INTELLECTUALITY FOR LIBERATION:
EXPLORING ANTI-OPPRESSION, PRAXIS, AND CARE

by

Andrew Abraham

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Graduate Department of Social Justice Education
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
University of Toronto

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Abstract

This thesis will argue that liberal education is inadequate for anti-oppressive praxis. I aim to explore notions of knowledge, intellectuality, praxis, and care that are compatible with anti-oppressive praxis. While intellectuals often traverse the academy, the task of the anti-oppressive intellectuals is to situate themselves such that they can understand and articulate the material conditions of oppressed people. The anti-oppressive intellectual's role is to develop and communicate understandings of the world that contribute to the liberation of people from oppressive conditions. This thesis aims to explore and promote notions of care and integrity that I argue can undergird and guide a viable approach to genuine anti-oppressive intellectual praxis.
Dedication

To our revolutionary ancestors, thank you for reminders.
# Table of Contents

Abstract ............................................................................................................................................. ii

Dedication ........................................................................................................................................ iii

Introduction: Some Ways I Relate With What You Are About to Read ...................................................... 1

Outline of This Thesis ........................................................................................................................ 6

Part One ............................................................................................................................................ 9

  Western Education .............................................................................................................................. 9
  Education as Growth ............................................................................................................................. 13
  Beyond Liberal Education ....................................................................................................................... 16
  Culture of Silence .................................................................................................................................... 19
  Anti-Oppressive Definitional Power ....................................................................................................... 20
  Summary ................................................................................................................................................. 23

Part Two .......................................................................................................................................... 24

  Knowledge is Embodied, Situated, and Locatable ................................................................................. 24
  Interruption, Analogy, and Violence ...................................................................................................... 28
  The Warrior, Violence, and Analogy ....................................................................................................... 32
  Summary ................................................................................................................................................. 41

Part Three ........................................................................................................................................ 43

  More About Intellectuals ........................................................................................................................ 43
  More About Praxis .................................................................................................................................. 45
  Praxis and Care ....................................................................................................................................... 46
  Praxis and Integrity ................................................................................................................................ 49
  Praxis and Self-Care ............................................................................................................................... 52
  Concluding Statements .......................................................................................................................... 55

Postscript: Poetry ............................................................................................................................. 59

  Reading My Intentions ............................................................................................................................ 59
  Less Talk, More Action ........................................................................................................................... 63
  Kande Mbeu (Throw the Seed) ............................................................................................................... 66

References ....................................................................................................................................... 69
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Introduction: Some Ways I Relate With What You Are About to Read

you might have heard it before
and it is new to me
and that might not matter to you
but it will
when i do

In this thesis I will examine and draw connections among some ideas and arguments relevant to my research interests. Currently I do not tend to locate myself within a specific field or academic discipline, though my approach is influenced by my academic training in philosophy and sociology. Still, the literature I will examine might do more to trace the learning processes entailed in my reading more about my research interests than to trace the boundaries or histories of an academic discipline. The connections I will draw among the ideas included in this thesis, I hope, trace some of the boundaries, paths, and intersections of my understandings of and hopes for concepts or ideologies like anti-colonialism, anti-imperialism, anti-oppression, liberation, education, violence, and care more than they trace the boundaries of distinct fields or disciplines. While I have not yet managed to congeal a satisfactory set of useful and liberatory disciplinary boundaries and organizing concepts, for now I hope to sincerely, if not always with sufficient rigor, examine and trudge and skim through academic literature, blogs, stories, and everyday conversations toward an anti-oppressive intellectuality
and liberatory praxis\textsuperscript{1}. For now I am less concerned with trying to avoid reinventing the wheel than with learning more about how to tend the earth on which wheels might roll.

This thesis project is a requirement for the completion of my Master of Arts degree, and it will make possible my removal from the academy with the attendant accreditation. The reading and argumentation that this thesis entailed served to help me link some of the ideas I have been exploring during my time at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE), and to test how they might fit together.

While I was a student at OISE, I identified more as a community worker and organizer than as an academic, and while those identities are not necessarily mutually exclusive I was prudent to carefully manage my investments in them. The joy and relevance I often find working in community seem to require attentiveness and protection from the encroachment of oppressive conceptualizations of intellectuality that often seem to flourish in academic spaces. I am sometimes at fault for such encroachments, and I find it useful to distance my identity from and limit my personal investment in the academy so that it is less likely to unduly affect my perspective and work.

Lately, the broad fields, ideologies, and concepts around which I have found interesting literature and conversation include anti-colonialism, critical race theory, revolutionary Pan-Afrikanism, and anti-oppressive and subversive studies generally. I am interested in anti-

\textsuperscript{1} While the notion of praxis is ancient, Portelli and Konecny (2013) explain that praxis as motivated “by the work of Friere...is taken to mean a bringing together of theory and practice” (p. 102). They note that “Friere asserts the transformative power of praxis, arguing that human beings are radically capable of changing their condition, of doing away with what has come before and giving the world new meaning through reflective action. Altering one’s position, giving the world new meaning, changing one’s condition, are distinctly political modes of engaging with the world. As we see it then, praxis has a double meaning, what we call the politics of praxis, that is not often appreciated by those in education. By praxis Friere not only meant reorganizing the relation between theory and practice to meld the two. He also meant renegotiating the political dynamics and relations of power that exist in any relation. In this case, a true praxis must also involve altering the political condition – a condition marked by an uneven distribution of power, privilege and authority – between theory and practice” (p. 103).
oppressive struggles, especially to the extent that anti-oppression is related to the direct involvement of those who get to count at intellectuals or artists in collectivistic organizing for liberation from oppressive conditions. The literature I have explored to write this thesis relates to various ways knowledge production is grounded in and affects material conditions.

I identify as an Afrikan man, and this identity entails a necessary process of refiguring the ways my identity correlates with colonial borders (geographically, ideologically, and so on). My personal process of ridding myself of the “seeds of decay [sown by imperialism] that must be mercilessly rooted out from our land and from our minds” (Fanon, 2004, p. 181) is perhaps reflected in my work inside and outside of the academy.

Before being more involved in the academy, I was involved in programs with young folks who have been seriously affected by violence. My years of involvement with anti-violence programming and the non-profit industrial complex facilitated my eventual rejection of anti-violence as a viable approach to resisting oppressive conditions. Finding anti-violence principles to be untenable and aligned with the maintenance of oppressive and deeply violent social relations (indeed, I have noticed that non-profit organizations often pander to anti-violence in order to maintain funding, even when they reject principled anti-violence positions), and after reading Frantz Fanon’s *Wretched of the Earth* (2004), I figured it might be worthwhile to reflect here on violence. In this thesis I will discuss violence as it relates to anti-oppressive intellectuality.

For years I was involved in participant-driven youth programming and community development and problem solving. Through this work I developed a deep respect for the thoughts and standpoints of the young folks we worked with. I found that my academic
professors and peers, and the literature they spent much time reading, had no more insightful or critical perspectives to offer than many of the young people in our communities. I often found a disconnect between scholars and practitioners of anti-oppressive education. Innovations in participant-driven community education, for example, emerges locally and contextually, and often does not much rely on or inform academic scholarship. I found that scholarship often lags behind innovations developed among communities engaging directly in collective anti-oppressive struggles. This disconnect could be conceptualized as a disconnect between theory and practice, but here I will attempt to explore the disconnect relating to the conceptualization of knowledge as separable from material conditions. One of the implications of my explorations, I hope, is that an anti-oppressive intellectuality will increasingly be considered necessarily grounded in anti-oppressive practice. Further, reflecting on the materiality of violence in liberatory struggle, it might become clearer that ostensibly anti-oppressive promoters of anti-violence are in tension with the realities of liberatory violence and, therefore, in tension with their anti-oppressive orientation.

My approach to anti-oppressive praxis involves an ethic of care. I figure an examination of care and integrity can ground a viable, broad, and genuinely anti-oppressive praxis that rigorously opposes all forms of oppression while actively promoting the present and future wellbeing of people.

The central question addressed in this thesis might be articulated plainly: What are some of the qualities of an anti-oppressive or liberatory intellectuality? This thesis is a preliminary survey of some issues related to this central question. The discussions and arguments included herein are discussions and arguments that we have almost every day, in some form, in the
course of figuring out what to do in order to effectively resist oppressive conditions and build with each other for our wellbeing. My time in graduate school and while writing this thesis has been spent primarily outside of the academy, testing and exploring ideas I encountered inside and outside the academy. The notion of praxis I explore here has entailed that the objects and locations of a large portion of my work are not in the academy. I hope that any gaps in my arguments here are filled, abundantly, in the course of real, practical conversations, work, and relationships built and maintained among folks who strive for integrity in our work for the wellbeing of our people.

A final note: in this thesis, though I will draw on some distinguished scholars and intellectuals, my main influences – the Great Thinkers grounding my work and thoughts – are my friends, comrades, and ancestors who inspire, challenge, and teach me far more than any writer included in my reference list. Thus, though they receive no citations, please read loved ones' and ancestors' Great Thoughts and Actions into every word and space and hear them in my words and silences. I hope any gaps in my reading and writing make some space for you to hear some other voices, whether they are real, imagined, or yours. This thesis is a small part of many ongoing conversations – let this one affirm the legacy of revolutionary ancestors whose liberatory contributions make it possible. And, of course, any contradictions or mistakes herein are mine, and I hope they do not reflect poorly upon those ancestors and contemporaries who have assisted me in considering these ideas.
Outline of This Thesis

Part One: I find it difficult to discuss North American history without thinking about oppression and colonial violence. I find it difficult to think of academic philosophy or education or intellectuality apart from their long and ongoing histories of and potential roles in maintaining oppression. In my experience, the course of being educated in the West is a course in navigating the university in its capacity as one of the core Western institutions of colonial cultural and ideological hegemony.

In this section I will illustrate, with Eva Brann's and John Dewey's conceptualizations of education as my entry point, some oppressive concepts that are often taken for granted and not adequately interrogated in Western education. I will use Brann’s account of education to indicate what I take to be a common account of the Western tradition in education. I will utilize Dewey's account of education to expand on the notion of free growth in education. I have chosen to draw on Brann and Dewey to illustrate some basic ideas and potential flaws of liberal education. Their accounts of liberal education, along with their focus on Western culture and modernity, will be used to help demonstrate the inadequacy of liberal education that is not also rigorously anti-oppressive. To begin considering what an anti-oppressive intellectuality might involve, I will present some concepts, including Mills' (1997) *Racial Contract* and Freire's (2000) critical consciousness that can help contextualize Western philosophical and educational concepts for students situated or oppressed within Western colonial educational contexts.

During my undergraduate studies I majored in philosophy. I enjoyed philosophy because I enjoyed the rigour and quality of critical thought that seemed more emphasized in the philosophy department than elsewhere in my formal educational experience. Still, I was
unhappy with deep-rooted white supremacy, often at the core of the philosophical theories and concepts discussed in my classes.

Inspired by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's use of "borrowed language [that he] beat...into various shapes to give...meaning to the physical and moral world" (Ngũgĩ, 1993, p. 5; Sicherman, 1995, p. 17), I am interested in beating colonial education in order to contribute to anti-oppressive educational efforts. This section of my thesis discusses the notion of anti-oppressive definitional power, introduces some ideas relating to anti-oppressive intellectuality, and will lead toward the second section where I will begin to address some issues worth confronting in our development of an anti-oppressive praxis.

**Part Two:** This section of the thesis will examine some concepts related to knowledge and knowledge production that I relate to a larger anti-oppressive project. First, I will explore an approach to knowledge production that conceptualizes knowledge as embodied, situated, and locatable. That is, my aim is to describe an approach to conceptualizing knowledge that requires us to account for the contexts in which knowledge claims are made and made sense of, as well as for the bodies and people who employ and are affected by knowledge production in oppressive conditions.

I will relate violence in liberatory struggles to reflections on the role of intellectuals in liberatory struggles. Describing some of my experiences in the academy as well as on some ideas from Fanon, Gelderloos, and Alfred, I will explore how the notion that knowledge is inherently embodied, situated, and locatable relates to a seeming inclination of some intellectuals to abstract oppressive conditions or anti-oppressive resistance beyond the recognition of the masses of people engaged in real-life liberatory struggle. I will confront the
notion of the warrior as it relates to Fanon’s confrontation with the colonized intellectual in an attempt to illustrate the necessity of intellectuals engaging directly in collective liberatory struggle. The aim of this section is largely to emphasize the importance of confronting the world as reality rather than mere analogy, as well as the importance of anti-oppressive intellectuals’ direct involvement in collectivistic liberatory struggle.

