aware of the insidious nature of colonialism and we will not let it fool us again, Amai. Our talking about colonialism's insidious nature is itself a step towards creating solidarity and bringing our families together. I thank you, Amai, with all our other ancestors who paved the path of struggle, because your efforts of liberation have taught me that we cannot use colonial structures to determine our future without reproducing colonialism (Alfred, 2005). I hope, Amai, I learned to love as deeply as you do. I know you are with me because I have felt your presence in all the great women (African, Black, Brown, Yellow, Red and White) that have been Amai to me when I needed you. May we be whole again because you are my bones, you are my flesh, you are my heart and, most importantly, you are my soul. I do not believe you could find the point which distinguishes you from me because I am of
you. Dear Amai, I clap my hands as a way of welcoming and honouring your spirit. Let us be one in addressing our deep pain because this pain is fragmentized love. In a day dream you once asked me what I had to say. Well I have spoken and now I ask you, “What do you have to say, Amai?

Respectfully your son Komba

Devi Dee Mucina

Amai, in these blank pages may you inscribe your spiritual wisdom to me.

For Amai’s voice
For Amai’s voice
For Amai’s voice
Dear Amai, I thank you for your love. I am here because you loved me. I am now equipped to continue on my journey of teaching Ubuntu because you, the spirit, are here with me. Amai, I am learning from our story which is why I want us to keep this dialogue open as I welcome Baba to it. In the next millet granary I speak to Baba in another letter.
Millet Granary 6: I am your Son, Baba

Dear Baba, may I present my remembered interpretations of our story as my way of re-establishing our familial bonds through dialogue. But before I can start to create dialogue, I must face some truths. For example, my motivation for the 2003 reunion with you came from my desire to confront you about the injustice I perceived you had committed against me. Mark Mathabane (1986), in the preface of his autobiography entitled Kaffir Boy, has this to say about his Baba: “They turned my father - by repeatedly arresting him and denying him the right to earn a living in a way that gave him dignity - into such a bitter man that, as he fiercely but in vain resisted the emasculation, he hurt those he loved the most” (Mathabane, 1986, p. X). The understanding that Mark Mathabane demonstrates for his father’s behaviour, I lacked as I only wanted to respond to my own pain. Like a lawyer, I had prepared my opening statements which I was confident clearly showed your guilt and I was also well prepared for any rebuttals that you offered as justification for your actions. For many years, I had rehearsed this confrontation and I was certain that victory and vengeance were mine. So when I arrived in Zimbabwe in 2003 to find you, the realities of living in a so called ex-colony manifested itself in ways that got in the way of my planned vengeance.

For starters, I was informed by people who knew you that you were living in the bushes and on the charity of other people because you were so poor. Your common law wife (meaning you had not paid for your wife’s bride prize and therefore had no claim to your children) had

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32 This Ubuntu pictograph symbolizes fatherhood (in Mutwa 1964 p. 678).
died of AIDS in the rural lands of her people. Your children with her were struggling against poverty with little support. My Canadian student life, which is supported by student loans and academic scholarships, was comfort beyond anything you could dream of but here I was ready to confront you about past injustices while you were still in the midst of experiencing injustice and harsh poverty. Such ex-colony realities were weakening my desire to exercise my vengeful voice. When I first saw you, I could not believe you were the same man who I called my Baba because you had aged and shrunk in stature. Our lack of communication over so many years left you speechless as I stood before you. The spectators in attendance had to coax you into speaking again. I could tell you were wearing your best clothes even though they were worn out to the point of being rags. If I had poisonous venom about how you had parented me, it kept dissolving away. After the formal public greetings you and I went for a walk and while we were walking you looped your hand around mine and asked me: “Baba what has kept you away for so long?”

Baba, I had not planned for you to confront me with gentleness and could not respond with anything else but truth. I remember telling you that I had stayed away from you because your desire to make me a Black English man made me feel like the idolized image you had of me was more significant to you than the actual me. I also told you that the dominant memories I had of you were of you beating me until I was unconscious, you threatening to kill me in front of the social workers and you willingly giving me up to the state in a court of law. Interestingly, without me elaborating any further, you turned to me and said, “I am sorry for the pain that I have caused you.” Baba, your honest few words have liberated me. They have satisfied my need for justice from your marginal location in the matrix of colonialism. Your apology has started to

33 When an Ubuntu Baba calls his own son, “Baba,” he is giving his son the highest form of respect.
give me the power to focus more on love and less on hate. I only wish I had been wise enough to apologize to you for your suffering under colonialism when you were here in body. Baba, could I now say: “I am sorry for the scars colonialism left on your heart and, if you will speak about it, I will now listen.”

Baba, do you remember how, for the rest of the visit, we shared with each other stories about the gaps that were between us. We established a plan for how I was going to get money to you in a reliable way. You seemed truly proud and happy to hear about my plan to start doing a Master’s degree and the only disagreement we had was over my refusal for you to start arranging a marriage for me, as I had already found the woman I was going to marry. You were especially perplexed when I showed you a picture of Mandeep. I remember you, Baba, saying: “Why don’t you keep her as a girlfriend and marry one of our own.” This could have been your way of conveying that, for the most part, South Asians in our African colonial context had a history of separating themselves from us. But Baba, you know that in matters of the heart sometimes political realities are ignored. This is what Mandeep and I did. By the time I left to come back to Canada, you were joking about having an Indian daughter-in-law and that is when I knew that our colonially fragmented familial bonds were being established again. We are changing our family structure from forced fragmentation to chosen relational engagement. I hope that in the afterlife our ancestors keep helping you heal beyond our family fragmentation.
This photo was taken at the Malawian Embassy in Harare while we waited for your emergency travel documents. At this moment I was in shocked excitement while also experiencing a form of anxiety because I was silently questioning myself about what I was getting you into. I wonder what you were thinking, Baba?

Dear Baba (1920? - 2009),

I hear the ticking of colonial time

You are waiting for me and I am waiting for you

Before us and between us colonialism has established foreign ways

And colonial time keeps ticking

You and I struggle to speak to each other in these foreign ways

And colonialism has made us believe that our time keeps ticking away

Where is the cultural dialogue which allows us to speak to each other?

Where is the path that leads to you?

And why Ubuntu Ancestors does this colonial time keep ticking?

In the matrix of colonial governance we are familial strangers to each other

Where will we meet while this colonial time keeps ticking?

Should we meet in the middle or should I come across to you?

I cannot think because there is this colonially ticking sound that keeps me running

Where I run to I am unaware
Why I run I am unaware

Oh Baba, dear old Baba what has become of our world?

Colonialism has taken all while leaving us its ticking idea of frantic colonial time.

How do we remember with all this ticking?

Fred D’Aguiar (1994), in *The Longest Memory*, helps me envision what I imagine to be your responses to my questions:

Memory hurts. Like crying. But still and deep. Memory rises to the skin then I can’t be touched. I hurt all over, my bones ache, my teeth loosen in their gums and, my nose bleeds. Don’t make me remember. I forget as hard as I can (p. 2)…. So I look with these bloodshot eyes that see without seeing, witness without registering a memory or sensation (pp. 4-5)…. My memory is longer than time. I want to forget. I don't want to see any more. (p. 26)

Baba, I now know how much your memories hurt because I now hold your memories. In this letter there are many memories of many things but the sweetest memory is from August 2008 when I was 35 years old and you took me home for the first time. This is the memory that gives me strength to talk about the early memories which are harder to talk about. Baba, I am giving you this letter as a way of putting some of those early memories to rest so that we can focus on love. There are so many memories I could start this story from but for this letter I want to start here.

I was probably around five years old. You and I lived in the servants’ quarters but I was your little hidden secret as Black domestic workers were not allowed to have their families in the White communities that they worked in. Like a curious cub, I wanted to explore my environment and you, like a protective lion, tried to establish in me the ability to distinguish danger. You had taught me to hide whenever I saw a White person and, from your teachings, I understood that
they posed a danger to our survival. However, my need for play led me to explore the back of the
servants’ quarters which was out of site from the main house and its sprawling gardens. It was
when I was returning to the servants’ quarters from my secret play area, before you returned for
lunch, that I noticed from the periphery of my vision something yellow moving. Instinctively, I
hid myself behind a bush. As I watched from behind the bush, I saw an older and much bigger
White boy who was wearing a yellow speedo (swimwear). It was evident that he had just come
out of the water as his body was still dripping water. From the way he looked around it was clear
to me that he was making sure that no one was observing him and when he was satisfied that no
one was watching him, he hid a key under the garbage bin near the main gate. Satisfied that he
had accomplished his mission, he went back to the main house and about an hour later you came
to the servants’ quarters looking truly terrified. You searched all over the servants’ quarters and
when I inquired what you were looking for, you would not answer me back. It was when I
offered to help you find what you were looking for that you told me about the missing house key.

I immediately told you that I had seen the White boy in his yellow speedo hide a key
under the garbage bin. At first you would not believe me and were convinced that I was mistaken
but I insisted I knew what I saw and offered to take you to the key. You asked if I could show
you the location of the key from the entrance of the servants’ quarters and I did. You went and
got the key. As you picked up the key I could see and sense your relief but as you turned to go to
the main house I could tell that you were angry at how unjustly you were being treated. I now
imagine as you were walking up to the main house you realized that this White family was
reflective of the settler White government because they did not care about your needs. The
colonial system only responded to Black needs if such action served their greater interest. As I
watched you, I noticed you pause, turn around and come back.
You packed up our few belongings into one suitcase and in your other hand you took my hand and led me up to the main house. You gave the madam her key back and in your broken English said, “My children see your children hide the key. I think your children do this because you tell him to do this thing.” I do not remember the rest of the conversation, I do not remember leaving that beautiful property and I do not remember going around with you seeking help as we had no place for us to stay. But I do remember crying because I was hungry, tired and scared of walking in the dark. As we stood on Westminster Avenue’s bridge behind Ellis Robins School, you suggested we go under the bridge to rest as it was out of the way and therefore less likely to cause us to be spotted by the police or community watch patrols. As it was the start of winter, the stream under the bridge had a small volume of water flowing through it so it was safe to be under the bridge. You sat your suitcase down and broke me a piece of bread while we shared a half liter of buttermilk for dinner. When we were done dinner you invited me to sit on your lap and covered me with your jacket for warmth. How many nights we spent under that bridge I do not remember or know but in your efforts to care for me you sent me to live in Black townships. You had to keep moving me from one kind family to another in order to ensure I was not too much of a drain on their meager resources. For how long this went on I do not remember but I remember you telling me that, when you were finally able to take me in, you still had to keep me as your little secret in the White community that you worked in.

To address my sense of fragmentation and disconnection while still building up my attachment, you gave me a whistle and told me to put it in my mouth when I went to sleep. I remember you saying: “Now you can get my attention at night when you are feeling sick, afraid or confused.” When I did get a cough you did not seem to get disgruntled by the whistling noises that I made in the middle of the night. All this we communicated in Shona, Nyanja and some
Zulu as you wanted to ensure that I knew how to speak our Ubuntu languages and this action of yours has helped me stay connected with our people and our histories.

Baba, I may fault you for many things but I can never say I went hungry when you were with me. I remember seeing you go hungry so I could eat, I remember seeing you beg so that I could eat and I remember saying to you: “I will take care of you when I grow up.” So how did we change from showing each other so much love to showing each other outright hostility? Do you remember that, right up to the time I went into the orphanage, you openly expressed your reservation over whether I would be willing to care for you in your old age as is part of our Ubuntu custom. Even when I was in the orphanage you would remind me, on the infrequent visits that I made to you, about our Ubuntu relational actions as a way of reminding me that you expected me to care for you. Why, Baba, did you need to remind me of that which was common knowledge and why, Baba, did I not want to care for you?

I am making explicit these questions of confusion which are situated between us because they are the creation of colonialism. Baba, I am sharing this story with you because I am recovering our unknown stories before, between and after colonialism as a way to move forward in a positive manner. Baba, let me continue this story before you offer your judgment.

When your new employers found out that you had me (a Black child) on their property, they were upset and would have fired you if it was not for the fact that you were the best “house boy” and “garden boy” that they had ever had. So they agreed to keep you employed on a temporary base until you proved that you could care for an African child without causing any problems for the White community. On your occasional Saturday or Sunday off day, we would go for walks together. These times make up some of my happiest memories and also mark some of my most hurtful memories. As you tried to navigate the colonial system at its lowest level, I
imagine you felt inadequate as your two children died due to malnutrition and poverty. Your participation in the colonial system threatened the existence of your in-laws, who were harassed by the colonial White soldiers for possibly supporting the Black guerrilla fighters and, on the other hand, the Black liberation fighters hassled them for welcoming a sellout (you) into their family. My maternal family evaluated that the risk you posed to their family as a whole was greater than the meager resources you offered them. My maternal family therefore did not feel they could justify risking their whole family for you. In the wretchedness of this colonial induced poverty and hardship, your marriage broke apart which left you isolated. In this state of loneliness, the colonial spirituality of Watchtower welcomed you into its community as a Jehovah’s Witness, on the condition that you denounced all that was Ubuntu.

Desperate for acceptance and community, you agreed to their conditions but, as you established yourself beyond their community, you began to question their Watchtower religion. This is when they told you that if you ensured that I walked the righteous path, meaning I remain in the fold of Watchtower and was a Witness for Jehovah, you would gain admission into the kingdom of God. It is possible that you believed in the teaching of the Jehovah’s Witnesses or that you thought new times, new religions. Whatever it was that motivated you to take the steps that you took, it made me feel like a religious sacrificial offering. Right from the moment you introduced Watchtower to me, it felt like you were making me convert to this new religion for your own benefit or because of your trained colonial fear. The Jehovah’s Witnesses made you believe that you risked damnation for your beliefs in traditional Ubuntu ways and because you believed them it seemed to me that you wanted me to become your tool of this colonially promised Watchtower salvation. All I had to do was believe in the righteous path of the Jehovah’s Witnesses but, even as a child, I could not do this. This was not my religion. It was a foreign religion and I could not follow it.
My refusal to follow in the fold of Watchtower as a Jehovah’s Witnesses was the major start of our volatile relationship. When I refused to go to the Kingdom gathering (because at that time that Jehovah’s Witnesses fellowship did not have a hall), you forced me to go by threatening to beat me if I did not go. As a side note, I now wonder where the White members of that Jehovah’s Witnesses fellowship met when the Black members were meeting in the bushes, because they were not there with us. It would seem the White brothers and sisters were happy to talk about a multicultural kingdom come while participating and perpetuating racism in our communities. I never heard the White Jehovah’s Witnesseses condemn colonialism as the evil we all needed to stamp out together. However, I can tell you that through the Black leadership which got its direction from the White leadership, the message was clear: political activism was diametrically opposed with the will of God. We Black people were, therefore, meant to suffer quietly in this physical world while preparing our spirit for the spiritual world through the Watchtower religion. I do not know if it was my political ancestors guiding me to awareness or if it was my desire to play and have fun with other kids that made me start lying to you about attending the Watchtower services. As you hardly ever went to these services, I was confident you would not find out about my lack of attendance.

My luck ran out one Sunday; you had sent me to the Watchtower service but I had gone to play. On returning home, I failed to notice that you were dressed in your Sunday best suit which would have been a clue that you had gone to the service. Following my past pattern of lying, I started as usual to give you a fictitious story about the service as I removed my Sunday best clothes. I remember turning to face you when, without warning, your fist hit me on the side of the head. I flew into the old dresser and its door broke in half. All I remember is the top half of the dresser hitting me on the head before I passed out. How long I lay unconscious I do not know but when I did gain consciousness I had problems maintaining my balance. As I could not focus
on anything, I closed my eyes and went to sleep. The next morning, clear fluid was coming out of my ears and you had to take me to the clinic where when the nurses asked me what had happened; I told them that the fluid had just started coming out by itself. Without you telling me, I knew I had to protect you in the same manner you protected me from the Whites.

Baba, as I now reflect on our relationship, I can see that it had started to fragment before the Watchtower incident. The drifting apart of our relationship started when you began trying to mould me into a perfect Black English man because you wanted me to escape some of the colonial exploitations that you had endured as a poor and illiterate Black man. To change my fortune, you encouraged me to make friends with White kids and you were very proud when I started to speak English better than our own languages. I even remember the story of how I made my first White friend. It was around 9 o’clock in the morning when I touched my first White person. I was playing on the main gate of your employer’s property when a White boy came up to me. He began to try to communicate with me but I could not understand him because he spoke English and I spoke Shona and Nyanja. An even bigger problem was the fact that I was afraid of this White boy. I had seen your employers from a distance and I had no wish of knowing White people up close. To me, his White skin looked like what I expected to see when a person had been skinned. I was also scared that, if this White boy touched me, somehow I would also end up with my skin peeled off too and I just did not want to look like he did. I was also sure that being White hurt.

But to my surprise, my aggressive posturing of unfriendliness (trying to hide my fear) did not deter the white boy in any meaningful way and strangely seemed to motivate him more. He soon began to reach over the gate for my hand and I remember jumping off the gate but the little White boy saw this as an invitation to climb over the gate. Afraid and out of ideas for keeping
that little White monster at bay, I began to cry. Your employer’s dogs, on hearing me cry, began
to bark. On hearing this uproar, you came to inquire about the problem and the first words out of
your mouth were: “Do you what me to lose my job?” Not knowing how to explain the White
boy, I just pointed at the problem. You looked at the White boy and then said to me: “You fool;
he just wants to play with you.”

I told you I was afraid of him and did not want to play with him but you said angrily:
“Either play with him or go inside but I cannot have these White people complaining about the
noise you are creating.” In fear of getting the curse of having what I perceived as no skin, I
turned and began making my way toward the servants’ quarters. As I was walking away, I heard
you speak in a foreign funny language to the White boy. I did not know what you were saying
but before I could reach the safety of the servants’ quarters I heard the white boy crying.
Strongly and swiftly you called me back. I remember you telling me that you did not need a
White boy crying at your employer’s gate; you did not want White people getting the idea that
you were doing something to their kids. As you displayed hostility towards me, I could not
understand why you were so intent with making the White boy happy. What power did these
people with no skin have that you were afraid of even their children? You spoke to this White
boy with the greatest respect and your actions made it clear that his social position was greater
than yours because of something he had. Later, I would learn that his skin which I had despised
was the recognized marker for White privilege.

I remember you saying: “If you do not play with him I will beat you.” Fear is hierarchical
because I remember being more afraid of you than the White skin of that boy. As I made those
tentative first steps toward the White boy, little did I know that I was embracing White culture.
As my new friend led the way into the White community, he reached into his pockets and
brought out two toy soldiers. He looked at both of his toy soldiers, looked at me with a smile and then handed me one of the soldiers. It seems, we both understood the universal language of playing war games and my White friend had a flair for creating imaginary characters which we had to fight. As we were laughing and playing, the White boy extended his hand to take mine and I, for a moment, hesitated before I allowed his White hand to touch my Black hand. It was through that White boy that I made connections with other White kids from the neighbourhood. Interestingly enough, I cannot remember the name of that White boy.

A number of the children that I played with were English which meant I learned to speak English with an English accent. You, believing that only a literate Black English man could lift us out of poverty, set out to make me a literate Black English man. You, with the help of your employers, had tried to enlist me in a White school but you told me that I had been denied on the grounds that I did not have a birth certificate. So you decided that the best thing to do was home school me. The morning after the school had rejected me, the other domestic servant, the cook, was sitting on the floor with some paper and a pencil in his hands. He summoned me to sit next to him on the floor. As I set down I began to feel apprehensive, as I knew Cook (the only name I knew him by) and not you was going to be my teacher. Cook was a big man who commanded respect and, from the day I first met him, he did not seem very interested in me and appeared standoffish towards me. So I was taken back to see him so interested in my education. As we settled down to the lesson, I noticed that you had seated yourself in a chair as if you were some expert on colonial educational training. To facilitate my learning, Cook had written on each single piece of paper a single alphabet letter starting with A and ending with E for a total of five alphabet letters, which he handed to me. Very carefully and very methodically he instructed me on each letter until I could identify each sound with its letter.
Cook was satisfied with our first lesson. All proud of myself, I began to get up with the intention of leaving for play. However, you were of the mind that more was better. So you tried to make me go over the lesson again but luck was on my side because, as you demanded that I repeat the lesson, your employers called for you. You told me not to go anywhere as you would be back in a few minutes but I was too excited about being outside with my friends as it was a weekend which meant we could play all day. Cook had started to make his way to the main house so he could prepare breakfast for your White employers. Seeing as there was no one to stop me, I left and went to play with my friends but as I approached my friends, I knew my actions would have consequences and, that evening when I got back from playing, you and Cook were waiting for me. You told me to sit down on the floor and I did without questioning you because I could tell from your somberness that you were in a bad mood. Cook brought out the list of letters we had worked on in the morning and he asked me to read each letter out loud. I took the list of letter from him and glanced at each letter but I could not remember all the letters or identify which sound went with which letter. I can remember Cook looking at you and saying, “I told you that he would forget most of it.”

