

Liminagraphy

Lessons in Life-affirming Research Practices for Collective
Liberation

Zuleika Bibi Sheik

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**Liminagraphy
Lessons in Life-affirming Research Practices for
Collective Liberation**

**Liminagrafie
Lessen in levensbevestigend onderzoekspraktijken
voor collectieve bevrijding**

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Gerry Samuel Sommer
Gelila Binyam
Bitania Binyam
&
the beautiful one's yet to be born

Little sparks ignite the largest flames of wisdom



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Acknowledgements

To all the relations
who walk with me
through this
lifetime

your
encouragement
support
and
kind gestures
however big or small
have left an imprint
on the flesh
of my heart

In this way
I carry you with me
always



Abstract

In *The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House* Audre Lorde asks us to take seriously the question “What does it mean when the tools of a racist patriarchy are used to examine the fruits of that same patriarchy?” she goes on to answer “It means that only the most narrow perimeters of change are possible and allowable” (2017 [1979]: 17)¹. Using Lorde’s dictum as an anchor, this thesis provides a decolonial feminist critique of the modern/colonial knowledge system whilst simultaneously arguing for a reclaiming of knowledges and research practice. In doing so it highlights the need for radical alternatives in our approaches to knowledge, justice and collective liberation, offering Liminagraphy as one possible pathway.

The research undertaken set out to find the ways in which we can cultivate knowledge that is epistemically non-violent in the context of the racialized, gendered, colonial and neoliberal university. Through conversations with women of colour and those who resist the logics of dominant knowledge production, it was learned that this involves the simultaneous processes of decolonizing the self, dispelling myths around gender and identity, refusing knowledge production as a practice, embracing multiple forms of knowing, and lastly, underscoring the necessity of building coalition across difference for collective liberation. These lessons then provided the fertile ground upon which liminagraphy germinated. Embedded in a decolonial feminist and transformative justice approach, with a relational-ethics at its core, Liminagraphy provides tools and practices which address the ‘how’ of decolonizing, ensuring that erasure, extraction and harm are mitigated in the research process. Thus, Liminagraphy is envisioned as a life-affirming approach to research that offers a pathway to decolonial re-existence and collective liberation through relationality, reciprocity, accountability and coalition.

¹ Lorde, A. (2017) *The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House*. Penguin Classics, UK.

Whilst this thesis builds upon the many valuable contributions to decolonizing specific disciplines and methodology its particular focus is on the unlearning of the researcher as expert and their reorientation towards life-affirming practices through being/becoming in relation. As such its main contribution is to debates on decolonizing methodology. In addition, it also contributes to discussions on anti-colonial approaches to development studies by radically questioning the inequities that underpin mainstream developmental research practices, thus highlighting disciplinary limitations. Using a radical approach which interrogates the practice of research, at the level of epistemology, ontology, methodology, axiology and the written form, this thesis contributes to generatively conceptualizing knowledge beyond disciplinary and western frameworks. Using poetry, storytelling and podcast as forms of enfleshed theorizing, its innovation lies in its refusal of taken-for-granted research protocols, providing a new approach to research which meaningfully engages with intersectional-positionality, abolitionist practices and what it means to dream-live-feel-think-sense-practice collective liberation.

Liminagrafie: Lessen in levensbevestigend onderzoekspraktijken voor collectieve bevrijding



Samenvatting

In haar boek *The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House* stelt Audre Lorde de lezer de volgende vraag: 'Wat betekent het wanneer de instrumenten van een racistisch patriarchaat worden gebruikt om de vruchten van datzelfde patriarchaat te onderzoeken?' Haar antwoord: 'Het betekent dat alleen de smalste marges van verandering mogelijk en toelaatbaar zijn' (2017 [1979]: 17).² Met deze uitspraak van Lorde als fundament biedt dit proefschrift een dekoloniale feministische kritiek op het moderne/koloniale kennissysteem. Tegelijkertijd wordt gepleit voor het terugwinnen van kennis en onderzoekspraktijken. Dit benadrukt de behoefte aan radicale alternatieven in de benadering van kennis, rechtvaardigheid en collectieve bevrijding, waarbij liminagrafie wordt voorgesteld als een mogelijke route.

In dit onderzoek is gezocht naar manieren om kennis te ontwikkelen die epistemologisch geweldloos is in de context van de geracialiseerde, gendergebonden, koloniale en neoliberale universiteit. Uit gesprekken met vrouwen van kleur en mensen die zich verzetten tegen de logica van de dominante kennisproductie, bleek dat dit het volgende met zich meebrengt: gelijktijdige processen van dekolonisatie van het zelf, ontkrachten van mythen rond gender en identiteit, weigeren van kennisproductie als gebruik, omarmen van meerdere vormen van weten, en ten slotte benadrukken van de noodzaak van het vormen van coalities die verschillen overbruggen voor collectieve bevrijding. Deze lessen vormden de vruchtbare bodem waarop de liminagrafie kon ontluiken. Liminagrafie is ingebed in een dekoloniale feministische en transformatieve rechtvaardigheidsbenadering, met een relationele ethiek als kern, en biedt instrumenten en praktijken om het 'hoe' van dekoloniseren te verkennen. Hierbij wordt ervoor gewaakt dat uitwissing, onttrekking en schade in het onderzoeksproces optreden. Daarmee

² Lorde, A. (2017). *The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House*. Penguin Classics, UK.

wordt liminagrafie opgevat als een levensbevestigende onderzoeksbenadering, die een weg biedt naar een dekoloniale herbestaan en collectieve bevrijding door middel van relationaliteit, wederkerigheid, verantwoording en coalitie.

Terwijl dit proefschrift voortbouwt op de vele waardevolle bijdragen aan het dekoloniseren van specifieke vakgebieden en methodologie, ligt de nadruk er in het bijzonder op om onderzoekers niet langer als experts te beschouwen en ze zich te laten heroriënteren op levensbevestigende praktijken door in verbinding te zijn/te komen. Daarmee levert dit proefschrift een belangrijke bijdrage aan debatten over het dekoloniseren van methodologie. Daarnaast draagt het ook bij aan de discussie over antiekoloniale benaderingen van ontwikkelingsonderzoek door radicale vraagtekens te zetten bij de ongelijkheden die ten grondslag liggen aan de gangbare methoden van ontwikkelingsonderzoek. Hierdoor worden de beperkingen van disciplinariteit zichtbaar. Met een radicale benadering die de onderzoekspraktijk ter discussie stelt op het niveau van de epistemologie, ontologie, methodologie, axiologie en geschreven vorm, draagt dit proefschrift bij aan het generatief conceptualiseren van kennis op een manier die verder reikt dan disciplinaire en westerse kaders. Door middel van het gebruik van poëzie, storytelling en podcast als vormen van *'enfleshed'* theorievorming, ligt de innovatie van dit proefschrift in de afwijzing van vanzelfsprekende onderzoeksprotocollen. Hiermee ontstaat een nieuwe onderzoeksbenadering waarin ruimte is voor intersectionele positionaliteit, abolitionistische gebruiken en voor wat het betekent om collectieve bevrijding te dromen-beleven-voelen-denken-ervaren-praktiseren.

1

Sunset

*One fateful night in the summer of 1918, with the Great War about to end, in the heart of the darkness three menacing horsemen each in possession of a whip and sword silently breached the walls and entered the town. One was called **Famine**, another **Spanish Flu** and the other **Cholera**. The poor, the old and the young fell like autumn leaves ravaged by the assaults of these ruthless horsemen.*

~ Jamalzadeh³

Another horseman has arrived, COVID19 and we have become sick. This generation is facing a global health pandemic, the likes of which (in terms of death toll) has not been seen since the Spanish flu of 1918. Whilst being touted as the ‘great equalizer’ COVID19 has “created a captive audience forced to reckon with old wounds and underlying conditions” (Sheik, forthcoming³). Like, Iranian author Jamalzadeh’s first-hand account of the Spanish flu in West Asia, it has been the poor, the elders and the young who have felt its effects the most, particularly across the old fault lines of empire. The colonies, the Third World, the Global South⁴, the name changes but the conditions remain the same. They say ‘the sun never sets on empire’, an unnatural abomination in opposition to the rhythm of life itself, yet the time of its zenith has long past and the horizon is fast approaching.

³ See *Spanish flu: How the world changed in the aftermath of the 1918-1919 pandemic* by Touraj Atabaki (2020). Available at: <https://iisg.amsterdam/en/blog/spanish-flu-how-world-changed-aftermath-1918-1919-pandemic-touraj-atabaki>

⁴ Global South is used throughout according to Nokuthula Hlabangane’s (2018: 669) delineation of the term “while not precise, conveys a shared colonial wound that encompasses dispossession of land, lifeways, and being”.

This thesis brings into question the primacy of Western epistemology in the pursuit of knowledge. In *Decolonizing Politics*, Robbie Shilliam (2021) asks us to consider how canons (and for that matter disciplines) limit our understandings and imaginations, using the case of the so-called father of politics Aristotle, Shilliam (2021: 55-56) demonstrates the limitations of western epistemology by stating that “[i]mperial centers talk to colonial margins but rarely listen back to them; that is broadly the case in academia as well as politics proper. And, because centers rarely listen back, you will not usually find colonial voices articulating themselves in the repositories or archives of politics, that is, the mainstream recorded history of politics”. This deafening silence in the archive is not through happenstance, it is the erasure that accompanies colonial and imperial logics, which regards the ‘other’ as non-being (Fanon, 1952[1967]). This is the darker side of modernity (Mignolo, 2011) in which a dominant understanding of human has never been a safe haven for those colonized, racialized and gendered by coloniality. In *Becoming Human: Matter and Meaning in an anti-black World*, Zakiyyah Iman Jackson (2020), extending the work of Jamaican scholar Sylvia Wynter (2003) reiterates this point by stating the distinction, making clear that the ontologizing violence of modernity/coloniality⁵, rather than excluding us from the category ‘human’, positions us as the exception that makes the rule. Yet, there has always been resistance to the oppressive regimes which continue to inflict violence, and the knowledges of those resistances silenced in the canon remain in the flesh, carried from generation to generation through stories, songs and folklore. As Shilliam (2021) rightly points out, those who have suffered the violence and injustices of multiple oppressions do not need to have read Aristotle to understand their condition. As such this thesis focuses on the ontological, whilst positing that the ontological and epistemological are not mutually exclusive, but rather held intimately in the flesh (Copeland, 2010 Spillers, 1987; Harney and Moten, 2021; Hurtado, 2019).

Positioned in a decolonial science which seeks to ‘cultivate knowledge’ as life affirming, a move away from the extractivism, appropriation and death of knowledge production (Shilliam,

⁵ Modernity/coloniality is a concept used to show the inseparability of the two terms. According to Anibal Quijano and later Walter Mignolo, coloniality is the darker side of modernity. See *The Darker Side of Western Modernity* (Mignolo, 2011).

2015), Liminagraphy is offered as one of the pathways to onto-epistemological re-existence, with collective liberation as its horizon. Liminagraphy, as a new compound word is derived from *-graphy*, which etymologically means to write but also to carve, scrape and scratch; *limin-* being the space of in-betweenness and the deliberate misuse of *-a-* signaling plurality, to bridge the two (see Chapter 7). These together denote a process of growth which seeks to draw out the knowledges of the flesh by coming into deep relation, whilst attending to the ‘double erasure’ (Vázquez, 2020) of modernity/coloniality, its violence and silencing. As such liminagraphy holds an intelligibility that is foreign to colonial logics, setting it apart from other western epistemological approaches (e.g., autoethnography, self-study, reflexivity) based on a singular, separated, individual self. Liminagraphy is grounded in a trans- post- and anti-disciplinary approach to research, held together by the anti-colonial roots that connect Decolonial Feminism, Black Studies, African philosophy and Chicana Studies. As such it honours the long tradition of resistance to being erased, whilst delinking from those methodologies and approaches which have been complicit in our dehumanization. After decades of ‘return to sender’, liminagraphy is what emerges when the empire refuses to keep writing back.

Writing Style: Speaking in Tongues⁶

I write to record what others erase when I speak, to rewrite the stories others have miswritten about me, about you. To become more intimate with myself and you. To discover myself, to preserve myself, to make myself, to achieve self-autonomy. To dispel the myths that I am a mad prophet or a poor suffering soul. To convince myself that I am worthy and that what I have to say is not a pile of shit. To show that I *can* and that I *will* write, never mind the admonitions to the contrary. And I will write about the unmentionables, never mind the outraged gasp of the censor and the audience. Finally, I write because I am scared of writing but I’m more scared of not writing (Anzaldúa, 2015: 167).

⁶ Inspired by Gloria Anzaldúa’s *Speaking in Tongues: A Letter to Third World Women Writers*

The writing style, as well as format and flow of this thesis follows in the tradition of woman of colour feminist, black feminist and indigenous authors featured in the anthology *This Bridge Called My Back* edited by Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherrie Moraga (2015), as well as Audre Lorde (2017[1979]), Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (2011; 2013; 2020), Sara Motta (2018) and countless others inspired to theorize the flesh. It breaks with academic conventions of what constitutes writing and theorization by calling forth the theory of the flesh “which sees practice as a form of theorizing and theorizing as a form of practice” (Anzaldúa, 2015: 181). At moments the writing of this thesis has flowed with the ease of a bird in flight, but mostly it has been like trying to fly wingless in gale force winds. The challenge has been two fold, one attempting to eke out space within the rigidity of academic writing (especially for publication) and two, lacking a vocabulary not connected to the production, machinery and consumption of “academic capitalism” (Leyva Solano, 2019: 49) which is invested in dichotomies of us/them, insider/outsider and self/other. It has taken time, to develop the vocabulary of knowledge cultivation finding the words in English that are life-affirming and build relation across difference; whilst honouring the languages associated with the lineages of knowledges in which my positionality is enfolded.

In *Pedagogies of Crossing*, M. Jaqui Alexander (2005: 346) states that writer’s block is indicative of “a spiritual problem requiring a spiritual solution”, brought about when the writer experiences alienation or is brought into misalignment through a confrontation with history that immobilized their sense of being. Indeed, a constant mantra during the writing process has been ‘to soften’, to not become rigid or hard due to the violence that surrounds us. Liminagraphy makes the claim that all knowledge is relational, even those stemming from a western epistemology of separation and individuation (we return to this point later in the chapter). Due to this relational nature of knowledge we are confronted with the violence of modernity/coloniality’s “double erasure” which causes disharmony. The body freezes, the mind goes blank and the heart aches. This is the darkness (Lugones, 2003) we must descend into, in order to encounter spirit and to come to voice with our “serpent’s tongue” overcoming the tradition of silence (Anzaldúa, 1987). This theorizing from the flesh does not translate well into the rigidity of academic writing, it is free, its wings unclipped, it is not aiming for abstraction or universal

understanding. It asks of you to make the knowledge understandable and accessible to those outside academia – it asks of you to share. Through storytelling, poetry, artwork, podcast, visuals, installations, performance – it asks of you to demonstrate the co-creation of being together (see chapter 7).

The reading of this thesis may be met initially with some frustration, you may find some sections repetitive, you may struggle to gauge meaning or you may find the references obscure and difficult to follow. These are merely symptoms of our academic training, the authoritative-imperial-proprietary 'I' wanting to center itself, wanting to come into relation through our dominant differences. It is my hope you will resist, that you are patient with me, as I learn to unlearn and come into relation as a 'we'. Writing in liminagraphy is about coming into relation across non-dominant differences (Lugones, 2003), this requires deep listening and reflection. There will be parts that due to our life experiences differing you will not understand, there will be languages unfamiliar to you and concepts that you may encounter for the first time, there are parts written for you and unwritten for the university. As you will come to see in Chapter 7, liminagraphy is about sharing lessons and collecting those seeds which you can take for your own garden.

Chapters 2 to 7 are published or papers in process appearing in forthcoming journals or anthologies, as such they each have an introduction and conclusion and appear to be distinct from each other. For this reason, the chapters can be read in any order, they do not form a linear narrative which would be counter intuitive to the cyclical temporality of liminagraphy. Indeed, what you will also find, is that due to this dance with temporality this thesis tells you about liminagraphy at the same time as it's doing liminagraphy – making explicit the relations that collectively birthed it into form whilst welcoming you, the reader into the dance of co-creation and cultivating knowledge (Chapter 7).

Decolonizing International D/development⁷ Studies?

Much like the citizen of a nation state, marked by modernity/coloniality's imposed categories; nationality, gender, class and ability at birth; categories which we seek to better understand in order to be liberated from them, this thesis finds itself being born in a discipline which marks it from birth. The following section accounts for its unplanned presence in the field of International D/development Studies (IDS) and what the implications are for the discipline. This thesis builds upon the many valuable contributions to decolonizing specific disciplines, in particular contributions made by Olivia Rutazibwa and Robbie Shilliam to decolonizing IDS, which will be discussed in further detail below.

IDS in its many iterations, as growth (Little, 1982), the fulfilment of basic human needs (Galting, 1990), and capabilities (Sen, 1985), continues to evolve along a trajectory of economic growth, modernization theory, theories of 'underdevelopment' and, neo-liberalism and the Washington consensus. This unilinear historical chronology takes its starting point as 1945-1948, marked by the end of World War II, the Truman speech, the Marshall plan, signing of the UN Charter and, the establishment of the World Bank and Bretton Woods institutions, with the main tenants of IDS from this perspective being the 'civilizing mission' and westernization. A civilizing mission that is in essence a continuation of colonial rule and oppression.

An anti-colonial reading of this period shows contemporaneously the decline of European empires, due in part to the decolonization of many African and Asian states, and the simultaneous entrenching of white domination and western superiority, for example the implementation of apartheid 'separate development' in South Africa. According to Olivia Rutazibwa (2019: 165) in *On Babies and Bathwater, Decolonizing International Development Studies*, IDS "is constitutively defined by colonial amnesia...these recurrent blind spots [mentioned above] are all the

⁷ The spelling 'D/development' is used to connect the narratives of 'big D' development and 'little d' development used in the discipline to differentiate between the former modernization paradigm of post WW2 development in the Global South and latter, focused on the inequalities caused by capitalism (Lewis, 2019). Marking the distinction as yet another fiction of eurocentrism.

more remarkable and unacceptable, given that the enslavement/colonial encounter is what created the need for Development Studies, or international solidarity, in the first place”.

That being said, with its relative adolescence, as compared to other more traditional and far more entrenched disciplines, coupled with its rationale of wanting ‘to help people’, IDS “is especially well placed to take on this task [of decolonizing] more seriously and explicitly” (Rutazibwa, 2019: 171). To this end, Rutazibwa (2019) offers a decolonial strategic framework for starting to think through the possibilities of decolonizing IDS: (a) *demythologize*, (b) *desilence* and (c) *anti-colonially decolonize*, which each operate on the levels of ontology, epistemology and normativity respectively – as depicted in the graphic below.



Figure 1: Framework for decolonizing International Development Studies
Source: Author's rendition based on Rutazibwa (2019)

Demythologize

Demythologizing works at the level of ontology, ‘the what’ is. The grand myth feeding much of IDS is that “the betterment of other people’s life cannot be thought of outside of a Western presence” (Rutazibwa, 2019: 164) or put simply an “ontology of underdevelopment” requiring external intervention (Tripathy and Mohapatra, 2011: 96). This myth is not organic, but builds

on the traditions and practices of the civilizing mission, as described by Césaire (1955: 84) as “the fundamental European lie” and, Enrique Dussel (1993), Walter Mignolo (2012) and Robbie Shilliam (2015) as the mythology of the Eurocentric. According to Rutazibwa (2019: 165) demythologizing is aided by three recurring issues which assist us in breaking with the perpetuation of this myth: “(1) *point of origin or departure*, (2) *Eurocentrism* and (3) *fragmentation*” [emphasis my own].

In IDS our *points of origin/departure* matter. What Thandika Mkandawire (2011, 7-8) terms the “Truman version of developmentalism” has thus far led us to an impasse as IDS continues to “suffer from a crisis of ideas” triggered in the 1980s (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2012: 50). The inability to overcome this impasse is directly linked to a starting point which positions the West now Global North as the purveyor of D/development and the Third World now Global South as passive recipients. A position that reduces D/development to treating real-life symptoms of hunger, water scarcity, disease, malnutrition and poverty, whilst dissociating these from broader questions of power, ontology, epistemology, normativity and representation which are the underlying cause (Tripathy and Mohapatra, 2011; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2012).

What if we chose a different starting point, for example the Bandung Conference of 1955, the first significant meeting of newly independent African and Asian states. With twenty-nine participating countries it represented more than half the world’s population at the time (Britannica, ND). At this conference their point of departure was decolonization and they articulated D/development “as a laboratory human aspiration to attain freedom from political, economic, ideological, epistemological, and social domination that was installed by colonialism and coloniality (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2012: 49, quoting Mkandawire, 2011, 7). Here the focus on self-determination, freedom and happiness as the tenants of D/development would fundamentally change the way IDS is taught and practiced.

The grand myth implicit within IDS also masks its explicit bias, *Eurocentrism*, projecting a zero point positionality as naturalized, neutral, objective and thus universal. For the sake of brevity we will focus on the concealment of this universalizing move (Dussel, 1993) rather than an in-depth discussion on Eurocentrism itself, for which you can consult the following

authors (Amin, 1989; Chakrabarty, 2000; Hobson, 2012, Quijano, 2000, Sabaratnam, 2013 and Wallerstein, 1997). This concealment is all the more troubling within IDS given its clear non-Western orientation and its vocation for the betterment of human life. In response scholars have called for the provincializing of Europe (Chakrabarty, 2000) and the de-provincializing of Africa (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018) – pointing out the fissures within the universalizing approach and calling for reparations beyond inclusion and aid.

There needs to be a resistance to *fragmentation* in our storytelling and narratives i.e., which parts of the story do we keep separate, when they in fact belong together? What do we silence in our telling of a particular narrative? Of significance here is Annibal Quijano's (2000) modernity/coloniality dictum, which shows that one cannot exist without the other, that modernity is co-constitutive of coloniality. However, that doesn't mean to say that we now start theorizing from the point of coloniality, whilst ignoring modernity. On the contrary scholars such as Gurminder Bhambra (2014), Rosalba Icaza (2017), and Cristina Rojas (2016) encourage us to think through connected histories, using co-creation, relationality, time, space and place. As cautioned by prolific feminist author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2009) the danger is a "single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story".

De-silence/Unmute

De-silencing/unmuting works at the level of ontology, which also relates to epistemology if you do not view these as mutually exclusive. 'The how' do we know what we know. "How is it that colonial amnesia and Eurocentric fragmentation – the 'mythological' – can persist, is maintained and invisibilized, even in a context of sustained critical scholarship, of attempts at deconstructing and critiquing what we already know?" (Rutazibwa, 2019: 168). Through erasure, silencing, hierarchized binaries and an absence of space. Erasure works through epistemicide (Santos, 2014) which manifests in two forms, the first and more commonly known, as the overt killing of other knowledges and, the second, more surreptitious form enacted through "oppositional binaries, overrepresentation/hyper-visibilizing (e.g. the 'crime/ terrorism-Muslim men' combo), neglect or literal silencing (#WhyIsMyCurriculumWhite) or

oversimplification ('Africa is a country'), vilification, criminalization ('corrupt African leaders') or victimization (Global South women in general)" (Rutazibwa, 2019: 169). Whilst the former has received wide-spread academic attention from various disciplines such as feminist-postcolonial studies (Gayatri Spivak, 1988), feminist standpoint theory (Donna Haraway, 1988), black feminist thought (Patricia Hill Collins, 1990), indigenous approaches (Linda Tuhiwai Smith, 1999) and decolonial approaches (Boaventura de Sousa Santos, 2014), sporadic attention has been given to the former, less obvious forms of silencing. It is only within the last decade that this silencing has been exposed through the work of Sara Ahmed (2012) *On Being Included*, Zuleika Arashiro and Malba Barahona (eds) (2015) *Women in Academia Crossing North-South Borders*, Sara de Jong, Rosalba Icaza and Olivia U. Rutazibwa (eds) (2019) *Decolonization and Feminisms in Global Teaching and Learning*, Sara Motta (2018) *Liminal Subjects* and Clelia O. Rodríguez (2018) *Decolonizing Academia*. It is within this emerging cohort of feminist and decolonial feminist scholars that this thesis is embedded, drawing from, learning with and cultivating together collective resistance and liberation.

Hierarchized binaries are expressed by Rutazibwa (2019: 169) in two questions: "(1) 'Who are (not) the experts?' (relating to the ways in which silencing manifests itself); and (2) 'What do we (not) consider expertise?' (engages with the systematic exclusion of the vast majority of other knowledges or ways of knowing)". In other words, who is not around the table and why, when asked within IDS it inevitably leads to cognitive dissonance, where the opportunity to meaningfully engage is reoriented toward banal concepts and practices which restore and reinforce the status quo. For example, following Linda Tuhiwai Smith, what research is to indigenous people is what capacity building is to the colonized developing world i.e., the dirtiest word in our vocabulary. Capacity building is a denial of ability, an erasure of knowledges and ways of being and a judgement of our capacity to theorize (think-feel-sense for ourselves). We can be known but we cannot know.

An absence of space refers to the hegemonic austerity of knowledges authorized within academia and IDS. In other words, by clinging to universality and a default epistemology, academia finds itself with a choice between two extremes, an admission of the fallacy of

universality and the hard process of decolonizing (accepting a plurality of knowledges) or maintaining the status quo. A possible pathway out of this predicament is through a reorientation from knowledge production as a capitalist process to knowledge cultivation (Shilliam, 2015, see also Chapter 5).

Anti-colonially decolonize

Anti-colonially decolonize works at the level of normativity, that is ‘the why’. Triggered also by the process of demythologizing, it asks of us “Why are we producing knowledge? What project of society does our engagement with knowledges serve? The colonial status quo (Tripartite and Mohapatra, 2011: 95) or does it foreground the need to break away from it? For radical alternatives, for thinking the world *otherwise*?” (Rutazibwa, 2019: 171). To anti-colonially decolonize we need to challenge the objectivity and neutrality of the knowledge process by interrogating the ontological and epistemological foundations of our work and whether our work is contributing to the violence and erasure of coloniality.

In line with Rutazibwa’s framework, Robbie Shilliam provides us with the possibility of re-conceptualizing knowledge:

To my mind, decolonial science cultivates knowledge, it does not produce knowledge. Using the Latin roots of these words, we could say that to produce knowledge is to lengthen, prolong or extend, whereas to cultivate knowledge is to till, to turn matter around and fold back on itself so as to rebind and encourage growth. Knowledge production is less a creative endeavor and more a process of accumulation and imperial extension, so that (post)colonized peoples could only consume or extend someone else’s knowledge (of themselves) (Chatterjee, 1998). In short, a colonial science produces knowledge of and for subalterns. Alternatively, knowledge cultivation is a necessarily creative pursuit as it requires the practitioner to turn over and oxygenate the past. Most

importantly, cultivation also infers habitation, which means that knowledge is creatively released as the practitioner enfolds her/him[/them]self in the communal matter of her/his[/their] inquiry. What is more, this constant oxygenation process – a circulatory one – necessarily interacts with a wider biotope, enfolding matter from other habitations. To cultivate knowledge of deep relation can therefore be understood as “grounding”.

In choosing to practice knowledge cultivation we immunize ourselves against the rampant co-option of the ‘decolonial turn’ evident in the popular use of ‘decolonize’ as adjective or metaphor (Tuck & Yang 2012). To this end, Shilliam also provides us with a framework for reading and decolonizing the canon of a discipline (in this case politics) through recontextualizing, reconceptualizing and reimagining. Recontextualizing requires reading a particular author in the colonial and imperial contexts in which their ideas arose. “The act of recontextualizing thinkers by reference to imperialism and colonialism must make a difference to how we understand the logics of these thinkers’ arguments” (Shilliam, 2021: 51-52). That is to say recontextualization inevitably leads to reconceptualization, which has implications for epistemology. Reconceptualization requires “tracking and connecting tissue that arranges concepts and categories in a logical fashion” indicating that as much as recontextualizing is about drawing from the past, reconceptualizing is about “finding concealed or ignored logics in popular and conventional arguments in the present” (Shilliam, 2021: 53-54). These two steps lead us to reimagining, in which we first have to come to understand the ways in which the canon, due to its dominance, has limited the ways in which we can know. “We must imagine, at least in principle, that those who dwell in these marginalized positions have traditions of thought that are generally edifying” (Shilliam, 2021: 54-55).

The Cobra Effect

Nagaraja slithers off the shoulders of Shiva and enters the dreams of the subjects of the British Raj. Some dream of being bitten, others of being chased. The British governor of Delhi snaps awake in the middle of the night in a cold sweat, in his dream the streets were full of serpentine bodies, falling in writhing balls from trees and hissing and spitting in every direction. The next

morning the subjects of the British Raj share their dreams with each other, it is agreed by the elders that they have been negligent in their duties and a pooja is arranged to offer milk and tender coconut as penance for their lapse. Meanwhile the British governor incensed starts to see snakes everywhere in the rope tying back the curtains, in the turbans of his servants, in the swaying of tree branches, in the curve of the faucet, in the head of the doorknob, in the reins which tethered the horses; finally startled by the dark scrawny wriggling arm of the juvenile hali who served his tea, he decided to act. He proclaimed a decree stating there were too many cobras in Dehli, ordering their slaughter by placing a bounty on their heads. The subjects of the British Raj undernourished by the effects of famine, saw this as an opportunity to feed their starving children. Having lived amongst the cobras for centuries, they had healers who knew how to charm the cobras using the hypnotizing sounds of the double-reed pungi. At the sight of cobra skins being handed over in exchange for loot the governor relaxed, chest puffed in pride at his ingenious incentivising of the natives. He earnestly got down to writing a dispatch to the governor of French Indochina, informing him of the success of his incentive plan, suggesting this could be a good strategy for dealing with his rat problem over there. In the village the elders and healers gathered in concern over the slaughtering of cobras, recalling their collective dream, they feared this would have dire consequences. They hatched a plan to start breeding cobras in order to ensure their survival. Concealing the snake mounds from the authorities by covering them with saris and incense, the subjects of the British Raj managed to keep this gambit going for quite some time. However, eventually the governor became suspicious of the beastly natives, sending his henchmen off to investigate. Once the ploy was up the governor immediately stopped the incentives. With no more bounty to be gained the healers of the village released the captive snakes creating The Cobra Effect. The governor's dream had come to pass and the city was overrun with snakes. Nagaraja stealthily slithered back upon Shiva's shoulder content at having helped their kin survive the famine. Meanwhile in French Indochina, Hanoi was teeming with tailless rats.

Based on an anecdote, the cobra effect coined by German economist Horst Siebert (2002) is the most common form of pervasive incentive in economic game theory whereby an incentive has an unintended and undesirable result for the orchestrator, unintentionally rewarding

beneficiaries for making the problem worse. In the normative reading of the cobra effect the subjects of the British Raj were seen as enterprising opportunists who “converted the snakes into valuable commodities” (Newell and Doll, 2015). However, using Rutazibwa and Shilliam’s frameworks and starting with what we know, we can demythologize and recontextualise narratives attending not only to the erasure, but filling in the volumes of silences through relational knowledge. In redressing these voids new points of departure are taken in the present which desilence and reconceptualise taken for granted ideas and concepts, allowing us to connect the struggles of the past with those in the present, in this way acknowledging that current social movements carry placards etched with slogans from the past, recognising that resistance to oppression takes many forms and these “are forms of understanding that do not obey the epistemic frameworks, [nor] the dominant narratives of the modern/colonial order” (Icaza and Vázquez, 2013: 699).