Part Three: In this section I will briefly distinguish between the academic and the intellectual, and I will draw on some of Gramsci’s notions of intellectuality to present a quality of intellectuality that can be useful within anti-oppressive struggles. As Said (1996) explains, people “who do perform the intellectual function in society, Gramsci tries to show, can be divided into two types: first, traditional intellectuals such as teachers, priests, and administrators, who continue to do the same things from generation to generation; and second, organic intellectuals, whom Gramsci saw as directly connected to classes or enterprises that used intellectuals to organize interests, gain more power, get more control” (p. 4). I will explain that the function of the organic intellectuals situated within the oppressed classes is to establish and maintain counter-hegemony, anti-oppressive definitional power, to promote understandings of the world that can be liberatory for oppressed people.

I will expand on the notion of praxis. Drawing on Friere, I will briefly elaborate on praxis in order to link it to an ethic of care. I will mention Noddings’ approach to an ethic of care, and then, drawing on statements and ideas of Amilcar Cabral, I will discuss and promote notions of care and integrity that I figure can undergird and guide a viable approach to genuine anti-oppressive intellectual praxis.
PART ONE

Western Education

Live in boxes of words and text
When you’re done
Fill ‘em in with a check mark or an x
Answer “no” or “yes”
‘Cuz there’s no in-between
It’s not holistic
It’s dualistic
And linguistically clean
There’s only one interpretation
If you know what I mean
I got the moral high ground
I took it with siege
I seized it with war
And by spreading disease
I civilized your people
With anti-literacy rules
I gave you lynch law
Enslavement
And residential schools
I made language mechanical
Not critical
Tyrannical
With manacled hand you rewrite my vision
With puritanical precision in rigorous texts
We in St. Bullshit College
What’s next?

In Paradoxes of Education in a Republic (hereafter referred to as Paradoxes) Eva T. H. Brann (1996) presents an account of liberal education. A liberal education, for Brann, is "the traditional name for non-utilitarian education" (p. 60). A liberal education is not necessarily useful in any particular predetermined way – it does not necessarily lead students toward any prescribed ends or goods apart from itself. For Brann, education properly understood is an end in itself and an inherent good. Education may happen to be instrumental in making possible various ends, but it ought to be pursued as an end in itself. For Brann, a liberal education entails
that learners learn for the sake of learning. Students ought to discover and develop their understandings of texts, and they should discover for themselves the meanings of various concepts, histories, books, and traditions explored in the course of their educations (Brann, 1996).

Along with her liberal orientation, Brann's (1996) account of education closely resembles the kind of education that was emphasized during my time in the academy. Brann (1996) claims that "the course of education is the course of learning to read, and that to have an education is to know how to read" (p. 16). Written language, for Brann, is the principal device (p. 64) through which the Western tradition is transmitted. Indeed, Brann thinks of the Western tradition (p. 20) as primarily "a collection of books" (p. 64). In her account of the Western tradition, Brann discusses "the books of the West, ancient, medieval, and modern, omitting, however, the post-biblical Jewish and the Arabic writings-a major lacuna because of [her] ignorance and their... inaccessibility" during the time she was writing *Paradoxes*. She omits "all reference to Eastern learning [because she does] not know whether it forms a tradition in the sense [she] is trying to formulate" (p. 65). In Brann’s account in *Paradoxes*, the Western tradition primarily comprises knowledge recorded in books, written first by Greek men and subsequently by white men. And because education is a process of becoming literate – literacy is the ability to draw meaning and truth from texts, where the reflective realm is deposited (Brann 1996, p. 17) – education is primarily a process of becoming a proficient reader of books that count as Western classics.

Brann’s conceptualization of education in *Paradoxes* is problematic in part because it focuses almost exclusively on written language. Although she explores a broader
conceptualization of reading as critical engagement with the world, with book reading the
primary practice for development of students' critical capacities, Brann scarcely mentions the
ways that dance, film, music, martial arts, or conversation, for a few examples, have influenced
the Western tradition or play roles in knowledge production in the West or elsewhere. There is
no account, for example, of the influence of Afrikan or various non-European oral traditions on
Western conceptualizations of music, dance, poetry, philosophy, and communication generally.
There is certainly no serious consideration given to the existence of various indigenous
educational traditions in place of which Western traditions are imposed. Brann writes almost
exclusively about writing, and her conception of reading effectively remains correspondingly
narrow.

Even if we do not consider the internet, which was only just becoming publicly available at
the time Brann wrote *Paradoxes*, it seems clear that books are not universally the primary
depository of knowledge – not even in the West. Outside of the Western academy, music,
dance, and oral traditions play important roles in storing and transmitting tradition and
influence how we understand the world. Even in the academy, it seems that knowledge is
stored and transmitted more by people and transmitted through speech and clarified through
conversation than it is stored in, transmitted, and clarified by books. Brann's account of the
Western tradition in *Paradoxes* seems to affirm the primacy of books while underemphasizing
speech and anything produced by people marginalized by and within the Western tradition.

For example, Brann (1996) calls for the preservation of knowledge of classical Western
languages (p. 83), but not of the languages of indigenous people. That is not to say that Brann
would object to the preservation of the languages of indigenous people. But, when given the
chance to promote the preservation of ancient languages, Brann writes about Greek and Latin, both deemed classical in her account, above other languages. Brann's choice helps to show that the perspective from which she writes places the hegemonic Western classics at the core of education and presupposes the legitimacy and universality of the Western classics' status as classics. Brann does not seem to write with the intention of critically questioning the legitimacy of the traditional Western conception of education or of which books count as classic within the academy. She does little to challenge Western hegemony.

Establishing education as, primarily, reading written works, and the object of education the Western classics, Brann maintains a narrow outlook regarding both the means and objects of Western education that seems to fit relatively well with the Western hegemonic education I encountered during my time in the academy. Freedom of thought and inquiry within such educational contexts might be difficult if one's outlook entails rejection of the supremacy of the Western tradition. Again, in Paradoxes Brann holds the position that students ought to discover and develop their understandings of texts, and that students should discover for themselves the meanings of various concepts, histories, books, and traditions explored in the course of their educations. The tension between the assertion regarding the importance of students' discovering for themselves what certain concepts, histories, books, and traditions mean and the promotion of a narrow and hegemonic Western education seems worth resolving if we wish to

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2 Gramsci (1971) describes the function of the intellectuals of dominant groups in maintaining hegemony, which includes:

1. The “spontaneous” consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group; this consent is “historically” caused by the prestige (and consequent confidence) which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function in the world of production.

2. The apparatus of state coercive power which “legally” enforces discipline on those groups who do not “consent” either actively or passively. This apparatus is, however, constituted for the whole of society in anticipation of moments of crisis of command and direction when spontaneous consent has failed” (p. 12).
maintain possibilities for students situated within such education systems to develop critical understandings of the world.

*Education as Growth*

Similar to Brann, John Dewey’s conceptualization of education asserts the importance of students freely developing their understandings of the world and interpreting and filtering what they learn through their experiences. For Dewey (1938) education is roughly synonymous with growth. Education proper does not prescribe specific values, ideologies, or ideas with regard to individual human progress. The purpose of educational experiences, for Dewey, is to increase a person’s capacity for “engaging new experience” (Noddings, 2007, p.26). Experiences that restrict one's capacity or inclination to pursue educational experiences do not count as educational. Education proper, in Dewey’s account, results in learners pursuing further education.

For Dewey, education helps people to develop ways of being and thinking that are useful for people as they navigate the environments in which they are situated. Dewey emphasizes critical thinking in education more than memorization, and he stresses the importance of broadening, rather than narrowing, the intellectual possibilities, interests, and experiences of students. For Dewey, the goal of education is not merely to prepare students for participation in labour, or to inform students about their cultures. Dewey would not likely deny that experiences that prepare students for work and inform students about their cultures are educational, but he would not limit education to these kinds of experiences exclusively. Importantly, education does not prepare students for work by limiting their experiences to only one realm of work, nor does education inform students about one culture exclusively. For
Dewey, an educational initiative that teaches students to be afraid of doubt and to avoid and reject teachings that oppose their own, would not count as educational (see Dewey 1939, 1916).

Learning, in a liberal educational account, can be related to the notion of developmental learning (Noddings, 2007, p. 50), which is learning that results in students learning ‘ways of thinking’ – new ways of analyzing, interpreting, communicating, and so on. Developmental learning can be contrasted with the type of learning that encourages the memorization of formulae, definitions, methods, procedures, and facts. Developmental learning entails understanding, development of new skills, and problem solving, and thus encourages innovation. A liberal education has to do with broadening, rather than narrowing, the intellectual possibilities, interests, and experiences of students. Indeed, development of new skills and new ways of thinking, rather than memorization and acceptance of dogma, seems to be what Dewey has in mind when he refers to education as growth. He does not conceptualize this growth to be without any restrictions (Dewey, 1938, p. 64). Rather, he recognizes that freedom to grow entails power relations and that freedom from restrictions is only valuable to the extent that it leads to "freedom which is power: power to frame purposes, to judge wisely, to evaluate desires by the consequences which will result from acting upon them; power to select and order means to carry chosen ends into operation" (Dewey, 1938, p. 64). For Dewey, power is essentially the capacity to achieve desired ends. Education as free growth has to do with students' development of their capacities to achieve growth in the directions they desire.

And, even as Dewey promotes education as free growth and rejects dogmatic education, favouring education that promotes students' freedom, he is limited by a Western hegemonic
outlook. He refers to savage, primitive, and barbaric peoples (Dewey, 1902, 1916) and seems to
demean people who do not fit Western constructs of modernity as underdeveloped or
undeveloped in mind and ability to understand their worlds intelligently. He asserts that the
difference between civilization and savagery, to take an example on a large scale, is found
in the degree in which previous experiences have changed the objective conditions under
which subsequent experiences take place. The existence of roads, of means of rapid
movement and transportation, tools, implements, furniture, electric light and power, are
illustrations. Destroy the external conditions of present civilized experience, and for a
time our experience would relapse into that of barbaric peoples (Dewey, 1938, p. 39).

As Fallace (2010) explains in “Was John Dewey Ethnocentric? Reevaluating the
Philosopher’s Early Views on Culture and Race”, consistent with Dewey's conceptualization of
habits and social customs maintained through taken-for-granted concepts and practices,
Dewey's ethnocentric and supremacist notions seem to reveal his acceptance of linear
historicism, the social (though, for Dewey, seemingly not biological) deficiency of non-Western
peoples, and racism common in white supremacist contexts. Rather than endorsing Dewey’s
seeming reliance on technologies like roads and electric power to distinguish civilization from
savagery, we might do well to consider that the West does not have a monopoly on technology
(see Sardar, 1999). Technologies are tools and processes that are functional for people and
communities. These “may include social and governance processes, ways of facilitating
conversations, processes related to food, agriculture, clothing, medicine, tools, as well as ways
of organizing community and honoring ancestors” (Abraham, 2011). Under a concept of
modernity that renders most people in the world in the past or as barbaric, we might wonder
what quality of free growth is possible. And though later in Dewey's career he maintained a
more "pluralistic appreciation of cultures as different, equally valid ways of looking at the world
[he] did not negate or erase the ethnocentrism found in his pre-1916 writings on education, which continue to be his most cited and revered" (Fallace, 2010, p. 476).

Dewey's conceptualization of education as growth and freedom as power to realize desired ends is limited by his adherence to hegemonic and racist notions. With Dewey, as with Brann, freedom of thought and inquiry becomes difficult if one's outlook entails rejection of the supremacy of the Western tradition (a tradition characterized by white supremacy, patriarchy, and capitalism). Eurocentrism or doctrines of white supremacy that result in racialized students' histories and experiences being devalued, for example, restrict students' capacities to pursue relevant educational experiences, and thus do not count as educational by Dewey's standard. As with Brann, the tension between Dewey's assertion regarding the importance of students' free growth and his maintenance of racist notions in his writings on education seems worth resolving if we wish to maintain possibilities for students situated within oppressive contexts to develop critical understandings of the world.