As you heard and saw how I was failing at meeting your expectations, your dreams and hopes for me were deflated and replaced with disappointment and embarrassment. So when you left the room, I knew you were going to find a stick to beat me with but as I waited for you it was not the impending beating that I was most disturbed by, it was the fact that I was not living up to your expectations of me. Hoping to restore your pride in me, I managed to remember the sounds A, B, and D but could not match them to the right letters. So when you came back, I remember saying very proudly, “I can remember some of the letters,” then I made the sounds that I could remember in hope that this would restore some hope in you about my ability but, as you listened to me, you looked unsure of how to respond to my new sense of satisfaction and
accomplishment. It is at this point that I noticed that you were as clueless about literacy as I was which meant it was Cook who I needed to impress and not you.

Cook then said, “If you can remember some of the sounds, then you can remember all the sounds if you try harder.” I looked at you and said, “I am sorry but I cannot remember any more.” You yelled, “Get your big demon eyes off me and put them on the paper.” Not knowing what to do next, I decided to show my inability to recall anything by taking your advice literally. I placed the paper above my eyes and as soon as I did this we all started to laugh at the silliness of my action. Chuckling, Cook asked, “What are you doing David?” and I replied, “Putting the letters on my eyes.” I had started to laugh again at my joke when you struck me hard on my back with your stick. I turned to protest and you struck me again. “Read the letters,” you said through a snigger but to ensure that your snigger did not fool me you struck me again over my left shoulder. I remember challenging you by asking, “Why are you beating me?” It seems you did not take kindly to having your authority challenged because in the next moment I could not protect myself fast enough as your stick rained down on me from all angles. As I reflect back on the ways you beat me, I cannot help but believe that I was your punching bag for the injustice you experienced at the hands of Whiteness. Still, I must ask you, how did you forget that I was the voiceless part of you in the power structure of compulsory able-bodied Whiteness? I remember that you beat me so hard that at one point I stopped feeling the pain and just watched as the blood flowed from my nose and other open wounds on my body. It was Cook who finally stopped you from your violent rage. I had blood blisters under my nails and welts all over my body and, in a conciliatory and somewhat sheepish manner, you told me to go wash the blood from my face. As I wiped the blood from my face, I said to you, “Look at what you have done to me.” The audacity of me questioning your behaviour shocked both you and Cook. If it seemed that you had been remorseful for your actions, you were now angry at me. The volatile nature of
our relationship unsettled Cook and he told you that he did not want to keep teaching me because he sensed the whole thing could end badly. On hearing this, I was thrilled as I knew the teaching problem was over but, unbeknown to me, my ordeal was far from over.

I did not have a bath or dinner that night and it was also the first night that I laid my own bedding on the floor. As I rolled my sore body into my bedding, I quickly fell asleep and was startled from my deep sleep. At first I was confused by the commotion but the feeling of wetness around my lower body let me know why I was in trouble again. You were cursing at me and I was deadly quiet from my embarrassment and fear. Terrified that you were going to give me another beating, I hung onto my wet sheets. Interestingly, I felt no sense of defiance as I believed I deserved any punishment you gave me for bedwetting. As you got out of bed, I got up and went to the door and opened it (keeping a safe distance between us). You picked up my bedding and threw it out on the porch and yelled to me, “Behave like an animal and I will treat you like an animal. Sleep out there, that way you can pee on yourself all you like.”

As I sat on the porch looking out into darkness, hearing the sounds of the night, I began to believe I was seeing monsters everywhere and for the first time I felt paralyzed by fear. As afraid as I was, I knew it was useless to ask you to let me back into the servants’ quarters as I knew you would not listen to me. At such a late hour, I did not know where to get help without getting you in trouble with the White community. Ben’s Shebeen (an illegal party house that sells alcohol, in this case it was in the servants’ quarters) was my only hope of getting help and my idea was to get Ben to come and talk sense to you. This idea seemed good to me as I could see Ben being open to speak to you on my behalf and I was sure you would listen to him as he was influential among the other neo-slaves. It took a long time to get myself to leave the porch
area and walk out the gate. A few times, out of fear I ran back to hide under my pee smelling wet sheet.

My real obstacle was the bush that separated your employer's property and the property of Ben’s employer. All the Black people in the area knew that Ben’s employers traveled a lot and their property did not border directly to any other white person’s property. This made his servant's quarters the perfect congregating place where the neo-slaves could relax and talk a little more freely. Knowing what I had to do to get help, I began to tell myself, “If no one shows up, when I hear the next loud sound then I will go through this bush alone.” Every time I heard a loud sound, my courage failed me and I would repeat the whole process over and over until I heard something really big come down the road behind me. I did not dare look because I did not want to know what monster was ready to pounce on me. I ran through the bush as fast as I could and I did not stop running until I ran into Ben’s Shebeen. The place was packed with people but I could not see Ben so I began to look around for him.

This is when I became aware that people were watching me. I could not understand why everyone was staring at me. As I made my way through the people, I heard Worm’s loud voice and I walked towards it because I was going to ask Worm where Ben was. I was walking towards Worm and his girlfriend when I noticed that they were fighting. They were both good looking and everyone was starting to stand around, watching them fight. They both had drunk a little too much and Worm was threatening his girlfriend by saying, “I will burn those new panties if you keep opening your legs so these ‘boys’ can see them.” In response to his threat, his girlfriend stood up and hiked her dress up and then yelled, “Burn them baby, see if I care.”

34 Worm was a nickname that the man was given by his employers because they could not pronounce his African name.
Worm got a lighter out of his pocket and flicked it on. He started to lower the flame between his girlfriend’s legs when another man stopped him while saying, “Do you want to do all this in front of your son?” Everyone followed the man’s gaze toward me. Someone noticed that I was only wearing a vest without any pants and yelled, “I wonder if Worm burnt them off.” The group broke out into roaring fits of laughter. Before I could move away from them, Worm yelled, “Do not laugh at this boy” and, as quietness fell over the group, Worm pointed to my penis and yelled, “This is our manhood being put on display by the White man. You see this boy’s fear, it is our fear. They have grabbed our genitals and have put them on display; how can we fight while they are squeezing our balls?”

As I walked away from the silent group, I felt a lump building up in my throat. I fought back the tears that were building up in my eyes as this would have betrayed how embarrassed and belittled I was at that moment. I wanted to get out of this mean place and I intensified my search for Ben. At last I found him on the other side of the room and within a few moments I was pouring my heart out to him. I will never know how he made sense of the situation as I did more sobbing than talking but somehow he got the point that I needed him to take me home and help smooth things over with you. Ben, being the business man that he was, looked at me and said, “Sorry kid, I cannot take you home, there are a lot of drunken people here and I need their money. How about I get JJ here to take you home?”

JJ took my hand in his big hand and we started for home across the bushes. I felt safe and confident that nothing could get me with JJ by my side. JJ was a big man but when we got to the front of the gate, JJ would not go any farther. From the look on JJ’s face, I knew that he was afraid of facing you. I could not understand why a big man like JJ was afraid of a small man like you. To this question, JJ replied by saying: “Your father is a respected healer and if he has the
power to do that then he has the power to hurt you too.” I tried to argue against his logic but JJ just said, “Sorry kid I cannot mess with the likes of your father. But I will tell you what! How about I watch you from the gate here until you get to the porch area and then I will leave.” I could tell this was the best JJ could offer and that trying to explain my story to him was a waste of time; I was sure nothing could or would change his position. So I started the walk toward the porch alone. I walked very carefully, turning toward every sound I heard while praying to the spirits to protect me from all evil. I could hear my heart pounding in my ears and as I made it to my bedding I pulled the one sheet over my head and closed my eyes. As soon as I closed my eyes everything started to spin and I began to see different colours flashing. I felt sick so I pulled the sheet off my head and opened my eyes. Opening my eyes helped me not feel sick but looking into the darkness was scary and hard to do but it was better than feeling sick. To comfort myself in the darkness, I kept telling myself: “Nothing will get me because you my great ancestor spirits are watching over me. You are watching over me because I am of you and I am living because this is your will, great ancestor spirits.” I would recite these words over and over again that night and little did I know that these words would pass my lips many more times in the future.

As I sat wide-awake from fear, I watched the darkness and learned all her sounds. That night I saw the many faces of a single night, from the pitch black darkness of night to the break of light as dawn approaches and finally the rise of the sun which announces the beginning of another day. That night I was forced to face the dark monsters of my mind. In my mind, I had proven that I was a true Ngoni. My victory over my own fears seemed to make me feel connected to the natural world in ways that I could not explain. I could see the miracle of life and the beauty and wonder of the world. As I sat with my face turned towards the warmthness of the sun, I felt powerful as the world had witnessed my triumph over fear. So when you came out the servant’s quarters, I was at peace with my surroundings and I did everything to make it appear
like the whole process had been easy for me. Why I had to always get under your skin I cannot adequately explain but I think it had something to do with my wanting of power. Sadly, because of your low parenting skills all my provocation led to greater degrees of violence as you too wanted power.

We were locked in the cycle of violence and at times I would run away as a pre-emptive measure that is I would run away before you found out that I had done something wrong. The advantage of this move was that at times I avoided being beaten and the disadvantage was that it made me appear like I was suffering from delusions. I would live in the street alley ways, bushes, wastepaper bins and, at times, I would break into abandoned buildings and live there. I had no problems searching for food in garbage bins or begging for money on street corners. If I made a lot of money, I would use it to buy groceries which I would use as a peace offering or as a bribe to get you to let me come back to you. It was fairly common for me to run away for months on end and then not remember or know why I had run away from you in the first place. At times like this I would come back to you genuinely confused about why I had run away and sometimes you would show extreme tenderness and understanding. I remember a number of times; you performed ritual ceremonies to cleanse me of evil spirits. But there were also other times when all you wanted to do was get your hands on me so that you could beat the hell out of me.

Dear Baba, I do not believe that when you hit me with your Ngoni club, so hard that I could not stand up, that you were teaching me any lessons. I do not believe either that, when you threw that brick at my head, you were trying to discipline me. I think at that point you had given up on me and you wanted to get rid of me. I remember you telling the social worker that it was better for them to take me before you killed me but when you said this, I was not offended because I understood that you were still angry at my behaviour. But I was shocked when, after
some months had passed, you stated in a court of law that you did not want me. You told a judge you could not care for me anymore and this is how I ended up in the orphanage called St. Joseph’s House for Boys at the age of 9 years old. Once I was in the orphanage, I saw less and less of you. You even started another family and I became more disconnected from you. However, I did not let any of this worry me because I believed I had entered the world of Whiteness through the orphanage.

When I arrived at the orphanage, St. Joseph’s House for Boys, it had about 35 boys there. Of this number, about 17 boys were of White descent and 13 boys were of mixed race. The mixed race boys for the most part identified with their Whiteness as it was associated with wealth and power. I, being one of five Black boys admitted into the orphanage, saw it as my entrance into Whiteness and felt privileged to share clothes with White boys, eat the same food as they did, sleep in the same dormitory and share the same washrooms. I felt that the orphanage was allowing me to be as White as I could be as a Black person. I therefore did everything possible to eroticize my Blackness so that I was more acceptable to Whiteness. I tried to limit my contact with the other Black boys in hope of becoming more acceptable to Whiteness. You became a reminder of the Black suffering I was trying to escape so I limited our contact to a minimum. If it were not for the reminders of my Blackness, I felt I was experiencing what it was to be White.

I had my own bed with white sheets, a full-length towel and toiletries that I did not have to share with anyone. I was put into a previously all-white school which was now integrated due to independence. I confirmed my own status into Whiteness when I started to dream in English; this, to me, was evidence that I was one of them. Yet, this happiness was punctuated with moments of isolation and ridicule because I was wetting my bed. The White schools that I had so
desperately wanted admission into were now informing me that I was slow and, at worst, brain damaged. I hated those White children who I perceived as fitting the system perfectly. I went into a rage at the slightest provocation by a White child and would hit them for having White privilege and for not understanding the hardship of being Black in a racist world. In their colonial education system, my Blackness, my behavior, my thoughts and my beliefs were all evidence that my mind was disabled. To fix my disabled mind they started labeling me because this ensured that there were government resources made available to ensure my unstable mind was fixed. Because they had started on this path, everything that I did was reflective of my unstable mind, which made me more volatile which further confirmed their diagnosis. In my moments of silence, I had started to realize that I did not fit into their White system. Nothing in their White settler system was culturally familiar to me. I remember feeling lost and betrayed by the White dream which spoke to me but was never for me.

I soon learned that in the White settler community my limitations in reading and writing were treated as a major part of my total defining identity which meant disability was all of me and none of my other identities could supersede it. Each new test performed on me confirmed my disability but when they first labeled me as mentally retarded and brain damaged there was some relief because I believed their labeling showed that my disability was beyond my control. I figured that their labeling of me as disabled would stop them from seeing me as a problem. I thought this process would protect me from all the criticism and humiliating putdowns because I moved from that category of invisible disability to visible disability. But I was wrong.

Baba, at this point in my life I had started to believe that I had failed at being a part of White settler society until I realized how much they valued dominance or, you could say, targeted controlled aggression. I learned this valuable lesson in the orphanage. Part of living in
the orphanage was the ritual of establishing where you ranked in the hierarchy of masculine power. Thus, physical fights over dominance were a frequent occurrence. Being one of the youngest boys in the orphanage, who was labeled as disabled, I was at the lowest rung of masculine power. I therefore had to ensure that my fights were vicious so that I was viewed as an intimidating opponent. When I fought I showed no mercy. My goal was always to achieve maximum damage and humiliation for the defeated opponent especially if I was fighting someone from my school. This communicated the message that I was not someone to mess with.

My fighting in school got me noticed by the rugby coach and soon I was on the rugby team. This was the first positive affirmation that I received at school and it had nothing to do with academics. It was all predicated on the ability to assert physical violence on another human being. I was so good at rugby I even started to believe I could transfer the skills I was learning to other athletic arenas and I was right. I won the school 800 meter race which meant that, through these sporting endeavours, I became a somebody, beyond my embodiment of Blackness as disability.

Baba, the success and affirmation that I was getting for imposing my physical strength on other children led me to join the boxing club at the orphanage. This seemed like a logical step for me especially as I had learned the fundamentals of boxing within three months of starting. I felt confident to challenge a bigger boy in the junior category of the orphanage. All the senior boys in the orphanage wanted to see this fright as it had the potential to be very bloody. But just when I thought I understood White settlers, I met one who contradicted my experience with White settlers. This bigger White boy was unwilling to fight me so the older boys and I began to taunt him. We followed him around the orphanage calling him all kinds of horrible names.
In an effort to get us to stop and reflect on the absurdity of White cultural violence without antagonizing any of us, the targeted White boy, in very dramatic fashion, began to question an imaginary figure instead of directly questioning us: “Why must we treat each other so badly? Is this not what we hope to have escaped from? So now why are we doing what was done to each of us to each other?” And to put an exclamation mark on this eloquent point he began to laugh at the stupidity of all of our behaviors. For a moment we were all stunned by the truth of his words. In that moment, the White boy had changed the White power game but I, the Black child, was not interested in his new interpretation because my sense of self was now tied to that White hierarchical power of masculinity. I, therefore, did not care whether he was right or wrong, whether he made sense or not. All I cared about was controlling the White power game from the top of the hierarchy. The question of whether to play the game or not was of no consequence to me. The way I understood the orphanage was, you played the power game as the only way to survive or the pressure of not conforming killed you. If you chose to survive then, by default, you chose the game and the game was only controlled from the top.

As you known Baba, it is said that the tongue is sharper then the assegai, (spear) so when I unleashed my tongue upon that White boy I was planning on doing deadly damage. I remember looking at the other boys and asked them: “Who the fuck is this white boy talking to? All of a sudden he believes in the spirits of the ancestors? Roots has gone and fucked him up or do we need to call the Psychiatrist to see him again?” If the White boy had touched us with the spell of reason then I had the antidote and I was blowing it in the direction of the four winds. The mention of calling the Psychiatrist again for the targeted White boy had all the other boys howling with laughter. My verbal attack had the equivalent of a leopard attacking a lion so I was fully prepared for a fight but the counter-attack that I received was not something I was prepared for. The targeted White boy stared at me and in that cold hard stare I read, “Do you want me to
put your fucking shit out for us to laugh at? The fact that you are labeled brain damaged, you can’t read or write, you wet your bed every single night, and you hide the fact that your father is a domestic servant. Or is it domestic slave?” All this, I interpreted from a few seconds of silent staring. My verbal attack had left me open to a verbal counter-attack by the White boy and on this verbal battleground my personal secrets (every single person in the orphanage had secrets about how he ended up there, some of these secrets were known to us and others, because of their heinous nature, were kept a mystery) guaranteed that I was going to lose this fight. Not wanting to face the humiliation and embarrassment of a personal verbal attack I began to silently plead for forgiveness, sympathy and mercy.

It seems, Baba, I did not want to have the White boy do unto me what I had done unto him. With the power to make my personal secrets public information in the orphanage, the White boy chose to respect my privacy. To let me know that he was not going to attack me, he softened his challenging stare and glanced downwards as if to acknowledge his intent to call a truce. As he did this he simply said, “You win.” This led to the deflation of this heated situation and no one seemed too disappointed for having missed the fight. It seems a greater lesson had been learned and I have never forgotten this gracious gift by a White settler boy. How is it, Baba, that I had become so philosophically White and a White boy was modeling Ubuntuness to me? How is it that I am still learning from the actions of a White boy when I had closed myself off to hearing the teaching of our Black elders?

Baba, could we deconstruct this story of disability as I believe it has something to say to both of us. White settler society marked your Black embodiment as disability and to justify this position they used their markers of literacy to label you as illiterate and this, among other markers, confirmed your otherness as disability. Is this why you tried to make me a part of
Whiteness by teaching me their spirituality, encouraging me to interact with them and teaching me to value their governance so I would not be othered as disabled as you were? It seems your best efforts could not stop me being othered as disabled and in this story that I share I am part of the social interpretation that make disabilities appear as it was made to appear in my embodiment. I do this by making the imposition that the targeted White boy was undermining the hierarchical norms of White settler society as we knew it in Zimbabwe. The evidence for this is in the way I attribute his bizarre behaviour to having his mind fucked up by the movie *Roots* and if there was any doubt about the presence of disability then my utterance to the authority of psychiatric intervention solidified the presence of disability.

What I do not communicate is that I am able to make this social interpretation in our interaction due to the fact that I was subjected to the humiliating experience of having disability imposed on me as an othering marker. In White settler society I was taught that to label someone as the presence of disability was to make them worthless in the hierarchy of power while legitimizing your own position. Here is how this contradiction works. When I was labeled as disabled in White settler society, I was made visible through being labeled as disabled, which is to be visible in a useless way. This is the tactic I deployed to undermine the authority and truth of the targeted White boy by making his uselessness or disability visible and then attacking this uselessness. In this hierarchical White colonial settler system, the humanity of the other is of little consequence to us until the other threatens to undermine our humanity. For the colonial White settlers in Zimbabwe, it was the Black led bush war that made Blackness visible beyond a useless visibility. For me, it was the fear of having my personal secrets exposed to the other boys in the orphanage by the targeted White boy that made him visible to me beyond a useless visibility. How did they get you, Baba, to play their White hierarchical masculine power game? Was it through spiritual intimidation and economic manipulation? In this neo-colonial global
society, the humanity of the other is respected in the moment that the other threatens your humanity which means the threat must be real, it must be an imminent threat geared for manifestation and the harm must be calculable. So my question to you, Baba, is how did you fight back? What was the threat you poised to them?

Baba, my need to be perceived as normal while embodying a Black body in a racist White political system led me to keep secrets about my Black social class level, my disability and other things. These secrets added to the already existing power difference that existed between me and the colonial White settler society which made me perceive myself as being too distant from their White normalcy. This is not to say that I did not know another standard of measurement because I did. The Ubuntu standards have always been there for us but you, Baba, encouraged me and demonstrated a disregarding of our Ubuntu knowledge systems and, from early childhood, you trained me to know that the only standard that mattered was the White standard. Yet, you were not consistent because in certain critical situations you would revere traditional Ubuntu knowledge. How did you hold such tensions together?

The first time I remember being proud of my Blackness was when I saw Comrade Robert Mugabe, as the Prime Minister of the new Zimbabwe, exercise responsible power as a Black man. At that time I loved Comrade Robert Mugabe because he showed a love for his Blackness without fear of Whiteness. I wanted to be like Comrade Robert Mugabe even though I knew the White settler society despised him for his lack of fear and reverence towards Whiteness. As much as I idolized Comrade Robert Mugabe, I knew from being labeled brain-damaged that I could never reach his status as I could not acquire the level of education that he had acquired, which most Whites in Zimbabwe openly acknowledge surpassed their own. Hence, Comrade Robert Mugabe became an anomaly I could not obtain just like Whiteness. I was also happy to
be Black during the night when Father Little (the warden of the orphanage) would sexually abuse the little blonde, blue eyed boys. Imagine being so conditioned to abuse in some way or other that we simply accepted it; the abusers had brought us to the point where we did not question the abuse and you were just happy the abuse was not visited upon you. Yet, in this hell I still believed I was in a better place than you were Baba.