This thesis has been nurtured by both Rutazibwa and Shilliam’s frameworks gaining from it the steps necessary for unlearning the discipline and the dominant positionality of the authoritative-imperial-proprietary ‘I’. In coming to realise the ways in which we have been taught to see and how we have been educated to forget – demythologizing, recontextualising, desilencing, reconceptualising, anti-colonially decolonizing and reimagining, offers a pathway to the creative potential of decolonial work, bringing to light avenues for cultivating knowledge of the past and future in the present. Rutazibwa and Shilliam’s frameworks have collectively cleared a path for this thesis to take a different starting point. The following section discusses the trajectory of this PhD project, showing how ‘starting with what we know’ can lead to a parallel path of ‘starting with what we don’t know’.

The PhD Journey

In setting off on a decolonial path Rolando Vázquez (2020: 163) offers the following moves: “I) Modernity, II) Coloniality, III) The Colonial Difference and IV) Decoloniality. The journey of this thesis has followed this non-linear path, not deliberately but as an unfolding where, the questions raised overlap and intersect with each other. This thesis initially began in 2014 with the following research approach and question:

This study, framed within the emerging culture-centered approach to development communication aims to valorise the Kat River community as agents of change, by exploring their perceptions of the meaning and expectations of development. This leads into an interrogation of the relevance of the hegemonic nature of dominant rationalist discourses of development, as compared to local understandings of development discourse. This study will provide a nuanced exploration of the ways in which dominant and local discourses of development, either compliment or contradict each other, thereby leading to development that values community agency in light of government policy.

Recognizing the ways in which we are complicit in the silencing of others and in enacting violence while under colonial logics is a necessary first step in liminagraphy, and one that needs to be held with non-judgement and compassion. The shame and guilt of having reproduced the violence we claim to be against can be debilitating, but does nothing to serve us in our pursuit of collective liberation. Instead, using this *conmoción*⁸ (shock) as fertilizer, we come to realize the fiction of modernity's "dominance of vision and more generally the dominance of representation over experience" (Vázquez, 2020: 23). In bringing into question our internalized oppressions we start to reflect on the ways in which modernity has wounded us, leading us to question dominant frameworks, concepts and ideas.

This questioning brought with it a long period of silence. The unravelling of the 'I', the decolonizing of the self was painful and the shedding of this dominant 'I' felt like an alienation, a losing of who I thought I was. During this period 2016-2019 I encountered Rosalba Icaza, who became my supervisor, Savitri Satoe, my yoga teacher and spiritual mentor, and I met Saaraa Chandini Dasarath, Parvez Ali Dasarath and Ella Noor Dasarath my nieces and nephew born in these years. These teachers gave me an anchor to the present, past and future which allowed

⁸ Concept in Spanish explained by Rosalba Icaza. See also Flores (2015) [*LA ESPINA EN LA CARNE*](#) and Anzaldúa (2015) *Now we Shift*.

me to slowly come to voice. The first utterance to emerge after *nepantla* (Anzaldúa, 2015), the in-betweenness of the borderlands was a poem penned in 2018 after an encounter with Olivia Rutazibwa at a seminar organised by Rosalba.

Feast

Knowledge
I am hungry for it
With gluttonous abandon
I devour it
Leaving you depleted
Exhausted
Drained
Still you come back for more

Why? Because I promised you something
A piece of paper
Legitimacy
A seat
A table

Ah...your ancestors fell for that too
So many generations, yet so little learned
Once a coolie, always a coolie

You say you are doing this for them
But you did not heed their warning
Silly, they could not read,
what's your excuse?
A print too small

You can stay here you know,
and feed off the knowledge of others as I do
Drain them, deplete them, leave them worse off than before
Call this research
We will reward you, praise you
hell we'll even give you that piece of paper

Go on then...this is what you came for
Cannibalise yourself in the pursuit of knowledge
Gnaw on the bones of your ancestors
Drink their blood spilled in the (sugarcane) field

So that you may arise, anew...in my own image

And...whilst we drown you in a black gown
 Think not of your ancestors draped in the *kala pani*
 Think not of their sweat fertilizing the soil
 Think not of their tears watering the sugarcane
 Think not of their backs broken to sweeten my tea

Think instead that you are one of us now
 and feast

In June 2019 during the co-creation of knowledge that took place in the workshop entitled *Undoing Colonial Patriarchy in Academia from the Margins*, the serpent tongue emerged uttering a refusal 'I am no longer willing to use the methodologies that have been complicit in my own dehumanization'. This statement once voiced created a doorway, yet darkness lay in its midst. A few months later through an encounter with elder Linda Tuhiwai Smith at the Millennium conference on *Extraction, Expropriation, Erasure? Knowledge Production in International Relations* at the London School of Economics, a new research question emerged. *In what ways can we cultivate knowledge that is epistemically non-violent in the context of the racialized, gendered, colonial, neoliberal university?* This was linked to two objectives (1) provide a collectively conceptualised methodological approach to epistemically non-violent research, and (2) foreground the experiences of women of colour in Dutch academia who are resisting, cultivating and transgressing academic spaces by questioning what it means to be erased, to have their/our knowledges omitted, to be hyper-visibilized and silenced at the same time.

Modernity

In questioning "the what" attached to the interrogation of modernity the following two chapters emerged: Chapter 2 – *From Decolonizing the Self to Coming to Voice* and Chapter 3 – *From Decolonizing the Self to Liberating the Senses* calling into question the ways in which we have come to be conditioned into reproducing modernity. Chapter 2 starts with positionality, using Fred Moten's (2018) "I consent not to be a single being" as the mantra which accounted of not knowing. In this chapter the taken for granted subjectivity of the individual subject is

interrogated in order to create space for the relational plural self to emerge. Following on from this Chapter 3 continues the life-long journey of decolonizing the self this time interrogating modernity's hold over the senses and its connection to the separation from ourselves and each other. Using poetry as an expression of enfleshed knowing which heals the colonial wounds caused by modernity's violence, this chapter inscribes revolution as a relational act, one which cannot be done alone. These two chapters are an attempt to escape the enclosure of modernity's representation and attends to the positionality necessary for approaching the aforementioned research question.

Coloniality

The next two chapters: Chapter 3, *Women of Colour are not Human. We are Relational Beings* and Chapter 4, *Decolonial Re-existence and the Myths of Knowledge Production* attend to coloniality's displacement and erasure of other ways of knowing-being in as much as this is co-constitutive of modernity. Chapter 3 seeks to question coloniality through the imposition of the gender and race as colonial constructs which connect us in struggle and resistance. Extending this argument to the category human, it then goes on to reclaim our ways of being through the spiritual work of return to nature, returning to the soil allowing us to come into deep relation with ourselves, each other and the life of earth. Chapter 3 creates an awareness of the "plurality of worlds of sensing and meaning [and] a plurality of positionalities" (Vázquez, 2020: 165) necessary for the question of knowledge production and disciplines in Chapter 4. Structured around three interrelated myths of knowledge production in the social sciences this chapter reveals what types of knowledges have been "rendered invisible, irrelevant and disposable" within the canon. Marking these absences the chapter moves on to state the conditions necessary for a reorientation away from knowledge production and towards knowledge cultivation as a life-affirming approach to research which hold the potential for decolonial re-existence.

Colonial Difference

In 2018 I attended the *Decolonisation and Re-Afrikanisation* conference held at the UNISA campus in Pretoria, there I met one of the co-organizers Nokuthula Hlabangane, whose kind words of encouragement lent volume to a shaky, stuttering and insecure voice emerging from a fledgling serpent tongue. It is through the work of Hlabangane that Chapter 6: *Hand in Hand*

– *Refusing Research during a Pandemic* emerged. Hlabangane’s (2018) deft justifications for the incompatibility of ‘methodology’ to African and relational ways of being-knowing provided the arguments for questioning the colonial difference. Following Anibal Quijano’s dictum “there is no modernity without coloniality” (Vázquez, 2020: 165), it takes complicity as its entry point refusing western methodologies, thereby opening space for the emergence of relational research practice. Offering *hand-in-hand* as one such practice which facilitates the drafting of a collective relational ethics which holds us accountable. This redirection nullified the aforementioned objective; as methodology, in its explorative search for certainty and stability, regulates, measures and controls our ways of being together, making these methods anti-relational.

Decoloniality

Decoloniality is grounded in practices which aim to counter the “double erasure” of modernity/coloniality and the colonial difference (Vázquez, 2020). In recognising the depth of what has been lost and reclaiming the vestiges that remain, decoloniality is a “move beyond resistance”, a “movement of re-existence” where through mourning and healing we co-create relational worlds where life is affirmed. Decoloniality concerns itself with the ‘how’ of decolonizing and as such this thesis offers Chapter 7, *Liminagraphy: Lessons in life-affirming research practices for collective liberation* and Chapter 9, *IqhawekaziRani* an anthology of poems, as examples of the how. In coming to the how, an encounter with Stefano Harney in December 2019 at a symposium entitled *Collaboration, Creativity and Change in the Imaginations of our Kingdom* co-hosted by Francio Guadeloupe in Amsterdam, changed the way in which the understanding of ‘relations’ shifted in this research from ‘representation’ based relations founded on difference to interconnected relations based on mutuality, reciprocity, reception, respect and love, bringing to light the creative potential of being together and co-creating. Thereby shifting the focus of the research question from ‘epistemic non-violence’ to ‘life-affirming’.

Chapter 7, is the core of this thesis offering an approach to research that is positioned metaphysically in the borderlands (Anzaldúa, 1987) and materially in the flesh, calling forth

knowledges through life affirming research practices that honour relations and aim for collective liberation (discussed in further detail below). Presenting a snapshot of a few of the many relations which birthed liminagraphy, Chapter 7 honours these relations through the podcast ‘Liminal Hangouts’ in which their worlds and words can be heard in their own voice, thereby avoiding decontextualization, abstraction and analysis. As with the naming of relations in the preceding chapter descriptions of each episode’s relation/s bares a name/s and in line with the ethics of relational accountability (Wilson, 2008). These lessons form the ‘how’ of liminagraphy reveal the creative flow of co-creation which comes from being together. The lessons, in no particular order, are as follows:

- *Whom is leaning from whom* with Rosalba Icaza, Associate Professor of Global Politics, Gender and Diversity at the International Institute of Social Studies (ISS), Erasmus University Rotterdam. Here we discuss learning to unlearn, mentorship or the undoing of mentorship and the importance of questioning.
- *Being together* with Erasmus School of Colour (ESOC), where members Merel Dap, Zouhair Hammana, Melisa Ersoy, Nia Nikoladze, and Alyssa Renfurm share with us the challenge of self-organising as students whilst coming up against the bureaucracy of the university; as well as the importance of cultivating safe spaces through friendship.
- *Finding our Rhythm with* social art-ivist Anima Jhagroe-Ruissen, we dance through rhythm attending to the silences of separation, by discussing the co-creation of knowledge that happens during dance and how this changes the performer and observer.
- *Listening* with Constance Dupuis and Nanna Kirstine Leets Hansen, both PhD researchers, the former based at the ISS and the latter at Roskilde University in Denmark. With Constance and Nanna we discuss our journey of unlearning and loving across difference

and the valuable lessons in learning to listen and what possibilities that opens up for relational accountability.

- *Being/Becoming* with Luthando Ngema and Charmika Samaradiwakera Wijesundara, both lecturers and PhD researchers, the former based at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in Durban and the latter at the University of Witwatersrand in Johannesburg. Collectively we discuss the concept of Ubuntu, its philosophy, use in our everyday lives and its appropriation into the canon and the implications of this on our journey of being/becoming.
- *Writing our Collective Liberation* with Rosa Itandehui Olivera Chávez and Paulina Trejo Mendez. Paulina is an artist and lecturer at the University of Bonn in Germany and Rosa Itandehui is an indigenous economist, storyteller and poet. Here we discuss the ways in which we are unseen by dominant logics, discussing whether this violence ever touches our soul and how spirituality is central to decolonizing the self.

Music for the podcast is performed and produced by the indigenous artist Ntombi Yelanga based in South Africa. The title song *Siya nibingelela bo Ma* (greetings to all our mothers), instrumental interlude and closing title are inspired by the reading of *From Decolonizing the Self to Coming to Voice* (Chapter 2) and poems from *IqhawekaziRani* (Chapter 9) some of which were written through collective writing sessions (listen to podcast *Writing our Collective Liberation*). This sharing of knowledges across geographical location, disciplines, genres and languages is a characteristic indicative of liminagraphy's cross-pollination approach to getting creative with our differences (Lorde, 2017[1979]).

Liminagraphy: a thesis

Sharing the burden of unanswered questions and starting with what we don't know liminagraphy reaches out for relations in order to know ourselves, each other and all life on earth. Thus, putting forth the thesis that all knowledge in the human and social sciences is co-created

and relational. It argues this by demonstrating the ways in which colonial logics underpinning western epistemology denies this relation, positioning itself as separate in the zero-point of earthlessness, worldlessness and contemporaneity (Vázquez reading Castro Gómez, 2020). In enacting the Cartesian dismembered subjectivity, the objective observer with the gods-eye view (positivist) represents experience as quantifiable data thereby reproducing the codes of colonialism and imperialism (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999); codes based on the exploration, seizure and bordering of lands, the genocide, capture and enslavement of peoples, and the epistemicide of other ways of knowing and being. As Nokuthula Hlabangane (2018: 671) notes in approaching the question of whether methodology can subvert the logics of its principal, “[s]uch data depend on a speaking individual with unbridled agency who is able to abstract himself from the webs of significance in which he is caught”. This position based on the work of René Descartes whose claim to have “birthed himself out of himself” (Wilshire, 1989: 94) through isolation and self-reflection, is the fiction upon which the individualism of the researcher is based. An individualism which “is a singularly Western trait and ideal” (Hlabangane, 2018: 672). Countering this monoculture of objectivity, qualitative research with its attentiveness to experience and subjectivity, positions itself as being more amenable to co-creation and relational ways of knowing, yet its origins in psychoanalysis crossing into the market economy in the early 20th century belies its aims. Its servitude remains to the sovereignty of the individual as consumer and the market betraying any meaningful attempts at relational ways of knowing. In other words, it cannot escape the “solitary, self-discovering traveller...conquering and subjugating the world for his own gain” (Hlabangane, 2018: 672). It remains in the enclosure of an authoritative-imperial-proprietary ‘I’, a position where its only recourse “to become someone is to project an image of itself”, a self “seeing the world as representation, experiencing the world as representation, experiencing itself as representation” (Vázquez, 2020: 155).

This reveals the limitations of representation, in what Vázquez (2020: 177) calls the “era of enunciation”. Reminiscent of Gayatri Spivak’s (1988) *Can the Subaltern Speak?* Enunciation only allows the subject to speak within the enclosure of modernity/coloniality, that is to say the subaltern is only invited to speak their pain and humiliation (Tuck & Yang, 2014). A related limitation to enunciating within the enclosure of modernity/coloniality is that the representation

of subjectivity forecloses on the possibility of a plural self or plural ways of knowing (Lugones, 2003). The intelligibility of modernity/coloniality is set upon the universal, a singular subjectivity observable through a dominant gaze which searches for purity and authenticity through abstraction (Lugones, 2003). This abstraction of a gaze which is nowhere/everywhere consumes all that is other. Put another way, the separation inherent in the move to abstraction diminishes the possibility of relationality to near impossibility (Vázquez, 2020).

Whilst the argument above may appear on the surface to overly focus on the researcher or the subjectivity of the researcher, it has further reaching implications for the ways in which we practice research and gain knowledge. The first is the orientation towards knowledge as something to be found ‘out there’ in the colonies, in the field, in the plantations and factories; in other words, not in the everyday of the researcher. This convenient separation of narratives reinforces the hegemony of knowledge produced in the North (Western Europe and North America in particular) deepening inequality and perpetuating a neo-colonial science under the guise of collaboration. In addition, this extractive approach to knowledge - where knowledge is seen as an extractable commodity, to be produced, marketed and consumed - implicates the process in violence and (academic) capitalism (Leyva Solano, 2019). What many indigenous peoples have come to call the ‘death project’ (Suarez-Krabbé 2016, see also Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999; Chilisa, 2012 and Tuck and Yang, 2014).

Importantly this has implications for the practice of research in the Global South⁹ and increasingly from the margins in the Global North which is more attentive to epistemology, cosmology, ontology and axiology as co-constitutive. This relationality at the ontological level can be expressed through the dictum “*umuntu ngumuntu ngabanye abantu*” (‘a human being is a human being in the ethical sense only through the recognition, respect, affirmation, and promotion of the well-being of other human beings, including the whole of nature’) found in the ethics and philosophy of Ubuntu, but which resonates across indigenous understandings of being (Ramosé, 2019: 262). This statement disrupts the assertion that we can only know each other across

⁹ See *Epistemologies of the South* by Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2014).

difference through power relations. It offers us a way to be with ourselves, each other, all life on earth and in the spiritual plain across non-dominant difference whilst orientating us towards life and living in harmony.

For the ways in which we cultivate knowledge this orientation towards life-affirming research practices, makes a significant impact particularly to the ways in which we can start to decolonize and reclaim knowledges on multiples levels. Liminagraphy, positioning itself as a relational approach which affirms life seeks collective liberation through relations, spirituality, the metaphysical, cosmological and ancestral. An anchoring of positionality, in the case of liminagraphy being in the flesh, opens up onto-epistemological space for the disavowal of the authoritative-imperial-proprietary 'I'. For as Gloria Anzaldúa reminds us "[y]ou share a category of identity wider than any social position or racial label" (Anzaldúa, 2015: 138). In other words, it gives us a way out of representation. Spirituality, an important means of resistance which has survived the impositions of colonialism and imperialism, is the essence of liminagraphy, guiding the hands, eyes, ears, lips and nose. When the senses are orientated towards flesh and towards life, it opens the possibility for entering the "era of reception" (Vázquez, 2020: 177). Here listening takes on a heightened role, tuning into the subtleties of receiving, hosting and reciprocating. Through this "spiritual activism" (Anzaldúa, 2015) we not only return to the practices stripped away through the violence and brutality of monotheistic religions followed by strict secularism but in the reclaiming of knowledges we set out on a journey of healing which counters the fragmentation of the selves, calling into harmony our beings, whilst simultaneously attending to collective generational trauma, colonial wounds and the harm caused by clashing with the violence of oppression in the present.

Dusk

At the time of writing this chapter, the Zapatista's arrived on the shores of Europe, sailing across the Atlantic, a reverse route of that taken by the conquistadores 500 years earlier. They arrived in Spain with the resonating call of, "[w]e weren't conquered – we won't surrender" (Vidal 2021), emphasising that the history of indigenous resistance is equally as long as the

history of colonialism and imperialism. Carrying with them the message of arriving in Europe “to listen and learn from local struggles” for social justice we are reminded of the liberatory praxis of encountering each other across non-dominant difference.

As the horseman of COVID-19 is upon us sword and whip in hand, we are reminded of the social protests that lead to social change in the wake of its predecessor’s hoof beats. In *We Will Not Cancel Us and Other Dreams of Transformative Justice*, Adrienne Maree Brown (2021: 42) points out that “we are in the very infantile stages of learning how to be in transformative justice practices with each other, to be abolitionist in real time, because we are still beginning, but the crises are so big, urgent, and constant that there is some leapfrogging, rushing ahead of ourselves, ahead of understanding a clear shared framework, clear distinctions”. Liminagraphy is an attempt to provide a pathway which helps us to come into relation with ourselves, each other and the life of earth, so that we can be together in transformative justice practice without causing harm to each other. It hopes to demonstrate the creative potential of being together, even through physical distance, showing us what is in our hands and how we may start to collectively dream our abolitionist present-futures.

You, me, and I’s
stand at a crossroads
awaiting a signal

in murmuration¹⁰
we
bring tons of steel
to a screeching halt
choosing life
we
defy
capitalisms urgency
a rush towards death

as we
disperse

¹⁰ See the choreography of Sadeck Waff in *Murmuration/Tutting* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N9Ixog-vCvx0&t=189s>

we carry the story
of us
with
every breath
practicing
revolution

2

From Decolonising the Self to Coming to Voice¹¹

Of the myriad calls for decolonising—the university, the museum, the curriculum, the mind, and so on—few have given attention to decolonising the self¹². In my/our process of decolonising the self, poetry¹³ has been pivotal in giving name to the nameless, which is dreamed but not yet realised (Lorde 2007, 73). As a black woman/woman of colour, following the pen strokes of Audre Lorde (2007) and Gloria Anzaldúa (1987), who put flesh back into words, poetry is a necessity in decolonising and reconstituting the self. In what follows, I hope to walk with the reader on this path of realising my colonised self, decolonising it through the emergence of the plural self, and the eventual reconstituting of self as a coming to voice (Lorde 2007, 79–86).

For those of us seeking higher education as former colonised beings, we enter the academy as both the researcher and the researched. There is a pressure to present ourselves either as a traditional representative of an entire region or ethnicity, or as an assimilated “modern” researcher, with the dichotomy never being questioned. Yet this fragmenting of the self points directly to the limitation of the individual subjective “I”. In *The Universal Machine*, Fred Moten (2018, ix) challenges us to contemplate the exhaustion of phenomenology due to its clinginess and servitude to the individual, an inherent assumption within phenomenology that “renders no-thingness unavailable and unavowable” (2018, ix). What Moten alludes to here is the absence of space within phenomenology for us to claim our humanity. In other words, a self that seeks individuality through subjective representation remains colonised and any “decolonising” aims are cancelled out by the individual’s obedience to modernity/coloniality (cf. Quijano 2007).

¹¹ Sheik, Z.B., 2020. Reflective Piece: From Decolonising the Self to Coming to Voice. *Education as Change*, 24.

¹² This project is inspired by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o’s iconic project of “decolonising the mind” (Ngũgĩ 1986).

¹³ The poetry referred to here is the “revelatory distillation of experience, not the sterile word play that, too often, the white fathers distorted the word poetry to mean—in order to cover a desperate wish for imagination without insight” (Lorde 2007, 73).

Decolonising the self, then, requires grappling with what is left after we strip away the years, accolades and achievements bestowed upon us by indoctrinated formal schooling and learning how to speak from and beyond the colonial wound as an act of collective healing and what it means to live-think-be and do decolonial feminist work. It asks us to reimagine ourselves in relation, invoking within us the connection to ourselves, our ancestors, the land, our bodies and others, so that the knowledge that is inherent and deep within us may be cultivated. It asks, when we peel away the layers of scar tissue necrotised at the colonial wound through ‘epistemological deep listening’ and heal all that has been erased, denied, shamed, negated and exiled, what emerges?

IqhawekaziRani

I am not a daughter of this soil
It is my adopted home
A home that cradles my orphaned soul

You say, I am not African
I am African
I am African in my heartbeat
I am African in my compassion
I am African in my generosity
I am African in my determination

It is the only reality I know

You say, I am not Indian
I am Indian
I am Indian in my breath
I am Indian in my kindness
I am Indian in my courageousness
I am Indian in my resilience

It is the only existence I know

I am a daughter of two Mothers
I cried for *Umama waseNdiya*¹⁴, as I was held by *Am'mā āppirikkā*¹⁵

¹⁴ *Umama WaseNdiya*—Mother India in isiZulu.

¹⁵ *Am'mā āppirikkā*—Mama Africa in Tamil.

Do not ask me to choose!

Both have raised me
one breast feeding my fire
one breast feeding my spirit

My feet move to the rhythm of your drums
one foot following the *tabla*¹⁶
one foot following the *isigubhu*¹⁷

It hurts *Am'mā āppirikkā*
It hurts *Umama waseNdiya*

My tears fall at your feet
You catch me as they fall

My child, your heart beats with the rhythm of *Am'mā āppirikkā*
My child, your breath moves with the harmony of *Umama waseNdiya*

My child, your body is Indian
My child, your being is African
Moving in perfect synchronicity

Rise *Qhawekazi*¹⁸
Rise *Rani*¹⁹

Rise, so you can raise others

In my/our process of decolonising the self, echoing Fred Moten's (2018) dictum, *I consent not to be a single being*. In foregrounding the privilege inherent in the choice of positioning ourselves as black women or women of colour, I/we acknowledge the "scales in the intensity of colonial wounds" (Mignolo and Walsh 2018, 125). As a third-generation South African woman of Indian ancestry, whose caste oppression was dropped to the depths of the *kala pani* (black waters), only to be picked up as hoes and machetes in the sugar plantations of British Natal, followed by white domination, brutality and dehumanisation known as apartheid, I/we consent

¹⁶ Twin hand drums from the Indian subcontinent

¹⁷ Double-headed Nguni drum

¹⁸ *Qhawekazi* in isiZulu refers to a queen and heroine who fights for her being and her people.

¹⁹ *Rani*—Queen in Tamil.

Who are we when we are not spoken for
 spoken of
 spoken over
 when we are not given a voice
 not given a platform to amplify our voice
 not given the volume control of our voice

Who are we when we find ourself hypervisibilised
invisibilised
represented
erased

What sounds have been muted in the depths of our colonial wound
A cacophony of visceral screams

filling our mouths
swallowed
stuck in our throats
swallowed
wrenching our guts
carried

womb to womb
grandmother to mother
mother to daughter

Our scream
is the sound of your first breath
is the sound of birth
of life itself
of thunder rolling

of wind howling
of waves crashing
of night turning to day
of sun rising
of clouds moving
of flowers blooming
of leaves falling
of day turning to night
of stars shining
of moon waxing and waning

This is the sound of our voice.

From Decolonising the Self to Liberating the Senses²⁰

The rains were so late that year. But throughout that hot, dry summer those black storm clouds clung in thick folds of brooding darkness along the low horizon. There seemed to be a secret in their activity, because each evening they broke the long, sullen silence of the day, and sent soft rumbles of thunder and flickering slicks of lightening across the empty sky. They were not promising rain. They were prisoners, pushed back, in trapped coils of boiling cloud. ~ Bessie Head, Maru (2010: 221)

*maAfrika amahle*²¹, let us take stock; as we sit here with nothing but thin air, the spray of mist our only reminder that there once was a ‘rainbow nation’. A useful metaphor during turbulent times. Rainbows by their nature are not meant to last and can only be seen under very specific conditions: the sun has to be behind us, it also has to be low in the sky and there has to be rain, mist or water droplets in front of us to refract light creating the iridescent colours. In other words, where we are positioned matters. It has become viscerally clear, in the month of July 2021²², that the majority have constant clouds raining poverty overhead, covered in a never-ending thick fog of precarity and survival, and those lucky enough to have jobs leave home before sunrise and return well after it has set. For this majority, there is no rainbow; the native South African remains “a pariah in the land of his [her/their] birth” (Plaatje, 2007 [1916]: 21).

*Black Sun*²³

Clouds hang low
blanketing those beneath
in dusk’s golden glow
we stand
black silent spikes
like those on the walls
prisoning
homes

²⁰ Sheik, Z.B. forthcoming. From Decolonizing the Self to Liberating the Senses. *Imbiza Journal for African Writing*

²¹ isiZulu translation to English ‘Beloved Africans’.

²² In July 2021, social unrest broke out in my home province KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng (South Africa) following the arrest of former President Jacob Zuma. A spark which ignited a powder keg resulting in rioting, looting, murder and violence, fueled by harsh lockdowns, unemployment and extreme inequality worsened by the COVID19 pandemic. The worst violence experienced since the end of Apartheid, lives were lost with stakings of a race war between the Indian and Black communities.

²³ All poems in the article are by the author.

in
 Chatsworth
 Umlazi
 Lamontville
 Phoenix
 KwaMashu
 Wentworth
 Cato Manor

in our thousands
 common, innocuous
 stoic statues
 in deep meditation
 we wait

as the last rosy ray
 of sun's dying wish
 lands upon the tip
 of our *iklwa*²⁴

inspired
 we shiver and shake
 galvanizing swiftly
 we melt and murmur
 one after the other
 until there is no
 one or other

wings fan feathers
 countless *ihawu*²⁵
 pierce the skies

maneuver left
 we di(v)e
 ascend right
 how can we survive?

black suns of the night
 whose irises shine stars
 mistaken for gems
 eye for an eye
 bleeds blood diamonds

²⁴ IsiZulu – meaning short spear

²⁵ IsiZulu – meaning Nguni shield

as we cry,
 “where are our stolen fathers?”

Clouds hang low
 blanketing those beneath
 in dusk’s golden glow

as the star-lings take flight

*Properties of the Self*²⁶

Come, *maAfrika amahle asihambe ndawonye*²⁷.

Recent events have brought to the fore the critical need for us to address our colonial wounds, beginning with a decolonizing of the self (Sheik, 2020). In order to enflesh (see Spillers, 1987; Copeland, 2010) ourselves back into being of and from the earth, we first need to acknowledge the depth of colonial logics we have internalized and the degrees of separation we have come to take as given. As we reflect *maAfrika amahle*, let us begin with the question of what has really been stolen? The opening line to Stefano Harney and Fred Moten’s *All Incomplete* (2021: 13) reads “The first theft shows up as rightful ownership”. They go on to delineate this ownership through two mutually constitutive strands: private property and the self. You see *maAfrika amahle*, in order to own pieces of the earth we need to first separate ourselves from it. We need to claw out the ochre from our skins, drain the waters from our eyes and douse the fire in our souls, so we may take ownership of ourselves as individuals. Whilst, during colonization and by extension apartheid, our bodies were marked as “property that can flee” (Harney & Moten, 2021: 17) through slavery, indenture, the *dompas*²⁸, arrest, kidnap; where we were owned, traded, bought, sold, tortured; our cages imposed upon by the overlords, plantation owners,

²⁶ Stefano Harney & Fred Moten *All Incomplete* (2021: 33).

²⁷ In isiZulu meaning ‘let’s walk together’

²⁸ Literal translation ‘dumb pass’ was a document black South African’s were required to have with them at all times under the Apartheid pass laws, especially when entering white-only government designated white-only areas. The police could stop any black person and demand to see their *dompas*, failure to produce on would result in arrest, imprisonment or fines. During the anti-apartheid struggle black people burned their *dompas* as an act of protest, defiance and liberation.

*baas*²⁹, landlords; these days through this self-owning individuation we choose our cages becoming private property, individuals, consumers, and as such we begin to extract, harm and steal from ourselves, from others and from earth. Trapping ourselves we hawk our time for currency to buy back our freedom from apartheid's coffers. Yet, our freedom can never be granted by those systems whose laws and acts require us as slaves and the extraction of the life of earth.