_Beyond Liberal Education_

Though Brann's and Dewey's accounts of education differ in the extent to which they assert that education ought to have utility, they share an important similarity: they are both limited by hegemonic Western outlooks. If we are attracted to Brann's and Dewey's assertions that students should learn to read or grow freely, we will do well to confront and resolve their hegemonic Western conceptualizations of reading and growth that might inhibit freedom. I aim to respond to hegemonic Western conceptualizations of education through an examination of Mills' _Racial Contract_ and critical consciousness.
Charles Mills' *Racial Contract* (1997) provides a framework for understanding how white supremacy runs through the Western tradition. Inspired by *The Sexual Contract* (Pateman, 1988), which "offers a 'conjectural history' that reveals and exposes the normative logic that makes sense of the inconsistencies, circumlocutions, and evasions of the classic contract theorists and, correspondingly, the world of patriarchal domination their work has helped to rationalize" (Mills, 1997, p. 6), Mills develops a contractarian theory to explain the ways white supremacy is at the foundation and core of Western philosophy. The Racial Contract entails mutually agreed-upon epistemologies and discourses among people constructed as white to maintain constructions of racialized people as less than full persons. The Racial Contract is what allows Dewey to believe in savages, barbarians, and primitive peoples, and not be deemed contemptible.

The Racial Contract entails suppressions and erasures necessary for revisionist histories that construct colonization and racial oppression as justifiable, forgettable, non-existent, or as inevitable manifestations of racialized people's defectiveness and backwardness. Mills outlines the ways the kind of colonial modernism found in Brann's conceptualization of the Western tradition and Dewey's notions of growth or development run through Western philosophy. This modernism entails that "developing societies are caught up in a time warp where they can never really catch up with the West. The present of the non-West is the past of the West. The future of the developing countries is the present of the West" (Sardar, 1999, p. 46). West-supremacist linear historicism effectively renders whatever is conceptualized as non-Western as not fully present. Sardar (1999) explains the oppressive effect of this modernism:

> The real power of the West is not located in its economic muscle and technological might. Rather, it resides in its power to define. The West defines what is, for example, freedom,
progress and civil behaviour; law, tradition and community; reason, mathematics and science; what is real and what it means to be human. The non-Western civilizations have simply to accept these definitions or be defined out of existence” (p. 44).

While I would characterize Western economic imperialism and militarism as entailing real power, Sardar’s point regarding the power to define is relevant to our examination of the ways material and cultural imperialism relate. The extent to which Western cultural imperialism and hegemony shape the boundaries of our concepts corresponds to the range of conclusions we can reach through reason (with concepts, the objects of reason) regarding the state of reality. Thus, if definitional power in Western education is mediated by oppressive structures or cultures, the range of conclusions regarding the state of reality, and thus the features of objects of knowledge studied by students, will likely exclude the ways oppressed people would interpret or experience those objects of knowledge in non-oppressive educational contexts. Oppression and hegemony entail erasures of reality that connect to Freire’s notion of a "culture of silence" (Friere, 2000). Friere’s notion of critical consciousness entails that oppressed people are able and inclined to critically engage with and describe the oppressive conditions in which they are situated – people accurately recognize and define their oppressive conditions as oppressive. The development of critical consciousness in oppressive contexts entails that people analyze the structures and relations of oppressive conditions, understand themselves within social, historical, and political contexts, and develop concepts, language, and practices that are liberatory. The culture of silence, described below, entails the obstruction of critical consciousness.
Culture of Silence

Freire (2000) describes a culture of silence in which oppressed people lose or are not encouraged to develop their abilities or inclinations to articulate the nature of their oppressive conditions. Historical and cultural erasure, suppression, and genocide result in oppressed people being disinclined to articulate the nature of their oppressive conditions due to negative and obscured histories and self-images. For Freire, education should provide opportunities for oppressed people to develop concepts that are liberatory. Mills (1997), describes the Racial Contract as an implicit agreement among whites (and, I figure, anybody who promotes white supremacy) to perceive and articulate, and support each other in perceiving and articulating, a false reality. Mills (1997) claims that anti-racism entails cognitive resistance to the racially mystificatory aspects of white theory, the painstaking reconstruction of past and present necessary to fill in the crucial gaps and erase the slanders of the globally dominant European worldview. One has to learn to trust one's own cognitive powers, to develop one's own concepts, insights, modes of explanation, overarching theories, and to oppose the epistemic hegemony of conceptual frameworks designed in part to thwart and suppress the exploration of such matters; one has to think against the grain (p. 119, original emphasis).

I interpret Mills’ claim as a promotion of critical consciousness. To facilitate thinking against the grain in oppressive contexts, intellectuals – who are in the business of working with concepts – can work on developing concepts that fit well into anti-oppressive counter-hegemonic discourse while developing anti-oppressive definitional power in educational practice. Perhaps the extent to which intellectuality has to do with concepts is the extent to which anti-oppressive intellectuality has to do with (theorizing and) creating anti-oppressive definitional power. Indeed, I take this redefining of concepts, away from those imposed by
colonial or otherwise oppressive knowledge production, to be at the core of the project of creating anti-oppressive definitional power (Abraham, 2011).

**Anti-Oppressive Definitional Power**

Developing anti-oppressive definitional power necessitates ways of understanding and describing oppressive conditions as they are while creatively figuring and articulating new possibilities for the future. To develop anti-oppressive definitional power is to develop critical consciousness and counter-hegemony, as part of the ongoing project of people’s self-determined development of liberatory ideas and material conditions. As Sardar (1999) claims, non-Western cultures and civilizations have to reconstruct themselves, almost brick by brick, in accordance with their own worldviews and according to their own norms and values. This means that the non-West has to create a whole new body of knowledge, rediscover its lost and suppressed intellectual heritage, and shape a host of new disciplines" (p. 57).

It is important, if we are going to work on developing anti-oppressive definitional power, to remember the materiality of colonialism. As Frantz Fanon (2004) states: "Let us be honest, the colonist knows perfectly well that no jargon is a substitute for reality" (p. 10). For Fanon (2004) decolonization involves recognition of the material consequences of knowledge production. That is, our concepts cannot be separated from the environments they arise from and influence. Anti-oppressive concepts arise from and influence anti-oppressive practice. Indeed, our involvement in anti-oppressive educational practice has implications for how we employ our intellectual capacities.

Dewey "defines experience as the transaction between an entire living being (body, mind, emotions) and its physical and social environments" and develops an account of experience that "stresses that the process of knowing the world inevitably involves changes to individuals
and their environment” (Hildreth, 2009, p. 788). Hildreth explains that "[k]nowledge, for Dewey, is a function of experimental inquiry. We cannot gain knowledge without...taking action to test hypotheses" (p. 789, emphasis original). Thus, "[t]here is, literally, no knowing without doing and no doing without power. Inquiry is more than just a process of gaining knowledge about the world; it is inherently an issue of power.... Power is enacted through experience, but every experience is itself situated and structured by a complex transactional field of forces" (p. 789). Hildreth (2009) explains that social customs and habits that frame our experiences, "often aligned with and exploited by ruling interests" (p. 793), can be oppressive, and thus we can reason, using Dewey's understanding of education as growth and growth "as a process of learning through experience" (p. 795), that education is a process of developing power to define the world.

Anti-oppression education has to do with defining the world in ways that are liberatory for oppressed people (Friere, 2000). In the context of philosophy of education anti-oppression has to do with creating anti-oppressive definitional power that grounds concepts in real-world contexts, material conditions, and accounts for the situated nature of knowledge. Resisting oppressive conceptualizations of education entails the development and promotion of counter-hegemonic philosophical, cultural, and political practices and other means of conceptualizing and applying knowledge in non-oppressive and liberatory ways. The application of knowledge, given Fanon's and Dewey's affirmations of the situated and power-infused nature of knowledge, is crucial.

Here we may borrow from Haraway (1988) who claims that "[m]any currents in feminism attempt to theorize grounds for trusting especially the vantage points of the subjugated" and
that, "[b]uilding on that suspicion, [she argues] for situated and embodied knowledges and... against various forms of unlocatable, and so irresponsible, knowledge claims" (p. 583).

According to Haraway, "'subjugated' standpoints are preferred because they seem to promise more adequate, sustained, objective, transforming accounts of the world" (p. 584). Privileging subjugated perspectives, for Haraway, serves to counter both excessively relativistic and totalistic versions of objectivity (Abraham, 2011), even while standpoint theory must account for cultural imperialism, hegemony, and false consciousness. That is, while we ought not to take for granted that oppressed people always understand or are inclined toward resisting oppressive conditions, we recognize that the material interests of oppressed people are more likely than their oppressors to sustain accurate anti-oppressive analyses and actions. The kinds of erasure and suppression required to construct the Western tradition as superior are not required by subjugated perspectives. Thus, part of developing anti-oppressive definitional power has to do with affirming that people subjugated in the West exist, and that their perspectives are worthy of serious consideration and study.

Anti-oppressive definitional power is perhaps easiest to conceptualize as the affirmation and realization (conceptually and materially) of oppressed peoples' prerogative to investigate and come to understandings of the world that they find useful and liberatory. Anti-oppressive education, to the extent that it promotes anti-oppressive definitional power, does not rule out the possibility of dialogue. Rather, it recognizes that dominance precludes full consent, so dominating perspectives are inherently incommensurable with the perspectives they dominate exactly because they dominate rather than dialogue constructively with them. The Western outlook ought to be revealed as oppressive when it is oppressive. Revealing oppression for
what it is while affirming and privileging subjugated perspectives makes space for more equitable dialogue. Erasure and suppression take up too much space for dialogue.

Summary

I have explained that some ideas of two philosophers of education, Eva Brann and John Dewey, who both describe education as a process of students' free development, are limited by hegemonic Western outlooks. And, I have outlined some concepts I believe can serve to counteract oppressive Western conceptualizations of education.

I presented Paulo Freire's notion of a culture of silence and noted critical consciousness as process of recognizing and articulating the nature of oppressive conditions. I further developed this idea by exploring the notion of anti-oppressive definitional power and its centrality to anti-oppressive education. I presented Charles Mills' Racial Contract as a framework for understanding the ways oppressions run through every aspect of social life. Given the Racial Contract, we need not wonder if education in the West involves oppression – it does, fundamentally, along with gender-based oppression, colonialism, imperialism, and other forms of domination.

In our development of anti-oppressive definitional power, in the context of education and of the ideas explored in this thesis, we will have to confront notions of knowledge, power, and liberation. My next task in the thesis will be to examine some central concepts in our discussion of knowledge and knowledge production within our anti-oppressive project.
PART TWO

Knowledge is Embodied, Situated, and Locatable

Knowledge is sometimes simply defined as justified true belief. Without delving into the notions of justification, truth, and belief, it is enough to say for now: the criteria for – and the concept and content of – truth are often, and often interminably, contested; justified beliefs often contradict each other; contradictory justifications are often not significantly stronger than one another; criteria for what count as strong justifications vary; and processes of perception are engaged with our bodies. This is not to speculate whether truth is relative, but is to claim that processes of evidence gathering, argument making, storytelling, and conceptualizing whatever might count as real are relational – these processes are dependent on relations among varying qualities of subject and object.

We can also note that it is impossible to have complete knowledge of the world. There is much that nobody knows or can know. Any object can be viewed from infinite angles and distances, at different velocities, in different light sources, for different durations, and so on. And, each bit of matter that makes up any object can also be viewed in infinite ways. It would thus take an infinite amount of time to examine the physical world and to establish or learn all facts about even one object, not to mention all objects. No person has an infinite time in which to learn all of anything, so we start with an assumption that knowledge is never complete. We engage in observation and reasoning to arrive at justifications for our knowledge claims.

And there would undoubtedly be much that no human knows about the non-physical world, if such a world exists. We cannot know whether there are non-physical truths. Of course,

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3 The definition of knowledge as justified true belief (JTB) is often credited to Plato, and has been debated extensively. In Philosophy of Education, Noddings (2007, pp. 108-110) describes JTB, and further elaborates on various positions on the possibility of knowledge and what knowledge comprises.
we cannot know with absolute certainty that everything is physical either – we cannot verify absolutely that this is the case. Some agnosticism on the nature of the universe is in order. Still, fabricating non-physical facts on the basis that there are unexplainable phenomena in the world seems epistemically irresponsible. One could claim that physicalism makes unsubstantiated claims because it makes claims based on our observations of the world as our limited perceptive capacities allow us to verify. However, it would not be fair to reject physicalism on these grounds alone, because disproving a positive claim is not practical and is perhaps impossible.