Regardless of my disability, I knew I would never end up like you, Baba. Meaning, I would never be a domestic neo-slave for White people because my sporting skills had opened doors that were not available to an orphanage child, especially a Black one. For starters, I was given a rugby scholarship to Prince Edward high school which is one of the most prestigious schools in Zimbabwe. The Lions Club sent me on an Outward Bound course while other members offered to adopt me and still others were willing to give me good employment with a respectable pay cheque. While my rugby skills also gave me the opportunity to travel overseas, my visibility as a Black person in Zimbabwean sport was interesting because it was both threatening and acceptable to the White settler society in Zimbabwe. My Blackness was threatening because it represented the taking over by Blackness of everything dear to Whiteness. Yet, paradoxically, it was also acceptable because I participated within their guidelines which meant I was conforming to Whiteness. However, at the time, it seemed to me that my sporting reputation had moved me from deprivation to freedom to make choices. The problem is that I had accepted Whiteness and, therefore, I was not concerned with its cultural limitations as I contemplated my new entrance into the power of Whiteness. At that time, the best and easiest offer to me came from the first female warden, Dianna.35 After having known me for some time, she proposed a marriage with offers of luxuries that came with being White. I would have taken

35 I have spoken about Dianna at length in my letter to Amai.
up Dianna’s offer if I did not feel ashamed by the prospect of marrying a White woman who I
did not love, was old enough to be my mother and was as manipulative as a hungry praying
mantis. Under these circumstances, I kept all my options open by not committing myself to
anything until I was sure that I could live with the decision I made.

As I made these choices to start a new life, you Baba, were being kicked from the very
extreme margins of White colonial society. You were old and most of the Whites who had been
your source of employment had left the country. The new Black elites had no need of you. From
there on you were homeless and penniless. The bushes were your home again but this time you
were alone as I was charting my way towards Outward Bound. I had told myself that I did not
want to be a sexual slave to an older White woman, be a Black pet to a racist White family or be
defined through sports. I had told myself that I wanted to define myself through a meaningful
career and the only way I could, at that time, perceive myself achieving that goal was by going to
work for Outward Bound. Outward Bound is an experiential learning school which offers
courses on personal development, teamwork, and management skills training:

To write my job application to Outward Bound, I went around St. Joseph’s asking
each of my brothers—other boys—to help me spell one or two words. This way I
was able to save face and still get the application and résumé done. My
educational level was well below what Outward Bound (OB) required, so the
[new] warden, Fen Goodes, offered me an apprenticeship with one condition. I
had to keep working on improving my education, especially since I was expected
to read and write reports. To help me, Fen said, “Here’s what we’re going to do.
I’m going to give you each word that you can’t spell, and we’ll put them all in this
big chart.” I studied this list, but I could never phonetically break up and retain the
words. So I pasted the words all over my apartment. I covered my kitchen with
positive words; another room would have words for negative characteristics; and
in the hallway I had connecting words. I used this strategy to write my reports.
While I was at OB I ran courses for elementary schools; high schools; helped
create and ran the first disable OB course in Africa; and ran management & team
building courses for companies in Zimbabwe. In my final year at OB Zimbabwe
(1992) I met Karen, a [White] Canadian woman, who was also an instructor with
OB. We started dating, and she sponsored me to come to Canada and helped me
make connections with the western Canada branch of OB. (Mucina, 2007, pp. 177-178 in Notes from Canada's Young Activists)

Baba, of your struggling and suffering, I did not want to hear or know. I was enjoying myself until I started to work at Brock Elementary School in Vancouver. How those culturally diverse children got me to love them is a mystery. I do not know if it was the fact that I was working in special education and, therefore, I could identify with their at-risk status. I tried to keep them interested in school through sports, after school programs, camping trips, intervention and prevention programs that focused on drugs, sexual abuse and youth violence. As these children and their families shared their stories with me, I too shared my stories with them. Our context was different but our stories had some shared common meaning and, from this base of shared meaning, I was able to let some of those children see that they had the power to help each other change their own lives. As I supported, challenged and sometimes pushed them toward change, they did the same for me. Those children inspired me to take all kinds of literacy programs so that I could go to college. While working in my office, I remember one of them said: “You know if you were a teacher or a principal you would help more kids.” And I responded by saying: “I don’t think I can make it into university.” And another one of the students said: “I don’t know if I can make it through school either but you are helping all of us try, so why can’t you try?” In that moment, those children became my elders and to their challenging counsel I responded by saying: “If you guys can work at it then I too can try working at it.” So the students I was serving became my mentors. This is the power of love and it inspired me to believe I could make a difference. Love gave me belief in myself. Using this inspiration I went to see a White sister who I knew to be a great educator counselor and planner. She helped me create my first self motivated and self directed education process map. As soon as I started this education route, regardless of the barrier in front of me I was determined to continue.
Baba, as afraid as I was about starting school again, I was even more afraid of letting those children down. So I worked hard at acquiring some basic literacy skills but I would not have achieved this goal without the help of my adopted family members. I have Black brothers and sisters; I have White sisters, Indigenous brothers and sisters, a Korean aunty, a White uncle, 2 Black fathers, 2 Black mothers and one White mother. All these family members have played a role in my educational success. The literacy programs that I took prepared me to start taking a night counseling certificate program at Vancouver Community College and, for the first time in my life, I started getting academic grades of A’s and B’s. As soon as I completed the counseling certificate program, I was given a promotion to the position of youth and family worker which meant I could offer counseling to the student and their families. Having tasted academic success, I was confident that I could take a university transferable Social Serve Certificate program at Langara College. As this was an intensive full time program, I had to leave my job and become a full time student. This was hard to do as I was walking away from a safe job to start living on student loans and disability access funding. Again, I was scared but, at the same time, I started to believe I could do my Ph.D. and achieving this goal has been my driving force. In August of 2008, I journeyed to you with my young family. These are the stories from my journal writing which I kept as reflections of my thinking in my coming to you and, then, in your taking us to our ancestral family home.

The Journey to You

Dear Baba, a few years into our married life, I started having intense dreams about your death and it is then that I knew I needed to conclude my affairs with you. Mandeep right away understood how important this trip was for me. So she started helping me make our plans for going to Africa. When Mandeep’s sister, my sister-in-law, Sanjit heard that we were going to
Africa; she made it clear that if we were going home to Africa then she was coming. Fearing that such a move would not endear me to my in-laws, I tried to dissuade Sanjit from going by telling her of the hardships we would be encountering on this trip but she was set on coming. Renee, my adopted Black sister, heard about our trip and told us she wanted to come too. I immediately agreed as I saw this as a great opportunity for her to connect with the mother continent and our people. South Africa is also an important place for me as you taught me that this geographical location was our natal home as Ngoni. So our journey to you started in our ancestral natal home lands and loosely followed the Ngoni migration routes. As we traveled north, I had a chance to engage our Ubuntu families in a changing southern Africa. Here are the journal notes from these experiences.
Johannesburg

Dear Baba, I am not going to bore you with the Johannesburg airport details for they are like any other airport details. I am not going to bore you with details that I do not care to remember. I'm going to give you fragments of memory that have been burnt into my memory bank. Each memory is a story among stories; yet, it stands out and speaks to me in this particular time. It is possible that at another time another story from this experience may stand out more. But for now, here is what stands out for me.

A medium sized African man in his early 50s comes up to us and asks in a South African accent, “Waiting for Diamond Digger Lodge?” In an unrehearsed reply, in unison some of us say, “Yes” and others say, “Right.” The man says, “Let’s get your stuff and go. By the way, I am Madiba.”

“Madiba is your name” I question.

The man: “Yes, like Nelson Mandela.”

As we start to talk about his name he also begins to lead us to the vehicle. As we near the vehicle, Madiba switches into his tour guide/operator role and says in his official voice, “Welcome to South Africa, is this your first visit?”

I say pointing to the others: “For them, yes but not for me.”

Madiba: “Where are you from?”

Me: “I was born in Zimbabwe.”

Madiba: “Mugabe, that old man is too much. So you are my brother. What about them?”
Sanjit says: “We are from Canada.”

And Renee adds: “But, my parents are from Grenada”

As if not to be out done, Mandeep adds: “Our parents are from India (meaning her and Sanjit).”

For the rest of the drive, we talk easily with Madiba who shifts from being informal in one conversation to being very formal in the next conversation. I wonder if it is always like this for him or if it is especially different today. I wonder how he views his brother travelling with three women, two Indian women and one Black woman. Does he wonder which one of these three is with me or has he generously considered me a polygamist?

Baba, as I go to register, I notice that all the domestic workers are Black and all the administration staff are White. As they see us, all the Black staff very politely greet us with the exception of the White man, who is painting in front of the area we have left our bags. His body language makes it very clear that he does not have to be polite to us. A White female tourist walks by and the White painter greets her with a smile. Aware that we have noticed him greeting her, he turns towards his work with a sour faced expression which communicates to me: “There is no smile or anything for you here, darky.” While walking towards the registration office, I see a Black sister working with tears running down her face. In this situation, the first thought that comes to me is that I am still in colour conscious South Africa where White is the top, all other colours are positioned in the middle and Black is at the bottom. I guess Desmond Tutu's rainbow nation is still on a colour ranking system.
Cape Town

Dear Baba, we are in Cape Town, your favourite city. Our White cabdriver says: “Watch out for these buggers, they can steal you blind.” He is talking about a young Black man who is looking tired and hungry.

The cabdriver then adds: “You can find accommodation that suit your needs within this one block, just make sure that the rest of you stay with the bags while one of you looks for a place.”

The Black street brother says: “Don’t worry brother; I’ll take care of you. I know all the hotels around here. I will take you to a cheap, very good place. Don’t worry brother, I’ve got you covered. In less than 20 minutes I will have you resting in your own place. But brother, I need something. I have not slept in two days, I'm hungry and tired. I don't need much just a little. Can you help?”

I say to my Street brother: “I’ll see what we can do. But first help me. Just to be clear, I am not promising you anything. Are we clear about that?”

Street brother says: “Yes brother, I understand, whatever you can give me. It is all up to you.”

“OK,” I say

I do not know why I am tipping this cabdriver because I am sure he is a racist. I have not yet quite figured out the currency exchange rate and I give the cabdriver a tip of about 80 rand. I can tell from the smile on his face that it was not as low as he was expecting. To show his gratitude he shakes my hand while saying: “Keep an eye on these Blacks. Sorry, I mean blocks.”
With a hint of sarcasm I say to the cabdriver: “Don’t worry, I think my brother will take care of us.”

As the cabdriver gets back into his vehicle he mumbles: “Your problem,” before driving away.

Street brother says to me: “Brother, come everything is very close here. You don’t have to go very far.”

Mandeep says: “Go ahead babe and we will watch the baggage.”

Street brother says: “Let us start with this place across the road; all kinds of people like it and it is also called Ubuntu. I will wait for you here.”

I ask: “Why?”

Street brother replies by saying: “If they see me with you on the security camera they won’t open the door for you. I am a street man; they don’t like us, better you go alone.”

The man at reception says they are all booked up for the week and I am sad because this place has a great feel to it and the guests seating around are indeed a reflection of the South African rainbow nation and, as a result, everyone wants to be here. Hence, there are no rooms left. Street brother takes me to three other places which will not open their security gate and inform me through their intercom system that they have no rooms available. I wonder if there is no room because I am a Black African man. I am starting to get frustrated when my Street brother says: “Try this place; it is very good but is a little more expensive than the other places I have shown you.” He leads me to a Daddy Long Legs Independent Travelers Hotel and I ring the security bell. I know the receptionist on the other side can see me. So I am surprised when I hear
a very pleasant sounding woman say: “Please come in sir, you will find me at reception if you walk up the stairs.” As I am walking up the stairs, I tell myself that this pleasant sounding woman must be a Black woman but, when I arrive at the reception desk, I see a tall, striking, slim brunette. She says: “Can I offer you a drink before I attend to your other needs?” I decline the offer of a drink but am shocked by her great service. This is a country of contradiction; one minute you’re being despised and in the next engagement you are being treated like a king. My experience with White people in South Africa taught me that the spirit of Ubuntu among White people is still a hit and miss affair. This being said, the hotel crew from Daddy Long Legs took such good care of us; we all became good friends and still keep in contact via the social network of Facebook.

Baba, as these are journal entries, I am only giving you the facts that stand out for me which means dates and times become compressed or flattened in order to engage the experience or facts. Point in case, the rest of the story of the street brother has no time indicators to convey the passage of time because we met when we did and it was never planned. We never knew when we would meet our street brother but when we did meet we tried to take care of each other. Our street brother was generous with his information while making sure we were safe. For example, the girls were out one night on the streets and a group of guys were making it hard for them to get back to the hotel by blocking their path. Being well known on the street, our street brother gently intervened by making it clear that these were his sisters and the harassment stopped right away. For our part, we tried to give our street brother as much as we could but sadly, after the girl’s harassment, we saw our street brother only one other time after that. To this day, I still hope that our street brother’s luck had changed and that he found that job he was looking for. I want to be hopeful about the fact that our street brother was nowhere to be found
on the last few days before we left Cape Town. We never got to say goodbye to him and I still find this sad because he reflected a part of South Africa’s Black challenge in a changing world.
To Durban on the Shosholoza Meyl

Dear Baba, the train should have left 15 minutes ago but we haven't started loading yet. I am a little anxious as I am not sure we are on the right platform. I have been assured that we are on the right platform but I have seen many people coming and going and we are still here. The Congolese man who cut my hair yesterday when we came to buy our train tickets warned me that this is the place where thieves make their fortune. He told me not to allow anyone to take any of our bags out of our sight. When we left the hotel that we were staying in, the staff warned us about the high level of robbery that takes place here in the train station. After checking in, the desk clerk warned us to watch our baggage. She informed us to only get direction and assistance from official customer representatives who were wearing uniforms and were situated strategically throughout the train station.

After such cautioning, Baba, I see myself scrutinizing every young Black man who came to stand near us. Though my colonial lens, I see the distance between myself and what I perceive as the other young, poor Black males. As I stand there, I become the Black colonizer who fears his own reflection (Black maleness). Fearing my own reflection, I notice two Black youth pushing the biggest load of luggage I have ever seen. I wonder where the luggage owners are. Whoever they are, they seemed to be breaking all the warning instructions we have been given about caring for our luggage. From the direction that the young men have come from, an elderly coloured (of mixed race) grandfather, out of breath from trying to keep up yells: “That is the right place, you can off load.” The elderly grandfather enquires with the official if the young men can help get the luggage on the train and the official informs him that it would not be possible but offers to get some attendants to load the luggage onto the train.
Grandfather turns to the direction that he has come from and about nine coloured elderly grandmothers are descending upon him in the most jovial manner. They are laughing, giggling and joking with each other. These grandmothers’ behaviour has a girlish mischief which seems to contradict their elderly status. As I watch them, I see their inner child who has been oppressed by the many years of adult responsibility. Their joy and carefree behaviour is as fresh as morning dew on a blade of grass. Their smiles and jovialness is beginning to infect my overly alert and anxious behaviour. They are all talking at the same time and, when they noticed this phenomenon, they begin to laugh at each other. I am quietly laughing at this drama that they are creating when I notice that my companions are also doing the same. Some of them notice us laughing at them and they wave, smile or say hello and, then, return to engaging each other in loud, friendly banter.

Baba, you will not believe that their mere presence has changed everything. These elders have taken the fear away and replaced it with love. I have no anxiety or worry about losing anything. These elders are helping me see all the other smiles on all the other people. Across from me on the furthest platform, I see a young man holding a newspaper. He is pretending to read it. Two other well-dressed young men approach him with two large bags and one of them whispers something in his ear. Slowly he closes his paper up and scans the area before getting up. For a brief moment our eyes meet and he smiles at me and I cannot help but smile back. I turn to see if anyone else has seen him in our group but the girls are engaged with watching the antics of the Gogos (grandmothers). When I look back again, the young men have vanished. I say nothing to anyone but I keep wondering, did I just witness a robbery? Yet, no one seems to be complaining about missing bags. Could it be that the young men were bootleggers selling stuff illegally on the train station premises? Whatever the case was, Baba, I am no longer scared of our Black reflection, thanks to the jovial manner of those great grandmothers. Regardless of
race, poverty creates violence and, regardless of the racist fear tactics used in South Africa, a smile can win you over or it can distract you.
As White People Come Home, Black People Leave

Dear Baba, We see it - We feel it- yet I force my family to keep silent until the pain is too much then we fight amongst each other. This, indeed, is a peculiar experience. Colonial history makes it possible; I am told it is over but my experience and my feelings communicate otherwise. I am in my friend’s home en route to Swaziland. He lives in a beautiful neighbourhood with his beautiful White family. Like him, his neighbours are White. As we were driving up to his house, an armed security truck passed us on patrol and, as we were parking the car, a police truck slowed down to check us out. It is just before 5pm and we are observing a Black exodus.

Mandeep says: “Why are all the Black people leaving?”

I say: “Because they are the domestic workers.”

Renee questions: “Is it okay for us to be here?”

Sanjit does not say a word but I can see that she is visibly very uncomfortable. I tell everyone that it will be okay because this is a very good friend. Our gracious hosts welcome us into their home. I am trying to get my family to relax in a colour conscious South Africa and it is not working. The next day a Black maid arrives and, on seeing visitors, makes a request for a uniform and we are all shocked into silence. For the first time, Sanjit makes her discomfort known by enquiring about when we are leaving. I tell everyone that we will be leaving in 3 days. I tell everyone that our hosts are doing everything they can to make us comfortable so we should suck it up. We spend the day at the beach and in the evening we hang out on the river shore drinking and eating. The conversation is very formal and polite. My friend and I reminisce about
our youthful experiences but even there, Baba, I see the race lines. I am now aware, Baba, that my friend’s memories are of a different Zimbabwe than mine. A colour conscious South Africa reminds me that what we appreciated of our friendship was limited to small moments of shared humanity but the White racism was always there. I guess if you experience racism all the time you have to ignore it sometimes to give yourself some relief. Is this how we have survived Baba?

On the Friday, two nights before we leave, our hosts want us to meet their friends at a costume party. Renee and Sanjit make it clear that they cannot handle anymore of this White gated community and have no desire to meet any more White racists. I think to myself that they are being a little melodramatic but agree that they should stay back if they are not up to it. Mandeep does not want to go but she feels obliged, as my wife, to come. I try to tell her that she does not need to go to the party but she will not put this burden down so we go together. The first thing we notice, as soon as we get to the party, is that there is no other visible race except for Whiteness. Most people are speaking between English and Afrikaans. We are introduced to a few of our hosts’ friends and it is painfully clear that we do not belong here. One of the guests comes up to us and says: “So how did you guys get into this party? You couldn’t have gate crashed, or are you the servers?” This is meant to be a joke but it seems only funny to them. We meet the host of the party and she introduces us to her parents.

The father settles down to speak to us as his wife and daughter leave. He starts by posing the following question: “So how do you like South Africa?”

I say: “It is a beautiful country.”

And he says: “But crime is destroying it (I take his statement to mean Black people are destroying the country).”
To this, I say: “How would you know when you live in a fortified White community?”

For no reason he switches subjects and states: “So you agree with the government, that I should sell 40% of my farm to the Indigenous?”

I say: “If you accept the fact that the land was stolen from them in the first place then this is a small price to pay.” Baba, how would you have handled this White man if you were in my position?

Our heated discussion is starting to create a sour taste for other White guests and our hosts intervene by making the excuse that they would like to introduce us to some other people. As we are all walking away, my old White friend says: “It looked like you needed some saving.” He and his wife offer to drive us back to their house right away. As they are offering their farewells to their friends, Mandeep and I wait for them in isolation. I look at Mandeep and I question myself: “How have I got my family into this racial nightmare? Where is the rainbow love in this wealthy White haven of South Africa?” After spending three nights in my friend’s White haven in our Black Africa, I felt grateful for having the resources which allowed us to have the freedom to leave their White haven. As much as I may hate how these White racist communities exploit our people’s labour, we in Southern Africa have not come up with better employment solutions or investments that target our masses of people, who have no to little education.

Dear Baba, you were like many of our brothers and sisters who enter these unwelcoming White racist communities on a daily base in order to keep their families alive; you understand the value of choice denied to our brothers and sisters. Let us as Africans invest in our own
communities so that we can give our own people the choice to work in environments where their dignity and self respect are honoured.
Dear Baba, we are at the border crossing for Swaziland from South Africa, the customs officer gives us a broad smile and says to us: “Welcome to Swaziland.” As he looks at my passport, he says: “Brother, you look Swazi and you have a Swazi name so how did you end up being born in Zimbabwe?” I chuckle and say: “This is why I have come here. I am hoping I can use my name to help me connect with my ancestral roots.” The customs officer shakes my hand and says: “Welcome home brother; if you go to the parking area, I will take my break now so I can give you directions to your people.” To my own research, the customs officer adds detailed maps and directions. I thank the customs officer and, as I start to drive towards our ancestral home, my sister Renee says: “This is a real home coming.” Mandeep says: “I didn’t like the racial tension in South Africa, it made it impossible to relax.” We are all in agreement about feeling more relaxed in Swaziland. They tell us that apartheid is over in South Africa but it did not feel like it for us.