There is no freedom to be found in the shopping malls, at the bottom of trolleys, in aisle number four nor five, at the tills or through smashed store-fronts. Where some pay cash and others don't pay at all, both are acts of ownership, of taking for the individual. You see *maAfrika amahle*, "[t]he moment you say it is mine because I worked on it [or for it] and improved it, or you say that I am me because I worked on myself and improved myself, you start a war. And by misattributing that initiation of this war to nature, you then codify this war as the (anti)social contract" (Harney & Moten, 2021: 32). What has really been stolen is the flesh from our bones, the flesh that identified us as pieces belonging to the earth, belonging to each other. "All property is loss because all property is the loss of sharing" (Harney & Moten, 2021: 14).

When we start this journey of decolonizing the self and healing, the loss, can often feel debilitating. We are losing the "properties of the self" (Harney & Moten, 2021: 33) we have been accumulating; those temporary wound dressings which the ego so calculatingly placed. These 'properties of the self', race, religion, gender, sexuality, class, disability and their intersecting oppressions of the individual, are only ever constituted through the imposition of colonial logics (Lugones, 2007, Harney & Moten, 2021). These are 'the master's tools'³⁰ of continued

²⁹ Boss in Dutch and Afrikaans. Used in the South African context to refer to a supervisor or employer, especially a white man in charge of black, brown and coloured people.

³⁰ See Lorde, A. 2017 [1979]. *The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House*. Penguin Classics, UK.

self-improvement³¹ which have gentrified our existence from ‘private property which flees’ to private property which accumulates. Put another way, where these intersections were meant to name our struggles, we have come to be defined by them; where we identify with it as part of our being. This is the trap of representation, we begin to mimic the modern/colonial order (Vázquez, 2020), we compete, loot, horde, accumulate, stockpile, take more than we need; when questioned, we point fingers, navel gaze and blame each other; we withdraw into our bleeding, tortured, aching bodies; seeking refuge by dressing it up, drinking it down, masking its scent, gorging our stomachs, binging our eyes and still the longing never subsides, the pain does not relent and the colonial wound festers.

Enfleshing³² Poetry

We are a people “bearing trans-generational trauma, widespread mental illness and extreme levels of violence” (Ndlovu, 2020: 14). We have been maimed by cycles of abuse unable to flee, to become fugitive; the dehumanization has stripped us of our stories, our indigeneity, culture, languages, rituals and traditions, ancestors and kin. As a private-property-self we have in its place “the self-justifying mythologies of the perpetrators” (Morales, 1998: 4). In *Medicine Stories* Aurora Levins Morales (1998: 4) makes a key connection between abuse and collective oppression, stating that “abuse is the local eruption of systematic oppression and oppression the accumulation of millions of small systemic abuses”. As if foretelling the reality of post-apartheid South Africa, she goes on to say that this abuse, inexplicable in the face of ‘humanity’, must either be explained away i.e., the rainbow nation or “we accept that we are less than human and lose ourselves, and our capacity to resist, in the experience of victimhood” (Morales, 1998: 4).

³¹ Following Harney & Moten (2021: 33) self-improvement is understood here as the individual created in order to enter into the anti(social) contact. This self-improving individual then begins to accumulate properties which it can put to work.

³² In *Enfleshing Freedom*, liberation theologian M. Shawn Copeland (2010) uses enfleshing to explain how the connection between the brutalization of black bodies under slavery and their denied freedom, attends not only to the dead but also to those of their living descendants. In this article enfleshing is used to speak of the spirits of those who have departed with their freedom denied, as well as to us, the living descendants who possessed by these spirits, carrying their and our wounds on our bodies, unaware that the remedy is to be found in the flesh.

Let us tend to our wounds, *maAfrika amahle*. The healing must begin. We start with the flesh. Not the animated skeletal corpse of the private-propriety-self, modernity's anatomical body, who is enclosed in "the generalized conditions of earthlessness (separation from Earth), worldlessness (separation from communities) and contemporaneity (the loss of relational time)" (Vázquez, 2020: 155). In decolonizing the self, we soften and journey inwards and touch the mnemonic body – the one who remembers (Chávez & Vázquez, 2017). The mnemonic body is the one who cannot be captured, enslaved, reduced, commodified, enclosed. The mnemonic body is light, she flows with the wind, floats on waters currents, whilst still being grounded and rooted, she makes many 'crossings'³³ between worlds seen and unseen, felt but not touched, heard yet unspoken.

Liberate our senses

as we breathe
to die a self
suffocating
intestines snaked noose
inside our necks

touch our eyes
with words
we dream
while awake

our ears speak
tongues
taste lines
sung in silence

our lips read
visions
out of sight
in mind

³³ M. Jaqui Alexander (2005: 23) in *Pedagogies of Crossing*, uses crossings to refer not only to the ocean routes across the Atlantic and Indian oceans which carried bodies as cargo, but also "to evoke/invoke the crossroads the place of convergence and endless possibility, the place where we put down and discard the unnecessary in order to pick up that which is necessary".

our skin smells
verses
heard incense-d
by spirits

libertate our senses
as we breathe
life
back into
being

When she, the mnemonic body speaks— what is voiced is *poetry*. Enfleshed poetry speaks to deep relation, where the mnemonic body evokes that which has been stolen, the flesh off our bone which identified us as belonging to the earth and to each other. *Andihambi ndondwa*³⁴.

We hear you there, comrade at the back “*ai voetsak wena*³⁵, *we are revolutionaries not Shakespeare*”. You are right, enfleshed poetry is not the “sterile word play...[of] the white fathers” (Lorde, 2017 [1979]: 2) nor the rhyme, meter, scales and form of Anglo-Saxon poetry we learned in high school. We are talking about the verses imprinted in our flesh, the ‘struggle poetry’ written in exile, *izimbongi*³⁶ praised on the streets, *ku femba*³⁷ in the township and spoken word in the ghetto. We are talking about that poetry which is not a luxury, that is a “vital necessity of our existence” (Lorde, 2017 [1979]: 2). Enfleshed poetry heals in community, through a reconnection with spirit, a remembering of who we really are, in “the bearing witness, in the naming of trauma and in the grief and rage and defiance that follow” (Morales, 1998: 16). This enfleshment is present in the healing work of poet Angifi Dladla. Through the Femba Writing Project Dladla taught poetry and play writing in schools, prisons and community centers for 30 years. He was keenly aware that there is “something the dead know” (Dladla, 2017) and much of his work is dedicated to healing the wounds that keep the spirits of the dead

³⁴ Ngiyabonga sis Ongezwa Mbele for sharing and translating the isiXhosa phrase *Andihambi Ndondwa*: I walk with many.

³⁵ South African slang, closest equivalent in English would be ‘ah, get outta here’.

³⁶ Praise poetry, songs and oral history performed by an orator at ceremonial events and important communal gatherings.

³⁷ Poetry through divination which summons spirits to cure the ills of society.

trapped. Working with youth who were involved in necklace murders³⁸ in the 1980s, they collectively worked through the pain, grief and trauma, healing not only themselves, but freeing the spirits which haunted them, reconciling with their families and community (Bila & Abodunrin, 2020: 12).

This is the transformational shift necessary for collective liberation. When faced with ongoing abuses, massacres, inequality, poverty, gender-based violence and state pillaging, healing the collective becomes harder, yet by refusing to privatize ourselves, refusing to leverage our properties, refusing to cannibalize ourselves through the consumption of others and the life of earth (Vázquez, 2020) we become mnemonic fugitives. This “refusal to cooperate with our dehumanization even when we may not be able to stop it increases our reserves of dignity and hope” (Morales, 1998: 17). It allows us to become unintelligible to colonial logics, as mnemonic fugitives we become intelligible to ourselves and each other in relational ways. In doing so, we set out on a path to recovery, where we stop robbing ourselves of freedom, the collective freedom that can only come through being together, “sharing is our means, the earth’s means in us and our means in earth” (Harney & Moten, 2021: 15). Reciprocity, sharing, listening, offering, receiving – these are the lessons the mnemonic fugitive offers us.

Decolonial aesthetics and the spiritual crisis

You see *maAfrika amahle*, the mnemonic fugitive’s expression through poetry evades modernity’s monopoly on subjectivity. This brings us back to the statement in the opening paragraph ‘where we are positioned matters’. Positionality has become a cornerstone of social justice, yet so much of it is contingent upon the performance of identity under the dominant logics of modernity/coloniality – a co-constitutive concept with the former denoting the historical western civilizing mission and its corresponding erasure of worlds of meaning and the latter demarcating the erasure and displacement of pluriversal ways of being and knowing (Vázquez, 2020). In the decolonizing of knowledges, emphasis is placed at the level of epistemology – our ways

³⁸ During apartheid necklacing (torture and execution where a rubber tire is filled with fuel forced over the victims chest and shoulders and set alight) was used in black communities to punish those members suspected of conspiring or collaborating with the apartheid government.

of knowing, but many have been misled into the labyrinth of the mind as the center of knowing. The mnemonic fugitive lives in the flesh of the mind, as it does in the flesh of all organs, none are principal – as such eyes, mouth, ears, nose, fingers, which we use to experience the external world, and heart, womb, lungs which we use to experience the internal world, are all equally important. For this reason, attempting to decolonize at the level of the mind alone continuously leads to the nonsensical logics of coloniality where the Cartesian split between body and mind is reinforced.

To better understand this divide, we need to turn our attention to aesthetics – notably associated with the arts, aesthetics’ control over sensing and experience through a normative western world view extends into our everyday social lives and as such holds as much weight as epistemology. In *Vistas of Modernity – decolonial aesthesis and the end of the contemporary* Rolando Vázquez (2020: 13-4) demonstrates how aesthetics – “the things perceptible by the senses in distinction from the thinkable or immaterial” - through the separability of subject-object came to regulate the senses and govern perception, representing itself as the “field of experience”. Following this reasoning, aesthetics which “determines the space of appearance and the possibilities of recognition, as an enclosure of the senses” (Vázquez, 2020: 14), can only recognize the private-property-self – the one who performs identity, the owner and the owned, one out of space and out of time. In this way, aesthetics is in the service of coloniality, where expression is for consumption under the universalized terrain of intelligibility which requires a subduing of the senses. This dulling of the senses is of pivotal importance as M. Jacqui Alexander (2005: 346) points out in *Pedagogies of Crossing* “there is a cost associated with taking refuge in the borrowed gifts of alienation that cultivate the practice of forgetting”. She goes on to explain that the learned “mistrust of our senses” and “the shame of our spiritual inheritance” forms another layer of oppression. You see *maAfrika amahle*, we are in spiritual crisis. Following Alexander’s guidance, we come to see the ways in which epistemology and aesthetics are intricately interwoven where this misalignment inevitably provokes “a confrontation with history, both its Cartesian variant that produced the splits in the first place and the history that is being mobilized to displace it” (Alexander, 2005: 346). We live in continuous war with our internal worlds, the effects of which play out in our external worlds.

In order to heal from the Cartesian split, inflicted upon us through formal education and learning through erasure; to bring mind, body/flesh and spirit into harmony, to inhabit the mnemonic fugitive, the one who belongs to the earth, to become intelligible to ourselves and each other, we need to address the ways in which we have been taught to sense. For this task Vázquez (2020: 15) offers us ‘decolonial aesthesis’ which “undoes the silencing of coloniality” whilst reorienting our perception to the senses. As both a critique and practice, decolonial aesthesis, opens space for the mnemonic fugitive to teach us, guide us and lead us. Where aesthetics regulates and governs the senses, decolonial aesthesis liberates the senses through re-membering and enfleshing. As such decolonial aesthesis provides us with a grounding for those “positions which we cannot escape” (Cairo, 2021: 79). “When we speak of decolonial positionality, we mean that all of us have a geo-historical position along the colonial difference. It is a position that is not of our choosing, that we cannot choose as one could choose to perform an identity” (Vázquez, 2020: 149). This marks an important move from the private-propertyed-self, the authoritative ‘I’, the sovereign individual, the subject/object who positions themselves through leveraging identities in opposition to a dominant subjectivity, claiming representation through enunciation; to the enfleshed mnemonic fugitive who takes a decolonial positionality that is always reaching out in search of relations who can help us remember, healing towards collective liberation through listening and reception (Vázquez, 2020).

Doesn’t this sound familiar dear *maAfrika amahle*. When we say we want to decolonize this and that, we are not asking for the current systems to work better, nor to be included in systems that are dependent on the suffering of countless others and the destruction of earth; we are asking to return home to the ‘we’. *Umntu Ngumuntu Abantu*³⁹. In Ubuntu we have a horizon, one that is beyond mere survival and perpetual resistance. Let us draw strength from its oral traditions, drink deeply from its well of wisdom and move towards ‘re-existence’ where the pursuit of an ethical life is a life-long journey (Ramose, 2002; Vázquez, 2020).

³⁹ In the philosophy of Ubuntu: A person is a person through other people / I am because we are.

Optical illusion

In meditation
 her eyes roll back
 dropping down her throat
 landing in the center of her chest
 now she sees clearly
 what her heart already perceived
 the *isigubhu*⁴⁰
 which *kuthu*⁴¹ beats
 the rhythm of life
 is held by another
 dropping down bloodstream
 landing in the body of her womb
 her vision recedes
 a touch
 from inside
 remembers the navel
 whose cord
 holds dreams
 she must be
 willing to
 receive

Encircling Collective Liberation

We're almost there, *maAfrika amahle*. "Crossings are never undertaken all at once, and never once and for all" (Alexander, 2005: 318). The journey from enunciation to reception is a necessary 'crossing' and one which we will have to make many times, for we still have to deal with our complicity as we work for institutions, buy to feed and clothe ourselves, rent to shelter ourselves. The microaggressions are ongoing, the abuses never ending, but we have a choice – we can choose each other, we can choose to host each other in our non-dominant differences, we can choose to "hold space" (Cairo, 2021) for each other so we may lay bare our wounds and be held in community, so together we can call forth the spirits of our ancestors we keep trapped in the carrying over of our generational trauma.

⁴⁰ Double-headed Nguni drum.

⁴¹ Fast musical beat in South Indian folk dance with an emphasis on percussion.

The private-property-self has led us up a treacherous path, fear keeps our eyes transfixed on our feet, as we are convinced of our eventual downfall when we forget that the mnemonic fugitive is always with us. From this vantage point, *maAfrika amahle* I ask you to look up, there in the distance do you see that bright rainbow. “How?”, you ask, you have never seen it like that before. Rainbows are not actually bows but full circles, the other half is what our eyes perceive as invisible, yet is always there. It is the degrees of separation which prevent us from seeing the full circle. Likewise, *maAfrika amahle*, our position as private-property-self has prevented us from seeing the relationality of our existence, the other half of the rainbow. When we choose to perceive through the mnemonic fugitive, to express our knowledges through poetry, *ku femba, izimbongi*, spoken word, we heal the wounds that trap the spirits of our ancestors, we heal ourselves, our communities and the earth – we come full circle. Look around you *maAfrika amahle*, we stand shoulder to shoulder on this treacherous path, you were never a lone revolutionary, hand in hand *asambe siye ekhaya*⁴². Together we can remember the way back...

The private-property-self has led us up a treacherous path, fear keeps our eyes transfixed on our feet, as we are convinced of our eventual downfall when we forget that the mnemonic fugitive is always with us. From this vantage point, *maAfrika amahle* I ask you to look up, there in the distance do you see that bright rainbow. “How?”, you ask, you have never seen it like that before. Rainbows are not actually bows but full circles, the other half is what our eyes perceive as invisible, yet is always there. It is the degrees of separation which prevent us from seeing the full circle. Likewise, *maAfrika amahle*, our position as private-property-self has prevented us from seeing the relationality of our existence, the other half of the rainbow. When we choose to perceive through the mnemonic fugitive, to express our knowledges through poetry, *ku femba, izimbongi*, spoken word, we heal the wounds that trap the spirits of our ancestors, we heal ourselves, our communities and the earth – we come full circle. Look around you *maAfrika amahle*, we stand shoulder to shoulder on this treacherous path, you were never a

⁴² In isiZulu meaning ‘Let’s go home’.

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lone revolutionary, hand in hand *asambe siye ekhaya*⁴³. Together we can remember the way back...

⁴³ In isiZulu meaning 'Let's go home'.

4

Women of Colour are not Human. We are Relational Beings⁴⁴

“Why would you want to be a woman? The category women is about white women, a modern understanding of the female....decoloniality is not about recovering gender”
~ Maria Lugones, 30 June 2020⁴⁵

Am I woman⁴⁶?

The simple answer is no.

Am I human?

The simple answer is no.

Am I an individual?

The simple answer is no.

Can you remember the first time you were racialized? Can you remember the first time you were gendered? Take a few moments, quieten and allow for a moment of stillness. As you start to journey inwards, see what arises - images, feelings, memories, sensations. Perhaps you would like to take a moment to note this experience down.

I can recall the first time the me in us/we became an “I” – it was the moment of my racialization and gendering, which in hindsight, have always been tied. In 1990 the cracks of apartheid South Africa had come to full rupture with the start of a process that would transform the country into a democratic state, with widespread unrest – it was violent and it was brutal. It was also the year I started pre-school; I was 4 years old. As Nelson Mandela was released from Robin Island

⁴⁴ Sheik, Z.B. forthcoming I. Women of Colour are not Human. We are relational beings. In Amoo, E.A. & Zoysa, R.S. (eds.), *An Anthology of Non-Conformism: Rebel Wom!n Words, Ways and Wonders*. DIO Press.

⁴⁵ Lugones, María. “On coalitions across Oppressions,” lecture, Middleburg Decolonial Summer School, 30 June 2020. Available online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xoh7FUIgEcU&feature=youtu.be>

⁴⁶ “I” is used in this text, not as the singular, first-person, modern subject, but rather as a marker of the plurality of selves that is continuously seeking partners, to converse with, to learn with, to grow with (Lugones, 2003: 724). The specific spelling ‘woman’ and ‘women’ are used inclusively to denote all women; trans women, women of colour, black women, indigenous women, and all people identifying as woman. Whilst simultaneously acknowledging that under the colonality of gender, ‘women’ is a placeholder term.

and began his thirteen-nation international tour, closer to home adults were starting to prepare for the realities of a post-apartheid South Africa.

In March the Minister of Education announced that the desegregation of schools would start in January 1991. Possibly, as an attempt to give it a trial run, or perhaps to already start reconciliation, my working class-Indian township pre-school would be going on a fieldtrip, not to the aquarium or zoo or museum, but to a white pre-school in a white neighborhood. What I did not know then was this would be the moment of brutal passage into ‘subjectivity’. I remember the bus ride, the tall white ma’am with curly hair in the corridor, but most of all I remember the playground. It was a hot-humid Durban day and I was climbing the box monkey bars. Higher up on the bars was a boy with pale skin, blue eyes and blonde hair: “Kaffir”⁴⁷ he shouted as he pushed. I could feel the roughness of wrought iron and the peeling of paint as my palms slipped and I fell in the dirt. Looking up at him, I frowned not knowing what the word meant. I knew the children there spoke a different language, so I got up and dusted myself off, thinking it must be because I’m a girl and moved to another part of the playground. On the bus ride home, I opened the lunch pack we were handed as we single-filed out of the pre-school, happy to find a red grape Liquifruit juice box which we usually only got on special occasions because they were too expensive. I didn’t tell anyone what happened on the playground because boys-being-boys and girls-being-girls was already well entrenched into my understanding of how the world worked.

The Coloniality of Gender

Anticolonial feminist theorizing has the ability to pollinate multiple disciplines, yet it remains at the margins of feminist theory. Maria Lugones (2003), in *Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes: Theorizing Coalition Against Multiple Oppressions*, identifies the reason for this as no longer white women’s inability to see difference (speaking on behalf of *all* women), but rather their preoccupation with recognizing the problem of difference as opposed to *recognizing and accepting*

⁴⁷ A racially abusive term used for black people, especially during Apartheid. In post-apartheid South Africa it is considered hate speech and punishable by law.

difference. In her seminal work *The Invention of Women* Oyéronké Oyewùmí (1997: 20) convincingly argues that “gender was not an organizing principle in Yoruba society prior to colonization,” demonstrating that the imposed categorization of women resulted in their loss of power, status and roles. Building on Oyewùmí’s arguments and the work of indigenous scholar Paula Gunn Allen, Lugones (2007, 2010) theorized ‘the coloniality of gender’ in which gender is a colonial construct that fundamentally alters our sense of self and our relations to each other, creating binary oppositions and hierarchical social categories: resulting in a totalizing dehumanization of anyone who falls into the category of women.

Some scholars (Segato, 2001; Rivera Cusicanqui, 1997; Paredes, 2008; Pearce, 2014) have challenged the coloniality of gender and others have written about the existence of gender in pre-colonial contexts (Ramaswamy, 2016; Thadani, 2016; Adjepong, 2015; Moagi and Mtombeni, 2019). However, Breny Mendoza (2015: 118) points out that what these theorists all agree on is that “the imposition of a European gender system has had profound effects on relations between men and women in the colony, unleashing lethal forces against Native, enslaved, and poor mestizo women sufficient to be considered genocidal”. Indeed, to view these as competing arguments would reduce the complexity and plurality of lived experiences, homogenizing difference into a fiction recognizable only through modernity’s gaze.

By herstoricing⁴⁸ the origins of gender, “the coloniality of gender makes clear that gender grants civilized status only to those men and women who inhabit the domain of human” (Mendoza, 2015: 117). Following this, the logical assumption would be that in order to be human one would have to stake a claim in the heteronormative colonial gender system. In addition, it is key to take note that under this system, European/white women were deemed closer to nature due to reproduction and seen as emotional and irrational, and as such were lower than men in the hierarchy of being human but still *human* due to their race and culture (Lugones, 2007; Mendoza, 2015). Thus, gender is “acknowledged as an important analytical category to understand the modern/colonial system of oppression, but it is also seen as what needs to be

⁴⁸ Making evident the erasure of women in his-tory.

overcome” by those seeking collective liberation (Icaza & Vasquez, 2016: 62). In other words, as gendered and racialized beings, then, we cannot seek to become human. Our attempts to decolonize, to reconstitute a self that is not an individual, can never be achieved through being a ‘women’⁴⁹, for what we will then lay claim to is an insubordinate position within a hierarchized system in which dehumanization is inherent.

The Myth of Eye

Born to a name-less country at war, alabaster hands struggled to hold power as ebony love spread throughout the lands. Ma had gone to the holy land for Haj, the only one to have travelled, let alone on a plane, subsequent to our ancestors who were hauled across the ocean on vessels commandeered by pale-faced masters. She was due September, so her mother got dressed early that late August day prepared to fetch Ma’s grant. Sudden spasms began, her abdomen convulsed and labored her breaths. Where she entered R.K. Khans alone, not an hour and a half later, her arms held hope. Dark brown hue equal to her father, her enchanted earthen eyes shone wonder and charm, as her mother marveled at her newborn’s small hands and subtle features.

When they left R.K. Khans, she entered a 3B Flats household as number fourteen bound by two bedrooms, a lounge, cold-water-only bathroom and cookery. Her parents had called Ma, whose stop over was Bharat to tell her the happy news; as the head of the household, she named the newborns. She chose a name from the Quran, one of astute beauty. However, due to an error by the clerk her name was marked by an absent letter. A lost letter that forever left a vacant space of conjecture, of who she really was.

⁴⁹ Using the inclusive spelling of ‘women’ shows the problematic narrowness of the term ‘women’, but rather than seek inclusion, ‘women’ is used here to mark our absence.

For years her parents taught her to spell her name plus the extra letter not found on her documents. When she turned seventeen, she needed to get papers to take her end-of-school exams. These new papers were necessary for her to accompany akka to the halls of knowledge never set foot upon by any of those who came before them. Yet, these new papers reproduced her name sans one letter and the names had to match on her exam papers. So, she awkwardly wrote her name always reluctant after the 'k'.

The groves of academe encouraged her to drop the extra load of a modest letter of a name they could not pronounce anyway. The lecture halls were full and there was no space for a lost letter that held all that was 'other'. Crushed under the pressure of hundreds of years of scholarly tyranny she renounced the concealed letter. A new name marked her separate from the past and as nameless as the country where she was born. Each forced scrawl of her new name deadened her body and pronounced the emergence of a modern subject. A carbon copy made of the masters' tools.

Her parents could not help as they watched her molt. They stared paralyzed as an educated, cultured and knowledgeable poseur replaced a daughter they once knew. She had become arrogant, detached and judgmental, a faux-settler, a sheep camouflaged by wolves' clothes. She was reproachful of her roots and became estranged from those who knew her best. Her parents often wondered was the bounty too steep a fee for a daughter's escape from poverty.

Three years went by, a degree at last, yet all she felt was empty. An unseen letter now marked the borders of two worlds, that of her ancestry and the learned modern subject. Her body fragmented, the agony of estrangement too severe to bear, she ran away from both worlds. She searched for who she was, journeyed to far off places, across land and oceans, yet the passport she held harbored the same name betrayed by an absent letter.

She returned to the halls of the academy hopeful, only to be awarded a Masters by her masters, so she ran away once more. And here, upon the land of the masters, she found the myth of the eye. She looked deeply at the grotesque, fractured servant she had become. She looked up at the ladder of backs she would have to stampee on to succeed at a game whose rules had been set for greed and wealth at any cost and she let go.

She embraced the freedom of the plummet toward darkness and braced herself for the brunt of the fallout. Through darkness they called out to her by name and hands reached to comfort her through the ache and torment. Awaken they shouted as she was reborn, a soul of great stature, two feet planted powerfully on mother earth's womb. She knows now that she was never woman, man, lone nor separate. The lost letter marks what no borders can enclose, a self that's whole; manas, body and soul.

Not Human nor posthuman

In her book *Becoming Human: Matter and Meaning in an Antiblack World*, Zakiyyah Iman Jackson (2020: 1) builds upon and extends the work of Jamaican scholar Sylvia Wynter, by unravelling the myths, colonial fantasies, and imperial delusions “regarding the quality of black(ened) people’s humanity”. By deftly placing her argument between critical race theory and claims made by new materialists, Jackson (2020: 1-4) simultaneously challenges the critique of bestialization and humanism’s antidote by pointing out that “black female flesh persistently functions as the limit case of ‘the human’” and as such fundamentally “alters the meaning and significance of being (human)” under the conditions of liberal humanism. Jackson (2020: 19-20) reinforces this statement by arguing that ‘human’ has never provided racialized beings safety from ontologizing violence and rather than being excluded from “the category Man and its overrepresentation of humanity”, we serve as ‘the exception that makes the rule’. Following both Wynter and Jackson, what then are the implications of accepting this position within humanity?

For those gendered and racialized, claiming these pre-conditions then means a full withdrawal from all relations to land, rivers, oceans, seas, mountains, the sun, the moon, the sky, all animal and insect life – a withdrawal from ourselves and those of our kin. It would mean the relinquishing of our ancestors, our spirituality and all traces of our indigenous knowledges that survived epistemicide. In other words, ‘human’ is what prevents us from truly being who we are. In which case, I choose not to be human; rather following the amaZulu of the province I call home: “I am river, I am mountain, I am tree, I am love, I am emotion, I am beauty, I am lake, I am cloud, I am sun, I am sky, I am mind, I am one with one” (Asante, 1990: 83).

Learning from *Ubuntu*⁵⁰, the rooted teachings of the lands in which I took my first breath, whose waters cleansed me, whose soil fed me and whose nurturing allowed me to grow; everything is connected and interdependent in continuity. Ubuntu as a way of life, an ethic and framework for encounters with others, of bringing someone on the outside in (Nqelenga in @fml.convo, 2020), helps us to understand difference. Ubuntu is not particular to Bantu-speaking Africans but as Francisco de Tejada reminds us, it stretches across “from the Nubian desert to the Cape of Good Hope and from Senegal to Zanzibar” (cf. Ramose, 2002: 230). Indeed, the worldview of interdependence, compassion, harmony, balance and reciprocity is present in many forms across Africa, with “The Baganda of Uganda refer(ring) to it as *Obuntu bulamu*, the Baluba of Central Africa as *Bumuntu*, the Shona of Zimbabwe as *Hunhu*, the Yoruba of Nigeria as *Iwapele* and, in Tanzania, it is embodied in the Kiswahili term *Ujamaa*” (Tamale, 2020: 223).

Whilst in translations of Ubuntu ‘human’ is often used, the noun *ntu* as in *abantu* - person or being is actually ontologically closer to the deep connections and relationality inherent within the Ubuntu worldview (Tamale, 2020: 223). Put more poetically, Na’im Akbar describes the African cosmos as a spiders web; “its least element cannot be touched without making the

⁵⁰ I approach Ubuntu not as *abantu*, not as *AmaZulu* but as a person whose difference was welcomed in through the acknowledgement of our interrelatedness. I give deep gratitude and thanks to sis Luthando Ngema for talking through the philosophy and principles of Ubuntu with me.

whole vibrate. Everything is connected, interdependent” (Tamale, 2020: 85). When Ubuntu speaks of oneness, it is not a oneness that moves towards assimilation (genocide, epistemicide, individualization, erasure) but rather a oneness that embraces difference, an ethic of living which is simultaneously rooted and in movement as it encounters relations of difference. That is to say, the oneness of the new age movement, post-humanism, new materialism, the oneness of cultural appropriation in modernity’s universalizing, is not relational oneness, it is not Ubuntu.

Women of Colour as Relational Beings

Women of colour the soil
hands in fists
we see
we dream

Fingers uncurled
we dig
we scream
hands in the earth we plead
we bleed

Flesh revealed
we heave
we grieve
eyes water parched skin
we rupture

Women of colour the soil
does not part

Knuckles bone raw
we stop
we breathe
knees buckle to ground
we secede

Looking down at our chests
how do we begin to heal?

Do not claw, do not dig
but start to feel

*la facultad*⁵¹

Women of colour the soil does not part
from that which it is...from the start

Thinking/being/doing/sensing/feeling. Not as woman and not as human, I choose to write from the ephemeral position of women of colour as relational being; as an 'I', that is a 'we' deeply connected to the webbed threads of a women of colour "intellectual ancestry" (Garcia, 2020) whose echoes reverberate through time and space. For, as Daimys E. Garcia (2020) reminds us, ancestry is not just blood; it is coalitional. It is a weaving of Maria Lugones' treads of wisdom, with Gloria Anzaldúa's captive lines, framed by Audre Lorde's silken words, which create an anchoring, of a web in which the "least element cannot be touched without making the whole vibrate" (Tamale, 2020: 85). Through their work we are provided with a concept (women of colour) that allows us to disavow the performativity of identity, whilst allowing us to name our struggles, account for our privileges, reclaim our being through our different lineages, reconstitute our mind, body and spirit, and connect to our spirituality, all in an effort to overcome the modern/colonial systems of gender and human, in order to practice coalitional relations, that allows us to be at ease with ourselves and enables us to be in relation with *all* others.

There remains a hanging thread in Lugones' work: the question of loving across difference⁵². Under women of colour as relational beings there is interdependence, all beings are connected. As such the difference between white feminists and women of colour is a false dichotomy; dependent only on the performance of identity. Yet, is it possible to accept white feminism as a difference when it's theorizing erases our being?

⁵¹ Gloria Anzaldúa's (2007) concept which speaks of the ability to connect with the depths of our soul, a perception anchored in the body which constantly guides us.

⁵² Whilst womanist authors such as Alice Walker (1981) and Layli Maparyan (2012) attempt to address this question, they do so through binary heteronormative universalist claims which do not account for the plurality of selves which underpin this article. In addition, through their womanist writings Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi (1985) and Clenora Hudson-Weems (1994) both foreclose on the possibility of reconciliation between black feminists and white feminists citing the intractability of racism.