Let us imagine that in an argument I claim that non-physical objects exist. In order to prove me wrong, one would have to search the whole universe in an instant – this is impossible and thus is not a fair expectation. It is a fair convention that the burden of proof rests on those who make positive claims. Now, let us imagine that I choose, instead, to assert that non-physical objects do not exist. I would be justified in my assertion until someone proves me wrong – and those who believe in non-physical objects only need to find one such object in order to prove me wrong. I could, of course, remain agnostic on the whole matter of the existence of non-physical objects – this is perhaps the most honest and accurate position. It is true that I do not know, with complete certainty, whether such objects exist – just as the physicalist cannot be absolutely certain about their positions. It seems most appropriate to proportion our knowledge claims to the evidence that supports them. Whatever methods we employ, we value them to the extent that they supply reliable evidence.

Further, as already implied, things have different appearances. For example, viewing from virtually infinite distances, angles, lights (different colors, brightness, and so on), at different
velocities, and so on, any object has virtually infinite different “looks”. There is no absolute appearance of anything – there is no absolutely right look. The appearances and meanings of things are relative. Further, absolute physical knowledge being impossible, and appearance and meaning being relational, we also come to understand the world through the languages and cultures through which we describe it. Our cosmologies, while grounded in our material conditions, are also the result of our collective histories, experiences, and cultures.

It is enough, for the purposes of this thesis, to make the claim that interpretations of whatever there is to discover and interpret in the universe arise from and are mediated through bodies’ perceptual capacities, experiences, cultures and languages and collectively arrived-at ways of conceptualizing things, and environmental and material relations. Even if we grant that there is a universal truth to be interpreted, we can fairly claim that all experience of that universal truth occurs through relations among our bodies (minds, bodies, and spirits, if any of them are useful conceptual categories at all, can still be conceptualized as physical) as we are situated/located among myriad entities in the universe. What we can know, if we can know anything at all, is inevitably situated, locatable, and embodied.

When our experiences of the world are mediated by colonial relations, impositions, and incentives, our conceptualizations of knowledge as located and embodied are well complimented by the development of anti-oppressive approaches to interpreting the world so that we can resist mediating our experiences through imposed doctrines. Because colonialism, for example, causes "African intellectuality [to be] decoupled from its sociality and polity" (Lebakeng, 2010, p. 24), it is important to reflect on the experiential and locatable sources of our knowledge claims. Accordingly, the extent to which we rely on colonial doctrine to justify
our interpretations of the world is the extent to which our interpretations of the world are

dislocated, and is the extent to which we ought to engage critically with and reframe of our

experiences with an anti-colonial (and broadly anti-oppressive) aim.

Indeed, as Fanon (2004) affirms, the colonized subject "has always known that his
dealings with the colonist would take place in a field of combat. So the colonized subject wastes

no time lamenting and almost never searches for justice in the colonial context" (p. 43). Though

Fanon is discussing decolonization in the context of anti-colonial revolution in Algeria in the late

1950s, the metaphor of combat is apt – it relates to a context in which intellectual abstractions
disconnected from the immediacy and materiality of liberation struggle are recognized as

trivial. Fanon uses the notion of combat to describe the colonized intellectual's rejection of

trivial abstractions as a result of direct involvement in collective liberation struggle as a "swift,
painful combat where inevitably the muscle had to replace the concept" (p. 157). Reading

Fanon, we affirm that our development of anti-oppressive praxis is directly related to the

material consequences of knowledge production and our involvement in collective liberatory

struggle (Abraham, 2011).

The notion that knowledge claims are embodied, situated, and locatable, if we are

concerned with the material consequences of knowledge production (indeed, if we claim any

quality of anti-oppression, we ought to be concerned), entails that our analogies are never
decoupled from our locations and the material conditions within which we formulate our
theories and practices. Fanon's use of the term combat is metaphoric, and it is never fully

separable from the physical violence of revolutionary combat. Fanon’s combat is directly

related to intellectual battle over embodied/situated/locatable knowledge claims. That is, while
violence is referred to through analogy, Fanon’s liberatory process has everything to do with acts of violence in the context of revolutionary struggle for liberation.

**Interruption, Analogy, and Violence**

*they taught me nothing
about my heritage
or how to survive
real life on the ground
n that’s not alright
with me n many folks out here who fail to see
how 2D learning’s gon help us
when life is 3D*

As I claimed earlier, domination precludes full consent, and dominating perspectives are inherently incommensurable with the perspectives they dominate exactly because they dominate rather than dialogue constructively with them. The violent interruptions of self-determined development of the masses that colonial encounters entail are often reflected in the ways interruptions occur in the course of social interactions in colonial contexts.

Many interruptions are fine and integrate smoothly among the many overlapping voices that weave in and out of dialogue. Many interruptions, however, reflect inequitable power relations. Some interruptions are discourteous. Some are violent. Capitalism, imperialism, and colonialism have been responsible for the interruption of the self-determined development and wellbeing of the majority of the people on this planet. As Walter Rodney (1972) claims in *How Europe underdeveloped Africa*, “In offering the view that colonialism was negative, the aim is to draw attention to the way that previous African development was blunted, halted and turned back. In place of that interruption and blockade, nothing of compensatory value was introduced” (p. 244). When we discuss interruption in oppressive contexts, we are discussing the disruption and obstruction of people’s attempts to develop the material and ideological
conditions for their liberation and wellbeing. Interruptions like these occur broadly as
disruptions in the histories, development, and wellbeing of nations and societies, and they also
happen in the context of personal intellectual development. To help illustrate how broad and
personal interruptions might connect, a story from my time at OISE: Once, after a professor
discourteously interrupted me during class, my mid-term essay became a letter to that
professor. I quote this letter at length:

When I decided I wanted to write generally about resistance for this paper, I immediately
thought of a moment last week when I spoke about resistance in your class. In this
particular class, white supremacy was not mentioned in a discussion revolving around but
also seemingly and meticulously avoiding direct confrontations with white supremacy.
We did not examine organized Indigenous resistance in a discussion about resistance to
"ghosting" (systematic and systemic erasures of Indigenous peoples in colonial histories,
stories, narratives of progress, art, and memories — epistemic erasures and violence that
are preceded and followed by genocide and murder [which are never merely abstract or
epistemological/ontological process and always entail violence against bodies]). I observe
this gap between our academic discourses and poetics and abstractions and the everyday
brutalities that we live and feel and remember and actively resist in our community
organizations most apparently in the academy, and I sometimes find myself speaking
about this gap. Speaking about this gap in a hostile environment often feels risky. I, and
most of us, know folks who have been fired from academic positions, harassed, bullied,
given low evaluations, and endured compromised mental health as direct results of
unapologetically addressing the material effects of racism in the academy” (Abraham,
2011, pp. 3-4).

When I mentioned white supremacy and insisted on discussing situated, locatable,
embodied forms resistance to situated, locatable, embodied, and unambiguously painful
violence I was told three times to "hold up" while the professor waved an interruptive hand. At
this moment, at my location in the academy, abstractions seemed favoured over examples. Had
I not been interrupted:

I would have mentioned organizing, community education, and self-determined
institutions building as forms of resistance. I might have mentioned that critical scholarship
can be crucial to these endeavours. I likely would have maintained that critical scholarship
not rooted in or connected to what Fanon (2004) calls "the people's revolution" (p. 13)
often relies on oppressive forms of intellectuality that maintain significant distances between the work of scholarship and community work. Had I reached a conclusion, it might have had to do with the importance of scholars having a capacity to discuss resistance in non-abstract ways – ways that allow us to talk about how we can contribute our labour in struggles against police harassment and brutal violence against Indigenous bodies, and how our personal decolonizing processes are at least partly contingent on the extent to which we involve ourselves directly in such anti-oppressive struggles.

[...]
I have met many critical scholars at OISE who can speak eloquently about racism and colonialism, all the while failing to notice or acknowledge that privilege is what allows them to speak so explicitly about racism and colonialism without being interrupted. Outside of the classroom, these interruptions too often occur as articulations or fulfillments of death threats.... White people, in my experience, are less often than anybody else brutally attacked and politely interrupted for speaking about racism and colonialism. And, had we discussed resistance further, we might have figured that forms of resistance are as varied as forms of power that are resisted...” (Abraham, 2011, pp. 5-6).

Part of the task of the anti-oppressive intellectual is to overcome oppressive interruptions and false consciousness. The colonial and imperial context ensures that those of us situated/located – and especially those of us with investments – in the academy are in compromised locations. As Fanon points out, “the unpreparedness of the elite [sometimes translated as educated classes], the lack of practical ties between them and the masses, their apathy [sometimes translated as laziness] and, yes, their cowardice at the crucial moment in the struggle, are the cause of tragic trials and tribulations” (Fanon, 2004, p. 97).

Unpreparedness, lack of practical links with the masses, apathy (whether displayed through ideological hollowness or inactivity in people’s organized resistance), and cowardice, as they relate to direct involvement in liberatory struggle are unfortunate characteristics of too many intellectuals situated in the academy. Perhaps an increased inclination toward abstracting the contents of liberatory struggle beyond the recognition of the masses of people corresponds with the extent to which Fanon’s colonized elite often avoid engaging, with seriousness, the
strategic, tactical, and material realities (including those related to violence) of liberatory struggle.

Even those of Fanon’s educated classes who are willing to examine and expose oppressive race or gender relations often avoid discussions of class, perhaps because to do so would expose their class consciousness and aspirations that go against the best interests of the masses of people whose historical (past and contemporary) struggles and resources make possible our traversal to and through academic spaces. In addition to the access afforded through sacrifices of our ancestors and contemporaries, access to academic spaces is often afforded through investments mediated by academic hazing rituals (massive, unhealthy workloads, irredeemable financial debt, and so on) that result in overjustification and effort justification (a notion drawn from cognitive dissonance theory) that entrench the intellectual’s location in, and indebtedness to, the academy. The material dependence of the intellectual qua academic worker on colonial-academic benefactors and overseers in the academic location too often entails that, other than in cases of subversion⁴, the academy holds little potential for creation of revolutionary (entailing a quality of transformative education that is not merely transformative, but also is inherently anti-oppressive and liberatory) spaces. As Peterson (2007) indicates,

Fanon’s search for a revolutionary space [emphasis mine] reflects a search for the new man that has transcended the binaries of colonial over-determination. Fanon’s rejection of the imperial power, in all its manifestations, disrupts the neat schema of colonialism and initiates a steady movement to the social, psychological, cultural and political margins beyond empire. The movement from Fort de France to Lyon to Blida-Joinville to the interior of Algeria and farther South into Sub-Saharan Africa to establish supply routes for

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⁴ Portelli and Konecny (2013) have argued to justify subversion in oppressive educational contexts in “Neoliberalism, Subversion, and Democracy in Education”.
the FLN [Front de la Liberation Nationale] constitutes a tremendous restructuring of Fanon’s identity beyond the set *perimeters* of French colonialism (p. 96).

Revolutionary space, not merely as abstraction but as lived and experienced, as situation and location, is central to Fanon’s movement toward genuine anti-colonialism. Accordingly, I interpret Fanon’s epistemic confrontations with violence as arising and inseparable from his bodily confrontations with revolutionary violence. That is, my interpretation of Fanon inspires my inclination toward conceptualizing knowledge in ways that compel action, and also inspires my inclination toward attempting to conceptualize knowledge that is inevitably *active* in that it is enmeshed with material conditions and practice (the notion of praxis, especially as it might be formulated along with a notion of integrity, is relevant here). The distancing in space or time of abstracted notions of violence from material violence that is endemic to the academy, brings me to the question: What can we learn from the inclination of many intellectuals who claim anti-oppression to only engage anti-oppressive violence with significant distance, either through abstraction or from a safe distance in space or time?

**The Warrior, Violence, and Analogy**

*Among poets the poets like to say, “I am a warrior.”*  
*Among warriors, however, the poets say, “I am a poet.”*  
- Afrikan Proverb

One notion I have often found useful to discuss – in order to illustrate some potential issues entailed by anti-oppressive scholarship that distances itself from violent resistance to oppressive forces – is that of the warrior. The notion of the warrior is central to Taiaiake Alfred’s (2009) work in the book *Wasase: indigenous pathways of action and freedom* which promotes a "revitalization of the ‘Warrior's Way’” (p. 11). In this book Alfred claims that
In advocating a strategy of contention, what I am acknowledging is that peace and harmony are only possible if we take the possibility of contention to its limit. That limit is reached by developing a renewed sense of pride in bold and serious disruptions of the status quo. Reaching that limit is only possible if we discipline ourselves to reject the promotion of offensive violence as the means of advancing our struggle; if we commit to using words, symbols, and direct non-violent action as the offensive weapons of our fight on a battlefield that is the critical juncture of contention and conflict; if we push disruptive direct action tactics right up to the point that they will become a means of violent attack on our adversaries (p. 77).