We are staying at a guest house in Manzini and our host is very excited to hear about my efforts to connect with my ancestral home and people. She gives us more detailed directions to Mdzimba which is the ancestral home of many Maseko Ngoni. Being here in Swaziland feels so liberating. For the first time, no one is asking me where I am from. I feel genetically connected to everyone around me. As we are driving into the Mdzimba Mountains, I see what I have only known through my academic Master’s research:

The Mdzimba (also known as Mdimba) Mountain areas were inhabited by the Mnesi (Mnisi) and Mncina\textsuperscript{36} mafuko (clan sytems) who were known for large

\textsuperscript{36} Mncina has also been presented as Masina, Macina and Mucina. The latter is how I depict my name.
stone-built munzis (villages) which dotted the landscape.\(^{37}\) “These were pure Sutus, members of the larger baPebi tribe (Bryant, 1929: 311),” and they were uncompromising about maintaining their collectively determined self-governance: “The Mncina resisted and were forced to flee, but for the most part the chiefdoms of the area took note of the fate of those who opposed Sobhuza’s forces and accepted Ngwane rule without putting up a fight (oral report in Kings, Commoners and Concessionaires by Bonner, 1983, p. 31).” The name, Mucina connects this student to Swaziland, using shared meaning/symbols which identify him as belonging to this community via a continuum of shared Sotho experiences that expend all dimensions of past, present, and lead to the future through a shared name. (Mucina, 2006, p.70)

Halfway up the mountain drive, we stopped to ask for directions but there is no one around to ask. We do not want to intrude on a family homestead by entering their property to get directions; we want to go to the nearest elder’s home so we can formally introduce ourselves in a traditional and respectful manner. As we are waiting for a vehicle or a pedestrian so we can get directions, I become aware that I am in no rush; I am relaxed and I say out loud: “I can feel that I belong here.” Following my senses, I remove my shoes and let my feet connect with the soil. I feel grounded for the first time. I only wish you were here, Baba, to experience this wonderful moment with us. I rub my hands and feet into the soil and say a prayer to our ancestors for both you and I, Baba. As I write about this experience, I am reminded of what I wrote in my MA thesis:

Nothing holds the human mind like questions of identity…. Bantu individuals make sense of themselves in relation to both land and community. Bantu voice comes from the relationship established within the boundaries of community. Experience gained from the homeland leads to the development of symbols that convey meaning within the boundaries of place. This triangular relationship of voice, place and symbols creates the individual (Bantu) identity as succinctly defined by Waters (2004) in her work, American Indian Thought. Without community one would have nothing to confirm one's identity, and existence would be meaningless and unexplainable. (Mucina, 2006, pp. 70-71)

\(^{37}\) Matsebula (1976) reports that: “Between the Black Mbuluzi and Komati Rivers lived the Mucina (p. 17).”
After some time, a truck comes by and I waved to the driver to stop. After exchanging some pleasant greetings, I conveyed my mission and the driver of the truck directs us back to the base of the mountain as the inhabitants of that area were all Masinas. At the base of the mountain, I ask for directions to an elder in the area and the directions that I am given lead me to the door of elder David Masina. I give elder Masina a condensed version of the story and research I have done so that I can end up at his doorstep. Upon hearing my condensed story, elder Masina invites me to come into his house and sit down so I can give them the whole story. I share with him all the stories that you have given me, Baba, and the research I have conducted as part of my education. At this point, I ask elder Masina if the others can come out of the car and stretch their legs and he agrees to this but insist that they must stay outside so that they do not interrupt our important conversation.

When Elder Masina is satisfied that he has all the details that he requires from my story, he welcomes me home and then he shares with me stories about how our people migrated from the area to as far up as Tanzania. He tells me that, in his lifetime, he has never seen a child of these lost ancestral relatives return home. He tells me that there is a greater reason for me ending up at his doorstep but he also tells me that he is unwilling to share his ancestral family knowledge until our family bonds have grown stronger. At this point, the elder made it clear that he was adopting me into his family. We had interacted for over an hour before he asked to meet the rest of my party. As I was taking elder Masina to introduce him to the rest of my family, his worker pointed out that we all looked so alike she found it unsettling. Elder Masina’s daughter responded by saying that I was the brother she had been missing in the family.

Elder Masina asked if we could have some photos taken of us together before we left. At first I kept in contact with the Masina family though letters but now I do it through the social
network of Facebook. Since going to Malawi and meeting my paternal family, I have learnt that the trajectory of my name is fraught with contradictions and complexities which are beyond my understanding. I am told that the Mucina name is reflective of how you, Baba, had disassociated yourself from your family. Yet in your teachings to me, you have always insisted that I start my home coming visit by going to the Mucina family, who you refer to as our maternal family.

Knowing this knowledge has made me realize that names can communicate who we are, who we want to be and, at times, who we are running from. Such revelations have not hindered the connections that I have developed in the ancestral homeland. I am also open to the fact that I may learn more about my connection to the Mucina name from the Mucina family in Lizulu. I know the connections that I have made to the land and the people in Mdzingama will bring me back to Swaziland, my ancestral home.
Botswana to Zimbabwe

Baba, we have been informed by our friends that there is no food in Zimbabwe and if we can find it then it will be too expensive. So they make us buy absolutely everything beforehand and we end up with two very large grocery bags. We go to the local bus station to find the buses going to Zimbabwe. We see a luxury bus going to Zimbabwe but I am informed that all the bus seats have already been sold out and the same bus will not be back for another two days. I do not want to wait for another two days as I am feeling a sense of urgency about getting to you, Baba. Thinking it would be a good experience for Mandeep and Sanjit to get acquainted with the local African transportation system, I buy our tickets to leave that evening at six o'clock.

We spent the rest of the afternoon rushing around getting last-minute packing done and road food bought. The bus conductor informed me to make sure that we had our bags there for check-in an hour before departure as space was at a premium on buses going to Zimbabwe. At five o'clock sharp we arrive with our baggage and the bus looks overloaded already but the conductor, seeing our concern, informs us that there is tons of space and somehow he manages to secure our bags on top of the bus carriage. The load of stuff on the bus carrier has doubled the height of the bus. Flabbergasted by the ingenuity and audacity of overloading a bus to such ridiculous proportions made us want evidence of this phenomena. As we are taking photos of the bus I heard the locals expressing dissatisfaction at the fact that Zimbabweans buying so much is driving up the cost of commodities. The local business man taking a break outside his store responds by saying: “I love Zimbabweans because they are honest, hard-working and always settle their debts. I will take a Zimbabwean over my own people.” I laugh at this exchange and think nothing of it.
The bus conductor has anticipated our inexperience in travelling on local buses and so has kindly reserved us a bench seat for three in the middle of the bus. However, it is impossible to get to our seats because all floor space has been taking up. To get to our seats we have to stand on people’s luggage. I am aware that fire aisle regulations in this situation do not apply so we make ourselves as comfortable as possible. Six o’clock rolls around and the bus is still being loaded. At eight o’clock, we still have not moved and I ask the bus conductor when we are leaving. He replies by saying: “Very soon my friend, don't worry.” The family behind us communicates to me in Shona that this means we are now officially on African time. At ten o’clock the bus starts to move but the conductor informs us that we are going to a gas station to fill up with diesel. This too takes over another hour. When our bus starts to leave the gas station, some locals in their cars begin yelling: “Zimbabweans go back home.” Such open hostilities make me pay attention to how the locals are reacting towards Zimbabweans. The evidence is reflective of the experience we have on the bus. People were openly jeering, throwing up the insulting middle finger, and generally conveying actions that made it clear that Zimbabweans were not welcomed.

As the bus was so overloaded, every time the bus went over a bump the frame of the bus would rub against the tyres and we could all smell the tyres burning. Fearing a tyre blowout, some passengers demanded that the bus driver go slower. We, therefore, did not get to the Zimbabwean border until seven o’clock in the morning. At the border crossing, the bus conductor informs us that we may need to put a little money together to placate the Botswana customs officials. After a little, while the bus conductor returns to the bus and informs us that his efforts had not yielded positive results and we had to unload the whole bus. With everyone helping, the process takes about two hours and then everyone has to stand in a queue with all their belongings. The customs officials keep making everyone re-line because they claim the
queues are disorderly. An hour goes by while the customs officers switch from insulting us to ignoring us. After some time, three customs officers approach us and announce in military style that they are taking over our situation. They tell us that if we give them our cooperation then it will speed up our leaving. For some reason, the customs officer who was speaking notices me and comes over and asks for my passport. I give it to him and while he is looking at it enquires if Sanjit and Mandeep are with me. I respond in the affirmative and he says: “Why are you doing this to yourself? Why do you not fly to Zimbabwe or take the luxury bus system? You would save yourself all this hassle.”

I respond to the customs officer by stating that this is the cheapest and fastest way to Zimbabwe. The customs officer laughs and says: “In my opinion this experience is not worth having because it is not a lot of fun. I will make sure you guys go in first.” The customs officer then yells to everyone else: “The queue starts behind this gentleman,” and everyone rushes over to be behind me. Everyone wants to be processed as quickly as possible so their journey home can continue. A few people with very large loads are disgruntled with how badly they are being treated and refuse to move. On seeing this open challenge, one of the officers starts using violent tactics. He throws people’s belongings onto the road which forces people to rush over and try to rescue their belongings. At the same time, there is a woman who seems to be unwilling to be intimidated or she may just be overly exhausted and cannot move. Either way, the customs officer approaches her with great violent haste but she cannot see him as he is in her blind spot. He violently slaps her across the face and the woman doubles over in pain but no one moves to help her. Somehow, the woman manages to get herself over toward us.

Sanjit, who is standing next to me, says: “I can’t believe that man has just hit that woman.” As she is saying these words, we both realize that Mandeep is standing in the area
where the woman was attacked. The officer is maliciously heading toward Mandeep and the realization of what is happening freezes us. The officer raises his hand in a motion to slap Mandeep hard on her back. When somehow he becomes aware that she is not African and he turns his slap into a forceful pat on the back. He says: “Madam you’ll have to move to where the others are? Do you understand?” I sigh in relief and the man behind me puts his hand on my shoulder and says in Shona: “Do not worry, they can still see her humanity but, for some reason, they cannot see our humanity even though this black skin binds us as family.” The actual processing by customs takes less than five minutes and I cannot understand why we went through hours of unnecessary suffering. I can only speculate that absolute power corrupts when it is being applied to the poor and vulnerable because the chances of consequential action by the poor and vulnerable is greatly diminished when they are focused on trying to survive.
Dear Baba, I am worried about how we are going to carry our luggage to the Zimbabwean side because our bus has been ordered not to stop until it is on the Zimbabwean side. This is obviously a frequent occurrence because there are a lot of porters with large carts. For a fee they offer their services but we cannot get one because we did not anticipate the dash that everyone else made to secure one. Luckily, the bus conductor comes toward us riding in the back of someone's truck. He informs us that the owner of the truck will help us with our luggage for a small fee and we load our luggage with other passengers on the truck. The Zimbabwean customs officials inform us that we each need a visa for 60 US dollars and, jokingly, the customs officer informs us that all this could have been avoided if Canada had not imposed a visa requirement on Zimbabweans. The easy-going nature of the Zimbabwean customs official is relaxing everyone but some of our bus passengers are trying to take advantage of this. Those who had bought large flat screen TVs, refrigerators, car parts, bicycles and other non-essential goods must pay duty on all these goods. The problem is, the owners of these goods are making it difficult to trace their whereabouts and this is wasting our time. The bus driver threatens that we should leave these unclaimed goods and drive away but his bus conductor informs him that all will be resolved in good time. So we wait and quietly complain.

At three o’clock we start loading the bus again but our bus conductor slips on some spilt cooking oil on top of the bus and he cannot continue doing his great job of loading the top of the bus. His two assistants take over but everyone can see they are not doing as good a job as he was doing. Sure enough, after driving for about an hour things begin to fall off the top of the bus. At a police roadblock, the Zimbabwe police help inform the bus conductor’s assistants how to secure things on top of the bus. Around six o’clock, one of the back tyres explodes because of the
rubbing of the bus frame against the tyres. There is no spare tyre on the bus as it has been removed to make more space for goods. Luckily, the tyre explosion took place near the town of Gweru where the bus had a scheduled stop at a gas station in the town centre. Very slowly the bus makes its way to the gas station and here every effort is made to locate a spare tyre. We had now been on this bus for more than 24 hours.

Baba, let me tell you that as expensive as it was to get food and beer at the Wimpy bar in Gweru we did it anyways because we wanted to treat ourselves to good local cuisine, as a way to distract ourselves from our ongoing bus problems. We ate, drank beer, exchanged money for local currency and developed a friendship with the staff of the bar. This all occurred within a space of five hours before a spare tyre was fitted onto the bus. At this point, the whole bus had become quite familiar with one another. Political issues were discussed; feminist issues about power, equality and sexism were thoroughly debated and various forms of Christianity were debated while, from my opinion, traditional religion was quietly left out. The discussions were held in both English and Shona. When the conversation went into Shona, I would translate it for Mandeep and Sanjit. The closer we got to Harare, the more humorous the stories got. As we arrived in Harare, the tension of the nightmare bus ride seemed to dissipate from all of us but it was as if the gods wanted to keep us in check because, just after the first stop in Harare, the bus axle fell apart. And for the first time people expressed outright hostility and rage. The bus crew worked as swiftly as possible to ensure the bus made it to the final bus stop of Mbare, using a makeshift pin to hold the axle together. An unbelievable 38 hours later, we unloaded from the bus and we promised each other that we would not put ourselves through such an ordeal again. However, we did it again; the only difference was we did it to get you home, Baba.
As we have been in contact by cell phone, Innocent, a Zimbabwean friend who we had met in South Africa, comes to pick us up at the bus station. He takes us to the apartment that Kevin (our other friend) has allowed us to use. At the apartment, we met two other young men who are also staying there, Oliver from the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Joe the younger cousin of Innocent. Joe worked for a company as a computer technician and, therefore, we saw very little of him. Oliver, on the other hand was trying to make his fortune in Zimbabwe like most of our friends in the illegal diamond trade business. All were good people doing shady businesses in order to survive. The elder of this group of men was a man who we had dubbed as uncle Munya. It was uncle Munya and his business associates who took us in an open pickup truck to the township of Mbare to have the best barbecue I have ever had in my life. As we ate meat, sadza (thick cornmeal porridge) and drank beer, I became aware that many people had an illegal trading business as their main business or side job.

Failure to do what these men and women were doing meant that you could not enjoy the wonderful barbecue we were enjoying but little did I know that you, Baba, could not enjoy such luxuries. Unbeknown to me, five minutes’ walk from where we were enjoying our barbecue my maternal family members were trying to sell a few vegetables in order to survive. They were so poor that if the police raided them and took away their vegetables they would struggle to replace them and, at times, it meant going without food. Whereas, the butcher store which operated the barbecue that we enjoyed was the meeting place for high end illegal traders and it was situated right next to the police station. As good as the barbecue was I could not fully enjoy it because about 60 meters away from us there were kids feeding on our leftover bones on a rubbish heap. These beggars and food scavengers were kept at bay intermittently by other children who were hired to do so. The colonial act of divide and conquer, which was applied to us using racial markers, we had now modified and were applying it along class lines. The envious stares of the
poor confirmed that we have made it out from their position or that we were the inheritors of our families’ breakthrough into the new Black wealth. Yet, I still remember how I used to forage for food in garbage heap just like the kids I was watching. I was one of them and now I am seated on the other side. I want to identify with their struggle so that I can help but I do not want to be in their position because I remember how hard it is. It is this memory of hardship and the stories that I have heard from kids who have foraged for food in garbage heap that motivates me to tell stories about why we need to make change.

The next day, I took Mandeep and Sanjit to the orphanage to see where I grow up. The place looks rundown. There is mould on the walls, windows are broken, electrical wires are exposed and there is no running water in the bathrooms. I also see some of the boys who are still in the orphanage from five years earlier when I did some outreach work through my Child and Youth Care degree program, with funding from Langara College. The aim of that trip had been to offer the staff residential care training so that they were able to provide better care for the children as most of the staff had little formal training in residential child care. As part of that trip I also did workshops for the boys and used my own experience as a foundation for engaging fears about leaving the orphanage. I also talked about the actions that I took which allowed me to be successful beyond the orphanage while also honestly reflecting on actions that limited my successes. Besides giving professional and personal advice, I also came with money which was used to purchase food.

All this was made possible through the funding given by Langara College’s student union body and, to top it off, they also donated many computers for the boys. So you can see how the boys in the orphanage were surprised to learn that I had come empty-handed. As I was leaving, I heard one of the boys say: “Where is the money and computers?” I pretended I did not hear the
comment because if I had answered it truthfully I would have said: “I am sorry, this trip is about connecting with my father and my focus is mainly on this and nothing else.” To achieve my goal of finding you, Baba, I needed the help of Baba Colin (the orphanage cook) who had helped me track you down in 2003. Baba Colin had learnt that you were not staying with the young family who had been caring for you when I left you but, after a day of searching, Baba Colin found an address for where you were staying. When we arrived at the address where you were staying no one could tell us where you had gone so we tried to track you down. However, as we were searching for you, we heard many stories about your poverty and homelessness. Most people talked about how they had played a role in preventing your death from starvation. The one consistent story that I kept hearing was about how you and four other old men were living in the bushes. Three of the old men had been found dead and another was missing, presumed dead by most people. You, Baba, were the only one who was reported to be in relative good health. On hearing these reports, I felt guilty for not having taken better care of you as your firstborn son.

That night, I led our family into a discussion about how we could care for you. Our total savings at that moment was around five thousand dollars and we also had an emergency fund of about two thousand dollars. This to me meant that we could only afford to get property and still have enough money to build a very small house for you in the townships or rural communities. The problem was you would not have your family or community around you. In the midst of my planning, Mandeep questioned: “Do we know if this is what Baba wants?” Not wanting to impose anything on you, we decided to suspend all these questions until we met you the next day. In preparation of our meeting, while still in Canada, I had bought you a whole suitcase full of clothes, shoes, runners, jackets, sweaters, a solar powered flashlight, a hand windup radio and I had even remembered to get you a good watch and a finger ring. In Botswana, Mandeep had taken charge of buying you a large bag of groceries. As we had no transport, we were dependent
on our friends to get to you. Innocent’s cousin Joe had been left with a family member’s car which he was happy to use for driving us around. This, Baba, is how we were able to bring to you the things we had bought for you.

Joe drove us to the place you were staying and, with the state I found you in, I was just thankful that you were still alive. Looking at you, I was taken back by how emaciated you were. I remember you telling us that you were having stomach problems which affected what foods you were able to digest. As you were speaking, I kept asking myself: “How have I let this happen to you, my own Baba? How will I explain this to our ancestors?” Oh! Baba, I felt great shame and you only made my shame even greater when you started to share the little we had given you. How is it that with so little to your name, Baba, you were so generous? I see now that your generosity was not limited to familial blood kith and kin. You were the love that was Ubuntu and this is why you were never a stranger in unfamiliar places. In your sharing with all, I am now aware that I, as part of your family, may have had less in the moment but now have more because you were willing to share.

Ubuntu through you means that if I see a person next to me starving then I must share that little bread that I was saving for tomorrow. After I have saved the person next to me then we together can worry about tomorrow. Baba, your Ubuntu practice is hard to follow and I have a lot to still learn. As we were talking, I watched you put a pile of things you wanted to give to my brothers and another pile of food stuff that you wanted to share with your community. As you were making your sharing piles, you also gave me your stories about your struggles, your farming activities, planned future business adventures and familial hopes. After hearing some of your story, I felt that your stories had a common theme of finding final settlement and so I asked you if you wanted to take us home to our family community of Zulu. Thoughtfully, you informed
us that you were ready to go home but you were afraid that everyone you knew was dead and no-one would know you. You were also afraid that you would not fit in with the community after being away for so long. You had been fragmented from your family for so long you even suggested that we could go alone while you stayed in Zimbabwe. I assured you that we would not leave you in an environment that you did not feel safe or happy. With this promise from us, you hesitantly and cautiously agreed to take us home to Lizulu. At the age of 35 years old, I was so excited to be going home with my Baba. I was a little kid again in your care and, at the same time, I was an adult who was caring for you.