In order to address this question, we need to weave in the work of Chicana feminist Gloria Anzaldúa: “The struggle has always been inner, and is played out in the outer terrains...Nothing happens in the ‘real’ world unless it first happens in the images in our heads” (Anzaldúa, 2007: 109). There are various inner pathways to reach the liminal space of humility and reciprocity needed to love across difference. The most accessible is through ancestry and lineage. These are the knowledges, philosophies, stories, recipes, ceremonies, songs, languages, dances, prayers, gatherings, jokes, retelling of memories, that have travelled across lands, oceans and skies; that survived through multiple oppressions, colonization, slavery, indenture, imperialism, war, genocide, apartheid, endured the cutting of tongues, carried in hearts, passed from lips to ears, sometimes in translation, oftentimes without words. This pathway asks of us to continuously come up against our inner conflicts, our biases, inherited stereotypes, schooled programming, capitalist indoctrination, etc., and love into acceptance the dark parts of ourselves that we struggle against. This pathway allows us to sense/feel the differences within us that are waiting to be accepted and loved. By accepting the difference within us, it gives us a grounding that transcends borders, temporalities, and space.

This spiritual work is deeply entwined with another pathway, that of nature⁵³. One of the most heinous crimes of colonialism was turning us against the land with whips and hoes. We need to lovingly be able to sink our fingers into soil once more, to submerge ourselves in the oceans without the profound fear that all might be stolen from us again, to transcend the irrational fear that all other beings (animals, insects, plants) are out to get us. That our survival is dependent on killing this insect or that chicken. We need to open ourselves up, to remember how to live in deep relation and that can only be taught by nature and being with each other.

Our collective liberation lies in becoming relational beings through the spiritual inner work of decolonizing the self, connecting to nature, the lands and waters of which we were forced to become estranged. The acceptance of difference as transformative for coalitional relationships

⁵³ The generic term “nature” is used to refer to the category of non-humans, which covers flora, fauna, air, water bodies and inanimate entities (Tamale, 2020: 84).

is the pre-condition for moving away from being a modern individual subject and towards a relational being. It is a return to the 4-year-old who looked up at a child on the box monkey bars, and didn't allow the difference of other children to stop the joy of playing. It is only once we recognize difference as transformational that we can reach out in and beyond coalition as an act of radical love.

Decolonial Re-existence and the Myths of Knowledge Production⁵⁴

The first step to decolonizing, is demythologizing (Rutazibwa, 2019). In tracing the origin of the myths of knowledge production we begin with the question ‘Why do we do research?’. In her book *Qualitative Research and Intercultural Understanding* Deborah Court (2018: 3) attempts to answer the question of why we do research by positing that it is in order to “acquire new knowledge, the goal of which is to improve the human condition...in order to contribute to shared bodies of knowledge [disciplines] that are the repositories of human understanding”. Whilst on the surface this innocuous statement might appear banal, it reveals multiple myths all too common in research practices, which will be examined by splitting the above statement into three parts: (1) Acquiring new knowledge, (2) Improving the human condition, and (3) Shared bodies of knowledge.

Myth 1 - Acquiring new knowledge

Though the pursuit of knowledge is not limited to the purview of the West⁵⁵, through colonialism and imperialism the West has projected itself as the *menhir*⁵⁶ of knowledge production⁵⁷. These processes, fed by ‘scientific curiosity’, were neither fortuitous nor benign, they were premeditatedly and voraciously designed to eradicate indigenous peoples and expropriate their lands for the profit and gain of the West. It was science, research and technological advancement in shipbuilding, navigational instruments and firearms that made Western expansion,

⁵⁴ Sheik, Z.B. forthcoming2. Decolonial re-existence and the Myths of Knowledge Production. In Nirmal, A. & Dey, S. (eds.), *Myth, History and Postcolonial Consciousness: Politics of Theory and Praxis*. London & New York: Routledge.

⁵⁵ The term “the West” as delineated by Stuart Hall is “an idea or concept, a language for imagining a set of complex stories, ideas, historical events and social relationships” (Tuhiwai-Smith 42). For a more detailed explanation see Hall, Stuart. “The West and the Rest: Discourse and Power.” *Formations of Modernity*. Ed. Stuart Hall and Bram Gielben. Cambridge: Polity Press and Open University. 1992. 276-320. Print.

⁵⁶ *Menhir* is a man-made upright standing stone, dating back to the European Bronze Age, they are most commonly found in Ireland, Britain and France. Menhir was used, as opposed to monolith which is naturally occurring, to emphasize the West as a man-made construct.

⁵⁷ Knowledge production is used to refer to hegemonic forms of knowledge processes, which is rife in contemporary research, and has come to signify erasure, extraction, neoliberalism and capitalism. Later, knowledge cultivation (Shilliam, 2015) is used as a means to delink from this hegemonic practice, to denote research that is liberating, grounding and encourages growth.

since the fifteenth century, possible (Adas, 2018a: 4487). That being said, prior to this, many European travelers in their comparison of the West to China and the Indian subcontinent bemoaned “the technological deficiencies of the West” (Adas, 2018a: 4487). So how then did the West manage to create this monopoly on knowledge?

A brief recount of the history of Europe points to a possible explanation. Whilst during the fifth century A.D. North Africa was the center of Christianity, the seventh to eighth centuries saw the swift rise of Islam across North Africa virtually extinguishing Christianity in the region; thereby splitting the Mediterranean in two (Kaplan, 2016). This schism would have far-reaching consequences, most notably that since then European history has been angled towards the North of the region (Ortega y Gasset in Kaplan, 2016). The subsequent galvanizing of the north after the fall of the Roman Empire was a slow process of feudalism, giving way to modern empires, which would later emerge as “the West” (Kaplan, 2016). This historical context, whilst tedious is vital in understanding the myth of acquiring new knowledge and how this led to the development of western civilization.

Well before the West recovered the fragments of their civilization, the Islamic world’s Arab intellectuals were translating Greek texts to Arabic, this crucial act would later set the conditions for the “translation from Arabic into Spanish, with Alfonso el Sabio and the School of Toledo, in the thirteenth century” (Mignolo, 2012: 74). In the on-going war between Christianity and Islam in the Iberian-peninsula (eighth to fifteenth century), el Sabio came into power after three successive Christian victories against Islam, namely: reconquering Cordoba in 1236, Valencia in 1238 and Seville in 1248. During his reign el Sabio surrounded himself with Jewish and Muslim intellectuals who facilitated the recasting of Greek knowledge through translations from Arabic and Hebrew into Spanish (Mignolo, 2012: 74).

Few Western scholars acknowledge the role played by Arab scholars in recovering much of the classical Greek teachings, which were used by Europe in its emergence as a global force (Adas, 2018b: 1351). Yet, this history is precisely why the West was able to devise a monopoly on knowledge. By claiming “vastly superior understandings of the transcendent world” based

on Christian beliefs, Western scholars found themselves unable to credit the teachings of Muslim scholars, for to do so would require an acknowledgment of the scientific and technological achievements of those they colonized (Adas, 2018b: 4487). This unacknowledged debt, erased by the “purity of blood”⁵⁸ principle is the lynch pin to the coloniality that persists today.

The year 1492 is crucial, for not only was it the year that Jews and Muslims were expelled from Spain through the “purity of blood” principle, but it was “also the year in which the conquest and colonization of the Americas began and the moment to which one can trace the emergence of a firm imperial Europe conceiving itself as the center of the whole world and as the telos of civilization” (Maldonado-Torres, 2008: 3). This process was aided and abetted by astronomers, cartographers, botanists, geologists, savants and amateur self-appointed ethnologists who were commonly found on these colonial expeditions. The proliferation of their ‘specimens,’ observations and tall-tales led to the establishment of scientific institutions and societies such as the Hortus Botanicus in Leiden (1590), Académie des Sciences in Paris (1666) and the Royal Institution in London (1799), which not only provided financial support for scientific expeditions but also certified that scientific procedures had been followed and distributed the findings to the European scientific community (Adas, 2018b: 1351). Within these institutions there was preference for and a predominance of the Baconian method⁵⁹ (inductive reasoning) in scientific thinking upon which much of contemporary science is based.

Though developed in the West and “vitally affected by the social and cultural milieu in which it arose” the dominant Baconian method, pedaled by Sir Francis Bacon (1902) in 1620, dictated the proper or Western scientific approach characterized as “seen to be value neutral, objective in its procedures, privileging abstraction and reason, empirically grounded, and somehow transcending time and space and thus universally valid” (Adas, 2018b: 1352). The

⁵⁸ Purity of Blood or *Limpieza de sangre* in Spanish saw the ethnic cleansing of Muslims and Jews, who were residing in Andalusia (controlled by the Catholic Monarchy), as a means to destroy the sultanate of Granada, the last Muslim political authority in the Iberian Peninsula (Maldonado-Torres quoting Dussel).

⁵⁹ The Baconian method is of relevance as it provides the foundation for inductive reasoning used throughout the social sciences, whilst its inception during the height of colonization remains unquestioned.

repercussions of this are as devastating as they are detrimental to knowledge and other ways of knowing/being.

The prevalence of the Baconian method during the colonial era not only ensured that other organic approaches to nature and the cosmos, which may have been more accommodating to other epistemologies were discarded or relegated to marginal roles in the interactions between the colonizer and the colonized, but it also solidified the hegemony of Western science by masking this false notion of the zero-point (Adas, 2018b: 1353). In other words, the above-mentioned attributes of the Baconian method provided the West with the confidence and institutional backing necessary to advocate for the spread of a dominant western epistemology as an act of inevitability and benevolence; a consequence of which has been the violent erasure of other epistemologies and ways of knowing/being.

Thus, in “a very real sense research has been an encounter between the West and the ‘Other.’ Much more is known about one side of those encounters than is known about the other side” (Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999: 8). As such, research is not so much about acquiring new knowledge, as it is about revealing this erasure and telling the other side in an attempt to ‘write back’ (Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999; Rushdie, 1982; hooks, 1989; Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies, 1982).

Myth 2 - Improving the human condition

The Baconian method in its refutation of other epistemologies not only erased other ways of knowing but in doing so denied the humanity of those who were colonized. This was achieved by setting the parameters for what it was to be human; white, male, European, Christian, civilized, etc., thereby ensuring the “double erasure” (Mignolo, 2012) of modernity/coloniality. In its wording of the world and naming of things, modernity/coloniality came to be governing orders which in the same breath of enunciating the human concealed the local of its enunciation. Thus, the principle of ‘humanity’ came to be the medium through which the implicit and explicit rules of imperialism could be shaped and enacted.

Much of the struggle for the reconstitution of humanity is framed within the discourse of humanism, which is premised on human agency, human freedom, secularism, a non-theistic life stance, and an emphasis on science in understanding the attributes of the world which are inconsistent with indigenous ways of knowing/being. The first humanist revolution aligned with the Renaissance (1300-1600), which saw a shift from a God-centered worldview to a Man-centered worldview (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015). The second wave took the form of Enlightenment (1715-1789) humanism, which led to the creation of modern institutions including the Inquisition, the nation-state, and slavery (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015). Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2015) argues that during the first and second humanist revolutions, a third humanist revolution was taking place, in which constitutive exclusions were exposed and in doing so provided a more consistent narrative of the entire human race. However, none of the above iterations of humanism nor post-humanism challenges the dichotomy of human and nature – incommensurate with indigenous ways of knowing/being. In other words, the forms of humanism and post-humanism do not account for the switch from the exploitation of humans to the exploitation of nature, whilst at the same time positioning these as mutually exclusive (Broeck, 2018).

This misnomer can be further explicated through Osamu Nishitani's distinction between *anthropos* and *humanitas*. For Nishitani (2006) *anthropos*, and by extension *anthropology* is used to denote the study of human beings, whilst *humanitas* on the other hand, was appropriated by Renaissance intellectuals in their pursuit of enlightenment. "Put simply, people are '*humanitas*' so long as they relate to knowledge subjectively, while those who remain the object of that knowledge are '*anthropos*'" (Nishitani 2006: 266). Thus, what Nishitani (2006: 268) alludes to is how epistemic differences are translated into ontological ones, where the "asymmetrical relation between *humanitas* and *anthropos* is being continually reproduced" where the former is the owner of knowledge, whilst the latter is "an 'other' that does not exist ontologically" (Tlostanova, 2017: 26). In other words, human serves as "a fictional noun pretending to be its ontological representation" (Walsh and Mignolo, 2018: 155).

The implication of this distinction is evidenced in the works of Franz Fanon, Edward Said and Sylvia Wynter who challenge the premise that in order to exist ontologically *anthropos* has to conform to the precedents of *humanitas*. Franz Fanon (1991 [1963]) in the critically acclaimed *The Wretched of the Earth* argues that the colonized is a formulation of the colonizer and as such both the colonizer and colonized are mutual constructs of colonialism. That being said, Edward Said (1978), in his seminal work *Orientalism*, in pointing out that the ‘oriental’ is a fabrication based on images and fictitious-passing-as-scientific work of the West in an attempt to perpetuate a narrative of superiority, demonstrates the power differential between the colonizer and the colonized. Both these arguments are historically contextualized by the work of Sylvia Wynter (2003), specifically in the essay *Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation—An Argument*, in which she traces the trajectory of ‘man’ from its political conceptualization during the Renaissance (1300-1600), to its religious reinvention during the Enlightenment (1715-1789) and its final resting place in the colonial distortions of Darwinism (1859) as those naturally selected (European) and those naturally “dysselected”, racialized as closer to nature. Of significance in Wynter’s chronology, is her assertion that 1492 was intrinsic to the West’s representations of man and what it was to be human, ultimately precluding other epistemologies and ways of being/knowing. Thus, the aim of anti-colonial work like those of Wynter, Fanon, Said and others is to disentangle humanness from modernity/coloniality in order to weave an onto-epistemological re-existence.

The preceding argument reveals the myth of improving the human condition in knowledge production, as an anthropocentric and Eurocentric pursuit only available to those who are allowed to ontologically and epistemologically exist under modernity/coloniality. A position which Santiago Castro-Gómez calls the zero-point epistemology, where the researcher enunciates from a nowhere; neither the researcher nor their position can be observed (Vázquez, 2020). From this zero-point claims of improving the human condition through knowledge production are contingent upon a damage-centered approach to research which requires those at the margins to demonstrate and prove this double erasure through narratives of pain and humiliation, in order for their conditions to be improved (Tuck and Yang, 2014). By limiting the scope of

knowledge production to pain narratives research then forecloses on the possibilities of onto-epistemological re-existence.

Myth 3 – Shared bodies of knowledge

The preceding argument demonstrates the impossibility of shared bodies of knowledge, in other words disciplines, under knowledge production. What we call disciplines today were developed in the early nineteenth century, and premised on the preceding five hundred years of slavery, colonialism, imperialism and oppression by the West. As argued by Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999: 11) in *Decolonizing Methodologies* “in their foundations, Western disciplines are as much implicated in each other as they are in imperialism. Some, such as anthropology, made the study of us into ‘their’ science, others were employed in the practices of imperialism in less direct but far more devastating ways”. In other words, disciplines provide a screen which researchers hide behind in order to obfuscate the foundations of the knowledge being produced and their complicity in modernity/coloniality.

In order to illustrate the argument above let’s reflect on the disciplines within the Social Sciences and Humanities. Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln’s (2018) multidisciplinary *Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research* now in its fifth edition has long served as the go-to resource for a state-of-the-art on the theory and practice of qualitative research, new methods and critical and ethical engagements with research. Through each edition Denzin and Lincoln have continuously updated a typology of research in the human disciplines in North America, highlighting historical moments and phases. They argue that their typology of research overlaps and coexists in the present:

...the traditional (1900–1950), the modernist or golden age (1950–1970), blurred genres (1970–1980), the paradigm wars (1980–1985), the crisis of representation (1986–1990), the postmodern (1990–1995), postexperimental inquiry (1995–2000), the methodologically contested present (2000–2004), paradigm proliferation (2005–2010), and the fractured, posthumanist present that battles managerialism in the audit-driven academy (2010–2015), an uncertain,

utopian future, where critical inquiry finds its voice in the public arena (2016–
) (Denzin and Lincoln, 2018: 25).

Whilst the exhaustive list above focuses on the contemporary, it would have the reader believe that the field of research prior to 1900 was *terra nullius*. The implications of this concealment are twofold. Firstly, it invisibilizes the role of research in its most perverse utilization as the justification for viciously enslaving Africans, the genocides of indigenous peoples, the violent extraction from mother earth, and the erasing of other ways of being and knowing (epistemicide). Secondly, this concealment has implications for the canon, as within all the disciplines of the Social Sciences and Humanities, the knowledge produced is premised upon the knowledge of a few white men from five Western European countries (Italy, France, England, Germany and the USA) (Dussel 2008). This provincial-passing-as-universal position of the zero-point has had far reaching consequences on the ways in which research is done, most notably that their theories are universally applicable to the rest of the world.

This universal claim and its concomitant erasure of other ways of being/knowing is described by Tuhiwai-Smith (1999: 42) as being built on “an ‘archive’ of knowledge” governed by “systems, rules and values” of the West. These serve as henchmen applying the rules explicitly through regulations and implicitly through claims of understanding how the world works (Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999: 43). She goes on to argue that whilst dissent, and challenges to the rules are rife it “is manageable because it also conforms to the rules, particularly at the implicit level” (Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999: 43). Prime examples of how this is enacted can be found in Marxism and Western feminism.

Marxism, notwithstanding its notable contribution to the class struggle and critique of the capitalist economy, remains an approach incapable of “going beyond Western imaginary” (Mignolo, 2012: 106). This point is well documented by scholars such as José Aricó (2013: np) in

Marx and Latin America, in which he uses the case of Simón Bolívar⁶⁰ in order to illustrate the way in which Latin America was excluded from Marx's thought and "convincingly argues that Marx's work, was not a dogma of linear 'progress' but a living, contradictory body of thought constantly in development." Similarly, Enrique Dussel (1990) argues that Marx's myopic focus on the working class blinded him to the realities of alterity and those who exist at the margins of the system. Not surprisingly, Fanon (1967 [1952]) in *Black Skin, White Masks*, came up against the limits of Marxism in accounting for race and colonialism. What this highlights is in Marxist moves from the local to the global (universal), the 'rules' are adhered thereby never challenging the 'archive' of knowledge mentioned by Tuhiwai-Smith above (1999: 42).

In contrast, Western Feminism has undoubtedly been pivotal in challenging the 'archive' of knowledge, radically confronting epistemology, not only as "a body of knowledge and world view" but also "the science of how knowledge can be understood" (Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999: 43). Nevertheless, Western Feminism has often fallen into its own trap, by pandering to the very 'rules' it claims to challenge. Numerous women of color scholars such as Gayatri Spivak (1988), Chandra Talpade Mohanty (1991), and Breny Mendoza (2016) have pointed out Western Feminisms countervailing tendency to make assumptions about the 'other' which align with Eurocentric world-views. Both Spivak and Mohanty are ardent opponents of the homogenization of women as a category, with Spivak (1988) pointing out that any attempt to 'represent' or 'give voice to' subaltern women should be seen as another way of the West asserting its superiority over the rest. Similarly, Mohanty's (1991) incisive *Under Western Eyes*, whilst drawing on Spivak's assertion of white men's feigned-altruism of saving brown women from brown men, chastises Western Feminism's attempt to do the same. These arguments, and those of similar kin, are succinctly summarized in Breny Mendoza's (2016: 100) *Coloniality of Gender and Power* which provides trenchant critiques to "colonialism, modernity, Eurocentrism, capitalism, nationalism and racism" in an attempt to provide an "alternative account of

⁶⁰ Simón Bolívar (1783-1830) was a Venezuelan military and political leader who led the revolutions against the Spanish empire, which resulted in the decolonization of Venezuela, Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Panama.

modernity as a violent process intricately tied to the construction and imposition of race and gender hierarchies”.

Thus, with regards to disciplines (shared bodies of knowledge), what the above demonstrates is that:

research is not an innocent or distant academic exercise but an activity that has something at stake and that occurs in a set of political and social conditions...Research is one of the ways in which the underlying code of imperialism and colonialism is both regulated and realized. It is regulated through formal rules of individual scholarly disciplines and scientific paradigms, and the institutions that support them (including the state). It is realized in the myriad of representations and ideological construction of the Other in scholarly and ‘popular’ works, and in the principles which help to select and recontextualize those constructions in such things as the media, official histories and school curricula (Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999: 5-8).

The discussion above on Marxism and Western Feminism addresses the ways in which the codes of imperialism are reinscribed in academia and as such are reproduced through research practices. This subversion is not achieved in isolation, but rather is validated through research, which is regulated by the academic disciplines. In other words, research inherently imbued with the codes of imperialism can only create “shared bodies of knowledge” in Court’s (2018: 3) sense that serve the dominant western paradigm and thus, can only be actualized through assimilation and servitude (producing knowledge).

Without belabouring the point further, what the preceding arguments in each part, demonstrates is an attempt to ‘write back’ against the erasure implicit in Court’s response to ‘why we do research’. The arguments in each of the myths make visible the historical trajectory of how research, disciplines and knowledge arose, and in doing so reveal explicitly where these

‘repositories of human understanding’ reside. Hypothetically, if we did have something like an egalitarian-shared body of knowledge, then knowledge created by other onto-epistemologies, world views and temporalities would not be regarded as ‘inferior’ and excluded from the canon. Thus, the claim of shared bodies of knowledge is a claim to universality - the grand myth of colonialism and imperialism.

In their chapter ‘Feminisms from unthought locations’ Gaile S. Canella and Kathryn D. Manuelito’s (2008: 49) warn “that the contemporary world will continue to use the research-as-power construct. Rejection of research as practice is also most likely not an option; therefore, reconceptualizing is of great importance”. Here it is important to note that whilst rejection is not an option, refusal is. Being more than just a ‘no’ Tuck and Yang (2014: 225) theorize refusal within research as attempts to “place limits on conquest and the colonization of knowledge by marking what is off limits” whilst simultaneously making “visible invisibilized limits, containments, and seizures that research already stakes out”. In doing so refusal creates spaces for reconceptualization and onto-epistemological re-existence.

Knowledge Cultivation and Decolonial Re-existence

*Feast*⁶¹

Knowledge
I am hungry for it
With gluttonous abandon
I devour it
Leaving you depleted
Exhausted
Drained
Still you come back for more

Why? Because I promised you something
A piece of paper
Legitimacy

⁶¹ This poem is repeated in the thesis in order to emphasise the double erasure of modernity/coloniality, and in the case of this chapter to highlight the importance of refusal on our journey.

A seat
A table

Ah...your ancestors fell for that too
So many generations, yet so little learned
Once a coolie, always a coolie⁶²

You say you are doing this for them
But you did not heed their warning
Silly, they could not read
what's your excuse?
A print too small.

You can stay here you know
and feed off the knowledge of others as I do
Drain them, deplete them, leave them worse off than before
Call this research
We will reward you, praise you
hell we'll even give you that piece of paper

Go on then...this is what you came for
Cannibalize yourself in the pursuit of knowledge
Gnaw on the bones of your ancestors
Drink their blood spilled in the (sugarcane) field
So that you may arise, anew...in my own image

And...whilst we drown you in a black gown
Think not of your ancestors draped in the kala pani⁶³
Think not of their sweat fertilizing the soil
Think not of their tears watering the sugarcane
Think not of their backs broken to sweeten my tea

Think instead that you are one of us now...and feast.

To produce knowledge in academia is to *feast* on oneself. As demonstrated in the argument on 'why we do research' the term 'produce' – in the context of research possessed by capitalism has become far removed from its etymological roots of 'creating' or 'bringing forth', rather it

⁶² *Coolie* is an unskilled labourer employed cheaply, especially one brought from Asia.

⁶³ Kala Pani means black waters, referring mainly to the Indian Ocean. By crossing this ocean many Indians feared they would lose their caste, social standing and cultural identity.

has been genetically modified to represent accumulation, excess, commodity, extraction, etc. It denotes,

‘academic capitalism’ that continues to see knowledge as part of a chain of production where ‘knowledges’ are produced, distributed and consumed first and foremost for the reproduction of the academic machinery and then for profit of various industries. In this mode of production, the motor is knowledge understood as a commodity that is bought and sold (with salaries, scholarships, etc.) (Leyva Solano, 2019: 49).

To produce knowledge in academia is to treat knowledge firstly as an external entity and as a commodity that can be traded, exchanged, sold and consumed. This is evidenced in contemporary debates on ‘research on’ vs ‘research with’ people, without addressing the underlying presumption in knowledge production that necessitates the question whilst at the same time debasing the privilege which is inherent in the choice. What then does it mean to refuse to ‘produce’ knowledge in the context of the racialized, gendered, colonial, neoliberal university? It is a refusal to produce death (Colombian Nasa people’s concept of the ‘death project’ invoked in the work of Julia Suarez-Krabbé, 2016), the death of peoples, death of knowledges, death of the land and death of living itself.

In refusing we create opportunities of reconceptualizing knowledge in terms of cultivation, rather than production.

...to cultivate knowledge is to till, to turn matter around and fold back on itself so as to rebind and encourage growth...knowledge cultivation is a necessarily creative pursuit as it requires the practitioner to turn over and oxygenate the past. Most importantly, cultivation also infers habitation, which means that knowledge is creatively released as the practitioner enfolds her/him/[them]self in the communal matter of her/his/[their] inquiry. What is more, this constant oxygenation process

– a circulatory one – necessarily interacts with a wider biotope, enfolding matter from other habitations. To cultivate knowledge of deep relation can therefore be understood as “grounding” (Shilliam, 2015: 24-25)⁶⁴.

This grounding in research is what allows us to escape the myth making of knowledge production, to decolonially and onto-epistemologically re-exist. It allows us to “write to record what others erase when I speak, to rewrite the stories others have miswritten about me, about you” (Anzaldúa, 2015: 167). Not only does it allow us to ‘write back’ but it also allows us to ‘write forward’ in ways that are epistemically non-violent. In considering knowledge cultivation as an approach to onto-epistemologically re-exist we need to focus on the ‘how’ (Walsh 2018). What pathways does knowledge cultivation offer us in terms of doing research within the racialized, gendered, colonial, neoliberal university without repeating the violence of knowledge production? Here Rolando Vázquez (2020) offers us three such pathways out of dominant forms of subjectivity under modernity/coloniality, which will be discussed alongside the three myths outlined earlier in the chapter.

In approaching the question of why we do research, the myth of acquiring new knowledge was dispelled by demonstrating how research as a practice is embedded in the historical process of colonization and imperialism. As such it carries the codes which continue to regulate whose knowledges are valid and whose are not. In reorienting our research practice to knowledge cultivation, we move away from the pursuit of new knowledge and return to a re-traditioning of research practice (Sheik, forthcoming). This process of tilling and oxygenating the past (Shilliam, 2015) aligns with Vázquez’s (2020) “pedagogies of positionality” which requires us to position ourselves “along the colonial difference”. The implications of this are twofold for our approach to knowledge. Firstly, it counters the zero-point by geo-genealogically grounding the validity to claims of knowledge in time and space. Second, it provides us with an “outside

⁶⁴ This quote by Shilliam defining knowledge cultivation appears twice in this thesis, for two reasons: 1) in order to emphasize the doing of refusal as more than just a no. 2) in order to maintain (as much as possible) its meaning in relation to Shilliam, in condensing or paraphrasing the depth of meaning would be lost, disconnecting the meaning in relation.

of modernity's field of intelligibility – not a normative outside – but a historical outside of those worlds of sensing and meaning, that has been under erasure” (Vázquez, 2020: 171).

In unveiling the second myth of knowledge production we found that improving the human condition reinforced an anthropocentric and Eurocentric zero-point world view which reinforces the double erasure under modernity/coloniality. In making the move to pedagogies of positionality we then cultivate knowledge through habitation, which necessitates creative approaches to decolonial re-existence. These “pedagogies of re-existence” take root in the possibilities of becoming by being temporally aware of the “paths into the future that have been severed by coloniality” (Vázquez, 2020: 173). In the practice of research this orientates us towards a path of healing the colonial wound. Through mourning the loss, recovering and re-traditioning knowledges we begin to move beyond resistance and into the possibilities of research as a life-affirming practice.

Finally, moving to the third myth - shared bodies of knowledge - we have come to see through the examples of Marxism and Western Feminism how the codes of colonization and imperialism continue to be reinscribed in research practice. This reproducing of colonial and imperial logics in Social Science and Humanities disciplines and their canons conceal the provincial nature of knowledge production whilst projecting it as universal. In practicing knowledge cultivation, we come to view knowledges as circulating, rather than confined to disciplines. This circulation speaks to the enfolding of matter from other habitations (Shilliam, 2015), showing how we may come into deep relation. The “pedagogies of relationality” (Vázquez, 2020) circulate on two levels, the first by bringing us in relation to each other, for it is only through being together that we create the possibilities for unlearning, listening, receiving, sensing, creating, recovering and healing which is necessary for knowledge cultivation. The second is at the level of coming into relation to all other life on earth and the life of earth herself. This coming into relation sees a return to the soil from which we emerged, acknowledging and honoring the immense debt owed to Mother Earth for the life she sustains within us (Vázquez, 2020). These are the knowledges that live, breathe and circulate in our flesh.

In dispelling the myths surrounding why we do research this chapter has revealed the impossibility of onto-epistemological re-existence through knowledge production. Knowledge production cannot escape the codes of colonialism and imperialism which underpin its methods, disciplines and canons. It's insistence on universality leads to the death and erasure of other ways of knowing and being, of knowledges in the plural. Thus, this chapter motivates for a reorientation towards knowledge cultivation as a life-affirming approach to research. Through knowledge cultivation we come to see that the answer to why we do research is to return home. It is but one of the numerous other ways in which we can find our way back to the soil, by honoring those who came before us laying out the path, those who walk with us in this lifetime and those yet to come. By reorientating us towards a position of listening, receiving and hosting (Vázquez, 2020) knowledge cultivation encourages us to unlearn, recover and heal by being together. The knowledge which flows from these crossings made to each other is the reason why we do research.

Hand in Hand: Refusing Research during a Pandemic⁶⁵

Our current collective circumstances require us to think about death, to grieve, and to consider that everything we have known has to change or come to an end.
Adrienne Maree Brown (2021: 50)

*Unthinkable thoughts*⁶⁶

What are your unthinkable thoughts? You know, the ones that keep you up at night, that squeeze in your chest, that keep you sleepless, unable to rest, unable to focus, that long walks will not chase away, that make your body feel heavy, that keep your breath shallow, that race through your mind, that won't allow you to be here in the present moment, that won't allow you to show up for yourself let alone others; those unthinkable thoughts.

*In a forest
that has been
log-ged for 500 years
the last tree
standing
was given
pencil and paper
and told
to tell their story*

Writing this to you now, I⁶⁷ write with discomfort, as I sit with and try to hold one of my unthinkable thoughts with compassion and kindness. That the anger, frustration and impatience stemming from pain and fear, will destroy the very path I'm trying to make to you. That as an

⁶⁵ Sheik, Z.B. forthcoming3. Hand in Hand: Refusing Research during a Pandemic. *Globalisations Journal*.