Alfred goes on to claim that arms/weapons are necessary only for physical survival, but that people should have “faith in the power of our ideas and in our abilities to communicate our ideas without resorting to the mute force of violence to bring our message to people” (p. 77). I have several points I will make briefly regarding this position on self-defense. First, I make a distinction between non-violence and anti-violence. Non-violence simply comprises whatever is not violent. Anti-violence indicates a principled opposition to violence. Even in the most intensely violent struggles, most of what people do will be non-violent – people must feed and heal themselves, engage in dialogue and myriad forms of communication, rest, strategize, plan, study, and so on. While non-violence is descriptive, anti-violence is normative.

Second, it is important to note that Alfred does advocate an offensive strategy, but rejects offensive strategies that include violence – that is, he is not theorizing an exclusively self-defense-based position, but seems to limit the use of violence to the tactical realm of self-defense. Third, as Friere (2000) notes, “Never in history has violence been initiated by the oppressed. How could they be the initiators, if they themselves are the result of violence? How could they be the sponsors of something whose objective inauguration called forth their existence as oppressed? There would be no oppressed had there been no prior situation of
violence to establish their subjugation” (p. 55). With that in mind, if we promote self-defense, we ought to be able to answer the questions,

Is it self-defense to fight off an abusive husband, but not to blow up a dioxin-emitting factory that is making your breast milk toxic? What about a more concerted campaign to destroy the corporation that owns the factory and is responsible for releasing the pollutants? Is it self-defense to kill the general who sends out the soldiers who rape women in a war zone? Or must pacifists remain on the defensive, only fighting individual attacks and submitting themselves to the inevitability of such attacks until nonviolent tactics somehow convert the general or close down the factory, at some uncertain point in the future? (Gelderloos, 2007, p. 69).

To the latter question: no. Self-defense in the midst of a violent status quo comprises a broad range of tactics that, narrowly considered, might be considered offensive. Fifth, and as hinted by the latter question in the quote immediately above, serious formulation of goals, strategies, and tactics to resist oppressive forces cannot rely on faith in ideas. To be clear, I am not disparaging ideas or theory generally – I am rejecting faith in ideas or theory. That is, it seems unadvisable to recommend that people working to resist and end oppressive conditions have faith in ideas, because people are capable of rigorously studying and experimenting with, practicing, and proving the effectiveness of strategies and tactics. People do well to test ideas in practice rather than have mere faith in them. Faith in specific ideologies is also unadvisable, because ideology by itself risks becoming unduly abstracted from practice. Faith in ideas is well replaced by commitment to praxis. The promotion of faith in ideas along with the promotion of anti-violence would be in tension with Fanon’s claim that the colonized subject "has always known that his dealings with the colonist would take place in a field of combat. So the colonized subject wastes no time lamenting and almost never searches for justice in the colonial context" (p. 43), and would seem to go against Assata Shakur’s (1987) famous claim that, “[n]obody in
the world, nobody in history, has ever gotten their freedom by appealing to the moral sense of the people who were oppressing them” (p. 139).

Lastly, in any case, as Gelderloos (2007) clarifies, “[v]iolence is not a strategy, and neither is nonviolence. These two terms (violence and nonviolence) ostensibly are boundaries placed around sets of tactics” (p. 81). That is, while violent tactics will likely entail violence-specific qualities of responsibility and carefulness, all tactics can be approached with seriousness, care, sensibleness, and level-headed regard for their likely effectiveness in realizing collectively self-determined strategies and goals. Fanon (2004), is clear that, “colonialism is not a machine capable of thinking, a body endowed with reason. It is naked violence and only gives in when confronted with greater violence” (p. 23). Once the colonized masses come to a self-determined commitment to undoing the conditions that make the entrenchment of colonization possible, the promotion of non-violence by some colonized subjects comes into play:

At the critical, deciding moment the colonialist bourgeoisie, which had remained silent up till then, enters the fray. They introduce a new notion, in actual fact a creation of the colonial situation: nonviolence. In its raw state this nonviolence conveys to the colonized intellectual and business elite that their interests are identical to those of the colonialist bourgeoisie and it is therefore indispensable, a matter of urgency, to reach an agreement for the common good” (p. 23).

The unpreparedness, lack of practical links with the masses, apathy, and cowardice Fanon describes the colonized elite/educated classes displaying at decisive moments in liberatory struggle are on display when colonized intellectuals use their resources and capacities – including the development and promotion of abstractions and symbols of liberation that are detached from significant engagement in the collective work of liberation from the material conditions of oppression – to pacify resurging revolutionary masses of people. Even when anti-
oppressive intellectuals figure they ought not to engage in violent tactics (the necessity of which would be determined contextually based on the likely effectiveness and relevance of their potential involvement), it would seem a contradiction of their claims to anti-oppression to distance themselves from the realities of violent anti-oppressive insurgency to the extent that they would participate in the pacification rather than the organization and promotion of such resistance.

It is important to note here that, though Alfred’s work seems to promote anti-violence except in instances of self-defense, Alfred’s anti-violence is not the same as the non-violence of the self-interested reactionary that Fanon rejects in the above quote. That is, while it is important to understand the pacifying and reactionary effect of many promotions of anti-violence, Alfred’s perspective is more nuanced, interesting, and important than vulgar anti-violent positions. Indeed, Alfred promotes people’s self-determined, active, and effective anti-oppressive resistance:

What separates the warrior from the cooperator is this dangerous engagement with power. Passivity shifts resistance to the less dangerous spheres that the dominant power has designated/created as areas for negotiation or reform – after all, it does not take any courage to negotiate, to advocate, or to reform…. And to be truly dangerous, words and ideas must be convincing in their logic and so grounded in social, cultural, and political reality that there is imminent possibility of their affecting and shaping the actions of people. Overblown rhetoric and fantastic pronouncements that resonate with no one and have no possibility of forming the basis of action are not warrior words at all. They are only small acts of blustery cowardice, rhetorical withdrawals from dangerous realities that are just as condemnable as bodily withdrawals in the face of physical danger (p. 57).

And still, Alfred, presenting the example of Ward Churchill’s notion of liberatory praxis whereby Churchill “rejects non-violence (specifically, the unwillingness to kill) [which I would consider anti-violence rather than non-violence] as an ‘illness’ and argues for the necessity of a violent socialist revolution to supplant the capitalist state” (p. 57), claims that, “[n]o one is
seriously considering these ideas as a platform for a real movement; they are therefore rendered safe” (p. 58).

I have two points to make regarding these claims. First, the claim that nobody is seriously considering violent socialist revolution does not seem plausible. People always resist oppression, often violently. The Black Panther Party is a recent and inspiring example of an organization that managed to effectively engage (materially and ideologically) the masses of working class Afrikans while promoting violent self-defense and socialism. Afrikan liberation movements over the past several decades are full of leaders and organizations that successfully engage masses of people while supporting and promoting socialism, revolution, and violent resistance to oppression.

Second, even if we were to grant that almost no one is seriously considering violent socialist revolution, the conclusion that the idea of violent socialist revolution is rendered safe would not necessarily follow from the fact that very few people are seriously considering it. That is, the fact that the above criterion for a dangerous idea – that it “must be convincing in [its] logic and so grounded in social, cultural, and political reality that there is imminent possibility of [its] affecting and shaping the actions of people” (p. 57) – is not currently met does not lead us to the conclusion that the idea of violent socialist revolution is safe. There are other possibilities for why potentially liberatory ideas do not gain traction, including fear of violent state repression. An idea (and the movements of the people who would promote an idea) might be coercively suppressed by oppressive forces exactly because of its potential threat to an oppressive status quo. Perhaps a widespread lack of the quality of courage Alfred promotes in his work could also account for folks’ reluctance to seriously consider violent
revolutionary acts. Indeed, many people are afraid to speak against oppressive conditions even when doing so is unlikely to result in significant punishment. If widespread cowardice were to be confirmed as an explanation for people’s lack of interest in anti-oppressive violence, perhaps indicating that nobody is seriously considering Alfred’s promotion of courage, then Alfred’s ideas regarding courage, according to his criterion for a safe idea, are perhaps rendered safe.

I figure, however, that the ideas of courage and violent socialist revolution are not sufficiently inhibited by oppressive forces or widespread cowardice to count as safe. If these were safe ideas, the colonial and imperialist states would not require extensive efforts to suppress such ideas from gaining sufficient traction to shape people’s actions. We know that the oppressive forces in the world do require extensive efforts to repress ideas (and their attendant practices) that threaten the status quo (see, for example, Churchill’s (1990) *The COINTELPRO papers: documents from the FBI’s secret wars against domestic dissent*). I figure that safe ideas can be distinguished from ideas whose threat to an oppressive status quo necessitates relentless suppression by oppressive forces. Even if only a few people seriously consider and endeavour to practice ideas that threaten an oppressive status quo, these ideas can gain traction and become increasingly relevant when they are genuinely beneficial to oppressed people and conditions are created for the ideas to flourish. Developing this traction and relevance is a task for folks who play the role of the organic intellectuals among oppressed people (I figure such intellectuals should be courageous given the likelihood of state suppression).

This discussion is about praxis, and it is also about integrity. Alfred provides an important account of the warrior as it relates to specific indigenous practices and people. But I have often
noticed the term warrior employed recklessly by others. A warrior, in my estimation, ought to take seriously the violent realities of material warfare. Given my exploration of the notion of embodied, situated, locatable knowledge, above, as well as the implications of intellectual avoidance (often through abstraction) of violence, the notion of the warrior, as it might apply to scholars with no experience, inclination, or willingness toward strategizing or enacting violence in the course of liberatory struggle, is often merely an analogy. The warrior is an apt analogy, perhaps, to the extent that it fits well with other popular analogies like fighting for justice, intellectual warfare (see Carruthers, 1999), combat (as discussed regarding Fanon), and so on. But, as with Fanon’s combat metaphor, a locatable and embodied notion of the warrior, given the compromised location of the academy, noted above, is dubious. Abstracting the warrior (either through a rejection or abstraction of violence) in order to grant warrior status to those in compromised positions seems to amount to the creation of analogue warriors.

Analogue warriors are the creations of non-warriors. I recently encountered the terms warrior-scholar or warrior-poet employed as if to romanticize the warrior in order to boost the credibility of intellectuals. But it is fine to not be a warrior. Intellectuals do not all need to be warriors, and while everybody engaged in a liberation struggle ought to engage in developing collective self-sufficiency (intellectuals, for example, should learn skills for self-sufficiency so that they do not rely on parasitism to sustain themselves, especially after their specialized role is increasingly rendered obsolete by increasingly participatory and horizontally-organized relations among people), there are other functions they can serve. Intellectuals need not call themselves warriors unless they actually engage in warfare. There actually are warrior-scholars. Folks who actively fight in, theorize, strategize, and intellectualize warfare have written and
theorized extensively, Frantz Fanon and Amilcar Cabral being two of them. And though I cannot claim to know what Fanon would say, his engagement with embodied and locatable knowledge and revolutionary violence lead me figure that we can be skeptical regarding the identity claims of intellectuals (scholars, artists, storytellers, and so on) with negligible battle experience claiming the title of warrior.

Our approach to the use of analogy here could do well to draw on Tuck and Yang’s (2012) approach in “Decolonization is not a metaphor”: we want to be sure to clarify that decolonization is not a metaphor. When metaphor invades decolonization, it kills the very possibility of decolonization; it recenters whiteness, it resettles theory, it extends innocence to the settler, it entertains a settler future. Decolonize (a verb) and decolonization (a noun) cannot easily be grafted onto pre-existing discourses/frameworks, even if they are critical, even if they are anti-racist, even if they are justice frameworks. The easy absorption, adoption, and transposing of decolonization is yet another form of settler appropriation. When we write about decolonization, we are not offering it as a metaphor; it is not an approximation of other experiences of oppression. Decolonization doesn’t have a synonym (p. 3).

Further, Tuck and Yang (2012) clarify that Decolonization as metaphor allows people to equivocate these contradictory decolonial desires because it turns decolonization into an empty signifier to be filled by any track towards liberation. In reality, the tracks walk all over land/people in settler contexts. Though the details are not fixed or agreed upon, in our view, decolonization in the settler colonial context must involve the repatriation of land simultaneous to the recognition of how land and relations to land have always already been differently understood and enacted; that is, all of the land, and not just symbolically (p. 7).