My excitement about going home began to infect you too and you suggested we leave right away. I reminded you that we needed travel visas for us and an emergency travel document for you. To this suggestion, you laughed: “Who will stop me from travelling on our soil; these are all my people, my lands and I have worked the soil from here to home. I know all the languages and the names of all the places,” you told me confidently. Philosophically and politically, I agreed with your position but we were running out of time and could not change our travel plans because of a lack of funds and school commitments. Wanting you to get us home for the first time with as little problems as possible, I told you that we were going to the Malawian Embassy and getting you a travel document. I remember what you said in response to my authoritative direction and the weight and responsibility of what you said is still haunting me. You placed your right hand on my shoulder as if you were transferring the burden of family responsibility on me and then simply said: “Baba, the sun is rising to your authority; I support this and will not get in your way.” Until now, I have not shared with anyone the heaviness of these words which you gave me.
As we went to the Malawian Embassy, you behaved like a little child who had new toys. You wanted to stop and show us off to your community of friends and I behaved like a strict parent because I kept telling you: “Sorry, we need to leave; sorry, we do not have time to meet other people because we are late and we need to go now if we are to get your emergency travel document before the Embassy closes for the day.” We arrived at the Embassy during lunch time so we had to wait for an hour before they reopened again. However, the security man informs us that the Embassy on that day closes at 3pm and there is a long line of people who are ahead of us, so he speculates that we may have to come back again. I tell the security man that I do not want to wait another day because for the first time in my 35 year old life I can go home. The security man asks why this is so and you give him our family story about our fragmentation. When the other Embassy workers hear our story, they make it clear that we will get your emergency travel document that day. And to help speed up, the process the security man offers his professional photography services for your identification photo. This service he offers at a US dollar rate.

Early morning, we catch the bus going to Malawi at the Mbare bus stop. I notice that you are not engaging any of us, so I engage you in light conversation until we near Nyamapanda which is just before the border with Mozambique. Nyamapanda is also the home of Lee and Simba, my brothers. If the bus ran this route more than once a week, I would have suggested we stop and see them but we are running out of time and to ease my conscience I ask you when you last saw my brothers. I am expecting you to tell me that you last saw them about a month ago but you say:

In 2005, Lee came to see me for some money because he needed shoes but his younger brother, Simba, will not talk to me because he feels I have abandoned him which makes him very angry. How do I explain to him that I cannot present myself to his mother’s family when I have nothing to offer them? I am the hunger
created by a lack of food in abundance and I am poverty beyond the comfort of measure. I am silent because I cannot find the words that stop my suffering. (personal communication, Baba, August 13, 2008)

Your truth creates uncomfortable silence. I want to offer you some comfort but blame keeps making its way toward my lips so I too keep silent because this is what I can offer as support without judgment. I am sorry I did not break the silence of our suffering when you were offering me the opportunity then. I hope it is not too late to start following your lead of breaking the oppressive silence which fragments our family farther.

The Malawi we took you to, Baba, was not the Malawi you left. The city of Blantyre impressed you so much that you told us that you were willing to live there, if things did not work out at home in Lizulu. You were so proud of this new Malawi that had blossomed while you were away and entertainingly you said: “I will stay here and die in my own country among my own people.” We spent two nights and two days in Blantyre before going to Zomba where a friend lent me his car for our usage. As we were driving to Lizulu, you started to get sick. You complained of abdomen pain and reported that your stomach felt sour. I had to stop the car a few time so you could throw up or so we could prevent you from throwing up. Travelling at a much slower speed, we got into Lizulu around 3pm. As soon as we arrived in Lizulu, we presented ourselves to the chief who informed us that our family lands and property were in Mozambique and we would need a letter of clearance from the police, which the chief assured us would take less than five minutes. The more important task was to find a family member who could take us home. Within half an hour the chief’s staff had found one of your nephews, Fixon.

Fixon informed us that most of your family members had passed on from this life to the world of the ancestors. I could not help but watch the facial expressions you made as you heard about the death of each family member that you inquired about. Fixon told you, Baba, that there
were extended family members who knew you and wanted to see you. As it was getting late, we made plans to go to our village early in the morning the next day. Just before we left for our motel, you asked Fixon very reluctantly, as if you did not want to hear the answer: “What of my sister, Janet?” On hearing this question, Fixon flashed a huge smile while telling you that your sister was doing very well for herself in Lilongwe the capital city of Malawi. She had built her own house in the capital city, had two living children, Moses and Regina, and from her other dead children she had many grandchildren. Your eyes reddened with tears as you told us that you wanted to go to your sister right away and you made it clear that you had no interest in meeting any other family members.

At this point, we would have left if it was not for the wise counsel of the chief and the persistence of Fixon. I remember the two of them managed to make the point that you needed to take us to our home village, so that our ancestors could connect with us. To this point you retorted by saying that our ancestors were always with me and, therefore, I did not need to go to a village full of the offspring of those who had caused you so much pain. The chief wisely told you that your retort was good while adding that if you took us to our home village you would be showing respect for our ancestors. The chief also added that your father had ensured that you had walked on the soil that held the remains of our ancestors, as a way of making sure you were connected to our lands and people. The chief then asked: “Will you deny your son this connection?” Under such pressure you agreed to go to our home village the next day.

About 60 family members were at the home village to welcome us home and they kept apologizing that they did not have time to inform other family members that were in schools or working in other parts of the country. I could not believe so many people were related to me. Regardless of how poor they were, I felt wonderful belonging to them and they to me. I am not
sure if you felt the same connection that I felt to all these family members. I have learned that your smile and sweet words can hide your true feelings. I am, therefore, wandering how you felt being welcomed by some family members whose parents may have had a hand in your leaving?

However, I must tell you that it felt good to see you show pride in me. I remember hearing you say: “This is my son and his family; they live in Canada and want to ensure I am taken care of before they go back to university in Canada. When they are done school they will help me start a bottle store (corner grocery store) here in Lizulu but for now they will find me a place near my sister so we can age peacefully and die surrounded by family.” By the time we left, almost every adult family member knew your plans and you showed a level of strength and pride that I had not seen in you. Even if we could not achieve everything you wanted, it was good to see you get energized about your dream. Somehow, from that moment your joy was mine and your problems were mine. Baba, I am still trying to find ways to help my two brothers in Zimbabwe.

Fixon offered to take us to Dadakazi Janet in Lilongwe. I was a little frustrated with Fixon’s directions because he was directing us by memory and could not give us reference points to help map our trip. His way of doing things required us to trust him while our Western academic training required us to depend on evidential data. With no other choice, I am forced to trust and depend on Fixon totally. I am uncomfortable at being in this position of total dependence on Fixon. My discomfort keeps me questioning and challenging Fixon’s directions which starts to make him nervous and this leads to small direction errors. When I realize what I am doing, I apologize to Fixon and let him lead us. This was not easy to do because of my Western academic data orientation which values evidence before trust. Needless to say, Fixon got us to Dadakazi Janet as soon as I got out of his way by suspending my judgment about his
navigational methods. What is now interesting is that I only know directions to Dadakazi Janet’s home through memory and not the conventional Western way of using street names which are there. The lesson here for me is that: if we want the outcome of a specific knowledge, we must honour its rightful process.

On arrival at Dadakazi Janet’s home, we were informed by the neighbours that she had gone to church. So we went nearby to her son and daughter’s home but her son (Moses) was away on business and her daughter (Regina) was also at church with her. Luckily, a niece informed us that she would send a message to Dadakazi Janet and cousin Regina to inform them that they had visitors at home. Regina and nephew Joseph were the first people to come back from church. After exchanging a formal greeting, Fixon informed Regina as to who you were. On hearing that you were Dadakazi’s brother, Regina started laughing so hard I thought she would start crying. While still laughing hard she got up, went and gave you a big hug and then told us that she had seen many things but she never believed or dreamt that she would see us. Regina informed us that Dadakazi had named one of her children after your memory but unfortunately the child had died. Looking at me, Regina informs me that Dadakazi has had a hard life but even at her lowest point she never stopped wondering about her brother, Peter Dee. As Regina was talking, more family members were coming in. In all this excitement, I remember Regina hugging me while telling me that we were family. Within a few minutes we were all talking over each other in a spirit of familial love. By the time Dadakazi Janet arrived the room was full of family and communal laughter.

As soon as Dadakazi walked into the room, we all went quiet but our hearts’ excitement kept dancing in the room. Dadakazi was about to ask who the visitors were when she locked eyes with you, Baba. As she stared into your eyes, she seemed to lose her voice. Regina then asked:
“Who is that?” And Dadakazi after a moment of disbelief said: “This is my brother who has been lost in some foreign lands. I have wondered for many years if he was dead; yet, I could not explain why I felt him. I have missed you my king. My heart is full of love and pain at the same time and I have no words to share. Now let me meet my family.” Lovingly, Dadakazi welcomes us home with hugs but as soon as she is done she races over to you and locks her arm around your arm. Looking at me, she says with deep, slow, emotional excitement: “Baba, thank you for bringing my brother back to me.” I am speechless and after sometime you, Baba, break the silence by saying: “We should also thank my daughter in-law because I believe she is the one who pushed your son to come find me.” Dadakazi gives Mandeep a quietly spoken thank you before she focuses back on you again Baba. The two of you were inseparable from that moment on.

As news of your arrival spreads, Dadakazi’s friends begin coming to witness this extraordinary happening. If Dadakazi was sugar through her words then her friends were her salt because they lamented you for abandoning her in this lonely world. Dadakazi’s friends conveyed to you how much she had lost and, on top of that, how much she had worried over you. In all these discussions you remained silent and, at times when things got heated beyond my comfort, I would defend you by reminding people that you were now here and the important thing was for us to start building our family as a whole. I told the family and Dadakazi about how you were living in Zimbabwe and asked them if you could stay with them while we tried to find you a place near Dadakazi so that you would not be separated from your sister again. As we were looking for a place for you, Regina called us to a family meeting. At this meeting, Regina informed us that if we made you and Dadakazi live apart we would embarrass ourselves before the community, as people would ask why we were keeping two old relatives apart who had found each other in old age after being separated a long time ago by colonial and familial
fragmentation. Regina then informed us that the family wanted Dadakazi and you to live in her house while using the money we would have spent on getting a home for you to upgrade Dadakazi’s house.

On hearing the family’s decision to keep Dadakazi and you together, I felt comforted and relieved about your safety. The little savings that we had, we handed over to the family for building our home extension. All this happened in late August of 2008, just before we came back to Canada. Since being back in Canada, we call home when needed and try to send a small portion of our academic student scholarship money to help the family financially if we can. One year later, in August of 2009, Khumalo your grandson was born and three month later (December 6, 2009) you left this living world for the world of the living dead ancestors. Sister Regina, on June 5, 2010, also left this world to be with you among our ancestors. Baba, take care of Regina and help Dadakazi have some peace because she has dealt with too much loss for one person. We are trying to support her as best as we can from here. In reference to your death, Baba, I am not sad in anyway because you are with our ancestors and I know that you died in your family home among your loving family members. You have left me the thread to continue connecting our family beyond fragmentation. Baba, for this and other lessons that you have given me, I thank you. I have said many things, Baba, but now I clap my hands as a way of welcoming and honouring your spirit. I am now listening so please inscribe your spiritual wisdom in these blank pages.

Respectfully your son Komba

Devi Dee Mucina
For Baba’s voice
For Baba’s voice
For Baba’s voice

I have shared with you the Ubuntu structures; I have shared with you the Ubuntu theories and I have shared with you our Ubuntu stories. It is now time to synthesize the kinds of deeds that nurture your resistance and resilience in your social actions of Ubuntu regeneration beyond colonialism. The next millet granary engages social individual actions of Ubuntu regeneration beyond colonialism.
Millet Granary 7: Social Actions of Ubuntu Regeneration beyond Colonialism

Living an informed Ubuntu life must be our goal and our effort to live this informed Ubuntu life becomes our resistance to colonialism. Our planned, intentional Ubuntu social actions of liberation beyond colonialism affirm our power and identity which reflects our resilience in the face of colonialism. This being said, we should also be mindful of what we call Ubuntu actions of liberation because, as Taiaiake Alfred\(^39\) (2005) reminds us in *Wasase: Indigenous Pathways of Action and Freedom*, inevitably, whatever means we use to achieve our freedom we will most likely use to maintain that hard won freedom. Comrade Robert Mugabe (1983), in *Our War of Liberation: Speeches, Articles, Interviews, 1976-1979*, reports on war as a tool of liberation. In his own words he reflects on the ruling party’s actions by stating:

> From its very inception, ZANU was unequivocal in its approach to the liberation struggle. It purposefully chose war as a means of achieving liberation. It must always be borne in mind that a system sustained by violence can only be overthrown by violence. War can only be defeated by war. So, because the essence of settler power was force, ZANU decided to adopt the very method of force to defeat it and create a just system based on people’s power, whose main anchor and guarantee shall remain popular force. Accordingly, if ZANU at its birth was to become a truly revolutionary movement, it had to forge an instrument of force, sharp and devastating to the enemy. This sharp instrument was ZANLA, whose structure only materialised some years later. Today, ZANLA stands as a mammoth liberation army, dreaded by the enemy but revered and adored by the people as the vanguard of their liberation struggle. (Mugabe, 1983, p. 60)

\(^{38}\) This Ubuntu pictograph symbolizes the stars which inspire stories of hope and divine guidance for the Nguni (Mutwa 1964 p. 672). Nguni hope and divine guidance is conveyed in our stories.

\(^{39}\) My using of Taiaiake Alfred is meant to reflect our global Indigenous familial relational bonds and our common resistance and struggle against colonialism.
With the support of our Black communities as well as a large international support for the Chimurenga (the armed struggle) efforts, who would have dared question the war leadership of Comrade Robert Mugabe? The people’s war actions were grounded in collective self defense against colonial forces and the desire of the Black collective to exercise the right of self determination. From my context, such anti-colonial actions are justified.

The problem of intervention arises when Comrade Robert Mugabe reaffirms the party’s 1976 principles as communicated in Geneva. In question, is the following section from principles (b) which reads: “Our army remains the bulwark of our political power. If the vote is the product of the gun, then the gun which has created it must continue to protect and secure it. Guns and votes are inseparable partners” (Mugabe, 1983, p. 100). Here I can imagine Taiaiake Alfred (2005) questioning Comrade Robert Mugabe: “What if the people choose to exercise their vote in opposition to the party wishes, what then?” What happens is well known by the people of the Ndebele ethnic Ubuntu in Matabeleland, a province of Zimbabwe. The historical evidence of what happens is recorded as scars on the bodies of the people, it is recorded in the minds of the people and it is recorded in the soil that holds mass graves that are still being found. It is projected that between 1982 to 1987 thousands of mostly Ndebele people were killed in what was called operation Gukurahundi.\(^\text{40}\) Zimbabwe’s Vice President, John Nkomo, who was at the time of speaking these words the ZANU-PF national chairman and Speaker of Parliament, communicated to Integrated Regional Information Networks that no one was ever trying to denied the existence of Gukurahundi. John Nkomo communicated the following message: “Even

\(^{40}\) Gukurahundi is a Shona word that conveys the washing away of the chaff by the early rains.
President Mugabe has acknowledged Gukurahundi as a time of madness, which must never be repeated, so that means government is in a position to redress what happened” (allAfrica.com, 2007, January 16). 41 We cannot just kill Ubuntu en mass and then claim that our social actions were guided by a time of madness. Violence is only justified as self-defense when deadly action is directed at you, individual or collective. Ubuntu politicians, listen up: the need for political domination or survival do not in any way constitute self-defense.

Let me be clear our social actions of regeneration beyond colonialism are based on our Ubuntu responsibility to our relational familial bonds. Our Ubuntu political philosophy of social actions is informed and motivated by creating spaces for Black empowerment without oppressing other people because it is a decolonization process, which is informed by the understanding of the interconnectedness of all life relationships in our territories and in the world at large. This means you will endeavour to approach your politics, healing medicine, economic interactions and spirituality from a relational, holistic, Ubuntu caring engagement. This being said, there are some simultaneous collective actions that we need to maintain as we work to fulfill our own social actions of self liberation. These collective Ubuntu actions are grounded in a commitment to dialogue that leads to regeneration, honest truthful actions of restitution and open transparent education which leads to actions of resurgence. It is, therefore, important that we understand the meaning of our revolutionary words:

Regeneration in the Maseko Ngoni context means we stop listening to the lies of the old colonial masters who insist we keep using their colonial institutions while quieting our opposition with tokenisms and symbolic gestures of Maseko governance. There can be no Maseko regeneration if our governance is not grounded in the foundation of Ubuntuism. All that is Maseko Ngoni is Ubuntu and all that is Ubuntu is Maseko Ngoni. Our full identity can only be reflected in

41 Zimbabwe: Calls for Justice 20 Years After Massacre access from allAfrica.com
our lands, our languages and our Indigenous governance. Restitution: ‘peacemaking requires making amends for harm done before any of the other steps to restore the fabric of a relationship can be taken (Alfred, 2005, p. 151).’... As the great Mutwa (1969) has pointed out, we Ubuntu do not forget the genocides committed against us. In one way or another, these heinous and wicked crimes must be made right... We know their evil is in our house because we are using their evil things to kill each other, but we are starting to wake up to this fact... Ubuntu colonisation requires very serious restitution as a precondition for any meaningful peace to be established with the colonisers. Resurgence is courageous action against injustice but, more importantly, it is action beyond resistance. ‘In rejecting the temptation to join the settlers and their states, seeking instead to confront settler society in a struggle to force an end to the Imperial reality and to lay down the preconditions for a peaceful coexistence, we would choose to use contention as a means of widespread enlightenment and societal change (Alfred, 2005, p. 151)’. (Mucina, 2006, p. 10)

The above Ubuntu collective principals are also important for creating sustainable social actions of Ubuntu regeneration beyond colonialism; however, we cannot wait for restitution because waiting will weaken our Ubuntu spirit. To these three points I would like to add a fourth dimension which is very important for our Ubuntu identity. The fourth dimension is Ubuntu spirituality. As an Ubuntu, I understand spirituality as the energy that connects me in a relational bond to humanity through visible and invisible connections. Spirituality is also my connector to the world at large. As was discussed under the section of Ubuntu Epistemology, our Ubuntu spirituality is very powerful. The power of spirituality makes it dangerous because it is in all things and our colonial desire for control and domination makes us misuse it. Frantz Fanon (1963), in The Wretched of the Earth, communicates this when he states:

Culture has never the translucidity of custom; it abhors all simplification. In its essence it is opposed to custom, for custom is always the deterioration of culture. The desire to attach oneself to tradition or bring back abandoned traditions to life again does not only mean going against the current of history but also opposing one’s own people. When a people undertakes an armed struggle or even a political struggle against a relentless colonialism, the significance of tradition changes. (Fanon, 1963, p. 224)
Fanon’s point on African spirituality is that it has become meaningless and the idea of nurturing it for him is preposterous and foreign. Yet, Fanon cannot see or define the function of African spirituality in ways that are outside the colonial relationships. It is interesting to note that Fanon does not investigate African spirituality in any meaningful African way and instead dismisses African spirituality as superstition, open for exploitability by men and women who want power. For Fanon, spirituality is no less a tool of colonialism than Christianity to which he advocates that “we must put the DDT which destroys parasites, the bearers of disease, on the same level as the Christian religion which wages war on embryonic heresies and instincts, and an evil yet unborn” (Fanon, 1963, p. 42). Fanon sees spirituality as justification of religious customs which have their power source in faith. Please take note of how Fanon links spirituality to religion and religion to custom (Fanon, 1963). To Fanon, spirituality becomes another open door for what he calls:

Colonialism, which had been shaken to its very foundation at the birth of African Unity, recovers its balance and tries now to break that will to unity by using all the movement’s weaknesses. Colonialism will set African peoples moving by revealing to them the existence of “spiritual” rivalries. (Fanon, 1963, p. 160)

The great Fanon, with these words, has positioned our spirituality against our Ubuntu unity of governance and he will not even acknowledge the existence of spirituality outside a colonial relationships. To any challenge we may offer, Fanon has concluded: “No, there is no question of the return to nature. It is simply a very concrete question of not dragging men towards mutilation, not imposing upon the brain rhythms which very quickly obliterate it and wreck it” (Fanon, 1963, p. 314). Like Njoki Wane (2009), Molefi Kete Asante (1996), and Credo Vusa’mazulu Mutwa (1969), Taiaiake Alfred questions: “How can anyone confront the depressing, disintegrating reality of this world without the restorative strength provided by
spirituality” (Alfred, 2005, p. 54)? The point I am making is that Fanon has missed the centrality of spirituality for Ubuntu.

The Ubuntu are spiritual beings. This is who we are and we cannot run away from it, in as much as a tiger can never remove its stripes. Yes, we can use spirituality to abuse each other but we can also use our Ubuntu spirituality to honour our diverse ways of gaining renewal in our specific communal context. Even when Baba and I were not in agreement on religion, he always seemed to know that my Ubuntu spirituality would guide me in a good way. Meaning, my spirit is my guiding inner voice which at times protects me through what people call the sensing ability or, what we call, an instinctual ‘feeling.’ My spirit is also at work when I hear my inner voice questioning the merits and consequences of my actions for the dignity, respect and pride of other people. I also would hold that following my inner voice is taking spiritual actions which serves as acts of resistance against colonialism. If you are paying close attention, you will have noticed that as I was articulating the collective Ubuntu actions, indirectly or directly, Ubuntu social actions of regeneration were being expressed. The collective action and social individual actions are rooted in each other. This means, as an Ubuntu person, each time you take any of the following every day actions you are living Ubuntu social individual actions of regeneration beyond colonialism which also means you are creating Ubuntu spiritual change. Your social actions become demonstrative changes that can inspire the rest of us and if you share this Ubuntu experience for our engagement then you are adding to our collective knowledge production. Remember, all these social actions come with responsibility for intent and impact. All the Ubuntu social actions of regeneration beyond colonialism that I have outlined here are reflective of my actions as determined by my context, relations and cultural values. You may need to change some things and add other things.
• Do not impose your Ubuntu Social Actions of Regeneration on anyone else. Do these actions because they are good for you and any other reason beyond this loses love;

• Love yourself, love your Blackness, love your spiritual ancestors and love humanity while being weary of the abusers and the usurpers;

• Take responsibility for all actions you take or offer;

• Honour our ancestors – We exist because they exist;

• Give thanks for all of our relations because all elements are part of the energy flux that makes up life;

• Learn the ways we honour the spirit of the land and the spirit of the waters;

• Develop your knowledge production by first developing your mental awareness through authentic Ubuntu education;

• Use our stories as medicines for fighting hate, pain, abandonment, isolation and fragmentation;

• Use your stories to teach because they allow us to build collective confidence and allow for honest, meaningful engagement from a respectfully curious position. This is the expression of love, which is the basis for researching our truths in our shared humanity.