⁶⁶ Inspired by the Adrienne Maree Brown's 2020 blogpost "unthinkable thoughts: call out culture in the age of covid-19, a revised version can be found in her book *We Will Not Cancel Us and Other Dreams of Transformative Justice* (2021).

⁶⁷ "I" is used in this text, not as the singular, first-person, modern subject, but rather as a marker of the plurality of selves (Lugones, 2003: 724) that acknowledges interdependence as the freedom that allows "the I to be, not in order to be used, but in order to be creative" (Lorde, 2017 [1979]: 17).

imperfect women⁶⁸ of colour vitriol can seep into my words, such that my actions become divisible from our abolitionist dreams, for I know that the words trapped here in this paper will far outlive this pain and anger.

So, I am choosing to share with you the hesitation in writing, to reveal that our choices need not be shrouded in edited versions saved in unmarked folders, but can rather be used as a pedagogical tool to mark absences but not be defined by them. Below is the first attempt to write this article, a paragraph that I reluctantly show you, a paragraph rewritten three times in one week, each time sharpening the blade.

~~*When will things go back to normal?* A Covid-19 rallying cry from those who for the first time in generations had their liberties curbed by the state. For those of us colonized, racialized, queer, gendered and poor this resembled the numerous other ways in which the state has always intervened in our lives. That is to say, “normal” or as bell hooks (2010) has termed it “imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy” wasn’t and has never been working for the majority of us. At the onset of the pandemic, when most of us were worried about our health, the health and safety of our loved ones, how we would make ends meet, work from home whilst caring for children, and maintain our mental health and well-being, social scientists in the West with job security, resources and high-speed internet connections got down to the work of sustaining the neoliberal machine, known as the university.⁶⁹~~

Each time I sit to write academically, I have to perform an exorcism of the ‘authoritative I’ (Vázquez, 2020). It is an initial process of purging the remnants of the modern individual subject we are trained to become from pre-school, which we “master” in university (see Sheik,

⁶⁸ The plural form ‘women’ is used in line with the explanation given in the footnote above.

⁶⁹ I use strikethrough here to transparently show process, so that these unfinished thoughts are not quoted, especially out of context.

2020). This ‘authoritative I’ is sharp, witty, callous, vengeful and adept in the art of critiquing and is quick to weaponize ‘call-outs’ in claiming punitive justice. As Adrienne Maree Brown points out in, *We Will Not Cancel Us and Other Dreams of Transformative Justice*, “Call outs elicit both a consistent negative and dismissive energy, and a pleasurable take-down activation, regardless of what the call out is addressing” (2021: 42). I refuse. I refuse to fall prey to the ‘authoritative I’, I refuse performing the prophetic intellectual (Motta, 2016), I refuse being held captive by pain and fear, I refuse us vs them. I refuse, for in this meditation on the discomfort felt while writing the strikethrough paragraph above, it has become clear that claims made by the individual ‘authoritative I’ seeking punitive justice, is devoid of liberation.

Instead, I draw from the deep well of a “coalitional ancestry” (Garcia, 2020) which has long used storytelling as a means of “affirmative decolonising critique” (Motta, 2016: 42). Writing from the position of storyteller allows for the voice of those historically denied a knowing-subjectivity to be onto-epistemologically expressed beyond the logics of enunciation, representation and punitive justice (Vázquez, 2020). It is a positioning that allows us to “move away from such patriarchal and racist enactments of masculinity towards a caring and nurturing self who is able to participate in, and contribute to the building of community” (Motta, 2016: 41) and abolitionist futures. With this in mind, I would like to turn our attention to the COVID-19 pandemic and the untenable situation we currently find ourselves in.

Pandemic Failures

Call outs have a long history as a brilliant strategy for marginalized people to stand up to those with power. Call outs have been a way to bring collective pressure to bear on corporations, institutions, and abusers on behalf of individuals or oppressed peoples who cannot stop the injustice and get accountability on their own. There are those out of alignment with life, consent, dignity, and humanity who will only stop when a light is shined onto their inhumane behavior (Brown, 2021: 60).

Early in the pandemic, COVID-19 was touted as “the great equalizer”, a myth which many subsequently debunked (see Mukhtar, 2021; Girvan et al, 2020). If anything, the pandemic has created a ‘captive audience’ forced to reckon with old wounds and underlying conditions which created the perfect host for a virus like COVID-19; evidenced by the social unrest in South

Africa, Chile's feminist uprising, Myanmar's Spring Revolution, Black Lives Matter in the US, Farmers Protest in India, Thailand Protest Movement, Strajk kobiet (women's strike) in Poland, Aurat March in Pakistan and Viajezapatista, to name a few. The glimmer of hope that came with the announcement of a vaccine in November 2020, was quickly doused as it became evident that this could not cure the ills of capitalism. We have witnessed "vaccine apartheid" play out before our eyes, where as of April 2021 "10 countries account for approximately 75% of the COVID-19 vaccines administered worldwide. About 130 countries-accounting for about 2.5billion people-are yet to administer a single dose" (Thier, 2021). This pandemic has also brought into sharp focus the nefarious relations between university research and corporate interests, where a mere 20% of vaccine funding has come from pharmaceutical companies, the rest being publicly-funded (Thier, 2020). Yet, pharmaceutical companies have been allowed to fix prices at will (AstraZeneca price per dose – Uganda \$7, South Africa \$5.25 and the EU \$2.16), whilst the EU, UK, Japan, Canada, Australia and the US (only recently backtracking), continue to block attempts by South Africa and India to have patents for the vaccine temporarily lifted (Thier, 2020). This is at a time when India has recorded the world's highest new infections in one day, 314 835; with mass cremations taking place in parking lots in Delhi (Siddiqui, 23 April 2021).

Whereas the argument above is important for drawing attention to Big Pharma and the role of nation states, which has been the subject of media attention, researchers and civil society, it falls short on two accounts. First, it has overshadowed and left unquestioned the complicity of research and the university in exacerbating these inequalities and exclusions. As an international institution, the university has two main functions, teaching and research, both of which are geared towards societal impact. In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, given the argument above, it is clear that in this regard it has failed. As a researcher in the social sciences, complicit in this system, it begs the question: if the university has failed to provide knowledge as a public good that could save lives, what else has it failed to do? This leads to the second shortfall of the argument above, that by its very formulation highlights the limitations of such research, "[f]or the masters tools will never dismantle the masters house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change"

(Lorde, 2017 [1979]: 19). This brings us to another unthinkable thought, one which I have sat with for the past six years as I try to complete my PhD. *Research is the problem.*

Research, Refusal and Abolition

In *Epistemic Freedom in Africa* Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018: 161) makes clear that the modern Westernized university was pivotal in inventing and universalizing a Eurocentric approach to knowledge through “genocides, ontolocides, epistemicides, culturecides, and linguisticides”. These logics have been sustained through accumulation, the circulation of capital, expropriation of labour and the non-circulation of wages (Boggs et al., 2019: 18). Indeed, Xochitl Leyva Solano (2019: 49), reiterates this by showing how the grammar of “producing knowledges” provides the structure for “academic capitalism”, where knowledge is an extractable commodity, in “a chain of production where ‘knowledges’ are produced, distributed, and consumed first and foremost for the reproduction of the academic machinery and then for profit of various industries” (see also Rutazibwa, 2019; Suarez-Krabbé, 2015). In addition, Indigenous scholars have long pointed out the ways in which research has been and continues to be complicit in dehumanizing and ethically unjust practices:

From the vantage point of the colonized, a position from which I write, and choose to privilege, the term ‘research’ is inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism. The word itself, ‘research’, is probably one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world’s vocabulary. (*Decolonizing Methodologies* – Linda Tuhiwai Smith, 1999: 1)

The ethical standards of the academic industrial complex are a recent development, and like so many post-civil rights reforms, do not always do enough to ensure that social science research is deeply ethical, meaningful, or useful for the individual or community being researched. Social science often works to collect stories of pain and humiliation in the lives of those being researched for commodification. (*R-Words: Refusing Research* – Eve Tuck and Wayne Yang, 2014: 223)

There is an increasing emphasis on the need to sensitize researchers and students to diverse epistemologies, methods, and methodologies, especially those of women, minority groups, former colonized societies, indigenous people, historically oppressed communities, economically oppressed groups, and people with disabilities, who have been excluded from dominant epistemologies. (*Indigenous Research Methodologies* – Bagele Chilisa, 2012: 14)

Nevertheless, during the COVID-19 pandemic a plethora of research methodologies emerged under the guise of efficiency and ‘business as usual’ with the purpose of remotely gaining access to already vulnerable and marginalized communities. As early as March 2020, when we were still in the early stages of the pandemic, resources began circulating online including crowd-sourced documents such as *Doing Fieldwork in a Pandemic* (Lupton, 2020) and LSE Digital Ethnography Collective Reading List (2020), *Breaking Methods*, a Youtube channel (2020), *Rapid Ethnography* (Sangaramoorthy and Kroeger, 2020), and *Patchwork Ethnography* (Günel, Varma and Watanabe, 2020).

As social science researchers, cognizant of our complicity, we need to ask ourselves if this is the pivot we need to be taking. As painful as the pandemic has been, we find ourselves on the cusp of significant social change brought on by the previously mentioned social movements that have called out oppressive systems and demanded transformative justice. Some ripples of these movements have been felt in academia at the managerial level with increased attention on representation, diversity and inclusion, decolonizing the university and addressing racism, yet how these translate in terms of ethical research and research practices remain shallow at best and performative at worst. Looking over our shoulder at the ways in which we have been doing research, collectively taking stock of where we are in the present moment, as we look to the future, we find ourselves in the unique position of choosing differently. Of refusing.

Refusal is understood here as a practice stemming from black and indigenous communities, where more than just a no, it is seen as “a rejection of the status quo as livable and the creation of possibility in the face of negation i.e. a refusal to recognize a system that renders you fundamentally illegible and unintelligible; the decision to reject the terms of diminished subjecthood with which one is presented, using negation as a generative and creative source of disorderly power to embrace the possibility of living otherwise” (Campt, 2019: 83). It is important to distinguish this pursuit of ‘the possibility of living otherwise’ from right wing investments in fake news and alternative facts fueled by conservative and populist regimes who have sought, from Brazil, to the US, UK, Poland, Hungary and India, to silence and thwart social and transformative justice aims seeking to redress historical oppressions along race, gender,

sexuality, disability and class lines. In this sense, refusal in research differs from these claims based on science-denial, whose claims are based on racist, neo-colonialist and white supremacist logics. Instead, refusal is rooted in collective liberation.

By practicing refusal and using our complicity in the university as an entry point, we start to open up space not only to challenge the extreme inequalities, logics of extractivism and accumulation within research practice, the university and society; but to also create the possibilities for radical alternatives. Put another way, “Refusal in research makes way for other r-words - for resistance, reclaiming, recovery, reciprocity, repatriation, regeneration” (Tuck and Yang, 2014: 244). Importantly, refusal creates space for relationality, for thinking-sensing-feeling⁷⁰ our collective abolitionist liberation. Following Fred Moten and Stefano Harney’s (2013) take on abolition, not so much of the university or research, but the abolition of a society, including institutions and institutional practices where knowledge can be weaponized for profit at the expense of people’s lives, the lives of all beings on this earth and the life of earth itself. “[n]ot abolition as the elimination of anything, but abolition as the founding of a new society” (Moten and Harney, 2013: 42). The generative and expansive qualities of refusal allow us to imagine this founding in the present, to till the soil, in preparation for planting our seedling hopes and budding dreams for a future in which we can live an ethical life in harmony with each other, all living beings, the non-living (ancestors) and Mother Earth.

Yet, how do we practice this whilst still under the strangle hold of modernity/coloniality⁷¹ and the western university? As Brown (2021: 42) rightly reminds us, “we are in the very infantile stages of learning how to be in transformative justice practices with each other, to be abolitionist in real time, because we are still beginning, but the crises are so big, urgent, and constant that there is some leapfrogging, rushing ahead of ourselves, ahead of understanding a clear

⁷⁰ Thinking-sensing-feeling comes from the Latin American concept ‘sentipensar’ which refers to the multiple ways in which we can know that have been erased by dominant approaches to knowledge. See Paulina Trejo Mendez’s (2019) unpublished doctoral thesis *Politics of Knowledge*.

⁷¹ Modernity/coloniality is a concept used to show the inseparability of the two terms. According to Anibal Quijano and later Walter D. Mignolo, coloniality is the darker side of modernity. See *The Darker Side of Western Modernity* (Mignolo, 2011).

shared framework, clear distinctions”. In other words, in our struggle to reclaim research and to not cause further harm, how do we hold ourselves and others accountable in loving and compassionate ways? We need to begin with our relationship to research, with knowledge, with disciplines (Sheik, forthcoming) and with ideas.

Reclaiming Research

In her article ‘Can a Methodology Subvert the Logics of its Principal’, Nokuthula Hlabangane (2018) points out the non-existence of space within the university for those on the opposite side of the colonial divide to have a conversation where onto-epistemological differences are treated with equal respect. In answering the question posed in her title, Hlabangane (2018) goes on to explain the “epistemic closure” brought on by methodologies aimed at equilibrium, which includes positivist, post-positivist and interpretivist paradigms. These western-based research paradigms fall short of collective liberatory praxis on two accounts: the first that knowledge is an individual pursuit and second its focus on prediction, control, stability and certainty (see Wilson, 2008; Hlabangane, 2018). “The ideal of a value-free social science is thus a myth” (Hlabangane, 2018: 670). It is exactly these kinds of myths which Olivia Rutazibwa (2019) encourages us to demythologize⁷² in our attempts to decolonize. Indeed, in our efforts to *reclaim research as a practice* which is anti-colonial, anti-racist, anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist and non-anthropocentric we need to begin by dispelling the myths regarding knowledges. The pursuit of knowledge is not and has never been limited to the western university⁷³. Other ‘traditions of knowledges’ have and continue to exist on the outside of modernity/coloniality despite attempts at epistemicide, erasure and silencing. These knowledges continue to circulate around us through oral tradition, folktales, songs, dance, storytelling, ceremonies, rituals, recipes, customs, beliefs, practices and lore. It is in the reclaiming of these knowledges through ancestry, spirituality and positionality that we can start to reclaim research as a practice. In doing so we need to return to tradition, to those practices of spirituality, of deep connection

⁷² Part of a 3 step decolonial strategic framework: demythologize, desilence/unmute, anti-colonially decolonize (Rutazibwa, 2019: 164-171).

⁷³ See Sheik (forthcoming) for a full discussion on how Western expansion through colonialism and imperialism resulted in the dominion over knowledge.

and relation, deemed heathen, backwards and savage by modernity's gaze. At this junction it is important to make a distinction between spirituality and religion. Following Wilson's (2008: 90-91) reading of Cascio (1998) who,

...discusses spirituality as something that is personal and individual, whereas religion is a social exercise. I would take this one step further and say that spirituality is one's internal sense of connection to the universe. This may include one's personal connection to a higher being, or humanity, or the environment. I would say that religion is (or at least, should be) the external manifestation of spirituality. People from within the same religion may share a similar set of beliefs about spirituality, but these beliefs can neither be assumed to be universal nor exclusive.

In other words, in order to onto-epistemologically exist whilst practicing research we need to return to our connection and relation with the cosmos. This path of reconnection will be different for each of us, depending on the ancestral lineages from which we descend, the lands of our birth, and the living or non-living teachers who find us. This re-traditioning of our research practice is what allows us to decolonially position ourselves, to allow for unlearning, relearning, thinking-sensing-feeling; so that we do not become entrapped by modernity/coloniality's snares of representation, inclusion, appropriation, validation and sovereignty; it gives us deep connection to ourselves, each other, all beings (living and non-living) and provides us with a horizon - the places where our abolitionist dreams are born, so that we can reclaim research as a practice of coming into relation (see Wilson, 2008).

From method to practices

Manja, jeera, dhanya, masala, garam masala, elachi, dhanya, methi. These are spices I use every day. These spices which were carried by my indentured ancestors across oceans, their seeds kept dry from the licking waves. Ma used these spices to cook dekhs on an open wood flame for kathams, weddings and janazahs, a tradition now passed on to my uncle. Nani used these spices to cook offerings for the dead during kavady, navrathri, Deepavali and for the

living on birthdays, Christmas and New Year. My mother, like her mother, and her mother's mother before her, performed magic with these spices. I never saw them look at a recipe, measure or set a timer, with multiple pots going at the same time, the process was habitual and instinctual. My mother's hand turning roti's on the hot tawa, her index finger used to measure spices. When I moved to the Netherlands to start my PhD, she gave me Zuleikha Mayat's 'Indian Delights'⁷⁴ as a gift. I remember looking at this new shiny red book, and recalling my mother's copy with the back and front cover missing, brown and yellowing pages held together by string binding, sections scattered like horcruxes across the house. At my first visit home my aunt asked me if I was cooking for myself and I said yes, but it doesn't taste the same, to which she responded "mother's hand is missing". I realized my mother had studied this book, and with each practice of a recipe, her hands remembered and she needed the book less. My copy now has post-it notes with handwritten additions and adjustments which my Mum patiently talked me through over the phone. Even though Ma, Nani and Mum used exactly the same ingredients and spices, each of their curries has a distinct taste, as does mine, my sister's and my brother's. It's in the hand.

Method, with its aim of 'finding out about' through rigor, validity and triangulation, has become rigid, continuously seeking out prediction, control, stability and certainty (see Wilson, 2008; Hlabangane, 2018). In doing so it forecloses on the possibility of intuition, kismet and non-material wisdom. As Franz Fanon ([1952] 1967: 12) aptly pointed out "[t]here is a point in which methods devour themselves". In contrast, *practicing* encourages 'learning from' through relation, reciprocity and accountability (Kimmerer, 2013, Wilson, 2008). Here the emphasis is on doing, as repeated, as process and praxis that, may over time become habitual and instinctive, but is never complete, never 'perfected'; where the learning process is generational and open-ended; we can never know all there is to know and that is alright. Using practices in

⁷⁴ A book first published by Durban based Women's Cultural Group in 1961, and holds most of the South African-Indian recipes.

the research process then becomes about holding ourselves accountable to the relationships we have built, be that to a person, peoples, community, land, sea, sky, rivers, mountains, the cosmos. These relations are held together by reciprocity, a position of sharing, gratitude and humility (Kimmerer, 2013).

Tamarind, mustard seeds, black pepper, jeera, red chillies, garlic, tomatoes, onion, oil, water, salt. In June 2020 I facilitated two guest sessions on Refusal in the Transitions to Social Justice LAB led by Rosalba Icaza. The previous year Rosalba and I, together with two consultants from our university's research-training-advice (RISBO) department, designed the course activities. The entire course, with interactive pedagogical tools, was designed for in-person classes. With the swift change to online-classes brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, we discussed whether to cancel the course due to all the uncertainty, but instead decided to keep the course running as a space to support each other and create community amongst the predominantly international student cohort, who were increasingly isolated and far from their families and loved ones. A few days before the first session, I came down with a cold and had a very sore throat and ear ache. As this was in the initial phase of COVID-19 widespread testing wasn't available and only those who were seriously ill were being tested. At the start of the session, I told the students I was still recovering, and was feeling better thanks to russo (rasam, russam), a soup my Mum and Nani made whenever we had a cold. A student from India unmuted himself to share the Indian roots of russo, which was also made in his household. A while later, during the open discussion segment, before commenting a student from Colombia, apologized for her voice as she also had a sore throat. To which the Indian student offered to make her russo and deliver it to her dorm. When I messaged to check up on her a few days later, she said she was feeling better and that the russo had really helped to soothe her throat. And I thought it's in the hand.

Hand in Hand is an exercise developed in the context of the 2020 Transitions to Social Justice Lab led by Rosalba Icaza at the International Institute of Social Studies. Without first explaining the exercise in detail, I would like to invite you to do the practice along with me, as a way of building relations between us. You will need:

- A blank sheet of paper
- Art supplies: coloured pens / crayons / coloured pencils / markers
- 5-10 minutes

Take a moment to look at your hands, perhaps they're curled over the edges of the hard copy you are holding, or maybe like me, they are resting on your keyboard as you look at the screen. Take a look at your fingers, did you know that fingers don't have muscles, rather the muscles that allow your fingers to move are located in the palm and mid-forearm, linked to the fingers by tendons. Hands are amazing. Gaze over the wrinkles made by time, the deep valleys between your fingers, notice any scars, or birth marks. Look, for a moment, lovingly at your hands, as if you are seeing them for the first time, remembering how well they have served you, perhaps by breaking a fall, holding on for balance, raising food to your mouth, curling around warm cups of tea, touching, hugging, feeling, caressing, squeezing, scratching, clicking, clasping, clapping.

1. Now place your hand with the fingers stretched apart on the blank piece of paper, take a pen or pencil in your dominant hand and start to draw the outline of your hand, starting from the base of the wrist, moving along the fingers and ending at the outer edge of the wrist.
2. Whilst reflecting on the ideas of refusal, abolition and transformative justice, write down or draw at least 5 ethics/morals/values that show how you relate to the worlds around you. These may have been learned at home, in your family or in other communities you are a part of. Don't think too hard about it, simply write down the words/ideas/symbols that arise.
3. Take the last few minutes to free draw onto your hand, anything else that you feel is important and worthy of remembering.
4. Turn to appendix 1 and compare your hand to mine. Notice the paths where we find common ground.
5. Take a deep breath and know you are not alone in this struggle. We are always together and hopefully one day we can have a conversation about what's in our hands.

Hand in Hand: Practicing relational ethics and accountability

This practice was inspired by “Body Mapping”⁷⁵, the arts-based therapy method borne during another moment of crisis – the HIV/AIDS pandemic in post-apartheid South Africa. Body mapping uses life-size body drawings to encourage participants to use visuals, words and imagery to narrate their life journeys. The method itself is widely written about (see Devine, 2008; Gunn 2017) and there is no denying its usefulness, yet it remains a method very much focused on the healing of the individual. As a methodology, it has come to be used by NGOs and civil society organizations as a tool of advocacy and evaluation.

Hand in Hand is a practice grounded in the pedagogies of positionality, relationality and re-existence (Vázquez, 2020). Positionality being the basis of our knowledge claims; not merely our identities, but rather our positioning along the colonial difference and groundings in relation to others and the life of earth. This leads to relationality, as the move away from dominant forms of subjectivity under modernity and “the logic of representation and its subject/object dualism” and towards re-existence where we start to see our being/becoming as relational to others and all life, where we can begin to heal together, rejoice in our in-completeness and forge pathways beyond resistance and struggle (Vázquez, 2020: 172). *Hand in hand* is a practice of reaching out for relations, of seeking deep connection across difference in a move towards coalition (Lugones, 2010). It is an exercise used to build relations by getting creative with our differences (Lorde, 2017 [1979]).

The full potential of the exercise comes through when it is practiced in groups, for example students, those forming an initiative for the first time, more established groups needing to ground their practice, collectives, social movements, etc. Below I provide some guidelines for facilitating the practice with groups, though keep in mind this is *not* a method, so feel free to add your own ‘hand’ to it.

⁷⁵ See artist Jane Soloman’s work with apartheid survivors and later women living with HIV/AIDS. See also Jonathan Morgan’s – Memory Box project.

Step 1: 3-5 minute mindfulness exercise (body scan meditation or breath work) or any other exercise which encourages developing a safe space

Step 2: 15-20 minutes for drawing the hand, writing morals/ethics/values and free draw (the facilitator also draws during this time)

Step 3: 20-30 minutes for discussion, the timing depends on the size of the group. In planning your session leave the maximum amount of time for the discussion.

Step 4: Start by showing your (facilitator's) hand drawing and starting the discussion by describing one of the words in your hand.

Step 5: Then ask the group if anyone has the same word and would like to share. After this person has shared, ask them to tell the group about another word in their hand.

Step 6: Now ask the group if anyone else had this word and would like to share. After the next person shares, ask them to tell the group about another word in their hand.

Step 7: Repeat step 5 & 6 for the duration of the discussion time. Whilst noting down all the words mentioned, as well as any significant phrases. If there is any lull in the discussion you can always turn to your own drawing to get the discussion flowing again.

Step 8: 5-10 minutes for wrap-up, where you discuss the outcome of the relations you have built, this can be in the form of relational ethical guidelines,

rules of engagement, a statement of relational ethics, a mission statement, a manifesto, vision, etc.

Step 9: The facilitator, a volunteer or group of volunteers are assigned the role of drafting the document.

Step 10: Close the session with a guided meditation or breath work.

Follow-up:

Step 11: The document is sent around to all participants (google docs works well) for additions, comment and clarification.

Step 12: Once the final document is ready it can be made public, as agreed upon by the group.

Hand in Hand is an exercise in which positionality and relationality harmonize, with all beings (living and non-living), to the lands, seas, and sky, to Mother earth; to all those relations we hold ourselves accountable to (Wilson, 2008). It allows us to return to the earth, to community and to our shared responsibility. During the practice, disagreements (conflict) *will* arise, these are indications of the colonial difference, which will be experienced as discomfort, unease and tension. It is important that we hold this discomfort with patience and kindness, making friends with it as this is our “coalitional starting point...the histories of resistance at the colonial difference are where we need to *dwell*, learning about each other” (Lugones, 2010: 753). It is from this coalitional starting point that we can begin to “practice accountability beyond punishment with each other” and to learn “how to handle conflict...[and]...move towards accountability in satisfying and collective ways” (Brown, 2021: 17-33). It will create opportunity and space for us to learn how to belong to each other, to reject the ‘authoritative I’, to listen deeply and to choose instead to soften, to hold each other with compassion and kindness first, it will

give us solid ground to stand on as we struggle against the oppressions which seek to divide us on a daily basis.

These systems of oppression which aim to keep us apart through categories and hierarchies, has, through the politics of scarcity, misled us into false corners, believing we only have two choices, struggle or assimilate. This is simply not true. I invite you to turn around and move into the vast open space that has always been there. That liminal space, with no corners, with space to breathe, outside of modernity/coloniality where time spirals, where subject-blends-object, where 'I am because we are' and where "duality is transcended...in healing the split that originates in the very foundation of our lives, our culture, our languages, our thoughts" (Anzaldúa, 2007: 102). *Hand in Hand* as a practice allows us to hold ourselves and each other accountable in loving and compassionate ways that do not inflict the same violence we are against. It is a first step towards moving past the "infantile stages of learning how to be in transformative justice practices with each other" (Brown, 2021: 42), so that we may belong to each other in coalition.

Our bodies breathe resistance. What's in our hands?

Our unthinkable thoughts are not something to be ashamed of. Rather like refusal, they hold lessons for us, they give form to our discomfort and are generative in allowing us to see the disharmony within ourselves, our actions and in the world around us. The failures of this pandemic and the mass crises left in its wake, have shown us the urgency of abolition. In our refusal to go back to 'normal', we can begin abolitionist work right where we are, by reclaiming research as a practice. By refusing to extract and expropriate from already vulnerable and marginalized peoples and communities, we start to create space to question the institutions in our vicinity and start to organize in anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist, anti-colonial and anti-racist ways.

COVID-19 has revealed the inequities in research methodology that we have taken for granted. Not only has it exposed the university as falling short of its claim to knowledge which could save lives, but has also made clear whose lives are worth saving. Thus, refusing research, re-

traditioning our research practices and orientating ourselves towards abolition not only transforms research into a life-affirming endeavor but also aligns us with all those in struggle against capitalist, imperialist and neo-colonial extraction and destruction of life. This reorientation allows us to practice life-saving by reaching out for relations, offering us a pathway out of the isolation of the 'authoritative I'. In research, it allows us to onto-epistemologically exist; to honor our ancestral lineages, the knowledges of the land, sea and sky allowing us to come into deep relation.

In the now famous essay *The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle The Master's House* Audre Lorde (2017 [1979]: 17) asks the question: "What does it mean when the tools of a racist patriarchy are used to examine the fruits of that same patriarchy?" She goes on to answer: "It means that only the most narrow perimeters of change are possible and allowable". *Hand in Hand* is an exercise which transcends perimeters, by encouraging us to become creative with our differences, to come into relation and into community. It is a practice that embraces the discomfort of dismantling, so that we may sink our hands into the rich dark soil beneath the Master's house and plant our seeds of hope and courage.

Hand in Hand, we brew and forge a revolution.
El Mundo Zurdo, Gloria Anzaldúa (2015)

7

Liminagraphy: Lessons in life-affirming research practices for collective liberation⁷⁶

*For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house.
They may allow us to temporarily beat him at his own game,
but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change.* Audre Lorde (2017[1979])

*I was born and live in that in-between space, nepantla, the borderlands.
There are other races running in my veins,
other cultures that my body lives in and out of,
and a white man who constantly whispers inside my skull.*
Gloria Anzaldua (2009)

Un Mundo Donde. Quepan Muchos Mundos (A World Where Many Worlds Fit)
Zapatistas

Liminagraphy is an approach to research that centers onto-epistemological re-existence through decolonizing the self and coming into harmony, that is deep relation with all life, that of each other, the earth and all her beings. It is grounded in a “decolonial science⁷⁷” which seeks to retrieve a “relationality that exists underneath the wounds of coloniality”, reclaiming our relations to land, sea, sky, our ancestors, lineages and spirituality (Shilliam 2015: 13). Inspired by Audre Lorde’s words in the epigraph above, liminagraphy is one radical possibility that emerges when “we sit with metaphor” (McKittrick 2021: 10). Co-created with women of colour and those who resist the logics of dominant knowledge production in the racialized, gendered, colonial and neoliberal university, it is cultivated from the joy of being together, long walks in nature, deep conversations, shared meals, holding space and healing laughter. It is an approach in/from the margins, where resistance is rife in the pursuit of liberating knowledge from colonial logics. To this end, liminagraphy addresses the “double erasure”⁷⁸ (Vázquez 2021: 41) of modernity/coloniality by attending not only to the erasure of other ways of

⁷⁶ Sheik, Z.B. forthcoming. Liminagraphy: Lessons in life-affirming research practices for collective liberation. *Journal of The Journal of Critical Southern Studies*.

⁷⁷ The use of science in this article follows Katherine McKittrick’s, *Dear Science* understanding of science as present, yet restless and uncomfortable, as “a shadow, a story, a friendship...[which] reveals failed attachments (2021: 3).

⁷⁸ The double erasure of modernity/coloniality refers to the erasure of knowledges coupled with the denial of such an erasure. See the work of Walter Dignolo, Rolando Vázquez, Annibal Quijano and Maria Lugones.

knowing-being-sensing and the negation of this absence in the domain of dominant knowledge production, more importantly, it also offers a pathway out of the politics of recognition and into reception.

Positioning Liminagraphy in Social Science Research

In the introduction to the inaugural book in the series *New Directions in Theorizing Qualitative Research* co-edited with Norman Denzin, James Salvo (2020) states that approaches to research based on a Western epistemology are at an impasse due to foundational presumptions pertaining to ontology – that is at the level of *being*. These presumptions are what Santiago Castro-Gómez calls zero-point epistemology, a position that is nowhere, unobservable and separate from everyday life (Vázquez 2020). Following Salvo's (2020) definition of the ontological as those beings who question their very being, this individual untethered ontological position has wider reaching consequences for epistemology, particularly as the paradigm of western epistemology has come to dominate the social sciences. Put another way, under this dominant paradigm the individual 'I' as a product of the Cartesian split severs ontology from epistemology thereby foreclosing on the knowledge of being.