We ought to develop and promote qualities of critical consciousness that entail that we are able and inclined to describe oppressive conditions accurately, and we should also be able and inclined toward identifying our locations and roles in anti-oppressive struggle accurately. Anti-oppressive or liberatory intellectual praxis must confront directly the material conditions
of oppression. Engaged with integrity, this quality of praxis entails that we identify ourselves truthfully. Analogies can be useful. Poetry and stories and other forms of communication in which we employ metaphor and analogy are often central to the ways we relate, communicate, and demonstrate ideas. And we should be careful to engage our analogies with a capacity and inclination toward actively drawing and demonstrating in practice connections between the ideas expressed in our analogies and the material realities of anti-oppression and liberation.

Summary

Alfred and Corntassel (2005) claim that:

When lies become accepted and normal, the imperative of the warrior is to awaken and enliven the truth and to get people to invest belief and energy into that truth. The battle is a spiritual and physical one fought against the political manipulation of the people’s own innate fears and the embedding of complacency, that metastasizing weakness, onto their psyches (p. 603).

If the imperative of the warrior has to do with awakening people toward knowledge of the truth of their conditions, to resist complacency and fear of active critical engagement with the world, to commit to exposing and refuting lies, especially those imposed or promoted by oppressive forces, then the role of the warrior and the role of the anti-oppressive or liberatory intellectual in this sense might overlap in significant ways. To avoid equivocation on the term warrior, and to not engage in an oversimplification of ideas Alfred describes and promotes, I emphasize that this discussion is intended less as a holistic engagement with the notion of the warrior than as a way of highlighting the importance of confronting the world, our locations in the world, and our roles in anti-oppressive struggle as reality rather than mere analogy. This discussion highlights the importance of the anti-oppressive intellectual’s direct involvement in collectivistic liberatory struggle.
To briefly summarize, in this section I have explored an approach to knowledge production that conceptualizes knowledge as embodied, situated, and locatable. I related violence in anti-oppressive struggles to reflections on the role of intellectuals in those struggles. Noting the notion of interruption, some of my experiences in the academy, and drawing on Fanon, Gelderloos, and Alfred, I explored how the notion of knowledge as embodied, situated, and locatable relates to the imperative that intellectuals confront the world as reality rather than mere analogy. The next section will expand on the importance of anti-oppressive intellectuals’ direct involvement in collectivistic liberatory struggles.
PART THREE

The discussion so far has begun to elaborate the potential role of intellectuals in anti-oppressive struggle. To elaborate further, in this section I will expand on the notions of the intellectual and praxis. My goal is to elaborate on concepts of intellectuality and praxis that might be compatible with broad and inclusive anti-oppression (that is, opposition to any and all forms of oppression). While we likely already have an idea of what an intellectual is, it will be useful to make our conceptualization of the intellectual explicit. I will also discuss and promote notions of care and integrity that I figure can undergird and guide a viable approach to genuine anti-oppressive intellectual praxis.

More About Intellectuals

My first task is to differentiate the intellectual and the academic. Academics as I refer to them here are intellectuals located, invested, or otherwise engaged in formal higher education institutions. As Cornel West explains, there “is a fundamental difference between an academic and an intellectual. An academic usually engages in rather important yet still narrow scholarly work, whereas an intellectual is engaged in the public issues that affect large numbers of people in a critical manner” (hooks & West, 1991, p. 29). While I consider academics to also be intellectuals, West’s distinction between the academic intellectual and the public intellectual might be useful in that implies that intellectual’s location, audience, and work are connected. We might infer that those intellectuals situated in the compromised location of the academy who do not maintain roots among oppressed people will become alienated from the public issues and large numbers of people to whom West refers.
To define the intellectual, I draw on Antonio Gramsci’s ideas regarding intellectuals. Edward Said (1996) explains that people “who do perform the intellectual function in society, Gramsci tries to show, can be divided into two types: first, traditional intellectuals such as teachers, priests, and administrators, who continue to do the same things from generation to generation; and second, organic intellectuals, whom Gramsci saw as directly connected to classes or enterprises that used intellectuals to organize interests, gain more power, get more control” (p. 4). Gramsci (1971) explains:

Every social group, coming into existence on the original terrain of an essential function in the world of economic production, creates together with itself, organically, one or more strata of intellectuals which give it homogeneity and an awareness of its own function not only in the economic but also in the social and political fields” (p. 5)

Gramsci (1971) also notes the following:

When one distinguishes between intellectuals and non-intellectuals, one is referring in reality only to the immediate social function of the professional category of the intellectuals, that is, one has in mind the direction in which their specific professional activity is weighted, whether towards intellectual elaboration or towards muscular-nervous effort. This means that, although one can speak of intellectuals, one cannot speak of non-intellectuals, because non-intellectuals do not exist. But even the relationship between efforts of intellectual-cerebral elaboration and muscular-nervous effort is not always the same, so that there are varying degrees of specific intellectual activity.... [Each person, outside their professional activity], carries on some form of intellectual activity, that is, [they are] a “philosopher”, an artist, [a person] of taste, [they participate] in a particular conception of the world, has a conscious line of moral conduct, and therefore contributes to sustain a conception of the world or to modify it, that is, to bring into being new modes of thought” (p. 9).

Gramsci’s (1971) organic intellectual is not the “traditional and vulgarized type of intellectual [that] is given by the man of letters, the philosopher, the artist” (p. 9). Rather, the “mode of being of the [intellectual] can no longer consist in eloquence, which is an exterior and momentary mover of feelings and passions, but in active participation in practical life” (p. 10). As already noted in a footnote above, the role of the intellectuals of dominant groups includes:
1. The “spontaneous” consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group; this consent is “historically” caused by the prestige (and consequent confidence) which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function in the world of production.  

2. The apparatus of state coercive power which “legally” enforces discipline on those groups who do not “consent” either actively or passively. This apparatus is, however, constituted for the whole of society in anticipation of moments of crisis of command and direction when spontaneous consent has failed (p. 12).

While the intellectuals of the dominating classes serve the function of establishing and maintaining hegemony, the function of the organic intellectuals situated within the oppressed classes is to establish and maintain counter-hegemony. Drawing from the discussion so far, we can reaffirm that developing anti-oppressive definitional power, which I have related to counter-hegemony, is central to our development and promotion of anti-oppressive intellectuality. The organic intellectuals of the oppressed peoples of the world are tasked with the project of developing and promoting concepts and understandings of the world that are liberatory. We can reaffirm that knowledge is situated, locatable, and embodied – that knowledge is mediated by the cultural and political contexts in which we are situated, and that the organic intellectuals of the oppressed classes must develop theories based on their direct and active engagement in collective anti-oppressive struggle.

**More About Praxis**

As Friere (1985) describes, “[p]raxis is not blind action, deprived of intention or of finality. It is action and reflection.... It is only as beings of praxis, in accepting our concrete situations as a challenging condition, that we are able to change its meaning by our action” (pp. 154-155). Further, Friere’s (2000) “defense of the praxis implies no dichotomy by which this praxis could be divided into a prior stage of reflection and a subsequent stage of action. Action and reflection occur simultaneously. A critical analysis of reality may, however, reveal that a
particular form of action is impossible or inappropriate at the present time. Those who through reflection perceive the infeasibility or inappropriateness of one or another form of action (which should accordingly be postponed or substituted) cannot thereby be accused of inaction. Critical reflection is also action” (p. 128).

Praxis is the active engagement in action and theorizing concurrently. Effective theory and action derive from and are inseparable from each other. As an example in the context of anti-oppressive struggle, as we formulate our organizational structures, membership, strategies, and tactics for resistance to state violence, we draw on the examples of our ancestors and contemporaries. With these theoretical and practical examples as the foundations upon which we innovate, we endeavour (sincerely, even if sometimes inelegantly) to experiment, engage in criticism and self-criticism, forthrightly assess our failures and successes, and adjust our theories and practices accordingly. We have learned, for example, the importance of self-defense and the inadequacy of anti-violence as a principled approach to state violence, even while we recognize the great majority of tactics in liberatory struggle will be non-violent.

Praxis and Care

Here I will not argue for what we ought to care about. Rather, I am starting with an assumption that you, the reader, care about the liberation of oppressed people and that your care compels your identification with and investment in ongoing histories and enactments of liberatory struggle.

To begin, what is care? The following is an account of an ethic of care, as described by Nel Noddings (2007):
First, the ethic of care dismisses the old distinction between *is* and *ought* as a pseudoproblem. We do not have to construct elaborate logical rationales to explain why human beings ought to treat one another as positively as our situation permits. Ethical life is not separate from and alien to the physical world. Because we human beings are in the world, not mere spectators watching from outside it, our social instincts and the reflective elaboration of them are also in the world. Pragmatists and care theorists agree on this. The ought—better, the “I ought”—arises directly in lived experience. “Oughtness,” one might say, is part of our “isness” (p. 222).

Noddings (2007), having affirmed that people are situated in and not separable from the physical world, continues to describe a quality of care that is common to many human situations in which people spontaneously respond to others’ plight – Noddings calls this “natural” caring, and differentiates it from “ethical” caring:

In contrast, “ethical” caring does have to be summoned. The “I ought” arises but encounters conflict: An inner voice grumbles, “I ought but I don’t want to,” or “Why should I respond?” or “This guy deserves to suffer, so why should I help?” On these occasions we need not turn to a principle; more effectively, we turn to our memories of caring and being cared for and a picture or ideal of ourselves as carers. Ethical caring’s great contribution is to guide action long enough for natural caring to be restored and for people once again to interact with mutual and spontaneous regard” (p. 222).

That is, the development of ethical principles is not the ultimate end of intellectual activity. Rather, especially as intellectuals committed to the ultimate elimination of all forms of oppression, our goal is to actively create the conditions in which people are inclined toward mutual care and ensuring the wellbeing of all people. Noddings (2007) elaborates on the role of ethical principles:

An interesting debate has arisen over the role of principles in ethics. No one would deny the everyday usefulness of principles as rules of thumb or shortcuts to reliable conclusions. We all learn from experience to respond in certain ways to certain situations, and for the most part these rules or principles save us a great deal of mental labor. But Kantians and rule utilitarians have made principles the very heart of ethics.... In contrast, the ethic of care gives only a minor place to principles and insists instead that ethical discussions must be made in caring interactions with those affected by the discussion. Indeed, it is exactly in the most difficult situations that principles fail us. Thus, instead of turning to a principles for guidance, a carer turns to the cared-for. What does he or she
need? Will filling this need harm others in the network of care? Am I competent to fill this need? Will I sacrifice too much of myself? Is the expressed need really in the best interest of the cared-for? If the cared-for is a stranger, I might ask how I would respond to her or him if she or he were a member of my inner circle” (pp. 222-223).

As I have already made clear, in oppressive conditions dialogue among oppressors and oppressed is precluded. Oppressive conditions are not characterized by mutuality or caring interactions between those who dominate and those who are dominated. Creating the conditions for such caring interactions to prevail necessarily entails the elimination of all forms of dominance and oppression – this broad transformation necessitates nothing less than worldwide liberatory revolution. Still, we can affirm from Noddings’ comments on the ethic of care that part of the role of the anti-oppressive intellectual is to develop, establish, and maintain ideas and practices characterized by caring relations among comrades. We develop principles and theories and practices and endeavour to influence the cultures and encourage organization of material conditions in which we are situated in order to establish care as a foundation of our anti-oppressive and liberatory praxis. We will require ongoing justifications for, and well-considered ethical debates, principles, and norms regarding care. But ultimately the quality of care Noddings is referring to must be built into the foundations of our cosmology, our cultures, values, aesthetics, social and political organization, relationships to our broader environments, and so on.

Care, as I conceptualize it here (borrowing some terminology from Frankfurt’s (1988) *The Importance of What We Care About*), has to do with what we are invested in, concerned with and about, and identified with. When we care about something we: invest in it resources at our disposal (e.g. time, labour, thought, land and resources, and so on); are concerned with it (it
keeps us busy) and concerned about it (we reflect upon it); identify with it to the extent that our happiness or wellbeing is tied up with or contingent upon it.

This reflection on intellectuality, praxis, and care helps us conceptualize a viable quality of anti-oppressive praxis and might help us clarify what integrity might mean for those of us who claim to care about anti-oppression or liberation.