• Fight colonially imposed fragmentation by choosing to create relational engagement;

• Protect your families because the Ubuntu family is the foundation of our Indigenous institutions; break the family and we struggle to find our voice;

• Invest in our own communities as a way of developing self-reliance, so that we give our people the choice to work in environments where their dignity and self respect are honoured.
• Be aware of how you are actively moving the center of discourse from colonial structures to Ubuntu structures so that you can share these social actions of Ubuntu regeneration beyond colonialism;

• Use and revive our languages as a way of fostering specific knowledges.

Here are some questions that should guide your actions:

1) Do my actions honour the spirit of Ubuntu love?

2) What are the consequences of my actions for our people?

3) Can I keep using my actions to sustain our total liberation?

4) Can I guarantee my actions do not oppress other people?

A close reading of Ubuntu social actions of liberation makes it clear that at the center of these actions is the revitalization of relational care, starting with the social self, in a manner that is not self indulgent as this opens us to our interconnectedness to all elements in our web of life. Ubuntu emphasizes that the wholeness of Black kinship ties, which extends to our ancestors in the after-world through the spiritual realm, also connects us in the present and to the spiritual future. As we Ngoni say, “I exist because my ancestors existed and the future will exist because I exist.” The solutions of Ubuntu social actions of regeneration beyond colonialism are both immediate and sustainable over the long-term because they are motivated by love for self, family, community and all our relational bonds. This millet granary has synthesized the Ubuntu Social actions of Ubuntu regeneration beyond colonialism that were spread out throughout this dissertation. In the next millet granary, I will engage the main discourse of our collective Blackness and the challenge directed toward our collective Blackness.
On 4 March 1993, two Somalis were shot in the back by Canadian soldiers, one fatally. Barely two weeks later, on 16 March, a Somali prisoner, sixteen year-old Shidane Abukar Arone, was tortured to death by soldiers of the Canadian Airborne Regiment. Dozens of men looked on or knew of the torture. Gruesome photographs of the 16 March event survive; photographs of the bloodied and battered head of a Black man, a baton holding his head in place for the camera as his torturer posed grinning beside him. For a while the photos confirmed that what had gone on during the Canadian peacekeeping mission in Somalia in 1993 could not be easily separated from racism, or indeed from colonialism. Soldiers had acted more like conquerors than humanitarians, and their actions underscored the meaning of Black bodies both here and there, historically and in the present.

-Sherene Razack, (2004, p. 4)

As has been illustrated by Sherene Razack (2004), in Dark Threat & White Knights, Blackness is still very much under attack. The attack on our collective Black embodiment is the impetus for our collective Black struggle as reflected in the stories of our collective resistance and resilience against colonial Whiteness. The following stories will highlight how, even within restrictive compulsory Whiteness, Pan-Africanism has given us, as Black people, the social educational tools to speak beyond colonialism as reflective of the writing and orality of Olaudah Equiano (1745 – 31 March, 1797), Sojourner Truth (1797 – November 26, 1883), and Frederick Douglass (February 14, 1818 – February 20, 1895) but no-one has helped me understand this more distinctly, using an Afrocentric perspective, than Cheikh Anta Diop (1974) in African Origin of Civilization: Myth or Reality. Elder Diop lets us see how compulsory able-bodied

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42 This Ubuntu pictograph symbolizes help (in Mutwa 1964 p. 383) and in this text I use it to convey how we can help education each other about our Blackness.
Whiteness has undermined the achievements of Black civilizations while associating the common failings of humanity with Blackness. Whiteness has only propagated a history that supports its own propaganda of universal truth, while undermining other truths and demonizing our relational interconnectedness. Whiteness has gone further to label Blackness as the marker of inferiority and this action has justified physical and mental genocide of the Black social beings. Elder Diop’s work gives me the power to communicate our collective Black resistance against this racism while trying to illuminate our Ubuntu path of love. On the other side, I will highlight and rupture the racist scholarship of compulsory able-bodied Whiteness which finds expression in the work of scholars like Jared Diamond (1997), Mary Lefkowitz (1996) and Alberto Moravia (1974). I see the goals of these racist, Eurocentric scholars as undermining the respectful, collective, social self curiosity of Blackness about its own powerful knowledges. But they do more; through their racist ideologies they actively try to stop humanity’s interconnected relational, respectful curiosity. These Eurocentric scholars are famous for arguing that Black Africa has been the recipient of White civilization and that the opposite view is so insignificant that it does not warrant serious consideration. It is this racist political reality which creates the miseducation of our Black children. It is, therefore, our duty to honestly engage the purposeful miseducation of our Black children using a regenerated Ubuntu philosophy. In this millet granary, I hold all Black efforts to prepare our children for our Black future by teaching them to know our past as a way of engaging our present and therefore giving them navigation skills to engage our future are teaching Ubuntu.
Blacks in Antiquity

Why is it important for Black people to show that Egypt was a Black civilization? I respond to this question by stating that: To celebrate Egypt is to celebrate one of the most important achievements of our Black ancestors. To recognize Egypt is to recognize our own creative Black Powers which centers Blackness with greatness. To see our Blackness as a power beyond measure is to believe in ourselves and our race which has been undermined through colonialism. Compulsory able-bodied Whiteness has shifted us from the centre of our Black power and has tried to maintain this position. However, our Black knowledge keeps guiding us back to our power again. When we are able to see our Black power as Ubuntu we will be ready as Ubuntu to say, “Sanibona.” Meaning, socially with my ancestors, we see you. The point I am making is that we must be here as the Black power to say, “I am because you are.” Cheikh Anta Diop's groundbreaking research offers evidence to support how Black Africans can regain their centre of Black power. In African Origin of Civilization: Myth or Reality, Diop starts his work by posing the following question: “What were the Egyptians?” And without doubt he swiftly responds to this question in the following manner, “In contemporary descriptions of the ancient Egyptians, this question is never raised. Eyewitnesses of that period formally affirmed that the Egyptians were Blacks” (1974, p. 1). In antiquity, the father of Western history, Herodotus was not ashamed to report that his countrymen had stolen and kidnapped two Black Oracles. In fact, he was proud of the kidnapping of these Black Oracles as this showed that Greeks were getting authentic Black knowledge. This reflects that, in antiquity, association with Black Africa was not a point of shame; it was in fact a point of honour and glory.

However, Eurocentric colonial academic scholars seem to enjoy privileging their own opinions about the peoples of the former colonies. Diop informs us in his work that we need not
worry about the colonial propaganda if we look at our own documents from antiquity because in these documents we will hear the Black voice of truth. For Diop, the question we should trouble ourselves with is, how did these people of Egypt identify themselves in antiquity? What was the name they used to self-identify and reflect their identity? To answer these questions Diop approaches the issues in the following manner:

Whence came this name Ham (Cham, Kam)? Where could Moses have found it? Right in Egypt where Moses was born, grew up, and lived until the Exodus. In fact, we know that the Egyptians called their country Kemit, which means “black” in their language. The interpretation according to which Kemit designates the black soil of Egypt, rather than the black man and, by extension, the black race of the country of the Blacks, stems from a gratuitous distortion by minds aware of what an exact interpretation of this word would imply. Hence, it is natural to find Kam in Hebrew, meaning heat, black, burned (p. 7). Egyptians themselves— who should surely be better qualified than anyone to speak of their origin— recognize without ambiguity that their ancestors came from Nubia and the heart of Africa. The land of the Amam, or land of the ancestors (man=ancestor in Wolof), the whole territory of Kush south of Egypt, was called land of the gods by the Egyptians. (1974, pp. 7, 150)

Diop also informs us that, in antiquity, Africa was the epitome of excellence in the development of academic institutions, which nurtured scholarship ranging from technology, science, mathematics, architecture, medicine, engineering, astronomy, and the arts, just to name a few of the disciplines. Hence, scholars and merchants from across the globe were drawn to this great Black civilization. Black Egypt was not only an intellectual civilization it was rich with natural resources and it was such great wealth which attracted foreigners to Black Africa. These foreigners, especially the White ones, were bent on acquiring possession of Africa by any means necessary. Hence, the dispossession of Black people was gained through relentless psychological and physical violence. We had to be stripped of our Black power, which is to say we had to be stripped of our self-confidence to ensure we drew less and less from our own creative strength. But the truth is conveyed, as follows, by Diop:
On numerous occasions, reference has been made to the fact that the Greeks borrowed their gods from Egypt; here is the proof: “Almost all the names of the gods came into Greece from Egypt. My inquiries prove that they were all derived from a foreign source, and my opinion is that Egypt furnished the greater number.” Since the Egyptian origin of civilization and the extensive borrowing of the Greeks from the Egyptians are historically evident, we may well wonder with Amerlineau why, despite those facts, most people stress the role played by Greece while overlooking that of Egypt. The reason for this attitude can be detected merely by recalling the root of the question. As Egypt is a Negro country, with a civilization created by Blacks, any thesis tending to prove the contrary would have no future. The protagonists of such theories are not unaware of this. So it is wiser and safer to strip Egypt, simply and most discreetly, of all its creations in favor of a really White nation (Greece). This false attribution to Greece of the values of a so-called White Egypt reveals a profound contradiction that is not the least important proof of Egypt’s Negro origin. (1974, p. 234)

Yet many Eurocentric scholars have tried to present Black Africa as a “basket case,” even though all ancient records and written sources clearly highlight the prominent position of the Black people in antiquity. Based on archaeological evidence and historical records from both Egypt and Greece, we can confidently say that the Egyptians civilization was a Black civilization. Yet, current Eurocentric scholars like Jared Diamond (1997) have tried to argue that in antiquity there were such people as can be called White Egyptians in Africa or dark looking White people because of the weather. To such theories Diop states:

In Egypt, the study of history rests largely on such written documents as the Palermo Stone, the Royal Tablets of Abydos, the Royal Papyrus of Turin, and Manetho’s Chronicle. To those authentic documents, we must add the whole body of evidence reported by ancient writers, from Herodotus to Diodorus, not to mention the Texts of the Pyramids, The Book of the Dead, and thousands of inscriptions on the monuments (p. 101).... In Lower Egypt, archeological diggings dating back to the predynastic have failed to uncover the existence of a White type. The Whites of Lower Egypt were transplanted there at a well-known, precise historical epoch; it was during the Nineteenth Dynasty, under Merneptah (1300 B.C.), that the coalition of Indo-Europeans (peoples of the sea) was conquered; the survivors were taken prisoner and scattered over the Pharaoh’s various construction sites (p. 239).... These facts prove that if the Egyptian people had originally been white, it might well have remained so. If Herodotus found it still black after so much crossbreeding, it must have been basic black at the start. (1974, pp. 101, 239, 5)
Cheikh Anta Diop has helped us locate the contributions of the first Black civilizations and the most powerful and influential one of these Black civilizations is Egypt. From here he has given us a bearing towards the Greeks, in that the Greeks acquired their knowledge and civilization from Black Egyptians. Cheikh Anta Diop references two of the most revered Western scholars, Herodotus and Diodorus, amongst many other scholars, who openly speak about the greatness of the Black Egyptians. Through hieroglyphic records and written documents like papyrus and scrolls, Diop has allowed us to hear from our ancient Black Egyptians. These ancient Egyptian ancestors of ours have told us that they were Black, the ancient Greeks have also confirmed from their own observations that ancient Egyptians were Black. As Ubuntu we express this as, I am a reflection of the existence of my ancestors - I exist because they exist or, as we say, “Umuntu ngumuntu ngubuntu.”

But there is one more source that will allow us to have another bearing towards our Egyptian ancestors. This third, foreign source, to use a geographical mapping term, will allow us to triangulate the different sources of information. Let us consider the first bearing as the Black Egyptian voices which are found in Egyptian evidence like the Palermo Stone, the Royal Tablets of Abydos, the Royal Papyrus of Turin, and Manetho’s Chronicle (Diop, 1974). The second bearing is the written documents about Black Egyptians, as conveyed to us by the early Greek scholars like Herodotus and Diodorus (Diop, 1974). The third reference point or bearing of ancient Egyptians comes from a community which in Western academic circles is respected and revered for its ancestral record keeping. The written history of the Jewish people has impacted the world like no other history. Interestingly enough, the Jewish history is intimately intertwined with African history in ways that give us familial bonds as well as, at times, outright hostile warfare. This tumultuous relationship is embodied in the story of the great famine which forced the great Jewish leader and prophet, Abraham, to go into exile in Africa. In this same story, we
also learn that Black Africa not only saved Abraham and his wife from starvation but it also provided Abraham with an African wife when they believed that his wife Sarah was barren. This African wife is reflective of how White patriarchy has exploited Black women. In the Bible titled, *Hurlbut’s Story of the Bible Self-pronouncing: The Complete Bible Story, Running from Genesis to Revelation, Told in Simple Language of To-day for Young and Old: One Hundred and Sixty-eight Stories Each Complete in Itself, and Together Forming a Connected Narrative of the Holy Scripture*, in the book of Genesis, chapter 16, verse 3, it is reported in the following manner: “And Sa’rai A’bram’s wife took Ha’gar her maid the E-gyp’tjan, after A’bram had dwelt ten years in the land of Ca’naan, and gave her to her husband A’bram to be his wife” (Hurlbut, 1904, p.31).

In chapter 41 of Genesis, we learn that Joseph had earned the favour of Pharaoh and was made the governor of all lands in Egypt. We also learn that Joseph was given an Egyptian name, Zaphnath-pa-a-neah which, we are told, means revealer of secrets in Coptic (Hurlbut, 1904). And finally, in reference to Joseph, from the same chapter of 41 in the book of Genesis, in verse 45, we hear that Pharaoh “gave him to wife Ase-nath, the daughter of Po-ti-phe-rah,” who was the priest of On (Hurlbut, 1904, p. 65). This means his wife who was Egyptian, was a Black woman. Now let us turn our attention to Moses. We are told from the Bible text in Exodus that Moses, (his Egyptian given name by his adopted Egyptian Princess mother), the Jewish prophet, was born and raised in Egypt. This being one of the most well-known stories from the Bible I do not need to elaborate. However, let us move to a less publicized story from the biblical book of Numbers, chapter 12, verse1, which reports that Moses had a Black wife: “And Miri-am and Aar’on spake against Moses because of the E-thi-o’pi-an woman whom he had married: for he had married an E-thi-o’pi-an woman” (Hurlbut, 1904, p. 183). We also know that Moses was able to pass for an Egyptian, so what colour was Moses?
Chaim Potok (1978), an insider voice in the Jewish community, answers this question in an indirect way. In his efforts to historicize his Jewish ancestors, he has been forced to address the centrality of Black Africa in the history of the Jewish people. In Chaim Potok’s (1978) book, entitled *Wanderings: Chaim Potok’s History of the Jews*, he has placed a large, striking full page image of Abraham and Sarah before a very Black Egyptian pharaoh on page 34. After searching the internet for a little while, I was able to find the image of this painting under the title of *Abraham and Sarah before Pharaoh* by Commenian Byzantine miniature painter. Vatican Octoteuch at the Vatican Library, Museo Sacro, Museo Profano.\(^43\) Chaim Potok begrudgingly acknowledges that Egyptians were Africans, meaning that they were Black. But he still manages to undermine the development of these Black people by stating:

> From graves we learn that the people were of African stock; later writings tell us that their language contained a strong Semitic element. How a Hamitic people – the African descendants, according to the Bible, of Ham son of Noah – came to have a basically Semitic language remains a mystery, and supports the argument of archaeologists who claim that predynastic Egypt was penetrated by a Semitic people from a still undetermined land or origin; merging with the older inhabitants, they helped turn the land onto the path of civilization. (Potok, 1978, p. 37)

Chaim Potok, like the other critics I am about to introduce, cannot conceive of a powerful Black civilization which has influenced the world. And whenever the evidence is before them, they manage to find some obscure way to deny the contribution of Blackness to the world.

I would like to end this section on Blacks in Antiquity by sharing a story from *The Rescue of Jerusalem: The Alliance between Hebrews and Africans in 701 BC* by Henry T. Aubin (2002). The fascinating part of this story is the main motivation that got Aubin, a Jewish man to

\(^{43}\) Can access image at [http://www.cc-art.com/sampler/Photoart/html/Abraham1.htm#anchorPic1](http://www.cc-art.com/sampler/Photoart/html/Abraham1.htm#anchorPic1)
write a book about how our Black ancestors rescued his Jewish ancestors. Right at the start of his introduction Aubin declares:

I originally undertook this research not as a historian but as a parent. My adopted son happens to be of African descent. In reading him the stories of Hercules, King Arthur, Charlemagne and Daniel Boone that I had loved as a child, and that his older brother had also greatly enjoyed, I saw that these did not resonate with him the same way. Stories that had implicitly affirmed the value of my own and my other son's background, which is white European, meant less to Nick. A subsequent search for tales of heroes from African history turned up disappointingly little material, either historical or legendary, to fire a nine-year-old’s imagination. With my wife’s encouragement, I looked at books on African history for adults to see if they contained raw material that could be adapted. That's how I came across some dry descriptions of a civilization I had barely heard of before, that of the Kushites, or Nubians, who lived in what is now northern Sudan and southernmost Egypt. Their history gripped me immediately. In the late eighth century BC a king of Kush took control of all of Egypt, right up to the Mediterranean, and formed its 25th Dynasty. For two generations Kush was among the most powerful nations anywhere in the Mediterranean world. (2002, p. xv)

I love this story and I find Aubin’s truthfulness humbling. In his quest to love and honour the Blackness of his son, he went in search of truth. It is clear to me Aubin would never have found the truth about Black civilizations in antiquity if he did not have a relationship with Blackness. I think the point Aubin’s story makes is that White people and other races can never honour Blackness until they recognize their familial bonds with Blackness. As long as White people see themselves as being the opposite of Blackness, they will continue to exercise their racism.

Aubin’s *The Rescue of Jerusalem* and Martin Bernal’s (1987) *Black Athena* are works that can be helpful in challenging and changing White racist perspectives while allowing Black scholars to focus most of their energies on educating Black people, who have been the focus of intense assault at both the mental and physical level. The African-centered teachings that I have engaged with so far, affirm our Black power before and beyond colonial engagement. These African-centered teachings draw their intellectual vision of our future from our collective Ubuntu
knowledge. This means their work affirms our ancestor’s work and the distinction between the past and the present becomes the continual regeneration of Ubuntu. To this Ubuntu position I will return after a good, solid engagement with the Eurocentric challenge of Blackness.
The Eurocentric Challenge to Black Civilizations

Jared Diamond’s well known book, *Guns, Germs, and Steel*, is another Eurocentric theory which tries to undermine Blackness. Jared Diamond knows very well that there was only one race in Africa and it was Black. Yet, he asserts the following questions in an effort to lead us astray when he states:

How did those five divisions of humanity get to be where they are now in Africa? Why were blacks the ones who came to be so widespread, rather than the four other groups whose existence Americans tend to forget? How can we ever hope to wrest the answers to those questions from Africa’s preliterate past, lacking the written evidence that teaches us about the spread of the Roman Empire? African prehistory is a puzzle on a grand scale, still only partly solved. (1997, p. 377)

First, Jared Diamond makes it seem like Africa’s history begins in 1000 A.D. The people that he is calling White are people of mixed race between Black Africans and other foreign races. However, Jared Diamond (1997) is grossly dishonest when he speaks about Africa’s preliterate past. Africans were writing thousands of years before Europeans had the notion of writing and scholars have unearthed African records and written materials that go back to 5000 B.C., as demonstrated in the work of Cheikh Anta Diop and many Egyptologists. This evidence is so well established that even classic scholars who are the harshest critics of Afrocentricity, like Mary Lefkowitz (1996), admit that these records are there.