The Indigenous paradigm does not suffer this impasse, as according to Salvo (2020 np) “[i]ndigenous being is specifically the conjunction of both being-with and being-from” where the former relates to knowledge communicated through language with each other and the latter making clear the connection between identity and land. In other words, in the indigenous paradigm, onto-epistemology is conjoined, where the questioning of being can only be done with others and thus the study of knowledge is always co-created. We have much to learn from indigenous epistemologies, particularly in these times of crisis which bring to the fore our interconnectedness. Yet, Linda Tuhiwa Smith's (1999) words in the opening paragraph of *Decolonizing Methodologies*, “the term ‘research’, is probably one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world's vocabulary” reminds us that we do not engage on a fair playing field when it comes to the exchange of ideas.

In seeking to avoid the impasse of western epistemology by reorientating towards indigenous epistemology, Salvo enters into a false binary, creating two intersecting pitfalls in our approach to research in the social sciences. The first has to do with violence, by absolving western epistemology of its complicity in colonialism, racism, sexism, slavery, imperialism, indenture, classism, epistemic violence (Spivak 1988) and epistemicide (Santos 2014), Salvo reinforces the prevailing reductionist claim in academia, that violence is antithetical to knowledge production and is seen,

...first, as something that occurs somewhere else (i.e., not in the Global North – and if so, it is understood to be the exception rather than the rule); second, as something that is perpetrated by somebody else (i.e., not by a rational political subject – and if so, it is done for the right reasons); and, third, violence is considered as genuinely something else (i.e., nonexistent in the academic realm – and if so, it is understood to be an unfortunate ideological aberration). (Brunner 2021: 193-4).

Thus, this impasse within western epistemology comes down to an inability to exercise “epistemic vulnerability” understood as “an openness to be affected and shaped by others” (Snyman 2015: 270). What this shows, is that knowledge produced through western epistemology lacks the ability to account for violence at the ontological level. This is reiterated by Eve Tuck and Wayne Yang (2014) who use Gaytri Spivak’s *Can the Subaltern Speak* in order to demonstrate that the other can speak but only if they speak of their pain and humiliation. In other words, through western epistemology we can only state the problems faced by our communities but we cannot bring about the other onto-epistemological worlds needed for our collective liberation.

This brings us to the second pitfall in Salvo’s argument, by positioning western epistemology and indigenous epistemology on either end of a spectrum, Salvo creates the impression that there is nothing in-between, thereby precluding other ways of being outside of modernity/coloniality, those that are non-indigenous and non-western, i.e., those in the borderlands. Chicana feminist Gloria Anzaldúa (2007: 25) uses the U.S.-Mexico border to illustrate the conceptualization of ‘borderlands’ as “a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary”. It is the in-between, the liminal space, “the locus of resistance, of

rupture, implosion and explosion, and of putting together the fragments and creating a new assemblage” (Anzaldúa 2009: 177). Borderlands is not constrained by physical space and whilst it emerges from the enfleshed experiences of being mestiza it reaches across time and space to all those who find themselves ‘in-between’ due to physical displacement, but also more subtle non-physical shifts such as across religions or tribal lines, between social classes or transitions in gender non-conformity (Chang et al. 2018). As such borderlands is “the one spot on earth which contains all other places within it” (Anzaldúa 2009: 180).

Our bodies
mausoleums for
an extinct home
yearn for her
sub-continent

Mama Afrika
fed us milk
made our bodies
whole

meta-morphosis
they tried but couldn't
apartheid the sky
partition the sea
so now we pray at the shoreline
but still
neither land
nor us
is free

From the borderlands emerges a new paradigm, an un-bordered liminal onto-epistemology⁷⁹. This is where liminagraphy is positioned, emerging from encounters in the borderlands. In this new paradigm the onto-epistemological position is enfleshed⁸⁰ in the mnemonic body

⁷⁹ Is an extension of liminal epistemology where the ontological and epistemological are not separate. Here the emphasis is on the flesh and the metaphysical. For more on liminal epistemology see Kej Vackermann (2016) *Retracing Liminal Epistemology in Jamaica Kincaid's Bildungsroman*.

⁸⁰ In *Enfleshing Freedom*, liberation theologian M. Shawn Copeland (2010), makes explicit that the relation between the brutalization of black bodies under slavery is deeply intertwined with their living descendants. See also Sheik “From Decolonising the Self and Liberating the Senses” (forthcoming).

(Copeland 2010; see also Hurtado 2019; Sheik, forthcoming). Not the anatomical body of modernity, which is out of time and space, but the enfleshed body that holds memory – the one who remembers (Chávez & Vázquez 2017). These groundings mark coloniality and its effects on the body, as two interventions distinct from the established post-modern and more recent new materialist approaches presented by Anglo-American and French approaches to epistemology. Enfleshed knowing is that which lives in the pause between the breaths that give us life, the brief moment between an inhale and exhale where death and the dead are present. The enfleshed mnemonic body enunciates deep relation, evoking “that which has been stolen, the flesh off our bone which identified us as belonging to the earth and each other” (Sheik forthcoming). Whilst the liminal position overlaps with indigenous onto-epistemology in terms of connection to relations, it expands beyond the material relation to land⁸¹ in order to account for knowing emanating from plural lineages anchored in multiple lands held together in the flesh. In other words, liminagraphy is grounded in an approach to onto-epistemology that is positioned in the borderlands where knowing arises from the flesh.

Theoretical Groundings of Liminagraphy

The nature of liminagraphy is in-betweenness moving towards harmony, and as such it's theoretical groundings can be found amid the anti-colonial common ground which roots decolonial feminism, black studies, chicana feminism, abolition studies, post-colonial studies and African philosophy. It brings into “question how the disciplines - psychology, education, history, anthropology, sociology, or science – through an ideology of Othering have described and theorized about the colonized Other, and refused to let the colonized Other name and know from their frame of reference” (Chilisa 2012: 14). In this way liminagraphy moves towards trans-, post- and anti- disciplinary ways of knowing which honour the re-traditioning of knowledge as a life-affirming practice (Sheik3 forthcoming). In doing so it opens up space for “a parallel movement where a polarized us/them, insiders/outside culture clash is not the main struggle,

⁸¹ Whilst being aware that Indigenous relations to land are at the same spiritual, acknowledging and honouring their continued struggles for autonomy and the return of seized lands, particularly in settler-colonial states.

where a refusal to be split will be [is] a given” (Anzaldúa 2009: 184). Given that liminagraphy draws from multiple theoretical groundings, each of which can contradict the other (e.g., post-colonial and decolonial), how then does liminagraphy reconcile these onto-epistemological differences?

Firstly, by decolonizing the self, liminagraphy creates the conditions for a decolonial re-existence where knowledge is cultivated rather than produced and consumed (Shilliam 2015), reorientating ourselves from “the age of representation to the age of reception” (Vazquez 2020: 17). Second, is by being aware that “the new paradigm must come from outside as well as within the system” (Anzaldúa 2015: 119). This calls for an honouring of anti-colonial knowledge ‘produced’ under duress⁸², but always conspiring towards healing generational trauma. We acknowledge the limitations created by the oppressive and discriminatory academic environment of the time, but do not take these limitations as our own. To do so, would be to purposefully tear open scar-tissue around our colonial wounds, letting in the necrotising logics of individual self-gain, thereby dishonouring the spirit of collective liberatory praxis kept alive through this work. We receive the wisdom and give thanks for the path breaking knowledges offered to us, as ‘the beautiful ones not yet born’⁸³, with the hope that we live up to the task of tending to the flame which has with such painstaking care been handed to us.

Birthing Liminagraphy

Semelparous

The sun spins out of control
holding on to dusk’s last hope
the blanket of darkness comes
and it’s too late

⁸² “This shift - from science to studying ways of knowing – has allowed me to work out where and how black thinkers imagine and practice liberation as they are weighed down by what I can only describe as biocentrically induced accumulation by dispossession. The weight is important here, because it signals not simply a monumental system of knowledge that is fueled by colonial and plantocratic logics, but the weight that bears down on all black people, inside and outside the academy, and puts pressure on their physiological and psychic and political well-being” (McKittrick, 2021: 3).

⁸³ Based on the novel by Ghanaian author Ayi Kwei Armah, *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (1969).

Eight voracious tentacles
 reach out
 teeth bared
 seeking out flesh

Four take over her limbs
 sinking their mandibles deep

Two slither over
 seal shut her eyes

One bites into her back
 until it reaches bone
 mimicking spine

Before her mouth
 Whales out a NO!
 the last tentacle
 teeth on teeth
 gags her scream

Immobilised
 blood siphons black
 black bleeds protest
 of this
 parasitic containment

As mantle crowns head's
 commandeered captive

entwined
 ink spills
 and heavy they sink

into kala pani's⁸⁴ arms
 to the depths of the depths
 where no light reaches

Kali⁸⁵ calls out
 surrender she says

⁸⁴ In Hindi means black waters, referring mainly to the Indian Ocean. By crossing this ocean many Indians believed they would lose their caste, social standing and cultural identity.

⁸⁵ Feminine form of kala (black). Referring to the Goddess Kali, the keeper of death, time and liberation (from cycles of reincarnation)

the darkness serves you

for in its
Semelparous subversion
where
death anchors life

liberation awaits

Liminagraphy carries an intelligibility that is foreign to colonial logics. Foreign because we are no longer screaming the “no” of non-being and the negation of our racialized and feminized ways of knowing-being (Motta 2018: 23). We refuse. By making ourselves unintelligible to modernity/coloniality, we start making ourselves intelligible to each other. This voicing is then the expression of all those knowledges which colonialism-imperialism-patriarchy-white-supremacy (hooks 1984) attempts to eradicate, yet is kept alive in our flesh through our resistance and survival. As Wandile Xaba (2021) reminds us,

[o]ur archives cannot be killed or burnt to the ground. Even those archives at UCT [University of Cape Town] have not been destroyed. The ancestors who wrote them will communicate the knowledge to their children when they need the knowledge and in the various indigenous ways the archive has been kept alive outside academia.

As such it is a quietening with our rage, a friendship formed with our anger and a mentorship with our discomfort that allows us to listen for the knowledges from our ancestors, the wisdom of “holding space” (Cairo 2021), of sharing, offering, and receiving. This attentive awareness to stillness, as opposed to the ‘urgency’ of capitalism, is what allows us to hear the whispers of spirit between our inhales and exhales, the stories shared in our dreams, and the subtleties of life thriving all around us. It is the medicine for the ailments caused by rubbing against the borders.

*Limin- / -a- / -graphy*⁸⁶

Emerging from the borderlands, from the state of *nepantla* seeking harmony, fragmentation is healed through the *Coyolxauhqui* imperative (Anzaldua 2015), phases in Anzaldua's seven stages of *conocimiento* (knowledge/wisdom). Etymologically, we begin by splitting the word *liminagraphy* into three parts in order to make evident the significance of its plural meanings. *Limin-* is used to denote the state of *nepantla*, the 'in-betweenness' and existing in a space of transition and transformation that arises from the rubbing of borders. An associated root word *limen-* refers to a threshold, being at a place of entering or beginning. So here, the roots refer to the constant fluidity of movement as we come up against borders, they do not hinder us, nor obstruct our path, rather it allows us "to see double" as we dance the rhythm of re-existence (Anzaldua 2015).

The root ending *-graphy* in its common use denotes writing, recording or description. However, its use in *liminagraphy* goes much deeper than its contemporary meaning. *-graphy* is derived from the Greek *-graphia* whose meaning changed over time as stone tablets were forsaken for paper, such that it moved away from its PIE (Proto-Indo-European) cognate **gerbh-* which means to scrape, scratch or...

You want to just stay here, to keep writing, but interruption is the constant state of the immigrant, alien, refugee, asylum seeker. It's an unusually warm day for September in The Hague, the sun warm on your face as the wind cools the sweat on your brow, you feel the tug of homesickness in your flesh. While cycling you look up, there atop a lamp post, sits a great crested grebe, bill to the sun, the wind ruffling its crest, you wonder if it feels this sensation of freedom the same as you do.

⁸⁶ Whilst English is used in developing the concept, the rules of structure in forming compound words in English are not adhered to.

In the city centre, you see masks on chins, on elbows, under benches and on the ground, all but on the face of exception. You enter the white monolith of logisticality⁸⁷, floors and floors and floors of data, of certifying, of verifying, of tracking and tracing, of determining your 'right' to breathe on the earth we share. Your hips ache as the blood drips between your legs, a stain upon the bleached walls of empire. As a distraction from the pain you eavesdrop on the conversation the consultant has with the Spanish couple in front of you. You hear her say to them, but you don't have that problem you can stay up to four months without registering for a BSN. When it's your turn you hand over your passport, she verifies and hands you the card that temporarily allows you to breathe on this land for six months more. Suffocated by the sterile glint of windows that are too clean, you rush to get out. As you exit, something catches your eye, something familiar, a crest. This one has large golden wings outstretched, the rising sun above its head, supported by elephant tusks, ears of wheat, the king protea, a spear and knobkierie, and a shield with two figures in greeting, symbolising individual transformation into belonging to the nation and collective humanity; embossed below in bold letters, !ke e: !xarra lke - literally meaning people who are different meet, or more symbolically unity in diversity, in the now extinct language of the indigenous !Xam of southern Africa, a stabbing reminder that this monolith of logistically once had sails.

This national coat of arms, a symbol usually used to identify kin, sat on the corner of a stack of documents, held by a young woman with anxiety furrowed on her brow. Next to her stood a friend equally worried. "Are you South African?" you ask, "no, Namibian, but I lived in South Africa" she replies. You talk for 10 minutes, she tells you she just started studying at Leiden University, you tell her you are just finishing your studies at Erasmus University Rotterdam. She says she is having trouble getting her card, they will not accept her birth certificate

⁸⁷ See Stefano Harney and Fred Moten (2021) *All Incomplete*.

because its laminated and doesn't have an official stamp. You sense her desperation, it has been yours before, ours. Documentation, a stamp is missing, documentation, it needs an official signature, documentation, the date is incorrect, as if in a never-ending search for a log entry that marked you as theirs. This is our greatest fear, that they will do it again, that they will own our right to breathe on the earth we share. Documentation is the only way in, documentation is the only way out. The dompas did not burn, it multiplied.

You suggest going to the embassy, they don't answer phones so just show up at their door. As you bid farewell and walk away, you wish you could do more, but this is her path to walk, as you did seven-years earlier – you pray she has it easier but deep down you know the crossing to the borderlands all too well.

...carve. As such, the -graphy used in liminagraphy, is used to show the motion of decolonizing the self, carving-cutting out those parts of the plural self that no longer serve us⁸⁸ (Lugones 2003; Icaza 2015), scratching at “the surface phenomena the meaning of deeper realities, [beginning to] ‘see through’ our own cultural conditioning and dysfunctional values” (Anzaldúa 2015: 83). This practice of shedding, of allowing the scabs to fall off on their own, allows for the generational healing of the colonial wound needed for collective liberation. Doing this remedial work allows us to write/create/draw/paint/scribble /graffiti the enfleshed knowing in ways that honour the relations that brought us here.

The bridge crossing from limin- to -graphy is the connective -a-. In forming compound words, it is common to use the connective -o- particularly for branches of knowledge, e.g., methodology, sociology, psychology, autobiography, ethnography. However, this -o- is meaningless holding no other function than to adhere to an etymological rule. Instead, opting to use the -a-

⁸⁸ In *Testimony of Pilgrimage* mentor and compañera Rosalba Icaza (2015: 16-17), shares how by sharing with students the discomfort and pain of epistemic violence, she was told a colleague that, that was tantamount to “...professional suicide. He was right, this was an act of killing some elements of the unrooted-professionalized-individual-self but it was also an act to acknowledge the ongoing flourishing of a self that sought to be a communal one”.

connective, not only marks the absence of onto-epistemologies within these branches of knowledge, but also denotes our re-existence within the new paradigm through Liminagraphy. In addition, it is used to convey meaning in several ways which are key to knowledge cultivation in a liminagraphy approach. The first, is derived from its use as a neuter(al) plural ending (e.g., phenomena) used to convey the plurality of knowledges and the plurality of selves found in the horizon given to us by Maria Lugones (2016), through the ‘coloniality of gender’. Second, its use in feminizing certain names (e.g., Paula) is co-opted to commemorate a “shift to the feminization of knowledge, one beyond the subject-object divide, a way of knowing and acting” in coalition (Anzaldúa 2015: 119; see also Lugones 2003). Finally, subverting its use in the scientific naming of flora and fauna in biology (e.g., mammalia) to reinscribe our return to nature and similarly disrupting its use in geography, particularly in the naming of places: Africa, Americas, Asia, Arabia – honouring the knowledges from these places which survived epistemicide. Thus, liminagraphy calls forth a decolonial re-existence which honours our relations to nature, our lineages and the plurality of knowing-being.

Liminagraphy as life-affirming research

*Moochchinil irukkudhu yeii...
Ulagin mudhal mozi kadha.
Stories are the world's first language...
it lives in our breaths
Arivu⁸⁹*

Liminagraphy starts with a story⁹⁰, the story of how the “me in us/we became an ‘I’” (Sheik, forthcoming1) or how the me finds their way to us/we. In *Research is Ceremony*, Shawn Wilson (2008) notes the importance of building relations between the author and reader in the co-creation of knowledge; using a letter to his sons as a way of reaching out to us. In liminagraphy this act not only positions our theorizing in a way that is beyond representation and thus unintelligible to modernity/coloniality but also open space for reception, for offering and receiving.

⁸⁹ Arivu, in Namma Stories – The South Anthem, NJ, Arivu, SIRI, and Hanumankind (2021)⁸⁹ Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fy3TqHU7DsU>

⁹⁰ Story is used here in its broadest sense and is not limited to the written word, story may be conveyed through any creative expression (visual, art, dance, etc.) as long as it is reaching out for relations.

Due to the constant motion of nepantla, liminagraphy is in an unchoreographed dance with temporality, as such whilst this article tells you about liminagraphy it is also doing liminagraphy – making explicit the relations that collectively birthed it into form whilst welcoming you, the reader into the dance of co-creation and cultivating knowledge. This is the welcoming of those on the outside in, whilst acknowledging there is no outside of the we/us in Ubuntu (see Sheik forthcoming¹). Put another way, liminagraphy starts with a crossing, as the me and you become a we.

When I think of borderlands, I think of the place I grew up in, Chatsworth, an Indian township offset from the Indian Ocean off the KwaZulu Natal coast. Like most artificially created peri-urban places created under Apartheid's group areas act, it houses displaced peoples. Descendants of indentured labourers from Mother India, discarded once their labour got rights, they moved from the sugarcane fields to the magazine barracks of the Durban Corporation and the margins of the city where black and indian neighbours lived side by side, before being forcibly removed in the 1950s. Chatsworth is a place where the continuous violence of oppressive regimes ruptures in the flesh, tearing skin, ripping open old wounds, it bleeds and bleeds. Sub-divided into units, Unit 3 Westcliff is one of the worst and poorest. Westcliff is further divided into 3A and 3B, the former regarded as being better off for having semi-detached houses as opposed to the council allocated flats of the former. I grew up and have family in both. Growing up there violence is normalized, where bruises are visible on your teacher's face, where the loud music from taxis is silenced by gunshots, where drug dealers buy vegetables from the same stall as you, where sugar boys⁹¹ were once your classmates and alcohol is used to numb the pain. But as much as it's a place where death lingers, it is also where life thrives.

⁹¹ Those struggling with addiction to crystal meth.

1990s.

Friday's in Chatsworth were my favourite, school let out early and Nani, my Hindu/Tamil maternal grandmother would be waiting for me at the school gate, as always dressed in a colourful sari. Her house was on Westcliff Drive, and the street would come alive on Friday afternoons with people and traffic heading to the open-air Bangladesh market. The wise woman that she was, she would have already been to the market in the morning, getting the freshest on offer. She would also hand us kids a little package of sweets wrapped in directory paper from Narsi's. We would play in the yard by ourselves, or sometimes we would join some neighbourhood kids in the back open field near the reservoir, always careful to avoid the one huge madoni tree where someone hanged himself. I would pray with my grandmother, watch her clean and prepare the lamp, using cooking oil and cotton wool, say govinda-gooovinda with her as she lit camphor and placed the burning pieces around the corners of the house. If it was Karvady time, we would go to the temple at night, my cousin and I would listen to the devotional songs set to the tabla and indian harmonium; whilst Nani being fluent in Tamil could listen to all the neighbourhood gossip. The atmosphere at the temple was joyous, and food plenty with aunties bringing veddas and goolgoolas, and lengths of trestle tables set with paper plates and polystyrene cups for people to eat vegetable curries, dhal and rice. Though through all this bustle of activity you could sense an undercurrent of tension. Late into the night it would happen, "trance caught him", you would hear people whisper, as a circle forms around the person in trance. My cousin and I would at first be scared, but our curiosity always got the better of us. I would watch in awe as the person surrendered themselves, losing control, their body taken over by spirit, seeing their mannerisms change, their bodies transform and speech alter in front of my eyes. Until my cousin beside me would tug on my shirt and we would try to guess

which of the gods caught him, recalling the names of the gods we had seen in our grandfather's comics which we were 'not' allowed to touch.

Saturday afternoons were usually spent going to a katham, an Islamic religious gathering, either hosted by my paternal grandmother or attending ones organised by other families. If we were hosting, preparations would start early in the morning, a marquee would be set up, my aunties would arrive and start peeling potatoes, grating carrots, and plucking the feathers off chickens or cutting the fat off mutton pieces. The smell of rose incense heavy in the air, used to keep away the flies. All my cousins would be around, mostly we would be told to stay out of the way, and when we inevitably didn't, we were given odd jobs to keep us out of the way. My grandmother, Ma, as the elder would be seated at the entrance as guests arrived, she would greet them, dot their wrists with attar, give a blessing and enquire about their family members. The women would sit on one side and the men on the other, us kids usually sat with the women, though the boys could go with their Dad's and uncles, but not the girls. The katham would start with a recitation of the Quran in Arabic, then Naat, praise poetry sung for Prophet Muhammad sal-lallahu alayhi wa sallam, usually performed by a young do-gooder that the rest of us kids despised. The atmosphere would be sombre, no music, just the recitation in Urdu, a language most of us didn't understand. The lecture by the Moulana that followed was also in Urdu and all the kids struggled to stay awake, still or quiet in our seats, often raising a shhhh from one of the kalas. I would often daydream during those nearly two-hours, occasionally jarred back to reality by bursts of shouting coming from the lecture. It would be a blessing when the do-gooder would be called to start the closing salaami, Mustafa Jaane Rehmat Pe Lakhon Salaam, followed by the Moulana closing with Fatiha in Arabic. The cacophony of voices, quiet for so long, would send shivers down my spine. One member of the family would walk around with smoky lobaan, whilst two others walked around with a gulabdhani in hand

sprinkling rose water over the crowd, us kids shrieked but we secretly loved it. Separate tables covered with trestle paper were set up for men and women. While this was being arranged and chairs reshuffled, the kids had the job of serving sweet meats; burfi, gulab jamun, chana magaj, serv and boondi, jelebi, halwa and banana puri; licking our sticky fingers once the tray was empty. At the tables milky sweet kheer or soji, chicken kahliyah and roti, dhal gosht and rice, or breyani were served straight from the hot dekh, all cooked on an open woodfire flame. After eating we would eye the aunties rolling their paan in beetle leaf and sneaking it into the side of their mouths. As the guests started to leave, others from the community who needed a meal were given food, and only thereafter did the family sit down to eat. All sitting at the same table, it was loud, old stories were shared, jokes, teasing and raucous laughter, us kids loved it as we got to see our elders, parents, aunts and uncles in a different light, less serious - as if a heavy burden had been lifted off their shoulders.

Sunday we would leave the confines of Chatsworth in my dad's old second-hand cream-coloured Mazda and head for the coast, with either Dire Straits or Carlos Santa blasted at full volume with the windows down. My sister, brother and I in the back seat singing along to lyrics we didn't understand...the opening riff of Sultans of Swing still reminds me of clear blue skies and salty beach air. Here we would get take-aways, sometimes fish and chips, other times a bunny chow or pie and coke, eating in the car with all the doors open. Afterwards taking a walk on the beach we would see iZioni, in white clothing praying in a circle and traditional healers deep in African ancestral worship. A sacrificial chicken was usually close by and we would later find it washed up on the shore, much to the disgust of the sunbathing mlungus. We would also find oranges, apples, coconuts and saris on the shoreline, with my Mum quick to warn us not to touch any of it, as these were from Hindu/Tamil prayers done for Ganga Amman and the offerings belonged to her.

Monday was back to school. Standing in line at morning assembly with starched white collared shirts or dresses, a noose around our necks and bata toughees with white ribbed socks, we mindlessly repeated in a monotonous drone, the secular Universal Prayer⁹².

*Father we thank thee
For the night and for the pleasant morning light
For rest and food and loving care
And all that makes the world so fair.
Help us to do the things we should
To be to others
Kind and good
In all we do and in all we say
To be more loving everyday.
Amen.*

Standing in the blistering heat, we didn't understand a word of what we were muttering and after the morning announcements we were sent off to class. In the classroom we sat in rows, at chipped wooden desks that once served our parents, watched over by a poster on the wall which showed the members of our newly elected democratic government. The teacher wrote notes in white chalk on a green board, just below it sat an innocuous duster and thick ruler, which were often used to keep us in line. We were taught, in English, that the Aztecs were all dead, that Christopher Columbus discovered the Americas and Vasco da Gama discovered us.

“The way we are taught our history is an endless repetition of the perpetrators story in which crusaders are shining knights, not massacring mercenaries, wars are glorious, conquers noble” (Morales 1998: 18). The violent stripping of our other ways of being which starts when we are children entering the classroom marks our separation from the ‘other’, the more classrooms we

⁹² Shaída Khan, my aunty for 40years of teaching primary school.

find ourselves in the deeper the chasm, creating an uprooting, the ascendance of zero-point which promises emancipation and freedom, but at a cost? (Icaza 2015). The realisation of what we have lost, hits and it hits hard! For as M. Jacqui Alexander (2015: 346) reminds us in *Pedagogies of Crossing* “there is a cost associated with taking refuge in the borrowed gifts of alienation that cultivate the practice of forgetting”. We may experience this weeding out of the false memories (Morales 1998) of self as violent, the ego of the “false self” (hooks 2001: 38) protests violently, we may become ill, have an accident, or experience this shift in a traumatic way, “[t]he first aftershock hits”, (Anzaldúa 2015: 121). It is here that the flesh starts to speak to us and the mnemonic body remembers. At first, we are unintelligible to each other and ourselves, each identity jostling for position, asking for attention, a triage of wounds all life-threatening.

Life-threatening because we have gotten used to being in a system directed at death. With regards to research, by internalizing the logics of extraction, consumption, expropriation and theft inherent in knowledge production, our false self comes to see itself as part of the academic machinery (see Leyva Solano 2019; Suarez-Krabbé 2015 and Rutazibwa 2019), viewing any act of dissent against the university as a personal attack. In an attempt at damage-control the false self seeks refuge in representation, leveraging identity to salvage vestiges of its crumbling facade. This is where we must be cautious, resisting the “impulse to take the beating in order to be worthy of holding the whip” (Harney & Moten 2021: 56). We can easily be led astray by the vain attempts of the false self to centre the ‘I’, becoming entrapped by the distraction of making ourselves intelligible to modernity/coloniality, a “self-imperialism” (Anzaldúa 2009) which in the end diverts us away from the very liberation we seek.

For this reason, liminagraphy delinks from knowledge production, rather situating itself and us in the fertile soil of knowledge cultivation (Shilliam 2015, see also Sheik, forthcoming2). This detaching from the zero-point, coupled with the decolonizing of the self and the emergence of the plural self, results in a rooting which makes liminagraphy incompatible with disciplinarity and methodology. With regards to the former, disciplines carry the codes of imperialism and colonialism whilst functioning as one of the ways in which its story is regulated and realised

(Tuhiwai-Smith 1999). Relatedly, these codes are transferred into methodology, the framework of rules, analysis and processes which govern disciplines, and as such creates an ‘epistemic closure’ (Hlabangane 2018). “The very idea of ‘methods’ follows the imperial need for certainty and stability. It is antithetical to ambiguity and flux” (Hlabangane 2018: 670). Given the constant motion in liminagraphy, space is opened up for knowledges emerging from the flesh, which is not possible through traditional methodological approaches like autobiography, reflexivity, autoethnography and self-study which are situated within the epistemic closure. Emerging from the borderlands liminagraphy does not carry the codes of colonialism and imperialism, but rather the traces of its violence embedded in the flesh. The act of healing the colonial wound, its orientation towards reaching out for relations and its horizon of collective liberation, precludes any desire for predictability, control or stability.

I am not your data, nor am I your vote bank,
I am not your project, or any exotic museum object,
I am not the soul waiting to be harvested,
Nor am I the lab where your theories are tested,

I am not your cannon fodder, or the invisible worker,
or your entertainment at India habitat center,
I am not your field, your crowd, your history,
your help, your guilt, medallions of your victory.

I refuse, reject, resist your labels,
your judgments, documents, definitions,
your models, leaders and patrons,
because they deny me my existence, my vision, my space.

Your words, maps, figures, indicators,
they all create illusions and put you on pedestal,
from where you look down upon me.

So I draw my own picture, and invent my own grammar,
I make my own tools to fight my own battle,
For me, my people, my world, and my Adivasi self!

~Abhay Xaxa (2016)

Liminagraphy has no data, no fieldwork, no triangulation nor validity, because we've tried that and invariably the "...zero-one, zero-one as it sorts thoughts, affects, flesh, information, nerves, in ever more precise and minute attributes of duplicate separation. In short, this rhythm becomes an algorithm. Everything it captures, everything it invades, everything it settles is set with a beat that is compelled to hear itself everywhere, feel itself everywhere" (Harney & Moten 2021: 56). Put another way, this "seemingly transparent data" in the form of policies, reports, white papers, etc., "prove that those communities living outside normalcy are verifiably outside normalcy" (McKittrick 2021: 4). The unsustainability of the zero-point.

Liminagraphy's onto-epistemological anchor in the flesh and crossings in the borderlands is made intelligible through storytelling. Stories - knowledges and theorizing - emanating from the flesh cannot be coded or quantified, it is fugitive evading capture. In liminagraphy there are no research subjects nor participants, no subjects and objects, no 'other', only the relations which hold us accountable (Wilson 2008). The stories shared are not substitutions for data, case studies or analysis, "[t]he story has no answers" (McKittrick 2021: 6; see also Cairo 2021). The significance of storytelling in liminagraphy lies in its drawing from the deep well of oral tradition, which has always been our way of sharing knowledge, through lessons. This act of sharing wisdom requires and encourages listening, not the mere hearing⁹³ of the false self, the 'I'. Here Aminata Cairo's (2021) guidance in the practice of listening is one of the seeds which cross pollinates liminagraphy. In the reaching out for relations, in the cultivation of knowledge listening is practiced by:

- Committing to engaging in a practice of listening to connect with and honour someone's story, whilst acknowledging that the sharing does not take away from either story, but rather shoes their connectedness.
- Listening in order not to retain information or extract, nor problem solve or interject.
- Witnessing and tuning in, giving the storyteller our full attention, being present, and non-judgemental.
- Being in the space of reception, breathing deeply, calming the mind and receiving, giving space for the story to sink in.