**Praxis and Integrity**

Integrity (often considered the antonym of hypocrisy), as it relates to care, has to do with our consistency of identity (we can call these, roughly and for the current discussion, our beliefs about ourselves), actions and investments, and principles (Frankfurt, 1988). Simply, we have integrity of care when our claim or belief that we care about something is proportional to our actions and investments that substantiate that claim or belief. While our actions and beliefs about ourselves might be related in complex ways to ideological principles, when it comes to care, we can observe ideology in action. For example, the material evidence for how our work contributes to the liberation of Afrikans is a good indicator to us of the extent to which we care about the liberation of Afrikans. Of course, as a symptom of oppressive conditions, we often have less to offer to liberation struggle than we care to offer. For now, we might reflect upon whatever resources we do have to contribute.

Indeed, in Amilcar Cabral’s (1979) “The Weapon of Theory” (a title whose metaphor might help reveal some of the teleological nuances of theory for Cabral) Cabral's famous notion of class suicide makes clear the role of those of us who have resources to contribute to people's struggle for liberation:

To maintain the power that national liberation puts in its hands, the petty bourgeoisie has only one road: to give free rein to its natural tendencies to become more ‘bourgeois’, to
allow the development of a bourgeoisie of bureaucrats and intermediaries in the trading system, to transform itself into a national pseudo-bourgeoisie, that is to deny the revolution and necessarily subject itself to imperialist capital. Now this corresponds to the neocolonial situation, that is to say, to betrayal of the objectives of national liberation. In order not to betray these objectives, the petty bourgeoisie has only one road: to strengthen its revolutionary consciousness, to repudiate the temptations to become ‘bourgeois’ and the natural pretensions of its class mentality; to identify with the classes of workers, not to oppose the normal development of the process of revolution. This means that in order to play completely the part that falls to it in the national liberation struggle, the revolutionary petty bourgeoisie must be capable of committing *suicide* as a class, to be restored to life in the condition of a revolutionary worker completely identified with the deepest aspirations of the people to which he belongs” (p. 136, emphasis original).

Here, Cabral’s words might help clarify, for those of us who purport to care about Afrikan liberation, what integrity of care might entail: class suicide, which entails a complete identification with and material investment (full enough to transform one's class status) in people aspiring toward the end of oppressive conditions. The few intellectuals who achieve such a class suicide must become organic intellectuals of the oppressed classes in which they are situated. Care, then, necessitates that anti-oppressive intellectuals become situated, located among the oppressed classes or at least such that these intellectuals can understand and articulate the material conditions of oppressed people.

The quality of care we are conceptualizing is situated, locatable, embodied, and active. We might consider the quality of care I am referring to here as *effective* care – our care, in effect, only exists to the extent that its effects are detectable. One of Amilcar Cabral's most famous statements echoes this sentiment: "Always bear in mind that the people are not fighting for ideas, for the things in anyone's head. They are fighting to win material benefits, to live better and in peace, to see their lives go forward, to guarantee the future of their children" (Cabral, 1974, p. 70). The fight and struggle for liberation, while necessitating discourse, is
never submerged by words and affirms, "that every practice gives birth to a theory" (Cabral, 1979, p. 123) specific to and informed by the material conditions and needs of people.

None of this is meant to deny the value or necessity of critical consciousness, principles, or ideological development and preparation in liberatory struggle. Nor is it to devalue the less concrete elements of culture (Cabral (1974) gives an account on how culture and material struggle relate in “National Liberation and Culture”). It is, rather, to affirm the material ends of liberatory struggle. Even contestations of histories and definitions of liberation and peace, for Cabral, arise from and ought to effect desired material outcomes for liberatory struggle (see Cabral’s (1974) “National Liberation and Culture” in Return to the source: Selected speeches).

The claims, "I care about Afrikan liberation," and, "my family and friends are Afrikans, and I care about their liberation" are substantively different from each other. I have observed people who claim the former while enacting the latter in exclusive and insular ways. Similarly, narrow nationalisms and chauvinisms often infuse the claim, "I care about Afrikan liberation," with untruth and hypocrisy. That is, in line with a fundamental principle of intellectual honesty that we proportion our knowledge claims to the evidence we have to support them (and remain willing to engage in ongoing discussion when there is insufficient space or time to present sufficient arguments or evidence), we ought to proportion our claims of care for Afrikan liberation to the evidence that our actions and investments are supporting the liberation of all Afrikan people. When we say we care about any quality of anti-oppression, when we claim any anti-oppressive ism, we have integrity to the extent that our actions resonate with the broad and inclusive anti-oppressive project of ending all forms of oppression.
Praxis and Self Care

There are at least two potential problems with my claims above: 1) our sincere actions and investments might unsuccessfully contribute a liberation project, and it seems unfair to then claim in retrospect that integrity of care was not achieved, and 2) as noted above, often as a symptom of oppressive conditions, we often have less to offer to liberation struggle than we care to offer.

Regarding 1, that our sincere actions and investments might unsuccessfully contribute to Afrikan liberation entails that caring is a process (or praxis). That is, it requires ongoing coconstitutive reflection and action that inform each other and are not easily (or coherently) separable from each other. When we receive evidence that our actions are ineffectively contributing to strategies and tactics, integrity of care, rather than requiring our success, entails that we duly make adjustments in order to increase the likelihood of ongoing success. For Cabral, revolution is a process, and necessitates honest, critical self-reflection and recognition that more and better can always be done. Indeed, Cabral (1974) made clear that members of the PAIGC should

dedicate themselves seriously to study, that they interest themselves in the things and problems of our daily life and struggle in their fundamental and essential aspect, and not simply in their appearance.... Learn from life, learn from our people, learn from books, learn from the experience of others. Never stop learning. Responsible members must take life seriously, conscious of their responsibilities, thoughtful about carrying them out, and with a comradeship based on work and duty done.... Nothing of this is incompatible with the joy of living, or with love for life and its amusements, or with confidence in the future and in our work (pp. 71-72).

Regarding 2, there are the differential qualities of sacrifice entailed by differential qualities of oppression – all sacrifices equal, folks with fewer resources to offer sacrifice proportionately more. Further, there are differential qualities of choice entailed by differential
qualities of coercion – all sacrifices equal, folks who have fewer choices (or face greater punishment or risk of punishment) sacrifice proportionately more. This is why the discussion here is primarily concerning those who, in their current conditions, can choose to contribute resources and capacities at their disposal (especially those who have gained those resources and capacities from people's struggles).

It might be relevant here to note recent discussions about self-care that have been circulating among local activists and community members where I have been located while writing this thesis. I have noticed that sometimes forms of care that I would understand as collective or community care are named self-care, as if these forms of care are individualistic. The range of formulations of self-care (a misnomer given that the most effective formulations of it would be better named collective or community care) and personal sacrifice we might consider are broad. When accounts of self-care range from, "I will expensively vacation in ways that maximize exploitation of Afrikan workers," to, "I will engage with and help build collectivistic community institutions that engender interpersonal caring while uncompromisingly fighting forces of oppression and developing services that'll meet our needs," the term becomes confusing.

While we could conceptualize rest periods as breaks from training or study, I figure it is beneficial to reject this conceptualization. Rest periods (which should be built into our routines according to the quality, intensity, and duration of our activities) are as essential to any effective work or process as any other element of that work or process. Rest is when we ensure time for healing, certain qualities of reflection, learning, nourishing, and so on. We are capable of figuring what it takes to rest effectively or to rest ineffectively, or to rest in ways that
maximize our contributions to whatever we care about. We can take rest, and care generally, as seriously as any other element of our strategies and tactics for liberation. Our caring and our seriousness of study allow us to reflect productively on whether we are contributing to or hindering our goals. Here, with what is perhaps one of his most famously quoted statements, Cabral (1974) offers some direction:

> We must practice revolutionary democracy in every aspect of our Party life. Every responsible member must have the courage of his responsibilities, exacting from others a proper respect for his work and properly respecting the work of others. Hide nothing from the masses of our people. Tell no lies. Expose lies whenever they are told. Mask no difficulties, mistakes, failures. Claim no easy victories (p. 72).

Each of us in a collective can duly contribute according to our capacities and benefit according to our needs.

Many of us know how it feels to hear someone say, “I care about you,” when their actions reveal otherwise. Let us never effect such feelings among the people we purport to care about. Ultimately, this examination of care and anti-oppressive praxis posits that the anti-oppressive intellectuals become worldly manifestations of the statement, "I care about liberation" or, “I care about the wellbeing of oppressed people.” Anybody with the audacity to make such a statement will do well to remember that care is active, not well abstracted, and that (rationalizations and cognitive dissonance aside) truthful and critical self-reflection moves us toward an integrity of care that necessitates the immersion in the material struggles for the liberation of all people. For some of us this necessitates no less than a Cabralian class suicide.

Ultimately, we want our people to be well! Our ethics is founded on the belief that whatever we build together can and should facilitate our wellness. Forthrightly defining
wellness, taken as a broad collectivistic endeavour, I figure, might become part of how we will derive the fundamental criteria for our ethics.

**Concluding Statements**

*our mission is a legacy
and if we ask those who came before us, "am I next?"
they will say, "you better be."

This thesis has argued that liberal education is inadequate for anti-oppressive praxis. Creating the conditions for people’s freedom of growth necessitates that oppressive conditions be actively identified, resisted, and eliminated. Organic intellectuals of oppressed classes have the role of building critical consciousness among their people. In many conversations with my comrades, it is expressed that we must not exclusively structure our lives around resisting oppressive forces – we must also make sincere efforts to imagine and build whatever we envision for the world as it ought to be. In order to build with each other while we resist oppressive conditions, we make efforts to cut the noose of oppressive hegemony. We engage in the development of anti-oppressive definitional power.

This thesis explored notions of knowledge, intellectuality, integrity, and care that I argue can be compatible with anti-oppressive or liberatory praxis. I have explored the notion of situated, locatable, and embodied knowledge, and have distinguished between academics and intellectuals (which are, of course, not mutually exclusive categories). While intellectuals often traverse the academy, the task of the anti-oppressive intellectuals is to commit Cabralian class suicide, to situate themselves, or continue to be situated, such that they can understand and articulate the material conditions of oppressed people. The role of the organic intellectual of the oppressed classes is to develop and communicate understandings of the world that
contribute to the liberation of people from oppressive conditions. Toni Cade Bambara (2012) speaks about this role of the intellectual:

The task of the artist is determined always by the status and process and agenda of the community that it already serves. If you’re an artist who identifies with, who springs from, who is serviced by or drafted by a bourgeois capitalist class then that’s the kind of writing you do. Then your job is to maintain status quo, to celebrate exploitation or to guise it in some lovely, romantic way. That’s your job...

As a cultural worker who belongs to an oppressed people my job is to make revolution irresistible. One of the ways I attempt to do that is by celebrating those victories within the black community. And I think the mere fact that we’re still breathing is a cause for celebration. Also, my job is to critique the reactionary behavior within the community and to keep certain kinds of calls out there: the children, our responsibility of children, our responsibility to maintain some kind of continuity from the past. But I think for any artist your job is determined by the community you’re identifying with (p. 35).

The above statement remains relevant today and every day. We learn from affirming this role of the intellectual that we must do the same. Countless revolutionary ancestors have played this role, and it is for those of us alive right now to continue to play such a role.

This thesis explored and promoted notions of care and integrity that I figure can undergird and guide a viable approach to the anti-oppressive or liberatory praxis that is the task of the intellectuals of the oppressed classes. Ultimately, we aim to build toward cosmologies that will hold as inherently and universally valuable a world without any form of oppression. An ethic of care as outlined here might facilitate or mediate that aim.

Why is any of this important? Frankly, I am not very invested in convincing anybody that this is important. My intended audience is folks who already hold as important our discussions about and work toward figuring out how to effectively resist oppression and build together for our wellbeing. Perhaps, though, some comrades will figure my reflections here are insufficiently valuable contributions to such discussions and work. In that case, this thesis can be considered a small fragment of a life comprising the entirety of my actions and contributions over time. If
we are comrades, I hope we can have valuable conversations or do some valuable work someday. In any case, the reasons for why readers might or might not find this discussion important vary widely enough that I will speak only to why I figure it is important. I believe that inquiry into the qualities and role of intellectuals in anti-oppressive and liberatory struggles is important, largely because intellectuals (noting that the intellectuals are those people serving the “immediate social function” (Gramsci, 1971) of intellectual, and should neither be considered as permanently bound to that function nor as having exclusive access to that function) play a role in the development or articulation of ideologies. Ideological development is crucial for liberatory struggle. I figure my discussion of some of the qualities of anti-oppressive or liberatory intellectuality moves the inquiry forward in a positive way and presents some ideas regarding the cultivation of intellectuality that resists the reproduction of oppressions that we observe in liberal education in Western contexts.