The problem with Jared Diamond (1997) is that he started with the assumption that Africa was the recipient of civilizations and did not give any respect to the fact that Black civilizations gave rise to other civilizations outside of Africa. This is why when he starts to speak about the contributions of Africa, it seems like he is giving token attention when in fact he is highlighting the truth that could not be suppressed any longer. Unfortunately, by the time he
states the truth, which is hidden in the very last few pages of his section on “How Africa Became Black,” his lies have taken away the strength of Black truth. So we hardly react when he truthfully says:

…our first surprise, a big shock for Eurocentric believers in the superiority of so-called Western civilization. We’re taught that Western civilization originated in the Near East, was brought to brilliant heights in Europe by the Greeks and Romans, and produced three of the world’s great religions: Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. Those religions arose among peoples speaking three closely related languages, termed Semitic languages: Aramaic (the language of Christ and the Apostles), Hebrew, and Arabic, respectively. We instinctively associate Semitic peoples with the Near East. However, Greenberg determined that Semitic languages really form only one of six or more branches of a much larger language family, Afroasiatic, all of whose other branches (and other 222 surviving languages) are confined to Africa. Even the Semitic subfamily itself is mainly African, 12 of its 19 surviving languages being confined to Ethiopia. This suggests that Afroasiatic languages arose in Africa, and that only one branch of them spread to the Near East. Hence it may have been Africa that gave birth to the languages spoken by the authors of the Old and New Testaments and the Koran, the moral pillars of Western civilization. (1997, p. 383)

With all this linguistic knowledge that Jared Diamond has gained from Greenberg he does not seriously present the obvious truth that Black Africans left Africa to share their civilizations with other people. Instead, he tries to create confusion about who the Black Egyptians were. I want you to remember what he said earlier on: “How can we ever hope to wrest the answers to those questions from Africa’s preliterate past, lacking the written evidence that teaches us about the spread of the Roman Empire? African prehistory is a puzzle on a grand scale, still only partly solved” (1997, p. 377). Do you remember me criticizing his words? Well, I assure you he did not make them unknowingly. I can tell you that he purposely set out to deceive us because look at what he now has to say when addressing issues of the archaeological evidence:

After all, Egypt by 3000 B.C. was undoubtedly the site of Africa’s most complex society, and one of the world’s earliest centers of writing. In fact, though, possibly
the earliest archaeological evidence for food production in Africa comes instead from the Sahara. Today, of course, much of the Sahara is so dry that it cannot support even grass. But between about 9000 and 4000 B.C. the Sahara was more humid, held numerous lakes, and teemed with game. In that period, Saharans began to tend cattle and make pottery, then to keep sheep and goats, and they may also have been starting to domesticate sorghum and millet. Saharan pastoralism precedes the earliest known date (5200 B.C.) for the arrival of food production in Egypt, in the form of a full package of Southwest Asian winter crops and livestock. (1997, p. 390)

His introduction of the Asian food crops implies a foreign element, which is not a problem if he was willing to acknowledge that Blacks left Africa on trade missions. Instead, he only holds onto the idea that foreigners brought knowledge to the Blacks of Africa. On the other hand, he also holds on to the idea that these foreigners were native to Africa. If you feel confused, I am with you in your confusion. Jared Diamond has created this confusion because Africa is the cradle of civilization. Being as Africa is the cradle of civilization and he is discussing the conquests of compulsory able-bodied Whiteness over the rest of the world, he wants to connect Whiteness to the first civilizations which are Black. Hence, he proposes an argument that Blackness is really not Blackness; it is instead, Yellow, Brown, or Red. Using this argument allows him to then assert that it is also White. In so doing, he asserts White dominance over Black history. Yet, there are still some problems that he has to contend with, for example:

African smiths discovered how to produce high temperatures in their village furnaces and manufacture steel over 2,000 years before the Bessener furnaces of 19th-century Europe and America (p. 394). …When whites finally spread east to encounter the Xhosa at the Fish River in 1702, a period of desperate fighting began. Even though Europeans by then could supply troops from their secure base at the Cape, it took nine wars and 175 years for their armies, advancing at an average rate of less than one mile per year, to subdue the Xhosa. How could whites have succeeded in establishing themselves at the Cape at all, if those first few arriving Dutch ships had faced such fierce resistance? (1997, pp. 394, 397)

Here Jared Diamond is acknowledging that Blacks south of the Sahara had developed mining and smelting technology and Africans in southern Africa, as late as the 1702, were able
to fight off the invading White colonizers. He then questions, how could the Whites have succeeded in establishing themselves in the Cape? If he had bothered to talk to the African Elders and the knowledge keepers he would have learned that the first explorers were welcomed by our African Black ancestors. When our ancestors saw the White people, they treated them as honoured guests because they understood our relational bonds as human beings. This is Ubuntu. Little did our ancestors know that their welcoming behaviour was being perceived as primitive and submissive. Our Black ancestors were extending Ubuntu, meaning they were honouring the humanity of their White relatives. By the time our ancestors realized that the Whites did not come in peace, the war machine was upon them. First from the North then from all directions, our ancestors had met an adversary with no regard for relational ties.

The sad reality is that Jared Diamond is not among the worst of the colonial White academics who endeavour to whitewash the great contributions of Black people. Mary Lefkowitz has made a name for herself through refuting all Afrocentric contributions to academic discourse. Her harsh unsubstantiated propositions, as reflected by the title of her 1996 book: *Not out of Africa: How Afrocentrism Became an Excuse to Teach Myth as History*, make it difficult to appreciate what little good criticism she may have to offer the Afrocentric discourse. Mary Lefkowitz is quick to denounce any claims made by Afrocentric scholars even if these scholars are supported by legendary Greek scholars’ writing from antiquity. Her unwillingness to accept that Blacks contributed greatly to the development of Greeks’ civilization has led her to denounce evidence given by Herodotus and Diodorus as being politically influenced. To support this position she states:

> On their part, the Greeks had from earliest times an abiding respect for the antiquity of Egyptian civilization. Because of this respect, they were willing to report, if not to believe, that their religion originated in Egypt, and that some of
their famous philosophers had studied there, even though neither they nor the Egyptians could provide evidence to support their ideas. (1996, p. 21)

The fact that Greeks have the same religion as Egyptians or that Greeks have legends and heroes that have the same name as those in Egypt and were born in Egypt means nothing to her. She addresses these minor irritants in the following manner:

Greens’ Egyptian origins derives primarily from modern cultural aspirations and has virtually no foundation in historical fact. The question of Greek cultural dependency is more complicated, and in many ways more interesting. There is no doubt that Greeks were influenced by other neighboring cultures during the whole course of antiquity. The issue is rather: What is meant by influence? In what respects? And by which foreign cultures? How large a role did Egypt play in the development of Greek civilization? (1996, p. 53)

Egyptian evidence from antiquity, which attempts to answer the questions that Mary Lefkowitz poses in relation to how Egypt influenced Greek civilization, she dismisses as hearsay. In her opinion, Egyptian evidence is no evidence at all. The way she dismisses Egyptian evidence without any regard from who is giving it, leads to only one conclusion: she can never believe the facts if they come from Black people or from someone who is in a position that supports Black truth and knowledge. She has belittled other scholars like Martin Bernal (1987) for his work which is entitled the Black Athena because he has told the truth about how Black civilizations have impacted and shaped the world. Martin Bernal has made it clear that the geographical position of the Greek civilization is reflective of the influence Egypt had in creating it. Bernal (1987) argues that if European civilization had developed independently there would have been evidence of it in places as far as Germany and other more northern European communities.

Mary Lefkowitz does not seem to see relevance in Martin Bernal’s argument about geographical proximity as reflecting the influence of the older Egyptian civilization on the newer
Greek civilization. In fact, such details she ignores or belittles when confronted with their evidence. Instead of addressing the evidence before her, she would rather viciously attack Black scholars. Just to be clear, I am not asking you to take my word; read what she has to say for yourself. As a sample, I would like to quote one of her attacks addressed towards Black scholars. Passionately she writes:

Evidently we have reached a point in historical study where motive, however perceived, is more important than evidence. Because questions like “Was Cleopatra black?” are asked for cultural reasons, the only acceptable responses will be culturally rather than factually correct: “Yes, she was black because she might possibly have had an Egyptian ancestor, and because as a black she could represent the fate of Africa under European oppression.” Myth has now taken precedence over reality, even in the academy. (1996, p. 52)

Mary Lefkowitz has permanently denied any evidence that has been presented to her showing that Cleopatra was African because she had Black blood coursing through her veins. To Mary Lefkowitz, insinuating that Cleopatra was Black is tantamount to blasphemy. A real Aryan scholar, Hilke Thuer of the Austrian Academy of Sciences is reported on the BBC News as making the sensational discovery:

Queen Cleopatra was a descendant of Ptolemy, the Macedonian general who ruled Egypt after Alexander the Great. But remains of the queen’s sister Princess Arsinoe, found in Ephesus, Turkey, indicate that her mother had an “African” skeleton. Experts have described the results as “a real sensation.” The discovery was made by Hilke Thuer of the Austrian Academy of Sciences. “It is unique in the life of an archaeologist to find the tomb and the skeleton of a member of Ptolemaic dynasty,” she said. “That Arsinoe had an African mother is a real sensation which leads to a new insight on Cleopatra's family and the relationship of the sisters Cleopatra and Arsinoe.” (news.bbc.co.uk)44

http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/also_in_the_news/7945333.stm

44
I wonder if our sister Mary Lefkowitz will now speak to us truthfully about Blackness with this new evidence about Queen Cleopatra. I for one do not hold much hope because before her attack on Afrocentricity she was a relatively unknown scholar; her Eurocentric racism has made her a prominent scholar in Western academic circles. She is well funded in order to maintain her Eurocentric racism. I have no doubt that she has come across evidence that contradicts her position many times and I am sure she has ignored it in order to maintain her recognition. For her to say anything that undermines the position that she propagates at the moment would mean her academic demise. She would disappear into relative obscurity and no one would remember her. This is an example of how colonialism offers rewards for doing its dirty work.

Now, I want you to pay attention to the fact that as I engage colonial Whiteness its racism and attacks on Blackness make it hard to apply the Ubuntu philosophy of relational interconnectedness. How do I enact “I am because you are” when the power of Whiteness only seeks to destroy or oppress Blackness? To give unconditional relational Ubuntu love to Whiteness is to risk aiding our own annihilation. Our Ubuntu ancestors have also warned us about giving unchecked love, this point is captured by Baba’s favourite saying: “If you keep picking up a log which keeps burning you, we will conclude that the problem is with you and not the log.” This point of learning from the past is the central message communicated when we say: “Wana wa njoka de njoka” which means: “The child of a snake can only be a snake.” Now, I know there are those of you who question: “Is there no hope beyond racism?” To this question I answer, there is a lot of hope; Blackness has and is paying the price of hope through our enslavement, through our oppression and through our dispossession. What else can we give and what has Whiteness given to our relational interconnectedness?
I will tell you what Whiteness is giving to our relational interconnectedness-Token colonial rewards which keep us distracted from living authentic Ubuntu lives. These colonial tactics are reflected in the work of Keith B. Richburg (1997) who wrote *Out of America: A Black Man Confronts Africa*. Keith, a Washington Post journalist, confronts the very serious and ugly reality of present-day Africa. But he never questions how this ugliness came to be. Keith is the modern day Black approximation to the adventure travel writer. Keith's writing has the sloppiness of *Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad in that it erases Africa of any humanity and, for this; the White media welcomes Keith into the fold of compulsory able-bodied Whiteness, albeit at the margins. Compulsory able-bodied Whiteness embraces the Eurocentric distortions which keep Africa in a state of confusion and chaos. We see this when Keith shares sentiments like:

So excuse me if I sound cynical, jaded. I’m beaten down, and I’ll admit it. And it’s Africa that has made me this way. I feel for her suffering, I empathize with her pain, and now, from afar, I still recoil in horror whenever I see yet another television picture of another tribal slaughter, another refugee crisis. But most of all I think: Thank God my ancestors got out, because, now, I am not one of them. In short, thank God that I am an American. (1997, p. xviii)

White Euro-America shows its gratitude at not having to express its own racism when a Black man does it for them. Unfortunately, after all these years of anti-colonialism, one could ask why compulsory able-bodied Whiteness is still successful in seducing Black people and I am sure there are many answers to this question. I would like to put forward that compulsory able-bodied Whiteness is successful at the game of colonizing because Whiteness delivers its shining trinkets (the illusion of political power, economic power over our people but not over Whiteness, military weapons, so that we can better dominate our relatives and a little money so that they can exploit our natural resources) which keep seducing all of us towards it. Even though Blackness is only viewed from the low margins of approximating Whiteness, it (Whiteness) creates a fallacy
of exceptionalism which makes individual Black people feel closer to compulsory able-bodied Whiteness. I see this when compulsory able-bodied Whiteness says to Keith:

Certainly Out of America is the most honest book to emerge from Africa in a long time.... If Richburg is grateful to be an American, we should be no less grateful to count him as one of our international journalists—honest, compelling, insightful. —USA Today. (Richburg, 1997, p. i)

Compulsory able-bodied Whiteness, in its recognition of Keith, keeps mobilizing its media apparatus to call his confusion and chaos: honest, hard-hitting, fair play, plain speaking and brave. Whereas, the truth is that Whiteness is in fact congratulating and recognizing its own insidious co-optation skills which it keeps using to divide Black people further apart. Alberto Moravia set the stage for Keith Richburg to view Blackness with shame and hopelessness. Alberto Moravia, in his book Which Tribe Do You Belong To?, does not attempt to hide his racism when he states:

Africans shrug their shoulders when people speak of the so-called ‘discoveries’ of Africa. There was nothing to discover, they say; Africa has always existed, like Asia, with its civilization and its cultures; ‘discovery’ is an unsuitable word which goes to indicate, especially, a Eurocentric presumption. Perfectly true. But the fact remains that this word has been used for Black Africa; whereas, on the contrary, nobody would have dreamt of applying it to India or China. And why? Probably because the moment for the African cultures had not yet arrived; anthropological studies were still only beginning; Negro art had not yet influenced European artists. Anyhow, let us put forward two interpretations of the word ‘discovery’: one aggressive and the other receptive. The explorers of the nineteenth century, such as Stanley, Livingstone, Baker, Speke and Burton, ‘discovered’ the sources of the Nile in an aggressive sense. Nothing in their writings suggests that their explorations in Africa enriched them culturally, aesthetically, morally, etc. In reality they were there not so much to admire and understand as to annex and to conquer. Annexation and conquest were at first, so to speak, psychological; then political, military and administrative. But I myself, who am now travelling by car towards the sources of the Nile, will discover them, on the contrary, in a receptive sense. That is to say, I shall admire and understand. Receptive discovery, in short, is above all an experience that enlarges our horizons. (Moravia, 1974, p. 146)
There is one good thing about racist people writing, we do not have to read between the lines.

For example Moravia has clearly put his hateful racism without mincing his words. There is no confusion about what he means when he states:

But in Africa the tribal culture which preceded colonialism had no truly historical characteristic features: there, we still find ourselves not so much in history as in prehistory. Furthermore, African nationalism cannot count upon the transplantation into Africa of an ancient European culture, as in Latin America. Colonialism in Africa, moreover, has lasted for three centuries less than in Latin America; besides, it is not a colonialism for purposes of population but of mere exploitation. People went to Latin America in order to stay there; they went to Africa to enrich themselves and then go back home. Even colonialism, in fact, does not make history in Africa, it is merely a chapter in European history. But then, since there is a lack of history of any kind whatever, from whence should the African nationalism of tomorrow derive its starting-point? (Moravia, 1974, p. 116)

Other scholars may want to challenge me by stating that I have chosen the one obscure piece of writing which supports my position but if you know literature you will know that Alberto Moravia was regarded as one of the best Italian literary novelist of the 20th century. On the first page of his book, *The Times* review considers his work as the “observational gifts and narrative realism of a skilled fiction writer and journalist” (1974, p.1). On the back cover of this book, *The Times Educational Supplement, Times Literary Supplement* and *The Observer* all rave about the authenticity and understanding of the African realities that Moravia demonstrates. Yet, I only heard racism when I read his work.

To Moravia, even the bodies of water that we find sacred are symbols to him of primitiveness. He sees the natural resources of Africa as too plentiful. He also makes it clear that Africans cannot manage these resources and he does not consider our relational bonds to nature because his worldview does not allow him to think in relational connection. Even when our people tried to explain to him our worldview and our relational bonds to all elements, he only
saw this as evidence of our primitiveness. Moravia makes it clear that nothing about Blackness or Africa is real or beautiful until the White man makes it so. Moravia supports this point when he says:

The region of the great African lakes, disposed in a semicircle beginning with Lake Rudolph and then continuing with Lake Victoria, Lake Albert, Lake George and Lake Edward, is still today one of the wildest and most uninhabited in Africa. Even the names of these lakes, names of European princes and monarchs, confirm, by their too-recent character, this sense of historical emptiness and human desertedness, just as happens with the various ‘lands’ of the Arctic and the Antarctic which are also baptized with the proper names of kings and potentates of the period of so-called ‘discoveries.’ Are they beautiful, these lakes? No, they are not. The sky of Africa, which is rarely serene and, when it is, is dimmed by the sultry heat, gives them a metallic colouring between grey and a leaden blue, oppressive and melancholy. Limitless, veritable fresh-water seas, it is impossible to see the end of them, so that the eye cannot take pleasure in the contour of their shores. (Moravia, 1974, p. 140)

This kind of hatred and racism spewed by Moravia has support because there are books upon books dedicated towards breaking the Black spirit. Even Keith Richburg’s denigration of his Blackness has a memory of how his community and family are absorbed into the toxic, distorted White projection of Blackness. Interestingly, Keith Richburg's perception of Blackness is informed by compulsory able-bodied Whiteness, yet for most of the book he never questions this and the few times that he does question it, whether it’s in Africa or in America, he seems more comfortable with blaming the victims of compulsory able-bodied Whiteness rather than confronting Whiteness. I see this when Keith recalls his childhood in Detroit:

Before the riots—in fact, all through my childhood—black people were “colored.” Or Negroses. Never “black.” When I was a kid, the word “black” had kind of a negative connotation to it. Someone who was considered handsome would be invariably described as “brown skinned.” To call someone “black” or “black skinned” was the lowest form of derision. It meant field hand. Ugly. Country. And when it was tossed around in the rhyming, singsong cadence of my southern relatives during those fun family gatherings, “black” would often come out in description as “that ugly black nigger,” or “sit your black ass down.” (Richburg, 1997, p. 13)
What Keith Richburg describes about Blackness in Detroit is related to what he describes about Blackness in Africa. In both cases, Blackness has been made to turn against itself through the deceitfulness of compulsory able-bodied Whiteness. Even great thinkers like Hannah Arendt who engage White power will only do it from the structural sensibility of their Whiteness. At an early time in her work, interestingly, Hannah Arendt (1958) gave us hope when she spoke about our total humanity in *The Human Condition*. In this work, she seems to transcend the limitations of racial politics by capturing humanity’s interdependence in the same way Ubuntu does when she states:

> Human plurality, the basic condition of both action and speech, has the twofold character of the equality and distinction…. In man, otherness, which he shares with everything that is, and distinctness, which he shares with everything alive, becomes uniqueness, and human plurality is the paradoxical plurality of unique beings. (1958, p. 175)

But when Blackness challenges White racism, the same Hannah Arendt who saw our relational humanity becomes fearful of losing her White privilege and therefore minimizes our Black struggle and suffering. In her fear which is supported by her Whiteness, she critiques Blackness from a White racist position in her work titled, *On Violence*. Hannah Arendt (1970) states with limited knowledge or purposeful dishonesty that:

> Serious violence entered the scene only with the appearance of the Black Power movement on the campuses. Negro students, the majority of them admitted without academic qualification, regarded and organized themselves as an interest group, the representatives of the black community. Their interest was to lower academic standards. They were more cautious than the white rebels, but it was clear from the beginning … that violence with them was not a matter of theory and rhetoric (p. 18)… [I]t seems that the academic establishment, in its curious tendency to yield more to Negro demands, even if they are clearly silly and outrageous, than to the disinterested and usually highly moral claims of the white rebels…. The yielding of university authorities to black demands has often been explained by the ‘guilt feelings’ of the white community; I think it is more likely that faculty as well as administrations and boards of trustees are half-consciously aware of the obvious truth of a conclusion of the official *Report on Violence in*
America: ‘Force and violence are likely to be successful techniques of social control and persuasion when they have wide popular support.’ (1970, pp. 18, 19)

When Hannah Arendt states that serious violence came with the Black Power movement on the campuses she is telling us that the violence experienced by Black people at the hands of White people was not serious on campuses. She is also telling us that the Black experience in American, as expressed by Black people, is not knowledge production in the White, meaningful way and useful academic way and, by extension, I take it that she is telling us that the only experience that matters is the White experience. If Blackness makes its self visible then Whiteness demonizes Blackness into invisibility. You can see this when Hannah Arendt (1970) responds to the Black violence by stating: “No doubt, ‘violence pays,’ but the trouble is that it pays indiscriminately, for ‘soul course and Swahili as well as for real reforms” (p. 80). This political work makes it clear that Whiteness is only willing to make Blackness visible on its terms. This is how Whiteness in our social political educational systems tries to erase Blackness. This means that as long as we, Black people, keep our focus on Whiteness we will never experience the power of Blackness. My point is not to create ways to annihilate White power because, like everything else, it too has its place in our relational bonds. My point is to highlight Black power, which has been submerged, undermined, denigrated and demonized, to its rightful place of great power. I also think that Whiteness needs to take serious action to demonstrate its commitment to relational interconnectedness with Blackness. A good starting point for demonstrating colonial Whiteness’ readiness to create change would be the establishment of reparations for colonial injustice. This would be a good starting step towards closing the ugly history of racism and opening a new chapter of respecting our relational interconnectedness. In the next section, Ubuntu knowledge gives power to Blackness.
Black Empowerment in Action

To leave our Ubuntu stories out of our scholarship is to help compulsory able-bodied Whiteness mark our Black memories as erasable, which leads to the enslavement of Black minds. This point was clearly communicated by Steve Biko in *I Write What I Like* where he tells us that: “At the heart of this kind of thinking is the realization by blacks that the most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed” (1996, p. 68). In different geopolitical locations across the globe, other Black people have expressed their Black consciousness in response to colonialism and in this respect; Marcus Garvey’s Pan-Africanism stands out because it was one of the first popular theories to unite Black people into global political action. Marcus Garvey saw his Pan-Africanism as having one major goal, the upliftment of Black people regardless of their present geographic location but was very clear that the Black person’s ancestral home was Africa and, therefore, the development of Africa was intricately connected with the development of Black people globally. The oneness of Black people which was central to Marcus Garvey’s Pan-Africanism can also be expressed as “Umuntu ngumuntu ngubuntu” meaning, “I, Blackness exist because they, Blackness exist.” Marcus Garvey exemplified this Ubuntuness by saying:

The masses of Negroes in America, the West Indies, South and Central America are in sympathetic accord with the aspirations of the native Africans. We desire to help them build up Africa as the Negro Empire, where every Black man, whether he was born in Africa or in the Western world, will have the opportunity to develop on his own line under the protection of the most favorable democratic institutions. (Garvey, 1969, pp. 71-72)

At a later time in South Africa, Steve Biko took up the issue of Blackness in an effort to raise Ubuntu social-consciousness in an oppressive and racist White governing South Africa. Biko believed that the Ubuntu struggle in South Africa had to be fortified with a strong rooted
Black social self identity as this was the only way to fight the undermining of Black minds.