⁹³ For the difference between hearing and listening see Cairo (2021) *Holding Space*, page 226.

- Be willing to extend outside ourselves through compassion, sincerity and a willingness to connect.
- Listening with the intention of affirming.

This summary of the chapter ‘Listening and Connecting’ in Cairo’s (2021) *Holding Space* is the fleshy knowledge encased by the seed covering which cracks when shared, revealing the co-creation of knowledge, whilst honouring the relations that brought us here.

Liminal Hangouts: A Podcast

Listen: <https://anchor.fm/zuleika-bibi-sheik/episodes/Introducing-Liminal-Hangouts-e175tq9>



In honouring the relations that co-created liminagraphy, the following section takes the form of a podcast. The lessons presented below have no linearity, they are not steps for doing a liminagraphy. Each episode features one or more of the relations (but only some of the many) who have shared their wisdom with us. These are the relations that hold the ‘me’ in ‘we’ accountable, in a reaching out for us. These episodes are but a cross-section of conversations, WhatsApp chats, Zoom calls, and voice notes over the past seven years which led to the emerging of liminagraphy. It all started with the question: *in what ways can we cultivate knowledge that is epistemically non-violent in the context of the racialised, gendered, colonial, neoliberal university?*

Lesson: Who is learning from Whom with Rosalba Icaza

Listen: <https://anchor.fm/zuleika-bibi-sheik/episodes/Who-is-learning-from-Whom-with-Rosalba-Icaza-e172grg>



Tejiéndonos en – May we continue weaving an us

It is through our relations that we learn to “become in/with ideas rather than just learning about those ideas⁹⁴” (Sheik and Dupuis, forthcoming). In liminagraphy this cross-pollinating across difference does not lead to the death of knowledges (epistemicide) nor the enclosure of representation (knowledges as imitation) but rather leads to growth and the expansion of knowledge (Vázquez, 2020). Through practicing, radical questioning and learning to unlearn together we make those crossings to each other’s worlds where epistemic shifts are possible (Lugones, 2003). In liminagraphy we come to see difference as the fiction of domination, becoming aware that homogenization is the plot twist aimed at creating conflict in order to keep us separate. Re-orienting ourselves to ‘non-dominant difference’ we gain the courage to knock on the doors of our mirror-image (Lorde, 2017 [1979]; Lugones, 2003). We learn together how to become unafraid through affirmation and nurturing, such that our re-existence and coming to voice is held with a deep sense of responsibility. In so doing, we unravel the dominant story and its focus on death moving from ‘epistemic non-violence’ to ‘life-affirming practices’.

⁹⁴ Translation by Constance Dupuis of: “a través de como es estar en / con las ideas, en lugar de solo aprender sobre esas mismas ideas.”

Lesson: Being Together with Erasmus School of Colour (ESOC)

Listen: <https://anchor.fm/zuleika-bibi-sheik/episodes/Being-together-with-Erasmus-School-of-Colour-e166f44>



Andihambi Ndongwa. I walk with many

Often times academia leaves us speechless. Between the silencing and censoring, when we do feel brave enough to open our mouths, the fear of saying the wrong thing, not using the correct terms or pronouns, being blamed for the discomfort our words raise, being publicly shamed, called out and berated, constricts our throats, steals the air out of our lungs, makes our palms sweat, causing our hearts to race and minds to blank out. The stress and anxiety shut down all potential for learning together, it pits us as opponents, denies our kinship and relation. So, to survive in this hostile environment we create a persona, a “false self” (hooks 2001: 38). A master at critiquing, finding gaps, demonstrating excellence and intelligence through the decimation of another, we are ruthless, cunning, competitive, over-confident and intimidating. We live in constant fear of being found wanting, afraid of the day when it will be us on the receiving end of the venom we so callously dish out.

It is by being together that we overcome the limitations of this false self. Through the individuation of the academic process we become separated, where any acts against the university’s monoculture is regarded as suspect. When in actuality it is the university that steals our ability to be together in ways that are not regulated, “the theft of assembly” (Harney & Moten 13). Yet, being together is the salve we need in order to heal from the violence. By being positioned in the borderlands, liminagraphy open ups space for the possibility of creating physical safe spaces together through loving and radical friendship. In these spaces we dialogue, create, write, unlearn and learn, ask questions and then more questions. We laugh, we rejoice, we reclaim the joy usurped by the university – the joy of learning together. By reclaiming space that is within

and outside the university we begin to theorize our everyday, unleashing the creative potential of being together.

Lesson: Finding our Rhythm with Anima Jhagroe-Ruissen

Listen: <https://anchor.fm/zuleika-bibi-sheik/episodes/Finding-our-Rhythm-with-Anima-Jhagroe-Ruissen-e173l2e>



*Yatho Hasta thatho Drishti, Yatho Dristi thatho Manah
Yatho Manah thatho Bhaava, Yatho Bhaava thatho Rasa*

Where the hands go the eyes, where the eyes go the mind
Where the mind goes there is expression of inner feeling
Where there is inner feeling there is *Rasa*⁹⁵

~ Natyashastra

There is a rhythm we have gotten used to, the “zero-one” the humdrum of modernity’s march towards death. “It is a rhythm of commodity production, internally disrupted at its origin. The first beat renders each commodity separate, bordered, isolated from the next. The second beat renders everything equal to every other thing. The first beat makes everything discrete. The second beat makes everything the same” (Harney & Moten 2021: 55). Yet, it is not the only rhythm as it would have you believe. There is a harmonious cacophony of rhythms emanating from the borderlands, unintelligible to colonial logics which perceives it as discord, as incongruous, as noise. The co-motion radiating from the borderlands as we move, dance, circulate, stamp out feet, beat our drums instead of each other, counters the silencing we have become accustomed to. In healing the separation, we escape the purity (Lugones 2003) of colonial

⁹⁵ Excerpt from the *Natyashastra* provided by Anima Jhagroe-Ruissen.

aesthetics (Vázquez 2020), our plural selves start a *raga*⁹⁶, beating the *parai* drum and *ighubu*, chumming the ghungroos, blowing the *vuvuzela*, strumming the sitar, clapping *taal* as together we enter *rasa*⁹⁷ – that space of transformation. Following *tala*⁹⁸ our hands guide us in cyclical harmony as we question our collective being.

Lesson: Listening as a Practice with Constance Dupuis and Nanna Kirstine Leets Hansen

Listen: <https://anchor.fm/zuleika-bibi-sheik/episodes/Listening-with-Constance-Dupuis--Nanna-Kirstine-Leets-Hansen-e176ck6>



Mujer que lucha por la vida - The women who fight for life

Who are the relations that hold us accountable? In liminagraphy ethics are collective and relational. We are allowed to falter, to make mistakes and missteps – these are the moments of unlearning which cause the most discomfort yet offers the greatest lessons. These moves are what shatter the ideas of perfection and purity (Lugones, 2003) inherent in colonialism-imperialism-patriarchy-white-supremacy (hooks 1984). We come to “hold space” (Cairo, 2021) honouring the journey of each other, knowing that in the co-motion in the borderlands we all are never at the same place at the same time. We hold space with compassion and care, resisting the urge to be quick to anger or snap judgments. In this space we unlearn the fears that kept us separate and, in the leaps, made in reaching out for relations we come to trust that someone will catch us, and over and over again in this act of receiving we come to see the myth of the individual. In this unravelling of the self our identities will start to jostle for position, the individual

⁹⁶ Raga, literally meaning colour in Sanskrit, raga is a melodic framework of improvisation which has the ability to ‘colour the mind’ and affect the sensing of the audience.

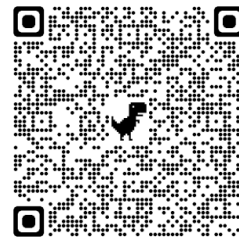
⁹⁷ Rasa is a concept from Indian aesthetics which evokes sensing that is indescribable. In this space the primary goal of art is to transport us (both performer and audience) to a parallel reality (the borderlands), where we touch the essence of our consciousness and reflect on spiritual, moral and ethical questions.

⁹⁸ Tala literally means clapping, either hands, hands on body or cymbals – which creates musical meter. In classical Indian music, tala forms a metrical system that repeats in cyclical harmony.

‘I’ grabbing onto any one identity to barter with in order to ensure its survival, at this stage we will need our relations, these are the ones who hold us accountable. The emergence of the plural self is accompanied by a quietening that’s necessary for listening, here we exit the space of enunciation and the politics of representation and enter the “era of reception” a space of hosting, receiving difference, reciprocity and radical intimacy (Vázquez, 2020). It is from this space that we recognize how to position ourselves in order to practice research that is life-affirming.

Lesson: Being/Becoming with Luthando Ngema and Charmika Samaradiwakera Wijesundara

Listen: <https://anchor.fm/zuleika-bibi-sheik/episodes/BeingBecoming-with-Luthando-Ngema--Charmika-Samaradiwakera-Wijesundara-e176ikc>



Umntu Ngumuntu Abantu – I am because we are

Who have we been made to become? In whose image? In Liminagraphy we start with this ‘being’, modernity’s “authoritative I” (Vazquez 2020), the “imperial I” (Hlabangane 2018) the “propertied self” (Harney & Moten, 2021) by recognizing within ourselves the one who has come to internalise their oppression. From there we must shift⁹⁹, return to the borderlands and enter the liminal space of *nepantla*¹⁰⁰, the space of transformation (Anzaldúa 2015). During nepantla, our worldviews and self-identities, are shattered. Nepantla is painful, messy, confusing, and chaotic; it signals unexpected, uncontrollable shifts, transitions and changes. Nepantla hurts!!!!” (Keating 2006: 8-9). This, shifting and moving, carving, rubbing and scratching, the commotion we cause is life unfolding, is the spiritual work of wounds healing. It is the motion of Ubuntu/Botho which “is the principle characteristic of being; it is the essence of life. In this sense, life is a universal wholeness. We speak here of a wholeness rather than a whole in order to underline and preserve the ontological primacy of the principle of motion on the one hand,

⁹⁹ See, ‘Now let us shift’ (Anzaldúa 2015).

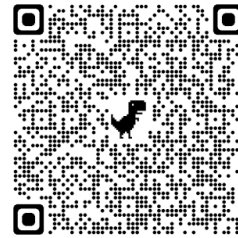
¹⁰⁰ The Nahuatl word for “in-between space” nepantla is used to refer to “the psychic/spiritual/material points of potential transformation. See, ‘Now let us shift’ (Anzaldúa 2015).

and, to stress its ubiquity, on the other. Indeed, motion cannot be divided into anything other than motion” (Ramose 2009: 72). This wholeness is not to be mistaken for the ‘unity’ of the nation state, which focusses on becoming a citizen or the ‘oneness’ of the New Age movement, which is preoccupied with personal development and well-being leaving social structures unquestioned (Keating 2006). In liminagraphy we start with our complicity, acknowledging without shame or judgement the ways in which we have participated in the erasure of other life worlds. This acceptance and choosing differently allows us to come to a “radical alternative complicity” (Moten & Harney 2020) where we resist the rigidity of identity through representation and return to motion that “serve[s] as reminders of each other’s search for wholeness of being” (Anzaldúa 2003: 20).

This being together in motion is what allows us to avoid the pitfalls of appropriation in the reclaiming of knowledges. That we do not consume dominant versions of ‘pure cultures and traditions’ from sources which extracted and expropriated parts of those knowledges which served it’s regime. Using liminagraphy as an approach to research practice that is orientated towards life, we turn to the flesh, ours and that of others. We learn together those knowledges surviving in the flesh through generations, the knowledges that have moved and continue to move, that breathe life into us. In this way we come to “be in/with ideas rather than just learning about those ideas” (Sheik and Dupuis, forthcoming), whilst also attending to the ‘double erasure’ of modernity/coloniality. Liminagraphy provides the fertile ground for the cross-pollination of knowledges which leads to growth across lineages and a strengthening of relationality. We honour and respect the lineage of each other’s knowledges, by accepting the limits of what is not for us, we show up for the struggles of the living descendants of those elders who were the knowledge keepers and start to build good relations with each other and all life on earth.

*Lesson: Writing our Collective Liberation with Rosa Itandehui
Olivera Chávez and Paulina Trejo Mendez*

Listen: <https://anchor.fm/zuleika-bibi-sheik/episodes/Writing-our-Collective-Liberation-with-Rosa-Itandehui-Olivera-Chvez-and-Paulina-Trejo-Mendez-e176kql>



*Aves que retornan*¹⁰¹ – The birds who return

In writing a liminagraphy we ask ourselves for whom are we writing? In writing together and writing for each other we reach out for relations across time and space. Invoking the deep wisdom of our ancestors (Xaba, 2021) we write for those silenced to death and through a “co-alitional ancestry” (Garcia, 2020), we honour the gifts of wisdom left for us. From the flesh, word by word, line by line, page by page we connect their struggles to our own, acknowledging our debt to them for a burden less severe. We connect to the long tradition of resistance to being erased and separated, keeping the memories of injustices and oppression in ink and paper, rather than flesh and blood. There is work we don’t have to do because others have done this work for us, we must continue building upon the knowledges painstakingly drawn from their flesh, in order to honour their bravery and courage in the face of oppressive regimes. We are here because they did the healing work, now we must continue, for the violence is on-going and we must try to stop it before it reaches the next generation, and the next, and the next....

We write for each other, our relations far and near in order to bring about harmony. We write from the borderlands, from the space where soul and spirit speaks to us, through our dreams, through the animals who visit us, and those relations who suddenly come into our lives with valuable lessons. We write these encounters and how we are changed by them, how it directs

¹⁰¹ A collaboration between Paulina Rebeldía and El Pasajero. Poem written by Paulina set to music by El Pasajero. Available at: <https://soundcloud.com/delpasajero/aves-que-retornan>

our politics and actions towards collective liberation. For these acts are the drops in the ocean, which create the waves of change.

*Asikishwe sibekwe e tala*¹⁰² – *The beginning*

Knowledge and our approaches to it are inextricably linked to our lives and the life of the earth. Whilst western epistemology has given us the tools to diagnose the ailments which compromise life, it does not offer the medicine so we may heal. In order to do so, it would have to admit its complicity in our wounding and the destruction of life, opening up to epistemic vulnerability and the ability to be affected by the stories of our ailments. In this untenable situation that we currently find ourselves in, specifically in the university, though we do not see this as separate from everyday life, the dominant logics of knowledge production directed towards extraction, consumption and expropriation is not concerned with affirming life. This “has always been the danger of the colonial archive and knowledge institutions: when we internalize coloniality as our compass and model for knowledge production, we impoverish ourselves, marginalize indigenous knowledges and alienate our ancestors (which is also the alienation from self)” (Xaba, 2021).

Liminagraphy is an attempt at practicing research that is life affirming. It does this by honouring the rhythms and seasons of life, of earth. It begins in the dark rich soil of the borderlands, the soil that should have touched our feet the moment we were born. The fertile soil which enriches the food we eat, that holds the trees which give us the air we breathe and that support every step we take. As we start to be nourished by the relations surrounding us, affected by their movements we enter into *nepantla*, confusing, disorientating and painful, the individual seed cracks open, shedding its former self and life unfurls as it breaks through the surface to reach the light. In this reaching out, the unfolding of flesh, it meets yet more relations, buzzing bees, crawling

¹⁰² Credo Mutwa’s (1998) *Indaba, My Children*. Let us move out into the light, let us emerge from the ground. Though *tala* is used, as isiZulu has evolved Mutwa could be referring to *obala* – meaning in the open or in the light. Translation and explanation provided by Luthando Ngema.

insects, flapping birds and the splash of rain, all that nourished it as it grows. It bears fruit in season, and when it is time sheds what it no longer needs and rests.

Liminagraphy is the wind that carries a seed, you – not as an individual, but as an entity that carries plurality within it – it honours your journey as one only you are intimate with and in the sharing of those experiences, you acknowledge a ‘we’, that the experiences in the flesh of your singular form only makes sense once you hit the ground and are nurtured by the soil, the rain, the nutrients, the earthworms, sun, and each other. Liminagraphy, like the flesh that holds the knowledges it brings forth, is temporary. When reading a liminagraphy we honour the telling of the growing season, we don’t try to copy or, replicate or generalise, we listen to the story and we take those seeds that we need for our garden, nurture them and allow them to germinate...to come to light.

8

Dawn

In the light of the golden hour at sunrise we walk. Held by the rose pink of soft morning light hinting at the coming of dawn. The birds begin their early calls urging the sun out of hiding. We walk in silence reflecting on the journey we have been on, sighing at how simple it all was in the end. The unfolding of life will always happen whether we are attentive to it or not. The passage of time between sunrise and sunset, the phases of the moon, the seasons, the tides, move with the rhythm of life. It is us who have become stuck, too rigid in our ways of control and attempting to prolong life whilst hurdling towards death, the counter intuitive beating of white-supremacist-capitalist-patriarchy (hooks, 1984). What possibilities arise in the slowing down and quietening of reception? (Vázquez, 2020).

*Out of the corner of our eyes we are started by a sudden swoop. There above our heads
perched on a tree branch above a buzzard. It's incredible wingspan causing the leaves to rus-
tle. Named a bird of prey by its predator, it only takes what it needs to survive,
then is accused of being lazy when it eats roadkill.
For a moment our eyes meet theirs
a calmness envelops the tight space
between skin and flesh
our vision sharpens in precision
and we see as it does
the flesh on our bones
and the urge to survive.
In acknowledgement
the buzzard takes off
knowing their message
has been received.*

Liminagraphy, like the flesh that holds the knowledges it brings forth, is temporary. "Writing ideas down fixes them as objects that can be taken out of context of time and relationship. As fixed objects, ideas lose the ability to grow and change, as those who hold relations with the ideas grow and change themselves. They lose their relational accountability" (Wilson, 2008: 123). Writing in liminagraphy is meant to honour the relations that have helped us grow,

coming together around a common question or project, we are collectively changed in the being together. Recording this process is to stave off further erasure, to survive, for there is a fine line between those stories we choose to give to the university and what we choose to keep to ourselves (McKittrick 2021; Moten and Harney, 2010, Simpson, 2007). In orientating ourselves toward life-affirming practices and being held relationally accountable by our co-creators we come to handle with care the ethical question: “whether we can live an ethical life in a world in which our wellbeing is dependent on the suffering of others and on the wasting away of Earth” (Vázquez, 2020: 143). In reorientating ourselves to an affirmation of life we may respond to this question by stating: we choose to live an ethical life doing what we can to not contribute to the harm and suffering caused to others, we start with our everyday actions, caring for ourselves, each other and the life of earth. Revolution is not a one-time event (Lorde, 2017[1979]) and we are here, in it for the long haul. Every morning at the break of dawn, we give thanks for the gifts we have received, the gift of friendship, of laughter, of joy, holding hands and hugging each other, for we know how quickly these precious gifts can be taken away.

Let us pause for a moment to reflect on the steps we have taken to reach this sunrise. First by returning to the questions in the first proposal of this thesis:

This study, framed within the emerging culture-centered approach to development communication aims to valorise the Kat River community as agents of change, by exploring their perceptions of the meaning and expectations of development. This leads into an interrogation of the relevance of the hegemonic nature of dominant rationalist discourses of development, as compared to local understandings of development discourse. This study will provide a nuanced exploration of the ways in which dominant and local discourses of development, either compliment or contradict each other, thereby leading to development that values community agency in light of government policy.

The valuable lesson held in the framing of this excerpt is the questioning of the dominant. More importantly, the position from which these questions are being asked matters. In the use of dominant developmentalist jargon, the positionality with the zero-point of western epistemology dangles somewhere in the nowhere of an objective observer and an innocent subjectivity. The instability of this mutating positionality enables the researcher to hold on to power whilst claiming to help, wanting to affect change, but being unwilling to change to make it happen. This is the enigma of knowledge production, most visible to those at the margins of academia which inevitably led to the statement: *'I am no longer willing to use the methodologies that have been complicit in my own dehumanization'*. A door is opened holding the question: *In what ways can we cultivate knowledge that is epistemically non-violent in the context of the racialized, gendered, colonial, neoliberal university?* In searching for a methodology which would not cause harm, what we had not realised at the time is that we were already doing it. We were already building relations, through other relations, *!ke e: lxxarra llke - people who are different meet*. We were already building trust, respect and reciprocity, having conversations inside and outside the university, resisting the silencing, making our own spaces, opening the doors of our homes, walking together, being collectively in awe of the setting sun over the North sea, eating together, marching together, protesting together – we were already doing the things academia wanted us to prove we were doing. Those who know “they were never meant to survive” (Lorde, 1978) hold life with a reverence and respect for its transitory nature acknowledging that holding on to it too tightly is like trying to hold onto smoke with your hands.

Through the lessons in this thesis, we have come to learn together in questioning *whom is learning from whom* attending to our complicity and the relations that hold us accountable through collective practices like hand-in-hand and writing together. In *refusing* the colonial logics of separability in the university we have come to see *being together* as an important lesson in revitalizing our spirits and healing our wounds, creating safe spaces for unlearning to learn through decolonizing the self and the senses. In learning to *find our rhythm* we have embraced the dancer, musician, storyteller and poet within, changing the beat of isolation to a crescendo of ruckus and riotous celebration of life, writing through liminagraphy the lyrics, poems and folktales tucked away in the flesh. Through deep listening we have come to receive,

to be open to being held accountable in caring and compassionate ways through radical intimacy, friendship and love. In this magnificent unfolding of *being/becoming* in motion, in the constant ebbs and flows of life's rhythm –we have come to see how our everyday actions can take us away from these relations causing spiritual disharmony. In encountering each other across our non-dominate differences we start to dream our collective liberation, we call it into existence through merely being together, writing, drawing, painting, sculpting, audio recording, playing music, invoking within each other that sense of *rasa*, the space of transformation.

Sunrise

We pass by the *basisschool*, as parents drop off their children, we hear words of comfort in Polish, of encouragement in Dutch and of reassurance in Mandarin. We wonder *who is learning from whom*. We continue through the paved streets, near the trash cans we see a group of seagulls fiercely fighting over a loaf of bread, ain't that a metaphor for the scarcity logics of capitalism. Reaching the edge of the park, we see a couple of Egyptian geese guiding their ducklings to the canal. Crossing the street, we reach the threshold teeming with life as the first rays of light nourish the leaves. We pass by the animal farm for children, surprised by the peacocks who somehow escaped their enclosure and were now eating with the sheep, even fences could not keep them from *being together*. As our gaze shifts to the ground we see a colourful chalk-drawn hopscotch grid, 1, 2, 34, 5, 67, 8 we take turns hopping and jumping, laughing at the jiggling of aging flesh. *Finding our rhythm*, remembering that the hops on one foot are a necessary inward journey as important as the jumps with both feet if we want to move. Reaching *Rijswijksebos* we breathe deeply walking amongst the sturdy trunks rooted in the soil. A couple walks by and greets us with a 'hi', as the woman passes by my nose picks up the familiar scent of coconut oil from her hair. A surge through time and space I feel Chatsworth, the tap-tap of my mother's hand on the top of my head, as she felt of the tap-tap of her mother's hand on the top of her head, as she felt the tap tap of her mother's hand on her head, as she felt the tap-tap of her mother's hand on her head as they sat on the ground in South India. The tap-tap of home within home.

You ask if I'm alright, my flesh is tired. We sit on a bench, the sun on our faces, we watch the breeze create waves in the grass. We are *being/becoming* I say and some times that hurts. After a while in silence, we start to circle back. My feet start to burn, blisters on the souls. You hear the authoritative-I say maybe you shouldn't have walked so much, maybe...or maybe I just need new shoes, or perhaps no shoes at all. Suddenly we jolt at a loud screeching sound, overhead a heron takes off cawing away. We laugh at our knee-jerk reaction, how sometimes we hear but do not *listen*. We're surprised that this morning nearly everyone we passed by greeted us. Hi, Morge, Hello, Hoi. That's because we move different now, our heads held high with dignity, our eyes aware to our surroundings, open to receiving. We pass by the *basisschool* again, this time we hear a child wailing, a stark reminder of the violence of the classroom, we know that there is still work to do. But for now, we must rest.

Perhaps you've already noticed that liminagraphy begins in the dark. In the darkness which envelops an embryo in the womb or the seed in the soil we need to be patient with ourselves and each other. We are not the sum total of the violence meted out to us by the state and oppressive regimes, who perpetuate inequality in order to hold power. "We are the consequences of dreams deferred and opportunities unseized¹⁰³" (Sheik and Dupuis, forthcoming).

There is no conclusion, no final answer, there are so many more questions. Now, as the body which holds this flesh begins to tire from the state of *nepantlera* – holding space and being a conduit – it is time to rest. I, an unstoried-plural-enfleshed I, will go to those relations who have always grounded, revived and nurtured my weary flesh. The children, the next generation. To the ones who see life in all its boundless opportunity, our littlest teachers, the children, whose love is given unconditionally and without reservation. A healing, soothing and joyous love which makes us feel undeserving of its magnitude. For we no longer see ourselves as they see themselves and they see us as we used to see ourselves. These teachers hold the biggest lessons for us as our flesh starts to age, they force us to be present, to come down to their level, to listen deeply for meaning in their half-formed words, and jumbled semi-developed

¹⁰³ Translation from Spanish provided by Constance Dupuis.

sentences, they force us to dance and sing silly songs, to dress up in all the colours of the rainbow, they force us to chase them around the yard, go down the slide with them, respond to their numerous questions which are almost always met with yet another why, never satisfied with the answer. They remind us not to be satisfied with simplistic answers. They are totally dependent on us for their well-being, and we have forgotten that we too are totally dependent on others for our well-being. They remind us of who we used to be before we became rigid and hardened into self-preservation. They do this with a force as gentle as a feather landing on our arm. Their enfleshed knowing is closest to the surface, it bubbles out through their laughter and excited yelps, equally in their tantrums and outbursts. They remind us it's okay to make up words when you can't find the right one:

ah-dika-dika
whoisdat
relitisation
cree
cutie-pie factory
in-level
rainbow-unicorn
puka-puka
liminagraphy

In affirming life, we honour the lives of the next generation and those yet to be born. We plant them a garden worthy of their love, we sow seeds of hope, magic, wonder and delight. We tend to the garden so other relations may visit them and teach them - buzzing bees, crawling insects, tweeting birds and fleshy worms; they grow as the garden grows. For in the transience of flesh we know there are only so many seasons left.

Sapling

On a balmy night, during monsoon season, convened the council of elders. Some swayed in their opinions whilst others held fast. The great African Baobab had spoken to them in dreams and it was clear that their inaction could not remain. Simply inhaling carbon dioxide and exhaling oxygen was not enough. The oxygen only seemed to fuel logging and rampant deforestation, a genocide of their kin. "What should we do then, hold our breath?" shouted a gnarled trunk. A long silence followed.

“The citrus trees to the South have already started to produce fruit that is sour and the apple trees in the North have dropped their babies half-developed. The trees in the West have all but ignored Great Baobab’s call, should we do the same?” offered a middle-aged deciduous.

“Do the same! Do the same! The ancient Oaks of the West do nothing, as the Baobabs are dying! The coldness of the climate has crept into their roots, turned their hearts cold. They are as quick to drop their kin as their leaves during the first sign of wintertide” bellowed the hollow of a grand rugged frame.

The horizontal sheets of monsoons fiery tears fell upon their luscious green leaves, as they contemplated their uncertain future. The decision weighed heavy on their canopies and caused their shoulders to slump.

In their resigned misery they did not notice the rain change shape and begin to fall in the pattern of sacred mandalas. Mariyamman, the Goddess of healing and rain, appeared to them in the form of a Neem tree, ever-green with arms spread wide as if awaiting an embrace.

She spoke, a melodic sound of raindrops upon a body of water, “what troubles you?” she asked the burdened trees.

They all spoke at once, with a deafening sound of leaves rustling in a howling wind.

“You, little sapling, tell me what’s the matter?” she cajoled.

The tentative sapling retold their dilemma whilst Mariyamman listened with care and concern.

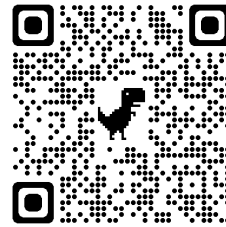
“And tell me little sapling, what would you do?” she asked.

The sapling looked around uncertain, afraid of the might of its much larger comrades. Deep within stemmed an unshakable voice, “our roots are all connected in Bhumi Devi, we feel the pain as our kin are slaughtered, we cannot breathe when knees pin down our brothers and hack them to pieces, and we suffer the loss of all those lives dependent on him. There is no choice, to live in pain in order to stay rooted to a world being consumed is not living. We have to act”. The other trees stood with mouths gaping to hear such wisdom from one so young. “You have your answer, do what you must, make the pain

stop” she breathed as her form melded with the droplets of rain and dissipated. Wordlessly the branches of the Karuṅkāli¹⁰⁴ trees lifted their saris and dashed onto the flooded street, forcing down their roots, cracking the tarred surface and planting their roots deep into the soil. As their imposing figures blocked the path of the loggers and fellers, a sapling, small yet mighty, is given a chance to breathe.

A Grounding Meditation

Listen: <https://anchor.fm/zuleika-bibi-sheik/episodes/A-Grounding-Meditation-e17a6u6>



¹⁰⁴ Ebony



Artist: Nazrina Rodjan (2021) |

To the womb that connects us

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Parti

Nani

Ma

Mum

Aunties

Nina

Fats

Saaraa

Ella

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Within these pages
rest
the words of ancestors
held in shackled hearts
whispered ear to ear
waiting for the day
when
one of us
would be free (enough)
from

all systems of oppression
racism
sexism
caste
ableism
colonialism
imperialism
apartheid
patriarchy
capitalism

To allow our healing to begin

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IN THE DEPTHS OF THE KALA PANI¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁵ In Hindi means black waters, referring mainly to the Indian Ocean. By crossing this ocean many Indians believed they would lose their caste, social standing and cultural identity.