What are the implications of these ideas? There are implications for intellectuals and other people situated in the academy. The academy, in my estimation, is an institution that hoards and greatly limits access to privileged educational resources that should be accessible to everybody. Those of us who traverse the academy should play a role in creating access points, engaging in subversion, or creating alternative educational spaces and resources for oppressed people. Intellectuals situated in the academy and anywhere else should continuously assess their investments and location in the academy and elsewhere, and confront forthrightly the effectiveness of their work and contributions to anti-oppressive or liberation movements or actions. For those of us audacious enough to claim we are striving for or achieving any quality of anti-oppressive or liberatory world or work, we should continuously reflect on the extent to
which we are acting with integrity of care. Intellectuals should also recognize that, as people organize in increasingly collectivistic and non-hierarchical ways, all people increasingly play the role of intellectual. Indeed, an ultimate goal of the anti-oppressive intellectual is to be made obsolete.

The implications of any anti-oppressive or liberatory praxis will play out in the effective actions we carry out toward the liberation of people and the ultimate end of all forms of oppression. This thesis is significant to the extent that it corresponds with actions carried out with sufficient integrity to be useful in the ongoing, long-term project and legacy of creating the conditions for all people to be well.

As stated in the introduction, this thesis is a preliminary survey of some issues related to the question, what are some of the qualities of an anti-oppressive or liberatory intellectuality. We can remember that the discussions and arguments included herein are discussions and arguments that we have almost every day, in some form, in the course of figuring out what to understand and do in order to effectively resist oppressive conditions and build with each other for our wellbeing. I hope to have contributed well enough both on and off paper to these discussions. I continue to hope that any gaps in my arguments here are filled, abundantly, in real, practical, and ongoing conversations, work, and relationships.
POSTSCRIPT: POETRY

Reading My Intentions

The following two poems are written to be heard more than they are written to be read from a page. I prefer to engage with my people without relatively cold, thin pages separating us. Nevertheless, I am including this section with two poems through which I address the notion of praxis. I currently use spoken word poetry as part of a collaborative project that engages in cultural work guided by, arising from, and hopefully contributing to a shared history and legacy of pan-Afrikan liberation struggle and community building. Most of the character of these pieces is developed through cadence, body language, conversation, storytelling, and relationships built among the folks with whom we share community spaces. That character is largely lost on these pages, but I hope there is enough left for some of the energy and intent with which I try to speak these words to endure. That said, my intentions need not matter too much.

I mention intention partly to revisit Brann’s claim that education is a process of becoming literate, and that that literacy is the ability to draw meaning and truth from texts, where the reflective realm is deposited (Brann 1996, p. 17). When we consider whatever might count as a competent or literate reading of something, we imply that readers can be better or worse at interpreting. It is important to note that the methods we use to interpret different types of object vary. Our modes of interpretation are not the same for all kinds of communication, whether verbal (e.g., spoken word poetry, storytelling), non-verbal (e.g., paintings, films, music), written, or as embodied in various other qualities of symbol or gesture.
It is often through use of rigid conventions that we interpret words. Spoken word poetry is sometimes an exception – the conventions for interpreting spoken word poetry are often less rigid than for other kinds of communication that utilize words. And reading competency is contingent on the rigidity of the conventions through which things are interpreted. The rigidity of a set of communicative conventions depends on the type of work or action we are concerned with. The rules for interpreting poetry will likely be more relaxed than those for interpreting an emergency first aid instruction manual. Communicative conventions are context-specific.

To carry out readings of works and actions, we might also investigate people’s intentions. Of course the meaning of a poem, for example, is not at all related to intention until an audience is made aware of the intentions of the poet. The question here, however, is not whether a poem has meaning before its audience is made aware of the poet’s intentions. The question is whether an audience can carry out a competent reading of a poem without being aware of the poet’s intentions. Livingston (1996) defends a moderate intentionalist position. He argues that competent readings depend “in part on our fallible comprehension of the actions and attitudes of the storytellers” (p.171). Using the example of a damagingly racist film, Livingston (1996) explains that film-makers are culpable for intentionally creating a damaging representation of members of an actual group. Cases of unintentional wrongdoing of this sort are harder to legislate, however, for here we face a difficult decision in which we must weigh a number of different factors, including the gravity of the harm done and the extent to which the relevant agent(s) could reasonably have been expected to foresee that harm would be done (p.153-154).

Much, perhaps most, oppression occurs with the unintentionally-oppressive participation of masses of people. Indeed, systemic oppression largely exists in the absence of intentional harm. It is worth noting here Bergland’s (2000) notion of ghosting, explored in "The National
Uncanny: Indian Ghosts and American Subjects", whereby indigenous peoples are repressed in an American imagination:

By discursively emptying physical territory of Indians and by removing those Indians into white imaginative spaces, spectralization claims the physical landscape as American territory and simultaneously transforms the interior landscape into American territory. The horrors of this discursive practice are clear: the Indians who are transformed into ghosts cannot be buried or evaded, and the specter of their forced disappearance haunts the American nation and the American imagination (p.5).

To be ghosted is to be defined out of existence, and such erasure happens not only through institutional control, but through oppressors' power to define which bodies get to count as human and what perspectives get to count as intelligent. Tanya Titchosky (2007) applies the notion of ghosting to hurricane Katrina, describing how power relations of poor, racialized, disabled bodies were erased, "disappearing from the social landscape as a form of human existence" (p. 6). The interaction of oppression with intention and oppression with indifference can be located at the sites of such erasures, where what could easily be (or become) active revulsion and hatred directed against subjugated bodies and perspectives manifests instead as the oppressors’ indifference and oppressed’s imagined disappearance in the minds and cultural products of oppressors. But the oppressed insist on staying alive and resisting oppression, no matter how unrelentingly genocidal the oppressor is.

And the oppressor is extremely vulnerable (dependent on the labour of the majority of people on the planet, for example), and so represses signs and reminders of their vulnerability, mutually agreeing to uphold their delusion of invulnerability (this connects with Mills’ (1997) Racial Contract). Invulnerable, with oppressive structures and institutions and infrastructures to carry out genocide without direct (or intentional) intervention, the most ostensibly powerful members of the oppressor classes do not need to intentionally dominate the oppressed.
Intentions do not always matter – competent anti-racist, queer, and feminist readings often must read beyond people’s intentions in order to understand how cultural products affect our conditions. In order to address hegemony as it manifests in cultural products, we often ignore intention altogether. The communicative conventions that help determine anti-oppressive ways of interpreting the world do not necessitate an understanding of people’s intentions, and it seems unreasonable to deem such readings as not competent. It seems more reasonable to accept that intention is not necessary for competent interpretations of people’s actions and works. While intentions will likely affect our readings of actions, objects, or events, intentions are not necessary for competent interpretations.

I do not expect my intentions to matter here, but I also figure that an anti-oppressive praxis will entail that my words here be read as they relate to the extent to which I achieve integrity of care. I cannot communicate that through this thesis. Even while this thesis circumvents some conventions of thesis writing, my approach has still been overdetermined by those conventions. In any case, I have spent more of my time while registered in graduate school engaging in organizing or educational work with my people than doing anything related to graduate school. While this thesis is a relatively formal project, the broader and vastly more important project of actively organizing ourselves to resist forces of domination (and to start to figure out how we might imagine and build a world without any forms oppression as it ought to be) will take more endurance. This work is constant, ongoing, long-term, and is not necessarily to be judged based on the intentions of individuals. An anti-oppressive intellectual praxis must involve an assessment of the affects of our work in the material conditions of oppressed
people. Whether or not we care about intentions, we should be read less as texts than according to our actions, relationships, and how we affect the world over time.

**Less Talk, More Action**

less talk
[more action]
sometimes that's what people say to me
and these people call themselves many things "doers" or "leaders" or "action-oriented"
and so whatever they claim to be
i check the friend i can always rely on thefreedictionary.com
and i look up the word "talk"
and i read
to articulate
to give expression to in words
to speak or to discuss
which is to speak and to be heard
to examine or consider
can be spoken, signed, or written
debate, conversation
and it's not necessarily sittin around
not doing nothin
so what does it mean?
less talk
[more action]
less speak and more do
more concrete, less abstraction
but let's consider this
if talking's not an action, then what is it?
when i speak what am i doing
if doing, is what i didn't?
see that's confusing
so let's use more precision:
we know that talking is an action
so saying less talk
[more action]
it doesn't make sense
what people usually mean when they say it is that the kind of action that talking is
at the moment, maybe it lacks content
or it lacks relevance
or it lists facts and dates and names and places
and still lacks context
or it's full of platitudes and empty promises
and wack concepts
or it treats black bodies, as objects
or as science projects
or it erases our personhood
denies the ways that we speak
or wastes time we could be spending developing strategies
for our progress
or, sometimes when people say less talk
[MORE ACTION]
what they actually mean is something like
i'm not interested in hearing folks talk back and forth
acting like they know our struggle better than we do
speaking above everyone else in the room
as if it's a contest
or, sometimes when people say less talk
[MORE ACTION]
what they mean is
young people are dying in the streets
and despite y'all comments
if all y'all words aint reachin the young brother on the concrete
right now, it just sounds a little bit like nonsense
and i agree with what y'all are saying
and i don't mean to speak no offense
and i'm down for critical consciousness
cuz colonization is complex
but with all due respect
fuck y'all talk
if y'all aint talkin to the youth
and i dun heard your theory a thousand times
and i'm tired
and it's time
for some proof

and i'm down to talk
about all the work we gotta do
about the ideological development
and the strategies and plans and goals we gotta
uncompromisingly pursue
and yes, talking is doing something
i figure
we just gotta be more real with each other
about the something that it's doing

see, when we talk
we have a chance to figure out our contributions
to get used to being critiqued
to lovingly confront our privileges, and our complicities
and our contradictions, and to explicitly
voice our commitment to the struggle
and to meet each other, on purpose
and that's why we speak
because everywhere i go
some of the most brilliant folks i meet
they aint talkin to each other
and it's usually
because of hurt feelings, hurt pride, n petty beef
so that some the most committed and serious people
behave like agents and reactionaries
because folks got confused by each other
or didn't come through for each other
or cuz they slightly disagree
and because of our everyday struggles
and our many hidden weights and pains
broken trust n scuffed knees
and because i needed somebody at sometime
and i didn't get what i need
and because we lack discipline
and because we get sad sometimes
and because our real enemies
will always benefit from these
we got work to do
so we aren't more limited in our capacities
for learning and for growing
in the struggle than we have to be
cuz when revolution come
and some of us are left behind
i hope it's not because
we could have but didnt feel inclined
to talk it out and squash shit
or to recognize
that less talk
[more action]
is exactly
what we need exactly at the moment
when our talk is so detached from our action
that we conceptualize speaking as anything but
something we need
to fight for anything worth having
or when our words find so little traction
in our struggles, lives, and passions
that we would ever
dare to say something as absurd as
less talk
[more action]

*kande mbeu (throw the seed)*

we sow seeds in the soil
so our people get to eat
n self-sufficiency’s the goal
n we don’t even see a need
for interventions from the state
donations, charity n greed-driven modes of food provision
see our vision is impeded
by mass media
mass production
massive debt
masses believin
that we
can’t fix our own problems
so to solve em
means we need
a mass movement
of our people
people movin through the streets
steppin to the rhythm of a
revolutionary beat
see we believe in
the capacity
of our people
to achieve
the liberation of all people
what we do
[throw a seed]

and when we say we throw a seed
its not just an analogy
to speak of freedom without feeding ourselves
is triviality
we need
to grow
food
to be clear
we need
to know
our food
intimately
and when we give life
to the life that gives us life
it keeps us grounded
so we don’t need a metaphor
to tell us how to get down
we don’t do “grassroots”
why we need a grassroots movement?
fuck grass!
we need a calabash roots movement
a ginger root, squash, kale, n beans roots movement
a watermelon, pepper, collard greens roots movement

we don’t need more turf lawn n grass politics
we need more Black Power working-class politics
a metaphors-match-our-lives-and-the-facts politics
a we-are-what-we-do-and-how-we-act politics
and we learn from the present and the past, all of it
until we show and prove a liberatory path politics

what we do
[throw a seed]

n when we throw seeds
to grow trees
that outlast the last of us

when what we grow in this world
endures past our imaginations
stifled in concrete and glass
and plastic
thus rooting into soil rich with
histories
of relentless beauty
love
and care
and bullshit
that we somehow use
to fertilize
the soil in which
our revolution grows

like a dung beetle hustlin
that is how we roll

what we do
[throw a seed]
References