Biko’s Black Consciousness had its beginning in Pan-Africanism and the lessons being learned from the Black struggle in America. Hence, in South Africa the Black Consciousness theory became the Ubuntu intellectual tool for exposing the whitewashing trickery of White racism. As a way of clarifying this point, Biko tells us:

> Not only have the whites been guilty of being on the offensive but, by some skilful maneuvers, they have managed to control the responses of the Blacks to the provocation. Not only have they kicked the black but they have also told him how to react to the kick. For a long time the black has been listening with patience to the advice he has been receiving on how best to respond to the kick. With painful slowness he is now beginning to show signs that it is his right and duty to respond to the kick in the way he sees fit. (Biko, 1996, p. 66)

It is clear that Biko believes that, as Black people, we must work for our freedom using our own knowledge because if we fail to find our own solution then we will keep looking to other races for our freedom. The truth is that no one can give Black people freedom, except Black people.

In the growing fragments of Black liberation theories, Molefi Kete Asante’s Afrocentricity philosophy stands out because it is an empowering, holistic, Black social movement theory. Afrocentricity is rooted in African spirituality which means it nurtures the Black social individual using a holistic Afrocentric global perspective about Blackness while being rooted in the experience of African Americans, as this is the context of its creation. Afrocentricity communicates that “I am because you are” while finding most of its examples from the history of African Americans (Asante, 1996). About our Ubuntuness, Asante has this to say:

> We have one African Cultural System manifested in diversities. All African people participate in the African Cultural System although it is modified according to specific histories and nations. In this way, we know that Yoruba, Asante, Wolof, Ewe, Nuba, and African-Americans possess values and beliefs
derived from their own particular histories yet conforming to the African Cultural System. All cultural systems are responsive to the environment; ours is no different but it is better for us because it is derived from our own historical experiences while maintaining fidelity in its best form to the African Cultural System (Asante, 1987) (in 1996, p.2).... Afrocentricism teaches us to honor Jamestown where the first bloods truly destined touched the American earth; to honor Thebes, the most sacred city; to honor Oshogbo where the healing waters flow; to honor Lake Bosumtwi where the God of Africa dwells; to honor the sacred spot where Nat Turner planned his revolt in Virginia. We have within our own history the most sacred and holiest places on the earth. Afrocentricism directs us to visit them and meditate on the power of our ancestors. (Asante, 1996, pp. 2, 4)

I would like to point out that there are many other expressions of Ubuntuness that I have left out and this is not because they are identical to the ones I have highlighted. It is just that there are too many unique Black experiences as embodied in other geopolitical locations like Papua New Guinea, the Caribbeans, the Middle East, Europe, India, Philippines and elsewhere globally to individually mention each one. All these Black stories are relationally interconnected and are saying to each other, “I am because you are.” This is the power of Ubuntu which is seeing our relational interconnectedness as Blackness. Yet, to get to this point of being able to talk about Ubuntuness, there are some contradictions that make this story possible. First, while reflecting on my experience here in Canada I have come to understand that I am here in Canada because compulsory able-bodied Whiteness was there in Zimbabwe. Second, it was a White woman who helped me get into Canada; she thought she had found love, I knew I had found my way to compulsory able-bodied Whiteness.

On my first travels to England from the orphanage in Zimbabwe, a wealthy White friend paid for the trip and accommodated me in London. While living with her and her family she taught me an important lesson about how to succeed and be wealthy in a western context. She told me: “Remember everyone can be used to help you get on top. This does not mean you do not care about them, it just means that you will use them.” I took her counsel unquestioningly
and it was not until 1998 when I started to question the wisdom of using other people. And third, it was being here in the relative safety of Canada with the supportive resources that it offers to disabled students that I have been able to think about Ubuntu. But there is tension here because I fight the labelling of Blackness as disability. I fight the labelling of Blackness as disability because this is another colonial tactic by compulsory able-bodied Whiteness used to undermine Blackness. As I fight to maintain the war against compulsory able-bodied Whiteness, I am silent about the disability within Blackness. Can I talk about Blackness and disability without White connotations? I have other tensions that I must face. For example, the same Canada that supports me is responsible for the genocidal policies that undermine Indigenous governance on Turtle Island; it has not done any better for the old Black communities like Africville in Halifax where they tried to erase any memory of the existence of Blackness (Nelson, 2008; Clairmont, 1999).

The disability community also bears scars of inequality as substantiated by the report of *The Urban Poverty Consortium of Waterloo Region*, October 11, 2000. In their report they state:

> People with long-term limitations have a greater chance of living below the LICO [Low Income Cutoffs]. The maximum benefit payable under the Province of Ontario's Disability Support Program (ODSP) to a single person with a disability is $930.00 per month - $314.00 below the LICO.\(^{45}\)

The point here is that you can be White but from the position of Whiteness your disability makes your Whiteness a useless form of Whiteness.

> If we are alarmed by our previous engagement with Canada’s largest school board; The Toronto District School Board where they report an disquieting 40 per cent dropout rate among

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\(^{45}\) Report was taken from: http://www.waterlooregion.org/poverty/talk/3.html
Black students\textsuperscript{46} we should be shocked into action by even lower educational attainment in Indigenous communities, where it is reported that: “Seventy per cent of young aboriginal adults living on Manitoba reserves have not completed high school — the highest dropout rate among on-reserve youth in Canada, a senior analyst said Thursday” to the Canadian Broadcasting Centre, commonly known as CBC news.\textsuperscript{47} There is no way such low educational attainment would be accepted if this phenomenon was disproportionately affecting more White Canadian kids. If this was a White phenomenon, it would be the biggest election issue in Canadian history and the rest of us Coloured people would join them in their fight. I believe the question on the White voting citizen's mind would be: “How is our educational system failing our children?” At the same time, all media apparatuses would be searching relentlessly for the reason of the educational system failure while, for sure, all academic think tanks would be scrambling to find the steps that rectify this situation. Better yet, they would hold the government accountable if they had not already replaced them with another government that promised immediate changes. But this is not the response that we have gotten. Why? Because I am not talking about your typical White children. I can make this conclusion because no drastic action has been taken by the government; there is no public outcry\textsuperscript{48} against the government, except from small pressure groups which pose no real threat to the status quo. There is only one question in the media, which is in fact the White question and arguably, is the White Canadian government’s question. I will also add here that, in some cases, this is the same question in the minds of some people of colour. I hope you are ready; here is the question: What is wrong with these coloured children?

\textsuperscript{46} The Star paper Available from: http://www.parentcentral.ca/parent/article/445172

\textsuperscript{47} Available at: http://www.cbc.ca/canada/manitoba/story/2006/12/07/aboriginal-education.html.

\textsuperscript{48} If there is an outcry which seldom happens, the focus and response of intervention is aimed at highlight the deficits of our children as reflected by The Review of the Roots of Youth Violence: Executive Summary report.
Yet, the more important question of how the system is failing our children seldom comes up and if it does it is likely to be met with silence, or at worst it is quieted down with small tokenism. Staying on the theme of tokenism I am reminded that in 2007, British Columbia marked the 100th anniversary of the 1907 anti-Asian riots in Vancouver where White racist people went around downtown Vancouver destroying mostly property owned by Asians and South Asians (see Sugimoto, 1978).

Yet White Canada marks this tragic history as if it is an isolated incident and as if this past has no bearing on the present. This is a “White” lie because if you think I am only digging up the distant past, think again. In 2002, I had a White person who, until then, I considered a dear friend inform me that she was afraid of the “Asian invasion” in British Columbia. She stated: “We welcome everyone with their different cultures and beliefs, this is what makes Canada multicultural, but this does not change the fact that Canada is a Christian, European country.” At this point I asked, “What about the Indigenous peoples?” She looked at me and for a brief moment hesitated and then very matter-of-factly stated: “We made some mistakes and now we will not let other people make those mistakes with us.” In her statement, she makes null and void the presence of the Indigenous people in Canada while declaring that diversity in the Canadian context is and must always be determined by compulsory able-bodied Whiteness.

Make no mistake, without Indigenous people there would be no Canada. It is Indigenous knowledge that kept the first White settlers alive. In present times, Canada needs foreign immigrants to maintain its economic growth and diversify to other markets. This point is well captured by Alison Ramsey who questions:

Is there a market here for skilled labour? Actually, Canada is seeing signs of worker shortages in several professions – including engineers, doctors and nurses, to name a few. Added to this is the fact that the population in some provinces is
shrinking, and employers are having difficulty filling their rosters with skilled help. Paul Darby, director of the Conference Board of Canada, estimates a shortfall of 3 million skilled workers by the year 2020....The lack is not just in professions that require higher education. The worst off are employers looking for skilled construction workers, who reported 7.7 percent of jobs went unfilled. They are followed closely by the business services and agriculture sectors. Hospitals and the personal service sector ranked tenth at 3.8 percent. The need is greatest in Manitoba, Ontario and Alberta.49

The Canadian government tells immigrants from the four corners of the globe that this is the best country to live in. This may be true but it does not erase the inequity faced by Canadian Blacks, Asian, Muslims, First Nations, people with disabilities and the list goes on. Let me bring another tension here. The seduction of compulsory able-bodied Whiteness does not affect all White Canadian people and it does not affect all White Canadian academic scholars because if this were true I would not be where I am today. Yes, I can say there are some exceptional White people but in this time and age is it realistic for me to wait for the exceptional White people to help me? If I do this, what message am I communicating to Black youth? What legacy am I leaving my children? I would say I am leaving our Black youth and my children a legacy of inequality. My point in telling this story is to challenge inequalities and acknowledge the struggle of Blackness in Canada while being a part of the challenge that changes education so that African knowledge is not accepted on exceptional basis. I want to see African knowledge be supported as European knowledge is supported in Canadian institutions.

Admittedly, before I started this journey of self discovery, I had signed up to be admitted into White Canadian society. I see now the absurdity of a Black man being admitted into a White society as an equal. Can the same society, which was designed to destroy my Black spirit, while

nurturing my Black physique for the role of beast of burden, now nurture my total being? Such knowledge is stored in my memory, in our stories and in our sacred ecologies. Now that I am awakening to my reality, such contradictions seem almost comical. Let me be clear, Brothers and Sisters, such questions are of colonialism and they keep me focused on colonialism when my focus should be Ubuntu. Through Ubuntu I am letting hate go and I am focusing on love but I will not forget the lessons that made me vulnerable to colonialism.

George Dei tells us: “[T]ransformative teaching must examine how notions of self, personhood, place, history, culture and belongingness to community are manifested in a specific cultural contexts/values” (2002, p. 7). Hence, as an Ubuntu I see my personal stories as the best starting point for honest truthful engagement with others. Personal stories become researchable material because our stories are our honest efforts to learn from each other. We need these stories because they are the medicines that heal hate, pain, isolation and the desire for revenge. Now that we are linked by this story, where do I end and where do you begin? Could the sacred spiritual cycle of breath connect the past, the present and the future into one, Ubuntu? In this millet granary I have tried to engage some of the conversations going on about our Blackness and, from this engagement, I have set a specific Black directional orientation for us. In this orientation I have conveyed that honest critical Black knowledge production is our way forward because it is the focus of relational love while being wary of the colonial usurpers who would distract us from our Ubuntuness. In the next millet granary, I will conclude by summing up what I perceive as the main points as communicated from my location.
I tell stories not to play on your sympathy, but to suggest how stories can control our lives... Stories are wondrous things. And they are dangerous [things too] (p.9).... For once the story is told, it cannot be called back (p. 10).... [A] story told one way could cure, that the same story told another way could injure... “They aren’t just entertainment / Don’t be fooled / They are all we have, you see / All we have to fight off / Illness and death. You don’t have anything / If you don't have the stories (p.92).”

-Thomas King, 2003

It is only fitting that I end this work with a story that starts with: “Paivapo,” (There once was) a time when human beings and animals could telepathically communicate. During this period of history, when human beings wanted meat, they went into the forest and asked for an animal that was ready to go to the spirit world to present itself and, before killing the animal, the human being would explain his/her actions and then thanked the animal for offering itself.

It was after performing such a ritual that a hunter was returning home with an old eland. As he neared home he heard his family crying. He dropped the eland and ran to investigate the problem. As soon as the hunter’s wife saw him, she explained that an elephant had taken over their home. At this point the hunter asked his wife if she had tried explaining to the elephant that this was their home and she informed him that she had tried but her efforts had failed. She told her husband that the elephant had justified his actions by stating that possession was nine tenths of the law. The elephant had also informed her that, since he had possession, he was going to use any means at his disposal to protect his property.

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50 This Ubuntu pictograph (in Mutwa 1964 p. 678) symbolizes hope and it has been my aim to inspire hopeful action through sharing stories.
Afraid of antagonizing the elephant, the hunter circumvented his old homestead, on his way to organizing a meeting about the problem elephant. After gathering us together. He clears his throat and says: “For as long as I have lived I have never seen animals behaving in the strange manner that elephants are doing. It started with them destroying our fields but we all agreed that this was bound to happen because we shared space. Now an elephant has taken over my home and he is unwilling to listen to common sense. On top of this, the elephant is threatening any human being that comes near my home. My question to you is this: Do we believe this is an exceptional elephant or do we believe that this is the start of a planned attack by elephants against us?”

Someone yells: “Look, we all saw this coming; these elephants have been taking over everything. If we do not do something now, we will soon all be out of a home, my suggestion is that we attack the elephants first and rid ourselves of the problem!”

Someone else yells: “I think we need to think about the consequence of our actions for our future and for our relational interconnectedness with all beings.”

Someone else yells: “The problem is that we do not understand elephant logic. If we want to resolve this problem, then we must learn elephant logic. Once we understand elephant logic, then we can use it to reason with the elephants.”

Someone else yells: “In the past when our ancestors had problems with our other relatives they just moved. Why do we not move?”

Someone else yells: “I do not want to use elephant logic because I do not want to behave like an elephant but I also do not want to move onto the territory of our other relatives. This means for me, I will only fight when I have to protect my home and family.”
Someone else yells: “We need action and less talk.”

Someone else yells: “Hey, reader what actions do you have to recommend for resolving this problem? Speak now or forever hold your peace.”

Someone else yells: “Can we trust this unknown reader with such an important matter?”

An elder speaking confidently but quietly, says: “Reader, speak your thoughts, after all what is put into action here will affect all of us. Do you see our greater responsibility?”

In this work, I have advanced that sharing personal memories and stories will produce a foundation for educational engagement on honouring our Black diverse knowledge productions. Ubuntuness teaches me that my Black ancestors are guiding my way. Working from an African centered approach ensures that I start from my Ubuntu knowledge and work towards our collective Ubuntu knowledge.

I have located my voice as a way of highlighting my responsibility to the people who taught me this contextual knowledge that I share with you. Using Ubuntu Epistemology, I tried to show you how we are a continuation of our ancestor’s legacy or, put another way, we are a reflection of their existence. Our well-being is their well-being. We know ourselves because we exist and we exist because they exist. This way of thinking has its roots in the most important guiding philosophical principle of Ubuntu: “Umuntu ungumuntu ngubuntu,” which very loosely and very poorly translated means: A person is a person among other persons or a person is a person only through their relationships with others; there is also a sense that humanity is bound up in one. The realm of the spiritual and the realm of the living become one through the teachings of Ubuntu.
Most importantly, I have shared these stories with you in hope that they will guide you as well as they have guided me. Stories are our ways of trying to find common meaning from our unique experiences as this confirms our interrelatedness. There are so many stories that could be told but I have chosen to tell you these stories. I hope the way I have told you these stories has also exposed my intentions which is to honour our Black knowledge production and love our Blackness. Yet, my stories (now your stories) can never be the whole truth because I am giving them to you through my experiences which are different from that of Baba and Amai (mother). So I wonder if the commonalities of our experiences are enough to give you a whole truth. By telling you this story, I have given it to you. It was my story until the telling; what you hold in your memory of this story is yours. I wonder, from your social location, what have you made different, what have you removed, and what have you kept as the constant theme which binds us to each other and to our ancestors.

Time has come and gone’ that which I was is no longer the same, it has changed but some fragmented influence of that experience is here as memory. This social phenomenon of remembering is important for learning as it stores all kinds of experiences. Remembering is further enhanced in its effectiveness by the fact that it is a social phenomenon which engages experience, imagination and motivation. To me, the drum in the right hands is like a log book of messages which communicates stories of love, the arrival of a new life, the exit of an old life, union, war and so many other intricate messages. The caves are our libraries; they are full of pictographs, hieroglyphics and petroglyphs which communicate to us about the past, the present and the future.

These Black teaching stories are ours regardless of where you are on the globe; hear them and they will connect you back home to Africa. Yet, do not fear to regenerate this knowledge
because you are Kwaca (the freedom spirit of dawn, the renewed beginning of the Black spirit). Respectfully remember that this experience of Blackness does not have precedence over other Black experiences. In fact, I have tried to express that the experience of Ubuntuness can be used to show the commonalities of Blackness without undermining the diversity within Blackness. I have also spoken of the oneness of Blackness which has its roots in Africa. This oneness, I have argued, is Blackness as reflected by other Black people. In the case of our ancestors, their social communal self recognition was what they termed Ubuntu and the knowledge that they acquired and have given to us they have taught us to identify as Ubuntu epistemology. In the story, I expressed this by stating that the memory we have of ourselves is what we the descendants of the old Ubuntu ethnic groups call Ubuntu knowledge, which is the expression of our Blackness as experienced by our ancestors and now us. I told you that I write and remember my Ubuntu history as a way of awakening my total self. Yet, I also know that our Ubuntu past history resides in all of us and we acquire more of it through sharing reflective stories of our memories as they connect us to each other and to our ancestral selves. In our honouring ceremonies of our ancestors we formalize the remembering of our ancestral knowledge as the blueprint for regenerating the present using our past knowledge and experiences.

I have gone through the colonial education system and now, more than ever, I see the value of Ubuntu for the development of a strong, diverse Blackness. This being said, I must also acknowledge that I am not the same as when I went in. I have survived the colonial system but I have changed too. I question a little more, I speak a little less, I listen a little harder, and I wonder a little more. But the most important thing that I do is that I pray a little more to our ancestors and I thank them a little more for my life. Malidoma Patrice Somâe (1994), in *Of Water and The Spirit*, reminds us that if some of us had to forget the spiritual past as a way to survive, then some of us will have to remember the spiritual past as a way to survive too. All
these stories and many others are necessary for creating our whole identity as Ubuntu. Our stories are our healing gifts to each other. We need these stories like we need medicine. Stories are the medicines of our spirits and our souls because we are stories among other stories.

Relatives from the maternal family, I come in thanks and honour because without you there would be no me. Relatives from the paternal family, I hope you will keep welcoming us all home. I hope our being away has not left a void that we cannot fill with love. May you help us feel whole again. May you help us connect with the old and may you make room for the new family members that we bring to you. Now that we are linked by this story, where do I end and where do you begin? Could the sacred spiritual cycle of breath connect the past, the present and the future into one, Ubuntu?
Reference