I live between many lives
and one
always betrays the other

~ displaced

134

Citizen

Decapitated balloons
float
disembodied, defleshed

backbone un-wound
string un-tethered
self-unknown

executed empty vessels
march
decollated
dis-tinct
into glass skyscrapers
concrete offices

breathless
dis-illusioned
floating there in the upper floors

safely away from
ground
land
plantation
field

enslaved instead
by four corners of a desk
betrayed by its own wood

Tsunamis

In her eyes
tsunamis dance on sheer cliffs
never falling

receding
they are blinked absent
apologized away

defeated in a battle of will
they retreat down choke point
salting her insides
congealing in dissent
preparing for war

and in the blanket of night
they mount a charge
and weep between her legs

Mothers and Daughters

Let me know
when you're ready to come home
She thinks it every time
but never says it

She birthed a free spirit
that crisp August morning
She was not about to ask her
to return to the womb

I don't know
when I will be ready to come home
She thinks it every time
but never says it

She was born on the cusp of power changing hands
from white to black
one world collapsed
many took its place
She was not about to tell her
the womb is too small

So there they stand
on opposite banks
as silence descends
between the space of
woman and home

Suspended

She lost herself in a foreign land
too weary to go out
too scared to stay in

The voices, the voices
they will not stop
their words exactly
she cannot grasp

She found herself
with both hands empty
too tired to change
too drained to stay the same

The doctors, the doctors
they only prescribe
their pills precisely
she cannot gulp

On two shaky feet
there she stands
frozen in time
too exhausted to return home
too shattered to remain

138

After Dark

Thoughts dance circles
under her eyes
every pounding step
bruising

purple
blue
black

Nights boxing match
with sleep
she taps out
in defeat

Black Sun

Clouds hang low
 blanketing those beneath
 in dusk's golden glow
 we stand
 black silent spikes
 like those on the walls
 prisoning
 homes
 in
 Chatsworth
 Umlazi
 Lamontville
 Phoenix
 KwaMashu
 Wentworth
 Cato Manor

in our thousands
 common, innocuous
 stoic statues
 in deep meditation
 we wait

as the last rosy ray
 of sun's dying wish
 lands upon the tip
 of our iklwa¹⁰⁶

inspirited

¹⁰⁶ IsiZulu – meaning short spear

140

we shiver and shake
galvanizing swiftly
we melt and murmur
one after the other
until there is no
one or other

wings fan feathers
countless ihawu¹⁰⁷
pierce the skies

maneuver left
we di(v)e
ascend right
how can we survive?

black suns of the night
whose irises shine stars
mistaken for gems
eye for an eye
bleeds blood diamonds
as we cry,
“where are our stolen fathers?”

Clouds hang low
blanketing those beneath
in dusk’s golden glow

as the star-lings take flight

¹⁰⁷ IsiZulu – Nguni shield

Fall

Waiting in vein
crunchy yellow
red raindrops
pirouette through the sky

autumn leaves letters
under her door
each one says

its time

let go

142

Semelparous

The sun spins out of control
holding on to dusk's last hope
the blanket of darkness comes
and it's too late

Eight voracious tentacles
reach out
teeth bared
seeking out flesh

Four take over her limbs
sinking their mandibles deep

Two slither over
seal shut her eyes

One bites into her back
until it reaches bone
mimicking spine

Before her mouth
Whales out a NO!
the last tentacle
teeth on teeth
gags her scream

Immobilised
blood siphons black
black bleeds protest
of this
parasitic containment

As mantle crowns head's
commandeered captive

entwined
ink spills
and heavy they sink

into *kala pani*'s arms
to the depths of the depths
where no light reaches

Kali calls out
surrender she says
the darkness serves you

for in its
Semelparous subversion
where
death anchors life

liberation awaits

NOMANSLAND

Sewing Lesson

She took needle and thread
pulled her lips together
sewed them shut

pleasure's partner pain

of men who took
beautiful flowers
pulverized them for
putrid perfume

pleasure's partner shame

of men who took
blissful peace
weaponized it for
waging war

Oh divine mother
what have we done

birthed beasts who
barged into our bodies
violate our sacred spirit

and then call themselves men

Seeking Immortality

Ready yourself every day to
meet your maker

Pray five times a day
Follow the five pillars of Islam
Treasure the gift of this body lent to you by your Maker
So, when your time comes
Inshallah you may be accepted into *Jannah*

Cover up this borrowed body
Keep it hidden from men's shameful eyes
For the sin will be yours not theirs

Keep your body covered
your gaze lowered
your voice pleasant
your movements silent

so, when the time comes to meet your Maker
Inshallah you may be accepted into *Jannah*

Cover up those bludgeoned bruises
Keep it hidden from society's betraying eyes
For the sin will be yours not theirs

Keep your body covered
your gaze lowered
your voice pleasant
your movements silent

so, when the time comes to meet your Maker
Inshallah you may be accepted into *Jannah*

Where virginity restores
you join 39 of your sisters
to spend an eternity in *Jahannam*
qurbani for the circumcised pleasure of men

who told you

Keep your body covered
your gaze lowered
your voice pleasant
your movements silent

so, when the time comes to meet your Maker
Inshallah you may be committed to *Jannah*

The War in Nomansland

Lockdown the offensive begins
a two arm-ed force
in-coming
tears pooling
erupting
on trembling cheeks
slapped

the war rages
on faces acid
with wombs smashed
defending fingers broken
with ribs snapped
running legs attacked
with skulls cracked
blood dripping
coalescing
on incarcerated hands
trapped

Ceasefire
white flag raised

crawling away
beside his de/feat
curl up into a ball
plead

But he turns on that
Kuthu beat
whose notes ferry her
across *kala pani's* deceit

swaddled, rocking
from *Nani's* arms

to *Parti's* feet

landing on Mother's back
back on Mother's land

Scorched earth
Hot, too hot,
camphor snaps
flames crackle
logs pop

Until *Ganga-Ma's* jaw drops
swallows her whole

150

Rutte-ing Season

Stay indoors

There is a pandemic

intelligent lockdown

don't get in a rut

go for a walk

frisse neus halen

1.5m

social distance

100m

leering Lexus

200m

waving Audi

300m

ogling bicycle

400m

cats call

500m

wolves whistle

600m

pedestrian silence

2 pairs of eyes stare

as if death herself walked by

700m

drop your head

800m

look at your feet

900m

keep walking

1km

There is a pandemic

Stay indoors

152

Sugar and spice

Our bodies
had to be loved into being

It is not for you
your greedy gaze
nor glutinous compliments

Our bodies
already ravaged
when we were
underdeveloped
but skin and bone
sugar and spice and all things nice

Our bodies
devoured
before we could say NO!

What was left
had to be claimed back
from darkness

Our bodies
had to be
coaxed into existence
caressed by loving thoughts
convinced of morning's light

Our bodies
had to be loved into being
It is not for you

SPIRIT AWAKEN

A field full of dandelions
wait patiently
for afternoon's breeze

~ the ancestor's call

Roadmap

I am going nowhere
both paths lead to death
so I turn back
to the past
pull it into the present

Take the path back
it's the only one that leads to home

Scream at the horrors along its spinal column
howl at the injustices slated on my ancestors' backs

A lifetime of healing
Taken one step at a time
Right, left, right, left
feet patter
over puddles of tears

I look up
greeted by my *Nani*
holding a flask of ginger tea
a comforting hand placed on my back

Her sari flutters in the cool breeze
Her jewelry sparkles in the warm sun

"Are you here to walk with me?" I ask

"No. I brought my truck"

"Truck? I didn't know you could drive?"

With a knowing smile she says
“I don’t, but we do,
Akatikku ākāsamēy tunai”
Heaven helps the helpless

Pitchachi

At midnight's fury
she entered the world
as her mother howled her last breath
she took her first

the innocent *kala pani* cradled
the SS Truro on which she was born
its stillness broken only to swallow her mother whole

Mother's body
Mother land
desecrated
discarded
and then dissolved

the inauspicious blood moon smiled down upon her
as the rest of the indentured
recoiled
retracted
“*Pitchachi*”, they screeched

her mother's sin imprinted
skin raven
eyes sanguine
hair slithering coils

banished by Parvati
heavens denied
colonized by empire
humanity denied

158

orphaned she arrives
on the shores of *Unkulunkulu's* star-spangled land
now under control of alabaster hands

through sweet nectar filled prison bars
she is watched
a kiss of death
2 metres long
lies in wait

their eyes finally meet
iMamba emnyama

orphaned no more
sisters reticulate
in knowing that the scales of justice
are only skin deep

Eclipse

For an eternity
he danced on barbed wire
between shadow and light
belonging and retreating

Whilst twilight swept away the last rays of sun
He walked through dunes of time and waves of memory

Astounded by his beauty
the night dropped all its stars
reaching out to touch his midnight skin

He looked up at the oil slick sky
hurling diamonds at his feet

When they finally embraced
their darkness became one
and in that nocturnal hour
they fell in love

And every night thereafter
he returned to him

During days he would pine and dance in circles
as the *kala pani* swirled around his longing hips
feet hastening the rotation of earth
just to see his love sooner
feel his ebony embrace
and raven-ous *bodhi*

During nights he would rejoice and regale his *Black Prince*

160

resting *Nataraja*'s feet in a salve of onyx
revived and rejuvenated by his lover's attention
only to be ambushed
by 6 degrees
below the horizon
cursing light's violent intrusion
he swears an oath of revolution

On *Laylat al-Qadr*
when night precedes day
his pounding pleading feet
pinion the earth

his body
turns axis
obscured with every rotation

and in that moment
shadow turns to smoke
and on the heavenly scent of lit *agrabathi*
he ascends to his beloved
shooting stars along the way

For he was the dark side of the moon and belonged to the night

Zulu Ekaharya

In her *kohl* rimmed eyes
smoldering embers
still burn
longing for
jasmine-d hair
and
mehndi-ed hands

chum chum
ghungroos displaced
silk sari unraveled
araku pillaged

long ago
she tied her *mundhani*
to a *bodhi* tree
set foot on the *Belvedere*
and crossed the *kala pani*
in a plain cotton sari

kuli in the fields of Natal
calloused hands
sweat drenched hair
a new role she asked *Nattuvanar*?

In the stillness of Maha Shivrathri
a distant *Ingungu* drum
Thak-dina-ka-dink
Tha-thin-tha

In her eyes a fire erupts

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Thak-dina-ka-dink
Tha-thin-tha

Her knees bow and feet start to move
Thak-dina-ka-dink
Tha-thin-tha

Her hands symbol words
Thak-dina-ka-dink
Tha-thin-tha

Her eyes speak
Oru vari kavitai kavitaikal
beautiful poetry
Thak-dina-ka-dink
Tha-thin-tha

Her body professes
a great new Indian epic
the Zulu *Ekaharya* is born

IqhawekaziRani

I am not a daughter of this soil
It is my adopted home
A home that cradles my orphaned soul

You say, I am not African
I am African
I am African in my heartbeat
I am African in my compassion
I am African in my generosity
I am African in my determination

It is the only reality I know

You say, I am not Indian
I am Indian
I am Indian in my breath
I am Indian in my kindness
I am Indian in my courageousness
I am Indian in my resilience

It is the only existence I know

I am a daughter of two Mothers
I cried for *Umama wasendiya*, as I was held by *Am'mā āppirikkā*
Do not ask me to choose!

Both have raised me
one breast feeding my fire
one breast feeding my spirit

My feet move to the rhythm of your drums

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one foot following the *tabla*
one foot following the *isigubhu*

It hurts *Am'mā āppirikkā*
It hurts *Umama wasendiya*

My tears fall at your feet
You catch me as they fall

My child, your heart beats with the rhythm of *Am'mā āppirikkā*
My child, your breath moves with the harmony of *Umama wasendiya*

My child, your body is Indian
My child, your being is African
Moving in perfect synchronicity

Rise *Qhawekazi*
Rise *Rani*
Rise, so you can raise others

BODIES RECLAIMED

166

Optical illusion

In meditation
her eyes roll back
dropping down her throat
landing in the center of her chest
now she sees clearly
what her heart already perceived
the *isigubhu*
which *kuthu* beats
the rhythm of life
is held by another
dropping down bloodstream
landing in the body of her womb
her vision recedes
a touch
from inside
remembers the navel
whose cord
holds dreams
she must be
willing to
receive

Women of Colour the Soil

Women of colour the soil
hands in fists
we see
we dream

Fingers uncurled
we dig
we scream
hands in the earth we plead
we bleed

Flesh revealed
we heave
we grieve
eyes water parched skin

we rupture

Women of colour the soil
does not part

Knuckles bone raw
we stop
we breathe
knees buckle to ground

we secede

Looking down at our chests
how do we begin to heal?

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Do not claw, do not dig
but start to feel
la facultad

Women of colour the soil does not part
from that which it is...from the start

Deliverance

With sand crystal speckled dark golden feet
she walks toward the receding shore
In the distance
sunset's swollen womb is pulled down towards seas open arms
a reluctant embrace

In she wades deeper and deeper
her hourglass hips submerge
water breaks water

Still deeper she goes
with salt glistening outstretched palms
to rescue the unborn
before they drown

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Bibi

The colour of soil drenched in morning's rain

Her blink sets suns
Calling on the night

Her eyes raise stars
Drawing in the light

Her breath pulls tides
crashing in waves from the top of her head

Her hips birth mountains
sloping down the hollows of her chest

Her hands flow rivers
mouthing between her legs

Her tongue catches time
ebbing through her veins

Her lips kiss death
while her feet dance with life

Sanctuary

Tall, timeless guardians stand watch
on an abode
lodged in Mother's lap
dwelling in her sweet breath

Where chirping neighbours nest
 bees hive
 fish dive
 squirrels hollow
 moles burrow

The sound of a gentle *om*

Safire light glints through tree tops
into her spacious heart
she smells of pine and earth

The house is alive
stagnant she flows
a tranquil stillness
evergreen

Deep breaths await
as peaceful moonlit nights
seduce
serene sun-kissed days

With a hand on her heart
and a smile on her face
she sighs
here lies sanctuary
home at last

172

RE-MIND

In a forest
that has been
logged for 500 years
the last tree
standing
was given
pencil and paper
and told
to tell their story

~ satya & ahimsa

a breath

1619	1860	2018
Slaves on your boat Trawling for greed Crowded as always Wrists bear Chains as their only chattels	Indentured labourers on your boat Sailing for Empire Crowded as always Arms carry Saris holding a few possessions	Migrants on a boat Floating for a better life Crowded as always Hands hold Parcels of belongings
Slaves on your boat Rowing for your gluttony Bodies as property	Indentured labourers on your boat Protected for profit Bodies as commodity	Migrants on a boat Sinking for sanctuary Bodies as disposable
Slaves on your boat Dying in captivity A breath for escape , one breath too many	Indentured labourers on your boat Drenched in servitude A breath for liberty , one breath too many	Migrants on a boat Drowning for freedom A breath for safety , one breath too many
Tides lash the ocean for its complicity The clouds darken and howl in humiliation	Swells thrash the kala pani for its collusion The moon winces and wanes in disgrace	Waves beat the sea for its connivance The sun recoils and dives down in

a day

400 years later
here she stand
on your shores

*I am here
I am breathing
Papers in hand*

“You speak English so well!”

_____ University is strongly committed to diversity within its community and especially welcomes applications from members of underrepresented groups.

“I regret to inform you that the committee has not selected you for the final shortlist”

The University of _____ is an equal-opportunity employer. We prioritise diversity and are committed to creating an inclusive environment for everyone. We value a spirit of enquiry and perseverance, provide the space to keep asking questions, and promote a culture of curiosity and creativity.

“Unfortunately, we decided not to invite you for the first round of interviews”

“Fuck off back to your country”

By morning
She serves you coffee
washes your cups
and filthy spoons
smiles when you say “*praat je Nederlands wel*”
400 years the *coolie* still serves

By afternoon
She assists in research and admin
teaches your children

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edits your papers
fixes your non-native mistakes
400 years the *baas* is still in charge

By night
she serves the ancestors
washes her body clean
learns as they teach her
to weave words into magic and
sentences into freedom
smiles when she hears them say

You are here
You are breathing
You will be erased

Feast

Knowledge
I am hungry for it
With gluttonous abandon
I devour it
Leaving you depleted
Exhausted
Drained
Still you come back for more

Why? Because I promised you something
A piece of paper
Legitimacy
A seat
A table

Ah...your ancestors fell for that too
So many generations, yet so little learned
Once a coolie, always a coolie

You say you are doing this for them
But you did not heed their warning
Silly, they could not read,
what's your excuse?
A print too small

You can stay here you know
and feed off the knowledge of others as I do
Drain them, deplete them, leave them worse off than before
Call this research
We will reward you, praise you
hell we'll even give you that piece of paper

Go on then...this is what you came for
Cannibalise yourself in the pursuit of knowledge
Gnaw on the bones of your ancestors
Drink their blood spilled in the (sugarcane) field
So that you may arise, anew...in my own image

And...whilst we drown you in a black gown
Think not of your ancestors draped in the *kala pani*
Think not of their sweat fertilizing the soil
Think not of their tears watering the sugarcane
Think not of their backs broken to sweeten my tea

Think instead that you are one of us now
and feast

White Innocence¹⁰⁸

One step forward two steps back

For every step we take forward
we will be held back by your pity
For every step we take forward
we will be held back by your shame

The burden of skin so deep

For every step back
we carry your dreams with us
For every step back
we carry your salvation with us

The burden of Sojourner

Look us in the eye
and see yourself reflected
Look at your hopes, fears and dreams
And see them as our own

Hold fast my hand and don't let go
Your fate is tied to mine
Hold fast my hand we were born of the same star
Hold fast my hand and embrace our differences
Your love is intertwined with my own
Hold fast my hand we are family reunited

Sing with me so our hearts can rejoice

¹⁰⁸ Based on Gloria Wekker's book *White Innocence* (2016).

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Align with me so our steps fall as one
Dance with me so liberation can be ours

COLLECTIVE LIBERATION

182

Liberate our senses

as we breathe
to die a self
suffocating
intestines snaked noose
inside our necks

touch our eyes
with words
we dream
while awake

our ears speak
tongues
taste lines
sung in silence

our lips read
visions
out of sight
in mind

our skin smells
verses
heard incense-d
by spirits

libertate our senses
as we breathe
life
back into
being

Roots and Moonbeams

Roots run deep
seeking you out
they crave, they creep
racing up through your legs
eager, eager
until they find what they seek
attach to your spine
they slither, slither
spiraling heart
encircling larynx

breathe, breathe

up and up
splitting third eye
reaching for the sky
to entwine its twin

a silvery moonbeam
drops into the top of your head
weaving through third eye
dropping down into your throat

breathe, breathe

sinking into your heart
squeeze, squeeze
wrapping around spine
deeper and deeper
shooting down your legs

until it reunites

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with Mother Earth
over and over
root and moonbeam
over and over
uniting, entwining
over and over
tightening, compressing
breathe, breathe

until the pressure
is too much
your heart cracks open
taking in roots and moonbeams
joined together as one
a direct connection to the divine
flows through your body

breathe, breathe

racing, searching, seeking
filling spaces thought long dormant
until it reaches your fingers
turned roots
silvery moonbeams
shoot out their tips

Its time

Write dear one, write

To my Black Sisters

1619

The paper was never blank

It remembers the ax
every wood chipped splinter
that left a gasp
before timber

The paper weight
memorized time in concentric circles
now held stationery
trunk storing history

2020

Reach out
Place your hand on its surface
Breathe in the oxygen it gave to you
For life is paper thin
Feel the roughness of its bark
now rooted to your fingertips

Even in death
it offers you life
to write our stories
so that
when black ink drips
on white innocence

We remember
there is no *tabula rasa*
there never was

This bridge called my back¹⁰⁹ continued...

This bridge called my back
has grown
from gnarly roots planted deep in the soil
watered with tears of failure and frustration
nourished by sun rays' small victories
strengthened by lessons of long and harsh winters
fortified with day-long minutes of reflection
turned hours of quiet contemplation
where anger and pain
fought and conquered
used as kindling to ignite a fire
that burns deep within my heart

This bridge called my back
is for you
the 'othered'
looking across the insurmountable ravine
at the ivory tower
This back is your bridge

For those at the margins
staring into the dark abyss of
'I'm not good enough'
This back is your bridge

Do not be afraid to tread on me
nor lighten your footfall
This bridge is not made of lightweight steel nor crumbly-concrete

Birthered by two mothers
breathed into life by Southern winds
fortified by African shores

¹⁰⁹ Based on *This Bridge Called my Back* (2015) edited by Cherrie Moraga & Gloria Anzaldua. Specifically Kate Rushin's 'The Bridge Poem' pp.xxxiii

bearing Ganga Ma's love

This bridge called my back
leads back to you

*Andihambi Ndongwa*¹¹⁰

We walk with many

¹¹⁰ Ngiyabonga sis Ongezwa Mbele for sharing and translating the isiXhosa phrase *Andihambi Ndongwa*

Flame

Tend to your fire

me
you
meet crumbling cinders of
us
they

Voice

Who are we when we are not spoken for
 spoken of
 spoken over
 when we are not given a voice
 not given a platform to amplify our voice
 not given the volume control of our voice

Who are we when we find ourselves hypervisibilized
 invisibilized
 represented

erased

What sounds have been muted in the depths of our colonial wound
 A cacophony of visceral screams
 filling our mouths
 swallowed
 stuck in our throats
 swallowed
 wrenching our guts

 carried
 womb to womb
 grandmother to mother
 mother to daughter

Our scream
 is the sound of birth
 of life itself
 of thunder rolling
 of wind howling
 of waves crashing
 of night turning to day
 of sun rising

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of clouds moving
of flowers blooming
of leaves falling
of day turning to night
of stars shining
of moon waxing and waning
This is the sound of our voice

Glossary

Agrabathi	incense stick
Am'mā āppirikkā	Mama Africa in Tamil
Andihambi Ndongwa	I walk with many
Araku	Temple jewelry worn by Bharatanatyam dancers
Baas	Boss in Dutch and Afrikaans. Used in the South African context to refer to a supervisor or employer, especially a white man in charge of black, brown and coloured people
Belvedere	Second British ship carrying indentured Indian labourers for the sugarcane plantations of Post Natal (Durban) in 1860
Bibi	meaning 'Miss' in Urdu, added to a woman's name as a show of respect. Appropriated by the British to mean the native mistress of a European man in India
Bodhi	in Sanskrit means awakening and refers to the last stage before Nirvana where the soul is released from the cycles of life and death, reincarnation
Black Prince	also known as Maharaja Sir Duleep Singh (1838-1893) was the last Maharaja of the Sikh Empire. At the age of 10 he was kidnapped by the British Crown, where he was kept under lock and key for 5 years and thereafter exiled to Britain where Queen Victoria 'Empress of India' and serial Godmother to kidnapped princes and princesses from the colonies, adopted him
Coolie/Kuli	Tamil word 'Kuli' meaning those who do menial work, appropriated by the British to 'coolie' referring to those who were indentured, considered a racial slur in South Africa
Ekaharya	In Bharatanatyam, Ekaharya is a solo dancer who takes on many roles in a single performance
Frisse neus halen	in Dutch meaning to get some fresh air
Ganga-Ma	Goddess of the river Ganges
Ghungroos	The anklets worn by Bharatanatyam dancers
Ihawu	Nguni shield
Iklwa	isiZulu meaning short spear
iMamba emnyama	Black Mamba

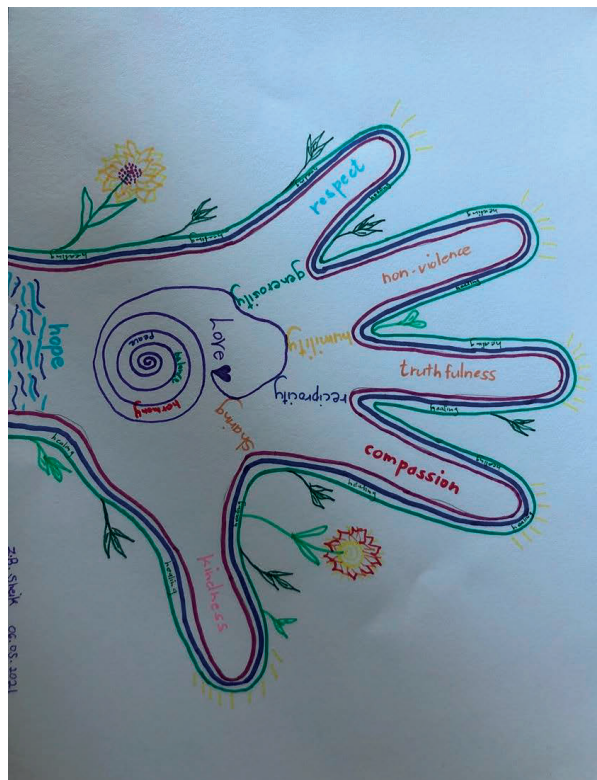
Inshallah	In Arabic meaning if God wills it. Used by Muslims to speak favourably of future events
isigubhu	Double-headed Nguni drum
Jannah	In Arabic meaning paradise or heaven
Jahannam	In Arabic meaning hell
Kala Pani	In Hindi means black waters, referring mainly to the Indian Ocean. By crossing this ocean many Indians believed they would lose their caste, social standing and cultural identity.
Kali	Feminine form of kala (black). Referring to the Goddess Kali, the keeper of death, time and liberation (from cycles of reincarnation)
Kuli/coolie	Tamil word 'Kuli' meaning those who do menial work, appropriated by the British to 'coolie' referring to those who were indentured, considered a racial slur in South Africa
Kuthu beat	Fast musical beat in South Indian folk dance with an emphasis on percussion
la facultad	Gloria Anzaldúa's concept which speaks of the ability to connect with the depths of our soul, a perception anchored in the body which constantly guides us.
Laylat al-Qadr	In Islam it is the auspicious night when the Quran was first sent down from Heaven and also when the first verses were revealed to Prophet Muhammad (sallallahu alaihi wa salam). Falls on one of the odd numbered days in the last 10 days of Ramadan in which night precedes day.
Maha Shivrathri	A night in which Shiva performs the heavenly dance which overcomes darkness and ignorance. It is a festival celebrated in India and across the diaspora
Mehndi	also known as henna
Mundhani	Decorated end of the sari that hangs loose over the shoulder
Nani	Grandmother
Nataraja	Hindu God Shiva in the form of the cosmic dancer. His dance maintaining the balance of the universe, between destruction and creation. The significance is to rid humans of illusions and free their souls
Nattuvanar	Bharatanatyam Guru, who is usually the director and conductor of the performance
Parti	Grandmother
Parvati	Hindu Goddess of fertility, devotion and love. The spouse of Shiva.
Pitchachi	A Goddess denied a place in heaven by Parvati. She is often depicted as a demoness, flesh eating and vampiric. Used as a

slur towards dark skinned Indian women. Pitchachi, though demonized, is the Goddess of mental wellbeing, overcoming addictions and material attachments.

Praat je Nederlands wel	You speak Dutch well
Qhawekazi	In isiZulu a Queen and heroine who fights for her being and her people
Qurbani	Ritual animal sacrifice in the Muslim tradition of Eid-al-Adha
Rani	Queen in Tamil
SS Truro	First British ship carrying indentured Indian labourers from Madras (Chennai) to Port Natal (Durban) in 1860
Tabla	Twin hand drums from the Indian subcontinent
Unkulunkulu	The God of the Zulus. Unkulunkulu created humans and cattle from reeds. The creator of all land and water Unkulunkulu taught the amaZulu to hunt, make fire and grow food.
Umama wasendiya	Mother India in isiZulu
Umntu Ngumuntu Abantu	A person is a person through other people / I am because we are

Appendices

Appendix 1



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About the Author

Zuleika Bibi Sheik is a poet, yogi and Lecturer in Sociology – Black Studies and Intersectionality at the University of Portsmouth, UK. Her areas of focus include decolonial methodology, gender studies, decolonial feminism, black studies, critical race theory and abolition studies. As a South African scholar of Indian descent, her work centers on onto-epistemological re-existence and collective liberation. Through her PhD she has developed Liminagraphy, a life-affirming approach to research practice. Her latest publication “From Decolonizing the self to Liberating the senses” (2021) appears in the *Imbiza Journal for African Writing*. She is also the host of *Liminal Hangouts*, a podcast which brings together those who resist at the margins of academia on topics such as decolonizing the self, practices of unlearning, accountability and coalition.

Publications

Sheik, Z.B. (2021) 'From Decolonizing the Self to Liberating the Senses'. *Imbiza Journal for African Writing*.

Sheik, Z.B. (2020) 'Reflective Piece: From Decolonising the Self to Coming to Voice'. *Education as Change*, 24, pp.5-pages.

Icaza, R. & Sheik, Z.B. (2020) 'COVID-19 Pandemic: Worlds Stories from the Margins'. Available at: <https://www.convivialthinking.org/index.php/2020/05/09/worlds-stories-from-the-margins/>

Publications forthcoming

Sheik, Z.S. (forthcoming 2022) 'Liminagraphy: Lessons in life affirming research practices for collective liberation'. *Journal of Critical Southern Studies*.

Sheik, Z.B. (forthcoming 2022) 'Hand in Hand: Refusing Research during a Pandemic'. *Globalisations*.

Icaza, R. & Sheik, Z.B. (forthcoming 2022) 'Introduction - Our Bodies Breathe Resistance'. *Globalisations*.

Sheik, Z.S. (forthcoming 2022) 'Enfleshing as Research Practice'. In Ureña, C., and Varma, S. (eds) *Decolonizing Embodiment*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Icaza, R. & Sheik, Z.B. (forthcoming 2022) 'Transitions on the Path to Radical Teaching'. In Morris, C., Motta, S., and Kadiwal, L. (eds) *F*** Normality: Reclaiming Teaching as Transformation*. London: Rowman and Littlefield.

Sheik, Z.B. & Dupuis, C. (forthcoming 2022) 'Los árboles son nuestros maestros. In *Nuestra Palabra es semilla que crece*. RETOS.

Sheik, Z.B. (forthcoming 2021) 'Women of Colour are not Human. We are Relational Beings'. In Amoo-Adare, E.A. and Siriwardane-de Zoysa, R. (eds). *An Anthology of Non-Conformism: Rebel Women Words, Ways and Wonders*. New York: DIO Press.

Sheik, Z.B. (forthcoming 2021) 'Decolonial Re-existence and the Myths of Knowledge Production'. In Dey, S., and Nirmal, A. (eds). *History and Myth: Theory, Praxis and Politics*. London: Routledge.

Conferences and Presentations

Dag van de Sociologie (Day of Sociology) Symposium 2021, Paper presentation: 'Epistemic Freedom in Higher Education Institutions' for the panel on Higher Education Institutions - An Inequality Regime.

Development Studies Association UK Annual Conference 2021, Roundtable participant: 'Racialised ways of knowing development.'

Amsterdam Philosophy Café 2021, Presentation on the 'Life and Work of Black Feminist Audre Lorde'

Centre for Sustainable Development Studies, 3rd Conference 2021, Roundtable participant: 'Decolonising Development Studies 2.0.'

European Conference on Politics and Gender, Amsterdam 2019, Roundtable participant: 'Whose University? Movements towards Decolonizing Higher Education.'

Millennium Conference, London School of Economics, 2019, Panel presentation 'Collective resistance and liberation by radical women of colour'.

Development Days Conference Helsinki 2019, Panel participant Working Group 5 'Re-Thinking, Re-defining, Re-positioning: "Development" and the Question of "Alternatives."'

UNISA International Decoloniality Conference, Pretoria 2018, Paper presentation 'The African Ivory Route: A Spiritual Journey in Method'.

Event Organisation

Diversity and Inclusion Organising Committee, Seminar Series 2018-2019 'Debating Discrimination in Dutch Academia'.

Diversity and Inclusion Organising Committee, Workshop 2019 'Undoing Colonial Patriarchies in/from the margins'.

Podcast

Liminal Hangouts (2021) - <https://anchor.fm/zuleika-bibi-sheik>

